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Flowering in the Springtime: An Iconographical Analysis of Botticelli's Primavera

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FLOWERING IN THE SPRINGTIME: AN ICONOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF BOTTICELLI'S *PRIMAVERA*

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ABSTRACT

Flowering in the Springtime: An Iconographical Analysis of Botticelli's *Primavera*

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This thesis examines how the iconographical program of Botticelli's *Primavera* allows the painting to function as a how-to guide of sexuality for an aristocratic young bride in late-fifteenth century Florence. This thesis argues that the inclusion and juxtaposition of specific mythological figures creates a message about the appropriate locations and behaviors expected of a woman when expressing her sexuality. This iconographical program takes into account popular vernacular literature, allegorical meanings of mythology, and Christian understanding of Classical myth in order to produce a message that is meant to be understood by a very specific audience.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Aristocratic women of the fifteenth century were raised with the knowledge that their ultimate success was a good marriage and having as many children, preferably male children, as possible. As a result of this mindset, their entire education and upbringing was geared towards transforming young girls into the ideal bride- quiet, submissive, and virtuous. In addition to books and etiquette taught by female relatives and tutors, visual art was also used as a didactic tool to teach girls proper behavior. Popular subjects included the Madonna and Child, stories from both the Old and New Testaments, and mythology. These subjects were chosen because they provided behavioral exempla for young girls.

One of the most popular ways in the city of Florence to present these didactic paintings, particularly those with a mythological narrative, was through *spalliera* panels. *Spalliera* paintings are generally large-scale rectangular panel paintings meant to be hung on the wall. They were often commissioned for weddings, and along with large chests, or *cassoni*, formed an integral part of the furniture ordered for the chambers of newly married couples. Furniture was a way for Renaissance couples to showcase their wealth and social status, and often included images.[1] The images depicted in furniture created for newlywed couples were meant to act as exemplars of virtues associated with conjugal duties.[2]

One of the most famous examples of a *spalliera* painting is Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera* (Fig. 1), thought to be commissioned for the marriage of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and Semiramide d'Appiano in 1482. The painting, which depicts an ensemble of mythological figures

[1] Anthony F. D'Elia. *The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,2004), 45.
[2] Jacqueline Marie Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family in the Florentine Renaissance Palace* (Los Angeles: The Getty Foundation, 2008), 5

in a flowery glade surrounded by orange trees, was hung above a daybed in the couple's nuptial suite.[3] For many years, the precise meaning of the painting was unclear, due to the enigmatic nature of its iconography. However, in the past two decades, most scholars, among them Charles Dempsey and Lilian Zirpolo, have agreed that the *Primavera* was meant to act as a behavioral guide for the newly wed Semiramide, displaying the traits of an ideal wife for her emulation.

Although much has been written about the *Primavera*'s role as a guide to proper behavior, its messages regarding sexuality have been largely overlooked. Sexuality played a central role in upper-class marriages of the fifteenth century. These marriages were contracted for the express purpose of strengthening ties through procreation. Thus, married couples were encouraged to engage in sexual congress often. In fact, religious figures, such as St. Augustine and Bernardino of Siena, urged couples to hang erotic imagery in their bedrooms in order to stimulate their sexual desire.

In addition to the modest and restrained public persona wives were expected to adopt in public, they were also supposed to behave in a sexually enticing way in private with their husbands. As Erwin Panofsky points out, the perfect Renaissance bride was described by contemporary thinkers as combining chastity and amorous abandon.[4] Her sexuality was meant to be used to entice her husband and to further the goal of procreation, but was to be restrained in public, where she was meant to act modestly and decorously. The iconography of the *Primavera* teaches more than just proper behavior; it is meant to teach the work's intended audience, a newlywed bride, how to utilize and display her sexuality, both in the public sphere, where one must behave with restraint and modesty, and in private with one's husband, where one ought to be wanton and lusty.

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[3] Ronald Lightbown. *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work,* (New York: Abbeville Publishers, 1989), 122.
[4] Erwin Panofsky. *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic.* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 137.

Sexual congress within a marriage was vitally important to the aristocratic families of the fifteenth century. Without regular and proper intercourse, a newly-married couple would never achieve the ultimate goal of their union—the conception and birth of male heirs. The *Primavera* utilizes its iconographical program to instruct the bride in this aspect of her marital life. The juxtaposition of Venus, Flora, and the Three Graces provides her with behavioral exempla and advises her when it is appropriate for her to display the qualities of Venus, and when she is expected to embody the characteristics of Flora and the Graces. Additionally, the costuming of the female figures contributes to this understanding, as Venus is garbed in clothing reminiscent of what one would wear in public, while Flora and the Graces wear looser, more casual clothing appropriate for the private setting. The presence of Zephyrus and Mercury, both gods heavily associated with myths of fertility and procreation, alludes to the presence of the husband and appropriate behavior while in his company. This poetic argument forms a guide for an aristocratic bride, informing her precisely when and how she is to use her sexuality. Unlike previous interpretations which have looked at the *Primavera* as an overall guide to behavior, this thesis will argue that the *Primavera* does more than this. An iconographical analysis of the work shows that in addition to being a behavioral manual, the *Primavera* functions specifically as a guide to a woman's sexuality, teaching a young woman exactly where and when she is to use her sexuality in an appropriate way.

Literature Review

Interest in ancient texts and narratives began to gain popularity amongst the lay aristocracy in the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries, when Christian scholars fled Byzantium ahead of the Ottoman army. These scholars, many of whom ended up in Italy, began offering their services as tutors in Greek, and as a result, sparked a curiosity about Classical

mythology, much of which was only known through Latin editions of Ovid or medieval texts that turned Classical heroes and deities into allegories of Christian behaviors and virtues.[5]

This viewpoint—that mythological figures served as allegories of behavior—became very popular during the Renaissance. Cities and families took up individual figures, such as Hercules, as their totem, and incorporated them into imagery.[6] The idea of moral *exempla* also took off during this time. This worked very nicely into the understanding of mythological figures as behavioral allegories and allowed patrons to create decorative schemes centered on pagan narratives, with the reasoning that they were promoting and teaching good Christian behavior. This was especially popular when decorating bridal chambers, and in fact, many wedding commissions depicted narratives from classical sources, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* or Homer's epics. These narratives were meant to be seen as both conversation pieces for the newlywed couple and their friends, as well as images with didactic meaning. In the mid- to late-fifteenth century, the figures of Venus, the Three Graces, and Flora were popular subject matter for wedding commissions, as they served as behavioral models for the newly wed bride.

The integration of the Classical gods did not begin in art, but rather in literature, with the writings of Petrarch and Boccaccio. Boccaccio, in fact, published two books on the topic—one, entitled *Famous Women,* published in 1361, was a collection of biographies of exemplary women mentioned in Classical literature, while the other, called *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods* and published in 1360, contained stories, myths, and explanations of Greek and Roman deities

[5] Michelle Zerba, "Renaissance Homer and Wedding Chests: The Odyssey at the Crossroads of Humanist Learning, the Visual Vernacular, and the Socialization of Bodies" in *Renaissance Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (2017), 831.
[6] During the late medieval period, the city of Florence adopted the figure of Hercules as one of its symbols and attached a carving of the mythological hero to one of the cathedral walls. Later, in the fifteenth century, the Medici family also adopted the figure of Hercules as one of their emblems, thus associating the family with the city of Florence in the minds of citizens and visitors alike.

and their festivals. In 1556, Vincenzo Cartari published *The Images of the Gods*, which was the first Italian mythography, and included explanations and examples of the most common depictions of the Olympian gods.[7]

In more modern times, the subject has become quite popular, and many scholars have examined the ways in which the people of the Renaissance, who were by all accounts a deeply Christian society, allowed themselves the use of pagan imagery, often erotically depicted. The first study examining the development of this imagery was Jean Seznec's *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, which was first published in French in 1953. Following him came studies of vernacular culture and literature, most notably Charles Dempsey's *The Early Renaissance and Vernacular Culture,* as well as books detailing the adaptation of Classical imagery in Renaissance art, such as those published by Luba Freedman in 2003 and 2011, as well as Malcolm Bull's *The Mirror of the Gods* from 2005. Most recently, Barbara Grazosi has published a history of the Olympians, and new translations of the texts by Boccaccio and Cartari have been released.

The twelve Olympians survived the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity due to their use as allegories. Christian theologians and genealogists used the gods to describe the rise of civilizations and the divinity of certain aristocratic and royal dynasties. For example, the medieval writer, Jean Le Maire de Belges, claimed that the Franks were descended from

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[7] The translations used in this text are as follows: Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Famous Women.* Edited and translated by Virginia Brown. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001. Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods* vol. 1. Edited and translated by Jon Solomon. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011. Cartari, Vincenzo. *Images of the Gods of the Ancients: The First Italian Mythography*. Translated by John Mulryan. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012.

Trojan refugees.[8] The Burgundian rulers, during the medieval period and into the Renaissance, claimed to be descended from Hercules.[9] Dante, who as an Italian living in the Mediterranean and relating himself to Virgil, had to engage with Classical culture. In his *Divine Comedy,* he conflates Apollo and the Holy Spirit, and gives Christ the epithet *il sommo Giove*, or "the highest Jupiter," and thus reconciles Christian theology with the pagan gods.[10]

The writer Eusebius, through the works of St. Jerome, bequeathed to the medieval world the understanding that all the figures and events of human history, from the birth of Abraham to the rise of the Christian era, were grouped into six vital periods: Creation to the Flood; the Flood to Abraham; Abraham to David; David to the Babylonian Captivity; the Captivity to the Nativity; and from the Nativity onwards.[11] These authors constructed mythological groupings and dynasties in order to make room for the pagan gods among the heroes of the Bible.[12]

During the medieval period, as well as the early Renaissance, the gods were often incorporated into astrological sequences, such as the one by Francesco Cossa in the Palazzo Schifanoia (Fig. 2).[13] The gods are shown in their habitual depictions from antiquity with their symbols to identify them. This connection between the gods and the stars dates back to the Classical period, and was abhorred by Church fathers, such as St. Paul, who "reproaches the Galatians for continuing to observe 'days and months and times and years' in the name of the 'weak and beggarly elements' to which they desire again to be in bondage."[14]

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[8] Jean Seznec. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 24. This legend is recounted in the *Illustrations de Gaule et Singularities de Troie* written by de Belges in 1509.
[9] Seznec. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods,* 24-25.
[10] Barbara Graziosi, *The Gods of Olympus: A History.* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2013), 187.
[11] Seznec. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods,* 14.
[12] Seznec. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods,* 15.
[13] Seznec. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: ,* 203-205.
[14] Seznec. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods,* 42. The quoted text is taken from Galatians 4:9-10.

