



Constructing social identity in Renaissance Florence: Botticelli's "Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)"

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CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL IDENTITY IN RENAISSANCE FLORENCE:
BOTTICELLI'S PORTRAIT OF A LADY (SMERADLA BRANDINI)

by

Lisa Y. Frady

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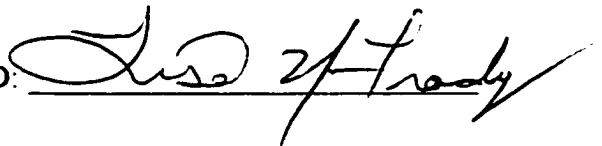
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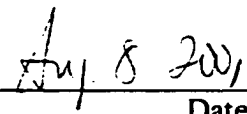
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ABSTRACT

Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* (c. 1471) is representative of a largely uninvestigated tendency in Italian Renaissance portraiture to depict female sitters without sumptuous clothing, jewelry, and heraldic devices. Traditionally, these visual cues had been used to construct the elevated social identity of portrait sitters. This study scrutinizes a work within a neglected portion of Botticelli's *oeuvre*, examining the ways in which its modest, and somewhat ambiguous, visual cues also construct its sitter's elevated social identity, while simultaneously protecting it. This analysis seriously considers a portrait of a woman who is not famous, nor an idealized beauty, nor an allegorical figure. It explores her image, its functions, and its multiple layers of meaning within the confines of late-fifteenth century social relationships, gender roles, and the original domestic viewing context of Renaissance portraits (considering their public display, as well as their relationship to Marian imagery, within the home).

CHAPTER I

Introducing the Portrait, the Problem, and the Painter

Arguably, the figure portrayed in *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* (c.1471; 65.7 x 41 centimeters; tempera on wood), by Sandro Botticelli (1444/5-1510), leaves no overwhelming impression on her modern viewers.¹ The space in which she is depicted consists of a rather stark domestic interior; her attire, of simple garments – no sumptuous baubles or precious gems adorn her form. It appears as if she has little to say, particularly to the art historian looking for overt visual cues that might imbue her with art historical, let alone social, significance. As a result, this portrait is rarely addressed within the confines of Botticellian scholarship.

Perhaps Botticelli's most well-known female portrait is *Portrait of a Young Woman*² (c.1475).³ The sitter has traditionally,⁴ and almost certainly erroneously, been

¹ It should be noted that the attribution of this work to Botticelli himself is overwhelming within current scholarship; it is contested by only three individuals (Yukio Yashiro, Adolfo Venturi, and Bernhard Berenson) who deem it a product of Botticelli's school or of his friends/imitators. The specific date of this piece is a bit more problematic. A few scholars have suggested it was executed as early as 1470, while a few others have suggested it was not produced until 1482. However, the vast majority of Botticelli experts suggest a date of 1471 for this particular portrait. For more information regarding the attribution of this work to Botticelli, see Roberto Salvini, *All the Paintings of Botticelli: Part I (1445-1484)*, trans. John Grillenzoni (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1965) 44. For more information regarding the debated date of this piece, see Salvini 44; and Michael Levey and Gabriele Mandel, *The Complete Paintings of Botticelli*, 1967 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1970) 88. For illustrations, see either Levey and Mandel 88 (black and white reproduction) or Patricia Lee Rubin and Alison Wright, *Renaissance Florence: The Art of the 1470s* (London: National Gallery Publications Limited, 1999) 326 (color reproduction).

² Ironically, this famed work is attributed by nearly all Botticelli scholars to the artist's school and not to his own hand. For illustration, see Levey and Mandel, Plate XII.

³ As the artist neither signed nor dated any of his works, with the lone exception of his *Mystic Nativity* (1501), dating remains a debate among connoisseurs. Thus, all dates listed for Botticelli's artistic productions within the confines of this paper are derived from Levey and Mandel, unless otherwise

identified as the famous Simonetta Vespucci,⁵ much admired by Giuliano de' Medici.

Giuliano's assassination in the Pazzi Conspiracy of 1478, coupled with literary

interpretations of Agnolo (or Angelo) Poliziano's contemporaneous *Stanze per la Giostra*

noted. Levey and Mandel were chosen for several reasons – not only does their text illustrate each of the works that have, at one time or another, been attributed to Botticelli, but it provides concise information in regard to various scholarly assertions toward both attribution and dating.

⁴ The term "sitter" is used within this paper to denote portrait subjects, whether or not they physically posed for a portrait.

⁵ This portrait has also been identified as Clarice Orsini, the wife of Lorenzo "the Magnificent" de' Medici; although, not surprisingly, this secondary identification has received secondary attention within Botticellian scholarship. Of course, both proposed identifications are questionable. Confusion surrounding the identification of the sitter in this particular portrait is further complicated by the fact that art historians have relied upon Giorgio Vasari to assist them in the identification endeavor. Vasari mentions two portraits of females, both in profile and both produced by Botticelli, in the collection of the Medici family – one "said to be the mistress of Lorenzo's brother, Giuliano" and the other, of Lorenzo's wife. However, within my research I have discovered that the issue is further complicated by the fact that Vasari incorrectly states that Lorenzo's wife is Lucrezia Tornabuoni, who is actually Lorenzo's mother (the error abounds within scholarship, even Wilhelm Bode refers to Lorenzo's mother as Clarice Orsini). Upon further investigation (as I thought this may have been a translation error), I discovered this is in fact what Vasari states in the original Italian (*madonna Lucrezia de' Tornabuoni, moglie di detto Lorenzo*). While this error is not addressed in George Bull's edition, it is addressed in a footnote of an Italian version edited by A. M. Ciaranfi. In regard to the sitter's identification, quite recently it has also been suggested by Sheryl E. Reiss that this image may be a portrait of Alfonsina Orsini de' Medici, the wife of Lorenzo "the Magnificent's" son Piero. However, Reiss dates this portrait by Botticelli to c. 1488, making Alfonsina 16 years old and recently married at the time of the portrait's production. While this is certainly possible (for Wilhelm Bode has suggested that this portrait was painted as late as 1490), the majority of Botticelli scholars suggest a much earlier date for this piece (c. 1475). Thus, the identification of the sitter as Alfonsina becomes problematic. If Botticelli did execute this piece in 1475, Alfonsina would have only been 3 years old and residing with her family in Naples (her marriage to Piero was arranged with the hopes of ensuring peace between Naples and Florence). For Vasari's comments, see Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, Volume I (Originally published as *Le vite*; Florence, 1550), trans. George Bull, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) 230; and Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, 1568, ed. A. M. Ciaranfi, 7 vols. (Florence: Salani, 1963), 3: 198. For more information on the portrait's sitter as Clarice Orsini/Lorenzo's wife, see Levey and Mandel 90; L. D. Ettlinger and Helen S. Ettlinger, *Botticelli* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976) 164; Wilhelm Bode, *Sandro Botticelli*, trans. F. Renfield and F. L. Rudston Brown (London: Methuen & Co., 1925) 88; and Edmund Spingelhurst, *The Life and Works of Botticelli* (New York: Shooting Star Press, 1994) 19. For more information on the portrait's sitter as Alfonsina Orsini, see Sheryl E. Reiss, "Widow, Mother, Patron of Art: Alfonsina Orsini de' Medici," *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy*, eds. Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2001) 125-128. For information regarding the date of this portrait, see Levey and Mandel 90; and Salvini 48.

(written 1474-1478, this work commemorated a lavish jousting tournament Giuliano organized in her honor),⁶ have contributed to her historical, albeit mythical, fame.⁷ Her fame was further promulgated by early Botticellian scholarship that suggested the artist, too, was consumed with desire for this lovely woman and used her as the model (nude, nonetheless) for the central figure in his *Birth of Venus* (c. 1482).⁸ Certainly these tales have caught the attention of scholars. Yet this attention has largely, if not solely, been engendered by and concerned with the somewhat romantic biography of the sitter. The surface of this painting, that is, the image itself – regardless of the sitter's identity – has largely been ignored within art historical studies.

Yet when the surface of this more popular image is compared to Botticelli's less famous *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*, an important commonality rises to the fore. Each of these images is characterized by a marked sense of modesty – both women appear in simple settings and in strikingly simple dress (inclusive of jewelry). Notably, this lack of finery and grandiosity ruptures established pictorial traditions; for, while still nascent, the genre of portraiture had become inculcated with the depiction of the female form in profile and adorned with sumptuous things (for example, *Portrait of Woman with a Man at a Casement* [c. 1435-1445], attributed to Fra Filippo Lippi).⁹ While several

⁶ See Angelo Poliziano, *Stanze cominciate per la giostra del Magnifico Giuliano de' Medici* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979).

⁷ See Ettlinger and Ettlinger 164; Bode 60; and Swinglehurst 19.

⁸ As a result, many of Botticelli's female portraits were initially identified as Simonetta – identifications that more recent scholarship has discredited and sought to correct (see Ettlinger and Ettlinger 164). For illustration of *Birth of Venus*, see Levey and Mandel, Plates XLIV-XLV.

⁹ For illustration, see Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender Representation Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) 55.

scholars have generally noted the changing ‘face’ of Renaissance portraits during the second half of the fifteenth century¹⁰ – for more modestly depicted female sitters are not confined to the works of Botticelli, but can be seen in portraits produced by a variety of artists¹¹ – Patricia Simons perhaps describes these changes most succinctly. Simons observes that only in Renaissance portraits of the later 1470s did women appear in frontal poses and “less ostentatiously dressed than their female predecessors.”¹² *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*, in opposition to *Portrait of a Young Woman*, is an early example of a work that breaks with the former tradition by depicting its female subject at a slight angle to the picture plane, facing the viewer.¹³ The transition from the profile to frontal pose is a subject that has received due scholarly investigation. This change is generally thought to be bound-up with period lyric poetry and effected to accommodate Renaissance viewers’ desires to communicate more faithfully or exchange glances with female portrait subjects.¹⁴ However, the tendency to depict more modestly, rather than lavishly, adorned female portrait sitters has not been critically, or at least sufficiently, addressed by art historians. Indeed, the absence of sumptuous adornment that had

¹⁰ For examples, see Tinagli 86; and Jean Alazard, *The Florentine Portrait*, trans. Barbara Whelpton (London: Nicholson & Watson Ltd., 1948) 43.

¹¹ To provide just a few examples, Domenico Ghirlandaio’s *Portrait of a Lady* (c.1490), housed in the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts; the *Portrait of Lady (Costanza de’ Medici?)*, which has been tenuously attributed to him and was produced during the same general time period; and Leonardo da Vinci’s *Portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci* (c.1480). For illustration of *Portrait of Costanza de’ Medici*, see Gerald S. Davies, *Ghirlandaio* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909) Plate XXVII; for illustration of *Portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci*, see Tinagli 87.

¹² Patricia Simons, “Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile, in Renaissance Portraiture,” *History Workshop* 25 (1988): 8.

¹³ Notably, this piece is one of the earliest Renaissance portraits to depict a female in a frontal or three-quarter pose (versus the standard profile).

¹⁴ Tinagli 85-86.

previously characterized portraits of females within the genre deserves more than a cursory look.

It is natural to associate these more modest portraits with the democratization of portraiture in general. That is, as less affluent people began to commission portraits, the nature of the portrait itself changed as it depicted less affluent sitters. However, such an association is somewhat problematic. The majority of Renaissance portrait scholars do not believe this democratization took place until the sixteenth century.¹⁵ While the portrait was certainly becoming more popular at the end of the fifteenth century, it still remained largely an object associated with those of an elevated status (sometimes classified within scholarship as patricians) – particularly in Florence.¹⁶ Furthermore, these modest portraits cannot be viewed in terms of popularity or an isolated trend within an evolutionary process, with one trend usurping another. Not only do modestly adorned

¹⁵ Alazard 21, 58; and Peter Burke, "The Presentation of Self in the Renaissance Portrait," The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication, ed. Peter Burke (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 164-165. A brief word of caution should be made in regard to Burke's scholarship. As 'ordinary people' began to commission portraits, Burke claims portraits of the elite became more elaborate and props therein multiplied and became more impressive. He dates this occurrence to the "turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" and asserts it was the result of the elite's pictorial attempt to distinguish themselves from ordinary or modest portrait sitters whose social status was below their own. Burke traces portraiture trends, many of which reverse themselves, through the eighteenth century, tying them loosely to contextual factors. While this particular component of his research is interesting and largely substantive, his initial premise is somewhat flawed. For, prior to the democratization of the portrait, Burke speaks of the genre's products as "relatively plain and unimpressive" – briefly mentioning the works of Botticelli in his discussion. He contends that early portraits "could afford to be simple" as the portrait itself (as a commissioned object) and not necessarily its pictorial formation, conveyed the high status of its sitter. However, Burke apparently does not consider the elaborate portraits depicting sumptuously adorned female sitters that pre-date the 'plain' and 'unimpressive' works of Botticelli in his chronological timeline. For examples of these early sumptuous works, see Page 55ff. of this document, where they are discussed in some detail.

¹⁶ Alazard 21, 58.

female portrait sitters appear within the same chronological timeframe as more sumptuously adorned sitters,¹⁷ but some modestly depicted sitters have been identified as extremely affluent women, such as members of the Medici family.¹⁸

Some scholars have associated these modest portraits – also bound-up with the Renaissance viewer's desire to communicate with portrait sitters, like the transition from the profile to frontal pose – with artistic attempts to depict female sitters as psychologically life-like, rather than as emblematic symbols of status.¹⁹ However, this is also somewhat problematic. It is overly generalizing; a lavishly adorned female portrait sitter is as equally well capable of communicating with viewers as is a modestly adorned one. Furthermore, this association is rather Vasarian in that it grants to artists unlimited

¹⁷ Domenico Ghirlandaio's modest *Portrait of a Lady* (c.1490), and another work tenuously attributed to him, *Portrait of Lady (Costanza de Medici?)*, roughly dating to the same time period, coexist with the artist's sumptuous *Portrait of Giovanna Albizzi* (c.1488) (refer to Page 55ff. for more information on the latter work). The simultaneous existence of modest and sumptuously adorned female portrait sitters continues into the sixteenth century as Ridolfo Ghirlandaio's modest *Portrait of a Lady* (1509) was produced only a few years after Raphael's more ornate *Portrait of Maddalena Doni* (c.1505-1507). D. Ghirlandaio's works are referred to both within Footnote 11 and Page 55ff. of this document: for illustration of R. Ghirlandaio's work, see Alazard Fig. 17; Raphael's portrait is also discussed on Page 55ff. of this document.

¹⁸ The identification of the sitter in Botticelli's *Portrait of Young Woman* as Clarice Orsini has already been noted, as has the identification of the sitter in *Portrait of a Lady*, attributed to Ghirlandaio, as Costanza Medici (refer to Footnotes 5 and 11 of this document).

¹⁹ For general references, see Alazard 58-78; Tinagli, 85-86. To provide a specific example, Tinagli notes, in reference to Leonardo da Vinci's *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci* (c.1480), that "the lack of the conventional decorative elements and of the details used in portraiture to establish status, like jewellery or precious fabrics, shows the extent of the artist's selection and his control over the means through which he guides the viewer's perception." However, as noted within the body of this paper, this comment is both generalizing and Vasarian. Certainly the artist's selection and control may have come into play in this particular case, if, as Mary D. Garrard has suggested, this specific piece was not commissioned, but was a gift to the Benci family which da Vinci painted within the bonds of friendship and gratitude. However, these broad notions regarding the lack of finery cannot be applied across the female portraiture board. In reference to this specific example, see both Tinagli 88 and Mary D. Garrard, "Leonardo Da Vinci: Female Portraits, Female Nature," The Expanding Discourse:

authority, imbuing them with divine insight and virtuosity. When considering certain aspects of the nature of Renaissance patronage, certainly artists' desires to depict psychologically engaging portrait sitters may have influenced the modestly adorned female portrait, but associating these portraits solely with artists themselves ignores contextual factors surrounding portrait sitters, the traditional function of the Renaissance portrait, and the totality of the demands of Renaissance patronage.

The Renaissance female portrait, typically commissioned by a male relative,²⁰ was a social tool – particularly during the fifteenth century. The portrait not only proclaimed its sitter's constructed social identity (intrinsically connected to economic status and the traditional roles of wife and mother), but also that of her family (here connected to the

Feminism and Art History, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: HarperCollins, 1992) 64.

²⁰ During the Renaissance, males, rather than females, generally commissioned art. The reasons for this are many, not the least of which is that men were usually in charge of household finances. Subsequently, Renaissance art historians have generally relegated the construction of females within portraits, and Renaissance artwork in general, to the male domain. Quite recently, however, Roger J. Crum has called this assumption into question. Drawing on a variety of sources, including the works of Leon Battista Alberti, Crum suggests that while Renaissance men may have paid for commissioned pieces, women certainly could have been involved in both their design and placement within the Renaissance home. Crum's assertions, which appear quite valid, are in need of further investigation. However, as far as current scholarship is concerned, it largely asserts that not only were female portraits generally commissioned by (and thus 'designed' by) male relatives, but that, prior to the last two decades of the Quattrocento, they were also commissioned posthumously. While some scholars, such as Paola Tinagli, casually mention this fact in their research, John Kent Lydecker clearly states the reason for this assertion is based on a combination of extant portrait inscriptions and documents concerning sitters. Lydecker's research reveals that portrait commissions were generally made after a loved one had died (taken from a sampling of late fifteenth-century ledger entries). For more information on Crum's research, see Roger J. Crum, "Controlling Women or Women Controlled? Suggestions for Gender Roles and Visual Culture in the Italian Renaissance Palace," Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy, eds. Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2001) 37-50. For information regarding posthumous portrait commissions, see Tinagli 49; and John Kent Lydecker, The Domestic Setting of the Arts in Renaissance Florence, diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1987 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1990: 8807448) 159-160.

economic status of her husband/father and the character of his lineage). Of course, the particular pictorial formation of the portrait, as with any other commissioned Renaissance object, was a process of negotiation – in this particular instance, between the artist, the patron, and the sitter.²¹ Thus, both the extent to which either the artist or the patron was involved in the portrait's design and the extent to which the content or design of the portrait was fictionalized, are impossible to determine. However, it is reasonable to assume the patron was generally pleased with the final product (which was, within the confines of this study, modest). Often the demands of Renaissance patronage, attested to in extant contracts, required that an artist fix or change any unsatisfactory elements in a commissioned work before the patron both accepted it and remunerated the artist for it.²²

²¹ This notion of negotiation within portrait construction is not univocally shared by art historians. Often scholars relegate total construction of a portrait to either the artist or the patron. In regard to the former, the scholarship of Paola Tinagli (in reference to Leonard da Vinci) has already been mentioned in Footnote 19 of this document. Similarly, the tone of Luba Freedman's scholarship intimates that Titian alone designed the portraits he executed, even those of more famous sitters such as Charles V. Conversely, other scholars, such as Harry Berger, Jr., relegate portrait construct to the sitter alone via his or her aware pose. For more information regarding the portrait as a process of negotiation, see Aby Warburg, "Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie," The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance, 1932, ed. Steven Lindberg, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999) 187; and Burke, "The Presentation of Self in the Renaissance Portrait" 153. For information regarding the alternative views of the scholars just noted, see Luba Freedman, "Charles V: The *Concetto* of the Emperor," Titian's Portraits Through Aretino's Lens (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995) 115-143; and Harry Berger, Jr., "Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture," Representations 46 (1994): 87-120.

²² Patron satisfaction with the final portrait 'product' is particularly relevant within this investigation of Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*. For, at this particular point in his career, Botticelli was trying to establish himself; he was not yet the acclaimed artist of the Sistine Chapel frescoes (1481-1482) or members of the Medici family, whose steady patronage did not begin until the mid-1470s or later. Rather, in 1470, Botticelli had just opened his own workshop and received his first officially documented commission. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the artist, rather than employing creative license, would have wanted this portrait – and the details therein – to be pleasing to his patron. Any dissatisfaction on the patron's part may have hindered Botticelli's burgeoning reputation. For Botticelli's biographical information, see Levey and Mandel 83. For information regarding Medici

Regardless of the impetus behind their specific pictorial construction, early Renaissance portraits depicting modestly adorned female sitters can perhaps best be understood within the confines of, or associated with, the complex nature of Renaissance social relationships. In this vein, I would like to suggest that Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*, despite the modest presentation of its sitter, serves as a rich site for examining the construction of social identity within late-fifteenth century Florence. This image contains visual cues that saturate it with meaning; yet, unlike more sumptuous Renaissance female portraits in which these cues are overtly displayed and their meanings are not only clear, but seemingly solitary, the visual cues provided within Botticelli's portrait are less explicit and seem simultaneously to convey a variety of things to a variety of viewers, without necessarily committing to any of them. When the portrait is placed within its original cultural context (inclusive of Renaissance social relationships), these mutable, and somewhat ambiguous, visual cues can be understood as markers that both proclaim and protect the elevated social identity of the sitter (and by association, her family).

