

“Lorenzo’s Mask”

Auburn University, February 28th, 2006

Mary Watt, University of Florida

“Quant’ e’ bella la giovinezza,

che si fugge tuttavia!

Chi vuol esser lieto, sia:

Di doman non c’e’ certezza.

“How beautiful is youth, which is so eternally fleeting!

He who wishes to be happy, let him be so: tomorrow holds no certainty.”

The author of these words knew only too well how true they were. When Lorenzo de’ Medici – Lorenzo the Magnificent wrote them in 1490 as part of the Florentine carnevale celebration, he had only two years remaining in his own life. Medici sovereignty was being challenged by the religious zealot Savonarola whose own regime, established after Lorenzo’s death, ended with Savonarola burnt to death at a stake in the Center of the Piazza della Signoria, an ironic end to the man who had instigated the infamous bonfire of the vanities. But before Savonarola’s threat, Lorenzo had been made well aware of the fleeting nature of youth when twelve years earlier he had witnessed the murder of his younger brother Giuliano in a bloody attempt by the Pazzi family to seize Florentine power. Lorenzo had survived the attack himself but the fallout of what came to be known as *La Congiura dei Pazzi*, or the *Pazzi Conspiracy*, was overwhelming. The

interrogations, executions and expulsions that followed forever changed the perception of Lorenzo's Florence. What had been developing into a Neoplatonic utopia, center of pastoral poetry, and a return to the fabled Golden Age of myth, had now been revealed as a your garden variety fledgling city state trying desperately to manage the power struggle that inevitably destroys such apparent utopia. From Athens to Camelot, the stories have always been the same.

It is the fleeting nature not only of youth but also of such Golden Ages of which Lorenzo's friend Angelo Poliziano wrote in his troubling pastoral play *Orfeo*, a Renaissance rewriting of the classical myth of Orpheus. Written after the death of Giuliano, Poliziano's disturbing tale of love lost forever, and a world changed irrevocably by one wrong move, a single backwards glance, reflects the inner turmoil of the Medicean circle in the aftermath of the death of Florence's "golden boy." Only months earlier Poliziano had been writing *Stanze per le Giostre* (Verses for the Jousts) in which Giuliano was touted as the true heir to Aeneas, a beautiful carefree youth whose blood now stained the floor of a Florentine house of worship. Poliziano's *Orpheus* bears many similarities to Lorenzo's song. To start with both pieces would have been performed only during Carnevale time and as such represent good examples of the carnevalesque or *carnescialesco* in Italian. Both pieces, for example, close with an invitation to worship Bacchus. In Poliziano's work the call comes only after Orpheus himself is torn apart limb from limb in surely one of the bloodiest pieces of Italian Renaissance Literature. Lorenzo's song is less explicit in its awareness of the negative aspects of life from which one seeks to escape in the arms of oblivion. His subtle reference to the uncertainty of tomorrow euphemizes the violence that lurked beneath the surface of the well-ordered

state. Poliziano is much more explicit, broadly acknowledging that even in the most bucolic of settings death and destruction is rarely far away. The two pieces then when viewed together may be seen as the embodiment of the antithetical yet symbiotic elements that most characterize the Carnevale season, its impulse through a variety of devices to both escape and confront the realities of a given society. Through those elements most frequently associated with its celebration, masquerade, reversal of social roles, intoxication and fabrication, Carnevale both reveals and conceal the harshest of truths.

Poliziano used his *Orfeo* to reveal the chaos that lay just beneath the surface while Lorenzo through his song, and indeed through his whole socio-cultural program tried his best to mask it. Renaissance Florence in this respect thus characterized that difficult balancing game in which the wielding of power must be executed with such sleight of hand so as to make its almost invisible, or risk the revelation of the hammer it truly yields. The Medicean monopoly was effective as long as people were unaware of just how effective it was. In other words, Lorenzo's power had depended on the appearance of its absence and the success of his regime was highly dependent upon an elegant masquerade. The Pazzi conspiracy and its aftermath revealed the extent of the ordinariness of Florence and in so doing destroyed its magic. Lorenzo's mask, the mask of benevolence, of munificence, of his magnificence had been pulled irretrievably from his very human face. And his invitation to drink and forget, ironically demonstrates just how difficult it was not to remember in the absence of an imposed or artificial oblivion. In this respect Florence in the time of the Medici regime epitomizes the very essence of the carnival season, and both demonstrates its role and explains its continued success in

the administration of a well-ordered, well-behaved, hierarchical society. Carnevale, as we shall see, recognizes the utility of willful blindness coupled with the intentional masking of reality to create a moment in time, a day or week in which humans might be released from the harsh realities and such messes as the Pazzi conspiracy, from the domestic disputes, economic woes, and impending political chaos, to eat, drink and be merry.