In actuality, this disdain was largely ignored, as the pagan names of the weeks and months survive even to this day, and the Christian Church itself, acting in the mid-fourth century, fixed the date of the Nativity as December 25—a date which coincided with the celebration of the birth of the sun in many pagan religions. Medieval thinkers acknowledged the astrological powers of the stars and recognized astrology as the foundation of profane culture and science.[15] Thomas Aquinas recognized that the stars had power over a person's personality, and since people follow their physical appetites into temptation, therefore, the stars lead people to sin.[16]

The Classical gods were also closely associated with alchemy and the elements used in it. Thus, many elements, such as mercury, were named after them and their characteristics were connected to the pagan deities. In fact, the purported founder of Hermeticism and patron of astrology and alchemy—Hermes Trismegistus—was seen as one of the five Mercuries identified by Cicero, and thus, medieval scholars and later, Renaissance Humanists, could rationalize their interest in hermetic texts and occult sciences.[17]

In the Renaissance, and particularly in art, the Classical gods gained popularity as moral allegories and behavioral *exempla.* According to Jean Seznec, "the true role of the Italian Renaissance in relation to the mythological material transmitted by the Middle Ages lies in restoring classical form.", and in fact, with the help of the newly discovered interest in antiquities, many artists did just that. [18] Beginning with Donatello's *David,* created in 1440, artists began to create paintings and sculptures *all'antica,* that is, in a style imitating that of

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[15] Seznec. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods,* 48
[16] Seznec. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods,* 48.
[17] Phyllis Pray Bober and Ruth Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculptures: A Handbook of Sources,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 57. During the Hellenistic period, Mercury was often synchronized with Thoth, the Egyptian god of knowledge, and thus in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods became known as the god of alchemy and esoteric knowledge.
[18] Seznec. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods,* viii.

antiquity.[19] This style took firm hold beginning in the mid-fifteenth century, and lasted well into the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

Many patrons and artists were enamored of the Classical gods, but others, whose deeply held religious beliefs saw this as idol worship, were driven to adapt these stories and figures to Christian beliefs.[20] The eagle of Jupiter became a symbol for Christ, and stories of the cruelty of the gods, such as the story of Marsyas, were conflated with the Passion and the Crucifixion. The Virgin Mary, too, adapted pagan symbolism, like the crown seen in depictions of the *Coronation of the Virgin*.

The idea of Venus as the goddess of love came back into vogue with the renewed interest in Neoplatonism. Previously, she had been relegated to astronomical texts as the embodiment of the planet Venus, or in her morally negative incarnation as the goddess of destructive lust.[21] Philosophers all over Europe, and especially in Italy, began scrutinizing the Platonic and Neoplatonic texts for connections with their Christian belief. One such text was Pausanias' speech on the Common and Heavenly Aphrodite from Plato's *Symposium*. Plato differentiates between *Pandemos Aphrodite*, or the Aphrodite who controls sensual love, and the celestial Aphrodite, or *Ourania Aphrodite*.[22] He speaks of the superiority of celestial love and praises the practice of pederasty as an expression of this divine love because it, "contains nothing of the female."[23] This love, when expressed correctly, is love of the soul, rather than of the body.

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[19] Donatello's David is also the first life-size bronze nude created since antiquity.
[20] Luba Freedman, *The Revival of the Olympian Gods in Renaissance Art,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.
[21] Seznec. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods,* 172.
[22] James Robson. *Sex and Sexuality in Classical Athens.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 227.
[23] Robson. *Sex and Sexuality*, 227.

Therefore, it is the love embodied by the Celestial Aphrodite, and is valuable because both lovers must take care and behave virtuously.

This philosophy was expounded on by Marsilio Ficino, who conflated the idea of the two goddesses of love with sensual and spiritual love. In his letter to his pupil, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, he encourages the latter to seek both kinds of love with his bride, Semiramide d'Appiano, in order to achieve a fulfilling marriage. In his treatise, *On the Nature of Love*, he divides mind and soul into three parts each—Saturn, Jupiter, and Venus. The celestial Love, according to Ficino, is the mind, and its being is Saturn, its life is Jupiter, and its power of understanding is Venus. Conversely, the soul belongs to earthly Love. "Saturn…it understands things supreme, Jupiter, because it moves the heavens; and Venus, because it procreates all that is lower."[24] The perception of beauty happens through the mind, which then causes the impetus in the soul to procreate. Because there is Love in both mind and soul, they are equally valuable.[25] According to Ficino, the love that is condemned by Plato via Pausanias is the love that puts physical beauty before the beauty of the soul.[26]

Like in antiquity, Venus embodied two aspects in the Renaissance—the goddess of lust and the goddess of love and marriage. Because of the importance of procreation in the Early Modern Period, she who embodies the qualities needed for this, namely love and lust, became the patroness of marriage.[27] "She unites the couple, sanctions the passions that brought them

[24] Marsilio Ficino. *On the Nature of Love: Ficino on Plato's Symposium*. trans. Arthur Farndell. (London: Shepheard-Walwyn Ltd., 2016), 26.
[25] Ficino. *On the Nature of Love*, 27.
[26] Ficino. *On the Nature of Love*, 27.
[27] Lightbown. *Sandro Botticelli*, 127.

together, and increases their amorous desires."[28] In an epithalamia, or love poem meant to celebrate marriage, Venus is usually described as resting in a bower. Cupid, who is sometimes armed with his arrows, comes to rouse her and escort her to a wedding.[29] The imagery of epithalamia is evident in Lorenzo Lotto's *Venus and Cupid* from the mid-1520s (Fig. 3). The painting contains all the traditional imagery associated with Venus, such as the myrtle, the roses, and the seashell, as well as contemporary symbols of marriage and fertility- the tiara and pearl earring, as well as the image of Cupid urinating.[30] Venus was seen as a model of behavior for both new brides and established wives, who were supposed to embody a combination of chastity and amorous abandon, as described by contemporary thinkers.[31]

The Three Graces, in the Renaissance mind, are inextricably linked to Venus. They are the personification of grace, beauty, and charisma, and are therefore fitting companions to the goddess of love.[32] Renaissance thinkers also saw them as a symbol of chastity, since according to Seneca, they are, "pure and undefiled and holy in the eyes of all."[33] According to Boccaccio, some thought that Venus was the mother of the Graces, for, "what love was there that ever lacked grace."[34] He also explains the belief that the Graces represented kindness and affection, qualities important in alliances, where if you are kind towards a man, that kindness will be returned to you.[35]

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[28] Andrea Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage in the Italian Renaissance" *The Metropolitan Museum of Art,* accessed February 17, 2016, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/marr/hd_marr.htm. Epithalamia often contain erotic imagery.
[29] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"
[30] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"
[31] Panofsky. *Problems in Titian,* 137.
[32] Bober and Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculptures,* 95.
[33] Lilian Zirpolo, "Botticelli's *Primavera:* A Lesson for the Bride" in *Women's Art Journal* 12, no. 2 (1992), 25.
[34]Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods,* ed. and trans. by Jon Solomon, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 387.
[35] Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods,* 745.

The myth of Flora, told in Ovid's *Fasti*, was well-known in the Renaissance.[36] She represented fecundity and the flowering of life during spring. However, the figure of the nymph-turned-goddess was not seen as a purely positive personage. Boccaccio states that she was a wealthy woman who made her fortune by, "squandering the flower of her youth and expending her physical beauty as a common prostitute amid panderers and degenerate young men."[37] Her name became synonymous with the spring due to the Floralia—games described as being lewd and lustful.[38] To mitigate their embarrassment, the Senate decided to invent the story of the rape of Chloris by Zephyr, and her subsequent transformation into the goddess Flora.[39] Bober suggests that the earliest figure of Flora from the Early Modern Period- that in Botticelli's *Primavera*—may have been modeled after a statue of Pomona, the personification of the season of autumn, which was known in the late fifteenth century.[40]

The association of Flora with female sexuality continued well into the sixteenth century. Depictions from this period conflate the goddess's traditional iconography, as seen in Botticelli's work, with the iconography of the Three Graces, specifically that of Voluptas, who represents physical pleasure. This conflation is grounded in a Neoplatonic reinterpretation of the Graces.[41] Panofsky explains this reinterpretation thus:

> As a triad, they retained, in one way or another, their old significance as a symbol of Friendship or Concord. As individuals, however, they outgrew their roles of mere

[36] In Book V of the *Fasti*, Ovid tells of his encounter with Flora, where she recounts her origin story. According to him, Flora was originally a nymph named Chloris who was raped by the West Wind, Zephyr. He then married her and made her the goddess of flowers and springtime, and there is no wife more contented than she.
[37] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, ed. and trans. by Virginia Brown, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 265.
[38] Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 267.
[39] Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 269.
[40] Bober and Rubinstein. *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture*, 104.
[41] Panofsky. *Problems in Titian*, 136.

> handmaidens (*pedissequae*) of Venus and were interpreted as independent entities, each invested with a meaning of her own.[42]

In the Renaissance, the idea of sensual gratification and physical pleasure (Voluptas) merged with the idea of the Profane, or Earthly, Venus, who symbolized material beauty and physical pleasure. For the people of the Renaissance, Flora was both a goddess and a courtesan. In fact, many courtesans of the time adopted the name for their own.[43] Many artists, especially in the sixteenth century, painted courtesans as Flora. One example of this is Palma Vecchio's *Portrait of a Blonde* (Fig. 4) from 1520, where the unknown woman, likely a courtesan, is depicted with the traditional iconography of Flora.[44] Certainly, it was difficult to distinguish between courtesans and high-born ladies in the sixteenth century. "The lady is indistinguishable from the courtesan who dresses like her, holds her copy of Petrarch's Sonnets, and mimics her manners."[45] However, the figure of Flora was also considered appropriate for the bride, for as Panofsky pointed out, the expectation of a bride who is passionately amorous behind closed doors was prevalent throughout Italy, as well as the rest of Europe.[46] In fact, Albrecht Dürer created two engravings of a young bride—one where she is depicted as *Castitas*, or Chastity, and the other where she is shown as *Voluptas*, or physical pleasure.[47]

The iconographical and allegorical meanings of Venus, the Three Graces, and Flora meant that these figures were closely associated with marriage throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. During the Renaissance, marriage was seen as a business transaction conducted by two families, rather than a love match of two individuals. One of the most