Historically, Renaissance portraits – whether products of Botticelli or any other artist – have received little sustained attention within the discipline of art history.²³

Instead, scholars have concerned themselves with both sacred and secular works that

patronage, see Herbert P. Horne Botticelli: Painter of Florence, 1908 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 183-189; Ronald Lightbown, Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989) 58; and Bode 51.

appear to be more narrative in nature. This point is particularly well illustrated by scholarship concerned with Botticelli's *oeuvre*. Although over two dozen extant portraits are attributed to his hand,²⁴ one is fortunate to find even a few words written about them, let alone any type of critical analysis. Conversely, his famed *La Primavera* (c.1477-1478) has received literally volumes of attention, beginning in the late 1800s, with Walter Pater's publications that extol Botticelli's artistic skill,²⁵ and continuing to the present day. Other works executed by the artist have also been extensively investigated – *Pallas and the Centaur* (c.1482), *Birth of Venus* (c.1482), *Venus and Mars* (c.1483), the *Nastagio degli Onesti Panels* (c.1483); the list is sizable.²⁶

While the subject matter of these well-researched pieces differs markedly from that of Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*, there are nevertheless important conjunctions between the portrait and the artist's secular works (two seemingly diverse

²³ Within this paper, the portraiture genre is confined to that of easel portraits of individual sitters, unless otherwise noted.

²⁴ Botticelli's authorship of each of these portraits remains a point of dissention within current scholarship. For example, Ronald Lightbown only attributes "eight or so" to his hand. This should not be surprising due to the nature of Renaissance workshop practices in which master and pupils or assistants often collaborated on projects and in which copying – both specific works and other artists' styles in general – was commonplace. In fact, many anonymous artists continued to produce works in the manner or style of Botticelli long after his death. For a concise summary of scholars who both support and challenge Botticelli attributions, see Levey and Mandel 85-112 (illustrations are also found there within); as well as Salvini 35-50. For Lightbown's comments, see Lightbown 54. For information regarding the practice of copying, see Bruce Cole, *The Renaissance Artist at Work* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983) 31-32; and (specifically in regard to Botticelli and copying) Levey and Mandel 85; and Alazard 49.

²⁵ Various scholars note the importance of Walter Pater within Botticellian scholarship, including Kenneth Clark. While Clark dates the rise of Botticelli's fame to 1870 (linking this fame to Pater's publications of that year which acted "like an elixir on the young aesthetes of the time"), he credits poet-painter Dante Gabriele Rossetti with Botticelli's nineteenth-century 'discovery' – Levey and Mandel credit B. Berenson. See Kenneth Clark, *The Art of Humanism* (London: John Murray, 1983) 142; and Levey and Mandel 9.

groups) that are brought to bear when these images are contextualized. Not only did this portrait almost assuredly occupy the same general domestic space within the Renaissance interior as Botticelli's secular works, but it was also read by contemporary viewers on multiple levels. Several scholars have already argued the latter point in regard to the artist's secular images – images, in which, to paraphrase E. H. Gombrich, there exists no fixed meaning.²⁷ For example, Lilian Zirpolo contends that *La Primavera*, while illustrating facets of Neoplatonic philosophy for the Renaissance man of letters,²⁸ simultaneously served as an ideal model of behavior for the Renaissance bride.²⁹ Christina Olsen proposes that Botticelli's *Nastagio degli Onesti Panels* were equally as malleable.³⁰ This series of four paintings candidly narrates a popular feminine moralizing tale of Boccaccio's *Decameron* (c. 1350) and fictively illustrates the actual marriage of Giannozzo di Antonio Pucci to Lucrezia Bini.³¹ Olsen also suggests that the panels not only serve to

²⁶ For illustrations, see Levey and Mandel 96-97.

²⁷ Of course, Gombrich is most concerned with the methodology of iconology: E. H. Gombrich, "Botticelli's Mythologies," *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Phaidon, 1972) 59.

²⁸ The Neoplatonic nature of this work is, and seemingly will continue to be, debated: for, many scholars, in opposition to Zirpolo, deny the existence therein of any Neoplatonic agenda. One of these is A. Richard Turner; see Turner's *Renaissance Florence: The Invention of a New Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997) 153.

²⁹ This work was likely commissioned by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici on the occasion of his wedding to Semiramide d'Appiani in May of 1482. For more information, see Lilian Zirpolo, "Botticelli's *Primavera*: A Lesson for the Bride," *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: HarperCollins, 1992) 101-109. For information regarding the contested identity of the patron, see Richard Cocke, "Botticelli's *Primavera*: The Myth of Medici Patronage," *Apollo* 136.368 (1992): 233-238.

³⁰ For more information, see Christina Olsen, "Gross Expenditure: Botticelli's *Nastagio degli Onesti Panels*," *Art History* 15.2 (1992): 146-170.

³¹ This particular piece, or *spalliere*, was likely commissioned by the father of the groom as a wedding gift to the bride: the coats of arms of each of the families involved (the groom's, the bride's, and the marriage broker's – the Medici) are prominently incorporated into the work. Interestingly, Vasari's

assert the “sexual, monetary and social superiority [of Pucci, the groom] over the bride and her father’s household,” but that they draw attention to a variety of Renaissance social issues with which some members of their original audience would have been familiar (such as the Roman Catholic Church’s denouncement of certain positions employed during sexual intercourse).³² Like Zirpolo, Olsen proposes that the multiplicity of meanings which Botticelli’s images evoked within their original audience was highly dependant upon, and influenced by, the personal circumstances of each individual viewer (socio-economic status, education, gender, etc.). This study seeks to demonstrate that the same is also true of Botticelli’s *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*, as well as to lend insight into the ways in which its original audience members were entangled within a complex web of relationships that may have influenced the pictorial formation of the portrait itself. Subsequently, my research examines an image of what appears to be a rather modest woman in an attempt not only to unravel the multiple layers of significance its visual cues provided its contemporary audience in regard to the sitter’s social identity; but also to understand the ways in which these cues functioned to simultaneously assert and protect this identity.

While this study focuses on a single image, it contributes to art historical scholarship in a variety of ways. First and foremost, it examines an image that is representative of a tendency (that of depicting modestly adorned female sitters) in

comments in regard to this piece are only directed at Boccaccio’s tale, and not the marriage. See Olsen 150; for Vasari’s comments, see Vasari, *Lives* 225. It should be noted that the patron of this piece is contested: see Levey and Mandel 84, compare to Olsen 150.

³² Olsen 163 and 154-155, respectively.

Renaissance portraiture that remains largely uninvestigated. It also seriously considers a portrait of an individual who is not famous (traditionally, art historians have devoted their scholarly attention to famous portrait sitters with interesting biographies). Furthermore, this examination does not relegate its female sitter to the realm of allegory or idealized beauty. Rather, it scrutinizes her image, and the circumstances of its production, within the context of Renaissance portraits as they functioned to construct social identity. In this way, an examination of the work under consideration necessitates an exploration of diverse issues, relevant to both women and men, within late-fifteenth century Florentine society. In an effort to further contextualize Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*, this investigation also directly links the research of scholars, concerned with the general distribution and placement of artworks within the Renaissance home, specifically to the portrait genre. While the original domestic viewing context of the Renaissance portrait has been briefly noted within portraiture scholarship, this study not only expounds upon the subject, but carefully considers the potential public display of Botticelli's *Smeralda Brandini* within the Renaissance home (and the implications of this), as well as the portrait's relationship to Marian imagery which occupied this same domestic space. Finally, this project enriches the body of scholarship concerned with an artist who has, in modernity, become one of the most celebrated of the early Italian Renaissance as it critically engages a body of previously unexplored material within his *oeuvre*.

Botticelli's biography has been compiled by a host of scholars attempting to reconstruct his life by piecing together rather limited bits of extant evidence. Accordingly, Botticellian studies have not only produced a multitude of debates regarding the tangible details of the artist's life, but have been sentimentally embellished with descriptions of his character and personality in an attempt to fill in the missing details. Indeed, a great deal of myth surrounds the artist and his work.

A remnant of this can even be detected in scholarship concerned with Botticelli's portraits. While several scholars have noted the modest or stark quality that characterizes many of them³³ (and many portraits of the period in general – including the painting under consideration in this thesis), their attempts to explain it, as is typically the case when modest Renaissance portraits are discussed within the discipline, ignore contextual factors and the demands of Renaissance patronage. Instead, this quality is attributed to the artist's own creative genius which manifests itself in his concerted efforts to minimize distractions and focus solely on his subjects. Subsequently, these modest portraits are described as works that imbue sitters with emotion and life³⁴ and illustrate their “deeper existence” – as well as that of the artist.³⁵ One study even claims that, in time, Botticelli's

³³ To provide only two of numerous examples, in 1948 Jean Alazard noted within Botticelli's portraits (as well as those produced by artists who emulated his style) “the simplicity of the dress” and the “plain” backgrounds; while in 1985 Albert Cook drew attention to their isolated space with simple backgrounds. See Alazard 48-49; and Albert Cook, Changing the Signs: The Fifteenth-Century Breakthrough (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985) 40.

³⁴ Alazard 47-51.

³⁵ Yukio Yashiro, Sandro Botticelli, 3 vols. (London: Medici Society, 1925) 1: 47.

portraits “were no longer portraits of real persons: they became the presentment of himself.”³⁶

Turning from legend to the historical record, the artist was born in Florence in either 1444 or 1445,³⁷ the son of a socio-economically modest tanner. The name given to him by his father, Mariano di Vanni Filipepi, was Alessandro, but he was (and is) more commonly known by his nickname, Botticelli.³⁸ He entered the workshop of the Florentine painter and Carmelite monk Fra Filippo Lippi (c. 1406-1469) sometime prior to 1464 and began his training as a painter.³⁹ By 1470, possibly even that very year, Botticelli had opened his own workshop and received his first officially documented commission. This was for his *Courage* or *Fortitude* of the Mercanzia Virtues, commissioned by the Florentine Merchants’ Guild.⁴⁰ Thereafter his workshop began to grow; in 1474 he had a number of apprentices, including his teacher’s son, Filippino Lippi (1457-1504). In 1478 he received a rather public and somewhat political commission

³⁶ Yashiro 1: 47.

³⁷ Information regarding Botticelli’s life is derived from a variety of concurring sources and is generally summarized in Levey and Mandel. However, where marked discrepancies occur or where additional information, not provided in Levey and Mandel, is needed, these will be noted. For example, the confusion regarding the year of Botticelli’s birth is the result of contradictory information found within extant documents, such as Vasari’s *Lives* and records of the Florentine Commune. For more information, see Adolfo Venturi, *Botticelli* (Rome: Casa Editrice D’Arte Valori Plastici, 1925) 97-98; and Bode 7.

³⁸ The etymology of his nickname, as with his year of birth, is a subject surrounded by much confusion. For a concise summary of this particular subject, see Levey and Mandel 83.

³⁹ Some scholars believe this may have happened as early as 1458 or 1459. See Lionello Venturi, *Botticelli* (London: Phaidon, 1961) 9; and Bode 11 (compared to Levey and Mandel 83).

⁴⁰ For illustration, see Levey and Mandel 87; and James H. Beck, *Italian Renaissance Painting* (Köln: Könemann, 1999) 185.

from the Florentine *Signori* (Florence's highest governing body)⁴¹ to paint the effigies of those individuals who had been executed for their involvement in the Pazzi Conspiracy. This work, executed in fresco, apparently was painted above the door of the Dogana (or customs house) on the Via de' Gondi between the Bargello and the Palazzo Vecchio⁴² – the building in which the *Signori* met and a crucial site of contested space during the conspiracy itself.

L. D. and Helen S. Ettlinger assert that Botticelli might have already enjoyed a considerable reputation as a portrait painter by this date, else he would not have been asked by the city to paint the conspirators.⁴³ This is certainly possible; of the thirty-six extant portraits of his contemporaries (ten female and twenty-six male) cataloged in a recent monograph, roughly half were executed prior to 1478.⁴⁴ Botticelli's popularity as a portrait painter may have even grown after the Pazzi Conspiracy. Only a few years later he was called to Rome by Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484) to paint a series of frescoes on the walls of the Sistine Chapel. These included 'portraits' of the Church's former Pontiffs, as well as scenes from the life of Moses (both series date to 1481-1482).

⁴¹ There were seven elected men that made up the *Signori*; they were charged with considerable power and oversaw a number of larger councils and committees. Each member was elected for a period limited to two months. The *Signori* were also occasionally referred to as Priors. For more information, see Michael Levey, *Florence: A Portrait*, 1996 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) 29; and sections throughout Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence under the Medici (1434 to 1494)*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁴² The exact location of these frescoes is a bit nebulous, but certainly they were located outside and near the Palazzo. See Horne 63-64; Levey and Mandel 83; Lightbown 72; Bode 48; Ettlinger and Ettlinger 10; and Salvini 32.

⁴³ It should be noted that the nature of the commission is unknown; Botticelli may have competed with other artists for it – or, as the Ettlingers intimate, he may simply have been asked to execute it. See Ettlinger and Ettlinger 156.

⁴⁴ For dates and illustrations, see Levey and Mandel 85-112.

Upon his return to Florence in 1482, Botticelli's reputation spread throughout Italy⁴⁵ and he received numerous commissions. While these dwindled over the years, the artist continued to work into old age. He died in circumstances much like those in which he was born – economically modest, although certainly not impoverished.⁴⁶ He passed away in 1510 and was buried in the Florentine churchyard cemetery of Ognissanti; the

⁴⁵ Recommendations noting his skill traveled at least as far as Milan and Mantua; see Alison Cole, Virtue and Magnificence: Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995) 35 and 168; and Levey and Mandel 84.

⁴⁶ While Vasari describes Botticelli's economic status as grim, claiming both "he earned a great deal of money but wasted it all through carelessness and lack of management" and that "he found himself so poor that if Lorenzo de' Medici . . . had not come to his assistance, he would have almost died of hunger," this is not completely accurate. Of course Vasari, within his text, concertedly downplays, in one way or another, all artists pre-dating Michelangelo – who becomes the flawless pinnacle of Vasarian artistic 'cycles.' However, Botticelli did plan and manage his finances in some regard. Not only did he and his brother (possibly other family members) buy a rather modest home in the suburbs (while certainly not a country villa of the elite, it was a small structure on landed property), but prior to his death, he settled his debts with the painters' confraternity, the *Compagnia di San Luca* – the painters of Florence did not have their own guild, they belonged to the guild of Physicians and Apothecaries. Furthermore, the total amount of money Botticelli made during his life needs to be put in perspective. Vasari categorizes this generally as "a great deal." Certainly Botticelli earned a large sum of money from his Papal commission in the Sistine Chapel – 250 gold ducats (this was certainly not easy money, however, as contract stipulations penalized the artist 50 ducats for failing to meet the March 14, 1482 deadline). However, this was, by far the largest commission (in terms of money earned) which he ever received. This figure of 250 gold ducats seems to pale in comparison to what the elite Florentine spent on clothing alone; to provide just one example, the Medici were said to have spent over 80,000 gold ducats in 1469 on an outfit for Giuliano. Additionally, it is important to note the 80,000 figure is from 1469, while the 250 figure received for the commission, from 1482; and prices actually increased, rather than decreased, in Florence by eight percent between 1492 and 1502. Regarding Vasari's comments, see Vasari, Lives 230, 227-228. Regarding Botticelli's debts and purchases, see Horne 266-269; Levey and Mandel 83-84; Lightbown 238. Regarding the Florentine painters' groups (guild/confraternity), see Horne 29-30, 308; Levey and Mandel 84; Levey 35. For information on Botticelli's Papal commission, see Horne 87; and Lightbown 92. For general information in regard to amounts received for typical Renaissance commissions, figures that are confirmed for Botticelli throughout extant documents reproduced in Horne, see E. H. Gombrich, "The Early Medici as Patrons of Art," Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance, 2nd ed. (New York: Phaidon, 1971) 52. For information regarding Giuliano's clothing, see Janet Ross, ed. and trans., Lives of the Early Medici as Told in their Correspondence (London: Chatto and Windus, 1910) 125. For information on Renaissance inflation/wage rates, see Richard A. Goldthwaite, The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economical and Social History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980) 304.

interior of the church still hosts the fresco of *St. Augustine* that Botticelli executed there in 1480. The artist's extensive *oeuvre* includes both sacred and secular works, typical of the Quattrocento in their rhythmic, linear quality and with little interplay between fore- and back-ground spaces.

Throughout his career, Botticelli could boast a wide range of clientele, from more modest commissioners of portraits (like the patron of *Portrait of Lady [Smeralda Brandini]*), to public governing bodies (like the Florentine *Signori*) to grand patrons of large fresco cycles whose names permeate the historical record (like Pope Sixtus IV). In addition to the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, the latter category included members of powerful Florentine families like the Vespucci, the Bardi, and the Medici. Much Botticellian myth is actually connected to Medici patronage. However, it is important to note that the majority of works Botticelli produced for the family were actually commissioned, not by Lorenzo 'the Magnificent' (1449-1492), but by his namesake and second cousin, Lorenzo Pierfrancesco (born c. 1463) who is thought to be the patron of some of Botticelli's most famous secular images (for example, *La Primavera*).⁴⁷ Certainly the former Medici did commission works from the artist, as did his brother Giuliano before his untimely death in 1478. However, this patronage, in its totality, is often exaggerated. It serves to elevate the artist as he is conflated with Lorenzo himself and his famous inner circle of friends that consisted of Neoplatonists, Humanists, and poets (for example, Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and Agnolo Poliziano).

Those propagating the Botticellian myth, a myth which legitimizes Botticellian studies as the artist himself is deemed worthy of academic pursuit, often emphasize and embellish the artist's relationship to Lorenzo and his circle, scurrying over less flattering details of the artist's life such as the fact that he was accused of sodomy in 1502. However, the exact nature of the relationship between Lorenzo and Botticelli is impossible to determine.

While it is said that Lorenzo did not necessarily prefer to spend time in the company of artists,⁴⁸ he did express enough interest in Botticelli to compose a jovial poem about his eating habits.⁴⁹ The tone of the poem itself suggests that he and Lorenzo may have shared more than a formal employer-employee relationship; then again, perhaps the poem is only an expression of Lorenzo's wit.

Certainly Botticelli was an accomplished artist who held a certain degree of acclaim throughout Italy, yet he remained a 'home town' boy. Commissions in other cities allowed him to travel from time to time (for example, to Pisa in 1475⁵⁰ and to Rome in 1481-1482), but the artist spent the majority of his life living and working in Florence. Not only did he paint for a variety of patrons, but he also served with a variety of people on Florentine committees responsible for both the design and the placement of civic

⁴⁷ See Lightbown 72, 87, 240; Bode 119, 142; Ettlinger and Ettlinger 119, 129; Gombrich, "Early Medici" 52.

⁴⁸ Umberto Baldini, *Primavera: The Restoration of Botticelli's Masterpiece*, trans. Mary Fitton (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986) 27.

⁴⁹ An English translation, attempting to retain both its rhyming nature and rhythm, follows: "Botticelli, little barrel-/Where do they get the "little" from?/Cramming food and talking nonsense/Fat and full and quite at home/Here to luncheon, here to dinner/Never misses – never doubt/He's Botticelli on arrival/Whole-hog rolling out" (quoted in Baldini 31; the date of this poem's composition is not noted therein). Perhaps this poem served Vasari as evidence for his claim that the artist would have starved if not for Lorenzo.

artworks.⁵¹ Like any other Renaissance male, Botticelli's professional networks were diverse and brought him into contact with many different individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds.

⁵⁰ Horne 34.

⁵¹ Here I am thinking particularly of the committee charged with reviewing the designs for the Florentine *duomo*, Santa Maria del Fiore, and that charged with choosing a location for Michelangelo's *David* (see Horne 177-178 and 307; and Levey and Mandel 84).

CHAPTER II

Examining the Current State of Scholarship – Theoretical Foundations for Interpreting Renaissance Portraits, Including Botticelli's Smeralda Brandini

Jacob Burckhardt's seminal work The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (1860) characterizes the Italian Renaissance as a defining moment in Western culture in that it engendered the notion of modernity. He asserts that not only did the socio-economic circumstances of the Italian Renaissance give birth to the notion of the individual, but that they allowed the individual, as an independent creature, to rise to the fore.⁵² Since its publication, his text has come under critical fire as it lacks documentation to assert its claims. However, within the purview of generally shared knowledge, many of Burckhardt's notions regarding the Renaissance and the individual (culminating in the universal man or *uomo universale*) have filtered down to the present day as largely unchallenged truths. The way in which Burckhardt's entire thesis, based largely on Renaissance literature of various genres, unquestionably accepts the image of the Renaissance man that Renaissance authors wished to project, is perhaps analogous to art historical scholarship concerning Renaissance portraiture. As Burckhardt accepted the words of Renaissance authors, so too have art historians generally accepted the Renaissance portrait quite literally, at face value. Scholars have tended to view Renaissance portraits much like photographs. As such, Renaissance portraits have

⁵² It should be noted that Burckhardt himself, later in life, rejected the notion of individualism which he had ardently used to characterize Renaissance Italy. See Peter Burke, Introduction, The Civilization of

traditionally served as illustrations, functioning as snapshots that allow viewers to gaze into the past upon specific individuals. More often than not, the ‘snapshots’ that are explored within the discipline’s scholarship are those depicting individuals who have been ‘concretely’ identified and whose lives, like Simonetta, provide interesting art historical vignettes. Thus, when either the identifications of portrait sitters are unknown or when the biographies of known sitters lack luster, this strand of scholarship catalogues, but rarely examines these works – assuming they offer no satisfactory target for the art historical gaze.

