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## The Heroic Parallels of Hercules and Lorenzo de Medici

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THE HEROIC PARALLELS OF HERCULES AND LORENZO DE MEDICI


by


Michael Putorti

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Art History and Visual Culture  
at  
Lindenwood University

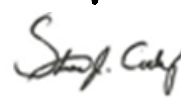
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THE HEROIC PARALLELS OF HERCULES AND LORENZO DE MEDICI

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master in Fine Arts  
at  
Lindenwood University

By

Michael Sachin Putorti  
Saint Charles, Missouri

May 2022

## Abstract

Title of Thesis: THE HEROIC PARALLELS OF HERCULES AND LORENZO DE MEDICI

Michael Sachin Putorti, Master of Fine Art, 2022

Thesis Directed by: Dr. Erin Sutherland

During the late fifteenth century, a painting was displayed in the Palazzo Medici, home to one of Florence's most influential families. The painting was commissioned by Lorenzo de' Medici from one of his favorite artists, Antonio Pollaiuolo. The painting, entitled *Hercules and Deianira*, portrays a scene from the Herculean myth. The composition depicts the hero Hercules, who can be seen aiming an arrow at the centaur Nessus, who is carrying Hercules' new bride, Deianira. Throughout his life, Lorenzo admired the mythological hero and would often acquire compositions depicting him as a way of representing his own heroic qualities. However, it is ironic that Lorenzo would ask for a commission depicting this scene, as it is the starting point of Hercules' demise. Lorenzo, as a well-educated man, would have been familiar with the story of the son of Zeus and would have been aware of this fact. The question remains, of all the heroic feats that he could have commissioned Pollaiuolo? What is the message he wanted to convey with this composition? The *Hercules and Deianira* composition shows Lorenzo as a strong and capable ruler, who can overcome any form of opposition for the greater good of the city he has sworn to protect.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Erin Sutherland for encouraging me throughout the two years spent working on my thesis. Her words of advice were not only crucial points of feedback in my development as a graduate student but became words of reassurance as I continued to work on my thesis. Her feedback was exactly what I needed to hear, whether they were when I was struggling with the direction of my thesis, or when I was having trouble narrowing my topic to something more manageable, is something that I will always be grateful for. I would also like to thank my two committee members, Dr. Esperanca Camara and Dr. Steven Cody, who were the first two professors I had within the graduate program. I would like to thank them both for dedicating their time to read my work and provide helpful valuable feedback. I would also like to thank my friend, Sam Campbell for being my editor, reading my thesis numerous times, catching any spelling or grammatical errors, and being one of my biggest supporters throughout the program.

**Dedication**

For my father, William Putorti Jr

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## Introduction

Lorenzo de' Medici ruled over Florence, Italy from 1469 until his death in 1492. Like many rulers, Lorenzo turned to art to express his ability to rule, commissioning several works of art from various artists. Many of the works centered around the mythical hero Hercules, the demigod son of Zeus, known for his god-like strength and for the twelve labors he performed. During the Florentine Renaissance, Hercules was perceived as a heroic figure. Many believed him to be both the founder and protector of Florence. He also demonstrated the qualities that were most desirable in those in positions of power, such as strength, bravery, and virility. Lorenzo wanted these qualities to be applicable to him as well, and he soon began to identify with Hercules.

The subject of this study is one of the compositions commissioned by Lorenzo, a painting entitled *Hercules and Deianira* (Fig. 1), painted by the artist Antonio Pollaiuolo (1429-1498), between 1475 and 1480. The composition portrays Hercules' defeat of the centaur Nessus, who attempted to abduct Deianira, Hercules' second wife, as recounted by Ovid. Through this composition, Lorenzo was no doubt attempting to portray himself as being a courageous protector like Hercules. However, it is odd that he would choose this scene to convey that message, as this scene marks the beginning of the end for Hercules, when Deianira was given a garment soaked in Nessus' blood, which had been poisoned by the arrow Hercules shot at him to save Deianira. This garment, when worn by Hercules, began to slowly kill him, a fact that Lorenzo surely knew. Given this information, the following questions remain. Lorenzo still chose to commission this scene, even though it references the demise of the hero with whom he is trying to associate. Like all propagandistic art, the *Hercules and Deianira* painting

convey a message from Lorenzo to the viewers. This message is that like Hercules, Lorenzo is devoted to protecting his beloved city of Florence, despite the various obstacles he may face.

### Literature Review

To provide a brief introduction to the myth depicted within Pollaiuolo's composition, two ancient sources convey the myth depicted in Pollaiuolo's composition. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which contains a chapter that focuses on Hercules and Deianira's marriage.<sup>1</sup> Another source that discusses a work by Ovid, known as the *Heroides*, which were the letters purport to be written by Hercules' wife, Deianira, is Sergio Casali's *Tragic Irony in Ovid, Heroides 9 and 11*.<sup>2</sup> Casali states how these letters were written right after Deianira gave Hercules the robe that was soaked in Nesses' poisoned blood. The first letter discusses how Deianira learns that a woman will be responsible for her husband's demise. However, she does not understand that it is she who will be responsible for his death.

Richard Rowland also analyzes Ovid's *Heroides*, once again focusing on the ninth letter in *The Desperation of Deianira: "Heroides" 9 and Early Modern Translation*.<sup>3</sup> Here, Rowland discusses how the *Heroides* have been perceived over the years. He states how many approached the myth with a misogynistic interpretation. During the Renaissance, Hercules was viewed as a "humanistic hero," who was tragically brought

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<sup>1</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses: The New, Annotated Edition*, Vol. New, annotated edition, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Sergio Casali, "Tragic Irony in Ovid, Heroides 9 and 11," *The Classical Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (1995): 505–11.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Rowland, "The Desperation of Deianira: 'Heroides' 9 and Early Modern Translation," *Translation and Literature* 22, no. 1 (2013): 1–24.

down by the acts of one woman. He then states how, over time, scholars began to feel sympathetic for Deianira, as she continued to work through her failing marriage.

The *Heroides* serves as the inspiration for one of Sophocles' plays, known as *Trachiniae*, or "The Women of Tracheus." In her article, "The Writing on the Mind: Deianira's Trauma in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*,"<sup>4</sup> Erika L. Weiberg discusses the overall message of the play. She argues that the play "dramatizes the psychological scars of a victim who has gone through physical and or sexual assault." She further argues that Deianira's character is suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which Weiberg claims has influenced various aspects of Deianira's life, such as her emotions, her sense of self, and her difficulty in connecting with others. During the Renaissance, when Greek philosophies and plays were undergoing a resurgence, many would have looked at Deianira's character with contempt. I am interested in Weiberg's discussion on the misogynistic interpretations of Deianira's character, as they are crucial to interpreting her role in the *Hercules and Deianira* painting.

Edwin Carawan also writes about Deianira's actions against her husband in his essay, "Deianira's Guilt."<sup>5</sup> Carawan's article also focuses on Sophocles' version of the young maiden being innocent in her betrayal of her husband. He argues against the assumption that Deianira felt no guilt over her role in her husband's demise, as well as the belief that she was acting not of her own will but that of Nessus. This is a compelling essay as Carawan analyzes how Nessus manipulated Deianira. Carawan then moves

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<sup>4</sup> Erika L. Weiberg, "The Writing on the Mind: Deianira's Trauma in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *Phoenix* 72, no. 1/2 (2018): 19-42.

<sup>5</sup> Edwin Carawan, "Deianira's Guilt," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 130 (2000): 189-237.

into Deianira's motives for killing her husband, which many believe was simply out of love for her husband. However, he proposes that Deianira defiantly came to the decision to betray Hercules. My reason for including this source in my research is to analyze the interaction between Nessus and Deianira and how it foils the relationship between Lorenzo's conspirators and the city of Florence.

Alessandro Barchiesi analyzes the *Heroides* in their "Future Reflexive: Two Modes of Allusion and Ovid's *Heroides*."<sup>6</sup> He questions what Deianira's motives were in writing the letters to her husband immediately after sending him the robe soaked in Nessus' blood. Throughout their writing, Barchiesi analyzes Deianira's letters through use of a deconstruction methodology in a way to understand her intentions in writing this series of letters. According to Barchiesi, Deianira starts to write with the intentions of simply sending a letter to Hercules. She has just learned that a woman would be responsible for her husband's demise. However, as she continues to write, the letter becomes a suicide note as Deianira learns of her husband's condition. She quickly concludes that she is the woman responsible for her husband's impending doom.

Ovid's writings have inspired many artists during the Renaissance. Paul Barolsky explores the numerous ways Ovid's myths have been depicted during this period in his article, *As in Ovid, So in Renaissance Art*.<sup>7</sup> The artists he discusses include Michelangelo, Bernini, and several others. However, Ovid also inspired many poets as Barolsky mentions, including Lorenzo de Medici, who would often refer to Ovid's

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<sup>6</sup> Alessandro Barchiesi, "Future Reflexive: Two Modes of Allusion and Ovid's *Heroides*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 95 (1993): 333–65.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Barolsky, "As in Ovid, So in Renaissance Art," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (1998): 451–74.

versions of the Greek myths within his own poetry. This is my reason for including this source in my own research, to help me fully understand the role Ovid's works played in the kind of art Lorenzo commissioned from his artists.

In her article, "*Apollo and Daphne*" By Antonio del Pollaiuolo and the Poetry of Lorenzo de' Medici<sup>8</sup>, Luba Freedman describes the relationship between Antonio Pollaiuolo and Lorenzo de' Medici, whose family was heavily invested in the arts and patrons to many artists, including Pollaiuolo. In her article, Freedman discusses the history that Pollaiuolo and Lorenzo shared. For example, she mentions how Pollaiuolo was introduced to Lorenzo through mutual friends, the Landfredini brothers, who were also patrons of the artist. The brothers commissioned a painting by Pollaiuolo to be given to Lorenzo as a gift. The painting, entitled *Apollo and Daphne*, depicts the myth of Apollo's pursuit of the maiden Daphne, who turned into a laurel tree to avoid the god's advances. Though this article does not discuss the *Hercules and Deianira* composition, it does provide an understanding of how Lorenzo became familiar with Pollaiuolo's work. It also observes the relationship between Pollaiuolo and Lorenzo, artist and patron, helping to understand why Lorenzo continued to commission art from this innovative artist.

In another article by Luba Freedman, *Florence in Two Pollaiuolo Paintings*,<sup>9</sup> she discusses two paintings, one by Antonio and the other by his brother Piero. For the purposes of my research, I focus on Antonio's painting entitled *Hercules and Deianara*.

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<sup>8</sup> Luba Freedman, "Apollo and Daphne" by Antonio del Pollaiuolo and the Poetry of Lorenzo de' Medici," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 56/57 (2011): 213-42.

