BELOVED RIVALS: POWER, PARAGONE, AND THE PETRARCHAN PORTRAIT

IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Beloved Rivals: Power, Paragone, and the Petrarchan Beloved Portrait in Renaissance Italy

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This dissertation focuses on a genre of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century painted portraits and accompanying sonnets inspired by Francesco Petrarch’s fourteenth-century book of love sonnets called Il Canzoniere. Petrarch’s poetic description of his beloved Laura and his commemoration of a portrait he commissioned of her from Simone Martini inspired the Renaissance tradition of commissioning portraits of a female beloved and writing Petrarchan poems in honor of both the sitter and the painter. I present evidence that these Beloved Portraits were commissioned and produced by a small elite circle of artists, patrons, and poets beginning with Lorenzo de’ Medici. Central to the tradition was a spirit of rivalry and competition between one another, Petrarch, Simone Martini, classical examples, and the paragone of the arts. I also provide an in-depth analysis of the relationship between specific portraits and contemporary illuminated manuscripts of Petrarch’s Canzoniere and identify never before recognized visual and iconographic
similarities found in both mediums. Furthermore, I consider regional variations in Florence, Venice, Milan, and Rome and I introduce a new category of Petrarchan portraits reflective of changing interpretations of Petrarch in the Counter-Reformation.
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INTRODUCTION

Very great, then, was that good fortune of Simone [Martini], to live at the time of Messer Francesco Petrarca and to chance to find that most amorous poet at the Court of Avignon, desirous of having the image of Madonna Laura by the hand of Maestro Simone, because, having received it as beautiful as he had desired, he made memory of him in two sonnets…. These sonnets… in truth, have given more fame to the poor life of Maestro Simone than all his own works have ever done or ever will, seeing that they must at some time perish, whereas the writings of so great a man will live for eternal ages.¹

Giorgio Vasari, The Lives of the Artists

When he commissioned Simone Martini to paint a portrait of his beloved Laura in the late 1330s or early 1340s, Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) became the first known patron to commission a beloved portrait in the early modern period.² Petrarch borrowed the idea from ancient sources, especially Pliny the Elder’s account of the first beloved portrait in his Natural History. According to Pliny, a Corinthian woman recorded the shape of her lover’s shadow on the wall before he embarked on a long journey and her father later sculpted the image into clay to give to his daughter as a memento of her


² Petrarch was born in Arezzo on July 20, 1304, and in 1312 he moved with his family to Avignon where his father, an exiled Florentine notary, relocated in order to serve Pope Clement V in his recently established Avignon papacy. Petrarch was trained in law in Montpellier and Bologna but his passion was for writing and reading Latin literature. Although he served the Avignon papacy as a cleric after completing his schooling in 1326, he continued to write on his own, producing many important works and exchanging letters with his friends and contemporaries, including Giovanni Boccaccio. In 1341, after the completion of his first major work, Africa, Petrarch became the first poet laureate since antiquity, receiving his laurel crown in Rome.
beloved. This is one of multiple recorded ancient portraits commissioned to celebrate a beloved or inspired by an artist’s desire for a beautiful woman, many of which are mentioned in Petrarch’s two sonnets written in honor of Simone’s Portrait of Laura, discussed at length in the following chapters.

Both Dante Alighieri and Giovanni Boccaccio, the other two fourteenth-century poets who made up the Tre Corone, or Three Crowns, of Florentine vernacular literature, pined for their beloved ladies in their works and, like Petrarch, received poetic inspiration through contemplation of feminine beauty; however, for Renaissance readers Petrarch was the primary model for the poetic imagery of physical love. This was in large part because he was the only one of the three who specifically provided a description of his Lady’s physical features in his poetry. It was this ability to comingle the spiritual with

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3 Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham, Books 33-35 (London: Harvard University Press, 1952; repr., 2003), 151. According to Pliny, this was the first portrait likeness to be modeled in clay, created by a potter from Sicily called Butades using a technique called plastice which predates the carving of statues. Pliny also recorded that the erotic beauty of Praxiteles’ *Aphrodite of Knidos* was so striking that it compelled men to fall in love with her as if she were of flesh and bone: “They say that a certain man was once overcome with love for the statue, and, after he had hidden himself [in the shrine] during the nighttime, embraced the statue and that there is a stain on it as an indication of his lust.” For additional information see Maurizio Bettini, *The Portrait of the Lover*, trans. Laura Gibbs (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 7-8. Also see J.J Pollitt, *The Art of Greece 1400-31 B.C.: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965), 128.

4 It is generally believed that Simone must have painted her portrait while he was working for Pope Benedict in Avignon from circa 1335-44. He also painted the frontispiece for Petrarch’s manuscript of Virgil in 1338 so it is likely that Laura’s portrait was also made around that time. For a wider discussion of Petrarch’s relationship with Simone and his beliefs about portraiture in general see Nicholas Mann, “Petrarch and Portraits,” in *Image of the Individual: Portraits the Renaissance, conference report* (London: British Museum Press for the Trustees of the British Museum, 1998), 15-21.

5 By the sixteenth century Petrarch became the primary literary model for poetry for the vernacular writers and Boccaccio was the standard for prose.

6 In contrast, Beatrice’s beauty stemmed from her ethereal role as a guide to his spiritual salvation and thus Dante’s focus is primarily on her inner beauty and virtue. For an excellent discussion of the differences between Beatrice and Laura consult Valerio Capasa, *Dante, Petrarch, Giotto, Simone: il cammino obli* (Bari: Edizioni di Pagina, 2003), 50-78.
the corporeal that led Petrarch to be associated with the inception of Renaissance humanism. 7

Though Petrarch’s various poetic descriptions of Laura did not create a cohesive picture when combined, his words nonetheless provided inspiration for the idealized feminine beauty that became the standard of female pulchritude in the Renaissance. 8

This, coupled with Petrarch’s praise of a portrait of Laura commissioned by him from Simone Martini, set Laura apart from Beatrice and Fiammetta as a model for fifteenth and sixteenth-century female portraiture because it allowed artists to work within a visual framework which was specific enough to be recognizably Petrarchan and flexible enough to apply to a standard of Renaissance beauty which could be adjusted to meet the needs of various regional styles and ideals.

Petrarch focused his poetic attention on various of Laura’s body parts, applying his knowledge of the classical poetic theory of effictio as he poetically painted a portrait of Laura’s porcelain skin, marble-white hands and “her tranquil eyes, her eyebrows lit by stars,/ her mouth, angelic, beautiful, and full of pearls and roses and sweetness of words/ that make a person tremble in amazement,/ and then her high forehead and her hair which

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7 Petrarch’s specific emphasis on man’s importance in the universal hierarchy and an emphasis on his humanity and individuality paved the way for Renaissance intellectual thought and artistic expression by justifying the intermingling of secular and sacred subject matter. Though the term humanism was a nineteenth-century invention, the Latin word humanista was used in the sixteenth century to refer to scholars and professors of the humanities including grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy. These subjects were read and interpreted in Latin and, when appropriate, Greek. For a complete discussion of Renaissance Humanism see Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Thought (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 3-23.

8 Petrarch’s poems were indebted to the twelfth century tradition of chivalric court poetry performed by Provençal troubadour poets. The troubadours, like Petrarch, exalted the beauty and virtues of their unobtainable beloveds following strict courtly rules of poetic and social convention at the French courts. From this tradition sprang the first Italian vernacular poetry written by thirteenth century Sicilian writers and later the Dolce Stil Nuovo style of Dante Alighieri, Guido Cavalcanti, and Guido Guinizelli. Petrarch’s poetry was indebted to the work of these stilnovisti, who refined Italian vernacular love poetry and focused their themes on the contemplation of female beauty as a means to spiritual salvation.
seen in summer at high noon put out the sun." Together these features created the
matchless beauty described by Petrarch in Sonnet 218:

However many lovely, charming ladies
she finds around her, she who has no equal,
with her fair face she makes of all the others
what daybreak makes of all the lesser stars.\(^9\)

Despite the fact that no visual evidence of her true likeness was extant in the
Renaissance, Petrarch’s poetic description inspired a canon of beauty emulated by most
elite Renaissance women and commemorated in the portraiture of the period.

Although Petrarch specifically mentioned Simone Martini’s portrait in the
Canzoniere, his contemporaries suspected that both Laura and her portrait were figments
of the poet’s imagination. Petrarch addressed this issue in a letter to his friend and patron
Giacomo Colonna:

So what are you saying? That I have invented the beautiful name of Laura merely
so as to talk about her and make myself widely talked about; that my mind is full
not of the pursuit of any Laura but of my clear, continual and unwearied desire for
the poetic laurea; that my verse and my sighing, all that concerns this living
Laura, whose captive I pretend to be, are fictitious. In this at least I wish that you
were joking and that I were feigning possession rather than being possessed….

dolce parole/ chef anno altrui tremar di meraviglia,/ et la fronte, et le chiome ch’a vederle/ di state a
mexxo di vincono il sole.) Effictio, the act of describing a person’s physical appearance, stemmed from
classical rhetoric and the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* which was misattributed to Cicero in the Middle Ages
and Renaissance. For more on effictio in the Renaissance see Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love:
Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 1992), 54-63.

\(^10\) Petrarch, *Petrarch’s Canzoniere*, 318-19. (Tra quantunque leggiardre donne et belle/ giunga costei ch’
al mondo non à pare,/ col suo bel viso suol dell’altrre fare/ quell chef a ’l dì de le minori stelle.)

speciosum Lauree nomen, ut esset et de qua ego loquerer et propter quam de me multi loquerentur: re
autem uera in animo meo Lauream nuchil esse, nisi illam forte poetiamic, ad quam aspirarem me longum et
indefessum studium testator: de hac autem spirante Laurea, cultus forma captus sideor, manufacta esse
omnia, ficta carmina, simulate suspense. In hoc uno uere utinam iocarceris; simulation esset utinam et non
Petrarch cunningly defends Laura’s existence without actually saying that Colonna’s skepticism was unfounded. Similarly, in his *Secretum* Petrarch provides an eyewitness account of Laura’s portrait but simultaneously raised questions about its existence since his witness was the long-dead St. Augustine (354-430 CE). The saint chastises Petrarch for tormenting himself by carrying his beloved’s portrait with him at all times:

> And furthermore, what greater madness than, not content with looking upon the actual semblance of her from whom come all these ills, to have sought out, from an artist of the highest skill, a man-made image of her *and* to carry it with you wherever you go, so as to give yourself further occasion for perpetual tears?"\(^{12}\)

If, as Petrarch claims through Augustine, the poet carried the portrait with him wherever he went, it is curious that it was never mentioned by any of Petrarch’s consorts, no known copies were made, and it was not listed in the poet’s will.\(^{13}\)

Giovanni Boccaccio agreed with Colonna that Laura was a metaphor for the poet’s pursuit of fame and many of Petrarch’s contemporaries concurred.\(^{14}\) However in the 1440s the humanist and first Petrarchan commentator, Francesco Filelfo, argued that Laura was of flesh and blood and commentators thereafter agreed. Filelfo’s commentary, written between 1444 and 1447 and printed in 1476, was well-known by Renaissance humanists and circulated among humanist circles. About Laura he wrote: “Some foolish persons, straining to turn sunlight into darkness, wish Madonna Laura to signify poetry; others make of her the soul, others virtue, with a thousand other ravings and fantasies; so

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\(^{13}\) Trapp, "Petrarch’s Laura: The Portraiture of an Imaginary Beloved," 102.

\(^{14}\) Ibid, 61.
much so that I am ashamed to speak so publicly about such rubbish.” And so, despite the inconsistencies, Petrarchists attempted to piece together (and no doubt add to) Laura’s background and search for visual evidence.

Fifteenth-century scholars sought her image in Avignon where Petrarch famously first saw her in the Church of Sainte Claire on Holy Friday, April 6, 1327. In the mid 1440s Luigi Peruzzi linked her, albeit dubiously, to Laura de Noves, the wife of Ugo de Sade family and identified her image as the Princess of Trebizond in a now destroyed fresco of Saint George in the Avignon Cathedral of Notre-Dame-des-Doms (fig. 1).

Peruzzi went so far as to posit that the fresco, painted by Simone Martini, was the image that inspired the poet’s famous poems. Thirty years later, Bernardo Bembo claimed to have seen the fresco while in Burgundy acting as the Venetian ambassador from 1471-74. His son, Pietro, also owned a copy of what he believed was a portrait of Laura as Saint Margaret in Avignon, which is discussed in Chapter Four.

Pietro’s sixteenth-century contemporaries, Pietro Aretino and Giovanni Rucellai, also sought portraits of Laura for their collections. Rucellai mentioned his pursuit of such a portrait in a letter to Lorenzo di Filippo Strozzi on May 13, 1506:

After various comings and goings I have got myself here to Avignon… I have been where Petrarch composed the greater part of his works, and have seen the image of Madonna Laura, which is truly a most beautiful thing and worthy to be loved by such a one as Petrarch. I wanted to have a copy made of that portrait, but I have not found here a man who is skilled enough to do it in the way that I want; all the same, I believe I can send you a sketch, at least, according as I get the opportunity.

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15 Ibid, 62. (Alcuni sciocchi sforzandosi fare del sole tenebra uogliono per Madonna Laura sintendì alcuni la poesia altri lanima: et altri la uirtu e mille altri frenetichi e bizarie: quantunque a me dispiaccia di tal material cossi apertamente parlare.)
16 Ibid, 102.
17 She was also identified in a fresco and attributed to Matteo Giovannetti in the Chapelle St. Jean in the Palais des Papes in Avignon (1346-48.)
18 Trapp, “Petrarch’s Laura: The Portraiture of an Imaginary Beloved,” 106. (Dopo vari casi e peregrinazioni mi sono condotto qui a Avignone…. Sono stato dove el Petrarca compose la maggior parte
While it is not clear to which “image of Madonna Laura” Rucellai referred in his letter, the fact that he mentioned his desire to have a copy made and the possibility of sending a sketch to his friend is significant in that it proves that the search for Laura and her likeness was a topic of discussion between elite humanists of the time and that these images were shared and exchanged between patrons.  

Just as Petrarch commissioned the most prominent artist of his time to paint Laura, so Renaissance Petrarchists sought out the most talented artists of their time to paint their beloveds. My dissertation focuses on this elite, intellectual practice of commissioning a painted portrait of a Petrarchan Beloved with accompanying sonnets in the Petrarchan style. These portraits, inspired by Petrarch’s poems in honor of Simone Martini’s Portrait of Laura and fueled by social and creative rivalries, were commissioned by princes and cardinals and painted by the most famous artists of the time, aiming to recreate, and often rival, Simone’s portrait; an image so beautiful that “only up in Heaven/ could [it] be imagined.”

My dissertation presents a new perspective on the Beloved Portrait by considering the impact of these rivalries on the genre. I also explore the role of the paragone between poetry and paint, as well as competitions between patrons, sitters, artists, poets, and even city-states over Petrarch’s legacy in their attempt to surpass the master in his art and his

dell’ opera sua, et ho visto la effigie di Madonna Laura, che veramente è cosa bellissima et degna di essere amata da uno tanto come el Petrarcha. Ho volute farla ritrarre da quella picture per mandarla, ma non ci trovo huomo che sia acto a falla in quello modo disidero; pure credo mandartene una boza almeno secondo ne concedera la sorte.) The original letter is in the Archivio di Stato, Florence (Carte Stroziane, 1ª serie, 137, fol. 22)

19 It is also interesting to note that Rucellai claimed that he did not find a local artist “skilled enough” to execute the portrait to his liking.

20 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 130-31. (Che nel cielo/ si pongo imaginar.)
mistress in her beauty. \textsuperscript{21} I also identify the primary role that Lorenzo de’ Medici had on the ritual, both as the first patron of a Beloved Portrait and posthumously as the tradition spread to subsequent generations of patrons, artists, and poets. Though the tradition lasted almost a century, no Italian Beloved Portrait can be adequately analyzed without an understanding of the close web of players who participated in the ritual in homage to the legacy of Lorenzo.

Finally, I am the first to present visual evidence that supports a relationship between contemporary illuminated manuscripts and incunables of Petrarch’s \textit{Canzoniere} and select Renaissance painted portraits. The same patrons who were active in the Beloved Portrait exchange owned many of the illuminated books discussed in this dissertation. I conclude that in some cases there is evidence to suggest that there was a visual exchange of ideas and information between the portrait painters and the book illustrations. Additionally, I am the first to analyze the impact of changing views of Petrarch and Laura, as revealed in contemporary commentaries, on the development of the Beloved Portrait tradition. This is discussed at length in Chapter One.

\textbf{Petrarch’s \textit{Canzoniere}}

While all of Petrarch’s works were famous in his own time, only a few lent themselves to visual interpretation, namely \textit{De Viris Illustribus}, the \textit{Trionfi}, and the

\textsuperscript{21} The word \textit{paragone} stems from the Greek word \textit{para} (beside) and \textit{agon} (contest). Renaissance artists and writers, such as Leonardo da Vinci, did not use the word \textit{paragone}; although Leonardo used the verb \textit{paragonare} (to compare). For an excellent discussion of the word and its historical uses see Claire J. Farago, \textit{Leonardo da Vinci’s Paragone: A Critical Interpretation with a New Edition of the Text in Codex Urbinas} (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 8-17.
Canzoniere. De Viris Illustribus, for example, was the subject of Altichiero’s famous Sala Vironum Illustrium (Hall of Famous Men or Sala dei Giganti), executed from 1367-79 in Padua’s Palazzo Carrara, and the Trionfi were often illustrated in illuminated manuscripts, independent paintings, and decorative household objects such as wedding cassoni and deschi da parto. However, the Canzoniere had arguably the most profound impact on the visual arts in the Italian Renaissance and the love poems in honor of Petrarch’s beloved Laura shaped society’s definition of feminine beauty as a whole. Also called the Rerum vulgarium fragmenta or the Rime Sparse, Petrarch’s collection of three hundred and seventeen sonnets, twenty-nine canzoni, nine sestinas, seven ballads, and four madrigals were written and rewritten over the course of many decades from 1327 until just before his death in 1374.

If the format had medieval roots, the content was anything but old-fashioned. In fact, in the words of Petrarch scholar, Mark Musa: “The pure dramaticity of the poems struck sensitive minds with such newness and aptness that Petrarch’s story became reality for poets, and readers alike, its emotional peaks and depths everyday tests of a lover’s sincerity.” It was this new, personal approach to love poetry that appealed to Renaissance readers and allowed for Petrarch and Laura to become symbols of an idealized humanist love story. The poems primarily centered around Petrarch’s unrequited love for Laura, a woman he first met at the Church of St. Clare in Avignon on
April 6, 1327. About this encounter he recalled: “I think about the first time I beheld you;/ the one made for my love as no one was.” Though his longing did not culminate in a physical relationship, Petrarch’s yearning for Laura became a poetic obsession throughout the *Canzoniere*.

The *Canzoniere* enjoyed a Renaissance of its own in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as humanist scholars attempted to analyze and mimic Petrarch’s verse. The *Canzoniere*, as literary scholar Leonard Forster explained, provided Renaissance humanists with “a poetic idiom of great flexibility, which could be noncommittal or serious, as desired. The roles could even be reversed: noble ladies… could languish for noble men.” This flexibility was particularly appealing in the courtly settings in which Petrarchists were most prized. Mimicking Petrarch’s verse could simultaneously demonstrate the erudition of the Petrarchist and his or her ability to wittily participate in courtly love games. The same theory applied to the visual tradition; the Petrarchan canon of beauty could be applied to portraits of proper women representing their status as marriageable aristocratic women, brides, wives, or mothers, and equally Laura was a model for mistresses, courtesans, and Neo-Platonic beloveds.

For these reasons and others that are discussed in the following chapters, Petrarch became the center of a significant literary, artistic, and cultural phenomenon referred to as *Petrarchismo*, and a simultaneous countercultural movement referred to as *Antipetrarchismo*. In this dissertation I explore the rise of *Petrarchismo* in the most important humanist centers of the time, namely Florence, Venice, Milan, and Rome, and I

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25 Ibid, xx. This encounter was documented by Petrarch on the flyleaf of his personal copy of Virgil and the date in Sonnet 211, see also xvi.
26 Ibid, 20-21. (*Ricordo al tempo ch’ i’ vi vidi prima/ tale he null’ altra fia mai che mi piaccia…*)
consider how Petrarch became an important political and artistic symbol for these regions. Though many art historians use the term to refer to mid-fifteenth-century images inspired by Petrarch’s verse, the movement is officially recognized by literary scholars as beginning in the sixteenth century with the Petrarchan poet Pietro Bembo. Bembo was a famous Venetian poet and scholar whose impact on the Petrarchan Beloved Portrait tradition is discussed at length in Chapter Four: *Painting Poetry: The Petrarchan Paragone in Sixteenth-Century Venice and Rome*. Bembo’s publication of *Prose della vulгар lingua* in 1525 promoted the universal use of the Tuscan vernacular for Italian literature. In this seminal work, Bembo suggested that Petrarch should replace Virgil as the “poetic model of imitation,” and in doing so, elevated Petrarch’s status above his own ancient hero.\(^{28}\) Literary imitation, or *imitatio*, dated back to classical times but was known to Petrarch and his Renaissance followers through the Latin works of Horace, Seneca, and Quintilian.\(^{29}\)

Both Dante and Petrarch referred to the ancient practice in their own works. In his *Commedia*, for example, Dante rewrote scenes from classical texts and incorporated mythology, subject matter, and even occasional lines from the original works.\(^{30}\) Dante’s primary contribution to the development of Renaissance *imitatio* was his groundbreaking use of the rhetorical device in the Tuscan vernacular. While Dante did not argue the superiority of the vernacular over Latin, he elevated his native tongue by using it to

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\(^{28}\) A. Feng, "From poetry to politics: Petrarchoism as discursive formation in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy" (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2008), 397.

\(^{29}\) Martin McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1995), 19. Both Petrarch and Dante were familiar with Horace’s *Epistles* and *Ars Poetica*, however Petrarch also used selections from Seneca’s *Epistulae 84* and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria 10, 2* to form his own theory of literary imitation. According to McLaughlin, Dante was probably unaware of Quintilian’s work, although he greatly influenced Petrarch’s conception of *imitatio* in his own writings.

\(^{30}\) Ibid, 18-19. The *Inferno* is a Christianized imitation of Virgil’s *Aeneid 6*, and the *Vita Nuova* is modeled on both classical and twelfth century provençal love poetry, especially the work of Arnaut Daniel.
imitate classical texts with the intention of presenting his work as original rather than a direct copy of an ancient text.  

31 Petrar
h, on the other hand, made it expressly clear that *imitatio* should be practiced only in Latin. In fact, in his *Epistolae familiares* Petrar
h criticized Dante’s use of imitation in his vernacular works: “Unless perhaps I am to envy him [Dante] the applause and raucous approval of the dyers, innkeepers, and woolworkers: I do not have their approval, but nor did Virgil or Homer, and I congratulate myself on that.”

32 Although Petrar
h theoretically believed imitation should be reserved for Latin works, he employed it in his vernacular poetry, especially when fashioning his beloved Laura. Following the advice of Seneca and Quintilian, and the visual model established by Zeuxis’s famous *Portrait of Helen of Troy*, Petrar
h believed that a writer should not imitate only one model, but rather borrow from the best of many examples in order to produce his own, unique creation.  

33 According to Pliny’s *Natural History*, a copy of which Petrar
h owned and fully annotated, Zeuxis combined the features of five beautiful women in order to create an idealized Helen:  

34 He was so scrupulously careful that when he was going to produce a picture [of Helen] for the city of Girgenti to dedicate at the public cost in the temple of Lacinian Hera he held an inspection of maidens of the place paraded naked and chose five, for the purpose of reproducing in the picture the most admirable points in the form of each.

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32 Ibid, 36. See *Fam. 21.15.22*.
33 Ibid, 27. See *Fam. 22.2.21*. Unlike Seneca, Petrar
h believed that a writer’s individuality was more important than a unified style: “Let me follow a leader, but with my own eyes, my own judgment, my own freedom.”
34 Petrar
h inscribed the details of his 1350 purchase of Pliny’s *Natural History* in this book, now in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France [Parisinus Latinus 680].
35 Pliny, *Natural History*, Books 33-35, 309. (*Alicui tantus diligentia, ut Agragantinis facturus tabulam, quam in templo Iunonis Laciniae publice dicarent, inspexerit virgins eorum nudas et quinque elegret, ut quod in quaque laudatissimim esset pictura redderet.*)
While Petrarch does not specifically mention the Zeuxis myth, he does compare Laura to Helen in Sonnet 260:

No one can equal her [Laura], not she most praised
in any age, on any foreign shore:
not even she who with her charming beauty
brought to Greece hardship and Troy its final shrieks…

The suggestion that Laura’s beauty was superior to the famous Helen’s is one of many rivalries Petrarch established between himself and his classical predecessors in the *Canzoniere*. It ultimately inspired the various Petrarchan competitions discussed throughout this dissertation.

**Historiography of the Beloved Portrait**

Over the last three decades, art historians have made significant contributions to the study of female portraiture in the Italian Renaissance by recognizing how these images further enhance our understanding of the role of women in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Scholars have identified semiotic signs, such as the standard profile pose and idealized physical features, and have posited persuasive arguments for the patrons’ and painters’ motivations to depict women as beautiful, decorous, and virtuous representatives of their male counterparts. Yet, these studies have focused largely on dutiful women whose portraits were commissioned to document familial affiliations, marital unions, or the birth of an heir. While many important studies have focused on individual portraits, what has not been adequately addressed is the role of the Beloved Portrait as a genre in the broader context of Renaissance *Petrarchismo*.

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36 Petrarch, *Petrarch’s Canzoniere*, 364-65. (Non si pareggi a lei qual più s’aprezza / in qual ch’etade, in quai che strani lidi: / non chi recò con sua vaga bellezza/ in Grecia affanni, in Troia ultimi stridi,....)
Elizabeth Cropper’s seminal article *On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style* (1976) first inspired my interest in this topic.\textsuperscript{37} Cropper convincingly identified the link between idealized beauty and Petrarch’s beloved Laura and was the first art historian to explore how Renaissance definitions of beauty, and consequently Renaissance visual images of women, derived from Petrarch’s various descriptions of Laura’s individual body parts.\textsuperscript{38} Cropper presented compelling evidence for how Laura’s physical features became visually and poetically standardized into a canon of beauty in the Renaissance. Furthermore, her analysis of the relationship between sixteenth-century treatises on beauty and contemporary portraiture presented a new, multi-disciplinary approach to the interpretation of female Renaissance portraiture. Cropper’s later publications on Petrarchan beauty in the Renaissance, including *The Place of Beauty in the High Renaissance and its Displacement in the History of Art* (1995) and *The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture* (1996) also provided important insight for my research.\textsuperscript{39}

In 1977, Joan Kelly-Gadol raised the question “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” Her discussion of the role of chivalric love in the medieval and Renaissance periods brought attention to the perceived sexual freedom celebrated in medieval courting practices. She concluded that the sexual and adulterous freedom inherent to the medieval chivalric culture ultimately supported, rather than threatened, the patriarchal social order of the time because it allowed select women to fill traditional roles.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
male roles when their husbands were either absent or the family required a change in marital affiliations in order to elevate their socio-political status. However, the Renaissance, according to Kelly-Gadol, afforded women much less romantic freedom.

With notable exceptions like Caterina Sforza, Isabella d’Este, and the two Queen Giovannas of Naples, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century courtly women were expected to be cultured and educated yet remain submissively charming and virtuous in their social relationships. This, according to Kelly-Gadol, was a reflection of the interpretation of the chivalric beloved relationship as defined by Dante and Petrarch. Unlike medieval French troubadours, both Italian authors fixated on a beloved who was both physically and psychologically unobtainable because both Beatrice and Laura communicated from the grave. This rendered the Renaissance beloved asexual according to Kelly-Gadol. While Petrarch may have intended for his relationship to be read in allegorical terms, this dissertation contends that Renaissance interpretations of the Canzoniere, both in contemporary commentaries and in manuscript illuminations, suggest that the Renaissance reader was more interested in Laura’s physicality than Kelly-Gadol recognized. In fact, unlike Petrarch’s own peers who questioned Laura’s existence, fifteenth and sixteenth Petrarchists sought tangible evidence of her existence in the form of visual documentation as will be discussed in the following chapters.

Cropper and Kelly-Gadol inspired a number of important contributions to this topic in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During this period, art historians began to turn their attention toward the role of women in Renaissance portraiture and to consider what

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41 Ibid, 37.
42 Ibid, 38.
these images communicated about contemporary views of femininity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The category of courtesan portraits was the focus of the next major study by Lynne Lawner. In the *Lives of the Courtesans: Portraits of the Renaissance* (1987), Lawner compiled images of all known and extant images of courtesans and mistresses and provided background on the visual tradition, primarily in Venice and Rome. Her book culled together for the first time a significant number of female portraits that featured more sensualized versions of Renaissance femininity. However, Lawner dubiously identified a number of sitters as courtesans without providing convincing evidence. Nonetheless, Lawner’s book remains the most comprehensive study of the courtesan portrait to date.

Building upon Cropper’s observations, Mary Rogers continued to explore Petrarch’s role in the canonization of female beauty in *The Decorum of Women’s Beauty: Trissino, Firenzuola, Luigini and the Representation of Women in Sixteenth-Century Painting* (1988). In her essay, Rogers specifically analyzed sixteenth-century treatises on beauty and their understanding of Petrarchan ideals. According to Rogers, these treatises demonstrated that a “woman’s virtue, good behavior and status are often understandable through the nature and style of her physical beauty.” Furthermore, Rogers identified the phenomenon of the ideal portrait: one not concerned with depicting a real woman, but rather aimed at portraying an idealized feminine beauty never found in nature.

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46 Rogers addressed similar themes in her subsequent essays: ———, "Sonnets on Female Portraits from the Renaissance North Italy," *Word & Image* II/4 (Oct-Dec 1986); ———, "Fashioning Identities for the
Another groundbreaking contribution to the study of fifteenth-century portraiture was presented by Patricia Simons in *Women in Frames: the Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture* (1992). Although the profile was initially used for portraits of both men and women, following in the ancient tradition of imperial coins and medals, Simons argued that in the Renaissance the profile pose had a different meaning when it was used for a portrait of a man than when it was used for a portrait of a woman. A man’s profile honored him with civic fame and individualism while a woman’s profile stripped her of individuality and held her within the confines of a frame.

Furthermore, according to Simons: “In the profile form eyes cannot be obviously downcast, for this would disturb the strict patterning, but the woman’s eye and face are deflected, buried, to the extent that they are averted. Thence she is decorously chaste, the depersonalized and passionless object of passion.” Simons argued that this depersonalization was the reason why the profile pose was retained much longer in portraits of women than it was for men. While Simon’s theories have some limitations, which have been identified by Jennifer Craven and Alison Wright, her approach remains a useful lens through which to analyze Beloved Portraits as objects of desire. This

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48 Ibid.

49 The first surviving Florentine portrait of a man in three-quarter pose is Castagno’s *Portrait of a Man*, c. 1450 and the first surviving three-quarter pose portrait of a woman is either Botticelli’s *Portrait of Smeralda Brandini*, c. 1470/1475 or Leonardo da Vinci’s *Portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci*, c. 1474 (the dating is unsure for both.)

50 For Craven’s discussion of Patricia Simons see Jennifer Craven, “A New Historical View of the Independent Female Portrait in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Painting,” (Ph.D. diss, University of Pittsburgh, 1997), 71-82.
dissertation employs Simon’s theories in the context of Petrarch’s own use of Laura’s gaze in his sonnets to communicate her availability or disinterest to her beloved.51

Jennifer Craven’s 1997 doctoral dissertation: *A New Historical View of the Independent Female Portrait in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Painting*, considered Jacob Burckhardt’s theory of Individualism as it related to Florentine portraiture. She dismissed the feminist methodologies applied by Simons and Mary Garrard for their reductionist view of a strictly male audience for Florentine female profile portraits and instead provided evidence of a broader male and female viewership.52 *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance* (1998), edited by Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson, presented excellent essays on Renaissance portraiture by many of the leading scholars in the field.53 Of particular use to my research was Nicholas Mann’s essay on *Petrarch and Portraits*, which focused on Petrarch as a patron of the arts, including his commission of a *Portrait of Laura* from Simone Martini.54 Also of interest was Georges Didi-Huberman’s contribution entitled *The Portrait, the Individual and the Singular: Remarks on the Legacy of Aby Warburg*, in which he explored the art historical search for likeness and identity in Renaissance portraiture and the inherent limitations that such a search presents. Didi-Huberman urged the art historian to move beyond iconography and

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traditional modes of identifying a sitter in order to approach the portrait “‘beyond the principle of individuality.’”55

Alison Wright’s essay, The Memory of Faces: Representational Choices in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Portraiture (2000) also addressed the role of the profile portrait in Renaissance Florence and presented the theory that the profile pose was used to portray the female sitter as a reflection of her family, both by displaying her familial heraldry on her sleeve, for instance, and celebrating her feminine virtues. It also functioned as a memory device, according to Wright; just as portrait medallions and donor portraits were intended to evoke the memory of the sitter in the mind of the viewer.56

Three recent museum exhibitions have highlighted the dynamic role of Renaissance female portraiture and touched upon the role of the beloved portrait in Renaissance culture. The National Gallery’s groundbreaking exhibition: Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women included portraiture from circa 1440 to circa 1540 and important essays by leading scholars on female portraiture including David Alan Brown, Dale Kent, Victoria Kirkham, and Joanna Woods-Marsden.57 This exhibition was followed by another seminal show held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2008: Art and Love in Renaissance Italy. The catalogue for this exhibition also included excellent essays by Andrea Bayer, Everett

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Both exhibitions are essential to my own work not only because of their important contributions to the field, but because they confirm that there is still much work to be done on the topic of female portraiture, especially in the realm of profane love. More recently, the Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and the Metropolitan Museum’s 2011 exhibition *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini* brought together some of the most important portraits and sculptures discussed in this dissertation including Botticelli’s two portraits of Simonetta Vespucci, portraits by Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo, Desiderio da Settignano’s *Bust of Marietta Strozzi*, and Gian Cristoforo Romano’s medallion *Portrait of Isabella d’Este*.\(^{59}\) Leonardo’s *Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani* was also included in the Berlin portion of the show and discussed in Stefan Weppelmann’s accompanying catalogue: *Gesichter der Renaissance Meisterwerke Italianische Portrait-Kunst*.\(^{60}\)

Two recent Italian publications have focused specifically on the *ritratto del amata*, or Beloved Portrait. The first was co-authored by Ingeborg Walter and Roberto Zapperi in 2006.\(^{61}\) In *Il ritratto dell’amata: storie d’amore da Petrarca a Tiziano*, Walter and Zapperi presented historical background for the most important, documented beloved relationships in the Renaissance. These included romances between Lorenzo de’ Medici and Lucrezia Donati, Bernardo Bembo and Ginevra de’ Benci, Ludovico Sforza and

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\(^{58}\) Andrea Bayer, ed., *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, shown at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).


Cecilia Gallerani and other notable couples. This book provided important factual information for my dissertation, however the authors did not adequately explore the visual tradition in depth nor did they consider the overarching relationship between the portraits and contemporary Petrarchismo. They also failed to consider the important role of the paragone and interpersonal and political rivalries in development of the genre, which is a central focus of my dissertation. In *Poesia e ritratto nel Rinascimento* (2008), Lina Bolzoni also addressed the Beloved Portrait tradition and its relationship to contemporary poetry. Though Bolzoni discussed the visual tradition in her book, her primary focus was on the poetic evidence of the portraits rather than on the paintings themselves. And though her book was not specifically on the Beloved Portrait tradition, Rona Goffen’s *Renaissance Rivals* inspired me to look at the role of paragone and competition between the patrons and artists associated with the Beloved Portrait tradition and fundamentally changed the way I viewed the genre.