But while Lorenzo's song shows us that he understood well the importance of letting the Florentines blow off a little steam, he was also acutely aware of the power of words and entertainment to create illusion or at very least to propagate an ideal. It is thus not surprising that we see in Lorenzo's Florence a great flowering of Italian vernacular drama. Renaissance Florence excelled in the production, for example, of the *Sacra Rappresentazione*, religious dramas based on religious legends, lives of the saints or episodes taken from the Bible itself. These plays, performed in the pre-Lenten season, were very often financed and sometimes written by Lorenzo himself and were performed by confraternities, lay religious societies devoted to good works and public displays of piety and penitence. A popular subject of such plays was the prodigal son in which the adventures of the prodigal are broadly dramatized such that the audience sees first hand the extent to which the son squandered his inheritance. These carnival time plays abounded with scenes of gambling, brawling and womanizing as well as the dismal lows to which the son sinks. The entire play, of course, is geared to the ultimate humbling of the son as he feeds pigs and eats the scraps they leave behind, and the audience is happy when the son returns to the forgiving arms of his padre/ padron. In one of the most famous versions, that of Castellano Castellani, the playwright takes liberties with the

parable found in the gospel of Matthew and suggests that it was the prodigal's nasty cheating friends, the bad boys, who urged him to ask for his inheritance thus demonstrating not only the symbiosis of humility and forgiveness but also clearly making explicit to the Florentine youth, both in the audience and those performing the play, the importance of choosing one's friends wisely. The prodigal's return to the benevolent father and the feasting that ensues (a fatted calf is, of course, killed and eaten) provides a marvelously apt piece for this season of feasting but it carries a deep message central to Florentine notions of civic humanism, the enduring goodness and abundance of the *padron*. Lorenzo is, of course, the providing father outside of whose walls lies fraud, hunger and disappointment, one need not stray; the father will provide. And a return is always possible provided one is prepared to humble oneself, admit one's faults and acknowledge defeat. The theatricality of the *rappresentazione*, truth wrapped in a fiction, acted out on a Renaissance stage, is the very essence of the purpose of parable but it is also the essence of the Carnevale, that in the masquerade and oblivion there lies, ironically, perhaps the greatest of truths.

As a *canto carnescialesco*, Lorenzo's song quoted above, speaks to the importance of forgetting about tomorrow if only for today. While it urges the celebrants to seize the day, this is hardly the *carpe diem* philosophy of purist neoplatonist thought which characterized seizing the day as a means of securing tomorrow. Rather the composition, entitled *Canzona* or *Song of Bacchus*, urges us to obliterate tomorrow, to bow to the god of wine, to drink, to forget. In Lorenzo's song, he offers the carnival revelers a means of seizing the past or Golden Age, recreating it through oblivion, through the eradication of worry, through the consumption of the liberating libations. In

wine there is truth, and the truth is that the Golden Age exists but we can find it only outside of ordinary time, outside of time and space. It exists and in one shining moment, in which the oblivion of Bacco, the frenetic singing of a carnival song, eradicates the artificiality of the rest of the world. In Lorenzo's time, as in our own and in the Roman era a thousand years before him, the carnevale time was an inversion in which, ironically, the wearing of a mask no longer constitutes deception but rather urges a revelation. In the donning of a carnival mask we reveal our true desires. The woman who dresses as a man, the man who dresses a woman, the princess costume, the action hero, all speak to an inner truth revealed in an exterior falsity.

For Lorenzo, Carnevale was the means by which he could continue to persuade the Florentines that the Golden Age did indeed exist and that it was theirs to seize. That he used Carnevale to do so, speaks to the prominent position that holiday occupied in Renaissance Florence. But the roots of Carnevale go back well back to the original purveyors of bread and circuses, from whom Lorenzo often sought inspiration for the construction of his own society. And so let us return for a moment to Ancient Rome, for in studying the history of Carnevale celebrations, we might better understand the role it played in the propagation of civic ideals and pacification of a potentially grumpy populace not only in Lorenzo's time but also in our own.

