

CHIVALRY AND PERFORMANCE IN MEDICEAN JOUSTS OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Jousts and other tournaments have existed in Europe since the early 1000s, but they began to take a different form during the Italian Renaissance, particularly in Florence during the fifteenth century. Rather than serving as demonstrations of military prowess, they became performative events that exhibited the patrons' and competitors' wealth as well as their devotion to the city. Descriptions of these tournaments tended to focus on the spectacular processions and visuals that were put on display during these occasions, rather than on the competitive portion of the event itself. The joust of Giuliano de' Medici in 1475 embodies these characteristics to the fullest, as reflected in the wealth of descriptions in chronicles, letters, and poems that it inspired. Overall, the florid nature of these accounts evince the joust's importance as a spectacle more than a military event, and the attitude to tournaments in Medicean Florence as a whole.

By the fifteenth century, the tournament had played a part in chivalric culture for more than four hundred years, and was moving away from its origins as a military exercise and towards a more performative display. Jousts, especially in Italy, tended not to focus on a knight's ability to fight, but instead on his courtly manners and the spectacular performance that he sought to create. Indeed, luxury was the focus of these events to such an extent that writers of the time paid little attention to the events or outcome of the jousts, and focused instead on their grandeur. Jousts during the first Medicean era in Florence, such as that of Giuliano de' Medici in 1475, provide a prime example of this, revealing the stylized and

performative nature of such events. In addition to honoring the individual and the city, moreover, the jousts hosted by the Medici blurred the distinction between public and private, which had been pronounced in the previous century, and assisted in the Medici's aspiration towards their place as true "princes" of Florence, rather than simply "first citizens."

Festivals, in the form of both public religious celebrations and private secular ones, had long been a part of Florentine culture. In the thirteenth century, the knights and nobility of the city would participate in "games"—that is, private tournaments—in order to celebrate these events,²³⁶ but these games would often cause chaos for the other citizens. These events were more akin to the French *mêlée*, based on actual military practice, than the later Italian joust,²³⁷ and reflected the emphasis on violence inherent in the chivalric practices of the nobility.²³⁸ Although the *popolo* regretted the militaristic nature of the magnates, which often led to violence against the citizens themselves, they respected the ideals of chivalry, such as the emphasis on honor, piety, and courtly manners. Indeed, even before the expulsion of the magnates, non-nobles had begun to adopt this way of life, as "chivalric ideals and valorization were reaching even beyond knighthood defined in a formal sense as a badge of nobility acquired by dubbing or simply by noble birthright."²³⁹ This was especially the case with those members of the non-noble upper classes who thought it fitting that they be honored—if not for military service, then for some service to the state.²⁴⁰

When the magnates were removed from power with the passage of the Ordinances of Justice of 1293, these wealthy non-nobles began to assume a pseudo-noble status that had been previously held by the hereditary nobility. Without their own noble traditions in practice or in name, they continued to emulate the chivalric ideal of the magnates by associating themselves with its ideals.²⁴¹ While they sought to avoid the violence inherent in the magnates' knightly values,²⁴² they still wished to evoke splendor and honor. Holidays and celebrations provided a fine opportunity for this. With the magnates' expulsion, the tradition of hosting games to mark events did not falter: both the individual families of the *popolo* and the city itself adopted the "feudal, personalistic, and private modes (jousts, dances, and *armeggerie*)" that were so commonly used by the *magnati* in their celebrations.²⁴³ Tournaments, however, consistently tended to be public. Even in the Medicean era, jousts

²³⁶ Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 217.

²³⁷ Richard W. Barber and Juliet R. V. Barker, *Tournaments: Jousts, Chivalry, and Pageants in the Middle Ages*, 1st American ed (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989).

²³⁸ Peter W. Sposato, "Chivalry and Honor-Violence in Late Medieval Florence," in *Prowess, Piety, and Public Order in Medieval Society*, ed. Craig M. Nakashian and Daniel P. Franke (Brill, 2017), 102.

²³⁹ Richard W. Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry* (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 123.

²⁴⁰ Gaetano Salvemini, *La Dignità Cavalleresca Nel Comune Di Firenze* (Firenze: Tipografia M. Ricci, 1896). In fact, beginning in the thirteenth century, the Priors and Gonfaloniere di Giustizia began to award knighthood to both citizens and foreigners who had provided a service, military or otherwise, to the state, such as acting as an ambassador or even for "virtue and devotion towards the People [of Florence]" ("virtù e la devozione di lui verso il Popolo"). Such acts were, clearly, not militaristic, but purely bureaucratic.