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[42] Panofsky. *Problems in Titian,* 136.
[43] Rona Goffen. *Titian's Women*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 72.
[44] The traditional iconography of Flora consists of roses and some sort of jewelry. This is in accordance to her conflation and association with Venus and with Voluptas- the personification of pleasure.
[45] Goffen. *Titian's Women*, 79.
[46] Panofsky. *Problems in Titian,* 138.
[47] Panofsky. *Problems in Titian,* 137.

important aspects of a marriage contract was the dowry. Detailed in contracts and memoranda, dowries were often divided between cash and goods.[48] The goods included in a dowry, called a *donora,* included items that would emphasize the bride's virtues.[49] The gowns and headdresses were meant to highlight her beauty and fertility, while devotional texts spoke of her piety, and household goods aided her in her duties as chatelaine of her new home.[50] The *donora* was carefully appraised, and this value was recorded by the husband.[51] When Caterina Strozzi married Marco Parenti in 1447, her dowry was valued at one thousand florins, with the *donora* coming out to 165 florins.[52] When Nannina de' Medici, the sister of Lorenzo "Il Magnifico," married Bernardo Rucellai in 1461, her dowry was valued at 2500 florins.[53]

In addition to the dowry, a groom was expected to provide a counter-dowry, which, according to Florentine custom, was technically a loan to the bride.[54] Unlike the dowry, which was meant to support the bride and remained under her name, the counter-dowry remained under the ownership of the husband, "so he could resell, rent, or lend…various components once the newlywed period was over."[55] In addition to clothing, furniture was included in the counter-dowry.[56] Some of this furniture might be included in the bride's dowry, as in the case of Nannina de' Medici, whose *donora* included, "1 pair of large wedding chests with painted backrests, very rich."[57]

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[48] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 2-4.
[49] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 4.
[50] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 4.
[51] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 4.
[52] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 2-4.
[53] Allison Levy, "Dames and Games in Early Modern Italy," (presentation, University of Mary Washington, Fredericksburg, VA, March 10, 2015).
[54] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 5.
[55] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 5.
[56] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 5.
[57] Giovanni Rucellai, *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone, I: "Il Zibaldone Quaresimale" Pagine scelte,* ed. Alessandro Perosa, (London: the Warburg Institute, 1960), 32-34. The translation provided here is by Allison Levy.

The most common type of bridal furniture commissioned in the early fifteenth century was the marriage chest, or *cassone*. These were generally commissioned by the groom, and were usually the single greatest furnishing expense.[58] "Large chests like these, painted with courtly, contemporary, historical, or didactic narratives and allegories, carried a bride's dowry goods to her new home, enhancing the processional—and material—aspects of the event as they did so."[59] These painted chests were most popular in the first half of the fifteenth century. One example of a *cassone* panel is the *Cassone Adimari* (Fig. 5), from 1450. The panel depicts a nuptial parade in downtown Florence.[60] In the center, a line of noble men and women dance gracefully under a colorful canopy.[61] On the left, a group of musicians play trumpets under a loggia, while two young servants carry a bowl and a dish into a house.[62]

Household furniture was an important part of Renaissance culture in general, and Renaissance marriage ceremonies in particular, where the wealth of the bride and groom was put on public display during the wedding procession.[63] Furniture was meant to showcase the owner's social status and wealth. Images were often incorporated into furniture, especially furniture commissioned for weddings. These images were meant to showcase virtues associated with marriage and spousal duties.[64] Prior to the Council of Trent in 1545, "marriage required no concessions to religion; only the consent of the couple was necessary to establish a binding

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[58] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 5.
[59] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 5.
[60] ---. "Cassone Adimari" *Guide to the Accademia Gallery in Florence*, accessed Aprl 1, 2016, http://www.accademia.org/explore-museum/artworks/cassone-adimari/. The panel was probably commissioned for the Adimari-Martelli wedding which occurred in the 1440s. It was painted by Giovanni di Ser Giovanni, who was known as "Lo Scheggia" and was the brother of Masaccio. Recent studies have shown that the panel is not from a *cassone* but is in fact a *spalliera* painting.
[61] ---. "Cassone Adimari".
[62] ---. "Cassone Adimari"
[63] D'Elia, *The Renaissance of Marriage*, 45.
[64] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 5

match."[65] Most weddings, however, were lavish affairs, and often included a special mass or an oration by a religious figure.[66]

By the 1470s, these bridal images had moved from the lids of *cassoni* to *spalliere* panels.[67] The term "*spalliera*" is derived from the Italian word *spalla*, meaning "shoulder."[68] This term was used for a variety of large-scale, rectangular paintings and hangings, which were installed on a wall at shoulder height or higher.[69] *Spalliere* ranged from tapestries hung above benches to painted backrests of daybeds.[70] Many fifteenth century and early sixteenth century paintings that fit the description of *spalliere* depict narratives chosen from ancient texts or contemporary literature.[71] These paintings were often meant to decorate bridal chambers. The most famous example of a *spalliera* painting is Botticelli's *Primavera* from 1482. Likely commissioned on the occasion of the marriage of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici to Semiramide Appiano, the work was hung above a daybed of similar dimensions.[72]

Images on *cassoni* and *spalliere* could be provocative and were meant to stimulate the viewer's desire.[73] According to one treatise, "there should be masculine paintings on the walls, causing the couple's minds to be imprinted with virility," in order to encourage conception of male children.[74] The appearance of children was believed to be influenced by the paintings that were placed in the room where they were conceived.[75] Imagination was thought to have great

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[65] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 2.
[66] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 2.
[67] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 6.
[68] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"
[69] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"
[70] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"
[71] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"
[72] Lightbown. *Sandro Botticelli,* 122.
[73] Rudolph M. Bell. *How To Do It: Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 113.
[74] Bell. *How To Do It,* 39.
[75] Bell. *How To Do It,* 40. This belief stems from ancient texts by Mercurio and Quintilian.

power in affecting the gender and appearance of children.[76] Couples who wanted to conceive a son were encouraged to look at, "pictures of valorous men."[77] These images were not considered appropriate for more public settings, but were common enough in bedrooms to generate comment.[78] Girolamo Savonarola, the inflammatory Dominican monk, complained that people had "near their beds and *lettucci* images of naked men and women doing indecent things."[79] St. Antoninus, who was archbishop of Florence during the mid-fifteenth century, condemned artists who created, "images that provoke desire, not because of their beauty but because of their arrangement, such as naked women and the like."[80] Others, such as San Bernardino of Siena, who in turn referenced St. Augustine, saw these erotically charged images as a way to encourage procreation.[81] Many people believed that visual beauty would also influence the appearance of a couple's children.[82]

Iconography from a variety of sources was incorporated into *cassone* and *spalliere* images that made up part of a bride's dowry in order to promote beauty, fertility, piety, and duty among Florentine brides.[83] Paintings that spoke of the poetic imagery of epithalamia were clear depictions of the pleasures and hopes of marriage.[84] Epithalamia are, "the marriage songs in poetry or prose invented by the Greeks, adopted by the Romans, and revived on a grand scale during the Renaissance."[85] Many of the epithalamia of the fifteenth century were inspired by the

[76] Bell. *How To Do It,* 40.
[77] Rudolph M. Bell. *How To Do It*, 39
[78] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 113.
[79] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage." Girolamo Savonarola was a radical Dominican monk who, upon the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent in 1492, seized power in the city of Florence and championed a strict, ascetic way of life adhering very closely to Christian doctrine.
[80] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 113.
[81] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 113.
[82] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"
[83] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 151.
[84] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"
[85] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"

poetry of Catallus and Claudian.[86] These orations praised the institute of marriage and its importance, both to society and to personal satisfaction.[87]

Often, these epithalamaic images included depictions of Venus, like in Botticelli's *Venus and Mars* or Lorenzo Lotto's *Venus and Cupid*. In these images, Venus was a stand-in for the bride, and often was costumed with bridal accessories such as a crown or a girdle. Flora and the Graces were also widely depicted, especially in the sixteenth century. The qualities associated with these figures were meant to provide a moral and behavioral lesson for the bride, who was supposed to emulate the goddesses, especially in her demeanor. The comportment of an ideal fifteenth-century wife—elegant and unemotional, displaying the modesty and restraint championed by contemporary writers on the subject of marriage—is demonstrated in Botticelli's *Primavera.* This was the earliest mythological painting to do so, and is echoed in depictions of Venus, the Graces, and Flora throughout the Early Modern Period.

The attribution of ideal qualities, such as restraint, modesty, and elegance to these deities, but most especially, to Venus and Flora, belied the juxtaposition of behaviors expected of a Renaissance wife. The ideal Renaissance wife was quiet, efficient, pious, and a good housekeeper. However, she was also supposed to be amorous and to incite desire in her husband.[88] Eroticized pictures were seen as ways to kindle desire and encourage procreation, and what could be more erotic than the goddess of love and the goddess of spring, and therefore, of new life? Just as the Virgin Mary during this period was meant to be a model of devoted motherhood, Venus was the embodiment of sensuality within the permissible boundaries of marriage. Combined with the image of Flora, who was attributed with lustful behavior bound

[86] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"
[87] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"
[88] Panofsky. *Problems in Titian,* 137.

within marriage, this depiction of sensuality was meant to teach a young bride how she should behave in her role as wife and sexual partner. The fact that these images were often hung in the nuptial chambers only highlights this didactic purpose—a wife was allowed to behave lustfully, but only within the boundaries of her marriage.

The use of behavioral *exempla* is not something unique to the Renaissance. During the medieval period, Biblical and religious figures were often used as examples of ideal comportment for both men and women. What is new is the Renaissance's conflation of pagan deities such as Venus, the Three Graces, and Flora, with ideal Christian behavior. These female deities were incorporated into imagery associated with marriage in order to provide an example for the newly wed bride, who was often familiar with Classical literature.[89] She was expected to interact with these images and model herself after the goddesses, who displayed restraint and modesty. The inclusion of Venus, the goddess of lust, and of Flora, who was widely believed to have been a prostitute, points to the importance of sensuality and sexual intercourse in a marriage, as the whole point of marriage in the Early Modern Period was the production of offspring. Therefore, a new bride was shown images that would encourage her to behave in a manner befitting her station. She was expected to be chaste, modest, and virtuous in public, yet sensual and desirable in private with her husband. By adapting imagery of pagan deities associated with love, lust, and new life- specifically, Venus, Flora, and the Graces, the Renaissance created iconographic imagery that would convey this type of behavior and act as a model for a bride.

Methodology

[89] Jean Lucas-Dubreton, *Daily Life in Florence in the Time of the Medici*, (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1961), 224.