While historians are not in complete agreement as to the origins of Carnevale, most agree that it has undeniable similarities to the Roman festival of Saturnalia. This feast, celebrated in honor of the God Saturn, the Roman version of the Greek God of Time, Kronos, coincided with the Winter Solstice and, therefore, fell typically somewhere around December 21 or 22. The day marks the return of the sun and the

consequent lengthening of the days. In the Roman harvest year it also typically marked the completion of the autumn planting. In addition to the Saturnalia, this particular time of the year also saw the celebration of the festival of Sol Invicta, unconquered sun, and in many cases the traditions associated with the Saturnalia and the feast of Sol Invicta overlap and fuse.

During the Saturnalia, the priests in the Temple of Saturn loosened the woolen bindings on the statue of the God, representing his liberation for the duration of the festival. We can see a clear connection between the notion of releasing the bonds of time and the same sentiment as expressed in Lorenzo's poem.

Parties were held in which images of Saturn were hoisted above the crowds and cries of "Io, Saturnalia" whipped the crowd up into a frenzy. The Romans changed the direction of the streets for the duration of the holiday and there was a large public banquet held at the Temple where celebrants often exchanged small earthenware figures that were sold during the festival. Significantly, among the most popular souvenirs of the Quebec Carnaval is the traditional small figure of "Bonnehomme Carnaval," a rotund white figure in a soft red cap, who looks like a mix of the Michelin man, a snowman and a jolly Pulcinello. Other gifts exchanged were small candles, obviously representative of the return of the light and whose exchange in the Christmas season is still popular.

Most significantly, during the holiday civic restrictions were relaxed and the social order was inverted. Often slaves were masters for the day and the masters were slaves for the day, waiting on the dinner table while the slaves dined at their leisure. During such pantomimes the masters of the houses typically dressed as slaves or as freedmen including the felt cap worn by freedmen. This soft cap, the *pilleus* thus also

represented the release or liberation associated with the holiday. The paper party hats traditionally worn at Christmas and at New Year's parties trace their origin to the *pilleus* of the Roman celebrations. During Saturnalia gambling was allowed in public and even slaves were allowed to partake. Not surprisingly, the Saturnalia was the most popular holiday of the Roman Year. Seneca's complaint that during the Saturnalia the "whole mob has let itself go in pleasures" might still be applicable to some of the more frenetic partying associated with the Carnival in Rio or the Mardi Gras in New Orleans, in particular the way in which some celebrants earn the colorful souvenir beads.

During the Saturnalia, each household would choose a *Saturnalicus Princeps* (Master of the Saturnalia) and this "Lord of Misrule" was free to order others to do his bidding. This tradition is still evident in the selection of the King and Queen of Carnevale.

In Cicero's time, the festival of Saturnalia lasted from December 17 to 23. Augustus tried to reduce the holiday to three days to limit the number of days during which the courts would be closed, but Caligula extended it to five. Historical accounts, however, suggest that most people nonetheless celebrated for a full week. In the first century Statius proclaimed, "Never shall age destroy so holy a day!" By the Middle of the fourth century, the festival had been so extended in length and had become such an important part of Roman identity that even the advent of Christianity did not terminate its celebration. Instead, the winter solstice was simply associated with the birth of Christ when in 336 Christmas was officially set as December 25th. The fusion of the pagan and the Christian celebrations allowed the continuation of a socially important Roman celebration and effected a figural association of the return of the sun and the birth of the

Christian Light of the World. The Saturnalia festivities saw little interruption even with the regularization of the liturgical calendar when the Christmas period was set as the twelve days of Christmas from December 12 to the Epiphany, January 6. Carnevale began immediately thereafter and continued until the day before Ash Wednesday. Yet even in the face of the division of the holiday into Christmas and Carnevale, some of the older recorded celebrations (we have records of Venetian carnival dating to 1097) made no distinction in the two holidays. It is not surprising then to see an overlap of many of the Christmas traditions with Carnevale traditions. It is also not surprising that the earlier start of Carnival occurs most often in cities with Roman heritage, in Italy for example one is more likely to find the Carnevale commencing on St. Stephen's day attesting to the Roman origins of the festival and its pre-Christian celebration.