²⁴¹ Trexler, *Public Life*, 223.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 224.

were commonly hosted by the city, rather than by individual families. Nevertheless, they retained the form of their private, feudal forebears.²⁴⁴ They now became opportunities where young men could display their individual ability, as well as their family wealth, to honor both the city and their families.²⁴⁵

With the Medici, however, the distinction between public and private celebrations began to blur. Not only did the character of the events reflect the traditions of the *magnati*, but the Medici began to support them themselves, spending their own money on public events. Indeed, they “[patronized] established communal festivities so lavishly that their communal character was overlaid, and confused with a Medicean quality.”²⁴⁶ This applied not only to holy days—for example, the public festival for Epiphany²⁴⁷—but also to secular events, such as jousts. Indeed, the two most famous jousts in Florence during this era were those of Lorenzo and Giuliano de’ Medici. Although each tournament included other competitors, the two Medici were the main focus. Lorenzo’s participation celebrated his impending marriage to Clarice Orsini; the reason for Giuliano’s is unclear, but it surely was meant to honor a similar event that reflected his manliness and coming-of-age.²⁴⁸ The family spent lavishly on both, as is evident when reading the contemporary descriptions, as we shall see. That said, it is difficult to discern whether these jousts were hosted by the city or the Medici themselves. In a letter addressed to Lorenzo de’ Medici, Rodolfo Baglioni, Lord of Perugia, mentions that Giuliano’s joust was “ordered by the Most Illustrious Comune,”²⁴⁹ but there is no other indication of this elsewhere. Writing long after the event, Francesco Guicciardini wrote that his father, Piero di Jacopo Guicciardini, had jousted in 1475 “not through his own will, because it [jousting] was not his practice, but to the satisfaction of Lorenzo and Giuliano de’ Medici, who made an extreme event out of it.”²⁵⁰ Though

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 234.

²⁴⁵ Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry*, 152-153. Here, Kaeuper writes only about honor that derives from chivalry being directed to the *res publica*. Trexler expands on this by discussing the various types of tournament and how they would relate to the public good. The joust was a purely individual event, while the *armeggeria* (armed combat of brigades of men) was communal. This is true in that the *armeggeria* would create bonds between young men and thus between their families, while the joust could not, instead pitting them against one another. However, I would argue that individual jousters did not represent only themselves, but also their families—thus a Medici would represent the whole Medici family, while a Pitti would reflect all Pitti. Therefore, while it did not create community in the same way that the *armeggeria* might, it did honor the city by representing the prowess of the men of its various families.

²⁴⁶ Trexler, *Public Life*, 423.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* The Medici often associated themselves with the Three Wise Men, and would even take part in the processions that reenacted the Magi’s journey to Bethlehem.

²⁴⁸ Giuliano would have been twenty-one years old at the time; Lorenzo would have been twenty at the time of his joust in 1468. I have found no reference to an impending marriage for Giuliano in any of the documents relating to the joust of 1475.

²⁴⁹ Rodolfo Baglioni to Lorenzo de’ Medici, 3 December 1474, in Isidoro del Lugo, *Florentia: Uomini e Cose Nel Firenze Del Quattrocento* (Firenze: G. Barbèra, 1897), 393. Cited by Kristeller in “Un documento sconosciuto sulla Giostra di Giuliano de’ Medici.” “Ho presentito che la Magnificenzia di Iuliano vostro fratello deve giostrare et intervenire nella giostra ordinata per la Ill[ustrissi]ma Comunità.” This and all translations mine unless otherwise noted.

²⁵⁰ From the *Ricordi* of Francesco Guicciardini, in Lungo, *Florentia*, 397. “Giostrassi, non per volontà propria chè non era suo esercizio, ma a satisfazione [sic] di Lorenzo e Giuliano de’ Medici che ne feciono [sic] una istanza [sic] estrema.”