The art of Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) has long since fascinated scholars and the general public alike. His elegant female figures, enigmatic compositions, and vibrant color palette have inspired an impressive body of scholarship employing a range of methodologies. Scholars over the ages have been particularly intrigued by his innovative paintings of pagan subject matter- *Pallas and the Centaur, Birth of Venus, Venus and Mars,* and most especially, *Primavera*—which has+- inspired numerous people around the globe. These works, all closely connected with the Medici family, have all been interpreted in a variety of ways, most connected to the domestic sphere in which they were hung. The presence of the figures of Venus, Flora, and the Three Graces in the *Primavera*—figures that during the fifteenth century served as moral *exempla* for a bride, as well as the original location of the work, hint at the painting serving as more than just a behavioral guide for a newlywed woman, but also, as a guide to understanding the expectations placed on her sexuality.[90] This chapter will delineate the various methodologies that have been used to research Botticelli and his *Primavera.* It will then explain why iconography, with a poststructuralist consideration of the social context in which the work was created and an examination of the literature which influenced it, is the best methodological approach to take when examining the issues of female sexuality that are present in the work.

According to Ronald Lightbown, who has written an extensive monograph on Botticelli, "in his [Botticelli's] lifetime, he was acknowledged as one of the great masters of Florence, a second Apelles, in the eulogistic language of humanist poets, comparing him to the greatest painter of classical antiquity. But he died just as the time when the new High Renaissance style was

[90] According to a 1499 inventory of the Medici home on Via Larga, the *Primavera* was hung above a daybed in the chamber occupied by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and his bride, Semiramide Appiano. The inventory is mentioned in a variety of publications, most notably in Ronald Lightbown's monograph on Botticelli- Ronald Lightbown. *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work,* (New York: Abbeville Publishers, 1989), 122. In addition to Lightbown, other scholars, including Charles Dempsey, Lilian Zirpolo, and Jacqueline Marie Mussachio have proposed this interpretation.

triumphing in painting so that his art suddenly became old-fashioned..”[91] During the High Renaissance and the following three centuries, Botticelli was mainly known as a biography in Giorgio Vasari’s highly influential collection of Renaissance artist biographies.[92] In fact, it is Vasari who mentions the *Primavera* as being moved to the Villa di Castello at some point after the inventory of the Medici home on Via Larga in 1499.[93] It is through his description of the work as that of “another Venus, the symbol of Spring” that the painting gets its title.[94]

Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) is widely acknowledged as the first art biographer and researcher. In his 1568 edition of *Le Vite di più eccelenti pittori, scultori, e architettori,* Vasari devotes eight pages to Botticelli, whom he acknowledges as a talented and renowned painter. He attributes Botticelli’s talent to the conscientious encouragement of the boy’s father, Mariano Filipepi (1394/95-?), who apprenticed him to a goldsmith, and later, to Fra Filippo Lippi (1406-1469).[95] During his apprenticeship, according to Vasari, Botticelli distinguished himself so, “that Fra Filippo grew fond of him and taught him so thoroughly that he soon reached a level no one would have expected.”[96]

Vasari’s biographical approach is in keeping with his motives for writing the *Vite.* By compiling a collection of artist biographies, he is likening artists to the princes, kings, and powerful statesmen about whom biographies were written during the Early Modern period. His purpose is to raise the status of the artist from that of a mere craftsman or artisan to that of an intellectual, imbued with the innate talent and genius required to produce works of art.

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[91] Lightbown. *Sandro Botticelli,* 14.
[92] Lightbown. *Sandro Botticelli,* 14.
[93] Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, 225.
[94] Vasari. *The Lives of the Artists*, 225.
[95] Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists,* trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 224.
[96] Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, 224.

Additionally, Vasari strives to aggrandize the Florentine art tradition that he is a part of, and to prove its superiority. By tracing the development of Florentine art through the biographies of men like Donatello (1386-1466), Brunelleschi (1377-1446), Alberti (1404-1472), Leonardo (1452-1519), Raphael (1483-1520), and Botticelli, Vasari is creating a genealogy of genius, innovation, and ingenuity for the Florentine art of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, of which he is a part.

Of the *Primavera,* Vasari makes only a mere mention. He prosaically lays out that: "Two of these paintings are still at Castello, Duke Cosimo's villa:…and the second is another Venus, the symbol of Spring, being adorned with flowers by the Graces. In both paintings Sandro expressed himself with grace."[97] From this description comes the title of the work as we know it now, as well as the initial recognition of the central figure as Venus. Its association with the Medici is cemented due to the 1499 inventory of their house on the Via Larga, where a painting identified as the *Primavera* is described hanging above a daybed.[98]

During the eighteenth century, writers did not feel it necessary to mention Botticelli as more than a mere footnote, and even then, did not expound on his works more than what had been written by Vasari.[99] Not until the arrival of Botticelli's *Adoration of the Shepherds* in England in 1854, and Aby Warburg's 1892 dissertation, that the iconography and meaning of Botticelli's mythological paintings were explored in-depth. From this exploration came the iconographical explanations of the *Primavera* that we know today- the identification of Flora, Venus, the Graces, and Mercury, the connection to the wedding of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco (1463-1503), and the symbolism about love and marriage that is inherently present in every aspect of the

[97] Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists,* 225.
[98] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 115.
[99] Herbert P. Horne, *Botticelli: Painter of Florence,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), xvi.

painting. This appreciation was furthered by the Pre-Raphaelites, who were "among the first to realize in some definite measure the peculiar character and charm of Botticelli's art."[100] Giovanni Morelli, the renowned Italian art critic and writer, called Botticelli a "great artist" in his 1893 *Studies in the Munich Gallery,* and John Ruskin, in his *Praeterita,* published between 1885 and 1889, alludes to the complexity and intricacy of Botticelli's art.[101]

Unlike their English and Italian counterparts, the German scholars of the nineteenth century were disdainful of Botticelli. In his *Cicerone,* first published in German in 1855, Jacob Burckhardt focuses on the formal qualities of Botticelli's work and calls him an artist who "never thoroughly accomplished what he intended."[102] Burckhardt praises Botticelli for his attachment to symbolism and pagan narratives, but criticizes his techniques, saying, "he [Botticelli] strove after an ideal beauty, but remained chained to a type of head, always recurring and recognizable from afar, which he reproduced occasionally in a most lovely manner, but which often was rude and lifeless."[103] This disdain stems from Burckhardt's focus on the formal qualities of Botticelli's works. Rather than looking at the iconography of the paintings and the social and societal context in which they were created, Burckhardt chooses to compare Botticelli's works to those he considered formally perfect- namely, the works of Raphael and Leonardo. Instead of appreciating the innovative nature of Botticelli's symbolism and narratives, scholars viewed him with indifference. He was not seen as rising above his contemporaries, but

[100] Horne, *Botticelli,* xvii.
[101] Horne, *Botticelli,* xvii.
[102] Jacob Burckhardt, *The Cicerone: An Art Guide to Painting in Italy,* trans. Mrs. A.H. Clough, (London: T. Warner Laurie, 1918), 63.
[103] Burckhardt, *The Cicerone,* 63.

rather, was criticized for his perceived shortcomings.[104] Burckhardt only mentions the *Primavera* in passing, calling it "realistically imperfect in the forms of the nude figures."[105]

The early twentieth century saw Botticelli treated with more care and sympathy. Following Aby Warburg's example, Herbert Horne, in his 1906 monograph on Botticelli, presents a more complete perspective that looks at Botticelli's technique and iconography together. Although Horne was criticized for, "scarcely doing justice to the artist and poet in Botticelli. A dry critique is not best calculated to awaken the appreciation due to an artist of such rich imagination and even mystical feeling," his work is one of the first to really delve into Botticelli's pagan works.[106] Horne was also the first writer to make a concentrated effort to distinguish between the works created by Botticelli and those made in imitation of his style, which he calls "school-pictures" that exaggerate the mannerisms of Botticelli to the point of ridicule.[107] Horne uses a mix of approaches- biography, connoisseurship, and formal analysis, in order to compile a more-or-less complete monograph detailing Botticelli's life and works. Horne is also the first to assert and to provide clear evidence that links the *Primavera* with Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, rather than with Lorenzo Il Magnifico, by expounding on the history of the villa at Castello, where Vasari first mentions the work, and by connecting Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco to Angelo Poliziano, whose poetry, especially the *Stanze per la Giostra,* undoubtedly inspired Botticelli.

The literary connections Horne makes, not only to Poliziano, but also to ancient Roman poets such as Lucretius, are early attempts to make sense of the composition and narrative of the

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[104] Wilhelm Bode. *Sandro Botticelli*. trans. F. Renfield and F.L. Rudston Brown (New York: C. Scribner's and Sons, 1925), 1.
[105] Burckhardt, *The Cicerone,* 64.
[106] Bode. *Botticelli*, v. Bode is referencing Herbert P. Horne's *Alessandro Filipepi Called Sandro Botticelli, Painter of Florence*.
[107] Horne, *Botticelli*, xix.

Primavera, which have baffled scholars for centuries. Horne recognizes the compositional skill of the work, and uses such complimentary language, like "grave beauty" and "exquisite design," to describe the figures of Venus and the Graces.[108] As he states, "In this picture, Botticelli displays…that rarest and most individual quality of his art, his peculiar and unrivalled use of line as a means of expression, not only of form, but also of mass and movement."[109] For the first time in the history of art, Botticelli's superior use of line and technique is recognized as something innovative, rather than being derided as crude through comparisons to art of a different style and era.

It was not until 1925, with the publication of Wilhelm von Bode's monograph on the artist that Botticelli began to be viewed sensitively by art historians. In his introduction, Bode stresses the indifference with which both Vasari, as well as preceding scholars, viewed Botticelli.[110] He was not seen as rising above his contemporaries, but rather was criticized for his shortcomings.[111] Jacob Burckhardt is quoted from his *Cicerone* as saying that: " 'Sandro Botticelli never quite achieved the complete expression of his ideas. He loved to express life and passion…and often painted with careless haste. He strove after an ideal of beauty, but never advanced beyond one type of head…it is occasionally extremely attractive, but often quite crude and lifeless.' "[112] Bode built on Horne's use of formalism and symbolism in order to offer an interpretation of Botticelli that viewed him as one of the leading artists of his time, due to his ability to infuse his works with poetics and truly embodying the principle of *ut pictor poesis*- the amalgamation of painting with poetry.

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[108] Horne, *Botticelli*, 57.
[109] Horne, *Botticelli*, 61.
[110] Bode. *Botticelli*, 1.
[111] Bode. *Botticelli*, 1.
[112] Bode. *Botticelli*, 2.