Many of the portraits discussed in the following chapters have been the subject of important art historical studies. Andrew Butterfield (1997) and Dario Covi (2005) have discussed Andrea del Verrocchio’s *Portrait of a Lady with a Bunch of Flowers* and its Petrarchan associations. Numerous studies of Leonardo’s portraits have been published in recent years, including Carlo Vecce’s excellent book entitled *Leonardo* (1998) and Martin Kemp’s equally important *Leonardo da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man* (2006). I also consulted essays by David Alan Brown on

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Charles Dempsey’s work (1992) on Botticelli’s paintings as they relate to the relationships between Lorenzo de’ Medici and Lucrezia Donati, as well as Giuliano de’ Medici and Simonetta Vespucchi, provided seminal information for my research.71 Also

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68 Barbara Fabjan and Pietro C. Marani, ed. *Leonardo: La dama con l’ermellino*, published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, shown at the Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome; the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan; and the Palazzo Pitti, Florence (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1998).
71 Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*. 
key to an understanding of Botticelli’s idealized portraits of Simonetta Vespucci, discussed at length in Chapter Three, is Rudolf Hiller von Gaertringen’s discussion in _Italienische Gemälde im Städel, 1300-1550: Toskana und Umbrien_ (2004).\(^2\) Sharon Fermor (1993) and Dennis Geronimus (2006) contributed to a broader understanding of Piero di Cosimo’s strange and beautiful _Portrait of Simonetta_, though neither author identified the snake around her neck as a Petrarchan symbol as I do in Chapter Three.\(^3\)

Giovanni Pozzi (1981), Anne Christine Junkerman (1993), and E.M. Dalpozzolo (1993) have done important work on Giorgione’s _Laura_.\(^4\) Jennifer Craven (1994) provided a groundbreaking analysis of Petrarchan imagery in Raphael’s _Fornarina_ by introducing the relationship between the portrait and Raphael’s own Petrarchan poetry.\(^5\) Pontormo and Bronzino have been the subjects of many recent museum exhibitions and scholarly publications. For Pontormo I consulted Elizabeth Cropper’s _Prolegomena to a New Interpretation of Bronzino’s Florentine Portraits_ (1985) and _Pontormo: Portrait of a Halberdier_ (1995).\(^6\) Pontormo’s _Portrait of Alessandro de’ Medici_ was the focus of two important essays; one by Leo Steinberg (1995) and more recently an essay by Patricia Simon (2008) which brought to my attention the role of the painting in the


\(^{5}\) Jennifer Craven, “Ut pictura poesis: A New Reading of Raphael’s Portrait of La Fornarina as a Petrarchian Allegory of Painting, Fame, and Desire,” _Word & Image_ 10, no. 4 (1994).

paragone of Florentine Beloved Portraits, which is the subject of Chapters Three and Five.\textsuperscript{77} The portrait was also discussed in the exhibition catalogue for the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s \textit{Pontormo, Bronzino, and the Medici: Transformation of the Renaissance Portrait in Florence} held in 2004.\textsuperscript{78}

Elizabeth Cropper’s work for the Florentine Bronzino exhibition, \textit{Bronzino: Pittore e poeta alla corte dei Medici}, held in 2010, was important to my research as were essays in the same catalogue by Massimo Firpo and Massimiliano Rossi on Bronzino’s Petrarchism.\textsuperscript{79} My discussion of Bronzino’s \textit{Portrait of Laura Battiferra} in Chapter Five could not have been possible without the work of Victoria Kirkham (1987, 1996), Graham Smith (1996), and Carol Plazzotta (1998), each of whom have provided valuable insights and analysis of both the paining and the poetic beloved relationship between Bronzino and Laura Battiferra.\textsuperscript{80} Also important were publications dedicated to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{77} Leo Steinberg, “Pontormo’s ‘Alessandro de’ Medici’, or I Only Have Eyes For You,” \textit{Art in America} 1995.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Carl Brandon Strehlke, \textit{Pontormo, Bronzino, and the Medici: The Transformation of the Renaissance Portrait in Florence} (Published in conjunction with an exhibition under the same name, shown at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2004).
\item \textsuperscript{79} Elizabeth Cropper, “Reading Bronzino's Florentine Portraits,” in \textit{Bronzino: Artist and Poet at the Court of the Medici}, ed. Carlo Falciani and Antonio Natali, published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, shown at the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi in Florence (Florence: Mandragora, 2010); “Per una lettura dei ritratti fiorentini del Bronzino,” in \textit{Bronzino: Pittore e poeta alla corte dei Medici}, ed. Carlo Falciani and Antonio Natali, published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, shown at the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi in Florence (Florence: Mandragora, 2010); Massimo Firpo, “Bronzino and the Medici,” in \textit{Bronzino: Artist and Poet at the Court of the Medici}, ed. Carlo Falciani and Antonio Natali, published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, shown at the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi in Florence (Florence: Mandragora, 2010); Massimiliano Rossi, “…that naturalness and Florentinity (so to speak)” \textit{Bronzino: Language, Flesh and Painting.}” in \textit{Bronzino: Artist and Poet at the Court of the Medici}, ed. Carlo Falciani and Antonio Natali (Mandragora, 2010); Carlo Falciani and Antonio Natali, \textit{Bronzino: Artist and Poet at the Court of the Medici}, published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, shown at the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi in Florence (Florence: Mandragora, 2010).
\end{itemize}
Bronzino’s Petrarchan poetry; specifically Franca Petrucci Nardelli’s *Agnolo Bronzino, Rime in Burla* (1988), and Deborah Parker’s *Renaissance Painter as Poet* (2000).  

Chapter Outline

Chapter One, *From Word to Image: Visualizing Laura in Renaissance Illuminated Canzonieri*, explores literary commentaries, treatises, and poetic styles derived from Petrarch’s verse, along with the essential issue of assessing all of the illustrated *Canzoniere* in the Renaissance. As visual evidence I present various examples of illuminated manuscripts and incunables of Petrarch’s verse and identify common elements in visual interpretations. I then focus on select books that vary significantly in their portrayal of Laura. By analyzing these books in relationship to Renaissance views of Laura’s sensuality, I present new information about the connection between Petrarch’s text and Renaissance female portraiture. Finally, I make carefully considered comparisons between manuscript illuminations of Laura and Renaissance paintings of female portraits in order to demonstrate shared physical and iconographic features, further underscoring the direct connection between these two media. Since there is no surviving image of Laura drawn from life, late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century illuminated manuscripts were the first attempts to convert Petrarch’s words to visual images. These illustrations provide essential evidence of how Renaissance artists and their patrons visualized Laura when reading Petrarch’s text and mark the beginning of the visual Petrarchan tradition. Not only do their illustrations provide scholars with an

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overarching visual understanding of Renaissance interpretations of Petrarch’s
descriptions of Laura, select unusual examples, such as a late fifteenth-century incunable
illustrated for Beatrice d’Este and Ludovico Sforza by Antonio Grifo, reveal a great deal
about the relationship between illuminated editions of the *Canzoniere* and large-scale
painted portraiture. This dissertation bridges the gap between manuscript illumination
and independent paintings by considering the direct relationship between the two media
through a visual analysis of the imagery and by acknowledging the prestige associated
with owning both types of objects in the minds of humanist collectors. I further
underscore the connection between the two media by using the aforementioned incunable
by Grifo to demonstrate that often these books were owned by the same patrons who
commissioned painted portraits of their Petrarchan beloveds.

Generalized Petrarchan portraiture is the focus of Chapter Two, entitled *A
Beautiful Face is Worth a Thousand Words: The Proper Petrarchan Portrait in
Renaissance Italy*. This chapter closely examines Laura’s popularity in the Renaissance
and the influence of her idealized features on female portraiture in general. The
relationship between Renaissance Neo-Platonism and the Petrarchan idealized female
beauty is discussed at length in Chapter Two using various examples from the fifteenth
and sixteenth centuries. I also analyze the various ways artists interpreted Petrarch’s
metaphoric description of Laura’s eyes, hands, and hair in their portraits. This chapter
focuses primarily on portraits of brides, wives, and mothers, as opposed to the more
sensuous examples presented in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three, *Love in the Time of Lorenzo: The Fifteenth-Century Beloved
Portrait*, applies the findings of the previous chapters to the more specific category of the
Petrarchan Beloved Portrait and focuses on Lorenzo de’ Medici’s important role in shaping the tradition in the fifteenth century. This tradition, roughly dating from the 1460s to the 1560s, was driven by an elite, interconnected group of patrons, scholars, poets, and artists who participated in its development, including Lorenzo de’ Medici, Bernardo Bembo, Leonardo da Vinci, Ludovico Sforza, and Pietro Bembo. As Petrarch and his legacy were the impetus for multiple intellectual, artistic, literary, and political rivalries in the Renaissance, I consider the role of the paragone in the Petrarchan tradition and rivalries between patrons, artists, poets, and city-states for Petrarch’s legacy. This chapter considers portraits and poems deliberately modeled after Simone Martini’s Portrait of Laura and stemming directly from Lorenzo de’ Medici’s first commission.

The following chapter, Painting Poetry: The Petrarchan Paragone in Sixteenth-Century Venice and Rome, focuses on sixteenth-century interpretations of the Beloved Portrait as the genre spread to Rome and Venice. The chapter begins with an analysis of Pietro Bembo’s influence on the Beloved Portrait tradition both in Venice and Rome. I argue that though the tradition was primarily active in these two cities during the first half of the sixteenth century, every known example has a direct tie to the Medici and their circle, often through Pietro Bembo. I also evaluate the role of literary advisors in shaping the tradition and promoting their patrons as Petrarchan descendants of Lorenzo de’ Medici. Rivalries and competitions between artists, patrons, poets, cities, and artistic mediums are also explored with a deeper analysis of the role of the paragone in the sixteenth-century Beloved Portrait tradition. \(^{82}\)

\(^{82}\) Artistic rivalries played an essential role in the development of the paragone and this spirit of competition between artists was promoted in contemporary literature, for example the rivalry between Michelangelo, Titian, and Leonardo in Ludovico Dolé’s *L’Aretino*. For excellent discussions of this...
The sixteenth-century Florentine Beloved Portrait is the subject of Chapter Five: *Lorenzo’s Legacy: The Antipetrarchan Beloved Portrait in Florence*. The portraits discussed in this chapter expose a distinctly Florentine rivalry and visual dialogue between artists, Medici patrons, and Petrarch and Laura, all stemming from Lorenzo’s first commission of a Beloved Portrait a century earlier. The chapter culminates in a new reading of Bronzino’s *Portrait of Laura Battiferra*, simultaneously Petrarchan and Antipetrarchan in its visual language. Acting as artist, poet, and beloved in his commemoration of his equally accomplished sitter, Laura Battiferra, Bronzino plays with canonical issues of Petrarchan beauty and language in his painting. This, I argue, was Bronzino’s response to growing Antipetrarchan sentiments in Italy, an angle never before considered in relationship to the portrait’s iconography.

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Although the collecting of illuminated books was not new to the Renaissance, production increased dramatically in the early fifteenth century, and these new numbers were reflected in the large libraries amassed by leaders such as Francesco Sforza, Duke Federigo da Montefeltro, and Lorenzo de’ Medici, as well as smaller collections by wealthy merchants and humanists. Because the most prestigious copies were written and illustrated by hand using costly materials such as gold and silver leaf on parchment or vellum, book ownership became a reflection of the owner’s wealth and erudition. Although they were housed in private libraries, these books were meant to be admired by the patron’s circle of friends and colleagues. According to manuscript historian Giordano Mariani Canova these books were prestigious objects that were displayed and circulated among the ruling classes. Borso d’Este, for example, brought his lavishly illuminated Bible with him to Rome when Pope Paul II invested him with the Dukedom of Ferrara in 1471. The two-volume book, illuminated by Taddeo Crivelli and Franco dei Russi a decade before, was a public display of the Duke’s wealth and sophistication.

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New to this period was the inclusion of humanist texts alongside religious books and classical literature, and Petrarch’s works were considered an essential part of the Renaissance humanist’s library. The *Canzoniere* and the *Trionfi* were the most widely illustrated of Petrarch’s texts and the two were often copied in the same book, almost always leading with the *Canzoniere* and finishing with the *Trionfi*. Illuminated versions of the *Canzoniere* originated in Italy in the 1380s and were produced exclusively in Italy until the mid-sixteenth century.\(^4\) It was in these illustrated interpretations of Petrarch’s poems that artists first attempted to translate his description of Laura into visual terms. Though there was a general pattern, the images varied widely and were often specific to the date, region, patron, and sometimes even the remarks added by a contemporary commentator. This chapter will consider the various ways Laura was visually interpreted in these books by analyzing Petrarch’s relationship with his Renaissance audience.

Through a close analysis of Petrarchan commentaries, regional claims to the poet’s legacy, collecting practices, and first-hand inspection of the manuscripts themselves, evidence of a direct visual connection between book illuminations and contemporary female portraiture will also be presented. This further supports the long-standing theory that Petrarch was fundamental in shaping the feminine ideal in the early modern period.

Though printed books appeared in Italy as early as the 1460s, hand-written and illuminated versions retained their prestigious status and were commissioned for the most important volumes in a collector’s library. In the 1440s and ‘50s, Ferrara was the center of manuscript illumination under the patronage of Leonello d’Este, but Florence soon developed as a leading city for manuscript production. By the mid-fifteenth century manuscript workshops were established in the city, and illuminators often followed the

same trends seen in painting alongside more traditional decorative styles like the medieval Florentine bianchi girari, an all’antica white vine motif developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. 5

The Role of the Literary Commentary in Shaping the Petrarchan Ideal

Most volumes of the Canzoniere were preceded by a commentary interpreting Petrarch’s work, and each essay presented an analysis of Petrarch’s sonnets through the subjective lens of the commentator. In my opinion, the impact of these fifteenth-century commentaries on Petrarchan imagery is evident in illuminated manuscripts of the Canzoniere, and regional claims to Petrarch’s legacy by Florence, Milan, and Rome informed the ways in which Laura was portrayed. This chapter addresses these political and social reactions to Petrarchismo through a discussion of collecting practices in the three cities and a close analysis of book illustrations produced for the leaders of these communities. By looking at the imagery and considering the patronage, it becomes clear that commentators such as Leonardo Bruni, Antonio da Tempo, Francesco Filelfo, and Hieronimo Squarzaferco were contextualizing contemporary Petrarchan sentiments in their essays and thus their commentaries are a reflection of broader contemporary political, social, and artistic views.

The Florentine poet Filippo Villani wrote the first commentary in 1381; however, the most famous and widely copied fifteenth-century Florentine version was drafted by

5 Canova, “The Italian Renaissance Miniature,” 21. Florentine manuscript workshops were the exception, as patrons in most cities employed itinerant artists rather than establishing permanent workshops. The migration of manuscript illuminators explains iconographic similarities seen in various regions, but most cities retained a signature style.
Leonardo Bruni in 1436. Like the other Florentine commentators before him, Bruni focused on Petrarch’s early years in Arezzo and how he longed for Italy while living in France. Additionally, Bruni stressed the merits of a Republican government like that in Florence as well as Petrarch’s discovery of the pro-Republican writings of Cicero and Livy. Through Bruni, Petrarch’s pursuit of classical literature was equated with the flourishing of humanism in the Florentine Republic.

The next important commentary was written between 1420 and 1440 by the Paduan poet and Visconti sympathizer, Antonio da Tempo. Since Petrarch was educated at the University of Padua, worked for the Visconti in Milan from 1353-62, and ended his days at an estate provided by the Lord of Padua, Francesco da Carrara, Antonio was well suited to represent both important cities. Petrarch’s alliance with the Carrara and Visconti families was controversial in his own time, and Boccaccio and his Florentine contemporaries were critical of his perceived support of a tyrannical government. Florentine commentaries thus strove to change Petrarch’s seeming endorsement of the Northern Italian courts by posthumously promoting his republican beliefs, while Paduan and Milanese sympathizers were keen to turn the myth into historical fact with their commentaries. Antonio da Tempo’s version promoted this fantasy. According to Antonio, Petrarch was able to be more prolific working under one supreme patron, as

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6 Florentine commentaries were also written by Pier Paolo Vergerio in 1397 and Gianozzo Manetti in the 1440s but Bruni’s was the most widely circulated. See William J. Kennedy, Authorizing Petrarch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 36.
7 Ibid, 36-7.
8 The commentary was first published in 1477.
9 Kennedy, Authorizing Petrarch, 38. He lived at the estate in Arqua, a province of Padua, from 1368-1374.
10 Ibid, 41.
opposed to dividing his time between multiple benefactors and responsibilities in republican Florence.\textsuperscript{11}

Antonio’s emphasis on Petrarch’s desire to act as a loyal, public servant extended to the poet’s relationship with Laura. Antonio used as evidence an apocryphal story that claimed Petrarch turned down Pope Urban V’s dispensation to marry Laura because it would distract him from public service:

Even though he wished to marry, at the urging of Pope Urban V who held him in the highest esteem, allowing him to retain his benefices while taking a wife, he refused, saying that the fruit he earned from writing about love would be lost after he had obtained what he wanted.\textsuperscript{12}

Antonio’s commentary thus encouraged his readers to prioritize their civic duty above their own personal desires just as the poet did in his lifetime. The inference is, of course, that it would be easy to choose civic duty over romantic love in a city ruled by benevolent lords such as the Visconti.

Antonio da Tempo left his commentary unfinished, and humanist Francesco Filelfo was commissioned by Filippo Maria Visconti to complete it from 1445-7.\textsuperscript{13} Before moving to Milan, Filelfo was employed as a humanist scholar in Florence. He later fatefuly sided with the Albizzi family in their controversial fight against the Medici for control over Florence. Upon Cosimo de’ Medici’s victory, Filelfo was forced to leave the city in exile and relocated to Milan.\textsuperscript{14} Perhaps because of his relationship with the Medici, and certainly because he was subsequently employed by the Visconti, Filelfo’s

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 40.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. (\textit{E quantunque li volse esser data per donna ad instantia di Papa Urbano quinto il qual lui singolarmente amava concedendoli di tenere con la donna li benefici insieme non volse mai consentire dicendo chel fructo chel prendea de amore a scrivere dappoi che la cosa amata consequitto hauesse tutto se perderia.})
\textsuperscript{13} Filelfo’s commentary was first published in 1476.
\textsuperscript{14} Ironically, Filelfo returned to Florence in the 1470s when Lorenzo de’ Medici offered him a chair of Greek at the Florentine Studium and he died in the same city. See Kennedy, \textit{Authorizing Petrarch}, 42.
commentary is decidedly pro-Milanese. In his important study of Petrarchan commentaries, *Authorizing Petrarch*, William J. Kennedy explains:

Filippo Maria’s motives for sponsoring this commentary were to identify Petrarch as a beneficiary of Viscontean patronage, but Filelfo’s motives for responding were evidently to strengthen his own standing at the Milanese court. Even in this regard Filelfo sees himself inheriting the mantle worn by Petrarch in an earlier generation. Not only does he fashion his own social identity upon Petrarch’s precedent, but he also discovers an immense gratification in reenacting his predecessor’s career at the Visconti court.15

Kennedy’s point is important in the greater context of Petrarch’s relationship to court politics. If emulating Petrarch at the Visconti court elevated Filelfo’s status with his patron, it suggests that an association with the poet, and expertise in Petrarch’s *oeuvre*, was a powerful and desirable position for a court humanist. This was a common angle for Renaissance commentators who wished to ingratiate themselves with their patrons and promote the superiority of their own city’s cultural hegemony.

Filelfo only completed his commentary up to Sonnet 132, and it was left to his successor Hieronimo Squarzafico to complete the task in 1476. Squarzafico, a publisher working closely with the humanist and printer Aldus Manutius in Venice, was primarily concerned with providing an accurate account of Petrarch’s life while reiterating the monarchial sentiments of his predecessors. By 1484, Squarzafico finished his commentary and published it alongside Filelfo’s text. Between 1486 and 1497, Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, accompanied by Antonio da Tempo’s *Life of Petrarch* and the two commentaries by Filelfo and Squarzafico, was reprinted ten times, and in 1503 Antonio’s commentary was included for the first time as well.16 Until 1525, these three commentaries dominated printed editions of Petrarch, only rivaled by the great Venetian

15 Ibid, 41.
16 Ibid, 44.
Petrarchist Pietro Bembo’s Aldine publication in 1501 and a group of unpublished commentaries that circulated among a small circle of readers.\textsuperscript{17}

An important shift in relationship to Laura was addressed in a later sixteenth-century Venetian commentary by Alessandro Vellutello. Vellutello was not a humanist scholar himself, yet he was from a prominent family in Lucca and became acquainted with Pietro Bembo while working at the press of Giovanni Antonio da Sabbio in Venice.\textsuperscript{18} In \textit{Le volgari opera del Petrarca}, published in Venice in 1524, Vellutello reordered Petrarch’s sonnets based on events from the poet’s life. But it was his perspective on Petrarch’s personal life that is most interesting. His shift from the political to the personal is especially apparent in his interpretation of Petrarch’s relationship with Laura.

In addition to his commentary on Petrarch, Vellutello included a \textit{Life of Laura}, the facts of which he based on his close reading of Petrarch’s writings. He also supplemented his research with interviews with her supposed descendants in Avignon. Vellutello concluded that Laura died too early to be a member of the de Sade family and was instead from the small village of Cabrieres near the Sorgue River. It was on the banks of the river, Vellutello claimed, that the lovers first met while on a pilgrimage to a monastery in Lilla: “Perhaps a bit tired from the journey, she paused for rest and refreshment beneath a flowering tree… when here she was first seen by the poet…”\textsuperscript{19}

This first encounter, historically believed to have occurred in the Church of Santa Chiara in Avignon, took on a new, sensual importance in Vellutello’s commentary because for

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 45.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 50. (\textit{Fors un poco per lo caminare stanza, s'era per riposarsi e rinfrescarsi sotto un fioreto arbore... quando dal Poeta, il quale che da Valclusa anchora a egli, per la medesima cagione a l'Illa andando fa in questo luogo la prima volta veduta.})
the first time it occurred in nature. According to Kennedy, Vellutello stages their meeting in nature in order to allow for his display of untamed passion for Laura. This marked shift from championing Petrarch’s political sentiments to portraying the poet as a lustful lover is significant to the analysis of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Petrarchan imagery in both manuscripts and painted images and will be explored in the following chapters.

Vellutello was a contemporary and friend of Pietro Bembo, the most important and influential Petrarchist of the sixteenth century, and so his commentary must be considered a reflection of contemporary sentiments about the relationship between Petrarch and Laura. The stress on Laura’s ability to elicit lustful thoughts from her unrequited lover who “pursuing her all day… [was] inflamed by a most ardent passion,” and Vellutello’s dedication of an entire essay specifically to Laura demonstrated that his readers were interested in more than Petrarch’s psychological pining for his unobtainable beloved. The focus on Laura as a real human being was also reflected in contemporary Petrarchan portraiture. Portraits by Raphael and Giorgione, for example, portrayed their Petrarchan sitters in a significantly more sensual manner than their earlier fifteenth-century predecessors. While this was as much a reflection of changing tastes and artistic trends as it was a reflection of Laura’s newfound physicality, it also suggests that the Renaissance audience was open to accepting Laura’s sensuality.

Early sixteenth-century readers wanted to transform Petrarch’s description of Laura into a dynamic heroine who reflected changing ideas about female sensuality. This

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20 Ibid. In Kennedy’s words: “The movement of a desire born in open, raw, untamed nature thus generates a complex psychological action. Petrarch has located his forbidden passion in this displaced paradise, a wilderness between two branches of a river that deviates from its own course, a scene of primitive, wild, uncontrolled urgency….”
is further supported by a slightly later commentary written in Naples by Sylvano da Venafro in 1533. Sylvano followed the general structure of Vellutello’s commentary, also including a Life of Laura; however, his interpretation of Petrarch’s verse aimed at asserting Naples’ cultural equality with the rest of Italy. He thus centered his focus on the courtly aspects of Petrarch’s verse and presented his relationship with Laura as a cautionary tale for the ladies of the Aragonese court in Naples. Though Sylvano forgave Laura’s participation in courtly love games because of her aristocratic heritage (Sylvano reverted to the earlier identification of Laura as a member of the de Sade family), he warned his readers that although Petrarch praises Laura’s modesty and chastity, he never calls her a virgin. Men, according to Sylvano, should be weary of the womanly wiles inherent to the fairer sex, and women should learn from Laura’s successful seduction of Petrarch when attempting to lure their own suitors.

Petrarch, Sylvano argued, was able to maintain his reputation despite his feelings for Laura because he pursued Laura according to the chivalric poet code. Kennedy explained:

The lover importunes his beloved with thousands of intricate formalities while she protects her interests with corresponding ceremonies. Beneath the surface may lurk unresolved anxieties, thinly masked aggressions, displaced violence, residual envy, and wounded pride, but the honorific code of a noble love covers all their traces. Sylvano shows how Petrarch eschews scandal and above all vulgarity by implementing this code, turning his commentary into an ars amatoria for a lover with good intentions. Sylvano’s appropriation of Petrarch and Laura as models for Renaissance courtiers was not a new way to interpret Petrarch. Lorenzo de’ Medici and his circle, for example, modeled themselves on the couple as early as the 1460s. However, Sylvano’s

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21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
commentary is important in that it provides a direct connection between Laura and contemporary Renaissance ladies. Laura was presented as the model, good and bad, for Sylvano’s female audience, and her behavior mirrored the French chivalric ideals inspired by the French and Sicilian troubadour poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. As Petrarch’s sonnets were indebted to troubadour poetry, Sylvano’s appropriation of him as a model for the Aragonese court was most fitting. His small, yet educated, audience would no doubt have found Sylvano’s reading of the Canzoniere both amusing and affirming of their importance in the cultural milieu of Renaissance Petrarchism.

The Fifteenth-Century Illuminated Canzoniere
Florence

Though Petrarch lived most of his life outside Florence, he remained in the minds of the Florentines a Tuscan poet. Florentine humanists celebrated Petrarch’s rediscovery of classical literature and philosophy and his role in establishing the superiority of the Tuscan vernacular. The claim to Petrarch and his humanistic achievements was an essential ingredient in the development of Florence’s own cultural mythology, which was based on the city’s promotion of itself as the heir to classical Roman cultural supremacy.23 Petrarch became a representative of the humanist agenda promoted in and around the Medici court, based on the pursuit of knowledge, literature and culture, and used by the Medici to promote their political power.24 Lorenzo fashioned himself as the

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ideal poet-prince and, alongside his humanist advisors, wrote poetry modeled on Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*. Petrarch, however, was more than a literary model for the Medici and their circle; he became a symbol of a courtly lifestyle called *Petrarchismo*, which dictated a social code of decorum, study, and idealized beauty. While humanists strove to mimic Petrarch in their verse and pursuit of classical studies, Florentine courtiers imitated the romantic relationship between Petrarch and Laura in real life. Platonic couples exchanged love sonnets and portraits, and some even organized Petrarchan triumphal processions in honor of their unobtainable beloveds. Moreover, Florentine women went so far as to transform themselves into versions of Laura by brewing potions to lighten their hair and whiten their skin and using tweezers to create the unnaturally high forehead praised by Petrarch in the *Canzoniere*.25

This passion for romantic *Petrarchismo* was reflected in contemporary Florentine illuminated manuscripts of the *Canzoniere*. As Renaissance Petrarchists began to shift their focus from Petrarch’s scholarly pursuits to his role as a lover, Laura simultaneously gained popularity in visual imagery. Although late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Petrarchan manuscripts were primarily created in Lombardy and the Veneto, the Florentines were first to illustrate Laura in the margins of Petrarch’s poems. Written in Florence in 1383, less than a decade after Petrarch’s death, a manuscript now in the John Rylands University Library in Manchester records the first extant image of Petrarch’s beloved (fig. 2).26 In the manuscript, Petrarch’s first sonnet, *Voi ch’ascoltare*, is illustrated with an image of Laura standing in the margin opposite her lover, dressed in a

pink robe and wearing a laurel crown. Her golden hair waves about her beautiful face as she looks away from the viewer’s gaze. Cupid’s arrows pierce both her heart and that of Petrarch who is shown writing his poetry in a historiated capital opposite his beloved. A *bianchi girari* border, typically used on Florentine manuscripts, surrounds the text and a coat of arms at the bottom of the page identifies its patron as a member of the Strozzi family.27

The John Rylands University catalog describes the work as “written during the lifetime of Petrarca, or immediately after his death, for Lorenzo di Carlo Strozzi, a member of one of the noblest families of Florence, by Paul the Scribe, as the name appears in the colophon.”28 The fact that Lorenzo di Palla Strozzi may have owned the book is significant, especially in relationship to the role of his daughter, Marietta di Lorenzo Strozzi, and her family in the development of the Petrarchan *spettacolo*. Marietta’s beauty was renowned by her Florentine contemporaries and attracted many aristocratic suitors including Bartolommeo Benci, Lottieri Neroni, and Prori Pandolfini who staged a snowball fight in her honor in 1464. The *spettacolo*, complete with torches, trumpets, and flutes, was clearly meant to draw the attention of the Florentine public. Richard Trexler identified this event as an *armeggeria* intended to create and affirm alliances between the Strozzi and the Benci, Neroni, and Pandolfini families. The gentlemen all came from pro-Medici families, and the Strozzi posed a significant threat

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27 According to J.B. Trapp, this manuscript was commissioned c. 1383, however the John Rylands Library catalogue lists it as commissioned by Lorenzo Strozzi in 1520. It is possible the book was acquired by Lorenzo in the sixteenth century and that he had the Strozzi arms added at that time, though the illuminations appear to be earlier as Trapp suggests. Florentine manuscripts were typically decorated with *bianchi girari* borders with animals and classical putti and a coat of arms at the bottom of the page. Small scenes or portraits are often found in medallions or contained in the initial letters, many of which were inspired by the Medici’s important collection of portrait medallions.

with the imminent death of Cosimo de’ Medici.  

An alliance between the families benefitted all parties involved, protecting the Benci, Neroni, and Pandolfini in the event of a Strozzi takeover and allowing Marietta to participate in aristocratic courtship rituals in spite of her family’s political exile.

During Carnivale the same year, Bartolommeo Benci organized a festival in Marietta’s honor “playing the part of one enamored of the said dame.” The elaborate procession included 400 torchbearers, musicians, and pages along with Benci and his brigade pulling a twenty-yard tall float celebrating Petrarch’s *Triumph of Love*. A bleeding and enflamed heart topped the chariot and both the Strozzi and Benci arms decorated its side. Moreover, both Benci and Strozzi relatives served as the masters of ceremonies in what Trexler recognized as “a political statement of hope and potential: Marietta might become a bridge to political alliance between the Strozzi and the Benci.” As the parade passed the Strozzi house, Marietta stood in a window surrounded by torches, asserting herself into the Petrarchan spectacle as the unobtainable beloved.

While there is no evidence that a beloved portrait or accompanying poems were commissioned by Benci in Marietta’s honor, she has been identified as the sitter for a marble bust by attributed to Desiderio da Settignano, now in the Staatliche Museen in Berlin (fig. 3), and recently included in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s exhibition in 2012 of *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini*. The identification of Desiderio’s bust is in part based on Vasari’s

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30Ibid.
31The two did not marry, perhaps because of the Strozzi exile.
32The attribution of both of these works is not definitive. Though today the bust is generally accepted as by Desiderio, it was reattributed to Antonio Rossellino by Pope-Hennessy in John Pope-Hennessy, *Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, 4th ed., vol. 2 (1996), 191. However, more recently in the 2012 exhibition catalog for the Metropolitan Museum of Art show, Francesco Caglioti accepted the attribution to Desiderio, but
claim that Desiderio carved a marble bust of her likeness, “And he portrayed from the life, likewise in marble, the head of Marietta degli Strozzi, who was so beautiful that the work turned out very excellent.” A painted portrait by Piero del Pollaiuolo, also included in the Metropolitan portraiture exhibition, has been linked to Marietta as well, but not as convincingly (fig. 4). Marietta’s identification in the portrait is based more on historical fiction than fact, mostly because of the similar features between the two sitters and has not been supported in recent scholarship. However, whether the sitter was Marietta or another Petrarchan beloved, the fact that Marietta was linked to the portrait underlines her mythic role in the tradition. The Strozzi were prominent leaders in Florentine society and staunch opponents of the Medici. Competition between the two prominent families is well documented and it is not at all surprising that the Medici adversaries would employ a similar appropriation of Petrarchan imagery for their own gain. Owning the earliest known manuscript illumination of Laura would certainly have been a great symbol of erudition and humanistic prowess for the Strozzi family.

Laura is seen a second time in the Strozzi manuscript on folio 105r in the margins of Sonnet 264 (fig. 5). Here Laura now wears a blue dress and lies lifeless upon a funeral pyre. Her blond head remains encircled with a laurel crown and her beloved watches her noted that there is no extant documentation to authenticate the piece or identify the sitter and thus the attribution is still in question. See Weppelmann, "The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini," 107-9. Anne Markham Schulz also supported the attribution to Desiderio.


34 The Metropolitan portrait has been linked to both Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo, but I am relying upon Alison Wright’s attribution to Piero in her 2005 publication: Alison Wright, The Pollaiuolo Brothers: The Arts of Florence and Rome (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 125-6. This attribution has been recently supported by Neville Rowley in Weppelmann, "The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini," 103-4.

from his historiated initial. The Grim Reaper replaces Cupid in the margin above the figures, and a variant of the Strozzi coat of arms emblazons the bottom of the page surrounded by a similar bianchi girari border. According to J. B. Trapp, the author of a seminal article on images of Laura in Renaissance books, the illumination of Sonnets One and 264 is typical in Renaissance copies of the Canzoniere. When a manuscript contains only the Canzoniere, or if it precedes the Trionfi which is more typical, there is usually a full-page illustration on the verso of the page facing the opening sonnet Voi ch’ascoltate. The sonnet is often surrounded by a decorative border and includes scenes or roundels either on the same page or on the recto of the page. The text is typically not illustrated again until the beginning of the Rime in morte di Madonna Laura, marking the death of Laura with Sonnet 264. The final sonnet, 366, is also traditionally illuminated with a miniature, historiated initial or marginalia.36

While the example of the Strozzi manuscript follows this characteristic pattern of illumination, its images are anything but standard. Not only does the illuminator make Laura as important in the illuminations as her beloved, therein drawing the reader’s attention to Petrarch’s role as a lover (as opposed to only scholar or moralist), it also visually records her likeness as it was interpreted from the text. This was a fundamental step in the creation of a canonical image of the Renaissance’s most prized and emulated beauty. Even in these early illuminations, Laura’s pale skin, rosebud mouth, white teeth,

36 J. B. Trapp, The Iconography of Petrarch in the Age of Humanism (Florence: Casa editrice Le Lettere, 1996), 13. Exceptions to this rule are found in a small group of manuscripts written by Bartolomeo Sanvito and his workshop that illustrate Laura’s death in Sonnet 323 and a codex of the Canzoniere, now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, created in 1476 for the Orsini family in Rome that includes fifteen additional illuminations by Francesco Marmita. For more on this see Trapp, Iconography, 13 (MS M427.) In 1348, a year before Laura’s death, Petrarch divided his poems into two parts, starting Part II with Sonnet 264. While the poem does not expressly mention Laura’s death, it is identified as the beginning of the Sonetti in Morte that make up the second section of the Canzoniere. For more on this see Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 666-67.
high forehead, and golden hair are captured, establishing a feminine ideal that would last throughout the next two centuries.