Indeed, it would appear that notwithstanding its absorption into the Christian the holiday retained a distinctively secular character. Indeed as its connections to the Roman deities faded, rather than adopting devotion to Christian virtues the holiday seemed to expand ever more into the secular sphere, emphasizing the social characteristics of the Roman era, such as the reversal of social order, and, at the same time, was used increasingly for socio-political ends. The animal sacrifices associated with the Saturnalia for example, continued to form part of the Venetian celebrations but became more and more associated with political victories over enemies of La Serenissima. During the reign of Pope Hadrian IV the Venetians celebrated a pivotal victory over the patriarch of Grado through the annual sacrifice of 12 well-fed pigs and a bull. That the sacrifice took place on the Thursday of Carneval attests to the continuing association of Carnevale and animal sacrifice.

But it was not only in Venice that animal sacrifices and political motifs colored the Carnevale celebrations. In Paris during medieval carnevale a fat ox, crowned with a fillet, was paraded through the streets. The ox was accompanied by mock priest and a band of tin instruments in imitation of a Roman sacrificial procession. Similar instances of animal sacrifice often with political connotations occur in other European settings as well. In England, as late as the 1700's cock throwing and various activities associated with killing roosters persisted. The Gentlemen's Magazine in 1737 reported that "battering with massive weapons a cock tied to a stake, is an annual diversion." Apparently though, it was not always so much fun as the Newcastle Courant reported in March 15, 1783. According to the report on the Tuesday evening of that week, it "being shrovetide, a person was amusing himself along with several others, with the barbarous custom of throwing a cock, at Howdon Clough, near Birstall, the stick pitched upon the head of Jonathan Speight, a youth about thirteen years of age, and killed him on the spot." The man who threw the stick was apparently detained and in York Castle prison but the point (no pun intended) is that such animal sacrifices which have no apparent relation to Christian revelry provide strong evidence of the pagan origin as of Carnevale. Moreover the fact that England was by this time firmly Protestant strongly precludes a Roman Catholic origin for such practices and suggests most strongly that the animal sacrifice had a meaning other than religious. Indeed the same Gentleman's Magazine essayist notes that cock bashing was "introduced by way of contempt to the French, and to exasperate the minds of the people against that nation." As in the Venetian case, the animal sacrifice then is rooted in the political and its coincidence of its timing with Carnevale suggests that the Shrovetide celebrations, especially in staunchly protestant

England, were not perceived a construct of popery but rather belonged either to a more distant past or served a purpose other than Roman Catholic liturgical observation. Instead the criticism of the French played out in the battering of its national symbol suggests that an integral part of Carnevale celebration is the ability to act out political opposition and social criticism. The commencement of the Lenten immediately following Carnevale was an innovation of the Christian calendar that had not existed when the holiday was celebrated as Saturnalia. The imposition of a distinct end to the holiday underlined the temporary nature of the Carnevale and created a sense of urgency to the last few days of celebration. Faced with an impending period of fasting and prayers, communities throughout Catholic Europe developed their own Carnevale traditions in addition to those carried over from Roman times, Shrove Tuesday was also characterized by the dice and card playing as well as mumming, that is, masquerade. Most often, however, the pre-lenten period is characterized by an emphasis on the pleasures of the flesh, so that in addition to the cart racing and bullfights which were popular parts of the holidays, indulging in sexual activity, in some cases veritable orgies, and rich food came to characterize Carnevale as much as the displays of political or military superiority discussed above. The imposition of fasting thus contrasts with the gorging of Carnevale, and in fact it is the imposition of the Christian Lenten period that gives the pagan festival its Christian name. *Carnevale* is derived from the Latin, farewell to meat. Some scholars have posited that have that it also comes from a combination of the Latin “*carne*” for meat and “*levare*” to remove, so that *carnilevamen* eventually became the Italian word *carnevale* but in either event in the Christian era, the portent of the return to the harshness of fasting and the strictures of penitence add an urgency to the

