



The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's "Primavera" and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent

Charles Dempsey

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Widely acknowledged as a prime manifestation of Florentine humanist culture under Lorenzo de' Medici, Botticelli's *Primavera* cannot be fully interpreted without considering the poetics that expressed the Laurentian cultural program and, in turn, the Renaissance itself. In this analysis Charles Dempsey examines the poetry written by Lorenzo and his literary clients in order to give definition to the cultural context in which the *Primavera* was created. A celebration of Love, the painting is shown to incorporate both public and private imaginative realms while embracing the ideal and the actual experiences of the present.

The *Primavera*, depicting Venus as the spirit of Love and springtime, is simultaneously old-fashioned and modern, rooted in International-Style vernacular conventions and evincing a nascent classical vocabulary. After describing the profoundly humanist classical foundation of the invention of the *Primavera*, Dempsey identifies its genre with rustic song, then relates the painting to the conventions of vernacular love poetry. A close reading of the painting in relation to works by Lorenzo, Politian, Pulci, and other poets working to elevate vernacular expression by infusing native Tuscan with Latin forms suggests how the idea of Love portrayed by Botticelli in the form of Venus incorporates not only the ancient springtime *renovatio mundi* but also the actual cultural renovation--the Renaissance--imagined and sponsored by Lorenzo the Magnificent.

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