Also unique to the Strozzi manuscript is the inclusion of select poems by Dante and an image of Beatrice herself. On the opening page of the poems the text reads in capital letters: “Here begins the expansive sonnets by the poet Dante Alighieri of Florence, in which various things are discussed and the rigidity of his Lady is demonstrated with rigid verse.”37 On the same page Beatrice and Dante are portrayed in a similar fashion to Petrarch and Laura (fig. 6). The poet in his canonical hood sits at his desk in an historiated initial and gazes across the page at his beloved Beatrice. She is portrayed in contemporary Florentine dress, wearing a long blue gown with a red lining. Her blond hair is pulled back in a fashionable chignon adorned with a delicate headdress, and above the couple a blue putto flies with a torch, drawing attention to the opening phrase introducing the poems to the reader. The elegant Beatrice gazes in the direction of her lover, yet with one arm wrapped around her waist and the other hand tucked into her dress, her body language is both chaste and ladylike. Her hands and hair, both a source of temptation and desire for Petrarch, are safely removed from the viewer’s gaze. Though Dante looks in her direction, the pen in his hand and paper before him suggest he is thinking about his beloved rather than her physical presence.

The physical and emotional distance between Petrarch and Laura is even more distinct in the Canzoniere images. The poet busily writes at his desk while Laura turns her gaze away from him entirely. Laura, unlike Beatrice, is not dressed in contemporary garb and her hair is loosely pulled at her neck rather than safely bound into a chignon. In

fact, with her loose robe, green vine sash, and laurel crown, the Strozzi Laura reads more as an allegorical figure than a contemporary woman. I believe this may be a reflection of lingering doubt about Laura’s existence and perhaps a response to the lack of visual evidence of her true likeness. Her laurel crown further underscores her ethereal presence.

She is half-woman, half-metaphoric symbol of her lover’s poetic inspiration.

Laura’s ethereal looks are no longer evident in a slightly later Florentine example now in the Beinecke Library at Yale University (fig. 7). Illuminated in 1464 by Antonio di Niccolò di Lorenzo, the opening page features a portrait of Petrarch in the historiated initial and his beloved in the right-hand bianchi girari border. While the configuration of the illuminations is strikingly similar to the Strozzi version despite the eighty years that separate them, the images themselves are considerably changed from the earlier Strozzi manuscript. Petrarch no longer wears his Florentine poet’s hood and is shown as an older, balding, almost monk-like man looking out at the reader in a three-quarter pose. He holds his book of sonnets in his hands and turns away from the image of his beloved. Laura is depicted in a round portrait medallion in the border, now bust length and in profile. Her green dress peeks out above the medallion and reminds the viewer of Petrarch’s lines:

Green clothes, bright red or dark or purple ones
no lady ever wore
or hair of gold has twisted in blond braid
as beautiful as this one who deprives
me of my will….

She turns to the left to face Petrarch, and her blond hair is swept up into a loose ponytail at her neck with a thin ribbon across her high forehead.

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38 Petrarch, *Petrarch’s Canzoniere*, 46-47. (Verdi panni sanguigni oscuri o persi/ non vesti donna unquanco/ né d’or capelli in bionda treccia attorse/ si bella come quest ache mi spoglia/ d’arbitrio….)
Laura’s image is even more striking because of her relationship to contemporary portraiture. When looking at the manuscript image, paintings by Paolo Uccello, Alesso Baldovinetti, and their contemporaries immediately come to mind. In fact, a portrait dating to the same period as the Yale manuscript (circa 1460/5) attributed to Paolo Uccello is so similar it could be argued the artists used the same sitter (fig. 8). In Uccello’s portrait of *A Young Lady of Fashion*, the young woman faces to the viewer’s left in the typical Florentine profile pose seen in the Yale manuscript. Though their faces are remarkably alike—blond hair, high forehead, creamy skin, and angular features—Uccello’s sitter wears a more elaborate costume typical of an aristocratic Florentine woman. Her golden hair is pulled back into a contemporary head broach, or *brocchetta di testa*, and she wears a fashionable white *cuffia* decorated with pearls. Her brocade dress is also traditional for a stylish woman of her time as is the pearl and jeweled choker she wears to draw attention to her long Petrarchan neck.\[^{39}\] Fifteenth-century Florentine women went to great lengths to transform themselves into Petrarchan beauties and clearly Uccello’s sitter was no exception.

The Yale manuscript is reminiscent of another contemporary Florentine portrait painted by Alesso Baldovinetti, a follower of Paolo Uccello (fig. 9). Bearing another striking likeness to the Yale illumination, Alesso Baldovinetti’s sitter is also in left-facing profile with her hair in a low ponytail. Her features are Petrarchan with one exception—her rather idiosyncratic nose. Though the sitter’s name is unknown, this feature would have clearly identified her to her contemporaries and in some ways makes her idealized Petrarchan features all the more exaggerated because of their perfection. Her graceful long neck, high forehead, golden hair, and perfectly sculpted eyebrows seem at odds with

her less-than-ideal (but absolutely real) nose. More unusual is that Laura’s nose in the 
Yale manuscript is also larger than one might expect of the Petrarchan beauty suggesting 
that both artists may have used a real person as their model.

In a discussion of the Uccello portrait and other similar works included in the 
pivotal exhibition *Virtue and Beauty*, David Alan Brown remarked, “While not 
particularly beautiful themselves, the women are portrayed as beautiful objects both in 
terms of literary notions of female pulchritude, which called for fair skin and blond hair, 
and of contemporary fashion.”40 This also applies to the Yale illumination. The 
illuminator, Antonio di Niccolò di Lorenzo, was undoubtedly well acquainted with the 
work of Uccello and his contemporaries, as he lived and worked in Florence at the same 
time.41 It is equally possible that Uccello and Baldovinetti consulted Antonio’s image of 
Laura before painting their sitters. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, manuscripts 
were both rare and costly to produce and thus proudly shared by their owners. Since both 
the manuscript and the paintings were created contemporaneously in the same city, 
perhaps for the same circle of patrons, it is more than likely there was some overlap 
between the visual images. The important issue is not so much which image was created 
first, but rather recognizing the visual connection between the image of Laura and the 
images of contemporary Florentine ladies. While art historians have been aware of the 
influence of Petrarch on Renaissance portraiture, the link between manuscript images and 
painted portraits has not been sufficiently addressed. The similarity between the Yale

40 Ibid.
work has been stylistically identified with larger scale works by Zanobi Strozzi, Apollonio di Giovanni, 
Andrea del Verrocchio, Antonio del Pollaiuolo, and Sandro Botticelli, indicating that he was influenced by 
Florentine contemporary painters and sculptors and thus very much an artist of his time.
image, its Strozzi predecessor, and fifteenth-century female portraiture further underscores the relationship between the two mediums.

Another contemporary Florentine manuscript of the Canzoniere, dating to the second or third quarter of the fifteenth century, was commissioned by the Strozzi family in Florence and is now in the collection of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana. The opening miniature of the manuscript is presumably set in Vaucluse with a hooded Petrarch seated in a Gothic cathedra, a throne originally reserved for emperors and Doctors of the Church such as Petrarch’s prized St. Augustine (fig. 10). The poet reaches out toward Laura who stands in a blue dress holding a sprig of bay leaf with a group of admirers behind her. In the margin Laura appears again holding a laurel crown. Though they are physically separated, Petrarch and Laura’s eyes meet and the poet stretches out his hand suggesting their physical contact is imminent. Laura’s perfectly Petrarchan profile is now stripped of the idiosyncratic features seen in the Yale manuscript but she retains her signature golden braid and fashionable gown. According to J. B. Trapp, this image is based on an earlier, late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century Florentine manuscript now in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. Though Laura’s dress and hairstyles change, slight variations appear in her face, and she is placed in various iconographic settings, all these mid-fifteenth-century Florentine Lauras share the same physical features. Her Petrarchan image is unmistakable, as is her influence on

42 Trapp, "Petrarch’s Laura: The Portraiture of an Imaginary Beloved," 79. This manuscript is in the collection of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence (MS Pal. 184, fol. 1). Laura also stands in front of a group of onlookers and extends a bay branch to a seated Petrarch. She is shown standing in profile wearing a red dress with her blond hair pulled back. An unidentified coat of arms sits to the right of the image. Upon firsthand inspection I discovered a later image of Laura on the back page of the manuscript. She is in three-quarter view with her hair pulled back into a gold cap and wearing two strands of pearl and coral beads. “Ritratto di Madon. Laura del Codice Laurenziano” is written below the image.
contemporary Florentine painted portraits. This connection will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

Venice

Early illuminated copies of the Canzoniere were also produced in Venice and the Veneto by the beginning of the fifteenth century. Petrarch was educated at the University of Padua and spent his final years working for the ruling Carrara family. Petrarch considered Venice “the most august city” and arranged to leave his personal library to the Republic in exchange for accommodations for his family in the city and with the stipulation that the collection be properly protected and remain intact. The poet, his daughter, and son-in-law lived in Venice from 1362 until 1367, and only a few volumes were in his personal possession when he moved to the Paduan territory of Arquà for the remaining years of his life.

Considering the relationship between Petrarch’s books and Venice, it is not surprising that some of the earliest illuminated manuscripts of the Canzoniere were produced in the city. The two earliest examples from the Veneto date to circa 1410. The first, illustrated by the Novella Master in Padua, features a golden-haired Laura in the right-hand margin wearing a long, flowing dress and looking up in profile at the golden banner she holds in her hand (fig. 11). She is engulfed by a bay bush, creating a green

41 Gertrude Rawlings, The Story of Books (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1901), 68. Sadly, the collection remained in Petrarch’s residence, Palazzo Molino, after the poet left the city and most of his books were neglected and ruined by dampness.
43 This included his famous copy of Virgil with a frontispiece designed by Simone Martini. This book, along with the rest of his collection, was left to Francesco da Carrera upon Petrarch’s death, and later seized by Gian Galeazzo Visconti for his library in Pavia.
45 Now in the collection of the Museo Correr in Venice, MS 1494, fol. 1.
border around her entire body. According to the fashion of the day, Laura wears a scarlet and gold houpplande, a unisex outer garment with flaring sleeves popular from the 1380s into the early fifteenth century; yet, like the Strozzi manuscript’s Laura (MS Ital. 1, fol. 3), she seems to be more otherworldly than of flesh and blood. The ethereal combination of her costume, golden banner, and the bay tree makes her appear to be a figment of the poet’s imagination.

That the artist chose to portray Laura as more of a mythic muse than a contemporary woman again suggests to me that she was supposed to represent a figment of Petrarch’s imagination as many of Petrarch’s contemporaries suspected.\textsuperscript{46} A Venetian manuscript of circa 1410, attributed to Cristoforo Cortese and now in the British Library, depicts a more realistic and contemporary-looking version of Laura, suggesting that by the early fifteenth century readers began to believe Laura was a real woman (fig. 12).\textsuperscript{47} She stands in profile on a riverbank with a bay tree on the hill behind her (as opposed to the unusual use of the bay tree as a halo-like background in the Paduan example) and she holds a laurel wreath in her outstretched hands. Across from her, Petrarch stands at his desk, holding an open book of his poems. This Laura is a precursor to a canonical image of Laura seen at the end of the century, specifically in the work of Antonio Grifo, which is discussed at the end of this chapter.

In general, Venetian illuminators tended to be more literal in their interpretation of the antique style, using ancient coins and marbles as their inspiration. The \textit{littera mantiniana}, or faceted initial, was conceived in Venice as were architectural frontispieces inspired by Paduan painting. Typically the title and the first letter in the text were written

\textsuperscript{46} Beatrice was also an ethereal character in Dante’s \textit{Divina Commedia}.

\textsuperscript{47} King’s MS 321, fol. 1, British Library.
This antique style is manifested in an extraordinary illuminated manuscript of the *Canzoniere* dating to circa 1465. Written by Bartolommeo Sanvito and illustrated by Franco de’ Russi and an anonymous hand, the illuminations in this book differ significantly from other contemporary *Canzoniere* in their *all’antica* style. The frontispiece to the Canzoniere, for example, portrays a Roman double *stele* against a stained green background (fig. 13). Petrarch and Laura face each other within a classically framed opening above a Latin inscription on the tombstone that reads “FRANCISCI PETRARCAE FLORENTINI POETAE EXCELENTISS RHYTHMI INCI PIVNT.” Perched upon the tombstone on either side of the couple are naked female spirits with butterfly wings. One holds a torch to represent her immortality and the other coddles a child at her breast. Below the couple, standing on the left side of the page is a full-length Apollo dressed in classical attire and playing a lyre. The inclusion of Apollo refers to Petrarch’s metaphorical adaption of the god’s persona throughout the *Canzoniere* and Laura’s association with the laurel (*lauro*) tree into which Daphne transformed in order to escape Apollo’s grasp. To the right of Apollo is a red cardinal’s

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48 The first architectural frontispiece was produced in 1457 by Bartolomeo Sanvito for Bernardo Bembo’s copy of Solinus’ *Polystoria* and will be revisited in a later discussion of a Paduan copy of the *Canzoniere* also written by Sanvito.

hat, added later by the owner of the book, probably either Ludovico Trevisan, Patriarch of Aquileia, or Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga.  

What is unusual about the image is its antiquarian style and incorporation of stained vellum to make the page appear to be made of another material, probably stone in this case. A second folio in the book is painted in mottled purple to replicate porphyry, a material associated with Roman funerary sculpture. The page marks the beginning of the *Trionfi* and depicts the Triumph of Love with a chariot and riders and another funerary plaque, all etched in gold (fig. 14). With his illuminations, he also reveals a sophisticated awareness of ancient Roman funerary motifs and the trompe l’oeil made famous by Mantegna at the time.

**Milan**

The ruling Visconti and Sforza families of Milan were intent on promoting their dynastic rule and this was reflected both in their literary commissions and book illustrations. The Milanese rulers primarily commissioned prayer books, dynastic histories, classical, and educational texts; however, Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* was also favored among the Milanese elite as the Visconti/Sforza dynasty had a long Petrarchan history. Petrarch worked as an ambassador and orator for both Giovanni and Galeazzo

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50 Trevisan owned a two other manuscripts scribed by Sanvito, also on stained vellum as well as a copy of Bembo’s *Oration* illuminated by Franco dei Russi. See Alexander, *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination 1450-1550*, 154.

51 Ibid, 153. According to John J.G. Alexander, Franco dei Russi was the first illuminator to show “awareness of the work of Donatello in Padua, especially the altar of the Santo, and of the paintings of the most famous Paduan artist of the 15th century, Andrea Mantegna.”

II Visconti in the fourteenth century and lived in Visconti-ruled Pavia for many years of his life. In a letter to Giovanni Boccaccio, Petrarch praised the city and his primary patron, Galeazzo II:

And you would have seen... an enormous palace in the citadel, a truly remarkable and costly structure. It was built by the magnanimous Galeazzo Visconti, the younger, the present ruler of Milan, of this city, and of many others in the area, a man who surpasses others in many things and himself in the magnificence of his buildings. Unless my love for the prince deceives me, your refined taste would have judged this work the most majestic of all modern creations.  

Petrarch’s championship of the Visconti dynasty is reflected in his contribution to the visual arts. The poet is credited with the creation of Galeazzo’s primary heraldic device; a white dove surrounded by the rays of a sun and often accompanied by the motto *A bon droit* or *A bon drayt*, meaning “with good reason.” This motto, along with a host of other Visconti heraldic devices, was used in various ways to promote the Visconti dynasty and the heraldic imagery was borrowed repeatedly by future Visconti and Sforza rulers to legitimize their right to rule Milan.  

53 Evelyn S. Welch, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 175. (Avresti ammirato nel luogo più alto della città, Galeazzo Visconti, il quale come molti in molte cose, tutti supera, e vince nella magnificenza delle sue fabbriche. Se a me non fa gabbo l’amore verso di lui, io credo che col tuo fine dissenimento, opera nobilissima fra quante sono le opera modern l’avresti tu giudicata....) Petrarch’s alliance with the Visconti was controversial in his own time and Boccaccio and his Florentine contemporaries were critical of his “apparent condoning of what they regarded as tyranny.”  

54 Petrarch is believed to have suggested it as a device for Gian Galeazzo II—See D’Arcy Jonathan Dacre Boulton, "Insignia of Power: The Use of Heraldic and Para-Heraldic Devices by Italian Princes, c. 1350-c. 1500," in *Art and Politics in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Italy 1250-1500* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 118. Some historians speculate Petrarch suggested it as a device in honor of Gian Galeazzo II’s first marriage to Isabelle de Valois in 1360. The motto is often associated with Galezzo’s epithet *Conte di Virtù* (Count of Virtue), referring to his inheritance through his marriage to the county of Vertus in France and a poem written by court poet Francesco Vannozzo entitled *Canzone morale fatta per la divisa del conte di Virtù.* For more on this see Sarah M. Carleton, "Heraldry in the Trecento Madrigal" (University of Toronto, 2009), 125.  

55 The Milanese interest in Petrarch and the French troubadour poets was an extension of their desire to associate themselves with French culture. Galeazzo and his brother Bernabò were exiled to the Court of Savoy in the mid-fourteenth century where the then ruler, Count Amadeus VI of Savoy, was credited with bringing French culture to Italy. Galeazzo and his brother were influenced by the French use of heraldic devices at the Savoy court and probably adopted their heraldic mottos there. For more on this see ———, "Heraldry in the Trecento Madrigal," 85.
Sarah Carleton explored in depth the importance of heraldic devices in the Visconti/Sforza culture and concluded that beginning with Gian Galeazzo’s father, Galeazzo II, the Visconti were among the first Italian families to use paraheraldic devices. Unlike heraldry, or coats of arms passed from one generation to another, paraheraldry allowed an individual to incorporate his or her own emblem or motto alongside their hereditary arms. Paraheraldry, like heraldry, could be inherited or appropriated by future generations; however, it could also be modified to fit the needs of its user. The Visconti/Sforza dynasty took advantage of the visual flexibility of paraheraldry and used various mottos and emblems to visually promote their lineage. The *biscione*, a Visconti emblem of a serpent eating a child, as well as the eagle, the turtledove, the knot, and the phoenix among other emblems, were reused and reconfigured by generations of Milanese rulers. Galeazzo II’s son, Gian Galeazzo Visconti, for whom Petrarch also worked, was famous for his library in Pavia and its collection of 800 rare books. Recent scholarship suggests the collection was mostly acquired through inheritance, gifts, and military spoils. Thanks to the military defeat of Padua in 1388, the Visconti acquired books from Petrarch’s own library, formerly in the collection of the poet’s patron and the Lord of Padua, Francesco da Carrara. As Gian Galeazzo was the son of Petrarch’s beloved

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56 Ibid, 123. I have changed the spelling of Gian Galeazzo’s name from Giangaleazzo in Carleton’s text to avoid confusion. His name is spelled both ways, but more often it is divided in two parts.
57 Ibid, 10. The use of paraheraldry was a late Medieval phenomenon, beginning in the fourteenth century.
58 Other Visconti heraldry included the leopard and flames associated with Bernabò Visconti and Gian Galeazzo’s devices included the eagle, sun, knot, dove, vertù, panther, and lion. See ibid, 85.
59 Welch, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan*, 31. Visconti’s collection included Petrarch’s famous copy of Virgil with a frontispiece by Simone Martini. The book is now in the collection of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan. Petrarch left the majority of his library to Venice in exchange for a house in the city, however many of his books ended up in other hands. In his will, Petrarch left Francesco his portrait of the Virgin by Giotto so it is not surprising he would leave him another prized possession as the men had a close relationship and Petrarch was in Francesco’s employ upon his death in 1374. For more on Petrarch’s
patron and himself briefly employed the poet, his motive for acquiring Petrarch’s library is obvious; the ownership of Petrarch’s books would remind his contemporaries of the Visconti’s ties to Petrarch and the family’s great artistic patronage. By association, it would legitimize his right to rule Milan in the wake of his controversial rise to power.60

The Visconti and Sforza families were famous for their use of artistic propaganda to defend their right to rule, and book imagery was no exception.61 They filled the margins of their manuscripts with images of ducal portraits, scenes of town and court life and Milanese heraldry. In her seminal book, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan*, Evelyn Welch explained:

> Despite, or indeed precisely because of the many changes and transitions that occurred in the two centuries of signorial domination, tradition proved as important as innovation. The message emphasized by the humanists, jurists, poets, painters, sculptors and musicians who served Milan’s successive regimes proved constant and even trite: however violent his accession, the current lord was a great ruler who held legitimate power and dominion. But if the concept was banal, the means by which it was conveyed varied enormously. The presentation of princely authority was carefully tailored for different audiences at different times…. The permutations were endless, resulting in numerous works of art and literature designed to enhance and secure the image of those who wished to control Milan.32

Though the Visconti were Milanese by descent and controlled Milan and its territories as early as the thirteenth century, they were not recognized as the legitimate rulers until Gian Galeazzo was made Duke of Milan by Emperor Wenceslaus IV in 1395. The Visconti surname died with his son, Filippo Maria, and the Sforza family took control of the city when Filippo Maria’s daughter, Bianca Maria, married the famous mercenary

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60 In 1386, two years before the defeat of Padua, Gian Galeazzo won his position after the mysterious poisoning of his uncle and co-ruler, Bernabò. Gian Galeazzo was no doubt keen to remind the people that he was the legitimate heir.


62 Ibid, 5-6.
soldier from the Emila-Romagna, Francesco Sforza. Sforza, like the Visconti before him, was keen to assert his legitimate right to the Dukedom, as were the Sforza rulers who followed him. It was with military force, family heraldry, visual propaganda, and I argue, Petrarch himself, that the families asserted their right to Milan.

Laura’s canonical features appear in Lombard manuscripts as early as the mid-fifteenth century. In a manuscript of circa 1440 illustrated by the Master of the *Vitae Imperatorum*, Laura stands above her kneeling lover and places a laurel crown upon his head while Cupid shoots his arrow at the couple from behind Laura’s head (fig. 15). The couple is placed in a pastoral landscape next to a riverbank with a large bay tree on the other side of the water. Laura is in three-quarter view wearing a dress decorated with embroidery and her signature golden hair is pulled into a loose ponytail that flows down her back. Her delicate facial features are unmistakably Petrarchan as is her high forehead and long white neck. An almost identical image is found in another manuscript dating to the 1440s and now in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana (fig. 16). The scene is the same: a kneeling Petrarch is crowned by Laura at the edge of a riverbank adjacent to a bay tree with Cupid shooting his arrow at the lovers from the far right hand corner of the image. The Laurenziana Laura stands slightly more erect with a golden band of embroidery at her waist and her face in profile, but her Petrarchan features and golden hair are identical to the Master of the *Vitae Imperatorum*’s rendition. While it is unknown which image was created first, there is no doubt that the iconography is shared, and that these Lombard Lauras reflect codes of beauty specific to the Milanese court.

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63 Fillipo Maria Visconti succeeded Gian Galeazzo as Duke of Milan in 1412. He married Maria of Savoy, however his daughter, Bianca Maria was the illegitimate daughter of Filippo and his mistress, Agnese del Maiano. Bianca Maria later married Francesco Sforza and was the mother of Galeazzo Maria, Ludovico, and Ippolita Maria Sforza. All were important figures in the development of Milanese Petrarchismo.
Just as the Florentine examples portrayed Laura as a fashionable lady of her time, the Master of the *Vitae Imperatorum* depicts Laura in the Milanese fashion documented in Cesare Vecellio’s late sixteenth-century costume book, *Habiti antichi et moderni* (fig. 17). In the text accompanying his rendition of a *Donzella Milanese*, Vecellio described Milanese women as wearing golden or silken hairnets tied with colored ribbons that fluttered behind their heads and with loose tendrils hanging at the sides of their faces. He also mentioned necklaces of pearls, silver beads or coral that represented the woman’s position in society.64 In both Milanese manuscripts Laura’s dress is strikingly similar to the one illustrated in Vecellio’s book. All three women wear long, full white dresses decorated with gold brocade and both the Laurenziana and the Vecellio versions are accented by decorative bands of embroidery. Though Vecellio’s *Donna* has a more elaborate headdress and her hair is not visible behind her back, all three women wear their long hair knotted at their neck in a similar style.

Recent scholarship has identified the coat of arms on the Laurenziana manuscript as that of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, though the dates of his life (1444-1476) would suggest the book was either commissioned by his father on his behalf, inherited, or seized by Galeazzo Maria during his lifetime. Given the Visconti/Sforza’s penchant for associating themselves with their forefathers, it is feasible that Galeazzo Maria placed his heraldic device on a manuscript owned by his grandfather.65 Yet the initials on the manuscript do not correspond with Galeazzo Maria’s monogram. In the *Great Hours of Galeazzo*

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65 Galeazzo Maria Sforza was rumored to have poisoned his mother, Bianca Maria, after his wedding in May of 1468. After Francesco Maria’s death in March 1466, she controlled of the duchy of Milan until her son took over shortly thereafter. She was removed to Cremona and may have been plotting with Ferdinand 1 of Naples to overthrow her son.
Maria Sforza, for example, created by the Ippolita Master between 1471 and 76, the Duke’s monogram is represented as both “GZ MA” and “G M” corresponding to the Duke’s initials (fig. 18). In the Laurenziana Canzoniere, however, the monogram flanking the coat of arms reads “IA AL.” The coat of arms on the Canzoniere also differs significantly from the impresa used in Galeazzo Maria’s Hours. Renaissance aristocrats famously used multiple heraldic devices and therefore it is certainly possible that Galeazzo Maria used a different impresa and monogram for the Canzoniere than he did for his Hours. However, I propose that the Canzoniere was owned by another member of the Sforza family. Galeazzo Maria’s sister, Ippolita Sforza (1446-1484), was betrothed to Alfonso d’Aragona, the Duke of Calabria, in 1455. The monogram theoretically corresponds to the couple’s initials IP/ Ippolita and AL/ Alfonso and it is both stylistically and chronologically possible that the book was commissioned to commemorate her betrothal.  

Humanist collectors and aristocratic patrons often used various monograms and emblems to identify themselves on illuminated manuscripts and it is often impossible to find an exact match for a Renaissance paraheraldic device. However, there are both stylistic and heraldic clues that identify the Laurenziana manuscript as a Sforza commission. The most concrete visual link to the Sforza is the inclusion of the Visconti device of a lion lying on flames, wearing an armored helmet and holding a branch on which two buckets hang. This device was not only adopted by Galeazzo Maria, but also used by Galeazzo and Ippolita’s parents, Francesco and Bianca Maria, and the Visconti.

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66 This attribution is entirely speculative as to date I have only found manuscripts with Ippolita’s initials as “HIP MA” as seen on MS. Italien 1712 in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Alternately her name is written out entirely as “HYPOLITA MARIA” on her copy of Virgil’s Eclogues now in the Biblioteca General de la Universidad in Valencia [MS 891].
rulers before them. The lion impresa, among other Visconti and Sforza heraldry, is included on an illuminated manuscript that was in Ippolita’s own collection of books brought with her to Naples. This book, now in the collection of the Universitado de València Biblioteca Històrica, bears the Visconti/Sforza arms and the initials of Ippolita’s parents, “FR SF and BLM” (fig. 19).\(^67\) An inventory of fourteen of her most prized books was part of her dowry list and included this manuscript among the titles. She also carried with her religious texts and a copy of Virgil’s Eclogues, which included two illuminated portraits of Ippolita. According to Judith Bryce in her essay, *Ippolita Sforza and her Books*, Ippolita undoubtedly carried more than the fourteen books listed in her dowry, and it is plausible that the Laurenziana Petrarch was one of them.\(^68\)

In addition to the Visconti lion motif, the unusual crest at the bottom of the page seems to be a conflation of Sforza/Visconti and Aragonese devices. The golden open-mouthed creature emerging from the top of the crest may be a fusion of the Visconti imperial eagle with its two wings and the golden dragon adopted by the Aragon dynasty (fig. 20). In both the Laurenziana impresa and the Aragon example, the creature appears to struggle to escape from the crest, with its mouth open, tongue extended, and front claws protruding outward. While I could not identify a precedent for the golden wing pierced by an arrow in either the Visconti/Sforza heraldry or the Aragonese imagery, it could perhaps be a pun on the container of arrows used as an Aragonese motto and the arrow shot by Cupid into the heart of Petrarch when he fell in love with Laura. Finally, though the colors are different, the roped top of the impresa and the waving pattern of the

\(^{67}\) Written by Robert Kilwardby (died 1279).

\(^{68}\) Judith Bryce, “‘Fa finire uno bello studio et dice volere studiare’ Ippolita Sforza and her Books,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* LXIV (2002), 56. Correspondence between Ippolita and her mother confirms that Ippolita brought the books in order to set up her own studiolo in Naples alongside portraits of her family.
design below are visually compatible with the Sforza emblem on the Valencia manuscript, suggesting the artist may have created a new paraheraldic device for his patron by incorporating her family’s heraldry into a unique design.

Stylistically, the connection between Ippolita Maria and the manuscript is also compelling. As was previously discussed, the Laurenziana manuscript is almost identical to the version created by the Master of the *Vitae Imperatorum*. The Master of the *Vitae Imperatorum* was the favorite manuscript illuminator of Filippo Maria Visconti and recent scholarship has revealed that the same artist illustrated a copy of Francesco Filelfo’s *Satyrae* for Ippolita’s father-in-law, Alfonso il Magnifico, in 1449 (fig. 21). The decoration of the book, dedicated to Alfonso by the poet in 1453, bears a striking visual resemblance to the Laurenziana *Canzoniere*. Gennaro Toscano argued that the Visconti library in Pavia was the largest and most impressive collection of the early fifteenth century and provided inspiration for Alfonso il Magnifico’s library in Naples. Lombard artists were very much in demand and owning books illuminated by the Visconti’s prized manuscript artist would have been a prestigious addition to the King’s new library.

Ippolita Maria had her own preferred manuscript artist, now called the Ippolita Sforza Master, who worked in the style of the Master of the *Vitae Imperatorum*. Given the stylistic similarities between the two Petrarchan manuscripts and Francesco Filelfo’s book, it is worth considering that the Laurenziana manuscript may have been illuminated for Ippolita by her favored artist in the style of his mentor, the Master of the *Vitae Imperatorum*. Regardless of whether this attribution holds, or if, in fact, Ippolita Maria

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was the patron, the connection between the two *Canzonieri* and their imagery is important in a discussion of the development of the Petrarchan ideal at the Sforza court.

Ippolita was a perfect candidate to represent the Milanese Petrarchan ideal. She was educated as a humanist and, like her sisters-in-law Beatrice and Isabella d’Este, established her own *studiolo*. Albeit not as grand a patron as Isabella, Ippolita was nonetheless intent on portraying herself as a humanist of her time. She was also well acquainted with the most important Petrarchist of her time, Lorenzo de’ Medici. Ippolita met Lorenzo de’ Medici in 1465 at her wedding to Alfonso. She then visited Florence on her way to meet her husband in Naples and stayed at the Medici palace where she became better acquainted with Lorenzo. Between 1468 and 1487 Lorenzo and Ippolita exchanged letters, of which only Ippolita’s responses survive. Though the relationship between Ippolita and Lorenzo was primarily political, Judith Bryce suggested a Petrarchan flirtation may have existed between the two rulers.

Ippolita was Lorenzo’s superior in the social hierarchy of the day, yet to exchange letters with romantic allusions would not have been unusual for the time, and especially for Lorenzo who was known for his romantic Petrarchan poetry. What is interesting about this relationship in the context of the development of the beloved portrait tradition is that Ippolita’s intimate relationship with Lorenzo, albeit platonic, and her visit to

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70 Ippolita was the only known member of the Sforza family to create a *studiolo*. The idea may have been inspired by a room designed by Francesco Sforza in the Corte d’Azeglio in Milan which was possibly modeled after Piero de’ Medici’s Florentine *studiolo*. For more on her *studiolo* and library see Alison Manges Noguera, "Portraits of the Visconti and the Sforza: Image and Propaganda in Milan, c. 1300-1500" (New York University Institute of Fine Arts, 2008), 190-97.


72 Alfonso’s brother, Federico, acted as a proxy at the wedding so the couple did not meet until Ippolita arrived in Naples.

Florence in 1465, placed her in the center of the Petrarchian festivities planned by Lorenzo in honor of Lucrezia Donati which will be discussed in the following chapter. Although the Laurenziana manuscript predates Ippolita’s visit to Florence, her relationship with Lorenzo proves a Petrarchan connection between the Sforza and the Medici development of the Beloved Portrait earlier than Leonardo’s arrival in Milan. Interestingly, the phenomenon of the Petrarchan Beloved Portrait, active as early as the mid-1460s in Florence, was not adopted in Milan until the early 1490s with Ludovico’s commission of a portrait of his mistress Cecilia Gallerani from Leonardo da Vinci which will be discussed at length in Chapter Three. Yet Petrarch’s feminine ideal is evident in extant images of Ippolita. Thus whether or not she commissioned the Laurenziana manuscript, Ippolita should be considered in the context of Milanese Petrarchan imagery because of her role in shaping it.

Two illuminated portraits of Ippolita are included in the copy of Virgil’s *Eclogues* she brought with her to Naples. In the manuscript created in 1465 by the Master of Ippolita Sforza, Ippolita is shown standing in profile in the historiated initial of the frontispiece (fig. 22). She wears a red gown with blue sleeves and her blond hair is neatly tucked in a chignon with a bejeweled pearl headdress. In the second image on folio 4 verso she is similarly portrayed in standing profile, this time in a green dress with red sleeves and a white apron (fig. 23). Unlike Bonifacio Bembo’s portrait of Ippolita’s mother, Bianca Maria, portraying her in an unflattering, yet dynastic profile pose (fig. 24), Ippolita’s portraits present her as the picture of Petrarchan perfection. Her forehead is high, her features are refined, and her hair shines like the sun.

By the 1460s, Florentine artists working in Milan slowly infiltrated the traditional style. Manuscript artists incorporated architectural details inspired by Florentine architect Filarete’s work in Milan and by the end of the century the influences of Leonardo and Bramante become evident in book illustrations.
While she resembles the earlier Lombard images of Laura only in a very generic way, she bears a closer resemblance to another Milanese *Canzoniere* dating to the mid 1470s (fig. 25). The book was created circa 1470 and owned by a member of the Sforza family (or a member of their circle) as is evidenced by the *impresa* at the bottom of the page featuring the Visconti *biscione* encircled by a wreath and the name “IVLLIVS VICECOMES.” On the opening page Laura places a laurel crown on Petrarch’s head as the poet kneels before her. Her dress, like Ippolita’s, has blue sleeves, although Laura’s gown has a high collar that completely hides her neck. Both Ippolita and Laura wear their blond hair tucked into a tight bun, and Laura’s crown is made of laurel instead of jewels. Ippolita is shown in a similar Petrarchan fashion in the portrait bust created of her by Francesco Laurana circa 1473 with her smooth skin and serene expression (fig. 26). Laurana’s Ippolita is every bit as Petrarchan as the Florentine female busts created by Verrocchio and seems to reflect a shift in the portrayal of female members of the Sforza family. Unlike Bona of Savoy’s portrait, which clearly reflects the

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75 According to the Christie’s catalog: “Although they were not supplied by the illuminator of the border, these arms and the family name are likely to have been those of the first owner. Another copy of the *Canzoniere* and *Triomfi* with an opening leaf illuminated by the same artist and with a similar miniature (Milan, Biblioteca Trivulziana, Cod. 903: see G. Petrella, *Il fondo Petrarchesco della Biblioteca Trivulziana: manoscritti ed edizioni a stampa (sec.xiv-xx)* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2006), 33-38. The manuscript has a roundel of exactly the same format where the Visconti arms are encircled with ‘Franciscus Vicecomes’. Of the family members of this name the most likely to have been the original owner is the son of Giambattista Visconti, senator to the duke of Milan, and his wife Regola Galeazzi. Francesco was himself named Consiglio segreto in 1466 and was a correspondent of the humanist Pier Candido Decembrio, who dedicated two works to him…. In the present manuscript, whereas the arms and family name are original, it is clear that the Ivllivs is a later modification. It seems probable that it was originally illuminated for one of Francesco’s close relatives, he had a brother Guido (Conte Pompeo Litta, *Famiglie celebri italiane*, Visconti di Milano, tav. XVI) or another Visconti at the ducal court from whom it passed by descent to a Giulio. One such was Giampetro, ducal counsellor in 1477 and ancestor of the Giulio who graduated from Pavia University in 1604.” (Christie’s Sale 7760, Lot 5, Nov 25, 2009, Christie’s King Street.)