festival that was absent in its pagan origins. Ironically the specter of Lent, may actually have added to the lasciviousness, licentiousness and general gluttony of the Carnevale season. Yet the awareness of the coming season of fasting is one of the ways in which the Christian Carnevale has evolved away from its pagan origins, where the festival simply ended and, while the social order returned to normal, there was no countervailing period of deprivation. Thus while the pagan festival was associated with feasting and drinking, the fact that starting Ash Wednesday there will be no more meat, no more fats, no more sweets has lent a particular character to those foods typically associated with Carnevale. The best obvious of the carnival foods therefore are meats. In England people traditionally ate bacon meat and black puddings on the last day of Carnevale (in England called Shrove Tuesdays in recognition of the shricing or penitence that follows.) But the unavailability of meat for most of the populace of the Middle Ages meant that it was not consumed in particularly large portions during Carnevale in any event. Fried foods on the other hand were available to most classes and as such the fried food and in particular fried sweets have become the hallmark of Carnevale indulgences. Doughnuts and pancakes and any other assortment of fritters have been prepared during Carnevale since the Middle Ages. In Germany for example, celebrants eat diamond shaped yeast raised potato pastries that are deep fried like doughnuts. In Finland the Mardi Gras pastry is a bun filled with almond paste and whipped cream. In New Orleans, the king cake reigns and in English countries pancakes are prepared using the last sugar, eggs and oil permitted before Lent. In Italy however, the real king of all Carnevale pastries are the *fritelle*. According to the Italian gastronome, Maffioli, they have their origins in ancient China. The presumption is that they were brought back from the orient by merchants

such as the famous Venetian Marco Polo. And while this could well be true, it is also unlikely that even before such time the Italians did not have a fried pre-lenten sweet. But it does make a nice story. The classic *fritelle*, in their simplest form are small spherical leavened doughnuts fried in lard, though more and more, vegetable oil is being used. After they are retrieved from the fat, they receive a sprinkling of powdered sugar and then in most case they are pretty much inhaled. The sooner they are eaten the better. The oldest extant recipes date to the Renaissance and incorporate goat's milk, rose water and saffron. Another variation leaves the *fritelle* plain but stuffs them with zabaglione. In Siena, during Carnevale, *fritelle* are prepared in the Piazza del Campo. Where sellers set up large drums of lard, heated over open fires. The Sienese *fritelle* are made from a fermented rice paste and are coated with powdered sugar or sugar and cinnamon straight out of the fat, and sold by the dozen. Yet as delightful as these indulgences are they are tempered by the knowledge that once Ash Wednesday rolls around it will not be until Epiphany that the oil vats will be seen again. This adds to the urgency and again ironically, makes the reveler acutely aware of the passage of time the closer he gets to the height of this celebration of timelessness.

So it is that the wearing of the masks is, notwithstanding all of the other traditions, dancing, theatre, gambling, the one most associated with Carnevale. The wearing of masks during this period has become a normal part of carnevale celebration and recalls the Roman tradition of pretending to be someone else in order to assume a different station in society at least for a limited time. Indeed the mask, like the entire celebration has an archetypal duality in its ability to deceive and reveal at the same time. The awareness of authorities as to the strong implications of such masks, is

documented in a 1268 edict issued in Venice, preventing masqueraders from partaking in a game of “eggs” a game of chance while masked. In a 1339 edict masqueraders are forbidden from moving about La Serenissima at night. We get a good sense of one of the uses to which masks and costumes were put through a 1458 Venetian edict that prohibits men dressed as women from entering convents to commit “*multas inonestates.*”

Evidently going in dressed as a woman was not the problem so much as what these masked men were doing once inside. Indeed masking which had seemed at first a good way of blowing off steam had gained in popularity so much so by the 1600’s that Venetians were remaining masked year round! The most common mask in Venice was and remains the *bauta*. The *bauta* consists of a black silk hood, a lace cape, a voluminous cloak (*tabarro*), a three cornered hat and a white mask that completely covered the face. The identity of the masquerader is completely concealed, leaving one free to be whoever one wishes he were in reality. In being no one, the masquerader can be anyone, go anywhere, say anything. In concealing one’s actual identity, one is free to reveal one’s true self.

The procession is another of traditions associated with Carnival that had its origins in the Roman culture, in which great processions were used to mark any auspicious occasion. Roman Holy Days were often celebrated with great processions led by worshippers carrying the image of the God being celebrated. In Christian times the tradition was adopted so that the feast days of saints were also marked by such processions, and so we ought not to be surprised by the presence of the procession in the Christian *Carnevale*. Given the socio-political aspect of processions in Roman times, it also not surprising that such processions in the Christian era were often also imbued with

