



Edited by Ilaria Bernocchi, Nicolò
Morelli, and Federica Pich

Petrarch and Sixteenth-Century Italian Portraiture

ROUTLEDGE

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Ilaria Bernocchi,
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Federica Pich

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 2024 by Amsterdam University Press Ltd.

Published 2025 by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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ISBN: 9789463727242 (hbk)

ISBN: 9781041184119 (pbk)

ISBN: 9781003701316 (ebk)

NUR 654

Cover illustration: Andrea del Sarto, *Portrait of a Young Lady with a 'Petrarchino'*, 1528, oil on panel, 87 × 69 cm, Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture degli Uffizi, Florence.

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

DOI: 10.5117/9789463727242

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to our contributors for their incredible work conducted at a time when research and access to libraries and archives was extremely difficult. We also particularly wish to thank Erika Gaffney, AUP Senior Commissioning Editor, for nurturing this project from the beginning.



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1 Introduction

Ilaria Bernocchi, Nicolò Morelli, and Federica Pich

This volume explores the multiple ways in which the legacy of Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch, 1304–1374) shaped the relationship between literary and visual portraits in the sixteenth century. Building on the extensive and diverse body of research on Petrarch and the arts produced by historians of both art and literature, this collection adopts a specific critical angle, focusing on different concepts and dimensions of Petrarchan and Petrarchist ‘portraiture’ in an interdisciplinary perspective.

By ‘portrait’ today we commonly indicate the so-called ‘image of an individual’, which is also the title of a pivotal collection of essays edited by Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson in 1998.¹ The definition of ‘individual’, however, as scholars dealing with portraiture have long known, is a treacherous terrain.² The association between the rise of the ‘spiritual individual’ as manifested by a rich corpus of painted and sculpted portraiture, and the dawn of the Renaissance, of which Petrarch can be legitimately considered the putative intellectual father, has deep roots in Jacob Burckhardt’s influential *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860).³ Burckhardt’s essay has been much debated in subsequent scholarship and reframed in the context of the author’s nineteenth-century sensitivity. On the other hand, the importance of portraiture in the late Middle Ages, when Petrarch was writing, has been advanced by an ever-growing corpus of robust scholarship.⁴ More recent

¹ Mann and Syson 1998.

² A review of the literature on this subject is beyond the scope of this analysis, but essential references for the sixteenth century are: Cassirer 1963; Boehm 1985; Batkin 1992; Burke 1995; Burke 1997; Martin 1997; Enenkel 1998; Baldwin 2001; and Martin 2004. Further bibliography is indicated throughout the volume.

³ Burckhardt 1951.

⁴ A rich overview of medieval notions of representation and identity in relation to sculpted faces can be found in the essays collected in Little 2006. The question of medieval individuality is explored in Bedos-Rezak and Iogna-Prat 2005, where of particular interest is the chapter by Étienne Anheim on Petrarch (Anheim 2005). For portraiture at the French court see Sand 2006; Perkinson 2007; and Perkinson 2009; for Romanesque portraiture see Dale 2002 and Dale 2007. The problem of premodern portraiture has been discussed in a crucial essay on likeness and presence by Hans Belting (Belting 1994), while the medieval understanding of the relationship between corporeality and individuality has been explored

responses to the Burckhardian view of the Renaissance individuality have posed an opposite model of individuality, one consciously built ‘from the outside in’ as a result of social and cultural conditionings.⁵ In his nuanced essay on the ‘myths of individualism’, John Jeffries Martin tried to address this ambivalence, pointing to the Renaissance individual as being constantly negotiating the relationship between the internal and external self.⁶ Quoting Douglas Biow, he even hinted at the more extreme consequence of this negotiation, the modern fragmentation of the self.⁷

What is Petrarch’s place in this debate? In many ways, the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* does not offer a single or straightforward answer to the issue of individuality: the autobiographical nature of the collection charts in unprecedented detail his spiritual and personal journey; at the same time, the *ex post facto* editing work on the sequence of poems indicates a conscious act of ‘self-fashioning’ aimed at conferring universal value on his individual experience; the very dialogue between the sonnets on Laura’s portrait (*Rvf* 77–78), moreover, paired and juxtaposed for us to read, dramatises the poet’s ambivalence and doubt, symptom of his ‘split’ response to Laura’s image. According to Thomas Mussio, who sees the *Canzoniere* as the key intermediary between Michelangelo’s troubled reflections in the *Rime* and the Augustinian conflict of the soul in the *Confessions*, the Petrarchan model of individuality ‘posits that the loving subject’s identity is based [...] on the experience of loving’.⁸ This complexity should not limit, but rather enrich our understanding of how Petrarch’s writings continued to inform the dialogue with the genre of portraiture in the sixteenth century. For the purposes of this volume, then, we will adopt an expanded definition of portrait that encompasses material objects (sculpted, painted on panel or canvas, drawn, or engraved), mental images created by memory and imagination (as the *figura nel cuore* of medieval poetry), as well as literary ‘effigies’, either derived from paintings or sculpture, by means of description or through a series of prescriptions. This diverse yet conceptually coherent corpus

by Caroline Walker Bynum (Walker Bynum 1995), whose analysis of ideas around the somatomorphic soul and the beatific vision around 1300 (ch. 7) is particularly pertinent here.