76 Below the main image Laura is shown again wearing a green dress with her hair down, and she shoots an arrow at Petrarch who is dressed as a courtier with an arrow in his chest.
Visconti/Sforza preference for dynastic realism over poetic idealism, Ippolita’s imagery places her in the visual culture of Petrarchan pulchritude.

The shared Petrarchan features seen in images of Ippolita and the Lombard manuscript illuminations of Laura are also found in an unexpected contemporary Milanese source. Created at the same time as both the Laurenziana and Master of the Vitae Imperatorum manuscripts, the Visconti/Sforza tarot cards were commissioned by Ippolita’s grandfather, Filippo Maria Visconti, in 1441, to commemorate the marriage of his daughter, Bianca Maria to Francesco Sforza. Though there are significant iconographical differences, there is a noticeable resemblance between many of the female characters and the manuscript images of Ippolita and Laura. Hand-painted on cardboard with gold-leaf backgrounds, Trionfi cards, like illuminated manuscripts, were costly and time-consuming to produce and so became luxury items commissioned by the elite. In the case of the Visconti/Sforza deck, Francesco Maria employed Bonifacio Bembo, a respected court painter and the creator of the aforementioned portrait of Bianca Maria, to create his seventy-eight cards, further indicating the importance of the cards to their owner.

Filippo Maria, like his father and grandfather, was a Petrarch enthusiast and Petrarchan imagery appears to have played a major role in the development of the cards. In fact, an entire suit of the cards feature the Petrarchan motto “A Bon Droyt” which also was adopted by Filippo’s wife, Maria of Savoy (fig. 27). Likewise, Visconti imagery is woven throughout the scenes on the cards. Filippo Maria’s sunburst devise, decorates the background of the trump cards, and the Visconti serpent is featured prominently on the
A baldacchino pictured on the Lovers card. In addition to the obvious connection between the name of the game and the trionfo they celebrated, the name and imagery for the carte da trionfi are likely borrowed from Petrarch’s famous I Trionfi, and card historians speculate his poetic accounts of triumphal processions of love, chastity, death, fame, time, and eternity provided inspiration for the game. Just as the carte da trionfi featured six trump cards, each pair representing a virtue and a vice, Petrarch’s paired his poems with good and evil representations. Love and Chastity are paired, for example, with Cupid representing Love, and Laura is associated with Chastity. The Trionfi were often included in volumes of the Canzoniere and thus the poems were intimately connected within the minds of their readers and in the visual interpretations of their illuminators. While there is no documented link between the trump cards and Petrarch’s Trionfi, most card historians agree that Petrarchan imagery played some role in the creation of the cards. For example, Laura’s role in the Trionfi has been identified as the inspiration for the beautiful blond woman riding a horse-drawn chariot on the Visconti/Sforza Chariot card, and the blindfolded Cupid on the Visconti/Sforza Lovers card appears regularly in illuminated Canzoniere (fig. 28).

Interestingly, the manuscript portrait of Ippolita is a much closer match to the women depicted on the Chariot and Empress cards than she is to Bonifacio Bembo’s portrait of Ippolita’s own mother. If the cards drew on Petrarchan imagery, as they likely did give the name of the game and their subject matter, perhaps the Master of Ippolita

77 Bayer, Art and Love in Renaissance Italy, 139.
78 Various interpretations have been proposed for Petrarch’s Triumphs, from purely allegorical to a personal exploration of his feelings for Laura. For a detailed account of the role of Laura in the Trionfi see Aldo S. Bernardo, Petrarch, Laura, and the Triumphs (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974).
80 Ibid, 122.
Sforza looked to them when creating his idealized portrait of Ippolita. Though the Moon, Star, and Temperance cards (fig. 29) were added to the deck in the 1470s and created by a different artist, they have stylistic similarities to the images of Laura painted by the Master of Vitae Imperatorum and his followers. Each card features a full-length image of a fair-skinned woman with long, golden hair. Her locks gather at the nape of her neck and then flow freely down her back just as Laura’s hair is pictured in the manuscript illuminations. Though the women featured on the cards have slight facial variations, their features are almost identical to one another and to the illustrations of Laura. Their white skin, high foreheads, perfectly arched eyebrows, long necks, and small rosebud mouths are in every way as Petrarchan as Laura herself. My intention is not to argue that the cards are meant to represent Laura, nor that they were a direct source for any of the manuscript illuminations, but rather to propose that the Petrarchan ideal appears to have informed both genres, made at the same time for perhaps the same patron, and that the visual relationship between the cards and the manuscript illuminations suggests an overlap between the two mediums that has not been previously explored in art historical research.

Though the cards are no longer extant, primary documents confirm the deck included sixteen trump cards made up of Olympic Gods and a single mythological card devoted to Daphne.\textsuperscript{81} The inclusion of Daphne is significant to a discussion of the relationship between Petrarch and carte da trionfi in that Daphne is a central figure in the Canzoniere and Petrarch and Laura were famously associated with the Ovidian couple. Petrarch threaded the story of Daphne and Apollo throughout the Canzoniere, associating

\textsuperscript{81} Now called the Michelino Deck. For a detailed account of documents associated with the cards and their descriptions see Franco Pratesi, "I Trionfi di Marziano," The Playing-Card XXVII, no. 3 (1999), 144-51.
himself and his beloved with the doomed lovers. Petrarch also used the metaphor to describe the poetic pursuit of an idea, which, as the poet finally grasps it, is transformed into text on the page. Once the idea is seized and the poem is written, it is permanently transformed into words, like Daphne into the laurel tree. The poet’s laurel crown became the symbol of his pursuit of ideas, just as it was a symbol of Apollo’s pursuit of Daphne. Petrarch’s quest for Laura was the same frustrating chase. He pursued her throughout his lifetime in poetry and his only reward was the fame that was the result of memorializing her in print. In some instances Petrarch inverted the Apollo/Daphne myth and became the unwitting bystander who was struck by love’s arrows. He often blamed Laura’s beauty and virtue for snaring him into a lifelong obsession that distracted him from loftier pursuits.

Contemporary manuscript images of Laura often showed her as Daphne, or alternatively pictured Petrarch transforming into Daphne’s signature laurel tree. For example, to the right of the image of Petrarch and Laura in Leonardo Bruni’s circa 1470 illuminated manuscript of the *Canzoniere* and *I Trionfi*, Laura is shown in the guise of Daphne transforming into a bay tree in order to flee from her pursuer Apollo/Petrarch (fig. 30). This manuscript, commissioned by a member of the Visconti/Sforza family, shows Laura/Daphne’s arms already turned into branches with her blond hair streaming out toward Apollo/Petrarch’s outstretched hands.

To my knowledge I am the first to recognize the visual connection between the Christie’s manuscript image and a small panel painting of Apollo and Daphne created

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contemporaneously in the late 1460s or early 1470s by Antonio del Pollaiuolo (fig. 31). In Pollaiuolo’s painting, Daphne is also shown facing forward with her signature golden hair spread across her shoulders. Like the manuscript image, her arms are outstretched above her head and transformed into the branches of a laurel tree. According to Alison Wright, the patron of this painting is unknown; however its small scale and highly finished style suggest it was likely commissioned as a book cover or a small painting intended to be displayed in a *studiolo*. Wright speculated that the painting was likely commissioned by Lorenzo de’ Medici or his circle since Lorenzo famously adopted the laurel device and associated himself with both Apollo and Petrarch. The *lauro*/Lorenzo pun was widely used in Medici Petrarchan poetry as was name play with Medici and Apollo Medicus. Furthermore, Lorenzo’s use of the sun and laurel crown in his heraldic devices as well as his role in establishing the Beloved Portrait tradition make him a primary candidate as patron of the painting. Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo were also acquainted with the Sforza in Milan. During the same period that he created the panel of *Apollo and Daphne*, Antonio’s brother Piero painted a portrait of Galeazzo Maria Sforza (circa 1471). According to a Medici inventory of 1492, the portrait hung in Lorenzo de’ Medici’s chambers and almost certainly was intended to advertise the

83 Wright, *The Pollaiuolo Brothers: The Arts of Florence and Rome*, 520. Wright dates the painting to the late 1460s or early 1470s based on the style and cut of Apollo’s dress. The painting’s dimensions (29.2 x 20 cm) correspond with another small painting of *St. Jerome* by Jan Van Eyck mentioned in a description of the Medici *studiolo* in 1492 as well as Mantegna’s *Judith* which was also given to Lorenzo de’ Medici. Wright suggested that given the fact that these paintings are similar in size and the Petrarchan associations between Lorenzo and Apollo, Pollaiuolo’s painting may have been created for the *studiolo* as well. Although it is small in size, Wright does not believe it is a fragment of another, larger work or meant to be inserted in a decorative object, but rather that it was intended as an independent painting.
84 Ibid, 94.
85 Ibid, 98. Lorenzo also owned a famous ancient intaglio depicting Apollo’s musical triumph over Marsyas. Apollo was worshipped as a healer and there was a Roman temple in honor of Apollo Medicus.
alliance between Florence and Milan. Perhaps Gian Galeazzo or another member of his entourage saw Antonio’s Apollo and Daphne while at the Medici palace and used it as inspiration for the commission of the Christie’s Canzoniere. Regardless of the patronage, it certainly is reasonable to argue that, based on its relationship to the earlier Lombard Petrarchan manuscript, Pollaiuolo’s panel may have been intended to represent both Daphne and Laura as well as Apollo and Petrarch.

In his poems, Petrarch fuses both himself and his beloved into the mythological characters. For instance, in Sonnet 60 he refers to Laura as a tree: “The gracious tree that I loved hard for years/ while its fair branches still did not disdain me/ brought all of my weak talent to bloom/ within its shade to grow in all my troubles.” Here, as in Pollaiuolo’s painting and the two contemporary manuscript images, Laura/Daphne is already transformed into the tree and represents both the poet’s lost love and his youthful pursuit of poetic fame represented by the laurel crown. In poem 23, however, Petrarch himself transforms into the laurel tree in a similar fashion to Laura’s metamorphoses in both the Pollaiuolo painting and the Lombard manuscript:

The way I felt when I became aware
of the transfiguration of my body
and saw my hair turning into those leaves
I once had hoped to make into my crown,
and both the feet I stood on, moved and ran
(as every limb responds to the soul’s power)
changing into two roots above the waves
not of Peneus but a prouder river,
and both my arms transformed into two branches!

86 Ibid, 131.
87 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 96-97. (L’arbor gentil che forte amai molt’anni/ (mentre i bei rami non me ebbe a sdegno)/ fiorir faceva il mio debile ingegno/ a la sua ombra et crescer negli affanni.)
88 Ibid, 559.
89 Ibid, 28-29. (Qual mi fec’ io quando primier m’accorsi/ de la trasfigurata mia persona,/ e i capei vidi fa di quella fronde/ di che sperato avea già lor corona,/ e i piedi in ch’io mi stetti et mossi et corsi,/ com’ ogni membro e l’anima risponde,/ diventar due radici sovra l’onde/ non di Peneo ma d’un più altero fiume,/ e ’n duo rami mutarsi ambe le braccia!)
In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* Daphne is similarly transformed into a laurel tree, first her body, then her hair, her arms, her legs, and finally her face: “Her supple trunk is girdled with a thin layer of fine bark over her smooth skin; her hair turns into foliage, her arms grow into branches, sluggish roots adhere to feet that were so recently so swift, her head becomes the summit of a tree; all that remains of her is a warm glow.” However, by transforming her arms before her hair in the Christie’s manuscript image and Pollaiuolo’s painting, I argue, Daphne is able to retain Laura’s signature golden locks, an attribute repeatedly associated with Laura in both manuscript illuminations and paintings and readily recognized as Petrarchan by Renaissance viewers. Though Pollaiuolo’s imagery has been previously recognized as Petrarchan by art historians such as Wright and more recently Andrea Bayer, the visual evidence provided by the Lombard manuscript illumination may suggest the painting was intentionally meant to be interpreted as a fusion of Laura and Daphne rather than purely Ovidian. Interestingly, while the iconography of the painting shares striking similarities with the Lombard manuscript, it varies significantly from Florentine illuminations of the same scene. For example, a Florentine manuscript, illuminated by Francesco d’Antonio del Chierico also shows Daphne in the process of transforming into the tree; however her arms are still human and stretched in front of her chest rather than in a “V” above her head (fig. 32). In the Florentine image Laura is turned in profile, and it is her hair, not her arms, that has transformed into a tree.

The Fusion of Poetry and Paint: Antonio Grifo’s Illuminated Canzoniere

In the 1480s and ‘90s Lombard book illumination flourished under the patronage of Ludovico Sforza and his wife Beatrice d’Este. While retaining the traditional Milanese affinity for dynastic imagery, the pair employed the finest artists of their time to produce books that celebrated the “pomp and high culture” of their court. 92 It was for Beatrice and Ludovico that the most extraordinary, extant illuminated incunable of the Canzoniere was produced by the Venetian Petrarchist Antonio Grifo. Hand-illuminated printed books gained popularity during this period and though many volumes of the Canzoniere fall into this category, Grifo’s is by far the most elaborate and atypical example. 93 Grifo was a Petrarchan poet who himself illustrated almost every sonnet in the book, though most printed books were not illustrated until the sixteenth century when woodcuts were printed along with the text. This book, now in the Biblioteca Queriniana in Brescia, is exceptional both for its illuminations and its commentary. 94 He also included hand-written notes throughout the book, clearly demonstrating his professional familiarity with Petrarch and making his visual interpretation all the more interesting. This unique manuscript provides key primary evidence of how Laura was visualized by Renaissance humanists and further underscores an intentional visual connection between Laura and contemporary Petrarchan beauties.

93 Ibid, 22.
94 Grifo illustrated almost every sonnet, significantly breaking from the traditional approach, which focused only on title pages and select poems. The incunable was included in the 2003 exhibition Michele Feo, ed. Petrarca nel tempo: tradizione lettori e immagini delle opere, published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, shown at the Sottochiesa di San Francesco in Arezzo (Arezzo: Edizioni Bandecchi & Vivaldi, 2003), 51-53.
Although Antonio Grifo’s biography is sparsely documented, it is generally agreed that he was a Venetian poet born circa 1430.\textsuperscript{95} He appears to have left Venice to study in Padua from 1456 to 66 where his participation in a joust was celebrated in contemporary poetry. Sometime toward the late 1480s the poet was exiled from Venice and joined the retinue of Roberto Sanseverino and his family of mercenary soldiers, traveling with the family and becoming acquainted with their powerful allies, including the Medici in Florence and the Este in Ferrara. Most importantly in the context of this dissertation, Grifo accompanied the soldiers to Milan shortly before 1490 where Roberto’s sons joined the Sforza’s military and the poet served the court of Ludovico il Moro and Beatrice d’Este as an in-house expert on Petrarch and Dante. It is under Sforza patronage, probably for Beatrice between 1492 and 1497, that Grifo illuminated his Canzoniere.\textsuperscript{96} His presence at court was important enough that he was mentioned in the writings of Beatrice’s secretary, Vincenzo Calmeta, who described “court gatherings


\textsuperscript{96} The patron of the manuscript is not documented, although it was presumably created for Beatrice d’Este. This is based on Grifo’s presence at her court and her interest in the literary arts. Beatrice is the most likely patron given that she was the Duchess of Milan at the time when Grifo was at court. She was a known patroness of poetry and Calmeta, Beatrice’s secretary, mentions Grifo by name and recounts his readings of the Divina Commedia for Beatrice and Ludovico at court. There is also written correspondence between Gasparo Visconti and Grifo, further supporting this theory. Grifo wrote two of his own sonnets in commemoration of Beatrice’s death, now in the Biblioteca Marciana, and his own Canzoniere celebrates Ludovico’s rule. In addition to Beatrice d’Este, the dedication has been linked to Caterina Cornaro on her trip to Milan in 1497. She is an unlikely patron given Grifo’s exile from Venice. Isabella d’Aragona and Eleonora d’Aragona have also been linked to the incunable. In the 2004 exhibition of Petrarch e il suo tempo, Giordano Mariani Canova dated the illuminations to between 1492 and 1497 based on Beatrice’s presence at the Sforza court, although in a previous article Canova acknowledges the date could be between 1491 and 1494 if Grifo intended to give it to Isabella d’Aragona (Gilda Mantovani, ed. Petrarcha e il suo tempo, published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name held in Padua May 8 - July 31, 2004 (Milan: Skira, 2006). For more on Grifo’s incunable refer to Canova, “Antonio Grifo illustratore dell’incunabolo queriniano GV 15.” See also Giuseppe Frasso, “Antonio Grifo postillatore dell’incunabolo queriniano G V 15,” in Illustrazione libraria filologica e esegesi petrarchesca tra quattrocento e cinquecento: Antonio Grifo e l’incunabolo queriniano (Padova: Editrice Antenore, 1990). The book is not listed in the inventory of the Visconti/Sforza library from 1488-1490 further supporting a later date. For the complete inventory see Maria Grazia Albertini Ottolenghi, La biblioteca dei Visconti e degli Sforza: gli inventari del 1488 e del 1490, ed. Giuseppe Billovich Gino Belloni, Giuseppe Frasso, and Giuseppe Velli., ? Studi Petrarcheschi (Padova: Editrice Antenore, 1991).
during which everyone, including Ludovico il Moro whenever he could, met together to listen to readings of the *Divina Commedia* 'by one Antonio Grifo, a Venetian, a man excelling in that art.'”

Grifo was not a visual artist by trade, which he admits in a dedication at the beginning of the book. He explains that it is at the request of “Alma Minerva e Altissima mia Madonna” that he has agreed to take on this long task which he is only ineptly able to complete because it is outside his profession. He also qualifies that it is upon the urging of his patroness, who has seen his previous work, that he has agreed to finish the arduous task and asks for her protection in the likely event that his book is not received favorably by his peers. It was not unusual for Renaissance authors to feign ineptitude, or for them to dedicate their work to important women; however Grifo’s dedication suggests a more personal relationship with his patroness than one might expect. Not only does he allude to past intellectual and artistic interaction with his patroness, he addresses her with a respectful, yet mysterious title that must have been understood only by her elite circle. His dedication to “Alma Minerva” flatters his patroness by comparing her to the Roman goddess of poetry and champion of the arts. Minerva is also associated with wisdom, which would have been the ultimate compliment for a well-educated woman like Beatrice.

In comparison, Antonio Cornazzano presented his 1476-78 publication of *Del modo di regere e di regnare* to Beatrice’s mother, Eleanor of Aragon with a significantly more formal dedication: “To the most illustrious and excellent Eleanor of Aragon,

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98 ———, "Antonio Grifo illustratore dell'incunabolo queriniano GV 15," 149.
duchess of Ferrara (fig. 33). Like her mother, Beatrice was well versed in the arts and poetry and an ideal object of Grifo’s admiration and the title of “Minerva,” the muse of poetry. In fact, Grifo stresses her “sublime intelligence” at the end of his dedication.

Following the chivalric tradition prized at the Sforza court, Grifo presents himself as a courtier poet so faithfully committed to his Lady that he was willing to sacrifice his own artistic reputation at her request.

Throughout the book, Grifo uses a visual vocabulary of his own invention in order to illustrate Petrarch’s sonnets. He repeatedly portrays a book pierced by Cupid’s arrow to represent the poet and his poetry, a snake to symbolize Petrarch’s carnal desire for Laura, and a laurel branch to refer to his beloved Laura (fig. 34). The laurel, snake, and eagle had multiple meanings in the Renaissance, some of them distinctly Milanese.

Visual and literary puns were central to Petrarchismo and Ludovico’s court was especially known for its love of puns and hidden symbolism. Just as Petrarch intended for his reader to associate his beloved Laura with the poetic laurel crown, so must Grifo have intended to play on the references to the Sforza emblems. The laurel branch, for example, adorned the heraldic corona used by both the Sforza and the Visconti as seen on a marble shield from the Castello di Porta Giovia in Milan (fig. 35). The snake’s dual association with the biblical symbol of lust and desire, as suggested in Grifo’s image of a reclining Petrarch with a phallic snake emerging from his groin (fig. 36), and the serpentine emblem of the Sforza and Visconti families (fig. 37) would also have

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resonated with a Milanese audience.\textsuperscript{101} The Visconti \textit{biscione} was borrowed from the arms of Milan. The blue serpent is associated with the patron saint of Milan, St. Ambrose, and the serpent holds a red figure in his mouth. According to Sarah Carleton, the \textit{biscione} symbolized the Visconti’s divine right to be aggressive militarily.\textsuperscript{102}

This theory is further supported by the presence of the imperial eagle in the image illustrating Sonnet 23 (fig. 38). Like the serpent, the eagle had multiple meanings for the Renaissance viewer. It literally represented Jupiter’s most famous guise referred to in Sonnet 23: “Canzone, never was I that golden cloud/ that once descended in a precious rain/ so as to quench in part Jove’s burning flame…..”\textsuperscript{103} However, the eagle was also an emblem adopted by the Visconti and appropriated by the Sforza. On another level, the eagle would have reminded the viewer of the political associations with Ludovico’s primary protector, the Holy Roman Emperor, while Petrarch’s poem would have recalled the Visconti-Sforza claim that they were the descendants of Jupiter himself.\textsuperscript{104} Although the dove is not surrounded by the rays of the sun in Grifo’s illustrations, the bird and the sun play a major role throughout the book. Ludovico’s brother’s wife, Bona of Savoy, adopted the turtledove as her personal device and the inclusion of the bird is likely a reference to the Sforza’s ties to the House of Savoy through this union.\textsuperscript{105} These symbols not only connected the Sforza to the Visconti and Savoy, they also reminded the

\textsuperscript{101} Ludovico Sforza both adopted traditional \textit{imprese} and invented new devices and was recognized for incorporating multiple devices into his visual propaganda. Interestingly, Martin Kemp has also suggested that Ludovico’s interest in \textit{imprese} was not merely political. He was deeply interested in astrology and in some instances used his heraldic devices as talismans for his personal needs. For a complete discussion of this see Kemp, \textit{Leonardo da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man}, 139.

\textsuperscript{102} Carleton, “Heraldry in the Trecento Madrigal,” 84. When Giangaleazzo became Duke of Milan in 1385 he changed his arms to show the \textit{biscione} quartered with an imperial eagle. See ibid, 123.

\textsuperscript{103} Petrarch, \textit{Petrarch’s Canzoniere}, 34-35. (\textit{Canzon, i’ non fu’ mai quell nuvol d’oro/ che poi discese in preziosa pioggia/ si che ‘l foco di Giove in parte spense…})

\textsuperscript{104} Welch, \textit{Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan}, 234.

\textsuperscript{105} Ludovico’s brother and Bona’s husband, Galeazzo Maria, was assassinated in 1476 and Bona subsequently acted as regent for her seven-year-old son, Gian Galeazzo Sforza, until he was overthrown in 1480 by his uncle, Ludovico, and exiled from Milan with his mother.
reader of Petrarch’s relationship with the Visconti, legitimizing Grifo’s position as a Petrarchan poet at the Milanese court.

Mulberry trees (*mora*) also appear frequently throughout the book as seen for example on folio 54 verso where a tall red-fruiting tree stands to the side of a walled city, very similar to Milan (fig. 39). The mulberry tree was a source of income for Milan because the trees housed silkworms and the sale of silk was central to the Milanese economy. It was also one of Ludovico’s personal devices used on his coat of arms because it punned on Ludovico’s nickname, *il Moro/mora*, and was a symbol of prudence, a virtue Ludovico arguably lacked in his own governing but was no doubt keen to associate with his reputation as a ruler. Renaissance humanists would also have known Pliny’s reference to the mulberry tree as “the wisest of trees” in his *Natural History*, which could be extended to represent Ludovico “il Moro” as a wise ruler. Ludovico used the device in the decorative program for his personal residence in the Castello Sforzesco. In the Sala delle Asse, Leonardo painted a mural *al secco* depicting a canopy of mulberry branches extend to the ceiling from sixteen trunks painted on the walls. At the center of the ceiling are Ludovico and Beatrice d’Este’s coats of arms (fig. 40). As word play was an inherent part of Petrarchan poetry and visual imagery,


107 Most of the now extant frescoes were repainted in the nineteenth century over the outlines of the original paintings. For a detailed discussion of the *Sala delle Asse* see Welch, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan*, 236-38. The mulberry tree was also featured in Gasparo Visconti’s *Pasitea*. The play was dedicated to Ludovico Sforza and written in defense of Milan’s literary reputation as it was compared to the revival of classical theatrical texts at the court of Beatrice’s father, Ercole d’Este, in Ferrara. Visconti described classical literary texts as protected under the shade of “*un Moro*.” For a complete discussion of Visconti’s play and it’s relationship to the mulberry tree and the Sala delle Asse see Kiang, "Gasparo Visconti's *Pasitea* and the Sala delle Asse."
Grifo and his readers would likely have enjoyed the double entendre and heraldic references these metaphors presented.108

When Petrarch is not metaphorically pictured as a book, he is dressed in various fashions, sometimes hooded, sometimes as a courtier and occasionally exotically plumed (figs. 41, 42).109 Although the poet is often represented metaphorically, Laura is almost always portrayed in human form. When picturing Laura, Grifo strictly adhered to the ideal features described by Petrarch in his Canzoniere, including Laura’s golden hair, eyes like stars, snow-white skin, and green and red dress, as she is shown in folio 19 verso (fig. 43). Laura stands next to a Petrarchan serpent and book in a very similar pose to the Lombard manuscript by the Master of the Vitae Imperatorum discussed earlier in the chapter. She is dressed in a red, green, and gold gown with her hair pulled into the same style depicted by the Master of the Vitae Imperatorum, and her beautiful features are nearly identical to the earlier image. Instead of a wreath she holds a circular mirror, and her kneeling lover is replaced by Grifo’s serpentine symbol. The similarities between the images are so striking it seems impossible that Grifo was not familiar with the earlier manuscript. As they were both created in Lombardy, it is very possible that the earlier book was in the Sforza library at the time Grifo was at court or shown to Grifo while he was preparing his own illustrations. At a minimum, the likenesses between these two images prove that Laura’s physical persona had become canonical by the late fifteenth century.

108———, "Gasparo Visconti’s Pasitea and the Sala delle Asse," 102. In Pasitea, Visconti, through his character Apollo, claims that the mulberry tree is superior to the laurel tree. This, Dawson Kiang recognizes, is likely a clever comparison between Ludovico “il Moro” and Lorenzo “Lauro” de’ Medici.109 This image is reminiscent of an extravagant suit, which was decorated with peacock feathers designed for Grifo by Leonardo da Vinci. The costume was created for a joust in honor of Ludovico’s marriage to Beatrice discussed later in this chapter.
Grifo’s manuscript is a product of a shift in thinking that began in the mid-fifteenth century at the court of Ludovico’s father, Francesco Sforza. In the 1440s, Francesco Filelfo, a humanist at the Sforza court, wrote a Petrarchan commentary that insisted on Laura’s existence and refuted earlier claims that she was a metaphoric figure in Petrarch’s sonnets. By the late fifteenth century, Filelfo’s argument grew into an obsession with discovering Laura’s true identity, and emphasis was put on Petrarch the lover rather than Petrarch the scholar. This trend mirrored the increased importance of Petrarchan features in painted portraiture and real women’s desire to emulate Laura.

At times Grifo takes great artistic license with Laura’s costume, fashioning her in many guises, and even nude on two occasions. To my knowledge, Grifo’s literal and highly unusual interpretation of Petrarch’s two sonnets describing his secret discovery of Laura bathing are the first images of a nude Laura, and, according to J.B. Trapp, two of only four examples in the Renaissance.110 Laura’s nudity suggests Grifo was confident that his audience would accept such a daring interpretation emphasizing Laura’s sensuality. In Grifo’s folio 9 verso, a half-length nude Laura bathes in a small flower-laden pool and peeks out from behind a tree to face a serpent-headed book of Petrarch’s sonnets lunging open-mouthed at her breast (fig. 44).111 Here Grifo interprets the last stanza of Sonnet 23 (Nel dolce tempo de la prima etade) in which the poet, in the guise of Actaeon, happens upon Diana (aka Laura) bathing in the woods:

I came upon that cruel and lovely beast
naked within a fountain
when the sun strikes the hottest time of day.
I, since no other sight can please me more,
stood gazing at her, but she felt ashamed

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110 Trapp, “Petrarch’s Laura: The Portraiture of an Imaginary Beloved,” 82.
111 This image of a serpent poking out of the top of a leather-bound book of the Canzoniere represents the poet’s lust for his beloved and reappears throughout Grifo’s illustrations.
and to revenge herself or else to hide
she splashed some water up into my face.\textsuperscript{112}

Though the poem describes six Ovidian transformations, focused primarily on Laura’s
medusan ability to turn her lover into stone, Laura is depicted only once in the almost six
pages of text dedicated to the poem.\textsuperscript{113} What is more, she is nude. As this was clearly
not the only option for an illustration, but decidedly the most erotic, it revealed that the
Renaissance reader clearly saw Laura’s sexuality as a primary component in Petrarch’s
text. It is also interesting to note, in the context of contemporary female profile
portraiture, that Grifo’s Laura is shown in three-quarter view, making eye contact with
Petrarch’s serpentine symbol. In fact, she seems the antithesis of the ashamed maiden
Petrarch describes and of the decorous women captured in contemporary paintings.

Laura is unclothed again in the margins of Sonnet 126 (\textit{Chiare fresche et dolci acque}) (fig. 45); however, here this is Grifo’s own interpretation of the text:

\begin{quote}
Clear, cool, sweet, running waters
where she, for me the only
woman, would rest her lovely body;
kind branch on which it pleased her
(I sigh to think of it)
to make a column for her lovely side;
and grass and flowers which her gown,
richly flowing, covered
with its angelic folds….
\end{quote}\textsuperscript{114}

While Petrarch does not expressly mention Laura’s nudity (on the contrary he describes
her clothing), some early Petrarchan commentators interpreted the line “rest her lovely

\begin{footnotes}
\item[112] Petrarch, \textit{Petrarch’s Canzoniere}, 33-35. (\textit{Mi mossi, e quella fera bella et cruda/ in una fonte ignuda/ si
stava, quando 'l sol più forte ardea./ Io perché d' altra vista non m'appago/ stetti a mirarla ond' ella ebbe
vergogna/ et per farne vendetta o per celarse/ l'acqua nel viso co le man mi sparse.})
\item[113] For a discussion of the poem see Feng, "From poetry to politics: Petrarchism as discursive formation in
\item[114] Petrarch, \textit{Petrarch’s Canzoniere}, 194-95. (\textit{Chiare fresche et dolci acque:/ ove le belle membra/ pose
colei che sola a me par donna;/ gentil ramo ove piacque/ (con sospir mi rimembra)/ a lei di fare al bel
fianco colonna;/ erba et fior che la gonna/ leggiadra ricoverse/ co l'angelico seno….})
\end{footnotes}
body” as an insinuation of her bathing in the nude and Grifo clearly agreed. In response to the lines, he portrayed a three-quarter length completely nude woman, facing forward and covered only by the long golden hair running down her back and a sheer scarf pulled across her body like a sash. This Laura does not meet the gaze of the reader but neither does she attempt to hide her exposed body. In fact, her right hand points toward her left breast, and her left hand holds the drapery away from her body akin to the stance of a Roman goddess.

Petrarch’s obsession with his beloved’s physical beauty aroused in his Renaissance audience the desire to emulate his passion in poetry and paint. Throughout the *Canzoniere*, Petrarch struggled to resolve his internal battle between his physical longing for Laura and his moral obligation to transcend earthly pleasures in order to reach spiritual enlightenment. In many of his sonnets Petrarch exposed his carnal desire for Laura, ignited by a contemplation of her physical features:

Not only that one lovely, naked hand
that clothes itself again to my deep sorrow
but the other, too, and those two arms, are ready
and swift to squeeze my meek and humble heart.

A thousand snares Love sets, and none in vain,
among those charming, new, and honest forms
adorning so her high and heavenly bearing
that human style and genius cannot reach it:

her tranquil eyes, her eyebrows lit by stars,
her mouth, angelic, beautiful, and full
of pearls and roses and sweetness of words

that make a person tremble in amazement,
and then her forehead and her hair which seen
in summer at high noon put out the sun.  

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115 Ibid, 596.
116 Ibid, 290-91. *(Non pur quell’una bella ignuda mano/ che con grave mio danno si riveste,/ ma l’altra et le duo braccia accorte et preste/ son a stringere il cor timidio et piano./ Lacci Amor mille, et nesun tende*
Although Petrarch was not the first to pine for an unobtainable beloved—Dante, for example, yearned for Beatrice in the *Divina Commedia* and *Vita Nuova*—his obsession with Laura’s physicality was new to the literary genre. Laura’s physical features had for Petrarch a “talismanic value to which the poet repeatedly returns for inspiration and solace.” These sensualized features provoked intense frustration in Petrarch. Throughout the *Canzoniere* he struggled to resolve his internal battle between his physical longing for Laura and his moral obligation to transcend earthly pleasures in order to reach spiritual enlightenment:

Father of Heaven, after the lost days,
After the nights spent in delirium
With fierce desire burning in my heart
Watching gestures so lovely to my harm,

Allow me now to turn within your light
To another life, to deeds more beautiful,
So that now having spread his nets in vain
My stubborn enemy may be disarmed.

Petrarch simultaneously loves, hates, and is comforted by Laura and this internal conflict, and the Platonic suggestion that through the contemplation of a woman’s physical beauty a man can reach spiritual enlightenment, made Laura the perfect model for the ideal Renaissance woman.

While Laura is not nude in folio 33 verso, the image is also sexually charged (fig. 46). A fashionably clothed Laura stands in profile facing her hooded beloved who now

invano/ fra quelle vaghe nove forme oneste/ ch’adornan sì l’alto abito celeste/ ch’aggiunger noi po stil né
‘negno umano:/ li occhi sereni et le stellanti ciglia,/ la bella bocca angelica di perle/ piena et di rose, et di
dolci parole/ chef anno altri tremar di meraviglia,/ et la fronte, et le chiome ch’ a vederle/ di state a
mezzo di vincono il sole.)

117 Ibid, xviii.
118 Ibid, 98-99. (Padre del Ciel, dopo i perduti giorni,/ dopo le notti vaneggiando spese/ con quell fero
desio ch’ al cor s’accese,/ mirando gli atti per mio mal si adorni,/ piacciami omai col tuo lume ch’ io torni/ ad altra vita et a più belle imprese,/ sì ch’avendo le reti indarno tesse/ il mio duro avversario se ne scorni.)
holds his book of poems against his chest with an arrow piercing his own heart and the
serpent that aggressively points toward Laura. What is suggestive about this image is the
flaming arrow that shoots from Laura’s eyes into Petrarch’s eyes and her gloved hand
that points directly at the book. Although Petrarch repeatedly describes Laura’s features,
it is her eyes that most enrapture him. At times they enchant, at others they attack, but
always they lead the poet closer to enlightenment through their beauty. Petrarch is not
interested in the color or shape of her eyes, but only their ability to lead him into her soul.
In fact, eyes are the first feature mentioned in Sonnet Three when Petrarch initially
introduces Laura to the Canzoniere:

It was the day the sun’s ray had turned pale
with pity for the suffering of his Maker
when I was caught (and I put up no fight),
my lady, for your lovely eyes had bound me….  