meaning beyond that of a simple presentation of the patron saint. During *Carnevale* the procession served to display the riches of the patrons of the festival, and the costumes used enabled them participants to present themselves in a particular fashion, just as the wedding procession in modern times often tries to paint the bride as a princess, long gown veil etc. so too were costumes in the *Carnevale* parade or Mardi Gras parade used to present allegorical figures such as the figure of *Carnevale*, often a corpulent man dressed in opulent clothing and “Lady Lent”, a hag-like emaciated character. But there were also present the king and queen of carnival who characterized opulence, fecundity and abundance. Elements of this procession are still evident in New Orleans where those on the floats bestow offerings on the revelers, beads in particular in a show of benevolence. The trick that the revelers one must do in order to receive such favors is also representative of the power that the king or queen or, in the Renaissance context, the prince has over vassals. The prince will provide, certainly, but the subjects must perform at his or her command. In Venice the procession took place on the water with festively decorated boats and masked rowers moving up and down the canals, displaying wealth elegance and power culminating in fireworks against the backdrop of the Venetian sky.

The socio-political function of such displays are impossible to ignore. In the case of the Haitian Mardi Gras custom of burning a Jew in effigy, for example, one can hardly suggest that such practices are simply a case of people having fun. Rather the pageantry, the allegorical figures and the masks, especially those organized by the state or large consortium are carefully orchestrated events intended to give vent to ideas or notions that might prove too explosive at most times of the years. As satire or parody however, they represent more acceptable forms of institutionalized oppression or in contrast, criticism of

the institutionalized power. In modern times for example, the *Carnevale* at Viareggio, Italy has become famous for its great paper maché cartoons of public figures aimed at ridiculing and criticizing those who hold the reins of power. This year's Mardi Gras parade in New Orleans included floats intended to criticize public response to the Katrina crisis of the year before. Indeed, such parades provide an opportunity not only for institutional entrenchment of civic ideals but also an opportunity for the disenfranchised to voice opposition to an otherwise seemingly untouchable ruling class. A topsy turvy world indeed, in which masters are slaves and slaves are masters even if only for the day!

In fact the political power of the mask as well as the importance of containing such power was explicit in the still another edict of the Venetian authorities who implicitly recognized the security threat such masquerades posed and in 1607 prohibited the wearing of masks except during the days of carnival and at official banquets. The need for containment and the restriction provided by the immediate commencement of Lent following *Carnevale* is perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the post Roman evolution of the holiday. In the Christian era, the end of *Carnevale* is typically celebrated with a burning event of some sort. In many cities on the last night of *Carnevale* the allegorical figure of *Carnevale* would be mourned in a mock funeral. In Venice, on the last night of *Carnevale*, a giant effigy of Pantalone, a character popularized in the Italian street theatre associated with *Carnevale* was hoisted between the two columns in St. Mark's square and burnt. The potential anti-Semitic undertones of this act (Pantalone is often associated with the figure of the banker, popularized in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* in the form of Shylock) speak once again to the socio-political aspects of *Carnevale* and are also evident in the Haitian *Carnevale* custom mentioned above.

The next day, Ash Wednesday, the seventh Wednesday before Easter significantly, dovetails with the burning of the night before as ashes are placed on the foreheads of the penitents. The Ash Wednesday observation has its roots in the Middle Ages and in many cases the ashes used are the ashes from the burning of the palms from the previous year's palm Sundays celebrations. Thus the interaction of the two holidays, the revelry and eventual burnout of *Carnevale* are manifested in the physical signs of penitence and fasting that follow. As such, the symbiosis of the two holidays provides a symmetry that culminates in the ultimate resurrection of the light at the end of the Easter season, thus revealing the falsity of the masquerade of a few months before. The imposition of rules and an end to the secular focus of the *Carnevale*, effects a transition to the spiritual but also provides a recognition of the inherent power of institutionalized authority be it ecclesiastic or civic, to control the behavior of the people and limit the expression of criticism. In the humbling act of contrition on Ash Wednesday, the revelers are made acutely aware of the limited potential of *Carnevale* to effect liberation. Just as the prodigal humbles himself and returns to the father's arms, the Golden Age is revealed as a dream, a mere moment out of time. Poliziano, one of the creators of Lorenzo's elaborate *Carnevale* celebrations knew this; that all good things must come to an end. Lorenzo knew this too. Lorenzo knew that his whole masquerade depended on the collective belief in the truth of the illusion. His song is a poignant portent of the inevitable fall of his own golden dream. And the fires of the theocracy that followed create out of Renaissance Florence as a real time play, a life size tableau, in which the revelry of the period of Magnificence was followed by the ashes that ultimately signaled that the party was over.