Guicciardini does not state it explicitly, he implies that the joust may have been hosted by the Medici, rather than the state, of which there is no mention. However, the accuracy here might be doubtful, not only because the account was written some time after the joust took place, but also because of what seems to be distaste towards Lorenzo and Giuliano, either on the part of Francesco himself or of his father, who must have recounted it to him. Regardless, this emphasizes how fine the distinction was between public and private patronage when the Medici were involved. Perhaps the citizens of Florence themselves were never truly sure.

However, the identity of the patron could become irrelevant when one was consumed with the splendor of the festival. Indeed, it was the grandeur that was the subject of the event: even the shortest accounts written by chroniclers speak to their luxury. Benedetto Dei, who was alive at the time and very well may have been present at the joust, first records that at the joust of 1475, “there were 22 jousters, very rich in jewels and pearls” before naming Giuliano as victor, and Jacopo Pitti as runner-up.²⁵¹ Of course, it surely was not of utmost importance to a chronicler to record the minutiae of a joust, but there is very little note of the events other than the winner.

Other contemporary writers recorded the joust in much more detail, though they still focused on the luxury, rather than the tournament itself. While one anonymous, contemporary account begins by listing the number of lances broken by participants in the tournament, he devotes only one paragraph to this subject, then turns to a much lengthier description of the participants’ entrance processions.²⁵² Giuliano’s is described with the most detail: his entourage included two men-at-arms, nine trumpeters in matching livery, twelve youths on horseback, three pipe-players, three “sumptuously covered” horses, and various members of his family, including Lorenzo, Piero, and Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, and Guglielmo dei Pazzi.²⁵³ He himself rode

un cavallo covertato di tafectà alexandrino frappato et frangiato intorno tucta
dipinta di bronconi d' ulivo et fiamme di fuocho ... portava in mano una aste grande
dipinta d'azzurro, silvi uno stendardo di tafiectà alexandrino frappato et frangiato
intorno, che nella sommità era un sole, et nel mezzo [sic] di questo stendardo era una
figura grande simigliata a Pallas vestita d'una veste bianca onbreggiata d'oro

²⁵¹ From the *Ricordi* of Benedetto Dei, in Lungo, “Florentia,” 397. “Furno [sic] 22 giostranti, molto ricchi di gioie e perle; e l’ maggiore [sic] onore ebbe Giuliano di Piero de’ Medici, e l’ secondo onore Iacopo Pitti.”

²⁵² “Carta della descrizione della giostra, qui incompleta, credesi opportuno di dar notizia e riferir qualche passo” in Giuseppe Mazzatinti and Fortunato Pintor, *Inventari Dei Manoscritti Delle Biblioteche d’Italia*, vol. 11 (Forlì: Casa Editrice Luigi Bordinandini, 1901), 27. “M. Giovan Francesco ruppe lanciae secte, cioè cinque in iscudo et due in rotellino ... M. Guasparre ruppe lanciae nove in iscudo ... Luigi Trotto ruppe lanciae 31, cioè 25 in scudo, tre in elmo et in rotellino, una in spalaccio ... Leone di Brembilla ruppe lanciae 22, cioè una in fregia data et in elmo, 17 in scudo, 2 in rotellino ... Giovanni da Parma ruppe lanciae 16; una in scudo, xj [sic] in elmo, tre in scudo senza rompere, una in fregiatura ... Conte da Padova ruppe lanciae 20 in scudo, una in rotellino.” These are the only recorded scores of the joust. There is nothing written about how many lances were broken by Giuliano de’ Medici or Jacopo Pitti, who came in first and second places, respectively.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 28. Piero was Lorenzo’s son and thus Giuliano’s nephew, and would have been three years old at the time; Pierfrancesco was Lorenzo and Giuliano’s first cousin. Guglielmo was married to their sister, Bianca.

macinato, et uno paio di stivalecti agucci in gamba; la quale teneva ipiè su due fiamme di tuocho ... Haveva in capo una celata brunita all' antica: e' suoi capelli tucti atrecciati che ventolavano. Teneva decta Pallas nella mano diricta una lancia da giostra et nella mano manca lo scudo di Medusa.²⁵⁴

a horse covered with Alexandrian taffeta and with edging around, all painted with olive branches and flames ... he carried in his hand a great pole painted in blue, a standard of Alexandrian taffeta all fringed and embroidered, atop which was a sun, and in the middle a figure who appeared to be Pallas, clothed in a white dress shaded in ground gold, with a pair of boots on her feet ... [Giuliano] wore on his head a bronze armet in the ancient style; and his hair was all twisted so that it seemed to blow in the wind. He held in his right hand, along with the standard of Pallas, a jousting lance, and in his left hand a shield with the face of Medusa.