Indeed, the subject of Renaissance portraiture is not an easy one with which to grapple; few extant documents discuss portraits specifically – or specific portraits. Subsequently, scholars are left with the task of piecing together information from a variety of sources in order to make historical sense of both portraiture in general and specific images of portrait sitters who confront them. However, within the last few decades, a handful of scholars from a variety of disciplines have begun to do just that. A brief review of their contributions – which scrutinize the genre and capsize the generalizing norm of Burckhardian individuality associated with it – will serve as a theoretical basis for examining Botticelli’s *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*.

In “The Importance of Being Ambiguous: Social Relations, Individualism, and Identity in Renaissance Florence” (1989), Ronald F. E. Weissman questions the validity, and perhaps more importantly, the practicality, of pure, unadulterated Burckhardian

individualism.⁵³ While Burckhardt extols Renaissance characteristics such as wit and ridicule as those that bespeak individuality,⁵⁴ Weissman extols them as those that bespeak self-constructed camouflage. This camouflage allowed the Renaissance man to sufficiently cloak his individual exterior and mask his unique opinions – some of which may have been read as objectionable – and thus maintain his socio-economic operability. Using extant documents that record economic transactions and, like Burckhardt, contemporaneous literature, Weissman contends that the Renaissance *uomo universale* was not marked by unrestricted freedom. Rather, he was constricted by a complex system of obligations.⁵⁵ Weissman asserts the construction of an ambiguous self that may have been read by contemporaries on multiple levels was not only plausible, but also desirable. This assertion is important because through it Weissman recasts Burckhardt's Renaissance individual as a mutable social type: a person who employed various tactics both to define and protect himself by allowing him to project a coherent, honorable image (receptive and loyal to all), while at the same time allowing him to mask his own intentions and loyalties. The resultant person or social type was essentially ambiguous, "play[ing] different roles to

Books, 1990) 13.

⁵³ Weissman's research, based on documentation, is confined to the world of the Renaissance elite. However, one can infer that the same complex web of relationships, although more difficult to document, certainly existed farther down the social chain and enveloped, to varying degrees, members of all social categories. For more information, see Ronald F. E. Weissman, "The Importance of Being Ambiguous: Social Relations, Individualism, and Identity in Renaissance Florence," *Urban Life in the Renaissance*, eds. Susan Zimmerman and Ronald F. E. Weissman (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989) 269-280.

⁵⁴ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 1860, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 110-119.

⁵⁵ While not specifically explicated by Weissman, many of these obligations pre-existed and continued into the period itself. The medieval past in its totality had not, as Burckhardt declared, "melted into air" with the advent of the Renaissance (Burckhardt 98).

different men.”⁵⁶ Some of the tactics he might employ in this ambiguous endeavor included erudite ‘verbal cleverness,’ in the form of wit and ridicule; furtive ‘expert concealment,’ in the form of guarded speech; and wise ‘stage management,’ in the form of receptive, cordial behavior.⁵⁷ While seemingly contradictory, these tactics were certainly preferable to frankness (read as authentic individual expression). The man who employed frankness risked voicing opinions that had the potential to adversely affect, if not sever, the complex network of social bonds on which he relied and in which he was enmeshed.⁵⁸ Weissman’s research, particularly in terms of documentation, is confined to the male gender; however, his assertions are equally applicable to women. The Renaissance woman was enmeshed within a similarly complex network of social bonds (as wife, mother, daughter, etc.) as the Renaissance man. Thus, projecting an ambiguous or mutable

⁵⁶ Weissman 274.

⁵⁷ Weissman 273.

⁵⁸ While not noted by Weissman, even Lorenzo ‘the Magnificent’ Medici was concerned with the persona he projected to the public at large. Not only did Lorenzo caution his male relatives against excessive use of silk and jewelry, but he also played the ‘ambiguity game’ using expert concealment and wise stage management. For example, Lorenzo himself submitted a design for the façade of Florence’s *duomo*. However, when the competition committee, of which Botticelli was a member, decided to ask Lorenzo himself to choose the best submission, he praised all of the designs, neither singling out his own nor one of his favorite artists. When viewed against this backdrop, the modest portraits of Medici women produced during Lorenzo’s life time and referred to in Footnote 18 of this document (perhaps even the modest portraits of Medici men produced during this same time period), in contrast to those of later Medici women (and men) produced during a time when the Medicis were less concerned with a tactful or non-evasive presentation of their status and power, feed into Weissman’s research, as does Botticelli’s *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*. For information on Lorenzo and his concern with his public presentation, see Gombrich, “Early Medici” 54-55; for illustrations of modest male Medici portraits (here produced by Botticelli), see Levey and Mandel 90; for illustration of a sumptuous Medici female portrait (Bronzino’s *Portrait of Eleonora Toledo* [c.1545], the wife of Cosimo I de’ Medici), see Tinagli 110. For more information on the attitudes of later Medici men, as well as portraits of them (particularly Bronzino’s *Portrait of Cosimo I* [c.1553]), see Kurt W. Forster, “Metaphors of Rule: Political Ideology and History in the Portraits of Cosimo I de’ Medici,” *Mitteilungen des kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 15 (1971): 65-104, particularly 75.

persona, rather than one that expressed unique individuality, would have also been advantageous to her.

While Burckhardtian notions of newly emergent individuality seemingly feed into the rise of the portrait genre itself, especially as it re-emerged during the Renaissance after a long period of dormancy following the Classical period, the rise of the genre is more complex. In Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300-1600 (1993), Richard A. Goldthwaite examines the economics and ideologies behind the emerging demand for artistic productions – including portraits – within the secular world of the Renaissance.⁵⁹ He asserts that Renaissance culture was a transformation of older, feudal ideologies that occurred in conjunction with evolving socio-economic circumstances. Ultimately, what emerged was a culture in which conspicuous consumption was moralized. Luxury items bestowed a sense of *magnificenza* on their owners;⁶⁰ and the “pleasures of material culture . . . [were] raised to a level of ethical dignity” befitting the new, urban elite.⁶¹ Thus, the demand for art emerged because art itself functioned as a means by which the elite (defined as those with the greatest power, money, and prestige) ennobled themselves, asserting their elevated identity. Subsequently, those not of the elite, but perhaps located

⁵⁹ While Goldthwaite’s scholarship is extremely convincing, his conclusion seems to capsize or confuse the entire thesis of his work. For, he concludes that the culture of the Renaissance “was generated by things” (emphasis mine). Yet his focus throughout his text is that the cultural desire or demand for things – the need for the elite to define itself as older ways of life began to collapse, through things – was what spawned the production of things. For more information, see sections throughout Richard A. Goldthwaite, Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300-1600, 1993 (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) – quote found on 255.

⁶⁰ Goldthwaite, Wealth 205-210.

⁶¹ Goldthwaite, Wealth 209.

close to them on the social scale and with a certain surplus of finances, could easily bolster the social status they projected by also commissioning art objects.

Similar sentiments, specifically in regard to portraiture, are echoed by Peter Burke in “The Presentation of Self in the Renaissance Portrait” (1987).⁶² Burke’s scholarship bolsters both Goldthwaite’s and Weissman’s assertions that the construction of identity was paramount to the emerging Renaissance elite. Furthermore, he maintains that the portrait itself was an important tool used in this very endeavor as “the painted face made its contribution to [the] social ‘face.’”⁶³ Burke notes that portraits were designed largely to enhance their subjects’ wealth, status, and power. They were not only items of conspicuous consumption (read as luxurious novelties) associated with the elite – or, like the sitter in Botticelli’s *Portrait of Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*, those desiring to hold membership within it – but they themselves were also “representation[s] of conspicuous consumption” which depicted the *magnificenza* of their sitters.⁶⁴ They were (and are) images which faithfully represented the cultural values of their age (values bound-up with notions of self-promotion); they did not necessarily mirror either a sitter’s physical likeness or their social reality.

In “The Concept of Portraiture in Art Theory of the Cinquecento” (1987), Luba Freedman explores various theoretical views on the portrait, as well as its construction.⁶⁵

⁶² For more information, see Burke, “The Presentation of Self” 150-167.

⁶³ Burke, “The Presentation of Self” 151.

⁶⁴ Burke, “The Presentation of Self” 151.

⁶⁵ Freedman’s research is, in some regards, generalizing and limited, but bolstered by other authors cited within the confines of this paper. For more information, see Luba Freedman, “The Concept of

While these treatises post-date Botticelli's portraits, Freedman's work is important in that it illustrates that the subject of portraiture was perhaps as problematic during the Renaissance as it is today. These theoretical treatises reveal, at least subtextually, that portraits were enigmatic and in need of definition. Considering the re-emergence of the genre itself in the Renaissance – a period leading out of the Middle Ages in which portraits were few and the idea of the image, rather than the image itself, was paramount – this is not surprising. According to Freedman's study, the evolution of the words *ritrarre* and *ritratto* within theoretical texts demonstrates a shifting attitude in regard to portraits that resulted in crystallization of artistic vocabulary. Portraits were relegated to a lesser category during the Renaissance, largely because they were considered to be simply mimetic, a product of copying the individual who sat for the artist (copying was a task often associated with painting apprentices and not masters⁶⁶). However, while openly acknowledging its inferior status, some individuals – such as Giorgio Vasari, Gabriele Paleotti, Giovan Paolo Lomazzo, and Giovan Battista Armenini – in their attempts to define both practice and product, imbued portraiture with a certain sense of grandeur that enhanced both the portrait painter and the portrait genre. Mimetic copying was transformed into a juggling act of both capturing and fictionalizing reality⁶⁷ – an endeavor

Portraiture in Art Theory of the Cinquecento," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 32 (1987): 63-82.

⁶⁶ Bruce Cole 31-32.

⁶⁷ This synthesis undoubtedly pleased patrons, for it seems that perfect verisimilitude was not a universal requirement among them. Here I am thinking particularly of Isabella d'Este. Isabella did not sit for the artist Francesco Francia; yet, his portrait of her became Isabella's favorite – one that she deemed more beautiful than nature (read than her natural, physical self). For more information, as well

successfully accomplished by only the most talented artists. Theoretically, portraits synthesized a sitter's physical likeness and his or her generally idealized form; they also attempted to capture (or create) and convey the sitter's personality or inner virtues. These strategies were designed largely to inspire respect and admiration within viewers for the sitter's noble character and to commemorate, as well as perpetuate, the noble and virtuous character of the individual depicted.⁶⁸ Certainly these latter notions are interwoven into both Goldthwaite's and Burke's scholarship regarding the aggrandizing self-construction of the emerging elite.

The research of other scholars both confirms these assertions and further explores the ways in which the Renaissance portrait functioned. While dealing with the medium of sculpture, Geraldine A. Johnson contends that the portrait was a tool designed to instill positive civic and family ideology, both as goals for the future and memories of the past, within the collective mind of its Renaissance audience.⁶⁹ In addition to primary citations, Johnson's thesis is bolstered by her notation of the prominent placement of portraits within the Renaissance home (an issue to which this study lends further insight). Similarly, Alison Wright and Anthony Molho, respectively, examine Renaissance customs of

as further examples, see Joanna Woods-Marsden, "'Ritratto al Naturale': Questions of Realism and Idealism in Early Renaissance Portraits," *Art Journal* 46 (1987): 209-216.

⁶⁸ Perpetuation or positive commemoration is a feature that Alison Wright connects to the role of remembrance within Catholicism. For more information, see Alison Wright, "The Memory of Faces: Representational Choices in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Portraiture," *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence*, eds. Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 86-113.

⁶⁹ For more information, see Geraldine A. Johnson, "Family Values: Sculpture and the Family in Fifteenth-Century Florence," *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence*, eds. Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 215-233.

commemoration.⁷⁰ Both scholars note the importance of commemoration as an act of preserving and promulgating family names. Certainly the portrait was an integral component of this endeavor, designed to celebrate specific individuals who were considered representative of the family and of the cultural values in which its very fabric was embedded.

Other scholars lend insight into specific trends in, and details of, female portraiture of the Italian Quattrocento – a category in which Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* resides. Both Patricia Simons' "Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture" (1988)⁷¹ and Paola Tinagli's Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender Representation Identity (1997)⁷² discuss the female form within portraiture as a location for the male display of wealth and status, as well as a more generalized location for the display of idealized feminine cultural values. These authors assert that the ornate and costly jewelry seen in female portraits, often coupled with heraldic devices, signals the economic status of the sitter's husband or patriarchal lineage.

⁷⁰ See both Wright 86-113; and Anthony Molho, "Names, Memory, Public Identity, in Late Medieval Florence," Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence, eds. Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 237-252.

⁷¹ It should be noted that Simons' research is bound-up with notions of the male gaze in psychoanalytic terms. Simons insists that the profile portrait format, employed for women long after it had gone out of vogue for men, may have been preserved as it not only cloistered the female body, but also disempowered its female subject by allowing the gaze of male viewers to remain dominant. Simons' research only tenuously considers the female viewer of the Renaissance portrait and does not examine female portraits where the subjects are depicted in frontal pose, like Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*. Furthermore, her conclusions – tied to her choice of methodology – are debated by many, including Alison Wright who contends that the profile format persisted as it provided an acceptable way in which to envision the female form as a "public cipher of virtue within the rhetoric of images in general." See both Simons 4-30 and Wright 86-113 – quoted found on 93.

⁷² Tinagli 47-83.

In “The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture” (1986), Elizabeth Cropper discusses the role of beauty within female portraiture,⁷³ as does Paola Tinagli, throughout her text. Into this discussion, Cropper and Tinagli insert a distinctive type of portrait – that of idealized feminine beauty. This category of anonymous female ‘portraiture’ was a growing trend during the last quarter of the fifteenth century and may have been influenced by the *dolce stil nuovo*. In this strand of Italian poetry, writers celebrated their often intangible relationships to an ideal woman – which, more often than not, were couched in Neoplatonic terms. These works extolled, and often magnified to the point of pure fictionalization, both the physical and spiritual (read as virtuous) beauty of women who served as objects of the poet’s desire. Within the realm of idealized portraiture, these poetically engendered women and their beauty were frequently fictionalized. While they may have been based on specific female models (and indeed, many have come down to modernity with labels of specific sitters attached to them – with Botticelli, commonly they are Simonettas), the resultant portraits were not intended to resemble particular individuals. Rather, they were designed to serve as idealized (and

⁷³ While Cropper’s research is interesting, her assessment of beauty stems from the Renaissance competition between the literary image and the painted image. Cropper asserts that modern scholars cannot view portraits of Renaissance females outside of this debate and furthermore insists all female portraits functioned as a paradigm for “the beauty of painting itself.” See Elizabeth Cropper, “The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture,” Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe, eds. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 175-190, particularly 176.

perhaps instructive) exemplars, admired and collected for their pleasing (and perhaps intellectual) aesthetic.⁷⁴

Turning from theory to application, the contributions of the scholars just noted facilitate a careful examination of Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* in regard to its function and its construction. First and foremost, it is important to note that this image cannot be considered a work of anonymous idealized beauty. The modest clothing and frontal pose of the woman depicted in *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* are in fact important visual cues that allow us to determine her portrait does not belong in this category. Portraits that do fall within this category are distinguishable from images of actual individuals by overtly decorative and often fanciful treatment of hair, clothing, and accessories.⁷⁵ Tinagli asserts another distinguishing feature of these portraits is that their sitters are depicted in profile;⁷⁶ Botticelli's portraits of idealized beauty seem to follow this norm. Of his ten extant female portraits, nine – all but *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* – display their subjects in profile; of these nine, at least three, and possibly as many as five, can be considered examples of idealized feminine beauty.

⁷⁴ For more information regarding instructive portraits of idealized feminine beauty, particularly as they relate to Botticelli, see Tinagli 73-77. Notions of idealized beauty are also discussed by Elizabeth Cropper; however, Cropper's scholarship is somewhat problematic in that it is rather generalizing and it extends itself to specific portraits of identifiable sitters. Thus, when considering beautiful portraits of specific individuals (versus portraits of idealized feminine beauty), issues of patronage and the socio-economic circumstances of the sitter/patron have little relevance within her research. See Cropper 175-190.

⁷⁵ Tinagli 73.

⁷⁶ However, this is not universally the case. A group of early sixteenth-century portraits of idealized beauty produced in Venice depict their subjects frontally. Interestingly, later in her text, Tinagli devotes attention to this Venetian trend. For more information, see Tinagli 73 and 98-104; also insightful in regard to Venetian female portraits which have simultaneously been interpreted as objects of pleasure

Botticelli's *Portrait of a Young Woman* (c. 1480-1485), for example, is a work that belongs in this idealized category.⁷⁷ The woman in this image resides within an unclearly defined setting. Her hair treatment, unlike the simple style adorning the woman depicted in Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* – or even more ornate styles adorning historic female portrait subjects (for example, Battista Sforza)⁷⁸ – does not fall within the confines of the culturally tangible when Renaissance fashions are considered. Rather, her hair is fantastically inventive. It is adorned with feathers, ribbons, and large pearls; it is knotted and tied in a number of tight braids, two of these extend down around the woman's neckline and are joined together at her chest in an ornate tassel (a similar hair style adorns Botticelli's *Venus in Venus and Mars*). The woman's necklace, perhaps based on an actual pendant,⁷⁹ depicts a female figure standing over a bound satyr. Through this device, the image perhaps becomes instructive – exploring the relationship between beauty and pleasure.⁸⁰

The sitter depicted in *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* has little in common with the woman portrayed in *Portrait of a Young Woman* and should not be classified as a

and instruction is Brian D. Steele's, "In the Flower of Their Youth: 'Portraits' of Venetian Beauties, ca. 1500," *Sixteenth Century Journal* XXVIII/2 (1997): 481-502.

⁷⁷ For illustration, see Levey and Mandel 98; and Tinagli 74.

⁷⁸ Here I am thinking of her posthumous portrait by Piero della Francesca (c. 1470); of course, Battista Sforza was a member of Italian court culture. For illustration, see Beck 160.

⁷⁹ Tinagli 75.

⁸⁰ For more information on these types of devices, see Tinagli 75, 57; and Steele.

work belonging to the same genre.⁸¹ Not only does the former figure lack the fanciful

⁸¹ Due to E. H. Gombrich's renown within the field of Renaissance art historical studies, mention should be made here of his scholarship in reference to Botticelli and Renaissance notions of ideal beauty. Gombrich asserts that Botticelli's distinctive female facial construction – well articulated chins, high cheekbones, domed foreheads – was not only re-used extensively by the artist throughout his career, but was subtly transformed into “ideal beauty.” Certainly this particular construction itself, perhaps influenced by the female figures of Botticelli's teacher, Fra Lippi, is ubiquitous. It pervades Botticelli's panels and canvases (although these are few) in the depiction of both sacred and secular female figures, even extending itself, in some regards (the well-articulated chin and high cheekbones), to his male figures. The similarity between Fra Lippi's female figures and those of Botticelli is marked and is one which many scholars, including Gombrich, have noted. One need only compare the shape and characteristics of Smeralda's face – both its features and its geometric construction – to that of Lippi's Marys, for example in his *Madonna and Child* of c.1452 or that of c.1455. Therefore, I suggest that these distinct facial features should be categorized only as an item within Botticelli's stock – a preferred facial construction or type which he repeatedly employed. While this type might be based on the artist's personal notions of beauty (as Gombrich asserts) in opposition to the beauty described in contemporaneous literature or observed in nature, it alone cannot be analogous to or equated with the same type of beauty associated with the genre of anonymous portraits of idealized feminine beauty. In this same vein, the categorization of any particular feature within an artist's stock as one which is ideally beautiful (read as aesthetically pleasing, here deferring to Gombrich's vague definition) – whether by the artist's contemporaries, the artist, or modernity – does not preclude its use within a portrait of a specific female sitter. Gombrich's scholarship does, however, draw attention to the fact that beauty and idealization were generally topics of Renaissance concern. This is particularly the case within the realm of Renaissance portraiture, as the scholarship of Luba Freedman, Patricia Simons, and Paola Tinagli demonstrates. Contemporaneous documents which record the reactions of patrons to their portraits attest to this same concern for beauty. For example, the Renaissance artist Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506), a contemporary of Botticelli, was often slighted for his artistic talent in this regard. On more than one occasion his portraits were thought to be unflattering by their sitters. Ultimately, even his most famous patron, Ludovico Gonzaga, remarked “Andrea is a good master in other things, in portraits he could have more grace – in portraiture he does not do so well.” However, unlike Botticelli, Mantegna did not employ any stock facial features; rather, his portraits (many contained within large groupings of individuals) are notorious for their realistic, and often harsh, details: sitters are depicted with wrinkles, thick necks, double chins, etc. With this in mind, if fifteenth-century Florentines, like E. H. Gombrich, saw within Botticelli's stock facial construction any hint of beauty, it is hard to imagine they, as patrons, would have shunned its use (these stock features are certainly found in Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady [Smeralda Brandini]*). Likewise, if Botticelli himself found these features particularly pleasing, it seems unlikely that he would deviate from them unless specifically requested by a patron (although at this early date in his career, any stock features he employed in *Portrait of a Lady [Smeralda Brandini]* are, I propose, largely attributable to the influence of Fra Lippi – rather than to the artist's own personal notions of beauty). As a point of interest, writing in 1503 – seven years prior to Botticelli's death – Verini compares Botticelli's works to those of the Greek artist Zeuxis who “fooled the birds with his painting of grapes.” The reference to verisimilitude, versus the employment of stock or standard forms that are not necessarily true to nature, is striking. For more information on Gombrich's assertions, see E. H. Gombrich, “Ideal and Type in Italian Renaissance Painting,” New Light on Old Masters: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

jewelry and hair treatment (as well as color, Botticelli's anonymous beauties are generally depicted with auburn-blond tresses,⁸² rather than this woman's shade of auburn-red⁸³), but she also lacks the relegation to an unclearly defined or a fanciful space. These types of visual cues not only assist the modern art historian in differentiating between portraits of specific individuals and portraits of idealized feminine beauty, but they prohibit the historian from perhaps too readily lumping all Renaissance female portraits into one idealized category.⁸⁴ Indeed, even Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), when speaking about the works of Botticelli, makes a distinction between portraits of beautiful women and paintings of beautiful women.⁸⁵

Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* depicts a specific, historical figure who was a member of Renaissance Florentine society. As a portrait of a specific individual, this image functioned in a variety of ways. It preserved, commemorated, and promulgated the virtuous and noble character of its sitter and, by association, her family.