<sup>9</sup> Luba Freedman, "Florence in Two Pollaiuolo Paintings," *Annali Della Scuola Normale Superiore Di Pisa, Classe Di Lettere e Filosofia* 2, no. 1 (2010): 275–394.

Freedman starts her scholarship by reviewing what has been said about this composition by Allison Wright, who has done extensive research on both paintings. The focus of both researchers is how the city of Florence is represented within the composition. Freedman also analyzes the iconography of the composition. Her research focuses on the symbolism presented with the figures of Hercules and Deianira, representing Lorenzo de Medici and Florence, respectively. I want to expand on Freedman's comparisons through two methods. The first method involves interpreting the symbolism presented by the figure of Nessus. The second involves expanding on Freedman's comparisons between Hercules and Deianira with Lorenzo and Florence, focusing on Deianira's actions against Hercules and the similarities of Florence's action against Lorenzo.

Freedman has also written separately about the inclusion of the Arno Valley in art in her *The Arno Valley in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Painting*.<sup>10</sup> In her research she analyzes the works of several artists from various walks of life, including Pollaiuolo. She begins by discussing the three different types of landscapes that often occur during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These three landscape categories include: river valleys with mountain ranges, country sides with numerous hills, and landscapes that feature a rocky terrain. Freedman places Pollaiuolo's paintings within the first category. She also states that often the incorporation of the Arno Valley was a subtle way of paying homage to the Medici family and that Pollaiuolo's inclusion of the Arno River in

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<sup>10</sup> Luba Freedman, "The Arno Valley Landscape in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Painting," *Viator* 44, no. 2 (2013): 201-242.

the *Hercules and Deianira* composition is rare. This source is valuable as it demonstrates the significance of the Arno Valley in Pollaiuolo's composition.

A scholar who has written extensively about Antonio Pollaiuolo is Alison Wright, who wrote a book entitled, *The Pollaiuolo Brothers: The Arts of Florence and Rome*.<sup>11</sup> Her book discusses a variety of topics pertaining to not only Antonio, but his brother Piero as well. Topics that she covers in her book include the brothers' upbringing and training as artists, their processes, and techniques. She also provides in-depth analyses on several of their artworks, including the *Hercules and Deianira* composition. Wright provides an analysis on both the visuals of the painting as well as its iconography. She discusses how the dynamics present in the painting add to the already heightened sense of drama, emphasizing the heroic actions of Hercules. She also states that through his defeat of the centaur, Hercules's victory is one of logic, therefore making it rational. Wright then discusses the origins of the composition, as the *Hercules and Deianira* painting was originally part of a wooden panel and later transferred over to a canvas. Given the composition's small size, Wright discusses the possibility of the painting being a part of a marriage chest, or *cassone*. Wright's analyses on the *Hercules and Deianira* painting are crucial as she provides a well written discussion on the reason the painting was created and what Lorenzo's intentions for the composition were.

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<sup>11</sup> Alison Wright, *The Pollaiuolo Brothers: The Arts of Florence and Rome*, (Yale University Press, 2005).

Maud Cruttwell is quite possibly the first scholar from the twentieth century to write about Antonio Pollaiuolo in *Antonio Pollaiuolo*.<sup>12</sup> Published in the early 1900, Cruttwell's book discusses a variety of topics, beginning with Pollaiuolo's early life and then moving into analyses of his various works throughout his career. In one chapter, Cruttwell writes about a series of Hercules portraits, which Cruttwell has named "The Hercules Group." The compositions Cruttwell writes about are three compositions created for the Medici family where the mythical hero can be seen battling a variety of opponents, such as the hydra and the giant Antaeus. This helps to provide an understanding of the other compositions Pollaiuolo painted of Hercules for the Medici family. Cruttwell also writes about Pollaiuolo's *Hercules and Deianira*, where he discusses the overall composition. And though he does not write as much about the *Hercules and Deianira painting*, Cruttwell's comparing it to the Hercules Group compositions provides an interesting discussion.

Leopold D. Ettlinger discusses how Hercules is depicted throughout art history in his *Hercules Florentinus*.<sup>13</sup> His writing focuses on portrayals of the hero by artists such as Michelangelo, Vasari, and Pollaiuolo. Regarding Pollaiuolo's artwork, Ettlinger discusses several works created for Lorenzo de Medici. These artworks include the Uffizi paintings, *Hercules and the Hydra* and *Hercules and Antaeus*. He states that Lorenzo, though he strongly admired the heroic myths, may not have begun his numerous commissions from Pollaiuolo until after he became the head of the Medici

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<sup>12</sup> Maud Cruttwell, *Antonio Pollaiuolo*, London, Duckworth 1907, New York, Scribner's, 1907.

<sup>13</sup> Leopold D. Ettlinger, "Hercules Florentinus," *Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 16, no. 2 (1972): 119–42.



family in 1469. Ettliger also discusses the origins of the compositions. He proposes that the Uffizi paintings were part of some type of furniture, such as a chest or cabinet, much like the *Hercules and Deianira* composition.

Patricia Simons also discusses how Hercules has been portrayed throughout history in her article "Hercules in Italian Renaissance Art: Masculine Labour and Homoerotic Libido."<sup>14</sup> She discusses a variety of topics relating to the mythical hero, beginning with why he is such an iconic figure to the Renaissance cultures. She states how Hercules was a symbol of masculinity, setting the standards that young adolescent men were expected to meet, as well as the kind of men women should hope to marry. She also discusses how Hercules was depicted in Florentine art, where she mentions two compositions by Pollaiuolo depicting Hercules' battle with the giant Antaeus. This source provides a general understanding of Hercules's role in Renaissance art.

Shirley Conroy Wilson also writes about Hercules and his numerous appearances throughout history in her dissertation "Renaissance Patronage of Hercules Imagery."<sup>15</sup> Wilson begins her thesis by discussing Hercules' portrayals from Antiquity. She then moves into how he is depicted in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which focuses on public commissions involving the hero. For example, she mentions his appearance on the seal of Florence and then discusses how the concept of patronage, or personal commissions, influenced compositions that included him, beginning with Florentine compositions. She states that many patrons, such as Lorenzo de Medici,

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<sup>14</sup> Patricia Simons, "Hercules in Italian Renaissance Art: Masculine Labour and Homoerotic Libido," *Art History* 31, no. 5 (2008): 632-664.

<sup>15</sup> Shirley Conroy Wilson, "Renaissance Patronage of Hercules Imagery," PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1983.

often identified with the heroic figure. She concludes her thesis with a discussion on how Hercules became a symbol of immortality during the sixteenth century. I agree with her conclusion. However, I argue that her idea of Hercules as a symbol for immortality can be applied to not only the sixteenth century, but to the fifteenth as well. Wilson's theory also observes the impact that Hercules' iconography had private commissions by patrons, such as Lorenzo de Medici's numerous commissions featuring the mythical hero.

Mark Aronson discusses the restoration process of Pollaiuolo's *Hercules and Deianira* composition in his article, "The Re-Restoration of Antonio Del-Pollaiuolo's 'Hercules and Deianira.'"<sup>16</sup> Aronson begins with a brief description of the composition and then discusses the numerous restorations the painting has undergone throughout history, ranging from 1850s to the late 1990s. He states that because of the painting's last restoration procedure, interpreting the composition has become rather difficult as details have now been lost. For example, the details surrounding Deianira's stomach, or the tips of Nessus' fingers as his arm wraps around Deianira's back as he holds her by her stomach. Aronson also provides images of the work prior to its various restorations, such as an engraving of the composition. This engraving, as well as the images of the painting prior to recent restorations, shows how much the composition has changed throughout time. For instance, the position of Deianira's left arm has been changed. For my research, this not only documents the numerous changes made to the composition, but also alludes to the painting's original composition.

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<sup>16</sup> Mark Aronson, "The Re-Restoration of Antonio Del Pollaiuolo's 'Hercules and Deianira,'" *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin*, (1999): 44–56.

My research expands on Luba Freedman's theory that the figure of Deianira in *Hercules and Deianira* represents the city of Florence. To better understand how this theory influences the way Hercules, and by extension Lorenzo, can be interpreted, it is crucial to first understand what Florence was like during this point in history. Vincent Cronin writes about this subject in his book, *The Florentine Renaissance*.<sup>17</sup> He begins by discussing the history of the city, discussing how the city came to exist. He then moves into the various ideals and values that the city upheld, as well as the type of government it maintained, particularly in relation to the Medici family and Lorenzo. He also writes about a variety of other topics including religion and the arts, providing a brief discussion on the iconography of the *Hercules and Deianira* painting. Like many scholars, Cronin states that Hercules represents the "virtuous man." In regards to Deianira, he views her as a representation of the more passionate side of man, while Nessus symbolizes the

Research and analysis about the life of Lorenzo de Medici is just as crucial to my thesis as research on Pollaiuolo's painting. William Francis Kent writes about Lorenzo de Medici in his book *Lorenzo de' Medici and the Art of Magnificence*.<sup>18</sup> Kent's book discusses a variety of topics, ranging from Lorenzo's education, his rise to power, and his struggle to maintain it. For the purposes of my research, I will be focusing my attention on the events occurring in Lorenzo's life when he first became head of the Medici family and during the late 1470s, as this is when Pollaiuolo's composition is

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<sup>17</sup>Vincent Cronin, *The Florentine Renaissance*, 1st ed. New York: Dutton, 1967.

<sup>18</sup> Francis William Kent, *Lorenzo de' Medici and the Art of Magnificence*. Vol. 24. JHU Press, (2004).

dated. In one chapter, Kent writes about Lorenzo's hesitation to ascend to power, however he cast aside his apprehension and assumed his role for the good of Florence. He also discusses the way in which others perceived Lorenzo. For example, Kent mentions how towards the beginning of Lorenzo's political career, he approached his power with a timid nature. According to Kent, Lorenzo was too focused on trying to please everyone, which resulted in many believing he lacked the strength or courage to rule over Florence. This helps to understand why it was crucial for Lorenzo to portray himself as being strong and capable through the artworks he commissioned.

Charles L. Mee Jr. also writes about the life of Lorenzo in his book, *The Renaissance of Lorenzo De Medici*.<sup>19</sup> His book discusses many of the topics Kent addresses such as Lorenzo's childhood and role as ruler over Florence. However, Mee also discusses the events of the Pazzi Conspiracy, factors that lead to its conception, and how the Medici and Pazzi families became rivals. For instance, in retaliation for the Pazzi family being named the bankers for the Papacy, Lorenzo helped to create a law that would essentially rob the Pazzi family of part of their fortune. This source helps to understand part of Lorenzo's character, being a cunning individual, but also provides and understanding as to why people began to resent both Lorenzo and his family.