Love found me all disarmed and saw the way
was clear to reach my heart down through your eyes,
which have become the halls and doors of tears.

Each time Laura’s eyes reappear in the Canzoniere they reveal Petrarch’s psychological,
physical, and spiritual state. Laura’s eyes are a mirror to Petrarch’s soul (as well as her
own) and he uses them as a way to frame his journey from carnal to spiritual love.

The direct eye contact between Petrarch and Laura and the flaming arrow support
Robert Baldwin’s theory that “literary love gazing is for the most part one way, either a
“dart-like” glance from the beloved which penetrates the lover’s eyes and wounds his
heart, or an equally devastating glance of the lover at the physical beauty of the
beloved…. Mutuality then is less important to most literary love gazing than metaphors

119 Ibid. 4-5. (Era il giorno ch’ al sol si scoloraro/ per la pieta del suo fattore i rai/ quando l’ fui preso, et
non me ne guardai,/ ché I be’ vostr’ occhi, Donna, mi legaro./ Tempo non mi parea da far riparo….
Trovommi Amor del tutto disarmato,/ et aperta la via per gli occhi al core/ chi di lagrime son fatti uscio et
varco.)
of one-sided devastation and surrender before the irresistible power of erotic desire.”

Though Laura looks directly at her beloved, Petrarch turns slightly away and thus avoids her gaze.

In a contemporary Lombard manuscript illuminated by Giovanpietro Birago between 1475 and 1500, the lovers sit across from one another and clasp hands (fig. 47). Hands also had erotic connotations in the Canzoniere and would elicit lustful thoughts in the viewer like those expressed by Petrarch in Sonnet 199: “Those fingers long and soft which naked now/ luckily Love shows me for my enrichment.”

Though they touch and face one another, only Petrarch looks directly at his lover; Laura’s face tilts slightly downward and her eyes focus on the poet’s arm rather than his eyes. The lack of eye contact between the lovers reinforces the emotional distance between them and alludes to Laura’s chastity. Petrarch appears to be a gallant and eager courtier in pursuit of a lovely, demure lady. Although they do not touch, Grifo’s image is significantly more sexually charged than Birago’s scene. The burning arrow leaves no doubt as to Laura’s assault on her beloved’s senses.

Grifo’s awareness of regional fashions and contemporary portraiture, no doubt acquired during his time in Venice, Florence, Ferrara, and Milan, is demonstrated throughout his illustrations. Grifo repeatedly encloses Laura in an architectural window frame like he does in folio 18 verso (fig. 48). This was an artistic device developed in mid-fifteenth-century Florentine portraiture by Fra Filippo Lippi, Sandro Botticelli, and the Pollaiuolo brothers, as seen for example in Fra Filippo Lippi’s Profile Portrait of a...

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121 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 290-91. (Diti schietti soave, a tempo ignudi/ consente or voi per arricchirme Amore.)
Young Woman (fig. 49). While it is difficult to prove that Grifo called upon contemporary Florentine models as inspiration for his incunable, it is certainly possible that he saw comparable portraits while traveling in Florence with the Sanseverino family in the 1480s. The similar use of the window device supports this hypothesis.

Certain elements in Grifo’s book prove he was familiar with various portraiture styles widely known and disseminated during the late fifteenth century. For example, he uses various styles of veiled hats to visually play with Petrarch’s complaint that Laura’s veil, by covering her eyes, metaphorically hides her soul and the fashion of the day. As a native Venetian, Grifo was certainly familiar with the role of the veil in female fashion, both for noble and not-so-noble ladies as seen in Cesare Vecellio’s De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diverse parti del mondo. According to Vecellio’s illustration, the noble Venetian sposa non sposata (fig. 50), or unwed woman, wore a dark veil to hide her face in public. Adolescent girls, on the other hand, wore lighter, white silk veils to cover their face and chest and engaged women received what Patricia Fortini Brown calls a “coming out party” where they were finally unveiled and paraded in front of extended family in a white gown with her unbound hair adorned with gold thread.122

It is not surprising that he demonstrated his knowledge of this accessory when illustrating Petrarch’s poems. In folio 40 verso, Laura looks out from a window and wears a thin white veil over her face in a similar fashion to that described for Venetian

122 Patricia Fortini Brown, Private Lives in Renaissance Venice: Art, Architecture, and the Family (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 141-42. Unlike their Venetian contemporaries, proper Florentine women were not forced to cover their faces. Instead they often used diaphanous veils as accessories to their hair and clothing. Florentine courtesans, in contrast, were forced to wear yellow veils in order to identify themselves when in public. Venetian courtesans also wore veils, but by choice in order to present themselves as modest, honest women when attracting potential clients. Florentine courtesans, in contrast, were forced to wear yellow veils in order to identify themselves when in public. For more on this see Lawner, Lives of the Courtesans: Portraits of the Renaissance, 19.
young women by Vecellio (fig. 51).\textsuperscript{123} Though the corresponding sonnet to this image does not specifically mention Laura’s veil, it was clearly a recognizable enough Petrarchan metaphor that the image did not require poetic accompaniment. Petrarch becomes frustrated when Laura’s eyes are hidden from him, either by a veil or with a downward look. In Sonnet 38, the poet laments that there is no obstacle “however much it hinders human sight,/ more than a veil that shades two lovely eyes/ and seems to say: “Now weep and waste away.” That downward glance of theirs which all my joy/ smothers through pride or through humility/ will be the cause of early death for me.”\textsuperscript{124}

Petrarch uses the veil in multiple ways, but most obviously, the fabric disables his ability to see Laura’s eyes, face, and golden hair. He accuses his beloved of purposefully hiding her eyes from him in order to protect her virtue and consequently push him away.

On another level, the veil metaphorically refers to the body as a veil for the soul. As stated eloquently by James Mirollo: “The veil worn by Laura is thus twice removed from the soul, a metaphor of a metaphor, it happens to cover and uncover that part of her body—face and especially mouth—where the soul is mirrored or issues forth in breath and words. The veil can thus mediate between body and soul as well as conceal or reveal both.”\textsuperscript{125} The veil and the downward glance, metaphoric or real, are the barriers that simultaneously protect the virtue of his lady and exclude Petrarch from his quest for the truth that love promises.\textsuperscript{126}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[123] She is shown in a similar full-length veil in folio 18v and many other times in the book.
\item[124] Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 65-66. (Qualunque più l’umana vista ingombra/ quanto d’un vel che due begli occhi adombra/ et par che dica: “Or ti consuma et piagni.”/ Et quel lor inchinar ch’ ogni mia gioia/ spegne o per umilitate o per orgoglio/ cagion sarà che ’nanzi tempo i’ moia.)
\item[126] The issue of female veiling was a preoccupation of the early church fathers, especially Paul and Tertullian, and remained a debate into the Renaissance. For more on early Christian issues see Mary Rose D’Angelo, "Veils, Virgins, and the Tongues of Men and Angels: Women’s Heads in Early Christianity," in
using the symbol to communicate multiple meanings, most often lamenting that the material hides Laura’s true thoughts from her lover, thus making it impossible for him to penetrate her feelings. In Sonnet Eleven he writes: “In sun or shade I’ve never seen you, lady,/ remove that veil of yours/ since you discovered my so great desire….” Laura’s veil literally and metaphorically blocks her from Petrarch’s gaze, on the one hand protecting her from his desire, and on the other suggesting she has something to hide.

In folio 97 verso, Grifo uses the veil to illustrate a specific line from Sonnet 323, which describes Laura as “shrouded in a mist of dark [and] stung upon her heel by a small snake…” (fig. 52). Though the poet does not specifically use the word veil, Grifo visually interprets his lines by portraying Laura in a tall, black hat with a long veil trailing behind her and covering her brocade dress. He also includes the Petrarchan serpent used metaphorically throughout the book to represent Petrarch to illustrate the *picciol angue* nipping at her feet. Laura is also shrouded in a mist of black clouds running across her brow, perhaps to suggest that the shroud, like the veil, should be read on multiple levels—literally as a veil of mourning and figuratively as a shroud of death. This death is both Laura’s and Petrarch’s. It will save him from his unrequited passion for his beloved and the pain he feels from losing her.


127 Petrarch, *Petrarch’s Canzoniere*, 12-13. (Lassare il velo per sole o per ombra./ Donna, non vi vid’ io.)

128 Ibid. 446-47. (Eran avolte d’una nebbia oscura. Punta poi nel talon d’un picciol angue….)

129 The entire sonnet presents six visions of her death. Grifo more or less literally interprets them, starting with painting the poet in profile at his window watching Laura transform into a half mortal/half beast and chased by hounds and ending with the veiled image.
The tall, veiled hat in the Islamic style worn by Laura in two other illustrations (figs. 53, 54) was made famous by the Venetian artist Vittorio Carpaccio in the 1480s (fig. 55). Even if Grifo had never seen the drawing or the many images like it, he was undoubtedly aware of Carpaccio’s source, Bernhard von Breydenbach’s highly popular Peregrinato in terram sanctam printed in 1486 (fig. 56). A variation on Carpaccio’s coned head covering was also well-known by the 1490s. Another variation is the medieval pointed hat seen in Memling’s portrait of a Young Woman with a Pink of 1485 (fig. 57). This hat was another widely recognized type and was meant to evoke ideals of chivalric love and beauty. It was most famously known through Leonardo’s caricatures of couples drawn while he was in Milan in the late 1480s and 1490s. An early sixteenth-century drawing after Leonardo, attributed to Francesco Melzi, depicts a caricature of Dante and Beatrice, in a similar coned hat. In his drawing Leonardo pokes fun at idealized poetic love and beauty as did contemporary critiques of Petrarch and Dante by humanists such as Lorenzo de’ Medici and Leonardo himself (fig. 58). Whether this association was real or imagined, Leonardo’s grotesques were widely known, especially in Milan, and would have been readily available as models for Grifo’s illustrations. Furthermore, as a respected expert on both Dante and Petrarch’s oeuvre, Grifo would have undoubtedly enjoyed Leonardo’s perverse interpretation of the famous couple and the comment it made on the idealized beauty prevalent throughout Grifo’s illustrations.

130 Brown, Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women, 140-41. David Alan Brown suggests this may have been for an Italian patron based on its provenance dating to the nineteenth century and iconographic similarities to contemporary Italian paintings such as Leonardo’s Portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci and the idealized beauties seen in Botticelli’s paintings.
It is likely that Grifo and Leonardo were acquainted based on their simultaneous presence at the Sforza court, mutual friendships, and common patrons. Further supporting this theory, experts on Grifo’s manuscript, including Giordiano Mariani Canova, have tentatively identified Leonardo’s ambiguous reference to a costume designed for a “Messer Antonio Gri veneziano compagno d’Antonio Maria (Mister Antonio Gri Venetian companion to Antonio Maria)” mentioned on folio 250 recto of his Arundel codex. The costume worn by the mysterious Antonio Gri was a primarily made up of peacock feathers which were meant to represent the rider’s loyalty as a servant to Ludovico Sforza, including a feather draping over the back of the horse and various peacock eyes on the horse’s costume. The rest of the costume featured symbols of “ben sevire,” meaning “to serve well,” a prized virtue for a Renaissance courtier. Though there is no irrefutable evidence to link Antonio Grifo to Leonardo’s “Antonio Gri,” he is as likely a candidate as the other two figures speculated to be the rider, namely the Venetian capitano del mar (Sea Commander-in-chief), Antonio Grimani, and a Aragonese courtier of Venetian descent, Antonio Grisone.

While Grifo’s awareness of Florentine and Venetian styles of portraiture and dress is certainly evident in the book, the most obvious influence is Milanese. Grifo’s Laura is often dressed in the Spanish style worn by the elite ladies at the Sforza court (fig.

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132 Prudence was featured on the horse’s right flank, dressed in red on a flaming chariot, or a “fosca cadrega” and holding a branch of laurel. On the left flank was an image of Fortitude along with Charity and Hope.
133 Antonio Grimani later served as the Doge of Venice from 1521-23. Antonio Grisone, a Venetian by blood, was employed by Frederick of Aragon, the heir to the throne of Naples at the time of the tournament. Carlo Vecce first proposed a link between Antonio Grisone and Leonardo’s inclusion of Prudence’s fosca cadrega (the fiery chariot). The fosca cadrega was an Aragonese device, which, according to Vecce, was a reference to the marriage in 1490 between Giangaleazzo Sforza and Isabella of Aragon. For a full discussion of this device see Carlo Vecce, "Focasa cadrega," Achademia Leonardo Vinci: Journal of Leonardo Studies & Bibliography of Vinciana IV (1991), 212-13.
59), including Beatrice d’Este (fig. 60), her niece Bianca Maria Sforza (fig. 61), and most famously, Ludovico’s mistress, Cecilia Gallerani (fig. 62). This style was so identifiable with the Milanese court that it was still the dress used in Cesare Vecellio’s sixteenth-century costume book to portray the *Donzella Milanese*, discussed earlier in this chapter. Even the unusual dress worn by Laura in folio 61 recto appears to have a connection to Beatrice via Pisanello and her Este heritage, as seen in a comparison to this anonymous mid-fifteenth-century fresco depicting a courtly woman playing *balla* in the Palazzo Borromeo in Milan (figs. 63, 64).

Beatrice’s Este tradition is also represented in the incunable. The extravagant hats worn by Petrarch and Laura throughout Grifo’s book appear to be directly related to the Este, as is evidenced in a comparison to two Pisanello drawings of Este noblemen. Beatrice’s uncle, Borso d’Este, was famous for his collection of expensive and outlandish hats and has been identified in two drawings attributed to Pisanello (figs. 65, 66). Even Grifo’s portrait of Laura in the Florentine casement window resembles his patroness, with the exception of her distinctly Petrarchan blond locks (fig. 67). The honor Grifo pays Beatrice and her consorts with his repeated use of the Milanese and Este styles reminds the reader of Petrarch’s words: “However many lovely, charming ladies/ she finds around her, she who has no equal,/ with her fair face she makes all the others/ what daybreak makes of all the lesser stars.”

When placed in the greater context of my dissertation, Grifo’s manuscript provides a unique opportunity to see the transformation of Petrarch’s text into image by a poet who was connected to an elite circle of Renaissance humanists, patrons, and artists.

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134 Petrarch, *Petrarch’s Canzoniere*, 318-19. (Tra quantunque leggiadre donne et belle/ giunga costei ch’al mondo non à pare,/ col suo bel viso suol dell’altri fare/ quel chef a ’l di de le minori stelle.)
His social and intellectual connections to the Sforza, the Medici, the Este, Bernardo Bembo, and Leonardo da Vinci, among others, make him a key figure in the visual development of Renaissance Petrarchismo. These same individuals participated in the practice of commissioning and/or creating beloved portraits and celebrating Petrarchan sonnets. This further underscores the importance of Grifo and his Canzoniere in a greater understanding of Petrarchan imagery in the Renaissance. Unlike Renaissance portraits of women who were meant to recall Petrarchan ideals of beauty yet portray real women, Grifo depicts Laura herself. Yet Grifo’s Laura is strikingly similar to the contemporary portraits of her disciples. Though there is no known direct connection between Grifo’s book and an independent painted portrait, his illustrations nonetheless incorporate various types of portraiture typical to the period and thus suggest a deliberate visual connection between Laura and idealized female portraits in the fifteenth century.
It is impossible to study the history of Renaissance female portraiture without considering Petrarch’s role in shaping it. By tracing the evolution of the Petrarchan portrait from the 1430s through the mid-sixteenth century, this chapter will establish a baseline for Petrarchan standards of female beauty as they manifested in the portraiture of the period. It will become evident that Laura’s features were so well-known and highly revered by the mid-fifteenth century that they became a standard component in female portraiture. The inclusion of idealized Petrarchan features in a painted portrait not only elevated the status of the sitter by association with the famous beauty, it also allowed artists to play with Petrarchan conceits such as name punning and metaphoric associations with Laura’s body parts.

Though art historians have recognized many of these Petrarchan associations in various portraits of the period, what has not been adequately discussed is the division between generalized Petrarchan portraiture and a smaller group of portraits specifically inspired by Petrarch’s two sonnets in honor of Simone Martini’s *Portrait of Laura*. That these “Beloved Portraits” existed is not a new observation, but what I intend to argue is that when considered together as a group in the context of contemporary literary *Petrarchismo* and its social, political, regional, and cultural impact from 1460 to 1560, the portraits take on new meaning. In order to explore fully the depth of the Beloved
Portrait genre, however, it is first necessary to understand the roots of Petrarchan beauty in Renaissance visual culture. That will be the focus of this chapter.

**Petrarch’s Laura**

What Laura actually looked like is impossible to reconstruct, even with Petrarch’s countless references to her beautiful features in his *Canzoniere*. Although the poet praised his beloved’s curly golden hair, ivory skin, dark eyebrows, long neck, lovely hands, long, soft fingers, pearly nails, rosebud mouth, pink cheeks, and fair eyes, when combined the features do not complete a visual picture of Laura. Like Zeuxis’ portrait of Helen of Troy, Petrarch borrowed the most beautiful qualities of multiple women in order to describe the perfect beauty, but in doing so he created a disjointed visual picture. Petrarch’s own view of Laura was equally confused. In his eyes she had many faces; she was his poetic inspiration (Laura/lauro); a virtuous lady; a virginal Madonna; an ideal beauty; and a seductress. This conflicting image of Laura conveniently allowed both proper and improper Renaissance ladies to emulate her beauty and offered Renaissance artists and patrons various contradictory interpretations of Laura, allowing them to eroticize some women and put others on a pedestal.

Just as Zeuxis borrowed the features of multiple women when painting Helen of Troy, Renaissance artists were encouraged to apply imitation and *mimesis* to their own portraits by treatises such as Leon Battista Alberti’s *Della Pittura*. Written in Florence between 1435 and 1436, Alberti’s treatise was well-known to Renaissance humanists and artists and clearly influenced the genre of beloved portraits developed by Lorenzo and his
circle. According to Elizabeth Mansfield, the classical concept of *mimesis*, or imitating and manipulating natural forms, is central to the Zeuxis myth and a key part of Renaissance art. Both Alberti and Vasari mention Zeuxis in their treatises on art. Alberti commended “Zeuxis, the most excellent and most skilled painter of all” and encouraged Renaissance artists to improve upon nature as did the ancient painter:

> It is useful to take from every beautiful body each one of the praised parts and always strive by your diligence and study to understand and express much loveliness. This is very difficult, because complete beauties are never found in a single body, but are rare and dispersed in many bodies.¹

Although Petrarch claimed that his beloved was an exception to this rule, his poetic description of her features suggests otherwise. When combined Laura’s various features create an image more monstrous than beautiful, a fact discussed in Renaissance treatises: nevertheless, her image remained the feminine ideal for more than a century.

It was, I believe, the inability to document Laura’s true likeness (and the lack of visual evidence of her existence) that made her a liminal figure in Renaissance art. As was discussed in the previous chapter on manuscripts, depending on the audience and the commentator, she was either depicted as demure, chaste, virtuous, and ladylike or diametrically opposite as a seductive Venus. Just as Petrarchan commentaries were geared to specific readers and shaped by the subjective perspective of the author and his patron, so, too, did images of Laura vary from book to book and portrait to portrait. Petrarch’s conflicting image of Laura informed the multiple types of women depicted in Renaissance portraiture and allowed artists to variously portray their sitters as virgins, ¹

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wives, mothers, mistresses, and archetypal ideals, all within the framework of Petrarchan imagery.

The Petrarchan Ideal

The Petrarchan ideal was motivated by more than mere vanity. According to Neo-Platonic beliefs in the Renaissance, it was through contemplation of a woman’s inner and outer beauty that the viewer’s soul could reach God. At the center of this new Christianized interpretation of Greek Platonism was the belief that beauty, especially in the form of a comely woman, was the key to the soul’s salvation. Though Petrarch’s poems suggest he was aware of Platonic theory, Neo-Platonic thought, as it was understood in the Renaissance, was not introduced until the late 1430s with the writings of Gemistus Pletho and Cardinal Bessarion. Marsilio Ficino and his circle at the Florentine Platonic Academy in the fifteenth century developed “new” interpretations of Plato’s writings combining Christian theory with the ancient philosophy. As one of a select few native Italians who could read Greek, Ficino became the most well-known translator and commentator in the mid-fifteenth century. He aimed to reconcile the divide between pagan philosophy and Christian thought.

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2 Petrarch did not read Greek and the corpus of Plato’s works were not translated into Italian until the 1430s. Cardinal Bessarion studied under the philosopher, Pletho, in 1423. Pletho was a staunch opponent of Aristotle and instead championed the philosophies of Plato. Bessarion later aimed to reconcile Aristotelianism and Platonism in his own work.

3 Agnolo Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, trans. Konrad Eisenbichler and Jacqueline Murray (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1992), xxv-xxvi. At the same time, the influx of Greek émigrés to Italy after the fall of Constantinople brought increased interest and access to ancient Greek writings by Plato and other contemporary philosophers along with Pope Nicholas V’s promotion of Greek antiquity in Rome.

4 Ficino’s primary supporter, Cosimo de’ Medici, employed him to tutor his grandson, Lorenzo, who would ultimately become the first known patron of a Beloved Portrait after Petrarch.
Art historians have long been aware of the role of Neo-Platonism in Renaissance female portraiture and the impact these notions had on the depiction of beautiful women in art. This philosophy was primarily reserved for an elite group of intellectuals and aristocrats in the fifteenth century. However, by the mid-sixteenth century, the circulation of discourses on beauty expanded these ideas to a broader audience, making the connection between Neo-Platonism and female beauty part of mainstream culture.

Arguably the most famous of these discourses was the Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne written by Agnolo Firenzuola in 1542. In his book, Firenzuola’s narrator, Celso, describes an ideal beauty based on the best qualities of the four courtly ladies he entertained at the court in Prato. This ideal is grounded in Neo-Platonic theory, as Celso explains in the First Dialogue:

A beautiful woman is the most beautiful object one can admire, and beauty is the greatest gift God bestowed on His human creatures. And so, through her virtue we direct our souls to contemplation, and through contemplation to the desire for heavenly things. For this reason beautiful women have been sent among us as a sample and a foretaste of heavenly things, and they have such power and virtue that wise men have declared them to be the first and best object worthy of being loved.5

Incorporating these principles, Firenzuola stressed that in order to be truly beautiful, a woman must have a harmony of perfect features along with superior personal qualities such as leggiadria, grazia, vaghezza, venusta, aria and maestà.6 Elegance, grace, charm, beauty, air, and majesty combined with golden hair and ivory skin created the ideal woman whose beauty shone inside and out.7

5 Firenzuola, On the Beauty of Women, 11. ———, Opere, ed. Adriano Seroni (Florence: Sansoni, 1993), 534. (La donna bella è il più bello obietto che si rimiri, e la bellezza è il maggior dono che faceesse Iddio sull’umana creatura: conciossiaché per la di lei virtù noi ne indirizziamo l’animo all’contemplazione, e per ella è per saggio e per arra stata mandata tra noi; ed è di tanta forza e di tanto valore, ch’ella è stata posta da’ savì per la prima e più eccelente cosa che sia tra i subietti amabil….)
6 Firenzuola defines these qualities in the First Dialogue of his book, see ———, Opere, 537.
7 ———, On the Beauty of Women, xxvii.
In her seminal article of 1976, Elizabeth Cropper was instrumental in revealing how Renaissance definitions of beauty, and consequently Renaissance visual images of women, derived from Petrarch’s various descriptions of Laura’s individual physical features and the later influence of sixteenth-century writers imitating Petrarch’s sonnets. Focusing primarily on Firenzuola and Pietro Testa’s visual interpretation of the text in his notes dating to 1650, Cropper built a compelling argument positing that Parmigianino’s *Madonna of the Long Neck* so closely followed Firenzuola’s recommendations for an ideal female form that the result was a “beautiful monster.” This, she argued, was because, when combined, Laura’s poetic features form a strange and unrealistic image.  

In spite of the disjointed figure born from Petrarch’s description, Firenzuola attempted to transform Petrarch’s cryptic poetic verse into a code of feminine beauty for his sixteenth-century readers. He provided guidelines for artists, courtly ladies, and courtesans to follow when attempting to beautify themselves as determined by Petrarchan standards. According to Firenzuola’s discourse, a woman’s hair should be thick but fine, long, curly, and the color of sunshine. Her dark, silky eyebrows should perfectly arch and taper at the ends above blue or chestnut eyes fringed with lashes neither too dark nor too light. Her ears should be soft and cheeks high with slightly flushed ivory skin. Her diminutive mouth should have vermillion lips of equal size that when smiling open to show only five or six ivory teeth. A long, slender white neck should set off soft and ample shoulders and arms that curve like the handles of a vase. The hands should be white with long fingers and her breasts should swell against her dress. Finally, her long slender legs should set off small, alabaster feet with high arches.  

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9 Ibid, 383-84.
Firenzuola, like Petrarch, recognized that finding all of these qualities in one woman was a nearly impossible task as his main character, Celso, explains:

Rarely, in fact hardly ever, do all the parts that compose perfect and balanced beauty reside in one single woman. As Homer first said and then that Carthaginian said to Hannibal: ‘The gods have not given every thing to everyone, but to some they have given intelligence, to others beauty, to many strength, to few grace, and virtue hardly anyone.’ Thus I will take from each one of the four of you and will do like Zeuxis, who chose the five most elegant girls of Croton and, taking from each her most exquisite feature, painted such a beautiful picture of Helen of Troy that in all of Greece one spoke of nothing else… In the same way I will try to make, from four beautiful women, a perfect beauty.10

Here Firenzuola clearly intended for his reader to recall Petrarch’s Sonnet 260 in which he compared Laura to Helen of Troy: “No one can equal her, not she most praised/ in any age, on any foreign shore:/ not even she who with her charming beauty/ brought Greece hardship and Troy its final shrieks.”11 Celso flatters the women by claiming that the image he describes is more beautiful “than that famous ‘Helen’ Zeuxis created from the five women of Croton…. This is very strong proof that today, in Prato, women are much more beautiful than they were in ancient Greece.”12 And so Firenzuola, through Celso, established a paragone between himself and Zeuxis, and the ladies of Prato versus Helen,

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10 Firenzuola, On the Beauty of Women, 13. ———, Opere, 537-38. (Di poi, perché la mente piglia meglio per via dell’esempio la essenza della cosa che si discorre, e con ciò sia che rade volte, anzi più tosto non mai, in una donna sola si raccolgono tutte le parti, che si richiedono ad una perfetta e consumata bellezza, e come disse Omero prima, e poi quel Cartaginese ad Annibale: <<Gl’Iddii non hanno dato ogni cosa a ognuno, ma a chi l’ingegno, ad altri la bellà, a molti la forza, a pochi la grazia, e le virtù, a rari>>, piglieremo tutte a quattro voi: e imitando Zeusi, il quale dovendo dipingere la bella Elena alli Crotoniati, di tutte le loro più eleganti fanciulle ne elesse cinque, delle quali togliendo da questa la più bella parte, e da quell’altra il simile facendo, ne formò la sua Elena, che riuscì poi così bellissima, che per tutta Grecia d’altro non si ragionava…. E così facendo noi, tenteremo se di quattro belle noi ne possiam fare una bellissima.)

11 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 364-65. (Non si pareggi a lei qual più s’aprezza/ in qual ch’etade, in quai che strain lidi:/ non chi recò con sua vaga bellezza/ in Grecia affani, in Troia ultimi stridi….)

12 Firenzuola, On the Beauty of Women, 65-66. ———, Opere, 592. (Ma ditemi il vero, non vi par egli che questa nostra dipintura sia risuscita nella mente vostra più bella con Quattro di voi, che la famigerata Elena di Zeusi con cinque Crotoniate? E questo è un fortissimo argomento che a Prato sono oggi molto più belle le donne, ch’elle non erano in Grecia anticamente.)
just as Petrarch claimed his beloved was more beautiful than the ancient beauty in his own sonnets.

The Profile Portrait

Even before the circulation of Firenzua’s treatise, the physical attributes he described were very much a part of visual culture. In fact, Laura’s features were already identifiable by 1434 in the first documented fifteenth-century portrait of a woman.13 Painted by Pisanello, the Portrait of Ginevra d’Este is believed to depict the daughter of Ferrarese marchese Niccolò III d’Este and the bride of Rimini prince Sigismondo Malatesta (fig. 68). Like Laura, Ginevra is the epitome of the Petrarchan ideal—her blond tresses are pulled severely off an extremely high forehead and wrapped by a white ribbon. Her skin is ivory with a hint of pink on the cheeks and lips, her neck is long and accentuated by her high-swept hairdo and her profile exposes a celestial blue eye. As a courtly lady, Ginevra was tied to the lineage of chivalric love poetry, reinvented by Petrarch, and especially appropriate for an Este marriage portrait.14 According to Joanna Woods-Marsden, there was no known Italian example that would have provided a model for Pisanello’s portrait; however, Simone Martini’s Portrait of Laura, or at least an oral description of it, must have been known at the Este court and may have provided the

13 Joanna Woods-Marsden, “Portrait of the Lady, 1430-1520,” in Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women, ed. David Alan Brown, published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, shown at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 75. I use Woods-Marsden’s date based on her assertion that the painting was probably a commemoration of the alliance between Ferrara and Rimini achieved through the union of Ginevra d’Este with Sigismondo Malatesta in 1434.
14 Cole, Virtue and Magnificence: Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts, 120. All of Niccolò’s children were given chivalric or heraldic names. Ginevra was named for King Arthur’s mythological Queen Guinevere and her half-brother, future ruler of the Este dynasty, was named Leonello after the heraldic king of beasts.
perfect poetic complement to the more obvious imperial precedent for the profile portrait.\footnote{Woods-Marsden, "Portrait of the Lady, 1430-1520," 75.}

Ginevra is identified as a member of the Este family by the urn symbol on her dress and the flowers, insects, and juniper leaves surrounding her profile. They poetically and Neo-Platonically associate her with the promises of love, betrothal, beauty, and inner virtue.\footnote{The background of the pattern of flowers behind Ginevra is made up of carnations, a traditional symbol of betrothal, and columbines to denote passionate love. These natural metaphors had a lasting influence on the portraiture of both real and ideal women of the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Pisanello used a similar background in his Portrait of Leonello d'Este in 1441. Joanna Woods-Marsden argued that Pisanello’s floral background is an “artistic experiment, [focusing] on the grace and transitory beauty of the fruits of nature as symbols of the teenage princess’ luminous youth, rather than on the Este wealth or Malatesta honor” and is not repeated in dynastic portraits by other artists. See ibid, 74.}

In an unusual gesture of individualization (in the context of early fifteenth-century portraits of women) a sprig of juniper is tucked into the sleeve of Ginevra’s dress, to pun on the sitter’s name (Ginevra/ginepro) and functions as a symbol of her chastity. Petrarch used similar word play throughout his sonnets, interchanging Laura and lauro to achieve multiple levels of meaning. Lauro, or laurel, refers to Petrarch’s pursuit of fame and the laurel crown awarded great writers since antiquity. Lauro also evokes the image of Daphne’s Ovidian transformation into a laurel tree in order to escape Apollo’s grasp, which became a metaphor for Petrarch’s elusive pursuit of poetry and of Laura herself.\footnote{Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, xvii. The complexity of Petrarch’s punning on Laura’s name is especially interesting in Sonnet 5 when he spells out LAURETA (a nickname) with the various letters in the poem. For more on this see ibid, 523.}

The profile format was known in the fifteenth century through classical medals and coins and the dynastic emulation of Roman medals of the Caesars was fashionable at the Este Court.\footnote{Pisanello first introduced humanist-inspired portrait medals to the Este court. See Woods-Marsden, "Portrait of the Lady, 1430-1520," 75.} These medals, many of which were designed by Pisanello, portrayed an ideal profile likeness of the individual on the front and commemorated the virtuous
attributes of the sitter on the reverse.¹⁹ As the conduit through which the Ferrara and Rimini courts were united through marriage, Ginevra d’Este’s portrait visually commemorated the elevation of two dynasties searching for ways to strengthen and legitimize their right to princely rule. Yet, second to being an Este daughter, Ginevra was a young woman. While her profile made perfect sense in the dynastic tradition of commemorative medals, it was likewise considered the most appropriate format for a chaste and virtuous lady.²⁰ By averting her eyes, Pisanello simultaneously aligned her with the classical tradition and protected the viewer from her “lovely, quiet glance/ wherein the rays of Love burn with such heat….”²¹

The role of the gaze in female profile portraiture was first addressed by Patricia Simons (1988).²² The profile pose, Simons argued, was the ideal format for these public female images because it allowed the male viewer to enjoy a woman’s beauty without the threat of her alluring eyes which, in Petrarchan terms, could turn a man to stone with “love’s fatal glance.”²³ The profile format, according to Simons, was also read as a visual metaphor for controlling a woman’s unpredictable and dangerous spirit as it was described in contemporary literature of the time:

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¹⁹ For example, a well-known medal of Empress Faustina promotes her role as an exemplary wife and mother by depicting her with her husband, Antoninus Pius, and the word “AETERNITAS,” or “Eternity,” on the reverse. Pisanello was known to have a small collection of medals, including one of Faustina, and even using it as model for an extant pen and ink drawing now in the Louvre. For more on this consult Luke Syson, "Consorts, Mistresses and Exemplary Women: The Female Medallic Portrait in Fifteenth-Century Italy,” in The Sculpted Object 1400-1700, ed. Stuart Currie and Peta Motture (Brookfield: Scholar Press, 1997), 43.

²⁰ With very few exceptions, and none that I know of preceding Pisanello’s Ginevra, women were always painted facing the viewer’s left. Many scholars have explained this tradition in relationship to contemporary associations with right and left. Since the Middle Ages, man had been associated with the right side of God, considered morally superior to the feminine left side according to Woods-Marsden, "Portrait of the Lady, 1430-1520," 69. Although there are no extant copies or descriptions of Simone’s portrait, it must be assumed that Laura was drawn in profile as was customary for portraits of the time, and it is not improbable that she too faced the left.

²¹ Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 62-63. (E ’l bel guardo sereno/ ove i raggi d’Amor si caldi sono….)

²² Simons, "Women in Frames: the Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," 39-58.

²³ Ibid, 50.
Visually, the strict orderliness of the profile portrait can be seen as a surprising contradiction of contemporary misogynist literature. Supposedly ‘inconsistent,’ like ‘irrational animals’ without ‘any set proportion,’ living ‘without order or measure’ women were transformed by their ‘beauty of mind’ and ‘dowry of virtue’ into ordered, constant, geometrically proportioned and unchangeable images.…

By eliminating eye contact between the sitter and the viewer, a woman’s chastity was left intact and a man’s sexual temptation was not challenged. It also depersonalized the relationship between the sitter and the viewer, which was especially appropriate for fifteenth-century female portraiture because the paintings were most often commissioned to celebrate a betrothal or commemorate a death. The profile also identified the sitter as a chaste and proper lady worthy of her male counterpart. As such, the sitters’ individuality was not the goal; rather, the portrait’s function was to document her role as daughter, bride, wife, or mother.

Alison Wright added to the discussion of the female profile portrait by stressing that profile was also employed in donor portraits and didactic images such as Paolo Uccello’s *St. George and the Dragon*. Rather than reading the profile pose as solely a mechanism for averting the female gaze she interpreted the pose as a means to communicate the virtue of the sitter. In my opinion, the use of the profile pose, like the incorporation of name punning, heraldic imagery, and metaphoric innuendos was undoubtedly used in various ways to communicate various messages. For Pisanello’s Ginevra, the profile simultaneously identified her as a virtuous and marriageable young lady and a member of the ruling class.