1986) 89-124, particularly 103-108. For illustrations of Lippi's work, see Rolando Fusi, Looking at Florence, trans. Michael Hollingworth (Florence: Bonechi, 1972) 104 and 71, respectively. For information regarding Mantegna and Renaissance patrons' reactions to their portraits, see Woods-Marsden 209-210 (Gonzaga's quote is listed on 210). Verini's comments, taken from his De illustratione urbis Florentiae, are cited in Level and Mandel 9.

⁸² Bode refers to this color as "golden;" see Bode 64.

⁸³ The Italian Renaissance ideal color for hair was actually blonde, as noted in texts (particularly poetic) and treatises, contemporaneous with Botticelli. Conversely, Alberti (writing prior to the production of Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady [Smeralda Brandini]*), acknowledges the culturally constructed beauty of the blonde, but recasts it, through the female voice, as meaningless vanity. For an example of a work that extols the glory of blonde tresses, see Agnolo Firenzuola, On the Beauty of Women, 1548, trans. and eds. Konrad Eisenbichler and Jacqueline Murray (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992) 46-48 (while this work post-dates Botticelli's portrait, it is nevertheless representative of Renaissance attitudes at the time of its production). For Alberti's comments, see Leon Battista Alberti, The Family in Renaissance Florence (Originally titled *I libri della famiglia*; c.1433), trans. Renée Watkins (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969) 215.

⁸⁴ As Cropper's research seems, at times, to do; see Footnote 74 of this document for more information.

It aggrandized its sitter through its mere presence by signaling that she was a woman of, or aspiring to, an elevated social standing; as a commissioned object, it tangibly marked both its subject and her family as elite (whether or not they actually were) and set them apart from individuals of a lesser social status. It also constructed (perhaps fictitiously) and further projected this elite social identity. Yet the portrait's particular pictorial formation does not utilize the traditional signs employed in this endeavor, such as sumptuous jewelry or male heraldry. In this regard, the sitter depicted in Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* is an anomaly as the figure therein is adorned with neither. This absence of finery and male insignia is a significant visual cue that lends insight into this image. This portrait is, like any other, as Peter Burke asserts, a faithful representation of the values of its age – a faithful representation, I contend, of specific cultural values or attitudes in regard to the construction of social identity.⁸⁶ The visual cues that construct this identity are enveloped within a combination of discerning naturalizations and metaphorical suggestions that allow them to be read on multiple levels; they are ambiguous. Nevertheless, these ambiguous visual cues do function to aggrandize the sitter and her family. At the same time, however, they seem to protect the sitter's aggrandized status as they do not exude pretentious overtones that had the potential to offend various viewers of this portrait. Instead, the visual cues within the portrait function differently for different viewers, allowing the portrait itself to play 'different roles for different men.' Its ambiguous visual cues seemingly incite neither envy, within viewers of

⁸⁵ Vasari, *Lives* 225-227, 230.

lesser status, nor anger, within viewers of greater social status. These visual cues do not seem to signal either that the sitter and her family are positioned well above (read as superfluous boasting) or are positioning themselves – despite their actual circumstances – well above (read as unsubstantiated superfluous boasting) viewers, in either category, on the social scale. For, the portrait's audience consisted of individuals who were undoubtedly a part of the complex network of social bonds on which both the portrait sitter and her family relied and in which they were enmeshed – individuals whom the sitter and her family did not wish to affront. Currently research regarding the construction of an ambiguous Renaissance social identity is confined to daily living. Still, notions regarding ambiguity are not only applicable here, but come to the fore through an investigation of this portrait, both within the confines of the specific socio-economic circumstances in which it is steeped, and within the confines of its discreetly negotiated function as a tool which constructed and projected an elevated social identity.

⁸⁶ Burke, "The Presentation of Self" 153, 150.

CHAPTER III

Examining the Historical Record – The Portrait, The Identity of Its Sitter, Her Status, and the Circumstances Surrounding the Production of Her image

The woman depicted in *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* is, at first glance, rather unpretentious. She is depicted in three-quarters length and at an angle to the picture plane. Her painted figure resides within a dark architectural framework that is suggestive of a tangible domestic interior. Behind the sitter is a door or window that pierces the enclosed space in which she resides (the majority of scholars believe this to be a window based on extant blue paint which fills in its framed space; this is not readily apparent in photographic reproductions⁸⁷). Likewise, to her right is a large, rectangular window; a column is set within its natural recess.⁸⁸ She stands in front of yet another window, which the implied narrative of the portrait suggests she has just opened; its shutter is depicted prominently behind her. The overall construction of the image conveniently allows both subject and viewer to gaze reciprocally into each other's respective domain. The woman's right hand grasps the window jamb before her, while her left, in which she is clutching a white handkerchief, is placed genteelly on her prominent abdomen. Her plain auburn-red hair is tucked-up under a white veil. Her attire itself is reserved. She is adorned with little jewelry, save a necklace of intricate interlace

⁸⁷ Lightbown also states that a landscape can be seen through this window – none of the other descriptions of the portrait consulted note this; see Lightbown 57.

⁸⁸ As with the window behind Smeralda, first-hand descriptions note a patch of blue sky, not easily distinguished in reproductions, visible through the window to the sitter's right: see Bode 87.

metalwork. In this same vein, her garments appear, at first glance, less than ostentatious – a layering of simple white, red, and transparent gowns.

The woman in the portrait has been identified through an inscription as Smeralda (or Esmeralda; hereafter referred to as Smeralda) Donati. Due to limited documentation, it is extremely difficult to enlarge the sphere of knowledge in regard to Smeralda's own personal history, in opposition to that of her father (or patriarchal lineage), husband, and male heirs. Secondary sources agree she was a Donati by birth,⁸⁹ and thus her father was presumably a man of some social standing. The Donatis were an ancient Florentine family whose presence in Florence dates at least to the twelfth century. Their male lineage had received the title of *Messer* – reserved in Medieval Florence for knights and in Renaissance Florence for jurists. Indeed, the Donatis were included in a group of powerful Florentine families, who, in 1286, had been legally defined as the city's urban nobility or magnates (*nobiles vel magnates*).⁹⁰ While the family's power (as late as 1480, the family was still considered to hold status as members of the ruling class⁹¹), popularity, and finances⁹² fluctuated over the years, the Donati family was firmly woven into the city's

⁸⁹ All general information regarding Smeralda Donati's personal history (and that of her husband) has been summarized from the following sources (specific information and any discrepancies will be further footnoted): Lightbown 57; Salvini 44; and Rubin and Wright 327.

⁹⁰ Carol Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates: Lineage and Faction in a Medieval Commune* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) 12-13.

⁹¹ The family fell, notably, in the middle ground, classified as S for status (HS was equated with high status and LS with low status). These findings are based on information extrapolated from tax documents (*catasto*) dating from 1427 to 1480 and criteria established by Anthony Molho; see Molho's *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) 365-375.

⁹² Within the *catasto* of 1427, two Donati households are listed among the 1,502 wealthiest families in Florence, with their fiscal worth ranging from 4,521 florins to 11,899 florins; while in the *catasto* of 1480, only one Donati household is included on this list and its fiscal worth is valued at only 1,812 florins. See Molho, *Marriage Alliance* 375-410.

communal fabric. By marriage they were related to numerous Florentine families, from the Alighieri (Dante himself) to the Rucellai – and, now through Smeralda, to the Brandini.

Smeralda married Viviano Brandini most likely during the 1450s.⁹³ In 1459, Smeralda and Viviano had a son, Michelagnolo⁹⁴ (died 1528).⁹⁵ From 1470 to 1471 Viviano had served as a *fattore* (an agent or one hired to oversee the rural land holdings or business transactions of the elite⁹⁶) in Constantinople; a career which has been characterized as both “adventurous and unsuccessful.”⁹⁷ It should be noted that this

⁹³ Salvini 44.

⁹⁴ Michelagnolo is occasionally referred to as Bernardo Bandinelli. This is not surprising, however, given both the fluidity of names during the Renaissance and the family’s surname change effected at a later date. For information on the former topic, see both Levey and Mandel 84; and Evelyn Welch, *Art and Society in Italy, 1350-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 87. The latter topic will be addressed within the body of this paper.

⁹⁵ It should be noted that the birth year cited for Michelagnolo by Ronald Lightbown is incorrect. Lightbown states that Michelagnolo was born in 1495 – a transposition error (see Lightbown 57).

⁹⁶ *Fattori* were important within the Renaissance business world; Giovanni Rucellai devoted an entire section of his *Zibaldone* to the subject matter, instructing his sons how they should both choose and treat their *fattori*. See both Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., “Demography and the Politics of Fiscality,” *Florentine Tuscany: Structures and Practices of Power*, eds. William J. Connell and Andrea Zorzi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 192; and Giovanni Rucellai, *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone, I. ‘Il Zibaldone Quaresimale,’* ed. Alessandro Perosa (London: The Warburg Institute of the University of London, 1960) 3-8.

⁹⁷ Lightbown 57. Lightbown does not elaborate on why this service was unsuccessful. However, within the confines of this paper, whether or not he was a successful *fattore*, Viviano’s transition from the more prestigious position of international *fattore* to local farrier may have been perceived by his fellow Florentines, perhaps even by Viviano himself, as some sort of personal failure or decline – whether or not he had served as a farrier prior to his *fattore* service – which may indeed have been the case (see body of this paper for more information on this topic). The farrier was often perceived as someone of low social status, being characterized in texts as a heavy drinker and a lighter thinker. In fact, Henry VIII was apparently somewhat surprised, in 1514, when he discovered Italian Giovanni Ratto, sent to Henry with several horses as gifts from the Gonzagas of Mantua, was not only “well versed” in horsemanship, “but also in courteous behavior.” For more information on farriers in general, see Pia F. Cuneo, “Beauty and the Beast: Art and Science in Early Modern European Equine Imagery,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 4.3-4 (2000): 269-321, particularly 299. While Cuneo’s research is largely confined to the North, extant documents of both Italian and European origin confirm that it is

career, as well as his socio-economic status, imply that Viviano was educated to some degree. After he returned to Florence, Viviano's occupation was that of a farrier. In this capacity, he likely served as much more than a blacksmith. Often a Renaissance farrier was extensively involved with the horses for which he made shoes – treating their wounds, removing their growths, and even breeding them.⁹⁸ While this transition from *fattore* to farrier seems unusual, I would like to suggest that perhaps Viviano was actually a farrier prior to his *fattore* service and that his knowledge of horses perhaps engendered his occupation abroad. While the evidence is only circumstantial, it appears that during the fifteenth-century Constantinople was one of the channels through which coveted oriental horses, Saracens (Arabians), entered Western Europe.⁹⁹ Saracen horses were both ridden and bred by the Italian upper-classes; in fact, the Italian Renaissance *cavallo gentile* derived many of its characteristics from oriental sources.¹⁰⁰ Italian horses became somewhat prized throughout Europe; beginning in 1520, King Henry the VIII of England began to buy horses bred by the Gonzaga family of Mantua.¹⁰¹ With this in mind, perhaps Viviano, as a man (farrier?) who was already well acquainted with horses was actually sent there (as a *fattore*), in part, to acquire those of oriental stock for a discriminating (and wealthy) Florentine interested in both breeding and ridding them (c.1492, Francesco

representative of practices and perceptions throughout Europe. For the comments of Henry VIII, see Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, "Managing the Infidel: Equestrian Art on Its Mettle," Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East and West (London: Reaktion Books, 2000) 153.

⁹⁸ Cuneo 269-321, especially 299-300.

⁹⁹ Anthony Dent, The Horse through Fifty Centuries of Civilization (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974) 186; and Jardine and Brotton 149-151.

¹⁰⁰ Dent 186.

¹⁰¹ Dent 188.

Gonzaga sent Alexis Becagut to Constantinople to do just that¹⁰²). Thus, after he returned to Florence, Viviano would have simply picked up where he had left off.

In any event, while Viviano worked as a farrier, his son Michelagnolo was trained as a goldsmith (perhaps one who learned a thing or two, both about working in metal and about horses, from his father; for, Alfonsina Orsini de' Medici, the wife of Lorenzo 'the Magnificent's' son Piero, on one occasion commissioned from Michelagnolo some gold and enamel *fornimenti a cavallo* or horse trappings¹⁰³). In turn, Michelagnolo trained the famous Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571) and was not infrequently patronized by Lorenzo de' Medici (patronage, perhaps, due to Smeralda's family ties; for it has been suggested by some scholars that her sister was Lucrezia Donati, Lorenzo de' Medici's Petrarchan love during the 1460s¹⁰⁴ – this connection certainly may also play into Viviano's work both at home and abroad). Michelagnolo's son, Baccio Bandinelli (1493-1560¹⁰⁵), became a famous sculptor and painter. Both Vasari, in his second volume of the *Lives* (1568), and Benvenuto Cellini, in his *Autobiography* (published 1728, written 1558-1566), characterize Baccio as somewhat of a selfish bumbler. Baccio, like his father, was also a popular artist with the Medici family both in Florence (by now Grand Dukes of Tuscany)

¹⁰² Jardine and Brotton 149.

¹⁰³ Reiss 134.

¹⁰⁴ Lightbown 57.

¹⁰⁵ Salvini notes a date of 1488 for Baccio's year of birth, as does Eric Maclagan; however, the rest of my consulted sources, including John Pope-Hennessy and Roberta J. M. Olson, record this event in 1493. See Salvini 44; Eric Maclagan, *Italian Sculpture of the Renaissance*, 1935 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1971) 228; John Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Phaidon, 1986) 362; and Roberta J. M. Olson, *Italian Renaissance Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 179.

and in Rome (via the Medici popes).¹⁰⁶ Cellini speaks of both Baccio and his father Michelagnolo (although a competent artist) as undistinguished and dishonorable.¹⁰⁷ Conversely, Vasari speaks of Michelagnolo as an intimate friend of the Medici, who, on occasion, was entrusted with safeguarding their most valuable possessions (other Renaissance writers record that this assistance actually included physically attempting to recover possessions that had been seized when the Medici were exiled¹⁰⁸).¹⁰⁹ Of course, both Cellini's and Vasari's texts are colored by their respective author's own personal bias – the former, in direct artistic competition with the lineage of Smeralda Donati for Florentine patronage; the latter, in his effort to extol Michelangelo Buonarroti as the supreme artist of the Italian Renaissance.¹¹⁰

Somewhere between the tales of Vasari and Cellini most likely exists the socio-economic reality of Smeralda Donati, her husband, and their family. A marked lack of specific extant documentation in this regard, combined with tremendous and frequent fluctuations in the governmental and regulatory structures of Renaissance Florence, make any discussion of specific class status difficult to discuss.¹¹¹ However, while certainly not

¹⁰⁶ See Giorgio Vasari, Stories of the Italian Artists (A revised and enlarged edition of *Le Vite*; Florence, 1568), trans. E. L. Seeley (London: Chatto & Windus, 1908) 233-247; and Benvenuto Cellini, The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini, 1728, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin Books, 1956) 379.

¹⁰⁷ Cellini 23.

¹⁰⁸ Reiss 126, 134, 144 (n.22).

¹⁰⁹ Vasari, Stories 233.

¹¹⁰ See both Footnote 46 of the document and E. L. Seeley, Preface, Stories of the Italian Artists (A revised and enlarged edition of *Le Vite*; Florence, 1568) by Giorgio Vasari, trans. E. L. Seeley (London: Chatto & Windus, 1908) VI.

¹¹¹ For a discussion concerning the problematic nature of social class identification during the Middle Ages and continuing into the Renaissance, see Giles Constable, "Was There a Medieval Middle Class? *Mediocrates (mediani, medii)* in the Middle Ages," Portraits of Medieval and Renaissance Living, eds.

among the uppermost echelon of the city's social elite, both Smeralda's patriarchal family history and the aforementioned texts that discuss her heirs, indicate that she, her husband, and their child(ren?)¹¹² were respected members of Florentine society – albeit at times precariously positioned within its social hierarchy – whose ancestry and occupations relegated them to a middle-ground (and possibly a type of middle-class).

It is enticing to attempt to fill in the specific details of Smeralda's life based on this limited biographical information. Could she have died prior to 1470, perhaps giving birth to Michelagnolo? Was Viviano overcome with grief at the loss of his wife? Was this perhaps the reason he took a position as a *fattore* in Constantinople? Did he imagine the distance and exotic location, far removed from Florence and Smeralda's memory, would serve as a balm to heal his wounds? Did this plan fail? After all, Viviano returned to Florence after only one year of apparently unsatisfactory *fattore* service. Upon his return, did Viviano, still consumed with grief – and now suffering professionally, commission a portrait of his dear, departed wife so that she would be with him always? Such an emotional tale, particularly in light of the nature of Renaissance marriages – based, not on love, but on calculated economic exchanges and bound-up with issues of status and class¹¹³ – is largely conjecture, although not completely improbable.

Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., and Steven A. Epstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) 301-323; and sections throughout Lansing.

¹¹² Extant documents note that only Michelagnolo was born to Smeralda and Viviano. The possibility that the couple had other children, perhaps even a daughter, certainly exists.

¹¹³ Anthony Molho, Roberto Barducci, Gabriella Battista, and Francesco Donnini, "Genealogy and Marriage Alliance: Memories of Power in Late Medieval Florence," Portraits of Medieval and

I would like to suggest another scenario: that Smeralda was alive and well and that Viviano specifically commissioned Smeralda's portrait in order to take it with him to Constantinople (upon his eventual return to Florence, the portrait's subsequent viewing context would have been, as with other Renaissance portraits, the domestic interior).¹¹⁴ The inconclusive dating of her portrait,¹¹⁵ combined with Smeralda's frontal, communicative pose at the window – as if she were greeting someone, perhaps someone departing for, or returning from, a trip – seem to bolster this hypothesis (again, of Botticelli's extant female portraits, Smeralda is the only female among the group depicted frontally). The notion that Smeralda's portrait would have been commissioned in order for Viviano, in some way, to interact with her from afar is certainly plausible. The transition from the profile to the frontal portrait pose in this regard has already been noted. Casting this transition into the realm of artistic theory, the Renaissance artist Leon Battista Alberti, writing in the 1430s, asserted that a portrait had the power to make absent men

Renaissance Living, eds. Samuel K. Cohn, Jr. and Steven A. Epstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) 39-70; Molho, *Marriage Alliance*; and David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427*, 1978 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) are all insightful in regard to the subject of Renaissance marriages.

¹¹⁴ This suggestion is not necessarily incongruous with current scholarship, noted in Footnote 20 of this document, that asserts female portraits, prior to the last two decades of the Quattrocento, were commissioned posthumously. Of course, the date of Smeralda's death is unknown. If, however, she was alive at the time of Viviano's departure, it seems logical that a commission of this sort would have been appropriate, although, according to some scholars, not necessarily traditional given the sitter's less-than-posthumous status. It should also be noted that this suggestion certainly does not negate the interpretation(s) of the portrait or the various ways in which Renaissance Florentines may have read it within the confines of this paper. It is merely a hypothesis as to the conditions under which the portrait was commissioned.