Cecilia M. Ady addresses similar points of discussion in her book, *Lorenzo dei Medici and Renaissance Italy*.<sup>20</sup> However, she also discusses other aspects of Lorenzo's life. For example, she discusses his relationship with his family and his

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<sup>19</sup> Charles L. Mee, *The Renaissance of Lorenzo De Medici*, [Newbury]: New Word City, Inc, (2013).

<sup>20</sup> Cecilia M. Ady, *Lorenzo Dei Medici and Renaissance Italy*, (London: English Universities Press, 1970).

interest in poetry. She also writes about the Medici's family's bank, the family's rise to power, and Lorenzo's ascent to the head of the family. Ady also provides a discussion on foreign relationships that occurred during that time, as it would have been important for Lorenzo to have support both inside and outside of Florence. One of the alliances that Ady discusses is a pact known as the "Triple Alliance between the cities of Florence, Milan, and Naples. Like Mee, Ady discusses the events of the Pazzi conspiracy, the events leading up to it and its repercussions. She also discusses the time of peace between the conspiracy and Lorenzo's death in 1492. This source provides a lot of information on what Florence's foreign relationships and policies were like and how they changed throughout Lorenzo's political career.

Several other authors have also written about Lorenzo de' Medici and his life. Such as Edward Armstrong in his book, *Lorenzo de' Medici and Florence in the fifteenth century*.<sup>21</sup> He begins by discussing Lorenzo's ancestors, particularly his grandfather and father, which is when the family's fortunes truly started to take form. Armstrong then moves into the period where Lorenzo and his brother, Giuliano ruled together over Florence. He also begins to discuss the various adversaries that Lorenzo had during his lifetime. For instance, there are several documents that support the idea that Lorenzo would be involved in many arguments with the pope, which would later cause problems for Lorenzo during the Pazzi Conspiracy. This source is valuable to my research because it discusses the negative ways Lorenzo was viewed, providing an understanding of why he needed works that showed him in a better light.

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<sup>21</sup> Edward Armstrong, *Lorenzo de' Medici and Florence in the Fifteenth Century*, Vol. 16. Putnam, (1896).

Another scholar to write about the Medici family is Edward Lee Stuart Horsburgh in his book *Lorenzo the Magnificent: And Florence in Her Golden Age*.<sup>22</sup> In the introduction to the book, Horsburgh begins with a discussion of the state of Florence during the fifteenth century. He discusses topics such as the Papacy and its significant role during this period. He also focuses on the city of Florence as a whole, describing its geographical and political importance, as well as what the city was like before the Medici family came into power. From here, Horsburgh moves into how the Medicis ascended to power, beginning with Cosimo Medici, Lorenzo's grandfather and then Lorenzo's father, Piero. He then discusses Lorenzo's coming into power and the state the government was in by the time Lorenzo took control, as well as how the Florentine government changed during Lorenzo's reign.

One of the most noteworthy events to happen in Lorenzo's life during this period was an incident known as the Pazzi Conspiracy. Lauro Martines discusses this event in their book, *April Blood*.<sup>23</sup> He discusses the attack on Lorenzo and his brother, Giuliano, who unfortunately did not survive the ordeal. The conspiracy was led by one of Florence's most noble families, the Pazzi family, who resented the Medici's power, though they were not the only conspirators, as Martines discusses. The attack, though it did claim one Medici life, failed, and resulted in Lorenzo's retaliation. My reason for including this source in my research is to better understand the Pazzi conspiracy, the

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<sup>22</sup> Edward Lee Stuart Horsburgh, *Lorenzo the Magnificent: And Florence in Her Golden Age*, Methuen & Company, (1909).

<sup>23</sup> Lauro Martines, *April blood: Florence and the Plot Against the Medici*. (Oxford University Press, 2003).

family's reasons for their resentment towards the Medici family and use this information to reinterpret Pollaiuolo's composition.

Victoria Loucks continues Martines' discussion in her article, "Religious Backlash Against the Pazzi Conspiracy."<sup>24</sup> Her analysis focuses on the aftermath of the Pazzi conspiracy, which she describes in the beginning of her writing. The assassination attempts tragically took place in a church, with Lorenzo's blood being shed on the floor while Lorenzo escaped. Naturally, this incident resulted in outrage, not only for the Medici family, but others as well. Many argued that the assassination was not only offensive to the Medici family, but to God Himself. And while this source focuses more on the religious undertones of the Pazzi conspiracy, Loucks does speak to the overall political factors, which help me to understand the Florentine government at this time and how these types of politics influenced Lorenzo's character.

Another scholar who addresses the aftermath of the Pazzi conspiracy is Marta Celati in "The Conflict After the Pazzi Conspiracy and Poliziano's 'Coniurationis Commentarium': Literature, Law and Politics."<sup>25</sup> Her research discusses Lorenzo's methods of retaliation as well as how the Pazzi family was punished for their efforts. Celati also provides information on the politics surrounding Lorenzo, both before and after the assassination attempt. My reason for including this source is to first, have a better understanding of the political government Lorenzo oversaw. Through this, I can have a better understanding of the type of ruler he was and wanted to be perceived as.

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<sup>24</sup> Victoria Loucks, "Religious Backlash Against the Pazzi Conspiracy," By Neil Wilson, Editor in Chief, *The Future of History*, 4-17.

<sup>25</sup> Marta Celati, "The Conflict After the Pazzi Conspiracy and Poliziano's 'Coniurationis Commentarium': Literature, Law and Politics." In *Forum Italicum*, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 327-349, (Sage UK: London, England: SAGE Publications, 2019).

## Methodology

My research utilizes several different forms of qualitative methodologies. I first begin with a structuralist manner of interpretation, looking into the iconography of Antonio Pollaiuolo's *Hercules and Deianira* composition. Throughout this thesis, I investigate the reason these three figures, Hercules, Deianira, and Nessus were chosen as a way of emphasizing Lorenzo de Medici's ability to rule over Florence. I am interested in understanding who, or what, each figure represents.

To understand the iconography of the composition, an understanding of Florentine culture is crucial. For example, as part of my research focuses on the figure of Deianira, who Luba Freedman proposes to be a representation of the city of Florence, it is necessary to understand what Florence was like, not only during the time of the composition's creation, but earlier in Lorenzo's reign. For this I intend to use a cultural studies methodology, focusing on the city's government and how it influenced Lorenzo de Medici, and vice versa.

Mythological information is just as crucial to my research. Lorenzo strongly affiliated himself with the mythical hero Hercules, looking to strengthen his reputation in Florence through Hercules' own reputation as a strong, brave, and virtuous man. My research addresses the reason Hercules was such an important figure to Lorenzo, looking into various parts of the Herculean myth that could aid Lorenzo in his quest to enhance his reputation as ruler over Florence. My research also investigates the figures of Deianira and Nessus and the role they play within the composition.

Many of the scholars that have interpreted Deianira's actions against her husband have utilized a misogynistic lens. I understand that their reason for doing so is



because this type of viewpoint is the same that would have been used by citizens who viewed the composition. During the Florentine Renaissance, Hercules was seen as a highly revered and iconic figure. The fact that this heroic figure's life was ended by the acts of one woman, would have outraged citizens, causing them to view Deianira as an antagonistic figure. However, many scholars have taken on a more sympathetic, and more feministic approach to interpreting the figure of Deianira. I would also like to employ this type of methodology. In my thesis, I discuss how Lorenzo felt about the city when he first came into power. I also investigate how he was perceived by the citizens of Florence. It is my belief that the relationship between Hercules and his wife parallels, in some respects, the relationship Lorenzo had with Florence during his reign.

Shortly after sending Hercules the poison-soaked garment, Deianira begins to write a letter to Hercules. The intentions of this letter are not exactly clear, as she first begins to write as if it is a love letter. However, her motives seem to shift as she begins to vent all her anger and frustration against her husband, until she finally learns of his current state and begins to understand that this was brought on by her actions alone. From this point, Deianira's letter becomes a suicide note. Scholars who have also investigated Deianira's letter have used a deconstruction methodology, which I also intend to use.

Other scholars have used a psychoanalytic approach to interpreting Deianira's actions and letter. There is debate among scholars on whether she intentionally meant to kill Hercules. Part of this is due to the story being a myth. Myths are not set in stone; they originally were told orally as opposed to being written down. In some versions of the story, Deianira was given only Nessus blood, unaware it was poisoned, thus

poisoned the garment herself. In other cases, Nessus gave her the garment after he had poisoned it. If Deianira had intended to kill her husband, psychoanalyzing her letter may speak to her intentions, offering a way of reinterpreting Pollaiuolo's composition.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

### **Section One: Hercules**

In the painting, *Hercules and Deianira*, Pollaiuolo depicts a part of the Herculean myth as written by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*. Hercules and his new bride, Deianira, are returning home when they encounter the river Evenus, which was currently overflowing. For Hercules, swimming across was an easy endeavor, though it would have been difficult for Deianira to fight the river's current. The centaur, Nessus, found the couple and convinced Hercules to let him carry Deianira over while Hercules swam to the other side of the riverbank. Hercules, not seeing any other viable option, reluctantly agreed and threw his club and bow over the river and swam across. Once he was on the other side, he retrieved his weapons and waited for the others. Once Hercules was far enough away, Nessus began to take off with Deianira, who began to cry for help. Realizing what Nessus was attempting to do, Hercules quickly moved into action and shot one of his arrows, which he previously poisoned with venom that he obtained from the hydra, killing the centaur. However, there is more to this myth that Pollaiuolo's composition does not portray.

According to Ovid's version of the myth, after Hercules shot Nessus with the poisoned arrow, Nessus formed a plot to get revenge on Hercules. He pulled out an article of clothing, and drenched it in his blood, which was now poisoned due to the arrow. Before he died, he handed the garment to Deianira as a token to remember him

by. He also told her that if she gave it as a gift to Hercules, it would make the hero fall in love with only her and no other. However, some versions of the myth report that Nessus only gave Deianira some of his blood, not telling her that it was poisoned. Later in the myth, Hercules is written to have had several affairs outside his marriage to Deianira. Having had enough of her husband's constant infidelities, Deianira followed Nessus' advice and gave Hercules the blood-soaked clothing, thinking it would make Hercules love only her and save her marriage. However, Deianira's plan did not work out the way she hoped, as the garment slowly began to kill Hercules, resulting in his death. However, after he died, Hercules was granted immortality and continued his life on Mount Olympus.

In Pollaiuolo's *Hercules and Deianira*, Hercules can be seen towards the right of the composition, clad in the Nemean lion's pelt from one of his previous labors, posed with an arrow pointed at Nessus opposite him. There is a powerful sense of movement in the way Hercules is depicted, both visible and implied. His upper body is carefully aiming the arrow at Nessus. However, looking at his lower body, it is as if he had just picked up his arrow while running towards it, suggesting he is agile both physically and mentally as he quickly jumps into action with a plan to rescue his bride. Furthermore, this also helps in supporting Hercules' reputation as an active character, always "on the move" and ready to lend a hand to those in need.