The description continues on, and includes aforementioned pearls and precious gems “of great value,”²⁵⁵ as well as the trappings of his horse and other details, such as the intricacies of his shield and helmet. Yet amongst this grandiose description of luxury, only one line refers to the joust itself. The author writes only that “with these things he jousted, and all lost to him.”²⁵⁶

The description of the other participants' costumes and retinues are much to the same effect, though they are all much shorter than that of Giuliano. Of course, this joust was meant to celebrate him. While there were other participants, they were not paid nearly as much attention as the younger brother of Lorenzo, who at this point was already being addressed as “Your Magnificence” by other rules from across Italy and Europe.²⁵⁷ Perhaps the processions of the other young men were not quite as splendid as that of the young Medici, but it is equally possible that the author did not feel the need to describe them. However, it is worth noting that the least grandiose description is given to those who were mentioned earlier for having broken lances. Giovanfrancesco and Gasparre di Roberto da Sanseverino were accompanied by “four men-at-arms: Luigi Trotto, Leone di Brambilla, Giovanni da Parma, and Conte da Padova,” whose participation in the joust is also recorded earlier in the document, as well as “four horsed trumpeters, six horses covered with drapes of various colors, embroidered with silver with the coat of arms of Robert; with squadron captains and men-at-arms.”²⁵⁸ While this seems quite lavish when read out of context, it provides little detail compared to the page-long description of Giuliano's entrance. It is

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. “...legatovi perle grosse, diamanti, balasci, rubini et zatùri di grande valuta...”

²⁵⁶ Ibid. “Et con esso giostrò et tucte si perderono.”

²⁵⁷ See the letters published in Del Lungo, *Florentia*. Lorenzo is referred to as “V.M.” (Vostra Magnificenza) in every instance.

²⁵⁸ “Carta della descrizione della giostra,” 29. “Giovanfrancesco e Gasparre, figliuoli di Roberto da Sanseverino, quattro uomini d'arme, cioè Luigi Trotto, Leone di Brambilla, Giovanni da Parma, Conte da Padova; sei trombetti a cavallo, sei cavalli covertati di drappo di vari colori ricamati d'argento con lo stemma di Roberto; con capi di squadre ed uomini d'arme.”

indeed possible that these men did not, in fact, have quite as lavish a procession as the other participants—but does this imply that military prowess and lavish decoration are interdependent? Perhaps—but we can only conclude the procession itself was more valued by this author than the actual acts of violence on which a joust is founded. This is especially remarkable when we consider that there is no detail regarding what Giuliano or Jacopo Pitti accomplished on the field. Indeed, we are given no detail as to how Giuliano won—how many lances he broke, or what happened on the tilts—but are only told of his lavish costume and entrance.

In other accounts, the sumptuous description focusing on the young Medici scarcely changes, as can be seen in a letter sent by Filippo Corsini to Piero Guicciardini regarding the same joust. As noted before, Guicciardini himself was a participant in the joust. Therefore, it would be expected that more descriptive attention would be given to him, as he was the recipient of this letter himself. While the accounts here are much more equal in length, Giuliano is still given the most attention. Perhaps there was not, then, a bias in the anonymous author's description, and Giuliano's entrance truly required more words to be described than any of the other participants.

The narrative that Corsini gives is very similar to that of the anonymous author: he describes Giuliano's entrance, accompanied by twelve youths on white horses, two "veterans," also on horses, and his brother, Lorenzo.²⁵⁹ Giuliano himself is said to have been dressed "in clothes truly so ornate, with gold and silver together and innumerable rotund, flashing gems clumped on top of one another"²⁶⁰—again parallel to the anonymous description. While he does not give as many specific details regarding the procession itself, Corsini describes Giuliano's entrance as "a matter deserving of even the greatest historical dignity," and "a thing the likes of which would have been seen by the greatest commanders [i.e., of antiquity]."²⁶¹ Thus, even without telling the reader exactly how the young Medici appeared, he is raised to a level above the other participants—an ideal on par with the ancients, who were so revered by the humanists who circled around the Medici and the other wealthy patrons in Florence at this time.