¹¹⁵ See Footnote 1 of this document for more information on the portrait's date.

present.¹¹⁶ The actions of Beatrice de Contrai seemingly attest to this same sentiment. In April of 1495, as she sat down to eat, Beatrice decided to place a portrait of her dear friend Isabella d'Este on a chair next to her. As she later explained to Isabella, "by looking at it I seem to be at table with your ladyship."¹¹⁷ Similarly, in 1498, Isabella requested that Cecilia Gallerani send a portrait of herself, painted by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), to Mantua. Among the reasons for this request was that Isabella might "have the pleasure of seeing your [Cecilia's] face again."¹¹⁸

Regardless of who commissioned this portrait, the identification of its sitter is based on the still-visible inscription located at the bottom of the windowsill which frames her figure. All Botticelli scholars agree this inscription, "*Smeralda di M. Bandinelli moglie di Vi. Bandinelli*," was added well after the portrait's completion. The lack of inscription on the original, however, is not unusual. In fact, in "Naming the Names: The Transience of Individual Identity in Fifteenth-Century Italian Portraiture" (1998), Evelyn Welch explains the absence of portraiture inscriptions, in spite of the fact that contractual demands often required figures within portraits to resemble specific individuals. Welch suggests a number of reasons to explain this phenomena, not the least of which is the desire to lend portraits more generalizing qualities which confer magnificence upon their

¹¹⁶Taken from Leon Battista Alberti's text *On Painting* (Originally titled *De Pictura*), cited in Jodi Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 8.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Evelyn Welch, "Naming Names: The Transience of Individual Identity in Fifteenth-Century Italian Portraiture," *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, eds. Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson (London: British Museum Press, 1998) 93; also see Tinagli 85.

sitters – perhaps for posterity.¹¹⁹ While various scholarly suggestions as to who added the inscription on Smeralda's portrait and when abound,¹²⁰ the predominate school of thought asserts that it was added during the sixteenth century by Baccio Bandinelli, Smeralda's grandson.¹²¹ Baccio, typical of many Renaissance Florentines, was interested in a self-aggrandizing genealogy that would endow his family with an elevated status. The attribution of the identifying legend to Baccio might explain the confusion as to Smeralda's marital surname – for it is listed as both Brandini and Bandinelli in current

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Tinagli 85.

¹¹⁹ For more information, see Welch, "Naming Names."

¹²⁰ A small group of scholars purport poet-painter Dante Gabriele Rossetti added the inscription (and a bit of touch-up paint) to the portrait before the Victoria and Albert Museum acquired it. Additionally, the very recent scholarship of Louis Waldman suggests the inscription is actually a seventeenth-century addition that should be attributed to Baccio's grandson, in a spirit of self-aggrandizement which he shared with his grandfather. In this same vein, Baccio Bandinelli's autobiography *Memoriale* has recently been called into question as a fake, again produced by his grandson (Waldman's research, introduced into scholarship only last year, has not been sufficiently tested to serve as a basis for fact here). Interestingly, documents concerning this piece in the Victoria and Albert Museum's current curatorial file do not discuss the debate over the inscription's attribution. For information regarding the inscription's attribution to Rossetti, see Salvini 44; and Levey and Mandel 88. For brief comments on Waldman's scholarship that suggests this inscription was added by Baccio's grandson, see Rubin and Wright 327 (Rubin and Wright intimate Waldman's findings are based on handwriting samples). Information from the Victoria and Albert Museum was derived from curatorial file information faxed to the University of Arizona, April 26, 2001 [Victoria and Albert Museum, South, Curatorial File Sheet on Botticelli's Smeralda Bandinelli (CAI.100) (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2000) 1].

¹²¹ See Lightbown 57; Rubin and Wright 327; and Barbara Deimling, *Sandro Botticelli: 1444/45-1510* (Köln: Taschen, 2000) 24. It should be pointed out that Lightbown also suggests Baccio, in an effort to bolster his claims to a long and noble lineage, may have simply purchased a portrait of "a well-to-do-Florentine" and added the inscription – thus adopting an anonymous female into the lineage. While this seems a bit preposterous, whether the work was commissioned by Smeralda's husband Viviano and remained in the possession of their offspring or was a portrait of an anonymous female which Baccio purchased and appropriated into the family's lineage is of little significance within the confines of this investigation. Both scenarios lend credence to the fact that this image was valued as an appropriate depiction of a Renaissance woman of some status. See Lightbown 57.

scholarship.¹²² However, it was Baccio himself who apparently adopted the surname Bandinelli over Brandini, his grandfather's proper surname, during the 1530s.¹²³ Interestingly, the adaptation of surnames was a popular Renaissance trend that Anthony Molho has suggested is linked to the emergence and definition of self on the part of the emerging 'middle-class' which was developing into a viable social force.¹²⁴ Males, including Baccio, generally transformed their own Christian names, or those of their matriarchal line, into surnames – in opposition to the names of their fathers or grandfathers. In part, this was done to construct or create personal lineages that seemed more viable within the political sphere. While not expressed by Molho, one could certainly conclude this was most desirable in cases where patriarchal names were linked to a less desirous heritage – perhaps this was the case with Baccio and his grandfather's unsuccessful *fattore* service in Constantinople.

Ultimately, the inscription – one which utilizes a more viable, albeit historically intangible, surname – was likely placed there by Baccio as a means of aggrandizing his own lineage. The act of inscribing Smeralda's name onto the portrait not only acknowledged, but also commemorated (and perpetuated to this day), the memory of his grandmother.¹²⁵ Indeed, during Baccio's lifetime, what Peter Burke refers to as the

¹²² For example, she is identified as Brandini by Lightbown (56) and Deimling (24); and as Bandinelli by Ruben and Wright (327), Salvini (44), Levey and Mandel (88), and the museum in which the portrait currently resides.

¹²³ Salvini 44; Ruben and Wright 327. Consulted texts dealing specifically with Renaissance sculptors, including those of Pope-Hennessy and Olson, do not discuss the origin of this new surname.

¹²⁴ See Molho, "Names, Memory" 237-252, particularly 250, 246-247, and 248-249.

¹²⁵ This action resonates with notions introduced into scholarship by Geraldine A. Johnson: the portrait as a reservoir for past and present ideologies concerned with positive family and civic values.

'portrait prop' was a popular location for the public display of family status.¹²⁶ As far as Baccio himself is concerned, I suggest that this particular portrait may have been deliberately utilized by Baccio to enmesh him within an illustrious legacy of Florentine art. Botticelli was, during his own lifetime, a well-known and admired artist;¹²⁷ while Baccio, certainly admired by the likes of the Medici (in fact his portrait is among other artists which surround Cosimo I in a fresco located in Florence's Palazzo Vecchio¹²⁸), seems to have occupied a more precarious artistic social position. Neither the comments of Cellini nor Vasari in regard to Baccio's character are wholly flattering. Additionally, Baccio was a rival – a "hated" one at that, according to Nathaniel Harris¹²⁹ – of Michelangelo (1475-1564).¹³⁰ A portrait produced by the famed Botticelli would have simultaneously served as a prop that personally connected the artist to Baccio's family and touted the family's identity and status.

Certainly Smeralda's portrait functioned in at least the latter manner – for it was preserved by the family and equated with it when her identification was added to the original work.¹³¹ It is therefore reasonable to assume that this image was valued as an

¹²⁶ Peter Burke, The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999) 141 (including n.12).

¹²⁷ Several contemporaneous documents attesting to this are reprinted in Levey and Mandel 9-10.

¹²⁸ Fresco by Vasari (c.1559) – other artists depicted therein include Vasari and Cellini; for illustration, see Fusi 63.

¹²⁹ Nathaniel Harris, The Art of Michelangelo, 1981 (New York: Galley Books, 1989) 40; for further information regarding the competitive nature between the two artists, see Pope-Hennessy 44-45 and Olson 179-181.

¹³⁰ Such a move, that is Baccio's self-aggrandizing and self-constructed association of himself with Botticelli, may have piqued Michelangelo if the two were hated rivals; for, Michelangelo had apparently been on close and trusting terms with Botticelli (see Footnote 272 of this document).

¹³¹ The portrait's provenance is of little use here, documented only in modernity (the portrait was acquired from the Pourtalès Collection by Dante Gabriele Rossetti and now is part of the Victoria and

appropriate, if not pleasing, depiction of a Renaissance woman both at the time of its production and when it was subsequently inscribed. This value resides, I contend, in the portrait's ability, through its ambiguous visual cues, to communicate varying degrees of elevated social identity, as well as different aspects of it, to a diverse audience. It is to these visual cues which we now turn.

Albert Museum's collection in London). However, the assumption that the portrait remained within the family is based on the fact that its inscription, according to scholars, was placed there by one of two family members. For information regarding the portrait's provenance, see Salvini 44: and Levey and Mandel 88.

CHAPTER IV

Smeralda's Attire – Elegant or Extravagant?

Smeralda's frontal, communicative pose at her open window allows the viewer an unobstructed view of three-quarters of her figure; thus, we are able to scrutinize not only the portrait subject, but her garments – items paramount in communicating social identity. As previously stated, the dress which adorns Smeralda appears to be rather simple – particularly if we compare it to those worn by other female sitters in extant portraits produced within a few decades of Smeralda's; for example: *Portrait of Woman with a Man at a Casement* (c.1435-1445), attributed to Botticelli's teacher Fra Filippo Lippi; *Portrait of Lady in Yellow* (c.1445-1455), by Alessio (or Alessandro) Baldovinetti (c.1425-1499); *Portrait of Giovanna Albizzi* (or Tornabuoni, married to Lorenzo Tornabuoni) (c.1488), by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494); and *Portrait of Maddalena Doni* (c.1505-1507), by Raphael (1483-1520).¹³² Three of these female portrait subjects, according to traditional identifications, are from Florence; the other, from Urbino (*Portrait of Lady in Yellow* is thought to depict Francesca Stati from Urbino).¹³³ It is important to note that the three Florentines are not all of the very highest social status. In fact, according to extant documents, Angiola di Bernardo Sapiti, the female sitter in *Portrait of Woman with a Man at a Casement*,¹³⁴ held a social status similar to that of

¹³² The dates of all four of these works are debated: dates listed here are those used by Tinagli 55, 56, 78, 96 (see also for illustrations).

¹³³ Tinagli 53.

¹³⁴ Wilhelm Bode claims that this particular double portrait, a product of Botticelli's teacher, is an "exact prototype" of *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*. Bode does not elaborate on the issue:

Smeralda.¹³⁵ However, Smeralda's portrait does not rely on her ostentatious presentation in order to assert social identity; although, as the portrait of Angiola di Bernardo Sapiti intimates, this would have been an appropriate way to do so, given Smeralda's social status.

The clothing and jewelry that adorn Sapiti, Stati, Albizzi, and Doni in their portraits embody what both Patricia Simons and Paola Tinagli refer to as a 'display culture' in which conspicuous consumption signaled status.¹³⁶ In their portraits, these women flaunt accessories such as ornate and prominently displayed jewelry and sumptuous gowns, some containing heraldic imagery or even embroidered text that denote and proclaim both their patriarchal lineage and their wifely duties or culturally desired feminine virtues.¹³⁷ On some level, these women themselves are transformed into ornaments, into precious baubles or gems – their corporal bodies dissolve and seem to meld with the accoutrements that proclaim their elevated status. By contrast, Smeralda's attire is notably less ornate than that of the other portrait subjects just mentioned, and, it

perhaps he is referring to the portrait's setting within a domestic interior and the female sitter's pose at a window – for no other similarities between these two images are to be found. On the contrary, a conspicuous air of difference permeates Lippi's work and separates it from that of Botticelli's. The most striking difference is the elaborate adornment of Lippi's female sitter who is depicted in stark profile. See Bode 87. The identification of this sitter as Angiola di Bernardo Sapiti is noted in Tinagli 52-53.

¹³⁵ Based on the findings of Anthony Molho, the family of Angiola's husband Lorenzo di Ranieri Scolari held status (versus high or low status) and Angiola's father was listed among the 1,502 wealthiest families in Florence. See Molho, *Marriage Alliance* 374 and 402.

¹³⁶ Simons 8; Tinagli 51.

¹³⁷ For an in-depth discussion of these four portraits, see Tinagli 52-58; 77-79; 95-98; and, particularly in regard to the patriarchal heraldry contained in Giovanna Albizzi's portrait, see Simons 13.

contains no patriarchal heraldry. She wears no ostentatious rings,¹³⁸ brooches, or pins – only a necklace of interwoven metalwork. Her accessories are few and her body remains transfixed within the frame of the portrait, allowing viewers to focus on the image of the sitter herself as a specific individual. However, when scrupulously examined, Smeralda's portrait extends beyond her as an individual. While unlike those of more sumptuously adorned females, nonetheless her portrait functioned to construct her and her family's social identity in broader Renaissance terms.

Part of this identity is certainly connected to that which adorns Smeralda's body. While Jacob Burckhardt was not convinced that Renaissance portraits represented prevailing Italian fashions,¹³⁹ the research of Elizabeth Birbari, author of Dress in Italian Painting, 1460-1500 (1975), begs to differ. The garments of Smeralda may appear to modern eyes rather plain and insignificant, but various contemporary viewers of her portrait may have drawn other conclusions. The cut and style of her garments, their various layers, and the fabrics of which they are made, mark her as a woman of propriety and distinction. Women's clothing in fifteenth-century Florence (and generally the whole of Italy) resided in the concept of a wardrobe. While particular fashions (in terms of fabric patterns, the cut of garments, the means by which they were fastened together, etc.) were in a constant state of flux, the wardrobe itself remained the main staple of Florentine dress.

¹³⁸ As a point of interest, rings were given to a Renaissance bride at the time of her marriage, and not just by the groom, but by relatives near and far. Clarice Orsini received more than fifty rings when she wed Lorenzo de' Medici in 1468 (see Ross 133); and Nannina de' Medici received twenty-six when she married Bernardo Rucellai in 1466 (this figure is incorrectly recorded as twenty-four by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber in Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Tuscany, 1985, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 231 (compare to number listed in Rucellai 29-30).

A wardrobe consisted of three pieces: a chemise, dress, and an over-dress.¹⁴⁰ Sumptuary law governed the number of wardrobes owned by a Florentine resident at any one particular time.¹⁴¹ Smeralda is dressed for a formal occasion (perhaps her session with the artist as she posed for her portrait), sporting all three layers of her wardrobe.¹⁴²

Smeralda's wardrobe is neither practical nor functional.¹⁴³ Her garments are large and bulky and would perhaps impede the simple act of walking. Although the three distinct layers of fabric create much of Smeralda's girth, she is nevertheless depicted in the Renaissance style, seen in both Northern and Southern images, appropriate to the female form: one which intimates pregnancy, whether or not the subject in question is actually

¹³⁹ Burckhardt 236.

¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth Birbari, Dress in Italian Painting, 1460-1500 (London: John Murray, 1975) 16.

¹⁴¹ Birbari 15.

¹⁴² Birbari 16.

¹⁴³ As a point of interest, while it was not proper for women of status (like Smeralda) to perform labor-intensive tasks, temporary wardrobe accommodations for light household chores were available to the Renaissance woman. Such clothing modifications allowed for greater mobility to perform even the most mundane chores (such as lifting and moving small objects or pouring liquids into bowls or pitchers) and included rolling-up one's sleeves, donning shorter over-dresses, and fastening a belt a few inches below the waist over an entire wardrobe ensemble and then pulling up the length of the over-dress so that it fell over the belt. Such wardrobe accommodations, and the tasks associated with them, are all illustrated in Renaissance works of art – some being employed therein by females of all ages who presumably represent elite types. Even Alberti, in *Della famiglia*, intimates, it would seem much to the author's dismay, that industrious, socially elevated females occasionally performed menial household labor. For information on labor-ready clothing modifications, types of chores performed, and the status of those who performed them, see Birbari 27. All of the garment modifications noted are illustrated in Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Birth of the Virgin* (1485/6-1490), in the Cappella Maggiore, Santa Maria Novella, Florence; the belting technique is also illustrated in Giovanni Bellini's *Madonna of the Meadow* (c.1500-1505). In the former example, it should be noted that despite the labor alterations, the garments – both their style and fabric – mark those that wear them as women of some status, while in the latter example the woman sporting a belt is likely a peasant. For illustrations, see Laurie Schneider Adams, *Italian Renaissance Art* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001) 245, 282. Alberti's comments can be found in *The Family* 229.

pregnant.¹⁴⁴ Marriage was an expected component of a Renaissance woman's life and also one of the few sources of relatively stable provision available to her, other than a convent¹⁴⁵ (rarely did a young girl of status grow-up to be anything other than a wife or a nun¹⁴⁶). As a wife, a Renaissance woman was both encouraged and expected to produce children whom she was subsequently to rear and educate, "teach[ing] them their duty to the immortal God, to their Country and Parents."¹⁴⁷ Heirs, particularly males, were important within Renaissance society for a variety of reasons.¹⁴⁸ A son provided a source of economic support for his family and continued his patriarchal line. Additionally, he was also a resource for the community at large. He contributed to the local economy through both labor and payment of taxes; he contributed to the local government through his

¹⁴⁴ Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) is an example of a Northern portrait which depicts its female sitter in a way that intimates pregnancy – in spite of the fact that she was almost assuredly not with child at the time of its production. Not only did its female sitter die childless, but recent evidence also suggests the couple depicted was not married until 1447. For information about the childless sitter, see Craig Harbison, "Sexuality and Social Standing in Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Double Portrait*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43 (1990): 267. For more information on the Arnolfinis and their wedding, see Lorne Campbell "Portrait of Giovanni(?) Arnolfini and his Wife," *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Paintings* (London: National Gallery Publications Limited, 1998) 174-211, especially 195, 197, and 209 (n.211); illustration on 177.

¹⁴⁵ Conversely, not only could young men easily provide for themselves, but as Alessandra Strozzi (c.1408-1471) remarked in 1466, they were often "happy to stay single." In fact, according to statistics derived from tax records dating to 1427, one in every eight Florentine men of marrying age remained single, while for Florentine women this figure was approximately one in every three. For Strozzi's comments, see Alessandra Strozzi, *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi (dating from 1447-1470)*, bilingual edition, trans. Heather Gregory (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 191. For information on marriage statistics, see Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 216.

¹⁴⁶ Simons 12.

¹⁴⁷ Due to limited library resources, an Italian copy is unavailable: Francesco Barbaro, *Directions for Love and Marriage* (Originally titled *De re uxoria*; 1415), trans. unknown (London: Printed for John Leigh and Tho. Burrell, 1677) 112 and 118, respectively.

¹⁴⁸ For a wealth of information regarding the place, role, importance, and life of children during the Renaissance, see Louis Haas, *The Renaissance Man and His Children: Childbirth and Early Childhood in Florence, 1300-1600* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) and Klapisch-Zuber, particularly her chapter entitled "Childhood in Tuscany at the Beginning of the Fifteenth Century."

honorable behavior/citizenship and potential civil service; he also married and had more children, thus keeping the community, in its totality, well populated and viable. An official document recording various deliberations of the Florentine City Council in 1433 clearly states, “women were created to replenish this . . . city.”¹⁴⁹ Similar sentiments are expressed by Venetian Francesco Barbaro (c.1398-1454) in his *De re uxoria* (translated as *Directions for Love and Marriage*) (1415), essentially a guidebook for the educated Renaissance man. Within this text, Barbaro maintained, echoing the policies of the Roman Catholic Church, that sexual intercourse was not designed for pleasure, but for procreation.¹⁵⁰ To this, the comments of Florentine Giovanni Rucellai must be added. In his *Zibaldone* (a collection of miscellaneous information he began to write down in 1457, largely meant to be read by his sons), he states, “there are two principal things that men do in this life . . . the first is to procreate.”¹⁵¹

Regardless of Smeralda’s condition (that is, with or without child), her overdress consists of a great deal (note the numerous gathers) of transparent fabric,¹⁵² trimmed with a dark, contrasting brocade interwoven with gold¹⁵³ (on occasion, this same light, airy fabric was also used to depict the garments of religious figures – including the Christ

¹⁴⁹ It should be noted that the Council was deliberating over the enactment of sumptuary law. See “*Deliberazioni dei Signori e Collegi. ordinaria autorità*, 42, fols. 5v-6r,” in Gene Brucker, ed., *The Society of Renaissance Florence: A Documentary Study* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 181.

¹⁵⁰ Barbaro 97-98.

¹⁵¹ Quoted in Goldthwaite, *Wealth* 223; and Crum 37.

¹⁵² Birbari 26.

¹⁵³ This detail is not apparent in reproductions, but is noted in the curatorial file compiled by the museum that houses this work.

child¹⁵⁴ and angels¹⁵⁵). Birbari suggests that transparent fabrics depicted in portraits of the period, and thus Smeralda's overdress, may have been made of silk.¹⁵⁶ The overdress is apparently fastened with hooks, for no sign of laces, a much more practical means of fastening clothing,¹⁵⁷ protrude though the brocade trim. Clearly this piece is designed to produce a pleasing aesthetic effect; it is not concerned with protection or warmth.

Underneath the transparent overdress is Smeralda's dress of red. Its shiny texture, revealed at the point where her overdress fails to fully cover the edges of her dress sleeves,¹⁵⁸ suggests it too is made of silk – perhaps even a product of Florence itself. By the middle of the fifteenth century, the city was as well-known for its woven silk (particularly its damasks, brocades, and figured satins which were exported to all of Europe and beyond¹⁵⁹) – as it was for its wool.¹⁶⁰ Both fine silk and brocade were also imported into the city from the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁶¹ The color, too, may be significant, for red was both the color worn by Renaissance governmental officials in

¹⁵⁴ For example, Masaccio's *San Giovenale Altarpiece* (c. 1422): for illustration, see Beck 117.

¹⁵⁵ For example, Matteo di Giovanni's *Assumption of the Virgin* (c. 1450) and Botticelli's own *Madonna del Magnificat* (c. 1483-1485): for illustrations, see Birbari Plate 8 and Beck 194, respectively.

¹⁵⁶ Birbari 84.

¹⁵⁷ Birbari 75.