In his writings on the Florentine painters of the Renaissance, Bernard Berenson called Botticelli's works: "never pretty, scarcely ever charming or even attractive; rarely correct…and seldom satisfactory."[113] However, he points out that the secret to Botticelli's popularity is his indifference to representation and his intense focus on presentation.[114] He continues: "If we are such as have an imagination for touch and of movement that is easy to stimulate, we feel a pleasure in Botticelli that few, if any, other artists can give us."[115] According to Berenson, Botticelli was happiest "when his subject lent itself to translation into what may be called a linear symphony."[116] Writing in the 1950s, Panofsky characterizes Botticelli's art as infusing the antique with Gothic sentiment.[117]

Only in the late twentieth century, with the rise of methodologies such as Feminism and Post-Colonialism, did interest in Botticelli evolve beyond mere formalist concerns and shallow iconographical interpretations. Lilian Zirpolo's 1992 essay, "Botticelli's *Primavera:* A Lesson for the Bride," examines not only the *Primavera* itself, but also its environment and the way it interacted with its viewers. As Zirpolo points out, the decorative program of the room in which the *Primavera* was hung was meant to be a way of "admonishing Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco's bride and supplying her with lessons on chastity, submission, and procreation."[118] By focusing her efforts on the female gaze and reaction to the work, Zirpolo, along with the rest of her colleagues who were a part of *The Expanding Discourse*, opened art-historical eyes to new

[113] Bernard Berenson. *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance,* (New York: Phaidon Press, 1952), 67.
[114] Berenson. *Painters of the Renaissance,* 67.
[115] Berenson. *Painters of the Renaissance,* 67.
[116] Berenson. *Painters of the Renaissance,* 69.
[117] Erwin Panofsky. *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History,* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955), 233.
[118] Zirpolo, "Botticelli's *Primavera",* 24. The essay was also republished in *The Expanding Discourse* that same year.

interpretations of the *Primavera*.[119] The famed work was no longer just a pretty painting, but had now evolved into something closely connected with the societal mores and expectations associated with fifteenth-century women.

During the mid-twentieth century, Panofsky claimed the work to be an illustrated interpretation of Marsilio Ficino's understanding of neoplatonic philosophy. In more recent years, Charles Dempsey has expanded this idea. In his various articles and his book- *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture in the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*- Dempsey demonstrates how Botticelli embedded in the work an allegory of love as it was understood by him and by the humanist scholars surrounding him.[120]

Dempsey and other Postmodernist scholars, such as Paul Barolsky, expanded beyond the methodologies of iconography and formal analysis in their studies of the *Primavera* and the other mythological paintings. They understood that the meaning of these paintings was not just in their symbolism or formal elements. Rather, these elements all had meaning, due to the social mores and cultural codes of the late fifteenth century. In order to understand the *Primavera*, Dempsey and his cohorts had to look beyond the art of the period and into the culture, rituals, and literature that were popular during the 1480s. These scholars did so by applying Postmodernism, New Historicism, and since these were all domestic commissions meant to be hung in spaces visible to women, Feminism.

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[119] *The Expanding Discourse* is a 1992 book edited by leading feminist art historians Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, which contains essays written by female scholars on feminist topics in art history.

[120] Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture in the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). The scholars I speak of here are those like Marsilio Ficino and Angelo Poliziano, who were part of the Medici intellectual circle and often worked with artists to create art with underying *all'antica* and humanist themes.

In addition to the iconography of *Primavera*, Dempsey has also explored, in-depth, the connections not only between Botticelli and the ancient poets, but also those between the artist's pagan paintings with the neoplatonist philosophy of Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), with the epic, Petrarchesque poetry of Poliziano (1454-1494), and even with the lusty *canti carnascialeschi* written by Lorenzo Il Magnifico (1449-1492).[121] Along with Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, who writes extensively on Florentine wedding traditions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Dempsey has examined the social context and literary influences of the *Primavera* and has allowed scholars to understand the work not only as a painting that carries forth a connection and references to classical mythology, but also as a moral guide for a newly married bride- providing her with a moral *exempla* and displaying the behavior that she ought to aspire to in her own life. Musacchio and other scholars have connected the stylistic elements of the *Primavera* to the traditions of *cassoni* and *spalliera* panel paintings, and therefore, to the traditions associated with marriage in fifteenth-century Florence. By looking at the clothing and jewels worn by the female figures in the work, Musacchio concludes that the purpose of the painting and others like it were to be, "models for Semiramide's [Appiani] behavior, encouraging her to chastity, submission, and procreation."[122] This interpretation of the *Primavera* as a didactic work of art with a moral message is continued in Paola Tinagli's essay about the connection between womanly virtue and the furnishings and images commissioned for marriages.[123] Another scholar, Lilian Zirpolo, points out in her article, "Botticelli's *Primavera:* A Lesson for the Bride," that the decorative program of the room in which the *Primavera* was hung was meant to be a way of, "admonishing

[121] These short poems are celebrations of lust and sex that were often read during the Carnival period that precedes Lent.
[122] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 115. Semiramide Appiani, or more correctly, Semiramide d'Appiano d'Aragona, was the wife of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, and therefore, the intended audience for the *Primavera*, which was originally located in their nuptial chamber.
[123] Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation, Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 36.

Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco's bride and supplying her with lessons on chastity, submission, and procreation."[124] Zirpolo's work interprets the *Primavera* as a behavioral guide, giving the intended audience general instructions on how a married, aristocratic woman is meant to behave. However, Zirpolo misses the work's connection to the ultimate goal in marriage—procreation. She makes no mention of sexuality in her analysis of the *Primavera.* When one examines the iconography of the work, one must keep in mind that the meaning of the program was created through the curation of a very specific set of symbols that carried a certain meaning for women of the aristocratic class. My research will take this idea of the *Primavera* as a behavioral guide one step further. By utilizing an in-depth iconographical analysis of the *Primavera,* in conjunction with postmodernist methodological techniques, as well as ideas drawn from New Historicist and Feminist methodologies, I will show how the *Primavera* is not only a didactic guide on moral behavior for a young bride, but also a poetic guide to sexual behavior. Its figures provide her with an example of how she is to use her sexuality within her marriage in order to achieve the ultimate goal—children.

An in-depth iconographical analysis of the *Primavera* allows for a deep examination of the iconographical program of the work. The composition and juxtaposition of the figures, as well as their costuming and the setting they occupy, is not coincidental. The messages the work is meant to convey—regarding marriage, behavior, and sexuality—is encoded within its iconography. In order to understand the enigmatic painting, one must look at the iconography as a poetic argument that is intrinsically tied to the society and context for which the painting was created. Therefore, one must adopt some elements of the postmodernist strategy, and merge them with an

[124] Zirpolo, "Botticelli's *Primavera,* 24.

iconographical analysis that takes into consideration Classical mythology, Christian tradition, vernacular culture, and contemporary literature.

The visual culture of the Renaissance is intrinsically tied to Classical culture, as well as the customs and theology of the Church. Therefore, the iconography of the period combines Classical mythology with Christian interpretations of philosophy and religion. In Marsilio Ficino's Neoplatonic treatise on Plato, entitled *On the Nature of Love,* he describes two Venuses.[125] One is terrestrial—she embodies sensual love and physical beauty—while the other is celestial, representing inner beauty and a love that is beyond the physical.[126] One who can properly appreciate both types of love and beauty "engages in procreation in accordance with the natural order and the laws promulgated by the wise."[127] According to Ficino, the two types of Venuses—the earthly and the celestial—come together in the form of the bride, who represents the melding of bodily and spiritual love.[128] In a letter to his pupil, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, Ficino describes the god Mercury as Reason and Venus as Humanitas, and instructs him to continuously look to reason and humanity as his guiding principles.[129] Thus, by combining Ficino's philosophical ideas with an iconography that speaks to a woman's duties in her marital household, Botticelli created a work of art that embodies Medici humanist principles and that serves as a didactic reminder for its main audience—the bride herself.

In order to gain a full understanding of the iconography of the *Primavera,* one must borrow techniques from Postmodernism in order to reconstruct the social context in which the painting was created. When examining the *Primavera,* postmodernist scholars look at all aspects

[125] Ficino's brand of Neoplatonism was a reinterpretation of Plato in keeping with Christian tradition and thought.
[126] Ficino. *On the Nature of Love,* 26-27.
[127] Ficino. *On the Nature of Love,* 27.
[128] Ficino. *On the Nature of Love,* 27.
[129] Zirpolo, "Botticelli's *Primavera",* 27.

of the surrounding social context, which in this case is marriage and the rituals associated with it, as well as vernacular culture, which informed Botticelli and his advisors of the iconographical plot of the painting. During the era of Lorenzo the Magnificent, masques, also called *mascherete*, became the fashion.[130] These festivals were often celebrated during Carnival, and would be themed *all'antica*. Participants would dress as mythological figures and would perform *canti carnascialeschi*- poems written especially for Carnival—whose lyrics were drawn from popular culture and legend. The figures in the *Primavera* then, according to Postmodernist scholars such as Charles Dempsey and Paul Barolsky, are also in part drawn from the same inspiration as these poems, as well as contemporary translations of ancient texts, such as Ovid's *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses*.

An examination of these texts, combined with a comprehension of marital customs in the late-fifteenth century and an in-depth iconographical analysis, creates an understanding of the *Primavera* as a poetic argument designed to instruct the intended audience—a wealthy Florentine bride—in her sexual responsibilities. The numerous sources for the iconography, ranging from classical texts like those written by Ovid to contemporary poems that deal with carnality and sexuality, would have been familiar to the viewer. She would then have been able to decode and understand the complicated iconographical message being relayed to her. Not only that, but she would have also understood its importance. As the new wife of a wealthy man, the bride's main goal was the conception of an heir. In order to do so, she would have had to know how to properly utilize her sexuality. Didactic *spalliere* paintings, like the *Primavera,* would have instructed her in her duty and reminded her of her purpose. An in-depth iconographical analysis, with consideration to the many literary and vernacular sources that inform the

[130] Charles Dempsey, "Love and the Figure of the Nymph in Botticelli's Art" in *Botticelli: From Lorenzo the Magnificent to Savonarola,* ed. Doriana Comerlati (Milan: Skira Editore, 2003), 31.

iconographical program, uncovers a poetic argument about the proper and appropriate use of female sexuality in Botticelli's *Primavera.*

Analysis

> *I dreamed that it was May, the season of love and joy…for one sees neither bush nor hedge that would not deck itself for May in a covering of new leaves. The woods…regain their greenness; this is the time when the earth becomes so proud that it desires a new dress, and is able to make a dress so lovely that there are a hundred pairs of colors in it. The grass, and the flowers, which are white and blue…these are the dress that I am describing.*[131]

Guillame de Lorris's words from the opening of the *Roman de la Rose* seem to describe precisely what Botticelli envisioned when he created the *Primavera*—a springtime haven, awash with flowers and populated by the embodiments of love, grace, and beauty. The novel, which was one of the most popular courtly romances and was widely read during the fifteenth century, sets the scene for the blossoming of love in springtime—a concept that Botticelli adopted in his painting. According to many modern-day scholars, the *Primavera* was meant to function as a guide and *exemplar* for a young, aristocratic, Florentine bride, and presents marriage as an allegory of springtime—a celebration of love and fertility, expressed through the symbolic language of Classical mythology and imagery. As Charles Dempsey, Lilian Zirpolo, and other scholars have demonstrated, hidden within this imagery are role models and admonitions, as well as allusions to religion. What many researchers have failed to mention is the most interesting function of them all—a guide to female sexuality. After all, a well-brought up girl in the fifteenth century had little to no knowledge of the affairs of the bedroom. The iconography of the *Primavera* is meant to teach the work's intended audience—a newlywed bride—how to utilize and display her sexuality, both in the public sphere, where one must behave with restraint and

[131] Guillame de Lorris, *Roman de la Rose*, trans. Francis Horgan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3-4.

modesty, and in private with one's husband, where one ought to be wanton and lusty in order to encourage sexual relations, and therefore, procreation. In this analysis, I will demonstrate how Botticelli used iconography to embed messages about sexuality and appropriate sexual behavior in this painting. After all, without proper use of her sexuality, a new bride would not be able to achieve the objective of her marriage—the conception and birth of male heirs.