Indeed, such a parallel would not be uncharacteristic during this era. As we have seen, Giuliano's outfitting itself is an entirely classical allusion: on a very superficial level, the depictions of Pallas on his standard and Medusa on his shield are clear references to classical mythology. Furthermore, his helmet *all'antica* (literally, "in the ancient style") was meant to reflect what artists of this era thought ancient armor might have looked like.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Un Documento Sconosciuto Sulla Giostra Di Giuliano de' Medici," *La Bibliofilia* 41, no. 10/12 (Ottobre-Dicembre 1939), 413-414. "Sequebantur cum equis albis duodecim formosissimi adolescentes ... Ipse vero cum magno egregioque peditatu inter duos veteranos equites sibi ad ludum adiunctos ... Multi deinde nostrorum civium proceres et presertim Laurentius eius germanus vir..."

²⁶⁰ Ibid. "...vero vestibus ita exornatus nempe auro argentque contestis unionibus magnis atque rotundis gemmis innumeris fulgentibus coacervatim superimpostis."

²⁶¹ Ibid., 413. "Mox sectus est Iulianus Medices res quidem vel maximo historico digna cui nihil quod ad summum spectaret imperatorem deesse videbatur."

²⁶² For an example of a helmet in this style and this era, see the *Sallet in the Shape of a Lion's Head*, ca. 1475-1480; steel, copper, gold, glass, pigment, textile; New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Thus, Giuliano himself was depicted as a heroic youth like those in tales of ancient times, be they mythological or historical. But not only was the joust classical: the event was, too. Corsini portrays the Renaissance joust as a sort of ancient tournament. He refers to it as a *ludus*—a game, such as those games sponsored by the Roman government. Is this, perhaps, a discreet reference to or criticism of the “bread and circuses” provided by the Medici, of which Giuliano’s joust would have been a part, to distract the people?²⁶³ Or is it simply a nod to the fact that, at this time, the Italians thought the Romans “to have been ideally chivalric,”²⁶⁴ and so attempted to embody that themselves?

Regardless, Corsini does turn to more physical elements of the joust, unlike the other descriptions we have seen so far. For example, he writes that “in Benedetto Nerli there is something especial, in that while his body might be of medium stature, in the concourse he was truly of robust soldiery to the last moment; he submitted to no one.”²⁶⁵ While he does not specifically tell of the exact moments in which Nerli showed this chivalric valor, he does consider how his height and weight would surely affect how he joust—thus providing at least some information pertaining to military tactics and violence rather than to pageantry. When he mentions Giuliano in the same section, however, he writes that he, “new and fresh, rose up well; he always bore [his lance] so that even the greatest commander would not desire to see either military knowledge nor anything else in him.”²⁶⁶ While again comparing him to antiquity, there is no mention of his stature, weight, or performance. Is it left to be assumed by the reader? Or is it instead related to the fact that the outcome of this joust would have already been known, and Giuliano expected to win, regardless of his actual performance in the tournament? Such was the case with Lorenzo’s joust in 1468. Still, however, onlookers were so invested that they prayed for his victory.²⁶⁷ It is not unlikely that the same thing would have occurred during Giuliano’s, seven years later.

The allusions in Corsini’s letter to classical literature are typical of the humanist style that was popular in Florence during this era. Indeed, the Florentines sought to emulate the Greeks and Romans in everything from painting to government, and saw themselves as the inheritors of the Roman tradition.²⁶⁸ Jousts in Italy, as we have seen, were affected by this interest in the mythologized past, but a similar phenomenon occurred in northern Europe as well. Even in the early days, “literature had a considerable influence on the tournament,”

²⁶³ Cecil H. Clough, “Chivalry and Magnificence in the Italian Renaissance,” in *Chivalry in the Renaissance*, ed. Sydney Anglo (Woodbridge [England]; Rochester, NY, USA: Boydell Press, 1990), 29.

²⁶⁴ Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry*, 149.

²⁶⁵ Kristeller, “Un documento sconosciuto,” 415. “Iacobus autem Pitthius forma corporis procerus non crebris ictibus rem gessit sed raris et illis memorandis concursibus summam pene totius certaminis sibi vendicavis.”