¹⁵⁸ As a point of interest, during the fifteenth century, no woman – unless she was a beggar – was to be seen in public with her arms uncovered or even exposed more than a few inches above the wrist (Birbari 72).

¹⁵⁹ Goldthwaite, *Building* 42-44.

¹⁶⁰ De Lamar Jensen, *Renaissance Europe: Age of Recovery and Reconciliation*, 2nd ed. (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992) 96.

¹⁶¹ Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) 46.

Florence¹⁶² and was associated with brides of some social standing.¹⁶³ Red or crimson garments were expensive, requiring costly insect dye in order for them to acquire the desired hue.¹⁶⁴

The sleeves of Smeralda's red dress are slashed opened and held together at intervals by dark bands. While slashing was a common practice that allowed the wearer of a garment greater freedom, it also imbued the wearer's dress with a more decorative aesthetic.¹⁶⁵ The latter is most likely the case with Smeralda's dress; for the sleeves of it are rather wide to begin with (note the excess folds of cloth surrounding her upper left arm) and most likely did not restrict her movement. Rather, here slashing ensures that more of her chemise, the final, although foundational, layer of her wardrobe was visible. During the latter half of the fifteenth century, the chemise began to be viewed in and of itself as a decorative garment, worthy of display.¹⁶⁶ Her chemise is apparently made of white linen. Considering the amount of linen exposed through the slashed sleeves of her dress and extending above the neckline of it, this linen could be the fine type imported

¹⁶² Peter Burke suggests the significance of the color red is more generalized, indicating Florentine citizenship. Burke, "The Presentation of Self" 159.

¹⁶³ In 1447, Caterina Strozzi married Marco Parenti in a gown of red; Marco was the son of Parente Parenti, a Florentine of immense wealth; Caterina came from an ancient noble family (high status) which was also, at times, extremely wealthy. See Strozzi 31; Edgcumbe Staley, Famous Women of Florence (London: Archibald Constable, 1909) 187; Molho, Marriage Alliance 398, 374, 403-404. Other examples of brides in red are sure to be found, but generally post-date the execution of Smeralda's portrait by a few years (assuming it was executed between 1470 and 1471).

¹⁶⁴ Alison Brown, Footnote 167, Dialogue on the Government of Florence by Francesco Guicciardini, trans. and ed. Alison Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 58.

¹⁶⁵ Birbari 68-69.

¹⁶⁶ Birbari 42.

from both France and the Low Countries which the Florentine upper-classes wore during the fifteenth century.¹⁶⁷

Finally, Smeralda's outfit is completed with two white kerchiefs. The first is a handkerchief trimmed with dark bands; its shiny texture is suggestive of silk. Its decorative design matches her entire ensemble, echoing the white linen chemise sleeves bound by the dark bands of her dress. The handkerchief itself signifies that she is indeed a woman of some standing, for handkerchiefs of the period stood as a symbol of breeding and status.¹⁶⁸

The other kerchief in the painting covers a portion of Smeralda's hair, signifying that she is a married woman. While during the fifteenth century in Northern Europe it was considered improper for married women to show any of their hair at all, in Italy, where the enveloping headdress was never widely adopted, little more than a thin piece of fabric was required.¹⁶⁹ The type of fabric, perhaps a small piece of linen or silk, used here is difficult to determine. Smeralda's veil is perched at the back of her head, likely secured with pins as no strings, required for fastening, are visible. The length of her hair is parted down the middle, drawn tightly back (perhaps into a coil or braid, often referred to as a *fillet*), and tucked underneath her veil. The hair that surrounds her face is tightly curled on either side (the Florentines called these curls *alla montano* or *alla caprara*¹⁷⁰), accentuating her high, smooth forehead. In its totality, Smeralda's hairstyle, complete with veil, is reminiscent of

¹⁶⁷ Birbari 42.

¹⁶⁸ Ruben and Wright 327.

¹⁶⁹ Birbari 80.

that which adorns the more famous and affluent Florentine, Giovanna Tornabuoni (nee Albizzi), in her portrait by Ghirlandaio (previously mentioned). While hair fashions, like those of garments, frequently changed, Smeralda's hairstyle is certainly within the range of popular fifteenth-century variations.¹⁷¹ In fact, several features – the high forehead – presumably plucked; the elaborate curls; the part down the middle; even the small, silk veil – represent some of the most fashionable Italian trends dating from approximately 1450 to the turn of the century. And yet, Smeralda's hair and veil are certainly not as elaborate as the sumptuous jeweled headpiece of Angiola di Bernardo Sapiti (the sitter in *Portrait of Woman with a Man at a Casement*) or the jeweled veil of Francesca Stati (the sitter in *Portrait of Lady in Yellow*). The hairstyles and headpieces of these latter two figures are, in fact, more reminiscent of those that adorned females of contemporaneous Italian court culture – for example the elaborate hair style of Battista Sforza (married to Federico da Montefeltro) of the court at Urbino; or, during the early sixteenth century, the sumptuous headdress (the *zazara*, said to be invented by Isabella herself¹⁷²) of Isabella d'Este (married to Francesco Gonzaga) of the Mantuan court.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Giuseppe Martinelli, ed., *The World of Renaissance Florence*, 1964, trans. Walter Darwell (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1968) 74.

¹⁷¹ General information regarding hairstyle trends was compiled from brief references scattered throughout Martinelli; Phyllis G. Tortora and Keith Eubank, *A Survey of Historic Costume* (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1989); Joan Nunn, *Fashion in Costume: 1200-1900* (London: The Hebert Press, 1984); Doreen Yarwood, *European Costume: 4000 Years of Fashion* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1975); Doreen Yarwood, *The Encyclopedia of World Costume* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1978); and Rosita Levi Pisetzky, *Storia del Costume in Italia*, 5 vols. (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1966) Vol. 3.

¹⁷² Tinagli 107.

¹⁷³ For illustration of *Portrait of Battista Sforza, Countess of Urbino* by Piero della Francesca (c. 1470), see Beck 160; and for *Isabella d'Este* by Titian (1534-1536), see Fred S. Kleiner, Christin J. Mamiya, and Richard G. Tansey, *Gardner's Art Through the Ages*, 11th ed. (Orlando: Harcourt College

In order to further imbue Smeralda's clothing, and the portrait itself, with social significance, however, the physical description of her attire must be supplemented with information regarding the contemporaneous historical regulations concerning adornment. During the fifteenth century, Florence passed no less than ten sumptuary laws.¹⁷⁴ In 1433, the Florentine *Signori* specifically targeted women as those whose excessive spending required regulation. The *Signori*'s official record discusses the immorality of women adorned with many costly accessories – the expense of which, generally borne by their male counterparts who assumed financial responsibility for these 'spend-thrifts,' was becoming unbearable. Thus, the *Signori* declared "women were created . . . not to spend gold and silver on clothing and jewelry," and, in order to "reform the city with good customs," enacted one of many sumptuary laws Florence was to see over the next several years.¹⁷⁵

Adding to this list, a law of 1472 prohibited everyone, with the exception of knights and doctors, from wearing large garments made of a certain type of red or crimson cloth. Only red belts and red garment linings were permitted.¹⁷⁶ The following year, 1473, another sumptuary law was enacted that further limited adornment and expenditure on adornments (although generally these laws dealt with funerals¹⁷⁷). Prior to this, in

Publishers, 2001) 672. As a point of interest, Botticelli's artistic skills were recommended to both the Sforza family and Isabelle d'Este by their respective *fattori* (see Alison Cole, 35 and 168; and Levey and Mandel 84.)

¹⁷⁴ Hunt 29.

¹⁷⁵ Brucker 181.

¹⁷⁶ Alison Brown 58.

¹⁷⁷ Hunt 205.

1415, a complete ban had been temporarily enacted on the use of precious stones and pearls; and, in 1449, ornate displays on women's dresses had also been curbed.¹⁷⁸

According to Alan Hunt, Florentine sumptuary laws largely exemplified "sharp struggles between a merchant class and an older nobility."¹⁷⁹ These laws symbolically expressed the defense of an older, hierarchical social order that was threatened by new social and economic forces (namely, the rise of the mercantile or 'middle-class').

Certainly these sumptuary laws were not spontaneously generated; rather, they were calculated responses of the Florentine elite to curb a pre-existing (and one would assume ever-increasing) display of luxury by those who resided in social classes below their own.

In essence, these laws sought to keep wealthy 'commoners' from acting like

'magnates.'¹⁸⁰ They attempted to insulate and protect the city's upper social echelon from being visually confused with those of a lesser social status; for example, individuals like Smeralda Brandini.

Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini), like any other Renaissance portrait of a female sitter, primarily conveys meaning to viewers through "the elegance of the sitter, her clothes, ornaments, and jewelry" – through the accoutrements employed in the construction of the sitter's social identity.¹⁸¹ Certainly the social importance of attire is

¹⁷⁸ Hunt 204.

¹⁷⁹ Hunt 164. It is important to note that Hunt's comments here are representative of a general trend which he has observed: in other sections of his text, Hunt does note that some sumptuary laws responded to, or were influenced by, other factors, such as the expense of warfare, etc.

¹⁸⁰ Hunt 165.

¹⁸¹ Timagli 50.

manifest within the history of Florentine sumptuary laws. The panel on which Smeralda's figure resides, however, does not necessarily mirror the sumptuary regulations on paper that permeated daily life in Renaissance Florence. Instead, the clothing which adorns Smeralda seems to oscillate between categories of flamboyant and reserved display. Yet these categories are taciturnly negotiated and the meaning which any one particular viewer derived from her garments would have been largely dependent upon his/her own socio-economic status. Smeralda's wardrobe is simultaneously appropriate to that of an ancient, magnate family of the original Florentine nobility (such as the Donati) and to that of the rising (yet somewhat sequestered or regulated through sumptuary law) 'middle-class' (such as the Brandini). Her wardrobe certainly denotes that she is indeed a person of some social standing. The fabrics, layers, and style of her garments would not have been lost on her fellow Florentines, many of whom would have been well acquainted with both textiles and fashions. Many elements of Smeralda's garments are both extremely fashionable and extremely expensive. Even the color of Smeralda's dress associates her with nobility and the elite. She becomes the noble bride through a pictorial transgression of sumptuary laws¹⁸² – implying that her status exempts her from them (she certainly was not a knight or a doctor, although the application here of the 1472 law regulating the color red is a bit anachronistic). At the same time, her garments do not even remotely resemble the more sumptuous (or heraldic) gowns of her four fellow portrait sitters – Angiola di Bernardo Sapiti, Francesca Stati, Giovanna Albizzi, and Maddalena Doni. Rather,

juxtaposing Smeralda's gown to that of Giovanna Albizzi produces a marked contrast, for Giovanna's gown appears to be constructed of a large piece of heavy, finely worked brocade – fabric more popular during the latter half of the century (particularly during the 1460s and 1470s) than Smeralda's monochrome silk.¹⁸³ A similar comparison can be made between Smeralda's modest jewelry and the ornate rings, necklaces, and brooches adorning these same four portrait sitters. The images of these latter women seem to reflect the sentiments of some elite Florentines such as Alessandra Strozzi. Writing to her son in 1465 about a potential bride, she states “she [the bride] will need beautiful jewels . . . just as you have honor in other things, she doesn't want to be lacking in this.”¹⁸⁴ Considering both this comment and the images of Angiola di Bernardo Sapiti, Francesca Stati, Giovanna Albizzi, and Maddalena Doni, as far as jewelry is concerned, Smeralda does appear to be lacking. Subsequently, Smeralda's attire (or various elements of it) is also reminiscent of that described by the Venetian Francesco Barbaro – careful not to appear too splendid or costly and in keeping with the economic station of the husband.¹⁸⁵ In this regard, instructional texts originating out of Venice, such as Barbaro's *De re uxoria*, have been linked by Giovanni Ciappelli to specific actions that signaled the embodiment of particular cultural values necessary for economic and social

¹⁸² Another pictorial transgression of sumptuary law (although here in regard to wedding expenditures, specifically by grooms), plays a significant role in the construction of the Pucci family as members of the Florentine elite in Botticelli's *Nastagio degli Onesti Panels*; see Olsen 162-165.

¹⁸³ Rubens and Wright 324; Birbari 56.

¹⁸⁴ Strozzi 151.

¹⁸⁵ Barbaro 87-91.

advancement.¹⁸⁶ If this is the case, following the strategies outlined by Barbaro may have served Viviano well in the face of his recent and unsuccessful service as a *fattore*. Despite the fact that his wife was a descendant of a magnate family, the historical record intimates that, upon Viviano's return from abroad, the social networks in which he was entrenched on a daily basis were no longer those associated with the realm of international business; furthermore, Renaissance farriers, in general, were often characterized negatively.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Giovanni Ciappelli, "Family Memory: Functions, Evolution, Recurrences," Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence, eds. Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 29.

¹⁸⁷ Refer to Footnote 97 of this document.

CHAPTER V

Smeralda's Setting – Stately or Grandiose?

As with her attire, the space in which Smeralda is depicted may have been read by her contemporaries in different ways and on multiple levels. She stands within an architectural framework, specifically that of a domestic interior¹⁸⁸ – space that was markedly associated with the culturally constructed values of Renaissance women. Women of status were not to labor manually outside of the household; their work was confined to that requiring a certain degree of intellectual prowess, namely, household management. Efficient organization of household affairs, including competent management of its servants,¹⁸⁹ ranked high on the Renaissance priority list. Numerous contemporary authors attest to this, including Francesco Barbaro and Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), the son of an exiled Florentine. Barbaro states that a good wife, in addition to bearing, rearing, and educating children, will also be a good manager of domestic affairs. He asserts that “unless they [household affairs, including the management of servants] be established by the Councils and Precepts of the Wife [they] have no Foundation and are want to be in great disorder.”¹⁹⁰ Like Barbaro's *De re uxoria*, Alberti's *Della famiglia*, (translated as *The Family in Renaissance Florence*) (c. 1434-

¹⁸⁸ Many Botticelli scholars have noted this is one of the earliest female Florentine portrait sitters to be depicted within such an environment; in this regard, Botticelli (and his patron, depending upon his involvement) may have been drawing on Lippi's *Portrait of a Woman with a Man at a Casement* (as previously noted in Footnote 134 of this document, Wilhelm Bode asserts this work served as a prototype for Smeralda's portrait).

¹⁸⁹ A normal 'upper-class' home generally had two or three servants, while homes of more privilege might have in excess of a dozen. See Goldthwaite, *Building* 106.

1443), was essentially a guide for the educated Renaissance man.¹⁹¹ In it, he echoes the sentiments of Barbaro, attributing to the wife the duties of household management. This was her appropriate domain; for, Alberti notes, “it would hardly win us [men] respect if our wife busied herself among the men in the market place, out in the public eye.”¹⁹²

When Botticelli’s portraits of women (including his anonymous idealized beauties) are considered in their totality, they seem to echo these same cultural values.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Barbaro 103.

¹⁹¹ Alberti drafted the first three books of this work prior to 1434; these were circulated among his family and friends. A fourth book was introduced in 1437, which Alberti personally presented in Florence in 1441, in conjunction with a literary competition organized there in that year. In 1443, the entire text was reviewed by Alberti and two of his friends – one was a Florentine. The text was presumably made public in its totality shortly thereafter, however, through handwritten manuscripts. The text was not printed until 1734, and then only sections of it. See Renée Watkins, Introduction, The Family in Renaissance Florence (Originally titled *I libri della famiglia*) by Leon Battista Alberti, trans. Renée Watkins (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969) 2-3.

¹⁹² Alberti, The Family 207.

¹⁹³ While the scholarship of Patricia Simons regarding the strict confinement of Renaissance women would seemingly correlate with Botticelli’s portrait of Smeralda, her claim that “only at certain key moments could she [the Renaissance woman] be seen . . . at a window” are both exaggerated and a bit anachronistic. It appears this claim is largely based on a solitary remark, made in 1610, by the Frenchman Grangier de Liverdes. Grangier de Liverdes commented that “in Florence women are more enclosed than in any other part of Italy; they see the world only from the small openings in their windows.” Certainly the public spaces to which Italian women of status were granted access were both culturally regulated and restricted; a number of extant authors attest to this, including Barbaro in De re uxoria and Alberti in Della famiglia. These two texts in particular are concerned with moderating every aspect of a woman’s life from general behavior to speech to eating habits to attire to sexual practice to public appearance. The public spaces in which Renaissance women were culturally permitted consisted of only a few venues: sacred events – this included not only regular religious services, but processions and festivals; and occasionally socializing secular events – such as dances, which generally required a chaperone; *armeggerie* (brigades of young men wielding arms and jovially challenging each other in the streets); and jousts, which women commonly watched, rather than attended, from the safety of a protected area, such as a nearby residence. However, when considering the restricted access of women to public life, often feminist scholars like Simons do not note or take into account the nature of the Renaissance world itself – characterized by political turmoil, plague, and crime. A cursory examination of both male- and female-authored documents, specifically in regard to Florence – for example the diary of Florentine Luca Landucci (kept between 1450 and 1516) and the letters of Florentine Alessandra Strozzi (written between 1447 and 1470) – confirm this. Furthermore, notions regarding the confinement of the Renaissance female are generally bound-up with notions of

Seven of his ten female sitters are clearly depicted within a domestic interior, while the

misogyny. While certainly beyond the scope of this paper, the tone of male Renaissance authors (like Barbaro and Alberti) should not be read as purely misogynist. For at times, not only do these very same authors (as well as other male contemporaries) counter such a notion, but some Renaissance women seemingly adopted similar views. Certainly this phenomenon was not ubiquitous – and in fact was strongly opposed by some women – but the letters of Alessandra Strozzi echo the sentiments of Barbaro and Alberti, noting the need for wives to be regulated and managed by their husbands and speaking of marriage arrangements in business terms. Strozzi even refers to one potential wife as “buona carne” or good meat. (As a point of reference, Strozzi was a member of the tarnished elite; while both she and husband came from families who held status, hers apparently higher than his, within the city, her husband, Matteo Strozzi, had been politically exiled.) Ultimately, rather than misogynistic, the pervasive regulation and proscription of the female gender outlined by individuals such as Barbaro and Alberti can be read, on some level, as egocentric. The obedient and virtuous wife bode well for her husband and for her family. The guidelines established by these male-authored texts, when adhered to, distinguished women of status (and, by association, their husbands and families) from women of lesser social standing. In this same vein, if, within Smeralda’s portrait, her figure was made to pictorially adhere to these same guidelines, this would bode well for Viviano. For Simon’s comments, see Simons 8. For Grangier de Liverdes’ quote, see Judith C. Brown, “A Woman’s Place Was in the Home: Women’s Work in Renaissance Tuscany,” Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe, eds. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 215. For examples of women attending religious services and festivals (some contemporaneous with the production of Smeralda’s portrait), see Richard C. Trexler, Public Life in Renaissance Florence (New York: Academic Press, 1980) 216-218; 358-360. For examples of their attendance (or implied attendance in the case of Alberti) at secular socializing events, see Trexler 225-240; and Alberti, The Family 215, 226. For Renaissance illustrations of women attending such events, dating from c.1440 to c.1470, also see Trexler 242-243. For information regarding Renaissance crime, plague, disease, etc., see various sections of Luca Landucci, A Florentine Diary from 1450 to 1516 (Continued by an Anonymous Author till 1542), 1927, ed. Iodoco del Badia, trans. Alice de Rosen Jervis (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971); and sections throughout Strozzi. For examples of males, roughly contemporaneous with Smeralda, who seemingly cherish or value females as partners and helpmeets (these include individuals, as well as the Florentine city council), see Landucci 7; Bernardo Machiavelli, “Ricordi, 1475,” Merchant Writers of the Italian Renaissance, from Boccaccio to Machiavelli, ed. Vittore Branca, trans. Murtha Baca (New York: Marsilio, 1999) 143-149; and William J. Connell, “The Humanist Citizen as Provincial Governor,” Florentine Tuscany: Structures and Practices of Power, eds. William J. Connell and Andrea Zorzi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 147. For examples of female opposition to confinement/regulation, see Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers, Introduction, Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe, eds. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) xv-xvi. For specific references to Strozzi’s comments on this subject, see Strozzi 151, 159-161, 185 (her *carne* quote is found on 184/185).

remaining three are either depicted against a stark background or within an unclearly defined space.¹⁹⁴

The room in which Smeralda stands is not depicted verisimilarly. The odd angle and lengthy extension of the shutter into the background, the compressed space, the three windows located so close together that they seem to jeopardize the structural integrity of the building which houses the sitter – all of these factors combine to render this interior perspectively impossible.¹⁹⁵ Thus, the specific type of domestic space that confines Smeralda's figure is elusive. At the same time, however, the architectural elements employed in the depiction of this space are certainly typical of fifteenth-century Florentine building practices and structures.

The walls of the room in which Smeralda stands are stark, painted in a dark, monochrome color; they are devoid of decoration. Indeed, the walls of fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Renaissance homes were generally plain, but those “of the better

¹⁹⁴ This represents a marked contrast when compared to the environments in which Botticelli's male portrait subjects are depicted. Four are outdoors; only five, within a domestic interior; and the remaining seventeen, against a monochrome backdrop or within an ambiguously defined space.