5 See Greenblatt 1980. For this model of selfhood see also Goffman 1959.

6 Martin 2004.

7 *Ibid.*: 5–6. In this sense, Petrarch’s *Rvf*:168.4–8, in which the poet reflects on trusting Love’s promise despite the passing of time, resonates powerfully: ‘Io, che talor menzogna et talor vero | ò ritrovato le parole sue, | non so s’i’ l’creda, et vivomi intra due: | né s’i né no nel cor mi sona intero’ [I, who have found his words sometimes false and sometimes true, do not know whether to believe him, and I live between the two: neither yes nor no sounds whole in my heart]. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from Petrarch’s *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (*Rvf* or *Canzoniere*) in this introduction are from Petrarca 1996a. English translations are from Petrarca 1976.

8 Mussio 1997: 339. Here Mussio (341–43) also draws an explicit connection between Michelangelo’s sonnet 87: ‘Vorrei voler quel ch’io non voglio’ and Petrarch’s ambivalence in *Rvf*:168. For further reflections on Petrarch’s poetry and subjectivity see Moevs 2009 and Zak 2010.

of portraits coalesces around a preoccupation with ideas of resemblance, imitation, substitution, memory, praise and self-fashioning, while embodying both singularity and exemplarity, the real and the ideal.

In the vast constellation of cultural practices that surround the notion of portrait in the Renaissance, Petrarch plays a key role at several levels, as a rich tradition of studies has persuasively demonstrated. In this context, the main scholarly strand—possibly the broadest in scope—has focused on Petrarch's own attitude towards images as expressed in his prose and verse and the fortune of his oeuvre in the visual arts, with responses as diverse as illuminations and emblems, portraits, and *cassoni*. Petrarch's attitude towards the arts was multifaceted: on the one hand, the philosopher and moralist; on the other, the man and lyric poet. As Michael Baxandall has observed in his *Giotto and the Orators*, Petrarch's *De remediis utriusque fortune* offers the first and 'longest discussion on art one has from the humanist Trecento'.⁹ Completed in 1366, *De remediis* stages a series of dialogues between Ratio and the four passions of the Stoic tradition (Dolor, Metus, Gaudium, Spes), where Ratio revoices an Augustinian moral perspective and Gaudium personifies human frivolity.¹⁰ The discussion on the arts is encapsulated in the chapters 'De tabulis pictis' and 'De statuis' (*De remediis*, I.40 and I.41). While Gaudium only pronounces standard formulas of appreciation for the vanities of the secular world ('I like paintings': I.40.1), Ratio advances articulated arguments against the deceitful nature of images: paintings are 'vacuous enjoyments', fruits of 'vanity' (I.40.2), 'fictions made up of vain trick', a corruption of God's superior act of creation (I.40.28); statues are mere 'seductions for eyes' (I.41.31).¹¹ Nevertheless, as Ratio concedes, sacred art can be instructive for the illiterate and those unable to grasp theological truths otherwise, and profane images of virtuous subjects can similarly set a positive example (I.41.42–43).¹² Petrarch himself had the chance to express admiration for sacred images. In 1370, four years after completing *De remediis*, he wrote his last will, giving details of various bequests and gifts, including 'a panel or icon of the blessed Virgin Mary, a work of the eminent painter Giotto' for his

⁹ Baxandall 1971: 53.

¹⁰ On the *De remediis*, see Bettini 2002; Perucchi 2014: 23–83, 203–287; Perucchi 2021; and Löhr 2021. See also Dunlop 2008: 86–88, and the edition annotated by Bernhard Huss (Petarca 2021 and Petarca 2022).

¹¹ Respectively: 'Pictis tabulis delector' (I.40.1); 'Inanis delectatio', 'vanitas' (I.40.2); 'Tu autem, si hec ficta et adumbrata fucis inanibus usqueadeo delectant, atolle oculos ad illum qui os humanum sensibus, animam intellectu, celum astris, floribus terram pinxit: spernes quos mirabaris artifices' (I.40.28); 'illucebre oculorum' (I.41.31). Cited from Perucchi 2014: 180–82, 188.

¹² 'Delectari quoque sacris imaginibus, que spectantes beneficii celestis admoneant, pium sepe excitandisque animis utile; profane autem, etsi interdum moveant atque erigant ad virtutem dum tepentes animi rerum nobilium memoria recalescunt, amande tamen aut colende equo amplius non sunt' (I.41.42–43). Cited from Perucchi 2014: 188.

patron Francesco Vecchio da Carrara, Signore of Padua. In praising the excellence of this work, Petrarch claims that ‘the ignorant do not understand the beauty of this panel but the masters of art are stunned by it’.¹³ In 1353, moreover, Petrarch had the chance to admire in Milan a statue of Saint Ambrose, which he understood as a faithful portrait, as he wrote in a letter to Francesco Nelli dating 23 August: ‘I gaze upwards at his statue, [...] which it is said closely resembles him, and often venerate it as though it were alive and breathing. [...] The great authority of his face, the great dignity of his eyebrows [...] are inexpressible; it lacks only a voice for one to see the living Ambrose’ (*Familiare*, XVI.11.12–13).¹⁴

Within the same strand of studies on Petrarch and the arts, several works have been devoted more specifically to portraiture, with particular emphasis on the portrait as material object and written description. A first major line of research has concerned Petrarch’s approach to ‘the image of the individual’, be it the image of others or his own, with the latter setting a paradigm for the iconography of ‘the poet’. Positioned at the crossroad of medieval and early modern thought and culture, Petrarch embodies the troubled transition from an allegorical vision of reality—which results from a combined reading of the book of nature and the book of God—to a proto-humanistic view of the world that has the individual at its centre.¹⁵ It seems apposite, then, that Petrarch should reflect in *Rvf* 77 and 78 on the representationality of painted portraiture, its complicated status as a substitute for the presence of the individual and a necessarily incomplete vehicle for the far richer—and elusive—‘truth’ of the soul.