²⁶⁶ Ibid. “Iulianus novus recensque insurrexit itaque bene semper rem gessit ut neque militandi peritia neque aliqua que ad optimum ducem spectaret vitus ullo pacto in eo desiderari posset.”

²⁶⁷ Trexler, *Public Life*, 432.

²⁶⁸ This is expressed in Leonardo Bruni’s *Panegyric to the City of Florence*. Other texts, such as Petrarch’s *Letter to the Shade of Cicero* and Lorenzo Valla’s *Glory of the Latin Language*, both of which can be found in *The Civilization of the Italian Renaissance: A Sourcebook* (Kenneth R. Bartlett, ed.), also provide fine examples of how Florentine intellectuals during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries sought to continue a dialogue with antiquity.

and “chivalric romances provided a literary framework for many occasions.”²⁶⁹ The romance provided an ideal—thus knights in England and France sought to emulate the heroes of their literature, such as Lancelot and Galahad,²⁷⁰ just as Giuliano seems to be emulating a classical hero. Indeed, it is from such romances and *chansons de geste* that the focus on courtly love, manner, and ceremony arose. Such works of literature encouraged knights to joust with their ladies in mind: a dame would provide a gentleman with the inspiration for his performance, which he might dedicate to his lady in turn. This tradition continued as jousts developed, and was practiced in Florence as well. Even in the fifteenth century, “conventions of courtly love necessitated a knight selecting as the object of his devotion an unattainable lady, who assisted at his arming.”²⁷¹ Giuliano’s joust, for example, was famously dedicated to Simonetta Vespucci. In Angelo Poliziano’s unfinished *Stanze cominciate per la giostra di Giuliano de’ Medici*, written to commemorate the event, Simonetta becomes “the image [that] will make him [Giuliano] yearn to show his valor on the field.”²⁷² Beyond just this, however, she is deified, raised to the level of Venus and Cupid, creating within her something so ideal that it is practically holy.

Stanze per la giostra was not the norm, however. While poems were often written to commemorate jousts—such as Luigi Pulci’s, written for Lorenzo’s in 1468—Poliziano combines this tradition with the humanist interest in classical literature. Indeed, it is written in vernacular rather than Latin, and combines this ancient mythology and epic style with contemporary events and customs. Poliziano uses the occasion of the joust to weave a narrative around his two protagonists—Giuliano and Simonetta. Yet the plot has little to do with the joust. Rather, it places the two in a world of myth and allegory, where Venus and Cupid conspire to make the young Medici submit to love, which he finds “indolent,” “an unseen plague” that “strips [men] of [their] liberty.”²⁷³ Of course, the work was never finished, and it is possible that either the section that described the joust had not yet been written or had been removed. Indeed, in his introduction to the work, Francesco Bausi writes that Poliziano would have edited the poem to give it a new purpose after the death of his two protagonists—Simonetta in 1476 and Giuliano in 1478—and thus removed the section regarding the joust proper. Indeed, it would have become more “eulogistic-allegorical” than celebratory, which made it necessary to “remove the stanzas which indulged on the description of the tournament.”²⁷⁴

Nevertheless, Poliziano does continue to follow the conventions of romances,

²⁶⁹ Barber and Barker, *Tournaments*, 4.

²⁷⁰ Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33.

²⁷¹ Clough, *Chivalry and Magnificence*, 31.

²⁷² Angelo Poliziano, *The Stanze of Angelo Poliziano*, trans. David Quint (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), II.22.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, I.13-14.

²⁷⁴ Angelo Poliziano, *Stanze per La Giostra*, ed. Francesco Bausi, Progetto Poliziano. L’opera 4 (Messina: Università degli Studi di Messina, Centro internazionale di studi umanistici, 2016), 55. “L’originario progetto delle *Stanze* fu radicalmente trasformato; a quel punto, infatti, l’idea di fare delle Stanze un poemetto encomiastico-allegorico svincolato dalla diretta celebrazione della giostra di Giuliano rendeva necessario espungere le ottave che indugiavano sulla descrizione del torneo.”