¹⁹⁵ Ronald Lightbown describes the interior space of Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* as “imaginative,” going so far as to suggest that the inclusion of the shutter “seems. . . [a] Flemish feature.” Certainly the perspective is not accurate. However, Botticelli's interior, rather than imaginative, is perhaps better described as a perspectively skewed arrangement of various tangible architectural elements which were employed in Renaissance construction. Botticelli's shutter was not merely a creative invention of an artist merely drawing on Northern precedent. This assertion is certainly not meant to minimize the artistic exchanges occurring during the Renaissance between Northern and Southern artists as each traveled abroad. However, Lightbown's statement is neither supported nor qualified. Perhaps he is referring to the particular style of the shutter with its recessed panels; however, even in this case, Masaccio's work in the Brancacci Chapel (see particularly his *Tribute Money*, c.1427) provides an Italian precedent. For Lightbown's comments, see Lightbown 57; for illustration of Masaccio's work, see Adams 100-101, particularly 101.

sort” invariably contained a painted frieze or some type of fresco series (in houses of the wealthy, virtually every wall was painted with fictive tapestries of fresco).¹⁹⁶ However, by the latter half of the century, the walls of rooms within grandiose residences evolved into elaborately decorative surfaces.¹⁹⁷ The fresco gave way to the frieze, as it extended into several zones of decoration and could be found in combination with gilt wood, paneling, and artistic productions.¹⁹⁸ Modest in their presentation, it seems the unadorned walls depicted in Smeralda’s portrait seem only to frame the windows that feature prominently there within.

Architectural treatises of the period, such as Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria* (translated as *Ten Books on Architecture*, largely completed in 1452 but not published until after his death in 1485), stress the importance of windows within the Renaissance home. Alberti notes that no room should be left without them.¹⁹⁹ This comment may seem unusual to modernity, but during the fifteenth century some rooms had no windows at all.²⁰⁰ The room in which Smeralda stands, however, contains not one, but three. Presumably this room is located above street level, for there are no bars on any of the

¹⁹⁶ Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior, 1400-1600* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991) 35; Lydecker 76-77.

¹⁹⁷ The walls of the elite villa were also not exempt from decoration; here I am reminded of Botticelli’s fresco series (c.1480) adorning the walls of the Tornabuoni family’s Villa Lemmi (formerly outside of Florence, but now within the city’s limits). For illustrations, see Levey and Mandel 92.

¹⁹⁸ Thornton 35; Lydecker 67, 77-78. Both plainer wall treatments and those with numerous zones of decoration are depicted in Ghirlandaio’s frescoes in Santa Maria Novella, Florence – see *Birth of John the Baptist* for an example of the former and *Birth of the Virgin* for an example of the latter, in Thornton 34 and 38, respectively.

¹⁹⁹ Leon Battista Alberti, *Ten Books on Architecture* (Originally titled *De re aedificatoria*; Florence, 1485), trans. James Leoni, ed. Joseph Rykwert (London: Alec Tiranti, 1955) 17.

²⁰⁰ Thornton 27.

three (bars or iron grilles were generally placed over ground floor windows for several reasons, not the least of which was to protect inhabitants from outside attackers²⁰¹). Certainly their inclusion would not have been aesthetically pleasing, but occasionally bars were included in Renaissance works of art, at times even obscuring the figures depicted behind them.²⁰² Nevertheless, their absence intimates that Smeralda is not positioned at ground level; rather, it appears she has just opened a shutter covering one of these windows to gaze outside from above. Shutters proliferated in Renaissance Italy in both pictorial and physical form. Windows not constructed of glass were certainly covered with heavy wooden shutters (single or in pairs).²⁰³ While some were attached to the exterior of the building and opened outwards, many were hinged at the side and opened inwards – such as the one before which Smeralda stands.²⁰⁴ Conversely, as there is no shutter visible within the frame of the large window to Smeralda's right, this may imply it is covered with glass.²⁰⁵ During the fifteenth century, glass was reserved for windows in

²⁰¹ Thornton 31; Trexler 227.

²⁰² There are numerous examples of grilles themselves covering ground-floor windows. Masaccio's frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence (c.1427), include several. Another example can be found in a Milanese miniature (c.1493-1495), which notably post-dates Smeralda's portrait. Grilles in both of these works, while the narrative of the scene depicted (at least in Masaccio's work) may play a role, nevertheless obscure the figures behind them. For illustrations, see Adams 94-95; and Thornton 31.

²⁰³ Thornton 28.

²⁰⁴ For both textual references to, and pictorial examples of, windows and shutters dating to approximately the same time as Botticelli's *Smeralda*, see Thornton 28-29, 131.

²⁰⁵ In contextualizing this particular window, I believe that many Florentines would have primarily imagined it was covered with glass and neither open nor covered with a shutter that was attached to the façade of the building. Certainly one of the reference points for viewers in this regard was the exterior world. When one considers the portrait's window within the confines of contemporaneous building practices, glass more readily comes to mind as a 'solution' for this window. Renaissance windows did not stand open; as noted within the body of this paper, they were covered. If viewers were to image the window as open, then Smeralda would not stand in a room, but a *loggia* (a gallery or arcade which was

only the most important rooms of a house; not only was it expensive, but often problematic as it was prone to breakage.²⁰⁶ During the third quarter of the fifteenth century, the large rectangular frame became extremely popular for those who could afford glass windows and was a feature of grander Florentine buildings.²⁰⁷

Depicted prominently within the natural recess of Smeralda's large rectangular window is a column. On a tangible level, this was an extremely fashionable element of Renaissance architecture. Alberti, in *De re aedificatoria*, asserts that there is nothing more elegant than a column.²⁰⁸ Giovanni Rucellai's brief descriptions of each building in Rome that he found particularly beautiful or compelling, attest to this (Rucellai traveled to

open to the air on at least one side), and particularly an upper *loggia*, or *l'aereo loggiato*, due to the open view afforded by its three windows. Certainly upper *logge* were both depicted in Renaissance works of art and were incorporated into the homes of private citizens. However, I believe the portrait's space is only tenuously suggestive of this. Rather, due to the enclosed space, demarcated by the solid formation of walls, it seems more likely that contemporary Florentines would have associated this space with a room. Also, considering Renaissance building practices and architectural treatises, it seems unlikely that a shutter of a different type from the one attached to the window in front of which Smeralda stands (that is, one opening outwards and attached to the exterior of the building) would have been employed here. This had the potential to disrupt the aesthetic balance and harmony of the home's exterior façade. Such a mixture of window treatments would have countered a sense of symmetrical, orderly propriety promulgated by authors of architectural treatises like Alberti. For illustrations of *loggia* within painting, see Thornton 313, 222. For illustrations of Florentine homes – specifically Renaissance *palazzi* – containing *logge* which are roughly contemporaneous with Botticelli's work, see Leonardo Lisci Ginori, *I Palazzi di Firenze nella Storia e nell'arte*, 2 vols. (Firenze: G. Barbera Giunti, 1972), particularly 2: 735-6 and 1: 347. (As a note of interest, in regard to the second illustration which depicts the Palazzo Ginori, Baccio Bandinelli, Smeralda's grandson, at one time owned the building adjacent to this *palazzo*; see Ginori 1: 350, 354 [n.14]). For illustrations of upper *loggia* incorporated into country villas of the Florentine elite, these date to the 1470s and beyond, see Amanda Lillie, "Memory of Place: *Luogo* and Lineage in the Fifteenth-Century Florentine Countryside," *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence*, eds. Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 195-214. For a summary of the importance of Renaissance symmetry within architecture, as noted in treatises of the period, see Thornton 319-320.

²⁰⁶ Thornton 27.

²⁰⁷ Thornton 28.

²⁰⁸ Paraphrased here: Alberti, *Architecture* 14.

Rome in March of 1449). Many of them make note of the *colonne* or columns which adorned each building.²⁰⁹ Rucellai's comments, written while he seemingly reveled in the splendor of ancient Rome, tie the column, situated within the Renaissance home, to a symbolic function. The column embodied a sense of grandeur and splendor associated with Greco-Roman antiquity and thus, by association, with the owner of the home in/on which it resided. Luba Freedman, in her discussion of Titian's *Charles V in an Armchair* (1548), asserts "the column only rarely appeared in portraiture in Titian's time" (emphasis mine).²¹⁰ Of course, its unique inclusion within Charles' portrait (or at least Freedman's reading of it) draws on the column as a symbol of moral strength and invulnerability to be associated with the sitter himself.²¹¹ However, at least two extant portraits of Renaissance females predating Titian's work also include a column – Botticelli's *Smeralda* and Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (1505-1514).²¹² Here, too, the column may function on the same symbolic level, denoting fortitude and constancy.²¹³ Within *Smeralda*'s portrait, perhaps her participatory action of opening the window in the foreground may also signal her participatory role in household management. And, if the column in the window to her right is also symbolic, her performance may perhaps be read as exemplary. Explicating the statements of Renaissance authors like Barbaro and Alberti, the wife was the 'pillar' of the well-ordered home on which the Renaissance family was dependent.

²⁰⁹ Rucellai 67-78.

²¹⁰ Freedman, "Charles V" 136.

²¹¹ Freedman, "Charles V" 136-137.

²¹² The sitter in *Mona Lisa* is depicted in some type of a *loggia* which is flanked on either side by two columns, the bases of which are still visible – the original has been cropped. Freedman does mention, but does not comment on, this particular image. Freedman, "Charles V" 137.

In addition to the individual architectural elements within Smeralda's portrait, groups of these elements, as well as the architectural setting as a whole, may have been associated by members of the portrait's original audience with a number of other structures. The room in which Smeralda is depicted might have conjured up notions of buildings physically situated in Florence itself, but also seen in artworks and described in literature of the period. While it is unlikely that the portrait's odd perspective was intended to function in such a manner, it nevertheless seemingly invites these types of associations.

The portrait's interior, particularly its large window divided by a column, is suggestive of a room overlooking an interior courtyard in a prominent palace, such as the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi (begun 1444) by Michelozzo di Bartolommeo (1396-1472).²¹⁴ In fact, the internal arcaded courtyard of the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi was the first of its kind (formerly, interior courtyards were little more than wide light shafts) and set the standard for future Renaissance buildings.²¹⁵ Then, too, this particular window is reminiscent of those constructed on the third floor of Florence's grandiose Palazzo Cocchi (c. 1470-1480), attributed to Baccio d'Agnolo (born c. 1462)²¹⁶ – large, rectangular, and divided by a single column.²¹⁷ These windows adorned the façade of the *palazzo* fronting the street; publicly situated, presumably they were seen by many Florentines. Other viewers of

²¹³ Rubens and Wright 327; Freedman, "Charles V" (who draws on Renaissance sources) 136.

²¹⁴ For illustration, see Ginori 1: 374.

²¹⁵ Turner 85; Kleiner et al., 610.

²¹⁶ For d'Agnolo's dates, see Levey 260.

²¹⁷ For illustration, as well as more information on the *palazzo*'s attribution (which has been a subject of great debate), see Ginori 2: 603-604.

Smeralda's portrait may have noted that this window is similar to those depicted in sacred paintings of the period²¹⁸ (perhaps relating these to Smeralda's virtuous and pious character). In a similar vein, the window's design also echoes descriptions of famous Greco-Roman buildings praised in Renaissance texts and depicted in Renaissance works of art (perhaps viewers would have associated these with an educated individual of cultivated taste). In fact, this particular window resembles those of the Curia (or Roman senate house) described by Alberti – twice as high as they were broad with columns in the middle.²¹⁹

The unobstructed view afforded by all three windows depicted in the portrait (two providing a view of clear blue sky, the third allowing Smeralda to gaze out of it) may have also suggested that Smeralda stands within a room of a country villa – the urban refuge of wealthy Renaissance landowners. Certainly those of lesser economic standing also owned some type of domicile outside of Florence (even Botticelli and his brother purchased a small home in the countryside), however, the prohibitive cost relegated the country villa largely to the domain of the wealthy.²²⁰ Indeed, during the end of the fifteenth century it was the elite who were investing in landed estates in order to strengthen their elevated image.²²¹

²¹⁸ Botticelli's teacher Fra Lippi included a similar feature, although in this case, a doorway, in *Herod's Feast* (c.1452-1466); while many others in later years included/developed this into a window structure, such as Francesco di Simone in his *Annunciation* (1504). For examples refer to Thornton 62 and 43, respectively.

²¹⁹ Alberti, *Architecture* 182.

²²⁰ Goldthwaite, *Wealth* 218.

²²¹ Goldthwaite, *Wealth* 194.

In this same vein, the view afforded by the windows within the portrait may also suggest that Smeralda stands within a tower; for the three open windows intimate the room runs the entire length of the building (or is a small projection off of the main structure). Towers, generally dating to the medieval period, were also associated with the elite and served as a symbolic stronghold for a select group of Florentines. Although dwindling in numbers, towers, both within the city²²² and the countryside (for they were sometimes incorporated into villas), often were attached to or situated near a family home and remained within its possession, serving to proclaim its heritage by publicizing its longevity, strength, and status.²²³

Ultimately, the space in which Smeralda is depicted, while containing tangible Renaissance architectural elements, is not illustrative of any particular or specific Renaissance interior. Clearly this interior does relegate Smeralda to her appropriate cultural realm, that of the domestic world. Moreover, the individual visual cues within this domestic interior also suggest that it is one of privilege; however, the degree of this privilege was certainly a matter of each individual viewer's own perception. The portrait's space is capable of transformation as the symbolic signs or cues with which it provides viewers are merely suggestive. The column; the large, rectangular glass window; the implication of a fine *palazzo* or a country villa (perhaps with an attached or nearby tower)

²²² Many towers dotted the scene in Renaissance Florence: for illustration of the numerous towers that existed in Florence during the fifteenth century, see *Catena Map* (c. 1470), in Martinelli 34–35.

²²³ For illustrations of country villas (including their towers), as well as more information on this subject in general, see Lillie 195–214.

– these imply that Smeralda’s home is rather grandiose. Of course, these are only implications; implications that may have been somewhat downplayed when viewers considered the unadorned walls of the room in which Smeralda stands. Certainly some interior domestic walls of the period were plain. But those in finer rooms, particularly of grandiose homes, were more ostentatiously decorated and adorned (and would have seemingly served as an appropriate setting for woman formally posing for a portrait). Thus, the portrait is ambiguous; Smeralda simultaneously resides within a stately home appropriate to a ‘middle-class’ Florentine family like the Brandini and a grandiose edifice appropriate to a Florentine Magnate family like the Donati.

CHAPTER VI

Smeralda's Audience – The Portrait's Location within the Renaissance Home and this Location's Relevance to the Construction of Social Identity

In order for *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* to communicate any type of meaning at all, it required an audience. If Viviano commissioned this portrait to take with him to Constantinople, it was likely displayed there, but it would also have been displayed in Florence upon his return. It was not unusual for Florentine men to leave the city on business – sometimes for prolonged periods – while their wives remained behind.²²⁴ Thus, it is hard to imagine that Viviano, although commissioning the portrait primarily to 'keep him company' while he was away, would not have had an eventual Florentine audience in mind at the time of its production. This 'eventual' audience was sure to see Smeralda's portrait within a domestic context, for portraits were displayed prominently with Renaissance homes.

Both the home and building in general were Renaissance topics of concern. According to Giovanni Rucellai, the second principle thing a man was to do in life was to build (as stated earlier, the first was to procreate).²²⁵ Rucellai directly conflates the resultant product (the constructed building) with the fame it brings to its patron and/or

²²⁴ To provide just one of numerous examples, Alessandra Strozzi was often separated from her husband Matteo, prior to his exile, when he went on diplomatic missions; see Heather Gregory, Introduction, Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi (dating from 1447-1470), by Alessandra Strozzi, bilingual edition, trans. Heather Gregory (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 4.

²²⁵ Quoted in Goldthwaite, Wealth 223; and Crum 37.

owner.²²⁶ This too is noted by Michelangelo, when, in the 1500s, he declared “a noble house in the city brings considerable honor, being more visible than all one’s [other] possessions.”²²⁷ This visible possession came to represent the family itself; much like a Renaissance portrait, the family house functioned as a social prop, emblematic of privilege and status. In fact, Rucellai stressed the importance of the home as a unique family possession that was never to be sold to another individual family; the family building was, in many ways, the family itself.²²⁸ Richard A. Goldthwaite proposes that within the realm of Renaissance culture, private architecture was among the very first tools utilized by the Florentine elite not only to ennoble themselves, but also to distinguish themselves from those who held positions of a lesser social status (conspicuous consumption was justified here, as shelter was a necessity).²²⁹ Leon Battista Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria* is telling in this regard. Alberti’s treatise follows the format established by the Roman architect Vitruvius (late first century B.C.) in his ten books of architecture.²³⁰ *De re aedificatoria*, which extols Greco-Roman building forms as prototypes, meticulously explained (and justified) the intricate construction of various Renaissance structures – both private and

²²⁶ This is particularly apparent in Rucellai’s discussion of the Roman Pantheon, as Richard A. Goldthwaite has noted; see Goldthwaite, *Wealth* 214.

²²⁷ Quoted in Thornton 11.

²²⁸ See Goldthwaite, *Wealth* 216-217. Also insightful in regard to the fifteenth-century Florentine *palazzo* as a reservoir for memory, extending past the history of the family itself and into the Greco-Roman world (in terms of architecture), is Brenda Preyer’s research, see her “Florentine Palaces and Memories of the Past,” *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence*, ed. Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 176-194.

²²⁹ See Goldthwaite, *Wealth* 214-224; and Goldthwaite, *Building* 397-398.

²³⁰ Vitruvius’s work, *De Architectura*, dedicated to the Emperor Augustus himself, served as the standard handbook for Roman architects; see Fritz M. Heichelheim, Cedric A. Yeo, and Allen M. Ward, *A History of the Roman People*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984) 312.

public. Both its presence and its overwhelming acceptance²³¹ indicate a marked interest in the subject of building, at least on the part of the educated Renaissance man – the text was originally published in Latin; the first Italian translation did not appear until 1546.²³²

Alberti's text followed that of Florentine sculptor and architect Antonio Averlino Filarete (c.1400-1465/9) who wrote his Il trattato d'architettura (translated as Treatise on Architecture) in Italian (making the subject more accessible) between 1451 and 1464.

Filarete's treatise also expressed a marked interest in the architecture of antiquity. With this in mind, the interior room depicted in Smeralda's portrait (as a visual cue itself) spoke not only to the family's wealth and values concerned with a female's role in society, but it also spoke to Viviano (and his cultivated taste, as the column in Smeralda's portrait implies) within the realm of male public opinion geared toward the importance of building and the appreciation for antique building forms.

However, certainly not all Florentines owned their own homes or were able to afford those that copied Greco-Roman prototypes.²³³ Some families, like Botticelli's shortly after his birth, rented homes; others rented a few rooms within larger homes that accommodated them with secondary entrances.²³⁴ The typical Renaissance house was three or four stories high (the ground floor was referred to as the *piano terra*; the second,

²³¹ Joseph Rykwert, Editor's Foreword, Ten Books on Architecture (Originally titled De re aedificatoria; Florence, 1485) by Leon Battista Alberti, trans. James Leoni, ed. Joseph Rykwert (London: Alec Tiranti, 1955) vi.

²³² Rykwert vi.

²³³ While specific points will be cited throughout this section, all general information concerning the Renaissance home is derived from a combination of sources, particularly Lydecker and Thornton. Both of these texts draw on Renaissance literature and extant household inventories.

²³⁴ Thornton 33.

the *piano nobile*) and consisted of several rooms. The two most important of these were the *camera* or bedchamber and the *sala* or hall. The *camera* and the *sala* were found in every Florentine house – from the small, single-family dwelling, which might only consist of these two rooms²³⁵ – to the grandiose *palazzo*. In larger homes, this combination of rooms was found in multiples, each set being related to specific individuals who resided therein. Invariably, the *camera* – which functioned, in part, as a place for sleeping – contained at least one bed and storage chest(s) – perhaps also a chair(s). In contrast, the *sala* – serving various functions from storage area to dining hall to entertainment center – typically contained large tables and benches. Although moderns might naturally assume the *camera* functioned solely as a private bedroom and the *sala* as a more public receiving area, this was not the case. The *camera* also served as a reception room for visitors and guests, as well as a room in which one could pass the time with close associates, family, and friends²³⁶ – it was not exclusively private. In fact, by the dawn of the sixteenth century guests came to expect a privileged, intimate welcome within the *camera* of the master of many elite houses. Consequently, this room became a popular site within the public venue. In response, some elites privately designated another chamber for sleeping (visitors, however, were generally not aware of this).²³⁷ A similar type of privacy was also advocated by Alberti in *De re aedificatoria*. He suggested that receiving rooms (the *camera*) have several doors. In this way, the master of the house could secretly dismiss

²³⁵ Thornton 285.

²³⁶ This function of the *camera* is illustrated both in Renaissance texts and works of art; for more information, see Thornton 285-288 (illustration on 285).