The language of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century art theory is also relevant to Petrarch’s understanding of portraiture, in light of his influence on the subsequent critical discourse. Villard de Honnecourt called mimetic imitation from life *contrefaire*, while he used *portraire* to indicate a superior form of representation founded in the artist’s ingenuity, which makes visible the ineffable and is based on Geometry. Geometry, as part of the Quadrivium, was one of the disciplines associated with the knowledge of the nature of things and God’s creation. Similarly, Jean de Meun, in the continuation of the *Roman de la Rose* (c. 1275), writes that

¹³ ‘Et predicto igitur domino meo Paduano, [...] dimitto tabulam meam sive iconam beate Virginis Marie, operis Iotti pictoris egregii [...], cuius pulchritudinem ignorantes non intelligunt, magistri autem artis stupent’. Cited from Mommsen 1957: 78–80. See also Dunlop 2008: 77.

¹⁴ ‘Iucundissimum tamen ex omnibus spectaculum dixerim quod aram, [...] scio, imaginemque eius summis parietibus extantem, quam illi viro simillimam fama fert, sepe venerabundus in saxo pene vivam spirantemquem suspicio. Id michi non leve precium adventus; dici enim non potest quanta frontis autoritas, quanta maiestas supercilii, quanta tranquillitas oculorum; vox sola defuerit vivum ut cernas Ambrosium.’ The Latin text is from Petrarca 1933–42: III (1937), 205–06. The English translation is from Petrarca 1975–85: II (1982), 319.

¹⁵ For a study of allegories and painting in Petrarch, see Dunlop 2008.

Pygmalion engaged with portraiture whenever he wanted to show his *ingenium*, so that the images he produced appeared to be alive but for the lack of vital spirit.¹⁶ Cennino Cennini, the author of the *Libro dell'arte* (written around 1400), uses the verb *ritrarre* to indicate an act of skilful imitation.¹⁷ He also explains, however, that painting is an operation of the imagination (*fantasia*) that makes visible what cannot be seen.¹⁸ Cennini's advice on imitation (of nature, but also of artistic models), has been connected by Andrea Bolland with what she terms the 'post-Petrarchan' culture of late Trecento Padua.¹⁹ Petrarch's reflection on portraiture and the image of Laura, therefore, intersects these complex discourses from a linguistic perspective first, and then a conceptual one.

Petrarch himself is the first modern author of whom we have images that were more or less contemporaneous with his own life; and in the twenty-five years after his death in 1374, he was portrayed more often than any other writer.²⁰ His reputation as a philosopher and poet forged the exemplary model of the man of learning: he posed for a portrait commissioned by Pandolfo Malatesta, the addressee of what is known as the Malatesta form of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*; Leonardo Bruni kept his effigy in his study as an inspiration.²¹ In many of his portraits, Petrarch holds a pen and a book; when open, the book frequently displays the first lines of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*; in others he wears the *laurea*, a reminder of the laurel coronation that took place in Rome in 1341 at the hand of Robert of Anjou. As J. B. Trapp has shown, it had long been the custom to represent Evangelists and Fathers of the Church showing the first words of their Gospel and treatises, or God himself holding the Scripture. Petrarch is the first secular writer to be pictured

¹⁶ Perkinson 2009: 54–61.

¹⁷ In the Preface, Cennini lists 'ritrarre e contraffarre' as alternative processes, but he includes both of them among the mechanical skills that the aspiring painter has to develop; see Cennini 1859: XIII.

¹⁸ '[E] questa è un'arte che si chiama dipignere, che conviene avere fantasia, con operazione di mano, di trovare cose non vedute (cacciandosi sotto ombra di naturali), e fermarle con la mano, dando a dimostrare quello che non è, sia' [and this is called Painting, for which we must be endowed with both imagination [*fantasia*] and skill in the hand, to discover unseen things concealed beneath the obscurity of natural objects, and to arrest them with the hand, presenting to the sight that which did not before appear to exist]. The Italian is from Cennini 1859: 2. The English translation is from Cennini 1899: 4.

¹⁹ Bolland 1996: 472.

²⁰ See Trapp 1992–93: 11–32. The first extant portrait of Petrarch is a full-page coloured profile introducing his *De viris illustribus* in a manuscript in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Lat. 6069F), where the image of Petrarch features as both the author and a prominent *vir illustris*. This model is the predecessor of many renderings to come in the following decades. As a result of his reputation, the poet was also portrayed in monumental setting in the Paduan area, such as the figure traditionally identified as Petrarch in the frescoes by Altichiero in the Oratory of Saint George of the early 1380s; the figure, again by Altichiero or his workshop, in the Chapel of Saint Felice in Santo; the portrait in the Sala dei Vescovi in Padua and once in Petrarch's house near the cathedral, which dates from the late 1300s.