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24 Ibid, 44.
Though it was used in other regions, the profile pose was primarily a Florentine phenomenon for portraits of women in the fifteenth century. Most of the paintings from the 1430s through 1490 follow a similar format, of which approximately forty panel portraits are still extant. The sitter typically faces to the viewer’s left and is set upon a flat, monochromatic background. At times she is literally painted into a window frame, and typically her left sleeve is decorated with a brocade that identifies the heraldic symbol of either her father or her bridegroom as is seen in Alesso Baldovinetti’s Portrait of a Lady (fig. 9) where, similar to Ginevra’s portrait, the flat, inanimate qualities of the sitter are overshadowed by the ornate brocades and heraldic patterns on her dress. It is the expensive garments and jewels that are exaggerated by the profile pose that most likely identify them as marriage portraits since Florentine sumptuary laws allowed only young, unmarried women and recent brides to wear such finery in public. Yet, young women were fiercely protected by their families and, according to Wright, it is likely that the artists were allowed only a brief personal visit with their sitters and undoubtedly had to rely on their sketches and visual memories when painting the portrait. Though the women were secluded, their portraits were displayed in semi-public rooms, either in camere, anticamere, or studioli. Though they were at times covered up, the portraits were intended to be admired for the beauty of the sitter and the skill of the painter. The conflict between protecting the girl and admiring her portrait may have been in part solved by painting her in profile if, as Patricia Simons posits, the profile format protected

28 Simons, "Women in Frames: the Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," 46.
30 ———, The Pollaiuolo Brothers: The Arts of Florence and Rome, 128.
31 Ibid, 119.
a sitter from the male gaze while celebrating attributes such as her jewelry, clothing, and idealized features.\textsuperscript{32}

Following in the tradition of Simone Martini and Pisanello, the brothers Piero and Antonio del Pollaiuolo painted some of the most iconic profile portraits of women in the 1460s and 70s. Though slight idiosyncrasies distinguish one portrait from another and thus lead art historians to believe the sitters were real Florentine women, the decorative format and Petrarchan features of the sitters are nearly interchangeable. Again, according to Wright, “With remarkable frequency female subjects are depicted according to fashionable conventions of beauty, which were also read as signifying virtue: a high ‘noble’ forehead, red lips and especially fair skin and hair associated with the outstanding features of the model poetic beauty, Petrarch’s beloved Laura….”\textsuperscript{33} In each of two documented Pollaiuolo portraits, the sitter is set before a flat, monochromatic background and wears a dress with the iconic embroidered pomegranate motif on her sleeve to symbolize fertility (figs. 69, 70). Her blond hair is swept up into a tight coiffure and decorated with nets and gems. Each woman boasts the creamy skin, long neck, rosy cheeks, high forehead, and small mouth prized in Petrarchan poetry.\textsuperscript{34}

Though the profile pose was used for both genders, it held a different meaning when used for a portrait of a woman than it did for a man. While a man’s profile honored him with civic fame and individualism, it generally stripped his female counterpart of any

\textsuperscript{32} Simons, ”Women in Frames: the Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture,” 46.
\textsuperscript{33} Wright, \textit{The Pollaiuolo Brothers: The Arts of Florence and Rome}, 119.
\textsuperscript{34} An exception to this rule is found in a portrait attributed to Piero now in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. This woman is not only unusual for her brunette locks and the turban-like wrap in her hair, but also because of her sharper, more realistic features. According to Alison Wright, her hair was originally gilt to give it a golden sheen. Wright speculates that her simpler hair and dress could identify her as of a lower social status than the others. Alternatively, her modest dress could suggest she is too mature to wear the sumptuous costumes and jewelry seen in the other paintings. She may also be from somewhere other than Florence and thus not bound by the same rules of dress and decorum. See ibid, 127.
personality. This is evident in a comparison of the male and female sitters in Piero della Francesca’s double Portrait of Federigo da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza painted in 1472 (fig. 71). Federigo intentionally commissioned Piero to copy his image from a medal issued five years before rather than have the artist paint him from life. This choice was a calculated one, and in Rona Goffen’s opinion, showed his desire to be consistent with his public visual imagery.\(^\text{35}\) By choosing the profile pose, the one-eyed Federigo also aligned himself with a famous Greek portrait known in the Renaissance through Pliny’s Natural History.\(^\text{36}\) According to Pliny, “He [Apelles] also painted a portrait of King Antigonus who was blind in one eye, and devised an original method of concealing the defect, for he did the likeness in ‘three-quarter,’ so that the feature that was lacking in the subject might be thought instead to be absent in the picture, and he only showed the part of the face which he was able to display as unmutilated.”\(^\text{37}\) Just as Apelles used the profile to show his sitter’s best side, so, too, did Piero della Francesco hide his sitter’s missing eye.\(^\text{38}\)

Battista, on the other hand, is so flawlessly Petrarchan she seems to be made of marble instead of flesh and blood (fig. 72). The date of the portrait suggests it was painted shortly after the birth of their only son and heir, Guidobaldo, and Battista’s subsequent death during childbirth.\(^\text{39}\) Her eerily smooth alabaster skin accentuates the


\(^{36}\) When he was a young man, Federigo left his helmet open during a joust in order to display an oak sprig in honor of his then mistress (he seduced her under an oak tree), and was consequently injured. The Duke forever felt the deformities were a punishment for the mistakes of his youth. This may have been his rationale for accentuating his nose in the profile portrait.

\(^{37}\) Pliny, Natural History, Books 33–35, 326–29. (Pinxit et Antigoni regis imaginem altero lumine orbati primus escogitate ratione vitia condendi; obliquam namque fecit, ut, quod debeat corpori, picturae deese potius videtur, tantumque eam partem e facie ostendit, quam totam poterat ostendere.)

\(^{38}\) Cole, Virtue and Magnificence: Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts, 83. The profile pose also allowed Piero to demonstrate his mastery of naturalism by painting the Duke’s deformed nose.

\(^{39}\) Ibid, 83-84. Battista was by all accounts beloved and dearly missed by her husband.
feature so prized in Petrarchan poetry and suggests a *paragone* between painting and sculpture for memorial portraiture. Battista’s portrait equally strips her of her personal accomplishments, including her humanist education, her success as a Latin orator, and the fact that she acted as regent when her husband was away from Urbino. Although these accomplishments elevated her above the norms of her gender, her portrait does not allude to her learnedness or political prowess, and instead draws attention to her elaborate coiffure, necklace, and embroidered sleeve—all items that would have been provided to her by her husband.

Furthermore, though her profile pose communicates her regal status as the Duchess of Urbino, this too according to Alison Wright was gendered in Renaissance portraiture, as female profile portraits associated the sitter with her family’s power rather than her own.\(^40\) This is certainly the case with Battista who was both a Montefeltro by marriage and Sforza by birth. Both families were keen to associate themselves with the ruling class since both Federico da Montefeltro and Battista’s uncle, Francesco Sforza, were not legitimate heirs. Federico was the illegitimate son of the lord of Urbino, Guidantonio da Montefeltro, and became Duke only after his legitimate half-brother, Oddantonio, was assassinated. Likewise, Francesco Sforza was a famous *condottiere* who married into the Visconti family and consequently took his position as the ruler of Milan. Battista therefore represented both families and it was essential that she be presented as a model of feminine perfection in her public image.

A lady’s role was to please her man, both with her physical beauty and feminine virtues. In Baldassare Castiglione’s words, “In a Lady who lives at court a certain

\(^{40}\) Wright, “The Memory of Faces: Representational Choices in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Portraiture,” 93.
pleasing affability is becoming above all else, whereby she will be able to entertain graciously every kind of man." This supports Piero della Francesca’s depiction of Battista Sforza as a frozen, idealized example of femininity devoid of the strong personality required to run a city in her husband’s absence. Further supporting Castiglione’s recommendation that a woman be praised for her virtues not her strengths, Piero included an image of Petrarch’s Trionfi on the reverse of each painting in a similar fashion to commemorative medals (fig. 73). The feminine virtues were used to represent Battista and the Triumph of Fame for Federigo. This alone communicates a different, gendered message for each sitter: Battista represents a model of ideal feminine perfection and Piero is a ruler whose visual imperfections celebrated, rather than detracted from, his power.

An interesting comparison can be made to a slightly later portrait medal cast of Caterina Sforza after she became the Regent of Forli upon the death of her husband, Girolomo Riario. The medal, cast by Niccolò Fiorentino circa 1488, portrays Caterina in left-facing profile wearing no adornment save a widow’s veil and with a stern expression on her face (fig. 74). On the reverse of the medal is an image of a winged Victory driving a triumphal cart and inscribed “VICTORIAM FAMA SEQVETVR” (Fame will follow Victory). This, according to Joyce de Vries, is a comment on her success in ruling Forlì after her husband’s death. Though Caterina does not literally ride the Victory

41 Baldassare Castiglione, Il libro del Cortegiano, ed. Giulio Preti (Turin: Letteratura italiana Einaudi, 1965), 219. (A quella che vive in corte parmi convenirsi sopra ogni altra cosa una certa affabiliu piacevole, per la quale sappia gentilmente intervenere ogni sorte d’omo con ragionamenti grati ed onesti...)
42 Joyce de Vries, Caterina Sforza and the Art of Appearances: Gender, Art and Culture in Early Modern Italy, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 43-45.
chariot, as does Federigo on the reverse of his portrait, Caterina’s triumphal presentation nonetheless presents her as a contender in the masculine realm, not as a helpless widow.43

Another slightly later double portrait of husband and wife reiterates the different associations the profile pose held for men and women. Though it was painted as late as 1500, Davide Ghirlandaio’s Portrait of a Young Man and a Young Lady portrays a female subject in profile and her male counterpart in three-quarter view (fig. 75). The result is that the young man’s face, though beautiful, is not idealized, while the young woman is every bit as Petrarchan as the earlier profile portraits by the Pollaiuolo brothers. Her hair is golden, forehead high, and skin ivory with a touch of pink on her cheeks. In contrast, the man’s eyes betray his identity with bags and fine lines specific to his own features. The portraits’ backgrounds are equally gendered; Ghirlandaio’s male sitter is placed before a landscape featuring both a city and countryside, while the woman is contained in a domestic loggia and visually separated from the landscape by architectural columns. On the shelves behind her head are various objects that represent her feminine virtues, including a prayer book, a brooch, and a strand of coral beads.

A decade earlier Ghirlandaio painted a Portrait of Selvaggia Sassetti in three quarter view (fig. 76), proving that his choice of profile for the Berlin portrait was a calculated one, either on his part or at the request of his patron. Perhaps this was because the portraits were intended to be displayed together and may have even been originally attached to one another with hinges.44 Therefore the choice of different poses for each gender must have been to communicate intentionally different messages about his sitters. If the goal was to show the young man as both individualized and worldly, the profile

43 Her medal is even more telling in comparison to a c. 1480-84 version portraying Caterina as an idealized and virtuous beauty after her marriage to Girolamo Riaro. For more on this ibid, 33-35.
pose was no doubt meant to associate the woman with the tradition of virtuous aristocratic Florentine women such as those portrayed in the Petrarchan profile portraits popular in the 1470s. This, as Patricia Simons argued, visually elevated the man and subordinated the female who is “cut off in a loggia and a household.” Just as Battista Sforza’s portrait stripped her of her personal merits and celebrated her wifely virtues, so too does Ghirlandaio’s portrait appear to honor the domestic qualities prized in a Florentine bride and promote the hierarchy between the genders.

The Shifting Gaze

In the 1470s, the profile pose began to be replaced by three-quarter and frontal views. Probably in response to Flemish portraits circulated in Florence, circa 1470/1475, Botticelli painted one of the earliest known portraits of a woman in three-quarter pose. Generally believed to be Smeralda Brandini, based on an inscription found on the windowsill, she stands three-quarter length and grasps the window frame with one hand and her gown with the other (fig. 77). In order to avoid the lustful thoughts potentially inspired by a sitter’s bare hand placed on a breast or stroking a sensual object, for example, a painter had to carefully hide or place the appendages in a decorous pose. Botticelli avoided this potential pitfall by having Smeralda’s hands grip inanimate objects.

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45 Ibid.
46 The recent exhibition catalogue for the Metropolitan Museum’s exhibition *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini* argues that explaining Botticelli’s innovation based only on his exposure to Northern painting does not give Botticelli the credit due for this groundbreaking change. See ibid, 112.
47 As the date of this painting is not concrete, it is not known whether it was painted before or after Leonardo da Vinci’s *Portrait of Ginevra da Benci* (c. 1474). Botticelli returned to the profile in 1480s with the New York *Portrait of a Young Woman* and the Pitti *Portrait of a Woman*. 
in order to keep them occupied and only partially exposed. Similarly, another three-quarter portrait attributed to Domenico Ghirlandaio shows the sitter with one hand under the ledge in front of her and the exposed hand holds an orange blossom to symbolize the sitter’s chastity (fig. 78).

An unusual example of a Petrarchan portrait is found in a portrait commissioned by Isabella d’Este, the Marchioness of Mantua, for her own studiolo in early 1500. Written correspondence between Isabella and her brother-in-law’s mistress, Cecilia Gallerani, documents that she sought examples of famous portraits when deciding who to employ and asked to see Leonardo da Vinci’s Portrait of Cecilia as evidence of his skill (fig. 62). In a letter written by Isabella to Cecilia in 1498, the Marchioness asked her to send Leonardo’s portrait so that she could compare it to another by Bellini: “Having happened today to see some fine portraits by the hand of Giovanni Bellini, we began to talk about the works of Leonardo, desiring to compare them with these paintings that I have. And recalling that he painted you from life, I beg you to send me this portrait of you by the present courier, whom I have sent with this in mind.” Cecilia responded that she no longer resembled the young beauty in the painting but that she would be glad to send the portrait as proof of her good will.

48 While the domestic interior places Smeralda in the Florentine tradition of Fra Filippo Lippi, her frontal pose is a radical departure from standards of female portraiture. The woman now looks forward, creating an intimacy between the viewer and the sitter. She does not invite us into her space, but she acknowledges our role as voyeurs. Her face retains many of the Petrarchan features, but it is rendered in a less ideal interpretation by its individualization. This may be one of the reasons that the artist abandoned the frontal pose in favor of the profile portrait in the last two decades of the century.


50 Brown, "Leonardo and the Ladies with the Ermine and the Book," 50 and 53. (This correspondence has led Brown, and others, to question whether the portrait is indeed Cecilia. If she was 25 at the time of Isabella’s letter would she reasonably have considered herself immature at the age of 16? Still, Brown
Isabella ultimately employed Leonardo for her portrait in 1500-1501 and received in return a life-sized drawing in black, red, and white chalk with yellow pastel over leadpoint. This drawing, probably the example now in the Louvre (fig. 79), was sent to Isabella and pricked by Leonardo for a future painted portrait that was never completed. Interestingly, although Isabella was inspired by Cecilia’s portrait, she and/or Leonardo rejected the more modern three-quarter pose used in the painting. Why then would Isabella allow Leonardo to draw her in profile when he was one of the earliest artists to reject the archaic pose? Avoiding the male gaze which, according to Patricia Simons, was the purpose of the earlier Florentine tradition, could not have been her motivation since the portrait was commissioned for her own private grotta. Furthermore, as a woman famous for her sophisticated eye and for outfitting her grotta and studiolo with a collection every bit as exceptional as those owned by her male peers, she was clearly aware of the audience for whom the portrait was intended. She commissioned it to be admired by her friends and associates rather than to advertise either her marriageability or her dynastic image in a public context. A copy of the drawing, now in the Ashmolean Museum, provides visual evidence of her desire to advertise her erudition and argues the painting must be Cecilia because it is unlikely Leonardo painted two portraits with the famous ermine. For the original letter see Ames-Lewis, Isabella and Leonardo, 224.

51 For a compete discussion of the materials and technique see Kemp, Leonardo da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man, 119-24. The drawing has traces of yellow-ochre pigment, which Ames-Lewis identifies as either an early example of pastel or chalk in that color. According to Carmen Bambach the drawing is considered to be the earliest extant Italian example to incorporate pastel. Furthermore, Leonardo’s notebooks record his use of pastel and his recipe for making the medium. See Bambach, Leonardo da Vinci: Master Draftsman, 17-18.

52 Kemp believes that the drawing was pricked in order to create a copy, now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, which he kept for a future painting. See Kemp, Leonardo da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man, 209. Francis Ames-Lewis more recently has posited that Leonardo only made two drawings, the first now in the Louvre and the Ashmolean copy produced by Leonardo’s workshop. For the complete discussion see Ames-Lewis, Isabella and Leonardo, 118. In a letter dated March 27, 1501 from Isabella to Leonardo, she requested a replacement of Leonardo’s portrait drawing, which she claimed had been given away by her husband, Francesco Gonzaga. Four years later, in May of 1504, Isabella apparently gave up hopes of receiving a painted portrait from Leonardo and instead asked him to send a portrait of a young Christ child as a replacement. For the complete letter see ibid, 235-36.
sophistication. In the drawing Isabella holds a book, undoubtedly referring to her patronage of contemporary writers and her collection of classical texts and celebrating Isabella’s exceptional humanist education (fig. 80). Further supporting this theory is Cosmè Tura’s frontispiece for Antonio Cornazzano’s Del modo di regere e di regnare discussed in the previous chapter (fig. 33). The book was dedicated to Isabella’s mother, Eleonora of Aragon, who was also respected for her virtues as a learned female ruler. In the manuscript illumination, Eleonor faces to the right, in profile, just as her daughter was later depicted by Leonardo.\footnote{This connection was made by Francis Ames-Lewis. For the entire discussion see ———, Isabella and Leonardo, 140-41.}

Her position as the Marchioness of Mantua would also justify Isabella’s desire to align herself visually with the monarchical tradition of profile portraiture as she was also depicted on a slightly earlier (1498) portrait medallion designed by Gian Cristoforo Romano (fig. 81). Though right-facing profiles on medals were not uncommon for women by the late fifteenth century, it was unusual to adopt the right-facing pose in female portraiture.\footnote{Two notable exceptions are Botticelli’s Frankfurt Portrait of Simonetta Vespucci and Piero della Francesca’s Portrait of Battista Sforza, both discussed in this dissertation.} The pose, in Francis Ames-Lewis’s opinion, was entirely about Isabella’s desire to present herself as an equal to her male counterparts at court and in the political sphere.\footnote{Ames-Lewis, Isabella and Leonardo, 2. Isabella acted as regent when her husband, Francesco Gonzaga, was away from Mantua.}

A version of the medal, cast by Gian Cristoforo in gold in 1503, shows Isabella in a hairstyle all’antica, probably modeled on ancient Roman coins, and a simple, yet fashionable, dress (fig. 82).\footnote{A nearly contemporary medal (c. 1480-84) portraying Ludovico Sforza’s niece, Caterina Sforza, presents Caterina in left-facing profile but with similarly idealized features and classical dress. According to de Vries, Caterina’s bound hair reflects her status as a married woman which again suggests that Isabella’s} A circle of diamonds and enamel flowers and a braided
border make the object all the more sumptuous. On the reverse an inscription reads “BENEM ERE NTIVM ERGO” (Because of Merit) accompanied by a classical, winged figure holding a palm branch in her left hand and a staff in her right with a serpent at her feet. Luke Syson has argued that the astrological figure at the top of the medal refers to Isabella’s sun sign, Sagittarius. Isabella’s choice of the profile pose intentionally placed her “in a continuum of celebratory portraiture that stretched back to antiquity, ensuring Isabella d’Este’s fame for a distant posterity.” This, according to Brown, explains the differences between Leonardo’s portraits of Cecilia and Isabella: “In many respects the illustrious sitters were alike—both were lively, fashionable and learned patrons of letters. But their similarities as individuals apart, the two ladies had quite different roles in society: Isabella was a ruler while Cecilia, at the time Leonardo portrayed her, was merely the mistress of a ruler.”

In addition to visually aligning herself with the great rulers of antiquity with her medal, Isabella fashioned herself as a Petrarchan beauty in her imagery. She functioned

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57 The medal was a prized piece in Isabella’s own collection and was kept in the same cupboard with her ancient gem believed to portray Augustus and Livia. According to Luke Syson, the fact that she kept the two possessions together and inscribed her medal in a similarly classical manner they were meant to be interpreted as a pair, thus elevating Isabella’s status to that of Livia. For a complete discussion see Syson, "Reading Faces: Gian Cristoforo Romano’s Medal of Isabella d’Este," 286-87; ———, "La Corte di Mantova nell’ età di Andrea Mantegna,” ed. Cesare Mozarelli and Robert Oresko (Rome: Bulzoni, 1997).

58 ———, "Consorts, Mistresses and Exemplary Women: The Female Medallic Portrait in Fifteenth-Century Italy," 288-90. George Francis Hill identified the winged woman as an astrological figure in 1930, Georg Habich identified the figure as Hygenia because of the serpent (1923), and J. Graham Pollard recognized the figure as a sign of Virgo in 2007. For more on this see Weppelmann, "The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini," 240.


60 Brown, "Leonardo and the Ladies with the Ermine and the Book," 60.

61 In Leonardo’s drawing, Isabella is shown at her optimal weight in an idealized profile pose, just as Titian portrayed her in her youth when he painted her portrait in 1536, though Isabella was by then sixty-two years old. Titian’s Portrait of Isabella d’Este is now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Isabella was notoriously insecure about her weight and keen to present herself as young and beautiful in her
as a “Laura” for her circle of court artists and poets and was the inspiration for their Neo-Platonic affection. Given Isabella’s Petrarchan self-promotion, it is not surprising that she was the model for Giangiorgio Trissino’s discourse I ritratti. Trissino’s main characters, Vicenzo Macro and Pietro Bembo, describe a Ferrarese beauty whom Bembo recognizes as none other than the Marchioness of Mantua, Isabella d’Este. Like Lucian who described the Emperor’s mistress Panthea in his Icones, Trissino first focuses on Isabella’s physical beauty, and then turns his attention to her personal virtues. Trissino’s dialogue was sent to Isabella in 1514 for her approval and Isabella’s active role in editing the book undoubtedly explains the lack of sensual innuendo found in other contemporary discourses on beauty. Just as the portraits she commissioned portrayed her in an idealized, yet classically regal manner, so, too, must she have wanted a written portrait of her to communicate the same message. Audience, according to Mary Rogers, had everything to do with how a woman was described in sixteenth-century treatises. In Trissino’s case, Isabella is presented on her way to church in her Sunday finery and accompanied by a group of courtiers. This, in Rogers’ words, “is very much a public appearance: Isabella is an aristocratic spectacle as she could be admired by a general audience—she is said to be ‘a tutto il mondo riguadene.”

This chapter has explored how the Petrarchan canon of beauty was employed for portraits of aristocratic women in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy. Laura’s high forehead, blond hair, ivory skin, and delicate features were the prized physical portraits. Nonetheless, Isabella’s portraits retained a degree of accuracy that made them identifiable, yet idealized.

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feminine attributes for the marriageable young women and new brides depicted by the Pollaiuolo brothers and for respected rulers such as Battista Sforza and Isabella d’Este. An emulation of Laura’s features identified her followers as beautiful, chaste, and virtuous women worthy of poetic praise and commemorative portraits. The next chapter, however, explores a simultaneous Renaissance fascination with Laura’s sensual side manifested in a genre of female portraits celebrating the Petrarchan erotic. These portraits, which I refer to as Beloved Portraits, were commissioned by the same circle of Renaissance patrons and painted by their favored artists, but did not portray their daughters and wives. Instead, the patrons’ lovers, mistresses, and Neo-Platonic beloveds were the subjects of the portraits. Though every bit as Petrarchan as the proper examples discussed in this chapter, the Beloved Portrait genre exploited the very same erotic features that their proper counterparts vehemently rejected in poetry and paint.
CHAPTER THREE: LOVE IN THE TIME OF LORENZO: THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY BELOVED PORTRAIT

Since Simone Martini’s *Portrait of Laura* did not survive past Petrarch’s lifetime, Renaissance artists and patrons were forced to rely upon Petrarch’s words, and their own imaginations, when celebrating the beauty of their own beloveds in portraiture. The practice of commissioning a beloved portrait was confined to a relatively small group of elite intellectuals, each with a personal, political, artistic or intellectual connection to Petrarch, and in many cases, to one another. Poets competed with their contemporaries and Petrarch himself, while patrons measured their beloveds to Laura’s example. Lovers followed chivalric rituals, ladies strove to match Laura’s beauty, and city-states vied for Petrarch’s legacy by establishing courts that reflected Petrarchian ideals of beauty and love.

Renaissance participants in the tradition aimed to celebrate the beauty of the patron’s platonic love interest and to praise the skill of the painter and his ability to imitate (and sometimes improve upon) the lady’s physical perfection with accompanying Petrarchan sonnets. This social practice of shared creation and recitation of love poetry was widespread among the cultivated enthusiasts of Petrarch’s verse and often inspired the commission of a portrait of an object of desire. Both the paintings and poems were intended to be an ongoing dialogue with Petrarch and his classical predecessors while elevating the status of the sitter and her admirer.
By considering these portraits as a group in relationship to the important role literary Petrarchismo played in Renaissance culture and politics and approaching them as a visual dialogue between artists, patrons, sitters, and city-states in ongoing rivalries over the paragone of the arts, the supremacy of the Italian vernacular, and princely claims to Petrarch’s legacy, the beloved portrait emerges as a dynamic exercise in Petrarchan besting among an elite group of erudite humanists. The social status and intellectual prestige that came with the commission of a Beloved Portrait inspired a century-long tradition rich with rivalry and competition among a small, well-connected group of patrons, artists, poets, and female beloveds. Though the tradition spanned many cities in Italy including Milan, Venice, Florence and Rome, it began in Florence at the court of Lorenzo de’ Medici. Lorenzo’s impact on the genre in the fifteenth century will be the focus of this chapter.

As was discussed earlier in this dissertation, people continually questioned whether Laura, and by extension her portrait, actually existed. If indeed it did, as Petrarch’s Sonnets 77 and 78 claim, the portrait would date to the late 1330s when Petrarch lived in Avignon, making Simone’s Portrait of Laura the earliest known female portrait in the Renaissance, and possibly the earliest recorded independent personal portrait in Italian art. The portrait, according to Petrarch’s poems, was created with a

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1 The portrait had to have been created when Simone was in Avignon between 1335 and his death in 1344. Petrarch completed his first form of the Canzoniere in 1341 and must have been working on the individual sonnets during the period in which Simone and he were together in France. A note in the margin of folio 9r of Vatican 3196 is dated November 1336 on the same page Petrarch wrote his two sonnets in honor of the portrait, leading scholars to believe the portrait was completed around the same time Craven, "A New Historical View of the Independent Female Portrait in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Painting." 91. The woman thought to be Laura died of the plague in 1348, raising questions about the dating of the painting. It is unclear from Petrarch’s sonnets whether Simone Martini actually painted her from life, or after her death,
“stile,” (pen), “in carte” (on paper.)\(^2\) According to a dialogue between Petrarch and St. Augustine in Petrarch’s *Il mio segreto*, the image was small enough that the poet could carry it with him wherever he went, thus keeping his beloved close even in her absence:\(^3\)

But what is more insane is that you, not content with the presence of the likeness of that face [that is, the face of Laura], have sought to have made another likeness by the skill of a famous artist which you have with you hanging on your person everywhere you go, the theme of permanent and continual tears.\(^4\)

Petrarch’s words, via St. Augustine, reinforce a theory central to the Beloved Portrait tradition: a portrait likeness by a great artist can act as a replacement for an absent lover and evoke emotion in its beholder. Alison Wright observed “the lovelorn Petrarch’s response is posited around the relationship between a brilliant artistic counterfeit and a remembered original.”\(^5\) This is in fact the crux of Petrarch’s dilemma and ultimately why he used his poetry to bring Laura to life. Though Simone’s Laura was so real she appeared to listen to the poet, she ultimately lacked the voice and intellect required to respond.

The *paragone* of the arts was an essential component of the Renaissance Beloved Portrait tradition just as the debate featured prominently in Petrarch’s own work. In his *De remediis utriusque fortunae*, for example, Petrarch set up various *paragone* including comparisons between the ancient and the modern; the informed and the uninformed; and

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\(^2\) Ibid, 94.
\(^3\) For an interesting discussion of Petrarch and Augustine’s discussion of the portrait see Maurizio Bettini, *Francesco Petrarca sulle arti figurative: tra Plinio e Sant’Agostino* (Livorno: Sillabe, 2002), 30-32. *(Quid autem insanius quam, non contentum presenti illius vultus effigie, unde hec canta tibi proveniunt, aliam fietam ulullaris artificis ingenio quesivisse, quam tectam ubique circumferens haberes materiam semper immortam lacrimarum?)*

\(^4\) Craven, “A New Historical View of the Independent Female Portrait in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Painting.” 94.

nature and art. In the Canzoniere Petrarch further extended his comparisons to include poetry versus the visual arts; painting versus sculpture; and Laura versus the most famous beauties in history. Fifteenth century humanists, artists, and patrons built upon and added to these paragone when they reimagined the Beloved Portrait tradition in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In his three poems in honor of Laura’s portrait, Petrarch asserted the superiority of poetry over painting and sculpture in its ability to bring Laura to life and thus give her lasting fame. Petrarch was aware of the classical argument found in the writings of Lucian who argued that while painting can document a sitter’s physical beauty only the words can capture a person’s character. Petrarch also held that words were the only true way to memorialize Laura’s beauty inside and out and to assure her lasting fame: “So my heart tells me now to write on paper/ some things to make your name far greater still,/ for in no way can sculpture be so solid/ as to give life to someone out of stone….O my Pandolfo, works like those are frail/ in the long run, while our work is the one/ that gives men immortality through fame.” Sculpture may be the most lasting material, Petrarch admits, but words are immortal.

By choosing Simone Martini to create a portrait of Laura, the poet ultimately championed the graphic arts over sculpture. Petrarch claimed that Simone’s portrait was by “a better artist with more talent” than Zeuxis, Praxiteles and Phidias, and in doing so he simultaneously referred to the paragone of the arts and set up a rivalry between

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7 Horace, for example, compared poetry and painting in his Ars poetica.
8 Dempsey, The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent, 63.
9 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 158-59. (Però me dice il cor ch’ io in carte scriva/ cosa onde ‘l vostro nome in pregio saglia/ che ’n nulla parte si salio s’intaglia/ per far di marmot una persona viva.)
Simone and the ancient masters. In the *Canzoniere* Petrarch compares Laura to the greatest beauties of his time and claims that “no matter how hard Polyclitus looked,/ and all the others famous for that art,/ not in a thousand years would they see even/ part of the beauty that has won my heart.”

According to Pliny: “Polyclitus is deemed to have perfected this science of statuary and to have refined the art of carving sculpture….” Petrarch thus boasts his knowledge of Pliny and Dante while arguing that Laura is more beautiful than any of the idealized sculptures created by the Greek master.

The unwritten, but perhaps most important, paragone was between Petrarch and the ancient masters who preceded him. Not only did Petrarch’s resurrection of the classical tradition place him on equal footing with the famous lovers known through Pliny, many of whom were literally divine, he ultimately superseded them with his celebration of Laura in poetry and paint. Because he had the ability to commemorate his beloved with his own words and thus bring her to life, Petrarch elevated himself to godlike status. The comparison between the ancient and contemporary beauties and the mediums in which they were commemorated is rooted in Horace’s *Ut pictora poesis* which formed the heart of the paragone between painting and poetry; a debate between the superiority of one medium over the other. The inferred message is that without the divine intervention enjoyed by Pygmalion, Simone must rely upon Petrarch’s sonnet in order to give Laura a voice:

When Simone first received that idea which for my sake he used his drawing pen,

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10 Ibid, 214-15. (*Ma miglior maestro et di più alto ingegno.*)
11 Ibid, 130-31. (*Per mirar Policleto a prova fiso/ con gli altri ch’ ebber fama di quell’arte,/ mill’ anni non vedrìan la minor parte/ della beltà che m’a’ve il cor conquiso.*)
had he then given to his gracious work
a voice and intellect as well as form,

he would have freed my breast of many sighs….
Pygmalion, how happy you should be with your creation, since a thousand times
you have received what I long for just once!\(^\text{15}\)

Ovid explains,

Pygmalion observed how these women lived lives of sordid
indecency, and, dismayed by the numerous defects of
character Nature had given the feminine spirit,
stood as a bachelor, having no female companion.
During that time he created an ivory statue,
a work of marvelous art, and gave it a figure
better than any living woman could boast of,
and promptly conceived a passion for his own creation.”\(^\text{14}\)

The artist’s lust for the sculpture was so intense that Venus brought her to life with her
lover’s touch. Interestingly it was Petrarch, not Ovid, who mentioned the “voice and
intellect” of Pygmalion’s beloved. The ancient writer focused entirely on the sculpture’s
physical attributes while it is Laura’s voice for which Petrarch longs.

Although the poet may simply have taken poetic license with his interpretation of
Ovid’s words, it is more likely that he intended to evoke Homer’s \textit{Ut pictura poesis}.
Unlike Pygmalion, whose marble sculpture was brought to life by Cupid’s divine kiss,
Petrarch had the power to activate his beloved with his own words.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{13}\) \textit{Petrarch, \textit{Petrarch’s Canzoniere}, 130-31. (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 intelletto,/ di sospir molti mi sgombrava il petto…./ Pygmaliòn, quanto lodar ti dei/ de l’imagine tua,/ se mille volte/ n’ avesti quell ch’ I’ sol una vorrei?) It is left to Petrarch to give Laura a voice through his poetry, raising another complicated issue. In order to comply with the physical and psychological distance required of unrequited love, Laura is only able to speak from beyond the grave. This is an issue that was not lost on Renaissance artists and poets.}

\(^{14}\) \textit{Ovid, \textit{Metamorphoses}, 350. (Quas quia Pygmaian aevum per crimen agentis/ viderat, offensus vitts, quae plurima menti/ femineae natura dedit, sine conige caelebs/ vivebat thalamique diu consortre carebat. Interea niveum mira feliciter arte/ sculpit ebur formanque dedit, qua femina nasci nulla potest, oportenque sui concepisse amorem.)}

\(^{15}\) Many classical writers told stories about sculptures like Pygmalion’s that were so beautiful they inspired the love of the beholder or portraits adored as substitutes for an absent beloved. The most famous of these anecdotes is Pliny’s account of Praxiteles’ \textit{Aphrodite of Knidos} now in the Vatican Museum in Rome.
Lauro’s Laura

As was discussed in the previous chapters, erudite Florentines were fascinated by Petrarch’s description of Laura and her famous beauty became the benchmark for aristocratic femininity. In fact, the earliest documented Renaissance Petrarchan Beloved Portrait was commissioned by Lorenzo de’ Medici. The young Lorenzo was well versed in classical and vernacular literature and had access to both through his father’s library. Lorenzo’s own poetry reveals his preference for Petrarchan verse. According to Ingeborg Walter and Roberto Zapperi, Lorenzo modeled himself on Petrarch both in his poetry and in his Neoplatonic relationships with two Florentine beauties, Lucrezia Donati and Simonetta Vespucci.

In her 2008 dissertation, Aileen Feng presented a compelling argument that identified literary Petrarchismo as a fundamental aspect of Lorenzo de’ Medici’s court. By employing Petrarchan techniques, Feng argued, Lorenzo’s court of poets and philosophers “textually authorize[d]” Lorenzo’s illegitimate claim to Florence. Lorenzo and his literary circle were focused on elevating the Italian vernacular and affiliating themselves with the great Florentine poets of the past. Yet the objective, according to Feng, was to present contemporary Florentine poets such as Lorenzo and his circle as the

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According to Pliny, Venus’ erotic beauty was so striking that it compelled men to fall in love with her as if she were of flesh and bone.