²³⁷ Thornton 288.

those with whom he was meeting without signaling to those who were waiting that he was available. In this way, one could “keep out such as you don’t care to grant it [an audience] to, without giving them too much Offence.”²³⁸

The *camera* and *sala*, which could be located either on the *piano terra* or the *piano nobile*, or both,²³⁹ were also associated with subsidiary rooms grouped around the nucleus of the *camera-sala* combination. These included the *studio* or *scrittoio* (a study or office – although sometimes a *camera* could also serve as a study);²⁴⁰ the *antecamera* (a small antechamber that sometimes functioned as a dining room); the *vestiaria* (a large closet or storage area for clothing and precious personal items); and the *saletta* (a smaller version of the hall).

In addition to these rooms used primarily for dwelling were those that were functionally dedicated to daily maintenance. These included pantries, storage rooms, bathrooms or latrines,²⁴¹ and a *cucina* or kitchen.²⁴² Of course, these extra rooms were primarily found within the homes of the wealthy and were generally located on the *piano nobile*.

²³⁸ Alberti, *Architecture* 85.

²³⁹ Lydecker 33-36. Throughout his text, Lydecker suggests that, based on a combination of extant household inventories and other documents, these rooms could either function as guest chambers or chambers used by the occupants of a home during summer months, as the ground floor would have been cooler than rooms upstairs.

²⁴⁰ See Lorenzo Lotto’s *Cleric in a Bedchamber* (c.1520) for an illustration of a *camera* that doubles as a *studio* or *scrittoio*; this example is also illustrative of the concentration of artworks found within this area of the Renaissance home (Thornton 297).

²⁴¹ An inventory of 1418 lists that each of the three main chambers in the Palazzo Medici had an attached latrine; Lydecker 33.

²⁴² Sometimes separate rooms were constructed for the preparation of bread, the *camera da pane*, or for the preparation of poultry; Lydecker 32.

As far as the display of artworks is concerned, rooms dedicated to daily maintenance play no role. Rather, here we are concerned with rooms such as the *camera*, *sala*, *antecamera*, and *studio* or *scrittoio*.²⁴³ Walls of Renaissance homes during the fourteenth century had largely been covered with frescos and tapestry;²⁴⁴ however, as previously noted, fifteenth-century walls experienced several decorative treatment phases. Again, while during the early part of the century many walls were plain, those in finer homes, echoing the fashions of the previous century, contained a painted frieze or fresco series. By the latter half of the century, walls became quite decorative in and of themselves. The fresco was used less and the frieze evolved into several zones of decoration. Additionally, walls were often covered with gilt wood or paneling and decorated with *spalliere* (paintings either mounted over a stretcher or executed directly on panel that were either inset into or hung on the wall²⁴⁵), easel paintings, and other removable art objects.²⁴⁶ While the typical Florentine home of 1400 held little more than necessities, by 1500 it was filled with things – many of them were items of luxury, such as

²⁴³ As a point of interest, several scholars, including Paola Tinagli and Patricia Simons (to a lesser degree), suggest that female portraits may have possibly functioned as ideal models of feminine cultural values – particularly for their daughters. These scholars have further suggested that these ‘model’ female portraits may have been hung on the walls of a daughter’s *camera* or been an item contained within her bridal trousseau. Although these assertions are expressed in very generalized terms, the scholarship of Lydecker makes these possible functions more explicit. His research reveals not only that Renaissance treatises suggested female children should be kept near the mother in her private *vestiaria*, where items such as portraits may have been hung, but also that occasionally smaller portraits were not displayed, but rather were kept within pieces of furniture, such as chests. See Lydecker 38 and 70, respectively.

²⁴⁴ For illustration, see Turner 123.

²⁴⁵ The term *spalliera* was used to describe various types of Renaissance paintings that are not universally interchangeable in terms of their architectural make-up; see Lydecker 43–44.

²⁴⁶ Lydecker 67, 78.

artistic productions.²⁴⁷ During most of the fifteenth century, the *camera* and the rooms immediately adjacent to it (such as the *studio* or *scrittoio*) contained any portraits that were found in the home, as well as the majority of other artworks a family might own.²⁴⁸ Other pieces were also hung in the *sala*, although to a lesser extent. This disposition altered itself slightly over the course of the century, as more works – including those that fall within the portrait genre, particularly busts – began to be displayed within the *sala*.²⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the most important area for the display of art, including portraiture, within the Renaissance home was the rather public arena of the *camera*. Christian Olsen hypothesizes that Botticelli's *Nastagio degli Onesti Panels* would have originally hung in either a *sala* or a *camera*,²⁵⁰ while extant inventories reveal that his *La Primavera* was situated in a room (possibly a *sala* or an *antecamera*) adjoining a *camera* of a bride and groom (within this same room hung Botticelli's *Pallas and the Centaur* and a *Madonna and Child* by an unknown artist).²⁵¹ Examining six extant inventories of Florentine homes (classified as patrician) dating from the later fifteenth to the early sixteenth century, John Kent Lydecker has found ten images of specifically named individuals (seven easel portraits and three portrait busts). Of these ten, eight were located in a *camera* and one in

²⁴⁷ Goldthwaite, *Wealth* 224-227; Turner 122.

²⁴⁸ Lydecker 66-68.

²⁴⁹ Lydecker 68. A portrait bust of Lucrezia Tornabuoni, wife of Piero de' Medici, produced c.1453, was displayed along with a bust of her husband in a *camera* of their *palazzo*. Cited originally in a work of Vasari, noted in Levey 199.

²⁵⁰ As the series contains four panels, each wall of the room may have been adorned with one of them: Olsen 150.

²⁵¹ Zirpolo 102-103.

a *studio*. The location of the final piece cannot be determined.²⁵² The majority of these portraits, situated within the *camera*, surely enjoyed a large audience due to the public nature of this particular room.

The small number of portraits uncovered in Lydecker's research is thus typical of the period (the inventories surveyed total literally hundreds of items that can be classified as works of art). As the portraiture genre re-emerged out of the Middle Ages, it remained the reserve of the Renaissance elite (this was changing, but slowly, during the latter half of the fifteenth century). In opposition to images of specific Renaissance individuals, Lydecker's studies reveal that devotional images – particularly those of the Virgin Mary – comprised by far the largest category of Renaissance artworks on display within the home. This fact is supported by Peter Burke, who, examining a catalogue of Italian, dated paintings, calculates that of 2,033 images produced between 1420 and 1539, eighty-eight percent (or 1,796) are religious works; a little over half of these are images of Mary (incidentally, of the remaining 237 secular images, approximately sixty-seven percent of these are portraits).²⁵³ A cursory examination of Botticelli's *oeuvre* produces similar, although microcosmic, results; without a doubt, religious images dominate the field of

²⁵² Lydecker 66-67.

²⁵³ Burke's sample was a catalog of dated European paintings, and, a brief word of caution is necessary here. While Burke records both the numbers and percentages, he calculates that 1,796 (religious works) of 2,033 is "about 87 percent" when in actuality it is a little over 88 percent, as noted in the body of this paper. Furthermore, in regard to his portrait calculations, Burke does not note the difference between portraits of individuals and those of ideal beauty. Then, too authenticity and dating, as the *oeuvre* of Botticelli demonstrates, are always problematic. However, Burke asserts his calculations are reliable

Renaissance artworks. Thus, it is natural to assume that any portrait displayed within the domestic environment was almost certainly situated within close proximity to (or, at the very least, in the same room as) sacred imagery. In this vein, it is possible that some of Smeralda's viewers may have associated the fabric of her light, transparent overdress (and perhaps Smeralda herself through it) with any images of sacred figures depicted in the same type of cloth and located near her portrait.

Given the statistics just noted, Smeralda's portrait may likely have been placed or hung next to Marian imagery – as were other secular works such as Botticelli's *La Primavera* and *Pallas and the Centaur*. Thus, it is also possible that some of Smeralda's viewers may have conflated her image with any of the Virgin Mary – the perfect exemplar of motherhood (the depiction of Smeralda could be read as showing her in a pregnant state) and marriage – that were in the vicinity.²⁵⁴ For Smeralda, in her red gown, is just one color short of Mary's typical red and blue raiment.

While any further associations between Smeralda and other female religious figures are certainly tenuous at best, the symbolic connections between them deserve brief note. Religion was an integral component of the Renaissance everyday.²⁵⁵ As previously noted, part of woman's task in childrearing was to instill within her offspring devotion to God.

and representative of Italian artistic trends in general. See Peter Burke, *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy 1420-1540* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972) 146.

²⁵⁴ Similar associations between female figures and the Virgin are employed by Zirpolo who asserts *La Primavera*, situated near an image of the Virgin and child, may have functioned as a lesson for brides: Zirpolo 107.

²⁵⁵ For more information regarding the pervasive nature of religion within Italy concurrent with the production of Smeralda's portrait and particularly relevant to Florence, see Timothy Verdon and John

Furthermore, the church itself represented the Renaissance female's only other culturally appropriate domain besides the home. Female faith and virtue were maintained by the church and a woman's association with it (although at times even a woman's public appearance at religious events was sanctioned²⁵⁶). Furthermore, Marian devotion itself increased in popularity during this time period. In fact, Mary, as well as other female saints, was not only an object of devotion, but of emulation. Her character and behavior set the standard for Renaissance women of all ages.²⁵⁷ Accordingly, windows, columns, and towers were fundamental to Renaissance religious iconography, directly symbolizing the Virgin or aspects of her character, as well as other religious figures.

Erwin Panofsky, while dealing largely with Northern Renaissance iconography and architectural symbolism, contends that the Renaissance window was "the accepted symbol of illuminating grace."²⁵⁸ He also notes that light, both within Northern and Southern Renaissance iconography, signaled that of the divine that "must strike the person blessed with this illumination [faith] from his or her right"²⁵⁹ – such as the light which illuminates

Henderson, eds., Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990) and sections throughout Trexler.

²⁵⁶ During the fifteenth century, Florence's Archbishop St. Antonius (served 1446-1459) warned females against excessive public appearances at religious gatherings. See Adrian Randolph, "Regarding Women in Sacred Space," Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy, eds. Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Grieco (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 20.

²⁵⁷ See Tinagli 155-185.

²⁵⁸ He notes this is particularly so within Christian (in opposition to the Judaic) faith; see Erwin Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting, 1953, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 1: 132.

²⁵⁹ Panofsky 1: 147.

Smeralda. In more general terms, glass served as a sign of purity, associated with Mary and the immaculate conception.²⁶⁰

The column or pillar symbolized the flagellation of Christ,²⁶¹ but it may have also been associated with Mary as the *Virgin of the Pillar*. In 40 A.D., Mary was said to have appeared, standing on a pillar, to Saint James (the Greater) in Saragossa, Spain; this site became one of Spain's greatest pilgrimages.²⁶² Extending this association to Italy, during the Renaissance the northern city of Mondovi played host to the local cult, Our Lady of the Pillar.²⁶³ It is also worth mentioning that a popular devotional text, aimed at women and originally written in Italian, incorporated a pillar into the story of the nativity.

Meditations on the Life of Christ (first transcribed c.1330), attributed to the Italian theologian and doctor of the Roman Catholic Church, Bonaventure (1221-1274), and an unknown Franciscan friar,²⁶⁴ records that "the Virgin arose in the night and leaned against a pillar; Joseph brought into the stable a bundle of hay which he threw down and the Son of God . . . was projected instantly on to the hay."²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ George Ferguson, Sigils & Symbols in Christian Art, 1954 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961) 175.

²⁶¹ George Ferguson 178.

²⁶² Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary, 1976 (New York: Random House, 1983) 95.

²⁶³ Peter Burke, Culture and Society 214.

²⁶⁴ See Frank N. Magill, ed., Masterpieces of Catholic Literature (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 455-458; John J. Delaney, Dictionary of Saints (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980) 110; and John J. Delaney and James Edward Tobin, Dictionary of Catholic Biography (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961) 155.

²⁶⁵ Quoted in James Hall, Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) 220; see also 247.

If the space in which Smeralda is depicted is read as a tower, at least two religious associations can be made. Mary herself was referred to as the Tower of David;²⁶⁶ while the tower, particularly a tower with three windows, was also an attribute of the third-century martyr, Saint Barbara.²⁶⁷ Of course, the number three itself referred to the triune nature of God.²⁶⁸

Religiously devout viewers of Smeralda's portrait may have associated her image with a variety of sacred concepts. Certainly there were a number of the faithful among her audience; for, Renaissance portraits, situated in public venues within the home, were viewed not only by all those living within it (this included both servants and extended family²⁶⁹), but also by the multitudes of friends, family members, and associates who came to call on its inhabitants. Considering the complex social fabric of the Renaissance itself, it is reasonable to assume that Viviano, as a somewhat educated man, had developed a network of male colleagues (including co-workers and contacts from both his service as a *fattore* and a farrier) who reciprocally relied on each other for a variety of things – from assistance to advice to friendship. Members of this network surely came to call on

²⁶⁶ George Ferguson 96

²⁶⁷ George Ferguson 107, 182.

²⁶⁸ George Ferguson 182.

²⁶⁹ In regard to the latter, some Florentines, such as Alberti and Tommaso Soderini, who wrote during the last quarter of the fifteenth century, advocated keeping the family together within one household and even extending the household to include new members as its children married. However, it should be noted that Richard A. Goldthwaite asserts that, at least for the elite, the home only temporary expanded as sons married; thus the domiciles of the elite generally housed only a married couple and their children. See Alberti, The Family 185-186; Paula C. Clarke, The Soderini and the Medici: Power and

Viviano at his residence. Although undoubtedly this group was smaller – and, in its totality, less prestigious²⁷⁰ – than that calling on elite Florentines like the Medici (whose *palazzo* accommodated visitors with large benches projecting from its façade and iron rings to which they could secure their horses), it certainly may have included individuals situated within Florence's upper social echelon. It is reasonable to assume that Viviano's employer, both for his services as a *fattore* and a farrier, was a wealthy man of some social standing. Smeralda, if alive, likely entertained her more intimate friends, relatives (the prestigious Donati – who had ties to the Medici), and colleagues, as well as those of the family in general. References to Renaissance women both hosting single visitors and large groups are noted in the writings of Leon Battista Alberti and Alessandro Strozzi, respectively.²⁷¹ Additionally their son, Michelagnolo, certainly had friends and colleagues who visited him at home. This group may have included others within his profession, for Renaissance workshop practices, as well as artistic collaboration, often extended from the public to the private realm.²⁷² This feasible scenario suggests that the potential audience of Smeralda's portrait was not only quite large, but would have included individuals of

Patronage in Fifteenth-Century Florence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 128; and Goldthwaite, Building 104.

²⁷⁰ The Medici entertained dukes and kings of international acclaim. For examples, see Levy 209; and Lydecker 35.

²⁷¹ Alberti, The Family 215; Strozzi 45, 49, 53, 55 – to provide only a few examples.

²⁷² For instance, a few Renaissance masters were known to have adopted their apprentices (Botticelli himself took Filippino Lippi, the son of his master, under his wing) and other local artists apparently developed solid friendships. As an example of the latter, in 1496 Michelangelo sent from Rome a letter to Botticelli; the letter was actually meant for the Medici clan, but it contained information which, one would assume, Michelangelo feared might be intercepted by Medici opponents. Thus, he sent the letter to Botticelli – one in a host of Florentines – who he trusted with its safe delivery. For information on masters adopting their students, see Welch, Art and Society 88-90; for information on Botticelli's care

diverse social (and socio-economic) standings – from upstart artists (like Botticelli) to elite relatives (like the Donatis).

This point is further illustrated by Renaissance authors such as Giovanni Rucellai. Examining Rucellai's *Zibaldone* (begun 1457), Anthony Molho and others contend that Rucellai's conception of family, shared by many of his contemporaries, was markedly different from that of modernity's.²⁷³ These scholars assert that the family or Renaissance household simultaneously embodied overlapping meanings that encompassed biological, as well as symbolic, members. The biological home extended beyond the purview of the immediate family unit and into the community at large. Blood-ties themselves were complex and pervasive; intermarriage among Florentine families created large networks of relatives. As previously noted, even the author of *Zibaldone* was related to Viviano Brandini through his marriage to Smeralda. At the same time, the symbolic family consisted of all those with whom one's biological family had forged bonds, ties, and obligations in the past – whether or not these still existed with any potency. The communal fabric of Renaissance Florence was indeed woven tightly together, possessing what Peter Burke describes as an "intimate, village quality."²⁷⁴ Even Botticelli's symbolic family was rather extensive. In 1447, Botticelli and his family rented the house in which they lived from the Rucellais,²⁷⁵ to whom Smeralda Donati was related; and, in 1458, one

of Filippino, see Horne 31-32; and for information on Botticelli's relationship with Michelangelo, see Horne 187-188.

²⁷³ See Molho, "Names, Memory" 237-239 and Molho et al., "Genealogy and Marriage Alliance" 39-70.

²⁷⁴ Peter Burke, *Culture and Society* 233.

²⁷⁵ Levey and Mandel 83; Deimling 92.

of Botticelli's brothers served as an apprentice to a member of the Rucellai family, a merchant, residing in Naples.²⁷⁶ Additionally, in 1504,²⁷⁷ although notably well after the portrait's completion, Botticelli himself served with Michelagnolo, Viviano's son, on the committee assigned to choose a location for Michelangelo Buonarroti's *David* (1501-1504).²⁷⁸ While less documented, this same type of community-wide interconnectivity is certainly applicable to the portrait sitter and her husband. Smeralda's patriarchal family alone, dating back at least to the twelfth century and serving as Florentine urban nobility, surely had ties to many local families from different socio-economic backgrounds. Over the centuries one can easily image her ancestors forging political alliances with families of similar status and providing economic assistance to those of lesser. Certainly Viviano's ancestors had done the same. Combined, their fifteenth-century family – including biological and symbolic members – surely permeated the communal fabric of Florence in its totality and provided both an extensive and diverse audience for Smeralda's portrait.

Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* is imbued with issues relevant to social identity, and various aspects of it, within late fifteenth-century Florence. This image speaks to Smeralda's 'assets' (her attire, her home), but also to her role in Florentine society as a wife, a mother, a manager of domestic affairs, perhaps even as a religious devotee. When this image and its visual cues are both scrutinized and

²⁷⁶ Levey and Mandel 83.

²⁷⁷ While the majority of scholars list this convocation of artists took place in January 1504, Wilhelm Bode records this meeting took place in January 1505; see Bode 138.

²⁷⁸ Horne 307; Levey and Mandel 84.

contextualized, myriad possibilities come to the fore in regard to social identity. However, any particular meaning that each individual viewer derived from this image was highly dependant upon, and influenced by, a variety of factors including gender, socio-economic status, and level/type of education. These factors influenced each viewer's familiarity with the portrait's visual cues and subsequently the ways in which they chose to interpret them. For example, whether Smeralda's attire is elegant or extravagant depended upon one's familiarity with contemporaneous fashions, the prices of various fabrics, other female portraits of the period, etc. In this same vein, whether Smeralda's domestic environment is stately or grandiose depended upon one's knowledge of architectural trends and practices, their ability to read various architectural treatises, etc. The 'whethers' within this work are endless, but the answer to each of the proposed questions – and the image, publicly situated within the Renaissance home – is mutable.

The Renaissance home itself, cautions Alberti, particularly its public spaces, should be decorated with care – it is likely that Alberti, when writing, had in mind the Renaissance home's extensive and diverse visitors. He contends that rooms seen by the public should be constructed with dignity and in such a way that they do not lessen the "Pleasure of Guefts, nor encourage the Impertinence of Persons that pay their Attendance to you."²⁷⁹ Alberti reiterates these sentiments later in his text, stating that public spaces of private homes should be decorated with splendor and yet not "create Envy."²⁸⁰

Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*, as a 'decorative element' situated

²⁷⁹ Alberti, Architecture 84.

within the Renaissance home, seemingly heeds Leon Battista Alberti's directive; for it is literally incapable of piquing viewers. As with any other Renaissance portrait, this image served a variety of functions. It commemorated Smeralda Brandini as a specific individual. It enhanced her wealth and status (and that of her family – both the Brandinis and the Donatis) through its presence and as it pictorially proclaimed her elevated social identity. In this way it also promulgated her family's esteemed name and communicated ideologies concerning their values as it pictorially proclaimed different aspects of Smeralda's social character. However, some of these pictorial proclamations are ambiguous; her elevated social identity (at least its degree) is intimated, but not clearly delineated. The portrait's ambiguous visual cues allow each individual viewer to determine for themselves where the Brandinis are positioned on Florence's social scale.

Ambiguity, as Ronald F. E. Weissman has demonstrated, was a feature that characterized Renaissance daily interactions among people of various social groups. Ambiguity, the grand charade, both defined and protected individuals – individuals like Smeralda and Viviano – who were entangled in a complex web of social relationships. The Renaissance charade of action is transformed within the confines of *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)* into the charade of image. The portrait itself functions to elevate the social identity of Smeralda, Viviano, and the Brandinis and Donatis as a whole. However, the portrait's particular pictorial formation – its ambiguous details – while further proclaiming this elevated social identity, also serves to protect it. Smeralda's portrait –

²⁸⁰ Alberti, Architecture 188.

unlike those of other Renaissance females which conspicuously depict ornate jewelry and patriarchal heraldry – does not exude pretentious overtones that had the potential to affront certain viewers. Thus, despite its rather modest construction, Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smeralda Brandini)*, when viewed within this context, is a rich site for exploring the construction of social identity within late fifteenth-century Florence.

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