Pollaiuolo was one of the first artists to depict movement and energy using bold brushstrokes.<sup>26</sup> The dynamics present in other areas of the composition further

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<sup>26</sup> Vincent Cronin, *The Florentine Renaissance*, 1st ed. New York: Dutton, 1967, 192.

emphasize Hercules' movements. Pollaiuolo was known for his expert way of depicting the human anatomy. In the *Hercules and Deianira* painting, Hercules' underlying muscles can be seen as he stretches his arms and back as he holds his bow and arrow. However, the way Hercules is positioned in mirrors the way a figure in Pollaiuolo's *Battle of Ten Nudes* (fig. 4).

In the engraving, a group of men are seen fighting one another with a variety of weapons, including long swords, daggers, an axe, and bows and arrows. The figures in the composition are shown in a variety of poses that mirror each other. For instance, the two figures in the center of the print are facing each other with the exact same pose, providing a sense of balance within the composition. To the far left of the print, there is one figure posed with a bow and arrow. The front of his body can be seen as he pulls the arrow back with his right hand, while his left hand holds the bow, though this part is slightly blocked by a figure standing in front of him. His lower body is depicted as if he is lunging forward, his right leg stretching out as his left leg is bent. This figure's form is nearly identical to the figure of Hercules, the key difference only being that Hercules is shown from the back, emphasizing Pollaiuolo's ability to depict the human body from various angles. In the *Hercules and Deianira* painting, Hercules's figure is positioned with his left arm held straight as he holds his bow, his legs are both bent slightly, as opposed to the figure in *Battle*, who is shown with only one of his legs bent forward. Hercules' right arm is just above his ear as he pulls the bow string back, ready to release his arrow. Pollaiuolo's *Battle of Ten Nudes* was created in sometime between 1470 and 1490, therefore it is difficult to know which work of art came first. Regardless of this uncertainty, one work inspired the other.

The *Hercules and Deianira* painting is small, measuring at barely two feet by three feet. Aside from being a talented painter, sculptor, and printmaker, Pollaiuolo was also a skilled goldsmith, which explains how he was able to create such an extreme amount of detail in such a small space. However, Alison Wright mentions another potential explanation for this small-scale work. She discusses that the image may have been part of what is known as a *cassone*, or marriage chest. These chests would often be used as part of the marriage procession and would often contain the dowry of the bride. After a couple was married, they could store a variety of valuable items inside the chest such as precious fabrics or clothing. The front panels would often be painted with scene from either the bible, or in some cases, scenes from mythology. To further support this explanation, the *Hercules and Deianira* painting was originally part of a wooden panel, meaning there is a chance it was part of a *cassone*, though later the painting was transferred over to canvas. However, there are a couple of flaws in this assumption that Wright discusses. She notes how in this scene Deianira is being abducted, whereas *cassone* images would normally depict scenes of courtly love. Therefore, it is unlikely that this painting would have been utilized in a marital context.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, even if the painting had been intended for a *cassone*, it would not have been commissioned for or by Lorenzo de Medici. The *Hercules and Deianira* painting was created between 1475 and 1480, by that time, Lorenzo de Medici had been married to his wife, Clarice Orsini, for a decade. However, even though a portrait of a woman

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<sup>27</sup> Alison Wright, *The Pollaiuolo Brothers: The Arts of Florence and Rome*, (Yale University Press, 2005), 98.

being abducted would be deemed inappropriate for a marriage chest, this type of subject matter still served another purpose.

Since his story was first told, Hercules served as a role model for young, athletic men, as he set the standards and expectations of men, a concept that transitioned into the Renaissance period.<sup>28</sup> For men of Ancient Greece and the Renaissance period, Hercules was the epitome of strength, courage, and virility. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Hercules iconography became a popular theme. For example, during the fourteenth century, Hercules' image could be seen on several churches, the reason for this being the multiple connections Hercules shared with Christ and David.<sup>29</sup> Over time, Hercules' reputation in Florence became more solidified. Eventually, he was viewed as the founder and protector of Florence<sup>30</sup>, influencing the lives of many citizens, including Lorenzo de Medici, who ruled over Florence during the late fifteenth century.

Not unlike Hercules, the Medici family was not born into their noble status, as they were a middle-class family. Though they were known mostly for their involvement with banking, their name, *de Medici*, translates to "of the doctors," meaning it is more than likely their ancestors practiced medicine.<sup>31</sup> And despite their success in political affairs, the family rarely involved themselves in politics. The Medici family owned the Medici Bank, which was founded by Lorenzo's great-grandfather, Giovanni de Averardo,

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<sup>28</sup> Patricia Simons, "Hercules in Italian Renaissance Art: Masculine Labour and Homoerotic Libido," *Art History* 31, no. 5 (2008): 635.

<sup>29</sup> Shirley Conroy Wilson, "Renaissance Patronage of Hercules Imagery," PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1983, 27.

<sup>30</sup> Leopold D. Ettlinger, "Hercules Florentinus," *Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 16, no. 2 (1972): 122.

<sup>31</sup> Cronin, *The Florentine Renaissance*, 59.

also known as Giovanni di Bicci, between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It was through his efforts of social climbing that the family obtained their fortune.<sup>32</sup>

During his life, Lorenzo commissioned a variety of artwork that reference Greek mythology. For example, before he ruled over Florence, he was interested in the myths of Apollo, who like Lorenzo, was interested in the arts, music, and above all poetry.<sup>33</sup> Lorenzo wrote several poems, such as his *Ambra*, which references the myth of Apollo and Daphne, a beautiful young woman the god tried to pursue. As Apollo finally reached her, Daphne's form began to change into that of a laurel tree, which would become a symbol of both Apollo and Lorenzo.<sup>34</sup> However, once he became head of the Medici family, Lorenzo began to turn to the myths of Hercules, hoping that his reputation could be as impressive as that of the mythical hero. Like Hercules, Lorenzo wanted to be viewed as a strong, brave, and virile man, enlisting several different artists to create masterpieces that portrayed him in this manner. Many of the compositions Lorenzo commissioned were from his favorite artist, Antonio Pollaiuolo, who Lorenzo described as the "greatest master in the city."

The two were introduced to one another when Pollaiuolo was commissioned by the Landfredini brothers, who were major supporters of the artist.<sup>35</sup> Throughout the course of his and Lorenzo's relationship, Pollaiuolo created numerous works of art depicting Hercules. For example, he created a series of paintings portraying several

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>33</sup> Luba Freedman, "'Apollo and Daphne'" by Antonio del Pollaiuolo and the Poetry of Lorenzo de' Medici," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 56/57 (2011): 217.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Barolsky, "As in Ovid, So in Renaissance Art," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (1998): 457.

<sup>35</sup> Freedman, "'Apollo and Daphne,'" 215.

victories of the mythical hero, such as his defeat of the Nemean lion, which has now been lost. However, Maud Crutwell mentions an account from Vasari describing the composition, giving art historians the only description of the missing painting. He describes the painting as depicting Hercules wrestling with the lion, his left knee on its chest, while using both hands to tear the beast's jaws open, while the lion continues to claw at him.<sup>36</sup> According to Florentine legends, the city of Florence was originally inhabited by a group of people who came from another town that was made habitable after Hercules had drained a swamp in the area, a practice he frequently made a habit out of.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the myth of Hercules' battle with the Nemean lion is heavily associated with a similar event in the life of Samson, causing the heroic figure to become important in religious aspects.

The two other compositions of the series, which together are known as the Uffizzi paintings due to their being displayed in the Uffizzi Gallery, portray Hercules' victories over other opponents. The first image, *Hercules and the Hydra* (fig. 3), depicts the hero during one of his twelve labors. In this case, his battle with the hydra, a multi-headed, serpentine creature. In the composition, Hercules can be seen wearing his Nemean lion's pelt, his right arm raised over his head, holding his club as opposed to a sword. There are two reasons that explain this choice of weaponry. According to mythology, if one head of the hydra is cut off, two more will grow back in its place, therefore a sword would be of no use to Hercules in this endeavor. Furthermore, Hercules' club is often

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<sup>36</sup> Maud Crutwell, *Antonio Pollaiuolo, London, Duckworth 1907*; (New York, Scribner's, 1907), 67-68.

<sup>37</sup> Etlinger, "Hercules Florentinus," 122.



assumed to be a symbol of “phallic power.”<sup>38</sup> This would also provide a way of showcasing Hercules’ strength, as more would be required to defeat the hydra with a club than with a sword. The hydra in the composition can be seen with two heads, one of which is being firmly held back by Hercules’ left hand. In the background, a landscape stretches far into the distance, and it resembles the background of the *Hercules and Deianira* composition. Based on the various hills that can be seen, as well as the river, this battle is taking place somewhere in the Arno Valley, further back in the background of the *Hercules and Deianira*. Therefore, this battle may be occurring closer to the city walls, though there is nothing in the *Hercules Slaying the Hydra* that resembles a city.

In the second painting, *Hercules and Antaeus* (Fig. 4), Hercules stands in the middle of the composition, his arms wrapped around another figure as he lifts him into the air. The second figure is the giant Antaeus, said to be one of the children of the Titan Gaea, an earth goddess, and from who Antaeus received his strength. Pollaiuolo depicts the sheer strength of Hercules in this moment, the expression on the hero’s face as he uses every ounce of his strength to lift Antaeus off the ground and away from his mother’s domain. Antaeus’ face is contorted in absolute pain, as his head tilts back in agony. Maud Crutwell states that, “No artist has ever concentrated in a human face so much passion and brute-force as in the tiny head of Hercules strangling Antaeus.”<sup>39</sup> The background in this composition also resembles the Arno Valley, once again providing the possibility that this is happening outside the city of Florence. However, unlike the

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<sup>38</sup> Simons, "Hercules in Italian Renaissance Art," 647.

<sup>39</sup> Crutwell, *Antonio Pollaiuolo*, 70.