The earliest mention of Botticelli's *Primavera* ties it closely to the marriage of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and Semiramide d'Appiano, which occurred in 1482. Due to the lack of documentation, the exact patron is unknown, but the iconography and close connections to literature of the period point to someone in the Medici circle, if not Lorenzo the Magnificent himself. The painting is mentioned in the 1499 inventory of the Medici house on the Via Larga—the residence of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, where it is described as, "set above a *lettuccio,* a kind of settle that stood against the wall, indeed was often fixed to it," in the nuptial room of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco and his bride.[132]

For women of the aristocracy or the wealthy merchant class, marrying well and successfully providing her husband's family with heirs was the ultimate goal. The ideal Renaissance wife was quiet, efficient, pious, and a good housekeeper. She was taught "a horror of waste" and how to train servants and keep beggars away from the door.[133] Her husband expected the house to be run smoothly. "If a stranger arrives unexpectedly, she is to do the honours of the house without bustle or excitement."[134] She was also expected to know how to cook and to supervise the servants in the kitchen.[135]

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[132] Lightbown. *Sandro Botticelli,* 122.
[133] Lucas-Dubreton, *Daily Life in Florence,* 104-105.
[134] Lucas-Dubreton, *Daily Life in Florence,* 106.
[135] Lucas-Dubreton, *Daily Life in Florence,* 105.

One of the Renaissance wife's biggest duties was her children. Not only was she expected to bear as many boys as possible, but she was also in charge of their education. In fact, many girls in this period received humanist educations in order to allow them to properly supervise the teaching of their future offspring. She was taught, "Petrarch, Ariosto and even such light-minded authors as Aretino."[136] In addition to the popular Italian authors, many women were taught subjects such as Greek, Latin and other humanist staples. As one jurist observed "the ladies of Florence were so conversant with moral and natural philosophy, and with logic and rhetoric."[137] This attitude towards the education of women was not limited to Florence. In Northern Italy, families, such as the Sforza, made it a point to provide their daughters with a comprehensive education so that they could be their husband's confidante and help-meet.[138]

These qualities were actively sought out by families looking for brides. In her letter to her husband, Piero de' Medici, from 1467, Lucrezia Tornabuoni (1427-1482) described the potential bride for their son, Lorenzo- Clarice Orsini.[139] "She has a sweet manner, not as refined as ours [our girls], and is very modest."[140] She told her husband that if Lorenzo would find the girl pleasing, there was no reason not to arrange the match.[141] Lucrezia then continued to describe Clarice as, "tall and pale, with a face that is neither beautiful nor common, and a good personality."[142] The potential bride's name was not even mentioned until Lorenzo's approval had

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[136] Lucas-Dubreton, *Daily Life in Florence*, 224.
[137] Lucas-Dubreton, *Daily Life in Florence*, 223.
[138] Jennifer D. Webb, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Varano and Sforza Women of the Marche," *Wives, Widows, Mistresses and Nuns in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Katherine A. McIver (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 13.
[139] Lucrezia Tornabuoni. *Lettere*. ed. Patrizia Salvadori. (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1993), 62.
[140] Tornabuoni. *Lettere*, 62. The original Italian is *"e à j dolce maniera, non però si gentile chome le nostre, ma è di gran modesta"*.
[141] Tornabuoni. *Lettere*, 62.
[142] Tornabuoni. *Lettere*, 64. The original reads *"La fancciulla...ch'è grande e biancha, non à uno bello viso nè rusticho, à buona persona."*

been secured.[143] Only then did Lucrezia deign to mention to her husband that their future daughter-in-law was named Clarice.[144] In her extensive correspondence, Alessandra Strozzi (1408-1471) repeatedly mentions beauty and chastity as key traits of a potential bride.[145] These letters emphasize the business-like nature of upper-class marriages in the fifteenth century. A marriage was a business transaction conducted by two families, rather than a love match of two individuals. The weight both women place on a candidate's manner and modesty also shows how prized these qualities were in young women.

A woman who exhibited these traits could expect to be married off well, and as a result, gain influence and agency. Much of this influence came from her dowry. The Italian city-states of the Renaissance placed much importance on a woman's dowry, and in some cases, defined her status for legal purposes.[146] As previously stated, dowries were used as vehicles for alliance and social mobility.[147] This caused a dramatic rise in their value, as many men from the artisan and merchant class leveraged their wealth and married their daughters into the aristocracy with the help of extravagant dowries.[148] In *Paradiso* Canto XV, Dante yearns for an age when, "A daughter's birth did not yet fill/A father's heart with fear, For age and dowry had not yet fled to opposite extremes."[149] Dowry negotiations were closely followed by Italian Renaissance society, and caused many fathers much anxiety.[150] "For every Florentine who might worry…that the false rumor that he had dowered his daughter with 2000 florins might ruin his tax position, there were

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[143] Tornabuoni. *Lettere*, 64.
[144] Tornabuoni. *Lettere*, 624. The original text is *"El nome suo è Crarice."*
[145] Maria Deprano, *Art, Patronage, Family, and Gender in Renaissance Florence: the Tornabuoni*, (Cambridge: Cambride University Press, 1994), 67.
[146] Diane Owen Hughes. "From Brideprice to Dowry in Mediterranean Europe" in *The Marriage Bargain.* ed. By Marion A. Kaplan. (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1985). 14. In Genoa, fifteenth-century sumptuary laws aligned the richness of a woman's dress with the size of her dowry.
[147] Hughes. "From Brideprice to Dowry," 14.
[148] Hughes. "From Brideprice to Dowry," 42.
[149] Hughes. "From Brideprice to Dowry," 42. The text is taken from Dante's *Paradiso* canto 15 lines 103-105
[150] Hughes. "From Brideprice to Dowry," 42.

many more who sought to hide the reduced dowries that their daughters carried into marriage, which might deprive the family of community status."[151]

Dowries were made up of a combination of money and household goods, which were meant to highlight the bride's virtue, piety, and beauty.[152] The intended groom was also expected to provide a counter-dowry, or loan, to the bride, which often included furniture and clothing.[153] These counter-dowries often included the egregiously expensive *cassoni* which feature so heavily in the household goods of the Early Modern Period.[154] These chests often included didactic imagery, which by the end of the fifteenth-century had moved to the more portable *spalliera* panels, which were hung at shoulder height.

Images for domestic settings were a staple of Renaissance homes. These images ranged from religious depictions of the Madonna and Child to secular and mythological images of eroticized subjects. These latter images, as Rudolph Bell points out, were meant to encourage healthy sexual relations and to aid in procreation.[155] Early Modern couples believed that gazing at beautiful images while engaging in intercourse would lead to good looking offspring.[156] Additionally, many guidebooks recommended hanging an image with a masculine subject in the bedroom, in order to encourage the conception of male children.[157] This advice was not only written in secular guidebooks and pamphlets, but was also mentioned in the writings of ecclesiastical authorities.

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[151] Hughes. "From Brideprice to Dowry," 42.
[152] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 2-4.
[153] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 5.
[154] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 5.
[155] Bell. *How To Do It*, 21.
[156] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"
[157] Bell. *How To Do It*, 24.

St. Augustine was one of the first to encourage the use of images in order to increase procreation. For him, procreation is, "the human race's first social union."[158] Husbands and wives, according to Augustine, "owe each other a mutual service to relieve each other's weakness, and thereby avoid illicit unions."[159] Wives do not have authority over their bodies, but their husbands do, and vice versa.[160] Procreation and the bearing of children is the ultimate goal of marriage, and what makes sexual relations within a marriage not sinful, but rather, pure.[161]

Augustine wrote these observations and ideas in his treatise, entitled *The Excellence of Marriage,* around 401 CE. His primary point focused on procreation as, "the fruit of marriage that is most closely related to the original social purpose of God's creation."[162] Augustine argues that, since procreation is the most important part of marriage, and is in fact the ultimate goal of conjugal relations, any device that aids in pure and legitimate procreation (that is, procreation within wedlock) is desirable.[163]

San Bernardino da Siena, also known as St. Bernardine, referenced St. Augustine in his endorsement of erotically charged images in order to encourage procreation.[164] As San Bernardino wrote: "As Augustine says- those that have images of acts of love over their beds do so in order to have children."[165] According to Bernardino's sermon, given in 1425, these visual stimuli were meant for the lower classes, for whom written or imagined stimuli were not enough.

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[158] St. Augustine. *Marriage and Virginity: The Excellence of Marriage, Holy Virginity, The Excellence of Widowhood, Adulterous Marriages, Continence*. Trans. by Ray Kearney. Ed. by David G. Hunter. (New York: New City Press, 1990). pt. 1 vol. 9. 37.
[159] St. Augustine. *Marriage and Virginity,* 37.
[160] St. Augustine. *Marriage and Virginity,* 57.
St. Augustine. *Marriage and Virginity,* 38-39.
[162] St. Augustine. *Marriage and Virginity,* 17.
[163] St. Augustine. *Marriage and Virginity,* 17.
[164] Jacqueline Marie Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 113.
[165] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family,* 113. "Dice Augustino che so'di quelli che fanno dipegnare nelle letiere loro uopere d'amore, e fanno per avere figliuoli".