16 Lorenzo’s own collection, now housed in the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence, was the subject of an exhibition in 1992. For the complete collection see Anna Lezuni, ed. All’ombra del lauro: documenti librari della cultura in età Laurenziana, published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, shown at the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence (Florence: Silvana, 1992).


18 Feng, “From poetry to politics: Petrarchism as discursive formation in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy,” xiii.
modern equivalent of Dante and Petrarch. These Renaissance humanists promised the continuation of Florentine literary and cultural hegemony into the Renaissance.\(^{19}\)

Lorenzo and his literary courtiers presented Lorenzo as the leader of this group as a poet-philosopher-prince able to continue Florence’s literary and cultural hegemony in the Renaissance. Angelo Poliziano, for example, included Lorenzo’s poetry in the *Raccolta Aragonese*, dedicated to Federico d’Aragona in 1472.\(^{20}\) Lorenzo’s continuing lineage was meant to be simultaneously interpreted metaphorically and politically; as a poet-prince he was able to elevate the culture hegemony as well as the political power of Florence. Lorenzo’s dual role as a poet and a ruler made him superior to Petrarch because, unlike the elder Tuscan poet who was able to write about politics but unable to change them, Lorenzo could do both.

Lorenzo was both patron and poet and thus traditional social and economic hierarchies did not restrict him. In the case of the *Raccolta Aragonese*,

The gift exchange between Lorenzo de’ Medici and Federico d’Aragona is nuanced; the anthology is gifted from a poet-prince already immortalized to a prince who has yet to be immortalized. Il Magnifico’s unique position sets him apart from Petrarch whose own lack of real political power made his rhetorical reversal of the hierarchy and undermining of his patrons into feigned expressions of power without actual substance.\(^{21}\)

Lorenzo’s manipulation of the relationships between poetry and politics and poet and patron is very relevant to a discussion of Petrarchan imagery during this period because it further underscores the importance of Medici Florence in the development of the Petrarchan Beloved Portrait. Lorenzo and his circle clearly recognized the power of Petrarch’s words and applied them to the creation of a civic identity centered on poetry

\(^{19}\) Ibid, 185.

\(^{20}\) According to Feng, in the dedicatory letter he justifies his inclusion of Lorenzo’s poetry as an extension of the Florentine literary lineage begun by Petrarch and Dante. Ibid, 186.

\(^{21}\) Ibid, 197.
and beauty. Feng’s argument also deepens an art historical understanding of Petrarchan imagery found in illuminated manuscripts of the *Canzoniere*. With illustrated books we see a literal relationship between text and image and the formation of the canon of beauty appropriated by Lorenzo’s court.

The focus of Lorenzo’s Petrarchan adoration was Lucrezia Donati, a renowned beauty who was married to Niccolo Ardinghelli, a Strozzi relative by marriage. Just as with Marietta Strozzi who was discussed in Chapter One, Lucrezia’s marital status did not impede her Petrarchan courtship with Lorenzo, and in fact made its public display admissible in Florentine society. And again, as in the case of Marietta Strozzi, the Donati family’s political influence was in decline and the attention from Lorenzo allowed their daughter reentry into Florentine society. That a woman’s beauty was persuasive enough to supersede the political shortcomings of her family speaks volumes about that power of feminine beauty in fifteenth-century Florence.

The couple began their Petrarchan courtship at the wedding party of Braccio Martelli in 1465 where Lucrezia wove a garland of violets for Lorenzo to wear during a future joust to display his platonic devotion to her. In the years following their meeting, Lorenzo organized two balls in her honor and most importantly held the promised tournament on February 7, 1469. The Medici famously organized such public spectacles for the dual purpose of celebrating a recent political victory, such as Lorenzo’s alliance with Milan, Naples, and Venice in 1468 in this case, and an opportunity to publically portray themselves as ideal chivalric rulers by honoring a beautiful lady in the Petrarchan

22 Marietta Strozzi was the inspiration for the first documented Petrarchan pageant in Florence.
23 Though there is no suggestion that Lorenzo and Lucrezia culminated their relationship, contemporary letters and literature suggest that theirs was more than a social flirtation and that both had real feelings for one another.
tradition. Favored Medici poet Luigi Pulci provided a full account of the joust as well as Lorenzo and Lucrezia’s Petrarchan courtship in his publication in 1469 of La giostra di Lorenzo de’ Medici. Of Lucrezia and Lorenzo’s first meeting he wrote:

Two most gentle sisters were among the others, one of whom has all her renown from Constancy alone, while the other is the sun among the brightest stars-Lucrezia, crowned with every grace, born from the noble blood of Piccarda, beloved by her young Lauro. Venus made this young nymph fashion a garland of violets, and caused her lover to ask it of her. The violet garland and Lucrezia and Lorenzo’s Petrarchan personal devices—the sun for Lucrezia (Lucrezia/luce) and the laurel for Lorenzo (Lorenzo/lauro)—featured prominently in the visual imagery associated with the couple. The sun also punned on Lorenzo’s device, Apollo. The sun god appealed to both Petrarch and Lorenzo because of the laurel wreath he wore in commemoration of Daphne’s transformation into a laurel tree in order to escape Apollo’s grasp and his role as the god of poetry. The laurel wreath doubly punned on the Lorenzo’s name (Lorenzo/lauro) and his poetic aspirations as it must certainly have referred to the violet garland Lucrezia wove for Lorenzo upon their first meeting. As was discussed in the previous chapter, name punning was often employed as a device in Renaissance portraiture, and Lorenzo and his circle no doubt enjoyed the multilayered meanings. According to the rules of courtly poetry, a poet was not required to reveal the name of his beloved, and such name punning was a well-known chivalric trope.

26 Dempsey, The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent, 84. (Fra l’altre duo molto gentil’ sorelle,/ che l’una ha sol di Costanzia ogni fama/ e l’altra è il sol fra le più chiare istelle/ quell’ache il Lauro suo giovinetto ama./ Lucrezia, d’ogni grazia incoronata,/ del nobil sangue di Piccarda nata./ Venere fece fare una grillanda/ a questa gentil nunpha di viole,/ e fece che ’l suo amante gliel domanda….)
In lieu of the violet garland, at the joust Lorenzo carried a triangular banner displaying Lucrezia in the guise of Laura. Though the standard is no longer extant, an anonymous diarist recorded a description of the banner:27

And on this beautiful pennant one sees a sun at the top and below it a rainbow. In the middle of the said standard in a field, there was an upright lady dressed in rich blue cloth embroidered with flowers of gold and silver. She moved on an intense red field [toward] a laurel bush with many dry branches, and in the middle a green branch that extended up into the white field; the said lady collected the said laurel and made from it garlands, sowing the whole white field, and the red field is sown with shoots of dry laurel.28

In La giostra, Pulci added that below the rainbow Lorenzo’s motto, *Le tems revient* (Time Returns), was written in golden letters, “by which one can interpret/That time turns and the century renews itself.”29 The rainbow and its accompanying motto reminded the viewer that, like the rainbow, the Medici would provide renewal and hope for Florence.30

The loose laurel depicted on the standard also had political significance according to Adrian Randolph who theorized that the eternal renewal was represented by the presence of dry shrubs, which, by extension, commented on the Medici family’s ability to rule despite adversity.31 Thus the act of Lucrezia/Laura weaving the laurel wreaths and spreading them into the red and white fields likely represented the fame that Lorenzo’s love poetry would bring to Florence.32 Furthermore, the red and white fields represented Florence’s heraldic colors and her gold and blue dress symbolized the Medici’s adoption of their traditional colors in their heraldry.

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27 Though tournament standards were often created by important artists, they were typically destroyed after the event.
28 Randolph, *Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, 203. Randolph did not provide the original source and I have been unable to locate it.
29 Ibid, 204. (Che può interpretarsi/ tornare il tempo e ’l secol rinnovarsi.)
30 Rainbows are often used in images of Petrarch’s *Trionfi* as well.
31 The text was quoted by Randolph, who did not identify the diarist specifically and did not provide the original Italian. See Randolph, *Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, 203.
32 Ibid.
of the French fleur-de-lis after it was given as an emblem to the family by Louis XI in 1465.\textsuperscript{33} Lucrezia also represents La Donna Fiorenza, suggesting that Lorenzo not only fights on behalf of his Petrarchan beloved, but in honor of Lady Florence herself.\textsuperscript{34} This interpretation is supported by the last stanza of Pulci’s La giostra in which he refers not to Lucrezia, but to the “ultima gloria” that the joust will bring to “Fiorenza nostra.”\textsuperscript{35}

As Charles Dempsey has discussed, much was written about Lorenzo and Lucrezia’s platonic affair in correspondence between the two lovers and in poetry composed by Lorenzo and his humanist circle.\textsuperscript{36} According to Dempsey:

> The mythologizing of Lorenzo’s love was embodied in an image simultaneously private and very public, manifest not only in the familiaris of his brigata but also available to the public imagination. It is a myth of extreme potency, a secular ideal celebrated in poetry, songs, and art in the tournaments and festivals of the city, sometimes in the persona of Lucrezia and sometime of another…. Whatever name she might assume, the Florentine nymph celebrated in Pulci’s Da poi che ’l Lauro and in the Canzoniere of Lorenzo represented a new cultural and societal ideal….”\textsuperscript{37}

Dempsey’s observation supports my theory that fifteenth-century Petrarchan imagery was as politically charged as the contemporary Petrarchan commentaries discussed in Chapter One. Lucrezia, like Laura and Petrarch, became a symbol of the Petrarchan ideal for Florence. And through his Neo-Platonic courtship with Lucrezia, Lorenzo was able to reinforce his personal and public image as a cultured ruler. This, I believe, played a central role in the development of the Beloved Portrait tradition and was the impetus for the spirit of competition and legacy that fueled the commission of the genre of paintings for the next century.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[33] Ibid.
\item[34] Ibid, 205.
\item[35] Luigi Pulci, Opere Minori, ed. a c. di Paolo Orvieto (Milan: Mursia, 1986), 120.
\item[36] Their relationship was acknowledged in contemporary works by Luigi Pulci (Lorenzo a Lauro), Ugolino Verino (Ad Lucretiam Donatam ut amet Laurentium Medicem), Michele Verino, Naldo Naldo, and Politian.
\item[37] Dempsey, The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent, 113.
\end{footnotes}
The overt Petrarchan comparison between Lucrezia and Laura in Verrocchio’s banner created for the joust, and the well-known association between Lorenzo and Petrarch, presented Lorenzo and Lucrezia as the modern-day Petrarch and Laura and by extension Apollo and Daphne. In fact, Pulci’s *giostra* begins with a reference to Apollo in its opening stanza, “If I were worthy of you, my sacred Apollo….,”38 Lorenzo’s association with Apollo was both well-known and regularly adopted in visual and poetic references to the poet-prince, as will be further discussed later in this chapter during my discussion of Botticelli’s portraits of Simonetta Vespucci. In *La giostra*, Pulci also included a fictional account of Lucrezia’s personal description of her desperation for Lorenzo’s return from a trip to Rome in which she described a vision she had during his absence. Lucrezia saw a laurel tree that was transformed into alabaster or glass by the sun and consequently made Daphne’s hair become blonde again. Afterward the air, heaven, and earth took on a golden hue and then suddenly the laurel tree disappeared and Lucrezia was left weeping and alone.39 This vision is significant to the development of the visual Petrarchan beloved not only because it clearly links Lucrezia and Lorenzo to the imagery used in Verrocchio’s banner, but also because it provides early evidence of a relationship between images of Laura and the blond Daphnes who figure in Petrarchan manuscript images.

Lucrezia’s association with Daphne is also relevant to my proposed rereading of Antonio del Pollaiuolo’s almost contemporary (late 1460s or early 1470s) painting of *Apollo and Daphne* discussed in Chapter One (fig. 31). If the painting was, as Alison Wright has speculated, painted for the *studiolo* of Lorenzo de’ Medici during the same

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38 Pulci, *Opere Minori*. (S’io meritai di te, mio sacro Apollo….)
years that Lorenzo was famously linked to Lucrezia Donati, and since Luigi Pulci documented their Petrarchan alter egos as Apollo and Daphne, Pollaiuolo’s painting could possibly be a reference to this relationship. While it is not a Beloved Portrait, per se, the possibility that Pollaiuolo depicted Lorenzo and Lucrezia in the guise of Apollo and Daphne validates a revised reading of the painting which I plan revisit in greater detail in the future.

When choosing an artist to paint a Beloved Portrait of Lucrezia, Lorenzo asked the premier Florentine artist of his time, Andrea del Verrocchio. Though the painting is no longer extant, it was recorded in an inventory of Verrocchio’s work for the Medici in 1488 and was allegedly displayed in the Medici palace. In a list of unpaid commissions for the Medici, Verrocchio recorded a “wooden frame within which is the head of Lucrezia Donati,” which Medici historian F.W. Kent identified as the same portrait for which Lorenzo wrote a Petrarchan sonnet in honor of Lucrezia. Though there is no visual evidence of what Lucrezia’s portrait looked like, another work by Verrocchio may provide some clues. Art historians have long debated whether Verrocchio’s half-length bust of a Lady with a Bunch of Flowers, circa 1475 and now in the Museo del Bargello (fig. 83), is meant to depict Lucrezia, though no evidence sufficiently proves that she is the sitter. She is dressed in a Florentine style typical for the time seen in contemporary female portraits by Botticelli, Leonardo, and Fra Filippo

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41 F. W. Kent, Lorenzo de’ Medici and the Art of Magnificence (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 76. Interestingly, in October of 1495 Lucrezia’s son, Niccolò Ardinghelli bought from the Medici a portrait of his mother for twenty-three large gold florins. Lucrezia was alive at the time of the purchase and may well have asked her son to purchase the painting on her behalf.
42 Even if the bust does not portray Lucrezia, as some have speculated, Verrocchio likely included her hands in the sculpture as well since both busts portrayed a Petrarchan beloved. See Brown, Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women, 165. The sculpture is also discussed in Pope-Hennessy, Italian Renaissance Sculpture, II, 194.
Lippi. In her long, elegant hands, she carries a small bouquet of flowers pressed to her breast. Although the flowers have been identified as a variant of dog-roses, as opposed to violets, the inclusion of hands may identify the sitter as Lucrezia since she was celebrated for her beautiful hands in contemporary literature. Verrocchio’s bust marked the first inclusion of hands in a portrait since antiquity and, in Dario Covi’s opinion, was likely inspired by Fra Filippo Lippi’s circa 1455 Portrait of a Woman, now in Berlin (fig. 49).

Though the portrait bust cannot be definitively linked to Lucrezia, according to art historian Andrew Butterfield she is at least meant to represent a beloved inspired by the Petrarchan love rituals at Lorenzo de’ Medici’s court. Though Lucrezia’s hands were celebrated in contemporary poetry and the inclusion of the appendages in the bust may be a reference to her beauty, the hands were a classic Petrarchan feature and were by no means associated with just Lucrezia. Yet whether or not the sitter is Lucrezia, an anonymous Petrarchan beauty, or even Ginevra de’ Benci as some have suggested, the inclusion of her long, white fingers holding flowers must certainly mean she is meant to portray the patron’s beloved, whoever she was.

A group of contemporary engravings known as the Otto prints may also provide some visual evidence of Lucrezia’s idealized appearance in Verrocchio’s images. The prints date to circa 1470 and are a collection of the first known Italian engravings. The

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43 Andrew Butterfield stresses that flowers were used to represent multiple feminine virtues including virtue and beauty. Flowers, too, were often given by women to men in exchange for poetry in fifteenth-century Florence. Butterfield, The Sculptures of Andrea del Verrocchio, 101.
44 Covi, Andrea Verrocchio: Life and Work, 137.
45 Brown, Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women, 165. Eleonora Luciano summarized the various scholarly debates over the identification of Verrocchio’s sitter and concluded that there is no proof of the previously held belief that the sculpture was a Medici commission, and thus it is impossible to definitively link Lucrezia to the portrait.
46 Ibid.
47 I am using the date provided in the recent exhibition catalogue Bayer, Art and Love in Renaissance Italy, 30.
group of forty-two Otto prints, named after their eighteenth-century owner, Ernst Peter Otto, was made by various artists and range in subject matter from courtly love to grotesque figures and Old Testament subjects. Their small size, round or oval shapes, and chivalric subject matter suggest they were intended to be affixed either inside or outside small courtship boxes, further supported by the existence of a group of boxes with the prints intact.\textsuperscript{48} Aby Warburg was the first to name Lorenzo and Lucrezia as the subjects of an Otto print now in the British Museum (fig. 84). Warburg identified the man as Lorenzo because of the diamond ring and three feathers device on his garment, and by extension, his beloved was recognized as Lucrezia.\textsuperscript{49}

The print is attributed to the Florentine artist Baccio Baldini, one of the earliest Florentine printmakers trained as a goldsmith and in niello engraving. On the print a man and a woman stand in profile on either side of a blank, circular opening, likely intended for a heraldic device to be added by hand. According to Jacqueline Maria Musacchio, these types of objects were used to circulate Medicean chivalric ideals to the masses while at the same time allowing the owner to personalize the print with his or her own heraldic device.\textsuperscript{50} The man and woman depicted on the print are certainly Petrarchan beloveds, evidenced not only by their amorous glances, but also by the banner that encircles their arms and reads: “’AMOR VUOL FE[DE] E DOVE FE[DE] NON È AMOR NON PUÒ [ESSERE]’ (Love desires Loyalty/Faith, and where there is no Loyalty/Faith, there can be no Love.)”\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{48} Randolph, Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence, 224. Some of the prints have room for a heraldic device or coat of arms which led the author to believe the boxes were given as marital gifts because of contemporary accounts of the exchange of boxes during prenuptial rituals.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 226.
\textsuperscript{50} Bayer, Art and Love in Renaissance Italy, 30.
\textsuperscript{51} Randolph, Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence, 204.
Pulci referred to this motto in his *giostra*. The poet recalls Lorenzo’s angst over his forced delay in planning Lucrezia’s promised joust due to his father’s wishes:

> But certainly that Lauro of mine, always constant,  
> Did not wish to be ungrateful to his Lord;  
> And therefore he [Lorenzo] has it written in diamond  
> That act worthy of celestial honor,  
> Recalling, like a genteel lover,  
> An old expression: Love desires loyalty [Amor vuol fe],  
> And he already prepared those gracious arms  
> But without the consent of his renowned father.52

This excerpt not only provides evidence of a connection between the motto on the sleeve of the courtier in Baldini’s print and Lorenzo’s joust for Lucrezia, it also refers to the diamond device that decorates the lover’s tunic. While Lorenzo is dressed in his courtly finery, Lucrezia’s image is a conflation of Petrarchan idealism and goddess-like features such as winged hair, bare feet, and flowing drapery. Each lover holds the banner with one arm and with the other they support what Warburg identified as an armillary sphere.

The print dates to the same years that Lorenzo planned Lucrezia’s joust and commissioned the imagery from Verrocchio. That both the print and the standard for the joust incorporated the sun and laurel as metaphors for the lovers’ names is convincing evidence in and of itself for an association with Lorenzo and Lucrezia. Baldini was known at the Medici court, and the vast majority of his work centered on themes of love and poetry. Furthermore, according to Vasari, he based his work on Botticelli, including a group of engravings after Botticelli’s drawings of Dante’s *Inferno*. Printmaking did not employ expensive materials such as precious metals or expensive paints, and the ability to create multiple copies of the same image made the works less expensive to produce.

52 Ibid. (*E perché egli havea scritto in adamant/ Quello atto degno di celeste honore/ Si riccordò, come gentile amante,/ D’un detto antico: Che vuol fede amore,/ Et preparava già l’armi leggiadre,/ Ma nol consente il suo famoso padre.*) For the original text see Pulci, *Opere Minori*, 65.
and thus more accessible to people other than the elite. It was nonetheless a new medium in Florence during the time Baccio Baldini created these images and thus printmaking must have drawn attention from Lorenzo and his circle as well. Furthermore, in the 1470s, printmaking began to be associated with recognized artists rather than anonymous artisans.

Baldini belonged to a group of Florentine artists who worked in the Fine Manner of intaglio printmaking. The circulation of prints in Florence during Baldini’s time was still relegated to a small group of collectors within the artist’s circle, primarily humanists, patrons, and printmakers. Lorenzo de’ Medici, Luigi Pulci, Andrea del Verrocchio and the other Medici artists and humanists active in creating the Petrarchan myth of Lorenzo and Lucrezia most certainly fit into the criteria described by Landau and Marshall as patrons of such early Florentine prints.

The dissemination of the Medici chivalric image of Lorenzo as a modern Petrarch supported the family’s cultural and political ambitions in multiple ways. Not only did it bring positive attention to Lorenzo as the model for love and beauty, it also placed him in the lineage of the great Tuscan poets and assured his lasting fame as both a ruler and a poet prince. It also reasserted Florentine cultural preeminence by reminding the rest of Italy that Florence was the epicenter of humanist thought and that the Florentine poets via the Medici were the rightful descendants of the Tre Corone, Petrarch, Dante, and Boccaccio.

Though the figures have not been previously identified as Lorenzo and Lucrezia, another contemporary Petrarchan engraving attributed to Baccio Baldini (circa 1465-80),

34 Ibid, 98.
now in the British Museum, must certainly depict Petrarch and Laura (fig. 85). That the scene is drawn from Petrarchan imagery is confirmed by a comparison to contemporary manuscript images such as a Milanese version of 1475, now in Linley Hall in Shropshire (MS, fol. 9), which depicts a kneeling Petrarch crowned by his beloved (fig. 86). The fact that this was one of the earliest Florentine prints means that the artist would certainly have looked to book illustrations for visual inspiration since printed material would not have been plentiful.

The prominent inclusion of a sun literally penetrating the center of the laurel crown suggests that the artist must also have simultaneously intended to refer to the most important Petrarchan couple of his time, Lorenzo and Lucrezia. The time and place of the engraving support this. Furthermore, Lorenzo was the first to resurrect the beloved tradition and he displayed Verrocchio’s banner in a very public manner during the joust. Anyone who was familiar with Verrocchio’s banner, Lorenzo’s poetry, or Pulci’s account of the joust would have been unable to disassociate Lucrezia and Lorenzo from the sun and laurel metaphors.

The sun is similarly prominent in yet another Otto print attributed to Baldini and now in the British Museum (fig. 87). In this round engraving, a couple dances in the central medallion and their clasped hands reach up into the rays of a sun. Each is dressed in attire befitting fifteenth-century Florentine courtiers. On the sleeve of the gentleman’s tunic reads the motto “AME DROIT,” or “Righteous Soul.” The beloveds are surrounded by floral motifs and putti play various instruments in the margins surrounding them. The music functions both as accompaniment for the dancers and metaphorically

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55 This is one of many examples. Note again the transformation of Laura into a laurel tree in the lower right medallion.
represent Apollo as the god of music. Below the courtiers is a reclining nude woman in
the guise of Venus who is tickled by a flower in the hand of her male lover, perhaps a
reference to the flowers exchanged between Lucrezia and Lorenzo. This metaphor for
profane love is balanced by the snakes that wind up the acanthus leaves to provide a
warning to the lovers—if they are not careful, they will be tempted to engage in the
immoral acts below. The snake, as was discussed in Chapter One, was also appropriated
as a symbol for Petrarch’s lust for Laura in Antonio Grifo’s manuscript illuminations and
can be read, like the other symbols, as a metaphor for courtly lust as well as the downfalls
of giving in to such mortal sin.

The same is true for a fourth print attributed to Baccio Baldini (fig. 88). Also a
part of the Otto collection in the British Museum, this circular print depicts two lovers
encircled in laurel-wreathed medallions on either side of a blank oval opening framed by
a laurel wreath and likely intended for a heraldic device. Above and beneath the lovers
are scenes of dogs hunting deer, rabbits and boar. Inside the left medallion is a forward
facing idealized half-length female with a contemporary hairstyle and a string of beads
around her long neck, just as Laura is often shown in contemporary manuscripts. On the
right, a male suitor is portrayed in profile, looking at his beloved across the way. On his
head he wears an ornamental helmet and in his hand he extends a flower toward his
beloved. The flower, I believe, is a reference to Lorenzo’s joust in Lucrezia’s honor.
Furthermore, the chivalric gesture of offering his beloved a flower makes it clear that the
man is not engaged in a military enterprise, but rather a ceremonial joust on her behalf.
The extensive use of laurel imagery in the print further suggests that the lover is a
Petrarchan poet, and at the time the print was created there was no greater Florentine poet prince than Lorenzo himself.

I am, to my knowledge, the first to recognize that the helmet is borrowed from those seen on ancient Roman coins. In fact, the helmet is almost an exact replica of the profile of Roma seen on the recto of silver Roman denarius coins. One example dating to 1779-170 B.C. depicts Roma wearing a helmet topped with flame-like cresting and the typical wing design on the side of the helmet (fig. 89). On the reverse of the coin is Victory driving a chariot and delivering the laurel crown to the victor. Lorenzo’s helmet has the same flame cresting and wing design and the inclusion of the flower in his hand suggests Victory was on his side during the joust. Furthermore, the association with Roma infers that the Medici are the rightful rulers of the New Rome (Florence). The imperial Roman connotations would also explain why the man is in profile in juxtaposition to his beloved’s frontal stance.

Two contemporary sources document the typical dress for a Florentine joust. The first is a cassone panel painting by Apollonio di Giovanni now in the Yale University Art Gallery (fig. 90). On the marriage chest a circa 1470 painted panel depicts a joust in Santa Croce complete with fighting soldiers in ceremonial armor and Florentine bystanders standing in the foreground. Beautiful Florentine women watch the scene from the windows of the palazzi that frame the piazza as do a group of clerics in the center of the opening. It is not hard to imagine one of the beautiful onlookers to be Lucrezia. Certainly the woman to whom the marriage chest belonged would have imagined herself and her betrothed in the chivalric scene.

56 In fact, the wing on the helmet may be a reference to Apollo himself, who wore a similarly decorated helmet in a coin depicting Apollo Vejovis, a Roman variant of Apollo.
The second source is a woodcut that illustrates the second edition of Pulci’s *La giostra*. This edition was the first to be illustrated and printed circa 1500 in Florence. The woodcut is featured on the opening page of Pulci’s book and depicts three knights and a standard bearer on horseback (fig. 91). Surprisingly, the illustration does not boast any obvious Medici imagery or heraldic device, but the scene nonetheless communicates the chivalric spirit of the joust with the knights’ ceremonial armor and the ornamental banding on the horses.

The hunting imagery on Baldini’s print also refers to another identity associated with both Petrarch and Laura and Lorenzo and Lucrezia. She is Diana, the Greek goddess of the hunt and the twin sister of Apollo. Petrarch dedicated an entire sonnet to Diana in his *Canzoniere*, fashioning her not as a huntress, but as object of her lover’s desire:

Diana never pleased her lover more,  
when just by chance all of her naked body  
he saw bathing within the chilly waters,  

than did the simple mountain shepherdess  
please me, the while she bathed the pretty veil  
that holds her lovely blond hair in the breeze.

So that even now in the hot sunlight she makes me  
tremble all over with the chill of love.57

In the original Italian, the third line puns on Laura’s name with the word *l’aura* (the breeze) and thus cleverly associates Diana with Laura both in the verse and by literally naming her in the sonnet. Lucrezia was also intertwined with Diana in contemporary Renaissance literature. In one of Lorenzo’s sonnets about Lucrezia he writes: “So long as

57 Petrarch, *Petrarch’s Canzoniere*, 82-83. (*Non al suo amante più Diana piacque/ quando per tal ventura tutta ignuda/ la vide in mezzo de le gelide acque/ ch’a me la pastorella alpestra et cruda/ posta a bagnar un leggiadretto velo/ ch’a l’aura il vago et biondo capel chiuda;/ tal che mi fece, or quand’egli arde ‘l cielo,/ tutto tremar d’un amoroso gielo.*)
the sun illuminates the leaves/ and the fountains run through the high hills/ I will follow
my Diana through the woods….“58 And in a sonnet dedicated to Lorenzo entitled _Da poi
che 'l Lauro_, Luigi Pulci claims that Lucrezia, who was as once as beautiful as Venus,
was now ravished with grief over her absent beloved. Pulci also recounted a
conversation he had with Lucrezia during which she confessed that her desperation for
Lorenzo made her consider leaving her husband and “seek out Diana” in order to pursue
a life of chastity rather than live in an unhappy marriage.59 This provides textual
evidence to support a connection between Lucrezia and Diana.

A visual link to Lucrezia is found in comparison between the woman in the Otto
print and Verrocchio’s bust of a _Lady Holding a Bunch of Flowers_. Though the facial
similarities between the bust and the woman in the print can be explained by generalized
Petrarchan ideals of beauty, it was unusual for a Florentine portrait of a woman, printed
or painted, to depict a forward facing female in the 1470s. Assuming the date of the print
is circa 1470, based on the recent re-dating of the Otto print, Baldini would have been
aware of Verrocchio’s bust as well as Botticelli’s _Portrait of Smeralda Brandini_ (fig. 77).
Since both portraits portray idealized, forward facing women with similar contemporary
hairstyles, and given Verrocchio’s role in the creation of Lucrezia’s image and the
Petrarchan/Laurentian symbolism in Baldini’s print, Verrocchio’s sculpture seems the
likely inspiration. Whether or not this print provides visual evidence that Verrocchio’s
anonymous bust is in fact Lucrezia is still impossible to prove, yet the similarities

58 Dempsey, _The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo
the Magnificent_, 99. (Mentre che ‘l sol allumerà le fronde/ e’ fonti righeran per gl’ alti poggi,/ la mia
Diana seguirì pe’ boschi….) Lorenzo d’ Medici, _Canzoniere_, ed. Paolo Orvieto (Milan: Arnoldo
59 Dempsey, _The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo
the Magnificent_, 92-93. (Di ricercar Diana.)
certainly confirm Andrew Butterfield’s theory that Verrocchio intended to portray a Petrarchan beloved. Regardless of the sitters’ identity, Lucrezia must have been the inspiration behind both images. The inclusion of the flowers in both the print and the sculpture, along with the similar features and hairstyles, visually associated her with the popular Petrarchan beauty of the time and her powerful lover.

Because the intended function of the prints was to decorate love boxes and nuptial gifts, the audience would have been ripe for the association between themselves as young lovers and the most famous modern day Florentine love story. Any young Florentine woman would have undoubtedly fantasized about a similarly chivalric courtship by her own beloved. The recipients of the boxes were likely less familiar with Petrarch’s own words than they were the myth of Petrarch and Laura, and by extension Lorenzo and Lucrezia. Thus sophisticated Petrarchan imagery would have been lost on the majority of viewers unless it had a more current association such as Lorenzo’s joust.

**The Poet Prince**

Not only did Lorenzo commission a portrait of his beloved from the preeminent artist of his time, he also composed two Petrarchan sonnets in honor of the painting. Though he does not expressly name the artist, as did Petrarch in his Sonnets 77 and 78, the title of Sonnet XLIV clarifies that the poem was written in honor of a portrait of a woman. In *Sonetto fatto a piè d’una tavoletta dove era ritratta una donna* (Sonnet written at the feet of a little table where there was a portrait of a woman), Lorenzo describes the portrait as a place where he finds rest and harbor from the pain of his
unrequited love as if the image “was alive and pure.” The reference to a painting that seems to be alive is both classical and Petrarchan, reminding the reader of Pygmalion’s Venus and Petrarch’s lamenting that Simone’s Portrait of Laura lacks “a voice and intellect” although her image is so realistic that she seems to hear her lover speak.

Though the sonnet does not specifically mention Verrocchio, the sonnet is nonetheless Petrarchan in its content, format, and reference to an image of an absent beloved. This is the first documented instance of a Petrarchan sonnet written specifically in honor of a female portrait since Petrarch’s Canzoniere. Lorenzo refers to his absent beloved in his verse again in his first sonnet. He laments their separation in the ancient tradition of the absent beloved and calls her a metaphoric sun:

Alas my heart remained although I went, and constantly my pain and sorrow grew. Early the sun sank down in western skies and left the earth to woeful hours obscure, afar my sun hath also veiled her ray, Upon the mind first bliss most heavily lies, how short a while all mortal joys endure, but not so soon doth memory pass away.

Lorenzo’s poem is closer in format to a third, less known sonnet in which Petrarch mentions an image of his beloved than it is to the more famous sonnets in honor of Simone Martini. In Sonnet 130, Petrarch describes the pain he feels in Laura’s absence:

My heart I feed with sighs—that’s all it asks, and I survive on tears—I, born to weep; nor am I bothered, for in such a state weeping is sweet, and more than one imagines.

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60 Lorenzo de’ Medici, Canzoniere (Turin: Letteratura italiana Einaudi, 1992), 31. (Fussi viva and pura.)
61 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 130-31. (Voce ed intelletto.)
62 Lorenzo de’ Medici, Selected Poems and Prose, ed. Jon Thiem, trans. Jon Thiem (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 97. (Crebbri vie più i penier e ’l dolor mio./ Chè già il sole inchinava all’ occidente,/ e lasciava la terra ombrosa e oscura;/ onde il mio sole l’ ascose in altra parte./ Fe’ il primo ben più trista assai la mente:/ ah quanto poco al mondo ogni ben dura!/ ma il rimembrar si tosto non si parte.)
And to one image only I hold on,
not made by Zeuxis, Praxiteles, or Phidias,
but by a better artist with more talent.  

Here Petrarch simultaneously refers to Simone’s portrait of Laura and the artist’s superiority over his classical predecessors, and an image made by God himself in the form of his beloved.

Lorenzo’s poem also focuses on the solace provided by an image of his beloved and the tears shed on her behalf. Though Lorenzo does not directly quote Petrarch in his sonnet, he does refer to similar sentiments; tears shed for an absent beloved and the comfort from her image. Absence was a recurring theme in the public image of Lorenzo and Lucrezia’s relationship. Lorenzo left Florence in 1466 after a carnival ball he organized in his beloved’s honor. According to contemporary accounts, Lucrezia moped about during his absence, dressed in black, and kept to herself. On a rare occasion when she was seen outside her home, one person reported that he saw her at the church of Santissima Annunziata carrying a copy of Petrarch’s Canzoniere in her hands, which was clearly meant to refer to her Petrarchan relationship with her beloved Lauro. Likewise, Lorenzo repeatedly lamented her absence in his poetry, and ultimately commissioned a portrait of Lucrezia in order to ease the pain of their separation as the ultimate Petrarchan gesture.

Lorenzo’s second sonnet in honor of his beloved’s image is also drawn from elements of Petrarch’s sonnets in honor of Simone’s portrait. The intended connection is

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63 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 214-15. (Pasco ‘l cor di sospir, ch’ altro non chiede,/ e di lagrime vivo, a pianger nato;/ né di ciò duolmi, perché in tale stato/ è dolce il pianto più ch’ altri non crede. Et sol ad una imagine m’attengo/ che fe’ non Zeusi o Prasitele o Fidoa,/ ma miglior maestro et di più alto ingegno.)

64 Walter and Zapperi, Il ritratto dell’amata: storie d’amore da Petrarca a Tiziano, 28. Carrying a copy of the Canzoniere, or a Petrarchino, is a trope that is adopted by Venetian courtesans in the 16th century and famously recorded by Pietro Aretino.
immediately apparent in the first line of Lorenzo Sonnet IX. It reads: “Poiché a Fortuna, a’ miei prieghi inimical…”65 This is a quote of Petrarch’s Sonnet 130 which begins: “Poi che ’l camin m’è chiuso di mercede….”66 The sentiments are slightly different—Lorenzo laments that his prayers are the enemy of Fortune and Petrarch complains that he has “found the road to mercy closed.”67 However, the choice of poiché by Lorenzo was without doubt intended as a nod to Petrarch and meant to remind his audience of Petrarch’s sonnet, and by extension, Laura’s portrait. Another connection between the two poems is found in the last lines of each sonnet. In Sonnet 130, Petrarch refers to the three classical artists most famous for ancient examples of renowned beauties: Zeuxis’s Helen of Troy, Praxiteles’ Aphrodite of Knidos, and Phidias’s Athena Parthenos.68 His inference is that Simone’s portrait is superior to the three most famous classical images of beautiful women. It also reveals his knowledge of these stories through Pliny’s Natural History, further demonstrating Petrarch’s own erudition.