*Hercules and the Hydra*, the *Hercules and Antaeus* painting does not depict the Arno River. The background instead resembles what Luba Freedman describes as marshes, which more than likely is in reference to the myth of how Florence was founded. According to Florentine legends, marshes covered the land and prevented the area from being habitable until Hercules drained the water from the valley making it possible to build the city of Florence.<sup>40</sup> Like the *Hercules and Deianira* composition, these two paintings demonstrate Hercules' and by extension Lorenzo's abilities to protect the city of Florence. Like the *Hercules and Deianira* painting, these two compositions were also painted on a small scale. Ettliger proposes that these paintings' origins may be like that of the *Hercules and Deianira* painting. He believes that the Uffizi paintings were part of some type of furniture, such as a cabinet.<sup>41</sup> According to Crutwell, they share same images as three large canvases that were painted for the Palace of the Medici in Via Larga in 1460, though these larger canvases have also been lost.<sup>42</sup> However, Ettliger refutes this claim stating that having smaller copies of larger compositions would not have been a common practice.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike the compositions depicting Hercules' defeat of the hydra and Antaeus, Hercules is not just facing a foe, with only his life on the line. In the *Hercules and Deianira* painting, there is more a stake. Hercules is trying to protect the life of his wife, adding to the suspense and pressure of the scene. That kind of suspense is amplified by what surrounds the figures. For example, the raging river beneath Nessus, who is

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<sup>40</sup> Luba Freedman, "The Arno Valley Landscape in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Painting," *Viator* 44, no. 2 (2013): 220.

<sup>41</sup> Ettliger, "Hercules Florentinus," 129.

<sup>42</sup> Crutwell, *Antonio Pollaiuolo*, 66.

<sup>43</sup> Ettliger, "Hercules Florentinus," 129.

quickly trying to flee with Deianira, or her own arms flailing in the air, within Hercules' line of fire. Through all these surrounding pressures, Hercules remains poised and confident in his abilities. The composition shows Hercules as courageous, protective, noble, qualities that were desirable in men of the times, such as Lorenzo. During his life, there were multiple instances where Lorenzo's ability to rule came into question, it would be crucial for him to be able to demonstrate stability and composure, not only for himself but for all of Florence. Luba Freedman continues the discussion of the iconography of the composition, though her research focuses on another figure.

### **Section Two: Deianira**

In the *Hercules and Deianira* composition, the river Evenus, flows into the background. In the distance, there is a wide stretch of land that helps make up the rest of the landscape. As Freedman points out, this landscape is of the Arno Valley, a part of Tuscany and close to Florence.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the River Evenus is a representation of the Arno River, which is rarely depicted in art.<sup>45</sup> Further off in the distance, slightly hidden behind Deianira's outstretched hand is the city of Florence. Like Hercules, the Arno Valley also helps to protect the city, as the Arno River would often serve as a barrier that many of Florence's enemies were unable to break through. However, Pollaiuolo's inclusion of the Arno Valley in *Hercules and Deianira* does more than just provide a setting for this moment in the hero's life. Many artists during the fifteenth century, including Pollaiuolo, incorporate the Arno Valley in their compositions, partly because Florence and the Arno Valley are always associated with one another.

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<sup>44</sup> Freedman, "The Arno Valley Landscape in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Painting," 213.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 213.

However, it also allows the artists to pay respect to the Medici family, who supported many artists during the fifteenth century.<sup>46</sup>

Freedman argues how Florence is represented through another form within the composition. Following the interpretation that Hercules is meant to symbolize Lorenzo, it makes sense that Deianira would represent someone, or something, that Lorenzo is trying to protect. Freedman proposes that Deianira is also meant to symbolize the city of Florence. As stated before, Hercules was believed to have been the founder of Florence, and here he was, protecting her in human form. He is devoted to her; he will do anything in his power to protect her. This is the kind of propagandic imagery Lorenzo would have wanted to promote his own abilities to protect the city of Florence. However, much like Hercules' relationship with his wife was difficult, so too was Lorenzo's relationship with Florence.

Luba Freedman discusses the significance of Deianira and her role in the composition. Pollaiuolo paints her with skin that appears soft and smooth. Her hair flows outward, its color blending into its surroundings. Deianira's figure is depicted in an odd position, as she is painted in the arms of Nessus as he abducts her. She is painted nude, or so it appears. Upon closer observation, there is a light sketch of what looks like a piece of sheer cloth over her figure, its contours barely visible (fig. 5). Through this sheer fabric, Deianira's breasts are exposed, while her arms are extended in the direction of Hercules. Between the figures of Hercules and Nessus, as well as the Euanus River, there is a lot of movement present within the painting. However, Deianira's figure demonstrates little to no movement at all, as if she were a statue,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 201.

paralyzed with fear. However, according to Mark Aronson, the position that Deianira can be seen in today is not how she was originally painted.

The *Hercules and Deianira* painting was first photographed and featured in an issue of *The Burlington Magazine* in 1906<sup>47</sup>. The image of the painting featured the composition in nearly the same way it appears today, however, with one difference. In this image, Deianira can be seen with her left arm bent back towards her head, (Fig. 6), as opposed to straight outward as it appears today. Over time, the painting endured a series of restorations, beginning in the early or mid-1800s. These restorations would, at times, require for the composition to be significantly altered. These changes that were made to the composition were more than likely the results of two scenarios. One option is that owners of the composition may have requested these alterations. The second option is that, due to the numerous restorations, details may have been severely damaged during the process and required changes to the overall composition. However, these restorations unfortunately could also result in these details being completely erased. For example, looking closer at Deianira's figure, one can see how her stomach slightly protrudes outwards. This detail cannot be seen as clearly due to the numerous restorations.<sup>48</sup>

Freedman suggests that Deianira was pregnant during this ordeal, adding to the suspense of the scene and further emphasizing the bravery of Hercules, who is risking his life to protect his wife and unborn child.<sup>49</sup> It is known that Hercules and Deianira had

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<sup>47</sup> Mark Aronson, "The Re-Restoration of Antonio Del Pollaiuolo's 'Hercules and Deianira,'" *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin*, (1999): 47.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>49</sup> Luba Freedman, "Florence in Two Pollaiuolo Paintings," *Annali Della Scuola Normale Superiore Di Pisa, Classe Di Lettere e Filosofia* 2, no. 1 (2010): 292.

a son named Hyllus together, however it is not stated exactly when Deianira became pregnant. Therefore, it is possible that the decision to portray Deianira as being pregnant during this scene may have been a request from Lorenzo de Medici as a way of presenting himself as a family-oriented person. Depending on when the composition was created, Lorenzo's wife Clarice Orsini may have been pregnant herself or at least have given birth to one of her children during the painting's conception. This also provides a message of morality to men of the time. To the citizens of Florence, Hercules risking his life to defend his family, demonstrated the values that were most important, a man must protect his family and his home<sup>50</sup>.

Vincent Cronin also discusses the symbolism presented by the figure of Deianira. He states that she is meant to represent the soul's passion.<sup>51</sup> He then goes on to state that Hercules symbolizes manly virtue, a conclusion supported by many scholars. This is a plausible idea, as Hercules, and men in general, would have been thought to represent the more logical side of man. In contrast, women would often be depicted representing the emotional side. Although, while Deianira may have been an emotional figure in some instances, such as the events of the *Hercules and Deianira* painting. However, Deianira was also capable of being logical, as she was often described as being interested in driving chariots and warfare.<sup>52</sup> In other words, she was a woman who can look after herself. However, in the painting she plays the role of "damsel in distress." This was more than likely a way of emphasizing the heroic actions of

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 292.

<sup>51</sup> Cronin, *The Florentine Renaissance*, 203.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 202.

Hercules. Deianira, much like Florence, needed to be protected. However, these are not the only traits Deianira and Florence have in common.

Much like Florence, the character of Deianira has been surrounded by controversy. Many who are familiar with her story have often viewed her as an antagonistic or murderer, which resulted in many placing the blame for Hercules' death on her. A major factor to this conclusion is the various interpretations of Deianira's letters to Hercules. In her first letter, Deianira first writes that Hercules need not reply to the letter she is currently writing, foreshadowing both of their deaths.<sup>53</sup> The letters begin to portray Deianira as a vengeful woman, full of rage against not only the other women in her husband's life, but Hercules as well. As Edwin Carawan notes, Deianira's names translate to "manslayer,"<sup>54</sup> or "destroy the male,"<sup>55</sup> according to Alessandro Barchiesi, creating the automatic assumption that this woman is not the submissive type of wife one would expect to be married to a hero such as Hercules.

First, to understand Lorenzo's relationship with Florence, it is necessary to understand Deianira's relationship to Hercules. Deianira was a princess of Calydon, as she was the daughter of Queen Althaea and King Oeneus, though some stories claim her father was the god Dionysus. According to mythology, Hercules won Deianira's hand in marriage in a wrestling match with the river god known as Achelous, who would change his form into a variety of beasts. At one point in the battle, Achelous took on the

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<sup>53</sup> Richard Rowland, "The Desperation of Deianira: 'Heroides' 9 and Early Modern Translation," *Translation and Literature* 22, no. 1 (2013): 3.

<sup>54</sup> Edwin Carawan, "Deianira's Guilt," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 130 (2000): 191.

<sup>55</sup> Alessandro Barchiesi, "Future Reflexive: Two Modes of Allusion and Ovid's Heroides," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 95 (1993): 340.

form of a bull with horns. Hercules, using his divine strength, broke off one of the horns, thus winning the match. After the battle, the two were wed, though they did not live “happily ever after.”

As stated previously, Hercules was not the most faithful of husbands, which naturally upset Deianira. Shortly after the two were married, Hercules began to fall for a woman named Iole, a daughter of King Eurytus from Oechalia. The king offered his daughter as a prize in a contest, which Hercules won easily. However, the King refused to give her to Hercules, causing the hero to lose his temper and kill Eurytus’ son, Iphitus. As a result, Hercules had to purify himself, much like he had to after he murdered his first wife, Megara, and their children. To cleanse himself, the Oracle at Delphi ordered Hercules to become a slave for one year. After this period ended, Hercules returned and claimed his prize. Deianira, afraid to lose Hercules, remembered Nessus’ advice. Hoping that the shirt would make her husband have eyes only for her, she gifted the shirt to her husband, causing Hercules’ demise.

Deianira’s letters inspired the works of many. For example, Sophocles wrote a play entitled *Trachiniae*, or “the women of Tracchus.” The play begins after Deianira sends the garment to Hercules. She then begins to discuss her experiences, both before and after her marriage to Hercules. Once again, Deianira is portrayed as a woman intent on vengeance, so much so that even Hercules condemns Deianira at one point in the play, stating that nothing so evil has been done to him compared to Deianira’s betrayal.<sup>56</sup> It is not until later in the play that Hercules learns that his death

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<sup>56</sup> Sergio Casali, “Tragic Irony in Ovid, Heroides 9 and 11,” *The Classical Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (1995): 506.



was not by his wife's hand, rather the hand of someone who is already dead, meaning Nessus.