However, it is pretty clear that, although he was reluctant to admit it, Bernardino's main audiences were the middle and upper classes, who could afford to commission such images.[166] Bernardino also condemned homosexuality and sodomy, and sought to encourage traditional marriage.

In addition to being catalysts and aids in the conception of heirs, *spalliere* panels were meant as didactic tools to instruct couples in how to have a successful marriage. This instruction was aimed particularly at women, who spent the majority of their time in the home, and as a result, would have been the primary audience of these works. Thus, Botticelli's message in the *Primavera* regarding behavior and sexuality were aimed at newly wedded brides.

Sexuality was an important part of a marriage, as it was intertwined with conception and procreation. The famous doctor, Michele Savonarola, encouraged foreplay and achieving orgasm as a means to conceive.[167] In order to bear sons, a woman's womb must be warm—a condition that only occurs through heightened arousal and orgasm.[168] Contemporary writers also emphasized the woman's duty to use her sexuality to keep her husband on a moral and socially acceptable path- "if you think your husband is chasing after other women…have sex with him. That is certainly not sinful, but highly meritorious."[169] A perfect Renaissance bride was meant to embody chastity and amorous abandon simultaneously.[170]

Botticelli's *Primavera* is clearly derived from this tradition of didactic painting. The panel painting, which resembles a tapestry, shows a semi-circular garden, adorned with spring

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[166] Musacchio. *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 113.
[167] Bell. *How To Do It*, 34.
[168] Bell. *How To Do It*, 34.
[169] Bell. *How To Do It*, 37. The quote is taken from Cherubino da Siena's *Regole della Vita Matrimoniale*, written in the late-fifteenth century.
[170] Panofsky. *Problems in Titian*, 137.

flowers and spruce and orange trees.[171] The resemblance to the pleasure garden mentioned in Boccaccio's *Decameron* is clear, but differs in that Botticelli's garden contains a myrtle at its center—the symbol of marriage and of the goddess Venus.[172] In the foreground, on the far right, the figure of the West Wind, Zephyr, chases the nymph, Chloris. As she glances back towards her pursuer, flowers fall from her mouth, and she is transformed into the goddess, Flora. Flora, who is dressed in a gown bedecked with roses, looks directly at the viewer, and strews more roses at the feet of Venus, who stands in the center of the composition, dressed in what Charles Dempsey describes as old-fashioned, "Byzantine fashion of feminine dress fashionable in Italy a century earlier."[173] On Venus's right, the Three Graces, clothed in diaphanous *camicie*, dance in a circle, while on the far left, Mercury stirs up the clouds with his caduceus.[174] Above it all flies a blindfolded Cupid with arrow drawn, ready to shoot towards the circle of Graces. The citrus fruits, which in the fifteenth century were understood to be synonymous with the Golden Apples of the Hesperides, as well as the presence of the myriad of flowers, signals to the viewer that it is spring.[175] According to courtly love poetry popular at the time, spring, which was equated with the month of May in the Early Modern period, is the most advantageous time for love.[176] Thus, Botticelli set the *Primavera*—a work who's primary purpose was instruction in the ways of love and marriage—in the spring.

The *Primavera* embodies the ideal of the perfect Renaissance bride in its iconography. On the far left is Mercury, dressed *all-antica* in a bright red drape that echoes the costume worn

[171] Lightbown. *Sandro Botticelli,* 123.
[172] Lightbown. *Sandro Botticelli,* 123-126.
[173] Dempsey, "Love and the Figure of the Nymph," 32.
[174] *Camicie* are long, flowing linen undergarments worn in Italy by both men and women during the Early Modern Period. They are analogous to the English shift.
[175] Lightbown. *Sandro Botticelli,* 127.
[176] de Lorris, *Roman de la Rose,* 3-4.

by Venus and posed in a way that recalls Botticelli's depiction of Matilda in his illustration of Dante's *Divine Comedy,* when she seeks to disperse the clouds that shroud the intellect and understanding.[177] Likewise, Mercury seeks to reveal the meaning of the *Primavera*.[178] During the Classical period, Mercury was closely tied to marriage.[179] The poet Martial appeals to the god to bless marriages, and the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* specifically ties Mercury with fertility and sexuality, as he mates with the forest nymphs, thus birthing more nymphs as well as new trees.[180] He is also seen as the escort to the Graces, as these deities are tied not only to the attributes of beauty and eloquence, but also to fertility and sexuality.

The Three Graces in the Renaissance mind are inextricably linked to marriage. They are the personification of grace, beauty, and charisma, and are therefore fitting *exempla* for the bride.[181] Renaissance thinkers also saw them as a symbol of chastity, since according to Seneca they are "pure and undefiled and holy in the eyes of all."[182] According to Boccaccio some thought that Venus was the mother of the Graces, for "what love was there that ever lacked grace."[183] He also explains the belief that the Graces represented kindness and affection, qualities important in alliances where if you are kind towards a man, that kindness will be returned to you.[184] The Graces in the *Primavera* embody not just the behavioral aspects of chastity and affection expected in brides, but also pleasure—in this case, carnal pleasure. Pico della Mirandola, a late fifteenth-century philosopher, defined them as a secular Trinity, identifiable

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[177] Paul Barolsky, "Botticelli's *Primavera* and the Poetic Imagination in Italian Renaissance Art" in *Arion: A Journal of the Humanities and the Classics* no. 2, vol. 8, 34.
[178] Barolsky, "Botticelli's *Primavera* and the Poetic Imagination," 34.
[179] Deprano, *Art, Patronage, Family, and Gender,* 79.
[180] Deprano, *Art, Patronage, Family, and Gender,* 79.
[181] Bober and Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculptures,* 95.
[182] Zirpolo, "Botticelli's *Primavera,"* 25.
[183] Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods,* 387.
[184] Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods,* 745.

with Venus.[185] The unity of the two Venuses of Neoplatonic philosophy—one representing sacred love and the other profane, or earthly love—is divided into the Trinity of the Graces.[186]

This idea of a Trinity of the Graces is apparent in two medals made by Niccolò Fiorentino.[187] One, made for della Mirandola himself, depicts the Graces, and names them as Beauty, Love, and Pleasure (Fig. 6).[188] Botticelli's Graces are undoubtedly the trio from the Mirandola medal. On the left is Beauty, who is characterized by her unbound hair and jeweled brooch; in the center is Love, who needs no ornament and is further identified by Cupid's arrow pointing directly at her; and completing the circle is Pleasure, or Voluptas, whose elaborately coiffed hair and jewels reveal her identity.[189] In the Renaissance, the idea of sensual gratification and physical pleasure (Voluptas) merged with the idea of the Profane, or Earthly, Venus, who symbolized material beauty and physical pleasure.

The *Primavera* depicts the poetic emergence of spring in the proverbial "Garden of Love." In the center of the painting stands Venus herself, framed by her sacred tree—the myrtle—and extending her hand in a gesture of blessing towards the Graces. She is further removed from the viewer, standing slightly behind the rest of the figures, but her vivid blue and red garments draw attention to her, and more specifically, to her lower abdomen, which seems to be swollen in pregnancy. Like in antiquity, Venus embodied two aspects in the Renaissance—the goddess of lust and the goddess of love and marriage. Because of the importance of procreation in the Early Modern Period, she who embodies the qualities needed for this, namely love and

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[185] Panofsky. *Problems in Titian,* 10.
[186] Panofsky. *Problems in Titian,* 10.
[187] Panofsky. *Problems in Titian,* 10.
[188] Panofsky. *Problems in Titian,* 10. The Latin inscription on the medal reads, left to right- *pvlchritvdo-amor-volvptas*
[189] Panofsky. *Problems in Titian,* 137.

lust, became the patroness of marriage.[190] Lightbrown relates that: "She unites the couple, sanctions the passions that brought them together, and increases their amorous desires."[191] In an epithalamia, Venus is usually described as resting in a bower. Cupid, who is sometimes armed with his arrows, comes to rouse her and escort her to a wedding.[192] The imagery of epithalamia is evident in Lorenzo Lotto's *Venus and Cupid* from the mid-1520s. The painting contains all the traditional imagery associated with Venus, such as the myrtle, the roses, and the seashell, as well as contemporary symbols of marriage and fertility- the tiara and pearl earring, as well as the image of Cupid urinating.[193] Venus was seen as a model of behavior for both new brides and established wives, who were supposed to embody a combination of chastity and amorous abandon, as described by contemporary thinkers.[194] Above Venus hovers Cupid, who ignites love and desire by way of his flaming arrows- a motif associated with love throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance.[195] The prevalent belief was that a "young man would fall in love when the rays from a beautiful woman's eyes wounded his heart," much like the arrow of Cupid in antiquity inflamed the hearts of those who were shot by it with love and desire.[196]

All these symbols of fertility and sexuality culminate on the right-hand side of the painting, where the analogy between springtime, procreation, and sexuality is made clear in the story of Flora.[197] Botticelli shows the rape of the young nymph, Chloris, by Zephyr, the West Wind, and her sudden transformation into Flora, his wife—a transformation akin to a bride's

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[190] Lightbown. *Sandro Botticelli,* 127.
[191] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage." Epithalamia are poems, often containing erotic imagery, composed in honor of a marriage.
[192] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"
[193] Bayer. "Paintings of Love and Marriage"
[194] Panofsky. *Problems in Titian,* 137.
[195] Deprano, *Art, Patronage, Family, and Gender,* 74.
[196] Deprano, *Art, Patronage, Family, and Gender,* 74.
[197] Barolsky, "Botticelli's *Primavera* and the Poetic Imagination," 30.

transition from maiden to matron. She represented fecundity and the flowering of life during spring. However, the figure of the nymph-turned-goddess was not seen as a purely positive personage. Boccaccio states that she was a wealthy woman who made her fortune by "squandering the flower of her youth and expending her physical beauty as a common prostitute amid panderers and degenerate young men."[198] Her name became synonymous with the spring due to the Floralia- games described as being lewd and lustful.[199] To mitigate their embarrassment, the Senate decided to invent the story of the rape of Chloris by Zephyr and her subsequent transformation into the goddess Flora.[200] This association with lustfulness and sexuality, as well as Flora's link to fertility—for it is she who brings the flowers of springtime—ties her to the sexual behaviors expected of brides. But Flora's importance in the *Primavera* is underscored by her compositional placement—she is placed at the far front of the work, directly gazing at the viewer and stepping towards them, as if to catch their attention. She tosses flowers from her lap, where they propagate, as if they are her children, and she is giving birth to them. The style of headdress she wears and the garland around her neck link her not only to Venus, who is the embodiment of love, lust, and marriage, but also to the Grace representing Voluptas, or carnal pleasure. Thus, Botticelli's Flora becomes the ultimate embodiment of fertility, love, lust and physical pleasure, linking all the ideas of comportment and sexuality into one figure, and setting a precedent for future artists and writers.