²¹ See Dunlop 2008: 87.

in such fashion, inaugurating a fortunate tradition of portraits *alla petrarchesca* that will be used widely, from the retrospective refashioning of the portrait of Dante to Renaissance women writers, eventually crossing the borders of the Italian peninsula.²²

A second major line of research has focused on the image of Laura, considered both as a concrete depiction attributed to the painter Simone Martini and as a mental and literary effigy continuously haunting the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*. Medieval poets referring to the visual arts were not a novelty in Italy. In his *Comedy*, for example, Dante praises Giotto through the voice of illuminator Oderisi da Gubbio (*Purgatorio*, 11). Giacomo da Lentini's poem 'Meravigliosa-mente' stages the topic of desire fuelling a 'phantasmic' portrait of the beloved, internalised in the lover's mind just as she appears: 'Avendo gran disio | dipinsi una pintura, | bella, voi simigliante' [Fuelled by desire, I painted a beautiful portrait of your likeness] (19–21).²³ In sonnets *Rvf* 77 and 78, however, Petrarch does not only comment on the work of a contemporary, whom he had actually met in Avignon, but also on a supposedly real portrait of Laura he himself commissioned.²⁴ The sonnets represent arguably the first condensed theory of portraiture and introduce many of the ideas that will shape the genre and its criticism for centuries to come.²⁵ Unlike the criticism expressed in *De remediis* through the point of view of Ratio, however, the two sonnets reveal a younger Petrarch, who was certainly not insensitive to the seductions of secular images. The first of the two sonnets envisages Simone travelling to heaven, where he had been able to see and translate visually the essence of Laura:

Per mirar Policleto a prova fiso
con gli altri ch'ebber fama di quell'arte
mill'anni, non vedrian la minor parte
de la beltà che m'ave il cor conquiso.

²² See Trapp 1992–93: 22–24; and Löhr 2011. For example, the image by Domenico di Michelino in the Duomo in Florence, of about 1465, displaying Dante laureate and holding his book; or the portrait of Gaspara Stampa drawn by Antonio Daniele Bertoli and engraved by Felicita Sartori in a miscellaneous edition of *Rime* by Stampa herself, her brother Baldassarre, Collatino di Collalto, and Vinciguerra di Collalto (Venice: Piacentini, 1738). For a recent study of the portraits and representations of Petrarch and of the manuscripts containing his works, see Brovia 2022. In her article, Brovia argues that the early fashioning of Petrarch's public persona first concerned his image and later his writings, and that the cultural appropriation of Petrarch's persona was in part due to political strategies.

²³ Cited from Antonelli et al. 2008: I, 47.

²⁴ The two sonnets were penned on MS Vaticano Latino 3196 in 1336 (fol. 7r), when Simone Martini was in Avignon, and transcribed 'in order' in MS Vaticano Latino 3195 in 1357. See Wilkins 1951: 89–91. The body of scholarship on *Rvf* 77 and 78 is extensive. See, for example, Lee 2017; Bartuschat 2007; Bertone 2008; Fenzi 1996; and Ciccutto 1991: 82–88.

²⁵ Pommier 1998: 33–38, esp. 35.

Ma certo il mio Simon fu in paradiso
 onde questa gentil donna si parte:
 ivi la vide, et la ritrasse in carte
 per far fede qua giù del suo bel viso.

L'opra fu ben di quelle che nel cielo
 si ponno imaginar, non qui tra noi,
 ove le membra fanno a l'alma velo.

Cortesia fe'; né la potea far poi
 che fu disceso a provar caldo et gielo,
 et del mortal sentiron gli occhi suoi. (*Rvf*77)

[Even though Polyclitus should for a thousand years compete in looking with all the others who were famous in that art, they would never see the smallest part of the beauty that has conquered my heart. || But certainly my Simon was in Paradise, whence comes this noble lady; there he saw her and portrayed her on paper, to attest down here to her lovely face. || The work is one of those which can be imagined only in Heaven, not here among us, where the body is a veil to the soul; || it was a gracious act, nor could he have done it after he came down to feel heat and cold and his eyes took on mortality.]

Within the sacred narrative of a profane love story, to put it with Gianfranco Contini, Petrarch touches upon the topic of the beloved's truest essence and beatific power, which will be fully celebrated after Laura's death, from the celestial perspective of eternity, in the *Triumph*: 'se fu beato chi la vide in terra, | or che fia dunque a rivederla in cielo?' [if those who saw her on earth were blessed, what then of those who will see her again in heaven?] (*Triumphus Eternitatis* 144–45).²⁶ Through a hyperbolic vortex comparing and contrasting the modern and the ancient world, Simone must have joined the blessed in the Empyrean, where he could admire the platonic idea of Laura, outdoing even Polyclitus and his contemporaries. The exceptional power of portraiture, therefore, is filled with the superior purpose of showing what mortal eyes cannot see.

The image of the painter translating a heavenly vision for an earthly audience ('Ma certo il mio Simon fu in Paradiso'), moreover, recalls the iconography of Saint Luke painting the Virgin, which recurs frequently between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.²⁷ Byzantine accounts attributed the miraculous icon of Mary holding the Child from the Monastery of Hodegon in Constantinople (*Hodegetria*) to the

²⁶ Petrarca 1996b: 538. On the vision of Laura in the *Triumphus Eternitatis*, see Bertolani 2001: 137–39; and Bertolani 2005: 225–27. On the metaphor of the body as a prison, see Marcozzi 2011: 13–42.