There are some scholars who have taken a sympathetic view of Deianira's actions. For example, in her analysis of Sophocles' play, *The Writing on the Mind: Deianira's Trauma in Sophocles' Trachiniae*,<sup>57</sup> Ericka L. Weiberg proposes a new interpretation of the play. She proposes that the play is meant to document the trauma Deianira endured in her life. In the play, as Deianira reminisces about her life, before and after her marriage, Deianira's time is slightly off. Weiberg attributed this to Deianira suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).<sup>57</sup> The first traumatic event to occur in her life involves Achelous, who wanted to be the first to marry Deianira, though her account of the battle between the river god and Hercules is not as clear, another feature of her PTSD. Furthermore, Weiberg concludes that it is because of Deianira's having PTSD that she sent Hercules the poisoned garment, whether willingly or not.<sup>58</sup> In other words, she concludes that Deianira is innocent of her crimes. This is, however, a modern interpretation. Expanding on Freedman's thesis, one could argue that much like Deianira betrayed Hercules, Florence betrayed Lorenzo. Though this may not be the message Lorenzo wanted to convey in the composition.

Lorenzo was barely an adult when his father died on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1469. According to various accounts, he was reluctant to ascend to his father's position. However, he understood that the city was just as upset by his father's passing as he was. And so, Lorenzo ascended to power. Thanks to his grandfather's and father's

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<sup>57</sup> Erika L. Weiberg, "The Writing on the Mind: Deianeira's Trauma in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *Phoenix* 72, no. 1/2 (2018): 23.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

efforts, Lorenzo's family name was already well established and respected. It would be up to Lorenzo, as well as his brother, to continue that longstanding tradition. As Cecilia M. Ady notes, the Medici reign relied on three factors: friends that were loyal to the family, support from the trade-guilds, and third, and perhaps the most crucial, the support of the people.<sup>59</sup> At the time Lorenzo took control of Florence, the city was a republic, whose model was inspired by the ancient Roman Republic. However, the Florentine Republic introduced more contemporary policies. For example, the Florentine Republic included a body of men that acted like a Senate, known as the *Concilio Maggiore*, and was made of elected members.<sup>60</sup> Their function involved matters of both internal and external security as well as taxation.

This newly established tradition of having senate-like groups continued into Lorenzo's reign and was further emphasized. During Lorenzo's time, various councils were created. For example, a group known as the Council of Seventy, which consisted of thirty members of the previous ruling committee along with forty citizens who were elected by the people. In other words, like modern government, the people held the power. The seventy figures were meant to serve for life and would become one of the most crucial factors in Florentine government.<sup>61</sup> And just like the landscape of the Arno Valley covered a great distance, so did Lorenzo's power, as domestic policies were only one side of his struggle with power.

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<sup>59</sup>Cecilia M. Ady, *Lorenzo Dei Medici and Renaissance Italy*, (London: English Universities Press, 1970), 43.

<sup>60</sup>Cronin, *The Florentine Renaissance*, 67.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 72

For anyone in a position of political power, foreign relations were just as important as domestic relations. Part of Lorenzo's job was to help maintain peace between all the Italian nations, a task that was easier said than done as each state had its own agendas and their own interests. At this time, Florence was heavily allied with the cities of Naples and Milan, a union known as the Triple Alliance or the Italian League dedicated to keeping the peace.<sup>62</sup> However, the issues of other cities would soon become the concerns of Florence, such as the riots in the town of Volterra.

At that time, Volterra was partially under Florentine influence, as the prefect that would be elected each six months would originate from Florence. Aside from this, Volterra was a self-governing town with their own magistrates.<sup>63</sup> However, the town had a history of internal and external conflicts. Therefore, as a means of protection, they submitted themselves to Florence, which meant they would be expected to adhere to any laws that were passed by Florence. This caused a certain amount of tension between Florence and Volterra, resulting in a series of revolts.

Near Volterra were several mines that consisted of deposits of alum, which had not been worked in some time. In 1471, a Sieneese man named Benuccio Capaccio proposed a plan to bring in a company to work the mines. In return, the company would pay an annual rent to the town.<sup>64</sup> The plan was approved, and the company was formed of men from various parts of Italy, including Volterra, Siena, and Florence. It was

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<sup>62</sup> Ady, *Lorenzo Dei Medici and Renaissance Italy*, 57.

<sup>63</sup> Edward Lee Stuart Horsburgh, *Lorenzo the Magnificent: And Florence in Her Golden Age*, Methuen & Company, (1909), 150.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 151.

believed by some, and confirmed by others, that Lorenzo had a stake in the company, though whether this was for his own personal advantage is unclear.

Over time, the agreement to let a company work the mines began to shift. The citizens of Volterra believed that those in the company were only interested in their own personal gain and that the mines were part of Volterra. They also claimed that the agreement of being paid rent by the company was illegal and achieved through false pretenses.<sup>65</sup> The company, not wanting things to escalate further, offered to pay Volterra even more in rent. As Volterra was under Florence's thumb, it was their decision on how to move forward. Florence chose to restore the agreement previously made, stating that anything found was considered Florentine property. However, the citizens of Volterra decided to act for themselves.

Soon, a riot began in which two shareholders of the company were killed, thus forcing Florence to intervene. It is not clear how involved Lorenzo was in Florence's intervention with Volterra, though many scholars have credited him with the end of the revolt. Fortunately, this civil war of sorts did not last longer than a month, with Volterra eventually surrendering. Not wanting to cause any more ill will, Lorenzo personally visited Volterra, lending a hand to those who survived the ordeal. Like Hercules was dedicated to protecting Deianira, among others, Lorenzo was dedicated to protecting and serving not only the citizens of Florence, but also those who lay outside the city's walls.

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 152.

### Section Three: Nessus

The figure of Nessus, which many may expect to be frightening or gruesome, is painted in a different manner. In the composition, Nessus is shown carrying Deianira in mid stride, his back hooves still visible through the water of the raging River Evenus below him. Looking at his face, he appears friendly, he looks to be almost smiling, as a way of appearing trustworthy to both Deianira and Hercules. He also looks as if he is trying to coax Deianira to come with him. From the waist down, Nessus' figure presents itself as an accurate depiction of that of a horse, a true testament to Pollaiuolo's abilities. However, from the waist up, the part of him that is a man, is odd. For example, Nessus' human abdomen appears slightly elongated as he turns at an odd angle to better grasp Deianira. Only one of his arms is visible, as it is seen reaching over Deianira's stomach, once again drawing the eyes of the viewers to that area to show how Deianira was pregnant, making it clear that he is a threat to this unborn child as well as her. However, in the painting's photograph in *The Burlington Magazine*, part of Nessus' hand can be seen coming from around Deianira's back, a detail now lost due to the restoration process, (Fig. 6).

The iconography of Nessus' figure is a topic that has not been discussed by many scholars. Although Vincent Cronin does suggest a philosophical interpretation. He proposes that Nessus represents the beast that lies within every man.<sup>66</sup> In other words, man's eternal struggle with himself. Alison Wright takes a similar approach, theorizing that Nessus is a representation of the irrational. She concludes that through Hercules'

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<sup>66</sup> Cronin, *The Florentine Renaissance*, 203.

defeat of the centaur, this victory takes on a rational overtone.<sup>67</sup> However, following the idea that Hercules is a representation of Lorenzo, and Deianira symbolizes the city of Florence, one can conclude that the figure of Nessus must represent someone or something that was a threat to both Lorenzo and Florence.

Throughout his political career, Lorenzo struggled to maintain his power as he was always under scrutiny. A part of this may be because he was only twenty years old when he ascended to head of the family. He was young, and truly did not possess any life experiences to help guide him.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, possibly because of his youth, Lorenzo approached his power with extreme caution. As F.W. Kent notes, Lorenzo worked hard on pleasing those who supported him, which is a part of his role as a political figure. However, this tactic may have also hurt Lorenzo's reputation as an affective and assertive leader, causing many questioning whether Lorenzo could manage such a level of responsibility. During the year of 1478, Lorenzo's struggle was at its worst. Over time, many came to resent Lorenzo and his family's dominion over Florence, viewing them as enemies of the state, forming rivalries and conspiracies to overthrow him. Chief among these conspiracies was one known as the Pazzi Conspiracy, which was formed by the rivaling Pazzi family.

The Pazzi family dates to the First Crusade, when in 1099, a warrior by the name of Pazzo Pazzi, obtained remarkable success. He returned home with three stones said to come from the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and his descendants would watch over these remnants that would be used every year to create new fire in the Cathedral of

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<sup>67</sup> Wright, *The Pollaiuolo Brothers: The Arts of Florence and Rome*, 102.

<sup>68</sup> Francis William Kent, *Lorenzo de' Medici and the Art of Magnificence*. Vol. 24. JHU Press, (2004), 45.

Florence.<sup>69</sup> This success in bravery continued throughout the several generations, resulting in the Pazzi family being one of the most respected families in Florence. Despite their noble reputation however, the Pazzi family, like the Medici family, were not blessed with good fortune from the beginning. It was not until the efforts of Andrea di Guglielmino de' Pazzi that the family achieved their wealthy status. And much like Giovanni de Averardo, Andrea de' Pazzi made his money through several business ventures, including land, farming, and owned multiple shares.<sup>70</sup> Also like the Medici family, the Pazzi family also owned a successful banking business, the Pazzi Bank, located in Rome. However, these were not the only aspects the two families had in common.

At one point in time, the two families were allies, thanks to the marriage of Lorenzo's sister Bianca to Guglielmo Pazzi. However, despite their familial ties, the Pazzi and Medici became heated enemies. This was due to Lorenzo robbing the Pazzi family of part of their fortune. Lorenzo invited Francesco de Pazzi, who managed the Pazzi bank in Rome, to Florence. It was revealed to Francesco that a law had just been passed that dealt with the estates of the deceased. What the law stated exactly is not clear, as it was drafted to truly make no sense to anyone.<sup>71</sup> Its only purpose was to take the money the Pazzi family had inherited from a previous marriage and give it to someone else in the family. The identity of this family member is unknown; however, it is stated that this new beneficiary had close ties to the Medici family. Naturally,

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<sup>69</sup> Lauro Martines, *April blood: Florence and the Plot Against the Medici*. (Oxford University Press, 2003), 62.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>71</sup> Charles L. Mee, *The Renaissance of Lorenzo De Medici*, [Newbury]: New Word City, Inc, (2013), 29.

Francesco was furious and never forgave Lorenzo. And his deceit only fueled the feeling of contempt the Pazzi family had for the Medici.