The dress of the figures gives the viewer information about where a bride may use her sexuality. Venus, the most restrained of the figures, is dressed in the public garb of an upper-class, Florentine matron. Thus, she represents the public sphere, where a wife is meant to be

[198] Boccaccio, *Famous Women,* 265.
[199] Boccaccio, *Famous Women,* 267.
[200] Boccaccio, *Famous Women,* 269.

restrained, modest, and dignified. Flora and the Graces, on the other hand, are dressed much more casually in diaphanous white dresses that imitate the shifts, or under-dresses, that women wore under their more formal costumes. Furthermore, the presence of the male figures of Zephyr, who is husband to Flora, and Mercury, the escort to the Graces, in the groupings with these more casually attired female figures represents the private sphere of the couple's nuptial room or bed.[201] Thus, pleasure and lust are appropriate when one is in private with one's husband, as that is the time that a married couple ought to engage in sexual congress in order to procreate.

The *Primavera* serves ultimately as a guide to all things marriage. By presenting the young bride with behavioral *exempla* drawn from Classical mythology and popular understanding, Botticelli offers her lessons on behavior and expectations. Additionally, by bringing together a multitude of allusions to fertility, lust, carnal pleasure, and love, Botticelli is instructing the young bride, in this case the young Semiramide Appiano, on her sexuality. As an aristocratic young woman, she is meant to be restrained and chaste in public. However, in private, she is encouraged to show amorous abandon and feel carnal pleasure, as these will lead to procreation and the successful conception of heirs- the ultimate goal of marriage and the greatest success a young woman of the upper-class can enjoy.

Conclusions

The iconographical program of Botticelli's *Primavera* is a poetic argument designed to instruct an upper-class Florentine bride in her sexual responsibilities. Botticelli creates this imagery by juxtaposing the figures of Venus, Flora, and the Three Graces. These goddesses all

[201] Renaissance bedchambers were not inherently private spaces, and thus, the bed became the focus of sexual metaphor, rather than the room itself. This idea is furthered by the placement of the *Primavera* above a daybed.

embody different characteristics of the ideal bride, and are therefore *exempla* for her to model herself after. The aspects of sexuality and the spheres where they are appropriate are further emphasized by the clothing of the figures. Venus—who represents the restraint and dignity with which a bride must conduct herself in public—is gowned in the public dress and headdress of a Florentine matron, while Flora and the Graces, who characterize the sexual, fertile, and enticing persona the bride ought to adopt in the private sphere of her nuptial chamber, are dressed more casually. Furthermore, the presence of Zephyr and Mercury, grouped with Flora and the Graces respectively, alludes to the presence of the husband in the private sphere. After all, the purpose of a woman's sexuality was to entice her husband and serve as a catalyst for procreation. Unlike the work of previous scholars, this thesis delves deeper into the definition of "behavior" and examines precisely how the iconography of *Primavera* serves as a how-to guide for the appropriate times and places for a woman to use her sexuality.

Sexuality, and especially female sexuality, was an important component of marriage in the Early Modern Period. Without appropriate sexual congress within a marriage, the ultimate goal of the union—the conception and birth of male heirs—would never occur. Women were encouraged by lay and religious sources alike to make use of their sexuality to keep their husbands from behaving inappropriately, and to engage in appropriate sexual activity as often as was possible. In addition to her chastity and virtuous behavior, a woman's fertility was the most important criteria by which her success as a wife was measured. Therefore, teaching her when and how to use her sexuality in order to conceive sons was of the utmost importance.

Botticelli's *Primavera* has been interpreted by multiple scholars as a didactic guide to proper behavior for the aristocratic bride of the fifteenth century.[202] The inclusion of Venus, the Graces, and Flora all provide the bride with behavioral exempla to model herself after. Each of the figures represents different characteristics attributed to the ideal wife. In addition to the behavioral characteristics these figures portray, they also provide the newlywed young woman, Semiramide d'Appiano in this case, with a guide to her sexuality. By inserting these specific figures in the painting and juxtaposing them with each other, Botticelli creates a painting that teaches a bride where and how it is appropriate for her to use her sexuality.

The ideal Renaissance bride was meant to embody a combination of Venus and Flora. She was expected to behave with dignity and restraint in public, in order to reflect well on both her natal family and on her husband. In private, however, the expectations were different. There, she was meant to be warm and welcoming to her husband in order to arouse him and inspire sexual desire. The juxtaposition of Venus (the goddess of marriage who represents the ideal public persona of a bride) with Flora (the fertile and lusty goddess of flowers) and the Three Graces (who are embodiments of beauty and pleasure) reminds the bride that although the expectation is that she behaves with restraint and decorum, she is encouraged to shed that persona and be enticing and sexual with her husband. This point is further emphasized through the clothing of the female figures. Venus wears a costume that would be appropriate to wear in public, along with the headdress of a married woman, while Flora and the Three Graces, the figures who represent pleasure and sexuality, are garbed in loose, diaphanous gowns that bring to mind the shifts, or *camicie*, which women used to wear in private. The presence of the male

[202] For more information regarding how the *Primavera* functions as a behavioral guide for a new bride, see Lilian Zirpolo's article "Botticelli's *Primavera:* A Lesson for the Bride" and Charles Dempsey's book *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*.

figures of Mercury and Zephyrus only adds to this. Both figures feature prominently in myths about sex, copulation, and procreation.

Botticelli's *Primavera* is a statement about the appropriate use of female sexuality within marriage among the Florentine elite in the fifteenth century. Its iconography elucidates to the newly married bride how and where she may use her sexuality in order to achieve the ultimate goal of the marriage- the conception of male children, as many of them as possible. The juxtaposition of the figure of the goddess Venus, with those of Flora and the Three Graces, teaches the bride a lesson about appropriate displays of sexuality both in public and in the private presence of her husband. This important lesson was encouraged by both lay and religious authorities, as it was widely acknowledged that a successful sexual relationship between a couple would lead to a multitude of heirs, and after all, a woman's success as a wife was measured by her fertility. Botticelli and his patrons understood this and created a painting that would instruct a young bride in exactly how she should go about achieving this all-important goal.

The juxtaposition of Venus, Flora, and the Graces, along with their costuming and the presence of the male gods Mercury and Zephyrus, comes together to create an iconographical program that instructs a newly wed bride on appropriate sexual behavior and responsibility. This iconography, which is steeped in Classical mythology and Christian tradition, provides the bride with *exempla* both for the private and the public sphere. In public, she is to act like Venus—restrained, modest, and dignified—portraying all the traits associated with ideal womanhood, while in private, specifically in her nuptial chambers with her husband, she is to be like Flora and the Graces—lusty, fertile, and enticing. An iconographical analysis of the *Primavera* demonstrates how the program comes together to create a poetic statement about female sexuality in the fifteenth century. By combining the analysis with an examination of literary and

vernacular sources, as well as information about fifteenth century wedding customs, it is clear that not only does the *Primavera* provide a didactic guide to behavior for a young bride, but also provides her with instruction regarding her sexual responsibility and behavior.

Illustrations

Figure 1 Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, tempera on panel, 203.2x314.9 cm (photo credit: Artstor www.artstor.org)

Figure 2 Francesco Cossa, *Allegory of April: The Triumph of Venus*, 1470, Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara, fresco (photo credit: in the public domain)

Figure 3 Lorenzo Lotto, Venus and Cupid, 1520s, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, oil on canvas, 92.4x111.4 cm (photo credit: in the public domain)

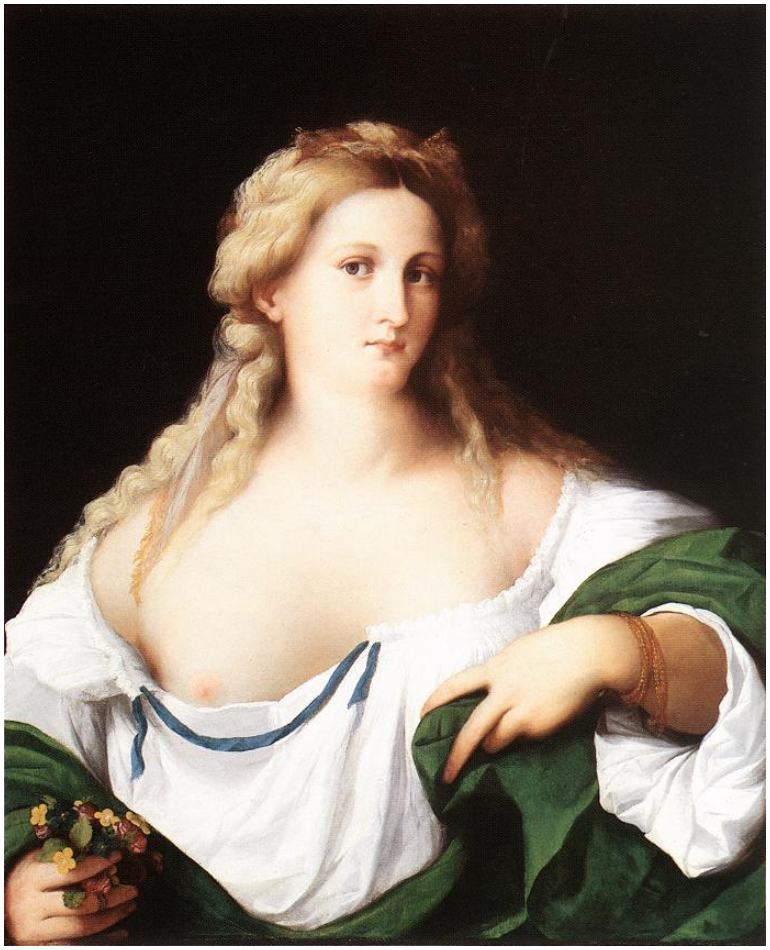

Figure 4 Palma Vecchio, *Portrait of a Blonde*, 1520, National Gallery of Art, London, oil on wood, 77.5x64.1 cm (photo

Figure 5 Lo Scheggia, *Cassone Adimari*, 1450, Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence, tempera on panel, 88.3x302 cm, (photo credit: in the public domain)

Figure 6 Niccolò Fiorentino, *Medal of the Three Graces for Pico della Mirandola*, 1484-1486, British Museum, London, bronze (photo credit: The British Museum www.british museum.org)

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