²⁷ See Hall 1983: 90–91.

Apostle himself, and the subsequent tradition of Saint Luke the painter made him the patron of artists' guilds.²⁸ Artists frequently portrayed themselves in the guise of Saint Luke painting the Virgin as a way to show their professional affiliation, entrust their work to the saint's protection, and proudly affirm the power of art to make the ineffable visible. Petrarch's reference to Simone's painting appears to refer in filigree to this tradition, subtly presenting him 'in the guise of the saint' to celebrate his artistic ability—and presumably provide a non-pagan counterpart to Polyclitus—and attributing an almost miraculous power to the image of Laura ('per far fede qua giù').

If *Rvf* 77 celebrates the illusionistic power of art, *Rvf* 78 expresses the lover's frustration against the limits of this seductive illusion, its inability to come alive and speak, re-presenting Laura's mind:

Quando giunse a Simon l'alto concetto
 ch'a mio nome gli pose in man lo stile,
 s'avesse dato a l'opera gentile
 colla figura voce ed intellecto,
 di sospir' molti mi sgombrava il petto,
 che ciò ch'altri à più caro, a me fan vile:
 però che 'n vista ella si mostra humile
 promettendomi pace ne l'aspetto.
 Ma poi ch'i' vengo a ragionar co' lei,
 benignamente assai par che m'ascolte,
 se risponder sapesse a' detti miei.
 Pigmalion, quanto lodar ti dèi
 de l'immagine tua, se mille volte
 n'avesti quel ch'i' sol una vorrei. (*Rvf* 78)

[When Simon received the high idea which, for my sake, put his hand to his stylus, if he had given to his noble work voice and intellect along with form || he would have lightened my breast of many sighs that make what others prize most value to me. For in appearance she seems humble, and her expression promises peace; || then, when I come to speak to her, she seems to listen most kindly: if she could only reply to my words! || Pigmalion, how glad you should be of your statue, since you received a thousand times what I yearn to have just once!]

The heavenly essence that Simone Martini is said to have captured proves to be an illusion, a fiction echoing the words of Ratio in *De remediis*. Unlike Pygmalion,

²⁸ On the *Hodegetria*, see Pentcheva 2006: ch. 4.

whose ivory statue of Galatea was brought to life by Venus in response to his prayers, Petrarch has not been rewarded with such a miracle. Instead of relieving the poet's pain, the portrait exacerbates it.²⁹ Sonnet 78 suggests an implicit parallel between Simone Martini's stylus, which failed to give voice and intellect to the portrait of Laura, and Petrarch's style of his 'rime sparse', as metonymies for their works. Just as Simone has not managed to endow the portrait with a voice, so Petrarch's poems have not succeeded in winning the beloved's resistance, her 'cor di smalto' (*Rvf* 70.22). Jean Campbell proposed to see a further, more conceptual link between the styluses used by Simone and Petrarch to portray Laura:

Although the stylus is the instrument that informs the painting subject and brings the work into being, it is not coterminous with an accomplished object. Rather, it is explicitly identified with the potential in the moment between the conception of a portrait, which Petrarch attributes to Simone's inspired vision of beauty, and the realization of a work that ultimately fails to fulfill his desire.³⁰

In this sense, the stylus becomes synonymous with the development of the artist's and poet's *ingenium* and is connected with their intellectual faculty, intermediary between the heavenly and the earthly sphere. However, it is precisely in the material translation of the products of *ingenium* (the impression of the stylus on the *carte*) that both Petrarch and Simone are defeated by the mimetic limitations of their respective arts.

Despite this, the sighs and frustration associated with Simone's failure and Laura's insensitivity have eternalised the poet's own voice through poetry. While Simone's portrait 'in carte' (*Rvf* 77.7) of Laura has not survived, Petrarch's poems have been a source of glory for himself and the painter.³¹ This is what Vasari's words seem to prophesy in his *Life* of Simone Martini through a *paragone* that celebrates

²⁹ In the *Soliloquia*, Augustine conflates the arts with the devil's deceit: even though not deliberately intended to lead the viewer astray, painting and sculpture are ultimately false promises (*Soliloquia*, II.VI–X; *Patrologia Latina*, XXXII.889–893). In the *Secretum*, Augustinus will openly condemn Franciscus's use of Laura's portrait as an idol: 'And what's even crazier is that, not content with the sight of the face that had brought all this upon you, you went and had another version of it painted by a famous artist, so that you could carry it around with you everywhere and thus have a constant cause for everlasting tears' [Quid autem insanius quam, non contentum presenti illius vultus effigie, unde hec cuncta tibi provenerant, aliam fictam illustris artificis ingenio quesivisse, quam tecum ubique circumferens haberes materiam semper immortalium lacrimarum?] (*Secretum*, III.7.4). Cited from Petrarca 2016: 180–81. On Petrarch and Augustine, see also Lee 2012: 63–112.

³⁰ Jean Campbell 2009: 213.