Another major part of being a political leader during the Florentine Renaissance was maintaining healthy relationships with other members of authority, such as the Pope. Francesco della Rovere was elected Pope and took the name Sixtus IV in 1471. When Lorenzo first ascended to power, the two figures got along well, and the Pope granted Lorenzo's family the honor of being the banker for the Papacy. However, over time the two would become enemies, and would have a series of disputes between them. This series of disputes began when Pope Sixtus IV began to make plans for the formation of a new state, which would be given to his nephew, Girolamo Riario.<sup>72</sup> Lorenzo made an agreement with the Duke of Milan, Galeazzo Sforza, where Sforza would sell to Lorenzo a town that would give Florence access to the new state the Pope was creating. When he found out about the agreement between Lorenzo and Sforza, the Pope ordered Sforza to end the deal. Sforza, ever the businessman, proposed a counteroffer in which he would sell to Pope Sixtus IV the desired town in exchange for a marriage between Sforza's daughter and the Pope's nephew.<sup>73</sup> The Pope then turned to Lorenzo for the money to pay Sforza, which Lorenzo made difficult to obtain. In retaliation, Pope Sixtus IV replaced Lorenzo as Papal Banker with Francesco de' Pazzi.

Girolamo Riario understood that Lorenzo still posed a threat to him, and quickly formed an alliance between the newly appointed Francesco de' Pazzi and Francesco Salviati, the Archbishop of Pisa and one of Lorenzo's rivals. They hired an assassin, a

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<sup>72</sup> Horsburgh, *Lorenzo the Magnificent: And Florence in Her Golden Age*, 166-167.

<sup>73</sup> Cronin, *The Florentine Renaissance*, 224.



man named Giovanni Battista da Montesecco, who was a former army captain, though he would later be replaced before the plot was executed. Montesecco was hesitant to join the conspiracy and would only do so with the blessing of the Pope.<sup>74</sup> The conspirators then went to talk to Pope Sixtus IV, who made it known that he was interested in a way of overthrowing Lorenzo. However, he also made it clear that he did not want any blood to be spilt.<sup>75</sup> Regardless, the Pope supported whatever plan the conspirators could devise so long as it resulted in an end to the Medici family reign over Florence.

The original plan was to only kill Lorenzo. The conspirators believed this would be an easier endeavor as Lorenzo could often be found alone. However, Lorenzo's brother, Giuliano was more popular than Lorenzo with the people. If Lorenzo were to be the only Medici to die, power would then shift over to Giuliano. Therefore, both Lorenzo and his brother were sentenced to die. Many plans were proposed to conduct the deed, each one falling through due to a variety of circumstances. For instance, the conspirators had trouble getting the Medici brothers alone in the same room. Another issue was figuring out where the assassination would take place.<sup>76</sup> At first, Lorenzo was invited to Rome on his own, meaning Giuliano would be assassinated somewhere else. However, Lorenzo declined the invitation. As a result, the conspirators were forced to travel to Florence and wait for the perfect moment. This moment would be made possible by a man named Rafaello Riario, who had recently been made cardinal and became the excuse to lure Lorenzo and his brother into the hands of the conspirators.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 225.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 225.

<sup>76</sup> Ady, *Lorenzo Dei Medici and Renaissance Italy*, 67.

The Pazzi Conspiracy took place during High Mass on Sunday morning, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1478. By this time, Montesecco had met Lorenzo on an assignment from Riario, and found Lorenzo to be friendly and decided he could not go through with the plan to assassinate the reigning Medici. As a result, four other men were tasked with the role of murdering the Medici. Two priests were charged with disposing of Lorenzo, while Francesco de' Pazzi and Bernardo Bandini, a business associate of the Pazzi family, killed Giuliano.

According to various accounts, Lorenzo only sustained minor injuries. He was near the choir of the cathedral when he was attacked. However, his assassins were not well versed in swords. Thankfully, this allowed Lorenzo to defend himself to some degree. Still, Lorenzo suffered many blows to his person. Lorenzo was able to break free of the conspirators and ran into the safety of friends of his nearby in the cathedral. At some point during the altercation, Lorenzo had been cut at the neck, which one of his friends sucked at in case the weapon had been previously poisoned.<sup>77</sup> His brother Giuliano, however, took the brunt of the assault. He was first stabbed in the chest with a dagger that was wielded by Bandini. Next, Francesco Pazzi began to repeatedly stab Giuliano, resulting in twenty stab wounds.

A trace amount of Nessus' blood was able to bring down the mighty Hercules. Those who conspired against Lorenzo believed that shedding his blood would be enough to bring down the Medici family. Nessus was able to trick Deianira into betraying her husband, and the conspirators believed that all of Florence would revolt against the Medici family. However, this was not the case, as the assassination plot received strong

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 68.

backlash. When word spread of the assassination attempt on Lorenzo and of Giuliano's death, citizens rushed to assure Lorenzo's safety. In their minds, an attack on Lorenzo was equivalent to an attack on Florence. However, Florence was not the only figure to be offended by the conspirators.

Once Montesecco learned that the assassination would take place in the cathedral, he began to have second thoughts about the whole idea. To murder the two Medici brothers was already a treasonous act. However, by doing so in a place worship, was considered an act of sacrilege. In the end, Montesecco chose to not go through with the plot, to him, it was unthinkable to commit such an act, and he accused the conspirators of having no respect for religion or God.<sup>78</sup> It likely that for this reason, as well as the Medici family being so respectable, that the conspirators were not able to win the favor of the people. In their minds, an attack such as this was viewed as a heinous crime against God. And like Deianira did not intend to cause Hercules any harm, the citizens of Florence had no intentions of hurting Lorenzo.

As stated previously, Deianira's states her feelings of anger and resentment toward the various women in Hercules' life, such as Iole and Queen Omphale of Lydia, who Hercules served as a slave during his year of purification. She believes that these women, who her husband consistently chooses over her, will be the downfall of her husband. According to the Herculean myth, during his year of servitude to Queen Omphale, who Hercules married at some point, the hero was forced to endure the humiliating task of dressing like the Lydian queen and helping her ladies-in-waiting with

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<sup>78</sup> Victoria Loucks, "Religious Backlash Against the Pazzi Conspiracy," By Neil Wilson, Editor in *Chief, The Future of History*, 7.

their spinning.<sup>79</sup> To Deianira, this other woman was ruining her husband's reputation as being a masculine hero, not yet knowing that it is herself who will permanently destroy him.

However, later in the letters, Deianira also states her anger at Hercules for allowing this to happen to himself, stating that it is he who is the problem.<sup>80</sup> This is the type of reaction that the conspirators against Lorenzo wanted all of Florence to have. Like Nessus when he first encountered Hercules and Deianira, the Pazzi family presented themselves as friendly, with only interest in the general welfare of Florence. However, also like Nessus, whose words of deceit rang in Deianira's ears as she watched her marriage begin to crumble, the Pazzi family waited for a moment of weakness between Lorenzo and Florence. After the assassination attempt failed, a member of the Pazzi family by the name of Jacopo de Pazzi rode through the streets of Florence yelling "Liberty! Liberty!" to get the Florentine citizens to revolt. Instead, the citizens replied with a variety of cheers ranging from "Palle!" which were part of the Medici family coat of arms, or "The Medici!" and "Down with traitors!"<sup>81</sup> To add injury to insult, Jacopo de Pazzi was also pelted with stones. However, he was able to escape, first the mob and then the city.

Naturally, the aftermath of the assassination attempt was devastating. A recorded number of 270 conspirators were either killed, sent into exile, or their reputations completely soiled. Many of the conspirators were able to escape the city, as

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<sup>79</sup> Rowland, "The Desperation of Deianira: 'Heroides' 9 and Early Modern Translation," 2.

<sup>80</sup> Casali, "Tragic Irony in Ovid, Heroides 9 and 11," 1.

<sup>81</sup> Edward Armstrong, *Lorenzo de' Medici and Florence in the Fifteenth Century*, Vol. 16. Putnam, (1896), 133.

Jacopo de Pazzi had. Other members of the family were not as lucky. During the attack on Giuliano, Francesco de Pazzi accidentally stabbed himself. After fleeing the scene, he went back to the family home where he stayed until he was arrested. Other members thought to be a part of the conspiracy include Francesco's two brothers, nephew, and several of his cousins.<sup>82</sup> However, the Pazzi that were in custody had offered no confession to the crimes they were accused of. As a result, certain tactics were required to get the conspirators to talk.

During the fifteenth century, there was an organization known as The Eight, which was founded a century prior, that functioned as Florence's police. Many found the organization unnecessary, however since the Eight had the support of the Medici family, any opposition was quickly put down.<sup>83</sup> It fell to this organization to draw out a confession from any of the Pazzi family members under custody. Like the various councils that served Lorenzo, the Eight were elected to their positions every four months. However, as this was a special case, Lorenzo, and a close friend of his served as two of the eight members, though what their exact roles were is unclear. It is more than likely Lorenzo simply lead any investigations or interrogations. The Eight were known for their way of gleaning information. They utilized what were known as *tamburi*, which were wooden boxes that were placed outside churches.<sup>84</sup> Citizens were able to anonymously accuse their fellow man of certain wrongdoings, and if their convictions were proven to be true, they would receive an award for their services to the city. This is more than likely how Lorenzo retrieved the evidence he needed to convict the

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<sup>82</sup> Martines, *April blood: Florence and the Plot against the Medici*, 198.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 197.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 198.

conspirators of treason, though it is possible other tactics that were far crueler could have been used, though there is no evidence to support this.

According to records, Messer Jacopo, the uncle of Francesco de Pazzi, confessed “without torture,” however this was untrue. Jacopo was tortured and stated that it was the inheritance scandal that motivated him to join the conspiracy.<sup>85</sup> Regardless of the methods used to obtain his confession, Lorenzo had all the proof he needed. Afterwards, Jacopo was hung with several other Pazzi family members, who were not given a trial. Furthermore, the Pazzi family’s reputation was dragged through the mud. The family’s name was erased from all public records, a process known as *damnatio memoriae*. Their coat of arms ripped from buildings, their valuables were seized and sold at auctions.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, women in the family were also punished as they were denied marriages and had to fight to keep their property. And any members who were fortunate enough to survive this ordeal were forced to change their surnames.<sup>87</sup> Francesco de Pazzi, his uncle, and his cousin Renato were all hanged for treason. Lorenzo was also attempted to have his brother-in-law, Guglielmo executed as well. However, Lorenzo’s sister Bianca came to his defense and convinced Lorenzo of his innocence, however he and other members of the Pazzi family who were not executed were sentenced into exile and forced to leave Florence.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Armstrong, *Lorenzo de'Medici and Florence in the Fifteenth Century*, 134.

<sup>86</sup> Martines, *April Blood: Florence and the Plot Against the Medici*, 102.

<sup>87</sup> Marta Celati, "The Conflict After the Pazzi Conspiracy and Poliziano's 'Coniurationis Commentarium': Literature, Law and Politics." In *Forum Italicum*, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 327-349, (Sage UK: London, England: SAGE Publications, 2019), 6.

<sup>88</sup> Armstrong, *Lorenzo de'Medici and Florence in the Fifteenth Century*, 137.