namely in his treatment of chivalric love. The joust provides Giuliano an opportunity to demonstrate his prowess, for as Cupid says, “only a triumphal palm will win her [Simonetta] for you.”²⁷⁵ And while this fictive Giuliano had not previously paid his due respect to Love, as would be required of properly chivalric knights, Cupid does commend him for his valor while hunting: “I saw him so ferocious . . . that the woods seemed afraid of him; his comely face had become all harsh, irate, and fiery.”²⁷⁶ Thus the poem does reflect Giuliano’s physical ability, and does not only create an allegorical figure from his name. Indeed, the second book of the poem tends to have a more militaristic tone than the first, which is more figurative, perhaps because of the implication that this is the section that would have contained the events of the joust, had they been included in the first printed edition of 1484. Poliziano also directly references the fact that a joust can lead to “eternal glory and fame”²⁷⁷—certainly personal, but also for one’s family and one’s city, as has already been noted. This certainly reflects the blurring balance between private and public with regard to the Medici, who were becoming “princes” more than “first citizens” of Florence.

While Poliziano’s work is unfinished, a similar work is the *Giostra di Lorenzo de’ Medici*, written by Luigi Pulci to commemorate Lorenzo’s participation in the tournament of 1468. Pulci’s poem, while it does contain some classical allusions, is much more focused on the joust than anything else, even if it does lend more than sixty stanzas to the pageantry.²⁷⁸ This, of course, follows the same pattern as the prose descriptions mentioned above. Yet Pulci does narrate specific moments of the joust, including when Lorenzo is pushed off his horse and “everyone on the field ran to help him.”²⁷⁹ But surely even this was idealized. In fact, one scholar has noted that the narrative of Pulci’s poem is taken directly from another prose account, but made more fantastical by adding elements from both mythology and the chivalric romance. Thus, the pageantry itself was an invention of the poet,²⁸⁰ although moments had been recorded in purely historical accounts.

Yet these poems, much like the jousts on which they were based, were meant to celebrate their protagonists, regardless of what truly occurred on the tilts. Thus, much as we have seen in the anonymous description and Corsini’s letter regarding the joust of 1475, even if the central figure of the tournament did not participate in the traditionally violent, chivalric manner, actually on horseback and breaking lances, he could maintain the ideals of chivalry that had been upheld by members of the *popolo grande* in Florence since the expulsion of the magnates in the late thirteenth century. As important as excellence in the military arts had been in earlier centuries, wealthy Florentines, like the upper class of other Italian city-states, were spending more time on intellectual pursuits than military ones due to

²⁷⁵ Poliziano, *The Stanze of Angelo Poliziano*, II.31.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, II.11.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, II.19.

²⁷⁸ Mark Davie, “Luigi Pulci’s Stanze per La Giostra: Verse and Prose Accounts of a Florentine Joust of 1469,” *Italian Studies* 44, no. 1 (1989), 44.

²⁷⁹ Luigi Pulci, *La Giostra Di Lorenzo de’ Medici* (Firenze: Antonio Tubini, Lorenzo d’Alopa, Andrea Ghirlandi, 1500), “Ne prima in terra il giovanotto fue / che tutto il campo correva aiutarlo...”

²⁸⁰ Davie, “Luigi Pulci’s Stanze per la Giostra,” 48, 52.

the influence of humanism.²⁸¹ This trend continued in the following years, where the joust became more and more stylized, distancing itself from its military origins. Jousts were even held to represent allegorical combat between values rather than between actual men, as in 1490, for example, when the Bolognese hosted a battle between *Fortuna* and *Sapienza*.²⁸² Yet, even without many vestiges of their original form or purpose, jousts in the fifteenth century reflected a growing interest in material and intellectual culture, as well as honor unrelated to direct violence. While the *popolo grande* in Florence did not completely create a new cultural tradition to suit their needs, they adapted an existing one that they found in the magnates' chivalry. From the amount of documentary evidence relating to these events, we can see how important they were, both for individual honor and that of the state. In the case of the Medici, however, these previously contrasting realms begin to blur to such a degree that even the contemporary reader has difficulty distinguishing them. Nevertheless, they point to the interplay of classical, humanist thought and culture with that of the more recent past, where violence was much more important than it was during the fifteenth century, and mark the beginning of a new performative and extravagant tradition that would come to be characteristic of the High Renaissance, and later the Baroque.

²⁸¹ John M Najemy, "Arms and Letters: The Crisis of Courtly Culture in the Wars of Italy," *Italy and the European Powers*, 2006.

²⁸² Clough, "Chivalry and Magnificence," 45.

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