³¹ On Vasari, Petrarch, and Simone Martini, and the fame resulting from poetry, see Campbell 2021, from which the expression 'eternal ink' that follows is borrowed.

the triumph of honour and fame resulting from the 'eternal ink' of poetry over the decaying materiality of painting:

Più felici di tutti [...] (parlando degl'artefici) sono quelli che [...] vivono al tempo di qualche famoso scrittore, da cui, per un piccolo ritratto o altra così fatta cortesia delle cose dell'arte, si riporta premio alcuna volta mediante gli loro scritti d'eterno onore e nome. La qual cosa si deve, fra coloro che attendono alle cose del disegno, particolarmente desiderare e cercare degl'eccellenti pittori, poiché l'opere loro, essendo in superficie e in campo di colore, non possono avere quell'eternità che dànno i bronzi e le cose di marmo allo scultore, o le fabbriche agl'architetti. Fu dunque quella di Simone grandissima ventura vivere al tempo di messer Francesco Petrarca, e abbattersi a trovare in Avignone alla corte questo amorosissimo poeta desideroso d'aver la imagine di madonna Laura di mano di maestro Simone; perciò che avutala bella come desiderato avea, fece di lui memoria in due sonetti [...]. E invero questi sonetti [...] hanno dato più fama alla povera vita di maestro Simone che non hanno fatto né faranno mai tutte l'opere sue, perché elleno hanno a venire, quando che sia, meno, dove gli scritti di tant'uomo viveranno eterni secoli.

[Happiest of all [...] are those (speaking of artists) who [...] live in the time of some famous writer from whom, in return for a small portrait or some other kind of gift of an artistic nature, they may on occasion receive, through his writings, the reward of eternal honour and fame. Such a thing should be especially desired and sought after by those most excellent artists who work in the field of design, for their works, being executed upon surfaces within a field of colour, cannot possess the eternal duration that bronze casting and marble objects bring to sculpture or buildings to architects. It was thus Simone's greatest good fortune to live in the time of Messer Francis Petrarch and to happen to find this most amorous poet at the court of Avignon, since he was anxious to have a picture of Madonna Laura by the hand of Maestro Simone; for that reason, when he received a painting as beautiful as he had wished, he immortalized Simone in two sonnets [...]. And in truth, these sonnets [...] have given the poor life of Maestro Simone greater fame than all his works did or ever will do, for the time must come, whenever it may be, when they will disappear, while the writings of such a great man will endure for all time.]³²

While *Rvf* 77 and 78 codify some of the most lasting themes regarding the power of portraiture, they also implicitly set the theoretical premises for its failure.

³² Cited from Vasari 1966–87: II, 191–92. The English translation is from Vasari 1998: 37–38.

Petrarch's distinction between Laura's physical image and her real portrait in heaven echoes the Augustinian distinction between a superior soul and an inferior body, a Platonic dichotomy that shaped his epistemological approach to images.³³ This position emerges also in the *Secretum*, where Petrarch's complicated—even tortured—understanding of visual representation is dramatised in Franciscus's dialogue with Augustine:

AUGUSTINUS: Your vision is correct, and yet the words of the Apostle apply to you: 'For the corruptible body weighs down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle presses down the mind that muses upon many things'.³⁴

When Augustine reproaches him for his admiration of Laura's mortal image, Franciscus replies:

FRANCISCUS: Don't you realize that you've referred to a woman whose heart is free of worldly concerns, and burns instead with desire for heavenly things, in whose face—if anything were ever true—the embodiment of divine beauty shines, whose character is a model of the highest integrity, whose voice and piercing gaze have nothing mortal about them, and even whose gait is not human?³⁵

FRANCISCUS: If the features of the love that holds me in sway were visible, they would resemble the face of the one on whom I have admittedly lavished much praise, though less than I should have.³⁶

The image of Laura is 'true' and morally acceptable because it exists in Petrarch's heart and is not of the flesh, has nothing mortal and cannot be compared to that of anyone else.

Well beyond studies on the image of Laura and its visual fortune,³⁷ *Rvf* 77 and 78 have instigated a rich strand of research on their poetic legacy. This has been

³³ On Augustine's epistemology and its development, see Moore 2011. On Petrarch's Augustinian positions in the discussion of the visual arts, see Gill 2005: 95–99.

³⁴ *Secretum*, I.15.4: 'AUGUSTINUS: Rite discernis, atqui verificatum est in vobis illud apostolicum: "Corpus, quod corrumpitur, aggravat animam, et deprimit terrena inhabitatio sensum multa cogitantem"'. Translated in Petrarca 2016: 59.

³⁵ *Secretum*, III.3.2: 'FRANCISCUS: Ceterum scis ne de ea muliere mentionem tibi exortam, cuius mens terrenarum nescia curarum celestibus desideriis ardet; in cuius aspectu, siquid usquam veri est, divini specimen decoris effulget; cuius mores consummate honestatis exemplar sunt; cuius nec vox nec oculorum vigor mortale aliquid nec incessus hominem representat?'. Translated in Petrarca 2016: 153–54.

³⁶ *Secretum*, III.4.2: 'FRANCISCUS: Si enim amoris in me regnantis facies cerni posset, eius vultui, quam licet multum tamen debito parcius laudavi, non absimilis videretur'. Translated in Petrarca 2016: 161.