Eight days after the conspiracy failure, Montesecco, who the conspirators originally chose as an assassin, also confessed to the crime, even though he did not take part in it. According to his confession, he was weary of the plot from the beginning, not understanding why anyone would plot against the Medici family. He understood that murdering the Medici brothers in Florence was a serious offense and was unsure how it would be possible. He also did not believe that the citizens of Florence would tolerate such a crime. He goes on to state how he was told that Lorenzo was not as well-liked as some many believed him to be. He was told that the citizens would be thankful to the conspirators.<sup>89</sup> Afterwards, Montesecco's confession was published and circulated as a way of demonstrating how the Pope was against the city of Florence.

Though Lorenzo was responsible for many of his conspirators' deaths, the citizens of Florence took matters into their own hands. For instance, the two priests who failed to kill Lorenzo escaped to the Benedictine Abbey of Florence until a mob seized the building and brought the two men into the authorities for confession.<sup>90</sup> Justice took longer to be served for other members of the conspiracy. Bernardo Bandini escaped to another part of the cathedral after the assault. Once he was sure he would no longer be detected, he somehow made his way all the way to Constantinople, where he was able to reside in for at least a year. However, the Sultan at that time, Mohammed II discovered Bandini's identity and relayed a message to Lorenzo, who sent a distant family member to retrieve Bandini and bring him back to Florence in chains and he was eventually hanged.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Martines, *April Blood: Florence and the Plot Against the Medici*, 153

<sup>90</sup> Horsburgh, *Lorenzo the Magnificent: And Florence in Her Golden Age*, 207.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 207.

The Pope's nephew, Girolamo Riario, was outraged when he heard the assassination plot had failed. He immediately ordered the arrest of the Florentine ambassador, though his imprisonment would not last long due to the efforts of the Venetian and Milanese representatives who reminded Riario the ambassador had diplomatic immunity. Pope Sixtus IV, when informed of the news, at first was sympathetic towards Lorenzo. However, he soon became just as furious as Riario, as he issued a decree that completely excommunicated Lorenzo, listing all the issues he had with the reigning Medici.<sup>92</sup> To make matters worse, the Pope declared a war against Florence, with Naples, under the rule of King Ferrante on his side, which was no longer interested in its alliance with Florence.

Pope Sixtus IV became the driving force of the war against Lorenzo and Florence. He continued to put pressure on the city, stating that if Florence wanted to return to the Papacy's good graces, all the city needed to do was expel Lorenzo.<sup>93</sup> In a meeting attended by Lorenzo, he offered to have himself exiled or killed if it meant that Florence would be safe from harm. Though Lorenzo had a lot of enemies, he had more friends as the city and the Republic chose to stand by him. By mid-summer, troops from Naples were beginning to invade. From that moment, the city was engaged in war.

Along with Florence, many foreign powers stood with Lorenzo in his war against the pope. These included Milan and Venice, who were among the first to send help to Florence. Bologna also lent support to Florence, gladly offering safe passage to those coming to Lorenzo's aid, despite several protests from the Papacy.<sup>94</sup> King Louis XI of

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 220.

<sup>93</sup> Ady, *Lorenzo Dei Medici and Renaissance Italy*, 72.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 73.



France was also sympathetic to Lorenzo's cause, though he was unable to provide any assistance. Lorenzo, after making sure his family was well protected outside the walls of Florence, stayed behind to help keep up with both supplies and finances for the war. However, it became increasingly obvious that Florence could not make it through another war. To prevent any more bloodshed, Lorenzo made the decision to travel to Naples and plead his case to make peace.

For some time, peace seemed unobtainable, and it was debated whether Lorenzo would have to travel to Rome and speak with Pope Sixtus IV personally, which Lorenzo was seriously considering. However, many warned him that this would more than likely result in his death.<sup>95</sup> However, a peaceful agreement had been made without Lorenzo having to meet with the Pope, though the latter still excommunicated Florence until sometime in the summer of 1480. However, the Ottoman Empire was beginning to become a threat to Italy and eventually, the Pope reunited Florence with the Church and the alliance between Florence, Milan and Naples was redeemed. Unlike Hercules, Lorenzo did not gain immortality. However, after the failed assassination, Lorenzo's popularity skyrocketed. After an agreement of peace was reached, Lorenzo returned to Florence and lived for another twelve years until his death in 1492. And the Medici family would go on to rule over Florence for another two to three centuries, spreading their influence throughout other parts of Europe such as France and Spain. One of Lorenzo's own children would be elected to the Papacy, further heightening the family's power.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 78.

## The Results

Antonio Pollaiuolo's *Hercules and Deianira*, created between 1475 and 1480, is a narrative composition, as it tells a part of two stories featuring two heroic figures. The first story is that of Hercules, as he rescues his new bride, Deianira, from the hands of Nessus the centaur, in one action-packed scene. However, this painting also tells part of the story of Lorenzo de Medici, who ruled over the city of Florence, Italy for twenty-three years. Lorenzo strongly identified with the famed mythical hero and commissioned a variety of works that would emphasize his power. These works include *Hercules and the Nemean Lion*, *Hercules and the Hydra* and *Hercules and Antaeus*.

Like Hercules, Lorenzo went through a series of trials and tribulations during his life and political career that would evaluate his ability to rule over Florence. However, through the *Hercules and Deianira* painting especially, Lorenzo was able to present himself as a strong and effective leader. Throughout history, Hercules has been viewed as a "virtuous man," setting the standards for men, not only during the time of Ancient Greece, but during the Renaissance as well. Like Hercules, men were expected to be strong, courageous, and virile, qualities that Lorenzo wanted associated with himself. However, he was also able to show himself as a devoted leader, not only to his family, but his city as well. Lorenzo dedicated his life and career to protecting the city of Florence, which is represented by the figure of Deianira, a character who, like Florence, was surrounded by conflict and controversial circumstances. These controversies, chief among them being the Pazzi Conspiracy of 1478, which plotted to overthrow Lorenzo and his family, are portrayed through the figure of the centaur Nessus. Through his commission of the *Hercules and Deianira* painting, Lorenzo was able to portray himself

as the protector of Florence, as Hercules has always been perceived to be. Lorenzo was also able to convey a time in his relationship with his city when it was strained and facing its toughest issue. Though the events that occur within the *Hercules and Deianira* painting result in the death of Hercules, the message Lorenzo de Medici wanted to convey is clear. Through his commission of *Hercules and Deianira* by Antonio Pollaiuolo, Lorenzo proclaims that no matter what obstacles he faces, whether they come from internal or external enemies, his love for Florence and its citizens will never end.

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## Illustrations



Figure 1 Antonio Pollaiuolo, *Hercules and Deianira*, ca. 1475-1480, 54.6 x 79.2 centimeters, oil on canvas transferred from panel, Yale University Art Gallery.

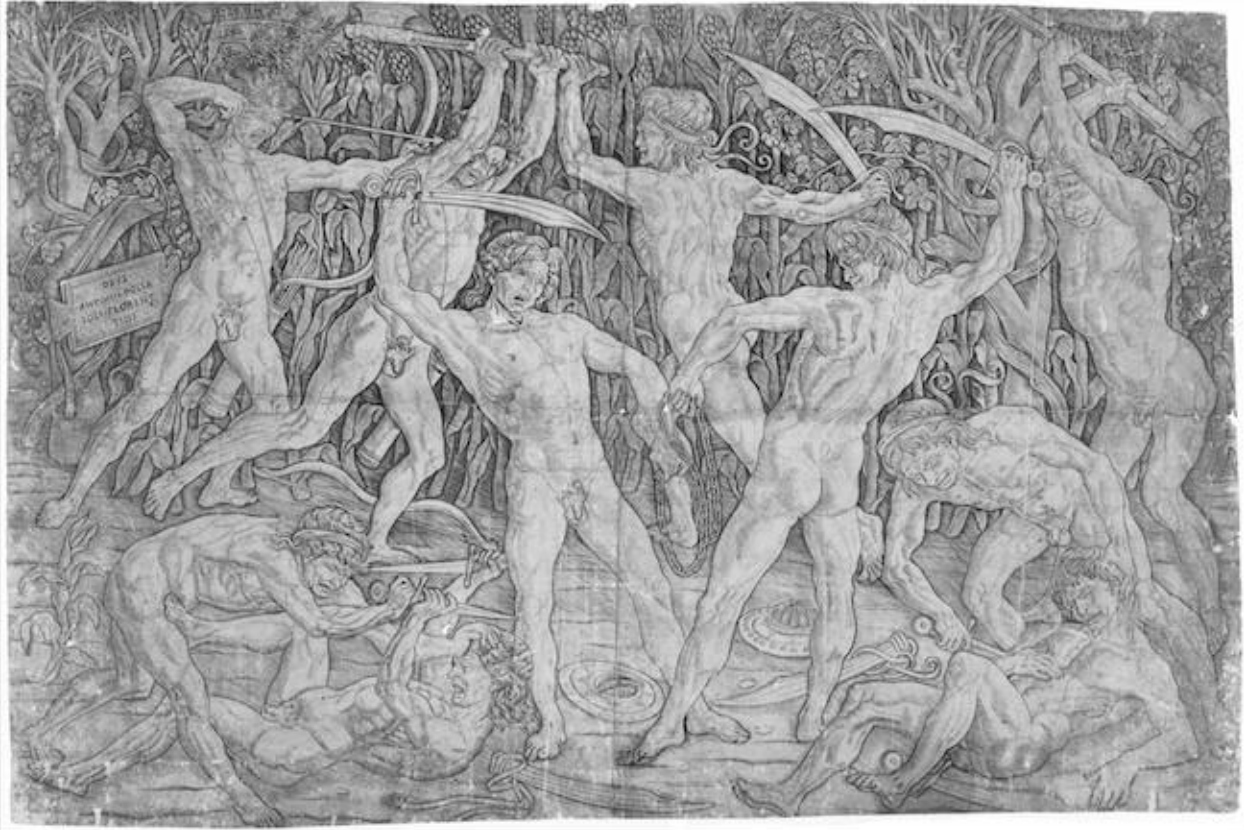


Figure 2 Antonio Pollaiuolo, *Battle of Ten Nudes*, c. 1470-1490, 40 x 58 centimeters, engraving, Yale University Art Gallery.





Figure 3 Antonio Pollaiuolo *Hercules and the Hydra*, c. 1460, 15.7 x 12 centimeters, oil on canvas, Uffizi Gallery.



Figure 4 Antonio Pollaiuolo *Hercules and Antaeus*, c. 1460, 16 x 9 centimeters, oil on canvas, Uffizi Gallery



Figure 5, Detail of *Hercules and Deianira*.



Figure 6, *Hercules and Deianira*, as it appeared in *The Burlington Magazine*, 1906.