³⁷ See Trapp 2001.

explored in particular through a number of critical issues first identified by Giovanni Pozzi and then taken up by Amedeo Quondam: the varying relationship between poetic and visual portrait; their biunivocal connection in terms of challenge and emulation between poetry and painting; and the self-referential autonomy of literary portraiture.³⁸ With regard to the relationship between poetic and visual portrait, Pozzi proposed to identify three distinct categories: occasional poems that make reference to a portrait and explicitly mention pictorial elements; occasional poems that refer to a portrait but make no reference to pictorial elements; and descriptive poems that display pictorial elements but make no reference to an existing portrait.³⁹ While helpful, such distinction tends to blur the line between two kinds of textual object that, though cognate, should not be confused with one another: on the one hand, amorous or encomiastic poems that are explicitly connected with a work of art (either extant or lost), which properly constitutes their occasion or subject matter, regardless of the presence or absence of visual elements in the text; on the other, poems that simply describe the beauty of a woman according to the rhetorical model of *descriptio pulchritudinis* codified by the Petrarchan ‘canon of beauties’, but make no reference to art except, possibly, for the mention of the act of ‘portraying’ metaphorically carried out with words and ‘style’. The latter group have been studied magisterially by Pozzi and Quondam, whereas the former initially attracted the attention of art historians, who collected them mainly as sources for dating and attributions, but later and gradually began to read them as iconographical sources.⁴⁰ Others, building on Pozzi’s legacy and on the foundational work of Elizabeth Cropper, enriched the corpus of poems on portraits and proposed new critical categories for their interpretation.⁴¹

If more critical attention has comparatively been given to portraits of women—an attention easily explained in connection with the canon of beauties and with the tradition of *ut pictura poësis*—the potential for the study of male portraits in the light of Petrarch and Petrarchism was already evident in John Shearman’s ‘Portraits and Poets’, one of the best examples to date of an effective and insightful integration of literary objects into an argument on the visual arts.⁴² More recently, such potential was taken up and explored in the monograph by Novella Macola on

³⁸ Pozzi 1979; Quondam 1991: 304.

³⁹ Pozzi 1979: 20–22.

⁴⁰ The documentary approach is found, for instance, in Colasanti 1904, while the more interpretative one is reflected in studies such as Goodman-Soellner 1983; Rogers 1986; Damianaki Romano 1998; and Pericolo 2009.

⁴¹ Besides the pivotal Cropper 1976, see also Cropper 1986 and 1995; Bolzoni 2008; Pich 2010; and Zemanek 2010. For a recent and valuable contribution on Giovan Battista Marino and the arts, see Russo et al. 2019.

⁴² Shearman 1992. See also Cranston 2000.

portraits with books, as well as in the work of Stephen Campbell and Marianne Koos on 'lyric' portraits, which contributed to undermining preconceived gender distinctions.⁴³ All these studies variously build on the now well-established notion of Petrarchan and Petrarchist metaphors and lexicon as a shared repertoire for the representation of both body and soul across a range of cultural practices. For instance, as Enrico Castelnuovo posited in his *Ritratto e società in Italia*, the use of the *petrarchino* in portraiture substitutes old heraldic references to draw attention to the sitter's intellectual side and inner life.⁴⁴ While the complex structural dimension of *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* and its mastery of syntactic orchestration mainly escaped a deep understanding and thorough imitation, its language, tropes, and motifs were taken up extensively across different literary forms and genres, in both prose and verse, and its imagery nurtured Renaissance visual culture in major and pervasive ways. In a century dominated by the rhetorical comparison between art and poetry (*ut pictura poësis*) and by the debate on the superiority of one form over the other (*paragone*), the interplay between Petrarch's oeuvre, 'Petrarchisms' (the diverse landscape of lyric poetry variously building on his model), and portraiture underpinned a variety of experiences, objects and practices, from medals to engravings, from narrative genres to dialogues on love and beauty.⁴⁵

On the one hand, then, through his *De remediis utriusque fortune* and *Familiares*, Petrarch made a crucial contribution to the development of a theoretical discourse about the visual arts; on the other, his *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* and *Triumph* offered new models for representation and self-representation, to which both Renaissance poets and artists proved to be exceptionally receptive.⁴⁶ For John Freccero, Petrarch's greatest achievement was his creation in the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* of a timeless self-portrait composed of 'lyric instants', sapiently combined to create a fictional persona that has escaped the ravages of time.⁴⁷ In this respect, a further Petrarchan legacy can be identified in the frequent references to his *canzoniere* in sixteenth-century discussions about the notion of lyric poetry as imitation (and, later, expression) of *affetti*, as established by theoreticians such as Antonio Minturno,

⁴³ Macola 2007; Campbell 2005; and Koos 2006.

⁴⁴ Castelnuovo 2015: 78.

⁴⁵ See Shearman 1992 and Trapp 2003. With a focus on portraiture as a theme and as a model between poetry and art, see Bolzoni 2010 and Pich 2010. On Petrarchan emblems, see Torre 2012. See also Bayer 2008; Lorne Campbell et al. 2009; Christiansen and Weppelman 2011; Kohl et al. 2014; Steigerwald and von Rosen 2012; Genovese and Torre 2019; Terzoli and Schütze 2021, with extensive bibliography. On 'Petrarchisms', see Gigliucci 2005.

⁴⁶ On the former issue, see Baxandall 1971; Ciccuto 1991; Bettini 2002; and Perucchi 2014. On the latter, see Cropper 1976; Campbell 2005; and Koos 2006.

⁴⁷ Freccero 1975: 34.

Agnolo Segni, and Pomponio Torelli.⁴⁸ Such notion not only resonates with the connection between lyric utterance and portrait as performances of the self but is embodied almost literally in ‘speaking’ portraits, namely effigies bearing inscriptions cast in the first person.⁴⁹ The agency of speaking portraits as acts of self-staging and self-affirmation is even more evident for images of poets and in the case of female sitters, who turn from silent objects of gaze into subjects of both gaze and voice.⁵⁰

Quid tum? The relationship between mimetic resemblance and the ‘truth’ of the soul remained at the heart of the discussion on portraiture during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁵¹ For instance, in Domenico Ghirlandaio’s *Portrait of Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni* the cartellino (mockingly?) laments art’s inability to depict the character and the soul.⁵² Leonardo’s studies of the *moti dell’animo* and the primacy he attributed to sight among the other senses, as well as his dense anatomical explorations of the brain, the heart, the nerves, muscles, and bones that turn thoughts into actions, produced an intense yet ambiguous form of portraiture, tied more profoundly to his own judgement than to the reality of the sitters.⁵³ In response to those who criticised him because the portraits of Lorenzo and Giuliano de’ Medici in San Lorenzo did not look like the models they were supposed to portray, Michelangelo famously wrote to Nicolò Martelli that he was not concerned with exact resemblance, because it would not matter a thousand years later; instead, what he wanted to portray and eternalise was their ideal image, their virtue and glory.⁵⁴ This statement is not unlike Petrarch’s ultimate message in *Rvf* 77 and 78: we do not see Simone’s portrait, we ‘admire’ it and the likeness it depicts through Petrarch’s words, as Vasari recognised, in an implicit ‘triumph’ of *poësis* over *pictura*. It is thus more important than ever to understand how Petrarch’s intuitions and qualms were received and transformed not just by his poetic followers, but by artists and their audience.

⁴⁸ An overview of the debate is offered by Frezza 2001.

⁴⁹ See Bredekamp 2010.

⁵⁰ See Pich 2021. For the growing emergence of women writers in the Italian Renaissance, see Cox 2008 and Cox 2013.

⁵¹ A particularly felicitous overview of this topic in art, from a philosophical as well as literary perspective, is in Zöllner 2005.

⁵² ‘Ars utinam mores animumque effingere posses pulchrior in terris nulla tabella foret’ [O Art, if you could depict the character and the soul, no painting on earth would be more beautiful!]. The verses are adapted from Martial, *Epigrammata*, X.32.5–6; see Simons 2011–12.

⁵³ On Leonardo’s anatomical search for the soul, see Kemp 1971; on judgement as the faculty mediating between the perception of reality and its representation, see Summers 1987: 170–76; on Leonardo’s idealisation in portraiture, see Brown 1983 and Meller 1983.

⁵⁴ The passage is cited in Castelnuovo 2015: 87. On the subject of resemblance and the aims of portraiture, see also Maria Loh’s discussion of ‘Renaissance faciality’, Loh 2009. A useful overview of the question of mimetic resemblance in Renaissance portraiture is presented in Woodall 1997.

Interdisciplinary Encounters

This volume investigates the multifaceted relationship between Petrarch and portraiture in a genuinely interdisciplinary framework and from a range of distinctive perspectives, displaying the complex network of material and conceptual aspects that characterise the phenomenon. We have gathered a group of early career scholars with international experience, whose main specialism lies in either art history or literature but whose research has already moved beyond their discipline of reference in significant ways. Each chapter addresses the forms and implications of the relationship between Petrarch and sixteenth-century portraiture through a close reading of texts, images, and contexts across a variety of media (painting, sculpture, and engravings), genres (lyric poetry, dialogues, and letters), and geographical areas (Florence, Venice, and Bologna). While keeping their specific focus and method, all chapters resonate with each other and, by their own interweaving, help illuminate understudied crossroads and oft-overlooked areas of interest.

The volume opens with two chapters by historians of literature, whose reflections move beyond the more familiar and well-established scholarly discourse in this area. Simone Monti and Martina Dal Cengio build on the general coordinates proposed by Lina Bolzoni and Federica Pich to break new ground by focusing on understudied objects—respectively, sonnets by widows on the portrait of their dead husband, and poems on sculpted busts—which shed a different light on the well-known patterns of lyric poetry about portraiture. Monti's chapter addresses both social and literary conventions by considering the narrow range of themes and tones deemed appropriate for female poets, and the consequent limits and constraints experienced by women in shaping their own poetic voice. By analysing two 'in morte' sonnets by Livia Spinola and Francesca Turina that focus on the portraits of their dead husbands, Monti shows their contrasting solutions, one taking solace in the image's illusionary presence, while the other alert to the dangers of lifelike representation. These divergent attitudes translate into different rhetorical stances: Spinola's sonnet is dominated by eulogy and epideixis, whereas Turina's poem enacts the illusionary experience in the form of an amorous address. In this respect, the poems develop in different directions two of the main discursive possibilities experimented by Petrarch in his sonnets on the portrait of Laura and more generally in his *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*: the conative dynamic of direct address (and dialogue) and the static and epideictic statement of praise, which also implies a different approach to the visual object.⁵⁵ Monti's analysis illuminates how the codes of poetry were fundamentally modelled on the male experience, just like the strategies of observation of the sitter in portraiture presented women artists

⁵⁵ On this, see Pich 2021.