Lorenzo ends Sonnet IX with a paraphrase of Petrarch’s words. He writes: “But can the one who expresses her true face/ show the virtue inside of her/ like Phidias, Policleitus or Praxiteles?”69 This is a conflation of Petrarch’s Sonnet 130 in which he mentions Phidias and Praxiteles in a comparison between the ancient artists and Simone Martini, and Sonnet 77 in which Petrarch mentions Polyclitus. It is also a combination of the content of all three of Petrarch’s poems. The first poem specifically mentions Polyclitus in the first line and implies that Laura is more beautiful than the famous

65 Ibid, 122.
66 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 214.
67 Lorenzo’s translation is my own and the full translation of Petrarch’s poem can be found in ibid, 215.
68 These examples were known to Petrarch through Pliny’s Natural History.
69 This is my transation from the original. (Ma sel colui che expresse il il volto vero/ mostrassi la virtú che in lei si informa./ che Phidia, Policleito o Praxitèele?)
Amazonian beauty sculpted by the Greek artist or any other classical example. However, Lorenzo’s concern that a portrait may not capture the inner virtue of a sitter is more closely matched to the content in Petrarch’s Sonnet 78 in which he wishes that Simone “had given to his gracious work/ a voice and intellect as well as form….”70 By suggesting that a visual artist cannot infuse his image with a personality, both poets comment upon the long-debated paragone between poetry and painting as well as painting and sculpture.

Petrarch engages in the paragone of painting and sculpture in Sonnet 130 when he claims that Laura’s image is superior to the most famous paintings and sculptures of antiquity; however, he still champions poetry above painting in its ability to give voice to his beloved. Lorenzo, on the other hand, approaches the paragone from a slightly different angle. In Sonnet XLIX he finds solace in his image of Lucrezia during her absence and claims the painting appears to be alive and pure (viva e pura), yet in Sonnet IX he questions whether the contemporary artist who can capture the true likeness of her face will be able to infuse the image with the inner virtue found in classical paintings and sculptures by the great masters.

The connection between Lorenzo’s two poems and Petrarch’s lesser-known Sonnet 130 is, I believe, further proof that Lorenzo intended his poem and the portrait of Lucrezia to be a conscious emulation of Petrarch’s Portrait of Laura. Scholars such as Walter, Zapperi, and Dempsey have drawn a connection between Lorenzo’s poems and Lucrezia’s portrait, as well as Petrarch’s three sonnets. They have agreed that Lorenzo was the first Renaissance patron to commission a beloved portrait and the first poet to

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70 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 130-31. (S’ avesse dato a l’opera gentile/ colla figura voce ed intelletto…..)
write a sonnet in its honor. However no one, to my knowledge, has provided a more thorough analysis of how the relationship between the language and concepts in both Lorenzo and Petrarch’s poems relate to the *paragone* of the arts and the spirit of competition and rivalry inherent to the Beloved Portrait tradition. This observation, I believe, reveals a great deal about Lorenzo’s understanding of both Petrarch’s poetry and the classical beloved tradition. Rather than mimicking the more obvious poems in honor of Simone Martini as became a common practice for future poets, Lorenzo weaved the three sonnets into his two poems in a sophisticated web of his own ideas. This not only demonstrates his comfort with Petrarch’s *oeuvre*, it also suggests that Lorenzo was intent on presenting himself and his beloved as equals to Petrarch and Laura.

Another key factor in relationship to the *paragone* of the arts is that Lorenzo, like Petrarch, functioned as both poet and lover and thus was able to give voice to Lucrezia with his verse. This put him on equal footing with Petrarch and elevated him above the classical masters. It also justified his appropriation of the Apollo persona in that he was a descendant of the god of poetry and unrequited love, just as Petrarch was before him. This comparison between Lorenzo and Petrarch was not only good for his private image, but also validated his claim to Florence on a public level. He was the heir to Petrarch’s legacy, the new father of humanism, and a divinely inspired poet prince worthy of the public’s faith and support.

Furthermore, Lorenzo’s choice of Andrea del Verrocchio was no doubt a conscious emulation of Petrarch’s choice of Simone Martini. No less than the best Florentine artist of his time would have been expected from a Medici prince. However, I do not believe Lorenzo’s choice was merely a reflection of his status and wealth. Rather
it was a conscious decision to elevate his beloved to the level of the great beauties before her who had been granted the honor of inspiring a Beloved Portrait from the hands of the great masters. As the tradition evolved over the next century, patrons continually attempted to best their peers by commissioning revered artists to paint portraits of their beloveds following Lorenzo’s example. As will become evident in the following chapters, though the Beloved Portrait tradition spread to other city-states such as Milan, Venice, and Rome, Lorenzo de’ Medici remained inextricably linked to the genre, and no portrait can be properly analyzed without an understanding of his role in shaping the Renaissance tradition. I believe this is why the tradition lasted the longest in its purest form in Florence and was revisited almost a century later at the court of Cosimo I de’ Medici by Agnolo Bronzino, which will be the subject of the final chapter of this dissertation.

Mimicking the Master

Andrea del Verrocchio is also generally believed to have influenced the next known documented Renaissance Beloved Portrait. During the same years that Verrocchio painted Lorenzo’s banner and sculpted his *Lady with a Bunch of Flowers*, Leonardo da Vinci apprenticed in his workshop and he was certainly inspired his master’s work when he painted his *Portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci* circa 1474-78 at the request of his presumed patron, Bernardo Bembo (fig. 92).\(^{71}\) The portrait portrays a

\(^{71}\) Walter and Zapperi, *Il ritratto dell'amata: storie d'amore da Petrarca a Tiziano*, 38. The painting was first documented by the Florentine writer Antonio Billi in his notebook. He documented the activity of Florentine artists from 1516-1525. In his paragraph dedicated to Leonardo he mentions the “Ritrassie in Firenze dal naturale la Ginevra d’Amerigho Benci, tanto bene finite, che ella propria non era altrimenti.” In
woman with alabaster skin and golden-brown waves framing her face. What is unusual about the portrait is that the sitter stares out in three-quarter pose and her features, while interesting, are not canonically Petrarchan. Also unusual is the halo of juniper that frames her face and names her as Ginevra (Ginevra/ginepro). Bernardo Bembo met Ginevra de’ Benci while visiting the Medici court as a Venetian ambassador in February of 1475. In honor of the new alliance between Venice and Florence and Bembo’s visit, the Medici planned a tournament in Santa Croce and the theme was love for a woman. Lorenzo’s brother, Giuliano, was the central figure in the tournament and carried a banner with the image of his beloved Simonetta Vespucci. During this visit to Florence Bernardo Bembo was likely introduced to the Florentine beauty, Ginevra de’ Benci, who was the niece of Marietta Strozzi’s beloved, Bartolommeo Benci. Though there is no documented proof of their meeting, it can be assumed that Bembo and Ginevra met at the Medici palace where she was a regular visitor.\textsuperscript{72}

The Florentine humanist Cristoforo Landino, who was a friend of both Lorenzo and Bembo, wrote an elegy in honor of Bembo’s Neo-Platonic love for Ginevra.\textsuperscript{73} The poem was inserted into Bembo’s own copy of Landino’s publication of Xandra, a collection of Petrarchan sonnets in honor of Landino’s beloved. A few pages later Bembo wrote a marginal note using Ginevra’s name for the first and only time. The note refers to Landino, quotes a passage from Ficino, and says that during a trip to Florence

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\textsuperscript{1540} Anonimo Gaddiano elaborated on Billi’s comment and wrote: “Ritrassi in Firenze dal naturale la Ginevra d’Amerigho Benci, tanto bene fini, che non il ritratto, ma la propria Ginevra pareva.”\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 36.\textsuperscript{74} Landino’s poetic celebration of their Petrarchan affair, and an additional group of Petrarchan poems by various Florentines believed to have been commissioned by Bembo, have led art historians to identify Leonardo’s sitter as Ginevra. For a recent publication of the relationship between Landino and his circle of poets and Ginevra’s portrait refer to Lina Bolzoni, Il cuore di cristallo: ragionamenti d’amore, poesia e ritratto del Rinaschimento (Turin: Eiunaudi, 2011).
Bembo attended the baptism of one of the sons of Landino. Landino’s poem praised Ginevra’s steadfast loyalty to her husband and identified her modesty as the source of Bembo’s greatest admiration. In a telling twist on the Helen story, Landino claims that Ginevra is superior to Helen not because of her beauty, but because of her fidelity:

“Paris’s mad love for Helen is famous, I admit,/ but it’s famous as foul adultery, nevertheless./ But you, Bencia, lovelier now than the offspring of Leda,/ are famous among all nations for your rare modesty.”

This quality, Landino explains, makes her a “model for the maids of Tuscany.”

In a second sonnet, Landino describes Bembo’s first encounter with Ginevra. He claims that before Bembo met Ginevra he thought that no woman could surpass the ancient models:

A statue of Cnidian Venus, uncovered long ago,
seemed to you fashioned by Praxiteles’s learned hand:
hitherto, Bembo, you’ve seen no Italian girl,
nor French, nor any other maiden like unto her.
But the first time Ginevra came before your eyes,
Bencia, with her golden tresses freshly bound,
then the plebeian beauty of the others disappeared from your heart; Ginevra only seemed to be divine. Then your mind was stunned by her extraordinary form, which reckoned it was seeing something more than human. But who can say no to you, Cupid, winged and fleet, than whom is nothing faster in the entire world? How stunned Bernardo was at first sight of her, how passion quickly captured his whole heart! He looked, and the flame shot though him to the marrow; a shuddering tremor passed through his strong bones. For her countenance was like what we often see when white lilies mingle with red roses, or if a pearl of India, found by the Arabian Sea

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74 Walter and Zapperi, Il ritratto dell’amata: storie d’amore da Petrarca a Tiziano, 38.
75 Cristoforo Landino, Poems, trans. Mary P. Chatfield (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2008), 279. (Notus amor Paridis, fateor, <fur>orque Lacuena,/ sed turpi tamen nest notus adulterio./ Pulchrior at Ledae partu iam, Bencia, cunctis/ gentibus es rara nota pudicitia.)
76 Ibid. (Puellis exemplar Tuscis.)
should be suffused with Phoenician color. Venus too sprinkled Bencia’s eyes with godlike splendor and the Graces’ charm shines full from her brow.77

While Landino does not mention a portrait of Ginevra, he refers to all of the Petrarchan features seen in her portrait.

On the reverse of Ginevra’s portrait (fig. 93) Leonardo includes Bembo’s personal device—a wreath of laurel and palm encircling a juniper sprig wrapped around the plant is a scroll with the motto “VIRTUTEM FORMA DECORAT” or “Beauty Adorns Virtue.” This inscription functions on multiple levels. First, like a portrait medallion, it commemorates Ginevra’s inner virtue as well as her outer appearance. Second, it recognizes Ginevra’s Neo-Platonic relationship with Bernardo Bembo. Third, the laurel acknowledges Bembo’s talent as a poet as well as Ginevra’s own literary renown.78 Finally, Leonardo, like Petrarch, employs name punning on both the recto and verso of the painting. With the juniper bush he names Ginevra/ginepro and with the laurel motif on the reverse he puns on her relationship to Laura/lauro. Ginevra is both a poet worthy of a lauro and Bembo’s beloved Laura.

77 Ibid, 285. (Sed Cnidiae quondam Veneris simulacr patria retecta/ Praxitelis docta sunt tibi visa manu:/ his tu non Italum, non Gallam, Bembe, puellam/ hactenus aut aliam conspicis assimilem./ Bencia sed nuper flavos redimita capillos,/ cum primum est oculis visa Ginevra tuis,/ tunc ut plebeae reliquae de pectore formae/ cesserunt! visa est sola Ginevra dea./ Tunc mens insolita stupuit, Bernarde, figura,/ cernere supra hominem nescio quid repuntans./ Sed negalatum quis te volucremque, Cupido,/ quo celere est toto iam nihil orbe magis?/ Conspectu ut primo stupuit, Bernardus, ut illi,/ corripit subito pectora tota furor!/ Vidit et internus irritut flaummedallas;/ atque horrens subiit dura per ossa tremor./ Nam facies illi, qualem cum saepe videmus/ candida purpureis lilia mixtra rosis,/ vel si Phoenicio veniat suffuse colore/ Indica Erythraeo gemma reperta mari./ Et Venus ipsa oculos divino spargit honore/ et Charitum tota gratia fronte nitet.)

78 She was educated and seems to have written some poetry herself as is documented in a letter from a young Florentine client of the Benci, in Rome trying to find work in the service of a cardinal. He met the daughter of Pope Innocent VIII and they discussed the beauty, elegance, fashion and art of Florence and the young man used Ginevra as an example of a Florentine woman. The daughter then asked to see all of Ginevra’s “words” and the young man promised to send her a poem and quoted the first line: “Chieggio merzede e sono alpestro tygre” (I ask your forgiveness, I am a mountain tiger.) Walter and Zapperi, Il ritratto dell’amata: storie d’amore da Petrarca a Tiziano, 38.
There is poetic evidence of a conscious poetic modeling of Ginevra and Bernardo’s relationship on Lorenzo and Lucrezia. Alessandro Braccesi wrote four epigrams in honor of the couple.\(^7^9\) In one he describes running into Ginevra at Santissima Annunziata, the same place where Lorenzo’s friends saw Lucrezia Donati. During the encounter Ginevra dropped a bunch of violets so that Braccesi would bring them to Bembo, mimicking Lucrezia. According to Braccesi, “the nymph Bencia” carried violets at her breast and, like Lucrezia, the act of carrying her beloved’s flowers in her hands was included in the iconography of her portrait. Landino praises Ginevra’s hands in his poem in honor of Bembo’s beloved: “Her hands are a work of art, Athena’s living art.”\(^8^0\) Although the painting is now cut off below Ginevra’s shoulder, the original probably included her hands holding a small bunch of flowers, similar to Verrocchio’s portrait. Just as Verrocchio was the first Renaissance sculptor to include a female sitter’s arms and hands in a marble bust, Leonardo’s *Portrait of Ginevra* is the first extant portrait to include the appendages. Leonardo likely painted Ginevra’s portrait while working in Verrocchio’s studio and certainly was familiar with the bust which, in David Alan Brown’s opinion is “unquestionably related to *Ginevra*…”\(^8^1\)

Ginevra’s portrait was not included in an inventory of Bembo’s collection, leading scholars to conclude that he did not bring it back to Venice with him, and perhaps left it in Ginevra’s care.\(^8^2\) In fact, it remained in the Benci family’s collection until the

\(^7^9\) Ibid.
\(^8^0\) Landino, *Poems*, 285. (*Est opus in minibus: Palladis extat opus.*)
\(^8^2\) Caroline Elam has recently argued that Bembo commissioned the painting himself, though she acknowledges that the painting was well-known in Florence and was the inspiration for many portraits that followed, especially by Leonardo’s followers such as Lorenzo di Credi. Her hypothesis is that Bernardo Bembo commissioned the painting from Leonardo when he was first acquainted with Ginevra in Florence between 1475-76. According to Elam, Bembo brought the portrait back to Florence on his second visit in
seventeenth century when it was purchased by the Prince of Liechtenstein. While it is possible that Bembo did not wish to bring the painting back to Venice because it was of a married woman, this explanation seems unlikely considering Bembo’s collection of Petrarchan objects, including a portrait he believed to be of Laura herself. It is also odd that he would commission a painting from the leading Florentine painter of his day and not wish to display it in his own collection in Venice. Perhaps Ginevra commissioned the portrait herself? Though there is no evidence to support this, we do know that she was well-known at the Medici court and would have had access to Leonardo and would certainly have been aware of Lorenzo’s portrait of Lucrezia. The fact that Lucrezia’s son bought her portrait from the Medici on her behalf further supports the social acceptability of a female beloved owning her own portrait. Yet this would assume that Ginevra had the means to purchase her own portrait or that her spouse purchased it on her behalf. Or might Lorenzo have commissioned the painting to commemorate a relationship modeled on his own with Lucrezia and subsequently given it to Ginevra along with the two sonnets he wrote in her honor? Though these questions cannot be answered in the scope of this dissertation or without further evidence, these possibilities are worth considering.

In many ways what is most important when discussing the Petrarchan relationship between Bembo and Ginevra in the context of the Beloved Portrait tradition is that although it involved a Venetian beloved, the relationship was constructed on the Laurentian model. Though Bembo was the most recognized Venetian Petrarchist of the time, he associated himself with a Florentine beauty, not a Venetian beloved, and his

1478 and gave it to Ginevra as a gift. In order to render the gift exchange socially acceptable, given Ginevra’s marital status, Bembo had a more appropriate motto added to his existing personal device on the reverse of the painting: Bembo’s personal emblem was “VIRTVS ET HONOR” as opposed to the “VIRTTEM FORMA DECORAT” used by Leonardo. Caroline Elam, in Pietro Bembo e le arti: Atti del Seminario internazionale., ed. Guido Beltrami and Davide Gasparotto (Venice: Marsilio, 2013), 409-20.
Neo-Platonic love for her was celebrated by Florentine poets and a Florentine painter. Even if Bembo was, in fact, the patron of the portrait, the fact that he did not bring it with him to Venice suggests that he associated Ginevra with the Florentine courtly games at Lorenzo’s court and may not have considered them relevant outside of that context.\textsuperscript{83}

**La Bella Simonetta**

I propose that another almost contemporary portrait also represents a Medici beloved, though no specific sonnets have been identified in its honor. A painting attributed to Botticelli, now in the Städelsches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie in Frankfurt, is generally believed to represent the Florentine beauty Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci (fig. 94). Simonetta has historically been identified as the Neo-Platonic beloved of Lorenzo’s younger brother, Giuliano de’ Medici, and she was long-believed to be the inspiration for a joust planned by Giuliano on January 9, 1475.\textsuperscript{84} The details of the joust and a standard now attributed to a collaboration between Andrea del Verrocchio and Leonardo, were documented in *Poliziano’s Stanze per la giostra di Giuliano de’ Medici.*\textsuperscript{85} Though the banner is no longer extant, a witness described it in great detail:

\textsuperscript{83} As will be discussed in the following chapter, Bernardo’s son, Pietro, was the first documented Venetian to commission a Beloved Portrait of a Venetian beloved from a Venetian artist.

\textsuperscript{84} Though the joust centered around Simonetta, it was actually held in honor of an alliance between Florence and other Italian city-states established in 1474. See David Alan Brown, "Verrocchio and Leonardo: Studies for Giostra," in *Florentine Drawing at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent: Papers from a Colloquium Held at the Villa Spellman, Florence, 1992*, ed. Elizabeth Cropper (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale 1994), 101.

\textsuperscript{85} The standard was previously attributed to Botticelli based on an extant drawing, also falsely attributed to Botticelli, and now in the Uffizi. According to David Alan Brown, Verrocchio and Leonardo collaborated on the drawing, which was a preliminary sketch for the now-destroyed tournament standard. Botticelli could not have been the artist because the drawing precedes his collaborations with Verrocchio (c. 1470). See ibid, 99-101. See also ———, *Leonardo: Origins of a Genius*, 123-25.
At the top was a sun, and in the middle of this standard was a large figure resembling Pallas [Athena], clothed in a calf-length dress of fine gold. And under this dress was a white shift, highlighted with ground gold, and on her legs she had a pair of blue boots. This figure held under her feet two flames of fire, and from the said fire shot flames that ignited olive branches that were on the bottom of the banner, so that from the middle up there were branches without fire. She had on her head a crestless helmet in the antique manner and her braided hair fluttered in the wind. This said Pallas had a lance in her right hand and in her left the shield of Medusa. And near the said figure there was a field adorned with flowers of varied colors, from which emerged an olive bush with one big branch, to which was tied a god of love, with the hands tied behind him with a cord of gold. At his feet were his bow, quiver, and broken arrows. On a branch of the olive, where the god of love was tied, was a short inscription in French that read: La sans par. The above mentioned Pallas looked fixedly into the sun that was above her.

Following his brother’s example, both Giuliano and Simonetta’s devices were featured on the banner. Contemporary reports record that during the joust Giuliano carried a shield with Medusa’s head emblazoned on the front and donned a helmet decorated with “a god of love sitting on an olive stump and with his hands tied behind an olive branch.”

Adrian Randolph provided an insightful interpretation of the relationship between the standard and its Medici symbolism:

The French motto emblazoned across the banner (La sans par) indicated that ‘she [presumably Pallas] is without equal.’ Visually, beholders were presented with a mythological psychomachia in which Pallas represented Chastity triumphant, and Cupid, Lust vanquished. The eloquent ensign, therefore, commented on the goddess’s and, by extension, Giuliano’s virtue. The burning olive branches under Pallas’s feet—which also appeared on Giuliano’s livery—were a variation on a traditional Medicean device, the broncone. The flames, representing Giuliano’s

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67 Ibid, 207. The same helmet was recorded in a Medici inventory of 1492 in the palazzo on via Larga.
burning love, to not consume the green olive branches; the amorous youth continues to burn, eternally….  

The complexity of the visual devices employed on the standard apparently confounded even the most learned Venetian humanist, Bernardo Bembo. That Bembo had to ask his Florentine companion to explain the allegorical program to him clearly indicates that the symbolism was distinctly Florentine and not directly borrowed from a well-known source like Petrarch or Dante. The source was, in fact, a mythical vision dreamt by Giuliano. According to Poliziano the young lover had a vision of Simonetta in the guise of Athena in the act of tying Cupid to an olive tree and then plucking the feathers from his wings. Both Poliziano and Botticelli were instrumental in creating the myth of Simonetta as an intentional conflation of Laura’s Petrarchan personae and the humanistic ideals of Medici Florence.

Just as he influenced Leonardo, Andrea del Verrocchio’s style had a significant impact on Botticelli’s work. Certainly Botticelli must have been aware of the two standards Verrocchio (and later Leonardo) designed for the Medici jousts, especially since he began work in Verrocchio studio circa 1470. Though Giuliano’s standard, like Lorenzo’s, was destroyed after the tournament, two extant works provide some visual evidence for how it may have looked. The first is a drawing by Verrocchio and Leonardo, now in the Uffizi, which is believed to be the Study for a Tournament Standard (fig. 95). The drawing is divided in the triangular shape typical of a standard and depicts a reclining Venus next to a standing Cupid emerging from tall millet

88 Ibid, 208.
89 Ibid, 209. This “dream” was likely the creation of Poliziano in an attempt to glorify the loss of the young Giuliano after his brutal murder as a result of the Pazzi Conspiracy.
90 This has been suggested by art historians such as Wilhelm von Bode and Heinrich Ulmann, and most recently, Ronald Lightbown. These scholars have also identified the influence of Verrocchio’s smooth sculptural style on the younger artist. See Ronald Lightbown, Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 26.
grasses. A woodcut illustration from Poliziano’s *La giostra di Guiliano de’ Medici*, published circa 1495 to 1500, may also reveal some of the original design. The woodcut depicts the moment when Giuliano first meets Simonetta (fig. 96). The two lovers stand on clouds to suggest they have been transported by their love. Giuliano is dressed for the joust, but Simonetta is draped in classical folds while she stands in a *contrapposto* position with her hair curling behind her neck.

The visual similarities between Simonetta’s depiction in the woodcut and Botticelli’s paintings of Venus, Chloris, and the Three Graces in *La Primavera* are unquestionable (figs. 97, 98, 99). Each boasts the idealized Petrarchan features typically associated with Simonetta. Interestingly, the book illustration does not portray Simonetta as a fierce warrior as contemporary descriptions of the joust standard suggest, but rather as an ethereal, idealized, Venus figure. One explanation for this may be that Simonetta was inextricably connected to Botticelli’s idealized mythological women, and when depicting her, the artist chose the most recognizable image.

Like the woodcut illustration, Botticelli did not incorporate the Pallas Athena imagery used for the joust standard into the Frankfurt portrait. I believe this was because the artist instead intended to represent the Petrarchan qualities also associated with Simonetta in contemporary literature and more appropriate for a painted portrait of a Neo-Platonic beloved of a Medici prince. According to Poliziano, Simonetta was “fair-skinned, unblemished white... [and] the ringlets of her gold-en hair descend[ed] on a

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91 Leonardo probably borrowed from Antonio Pollaiuolo’s incorporation of sorghum grass in his engraving of the *Battle of the Nudes*. For a more complete discussion consult Brown, "Verrocchio and Leonardo: Studies for Giostra," 104-05.
forehead humbly proud." The Frankfurt portrait follows Poliziano’s description, depicting Simonetta with an idealized long white neck, alabaster skin, arched eyebrows, rosy lips, a high forehead, and golden hair.

The sitter’s face varies little from portraits of “real women” with her classic Petrarchan features, or for that matter, from any number of images of the Virgin and of Venus in Botticelli’s oeuvre. However, Botticelli takes license with her hair and dress that would have been impossibly inappropriate for a real woman. In fact, what differentiates this painting from the rest of the genre is the complicated and alluring web of golden braids, loose tendrils and plumed accents. This sets the portrait apart from contemporary Petrarchan portraits of real ladies as sumptuary laws forbid Florentine women from being seen with their hair loose and adorned with beads.

The unbound hair in the Frankfurt portrait was intended to arouse the viewer just as Laura’s curls were an erotic fetish for Petrarch. In Botticelli’s portrait, Simonetta’s hair is wrapped in pearl nets called vespaio, or wasps’ nests. This has led art historians to identify the portrait as Simonetta because of the pun on her name vespaio/Vespucci. It also refers to lines in the Canzoniere:

Breeze that surrounds those blond and curling locks, that makes them move and which is moved by them in softness, and that scatters the sweet gold, then gathers it in lovely knots recurling, you linger in the eyes whence wasps of love

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92 Weppelmann, "The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini," 121. (Candida è ella, e candida la vesta,/ ma pur di rose e fior dipinta e d’erba;/ lo inanellato crin dall’aurea testa/ scende in la fronte umilmenta superba.)
93 Ronald Lightbown dates the paintings to the mid 1480s, though the recent Metropolitan Museum exhibition catalogue featuring these works dates them from 1475-80. For more on this see Lightbown, Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work, 312. See also Weppelmann, "The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini," 120.
94 ———, "The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini," 120.
Bees also symbolized imitation and were associated with Zeuxis’s selection of the best features of various women to create his portrait of Helen of Troy. Thus Simonetta’s hair, like Laura’s, metaphorically represents the desire that binds Petrarch to his beloved and her idealized beauty.

Later in the sixteenth century, presentation drawings by Michelangelo and Rosso Fiorentino employed imaginative coiffures in a similar fashion to portray a series of testé divine, or divine heads. Rosso’s black chalk portrait of Giulia Gonzaga (1530s), for example, shows the famous beauty in a contorted profile turning her head unnaturally over her shoulder and boasting a fantastic arrangement of curls, braids, and a pair of horns (fig. 100). Though the drawing is believed to represent the Duchess of Mantua, her hair is clearly meant to be fantastical and idealized, just as Petrarch did not intend for his reader to believe that a proper lady would wear her hair in such a manner. Likewise, Botticelli was no doubt aware of the sensual Petrarchan associations Simonetta’s mass of golden curls would conjure in the minds of his viewers. In the Canzoniere Petrarch writes: “Love.… then hide your snares/ in her hair blonde and curly,/ for only there my longings are entwined;/ with your hands spread her locks upon the wind / and bind me there, and you will make me happy./ No one shall free me from that golden snare,/ neglected artfully and thick with ringlets.…” Clearly the poet did not intend for his reader to believe that Laura would wear her hair in such a manner in public, for when

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95 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 326-27. (“Aura che quelle chiome bionde et crespe/ cercondi et movi et se’ moss a loro/ soavemente, et spargi quell dolce oro/ et poi ’l raccogli e ’n bei nodi il rincrespe:/ tu stai nelli occhi ond’ amorose vespe/ mi pungo….”)  
96 Rossi, “…that naturalness and Florentinity (so to speak)” Bronzino: Language, Flesh and Painting,” 190.  
97 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 388-89. (“Amor….i tuoi lacci nascondi/ fra i capei crespi et biondi./ ché ’l mio volere altrove non s’invesca;./ spargi co le tue man le chiome al vento,/ ivi me lega, et puo’ me far contento./ Dal laccio d’or non sia mai chi me scioglia/ negletto ad arte, e ’manellato et irto….”)
Petrarch is caught in Laura’s untamed tresses it is in the most intimate recesses of his imagination.98

The most remarkable difference between the Frankfurt portrait and others like it is that the woman in the Frankfurt portrait faces right instead of left.99 That this was a conscious decision on the part of the artist is proven by a comparison to a similar portrait, now in Berlin, and also attributed to Botticelli and his workshop (fig. 101). The two portraits were recently exhibited together in the Metropolitan Museum’s exhibition of The Renaissance Portrait where their function as idealized images was stressed by Stefan Weppelmann in the accompanying catalogue. Weppelmann contended that the most important function of the paintings was to represent idealized beauty as it was presented by literary and humanistic sources, and not whether the sitters were actually Simonetta.100 Ronald Lightbown also stressed the function of these portraits as “fancy portraits of ideal beauties, rather than real ladies.”101 Ronald Lightbown also held that these portraits were likely painted by Botticelli’s workshop in a response to the demand at the time for images of idealized woman, seen also on contemporary majolica.102

The Frankfurt portrait is distinguished from the Berlin example both in its superior quality and larger-than-life size.103 The Frankfurt sitter is anything but subtle with her striking features, elaborately plumed and braided hair, and diaphanous dress. Given the variety of metaphoric associations between Simonetta and mythological goddesses in contemporary poetry, art historians’ various interpretations of the sitter as

99 Like Isabella d’Este’s portrait, Botticelli’s choice of the right-facing profile pose may in part identify the painting as all’antica in the tradition of portrait medals.
100 Weppelmann, “The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini,” 123.
101 Lightbown, Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work, 313.
102 Ibid. For more on majolica from the period see Bayer, Art and Love in Renaissance Italy.
103 The painting is 32 ½ x 21 ¼ inches in comparison to the Berlin portrait, which is almost half its size.
Minerva, Thalia, Diana, and Venus are all within the realm of possibility. Certainly her size alone suggests she is more divine than mortal.  

Though many scholars, including Ronald Lightbown in his monograph on Botticelli, have used the size of the painting to dismiss Simonetta as an idealized portrait of a mythological figure, I agree with Monika Schmitter’s more recent assessment of the painting. In 1995, Schmitter considered poetic evidence by Bernardo Pulci and others that compared Simonetta to a nymph:

Nymph, whom in the earth a cold stone covers,
Beneficent star now received into heaven,
When your light is more discovered,
Return to see my wayward country.

Pulci’s contemporary, Angelo Poliziano, also compared Simonetta to a nymph with long flowing hair and black eyes and Leonardo instructed other artists to depict nymphs in paintings with their diaphanous dresses hugging their bodies. The woman portrayed in the Frankfurt portrait has the nymph-like floating hair and diaphanous white garment described by these contemporary sources.

What Schmitter was the first to consider, however, was that contemporary marriageable Florentine women were made to resemble nymphs in fifteenth-century Florence. Fra Girolamo Savonarola criticized this practice in one of his controversial sermons: “Look at the customs of Florence: how the Florentine women have married their daughters by taking them out to show and adorning them so as to resemble

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104 Weppelmann, “The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini,” 121.
106 Ibid.
nymphs….”  

If, as Savonarola’s sermon suggests, dressing as a nymph increased the appeal of young Florentine women, it is reasonable to assume that the guise would have been chosen for a portrait of the most desirable Florentine woman of all—Simonetta Vespucci. 

The inclusion of feathers in Simonetta’s hair and her diaphanous white dress certainly suggest that she is meant to resemble a nymph, but I propose they may also refer to Botticelli’s banner for Giuliano’s joust. In his dream, Giuliano saw his beloved dressed in white and picking feathers from Cupid’s wings. Could, then, the heron feathers in Simonetta’s hair symbolize her conquest over her first beloved? 

In his discussion of the portrait, Dennis Geronimus noted that feathers were used for the costumes of nymphs in Florentine pageants, processions and jousts. If there was, in fact, an overlap between joust costumery and Simonetta’s plumes, this would have further associated her with Giuliano’s famous joust in honor of his nymph, Simonetta. The inclusion of the feathers would have recognized the relationship between Giuliano and Simonetta and Botticelli’s role in creating the imagery. At the same time it branded the painting as a Beloved Portrait for both Lorenzo and Giuliano. Since Simonetta was by then an accepted symbol of Florentine Petrarchan Neo-Platonic love this could be a clever way to incorporate both Giuliano and Lorenzo into the painting.

What has not been adequately considered is an association between Simonetta and Daphne/Laura in the painting, though Schmitter did recognize Simonetta’s comparison to

\[107\] Ibid, 47. (Guarda che usanza ha Firenze: come le donne fiorentine hanno maritate le loro fanciulle, le menono a mostra e acconeianle là che paiano ninfe, e la prima cosa le menono a Santa Liperata.) See also Girolamo Savonarola, Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria, ed. Paolo Ghiglieri (Rome: Belardetti, 1971-72). 

\[108\] Lucrezia Donati was also compared to a nymph in contemporary literature. 

\[109\] Geronimus, Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange, 62.
Daphne in contemporary poetry. Simonetta was compared to Daphne in a tribute by Bernardo Pulci after her death in April of 1476. In his funeral elegy entitled, *Venite*, sacre e gloriose dive, he compared her to various gods and goddesses, including Venus who graced her with beauty, Minerva who blessed her with intelligence, and Mercury who was responsible for her eloquence. However in terzina seventeen, entitled *Bernardo Pulci a Giuliano nella morte della diva Simonetta*, Bernardo implies that Simonetta is Giuliano’s Daphne, just as she is his Laura. In Schmitter’s words, “Pulci, addressing Simonetta in heaven, asks her to think of the world she has left behind, where her Apollo [Giuliano] grieves for his Daphne. The sense of yearning here is across vertical space; Simonetta is above, in heaven, and Giuliano is left below, on earth.”

Just as Petrarch futilely chased his beloved, so, too, was Simonetta’s unavailability to Giuliano is represented by her comparison to Daphne. In both instances, the beloved’s unattainability made her all the more attractive to her suitor.

After her untimely death in April of 1476, Simonetta was appropriated as a symbol of Florence in poems by Lorenzo de’ Medici, Angelo Poliziano, Bernardo Pulci, and other Florentine artists. In Dennis Geronimus’s words:

> Before long, Simonetta came to embody the most elevated idea of the absent beloved, consequently becoming part of Florence’s collective, memory. Just as such sonnets and elegies cast her figure in a poetic framework, so did the painted commemorations that ensued. In both poetry and portraiture, the young Vespucci assumed a composite image, at once ungraspable ideal and real-life mistress.

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112 Ibid, 85-86. (*Quel tuo Febo al mondo sanza sole,/ ch’avendo i giorni tuoi sempre onorati/ della sua Dampne si lamenta e dole.*)
114 In addition to Bernardo Pulci and Lorenzo de’ Medici, poems were written by Francesco Nursio Timideo, Naldo Naldi, and Francesco Dovizi da Bibbiena.
115 Geronimus, *Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange*, 64.
Her various funereal elegies and poems, Allan argued, promoted her as an idealized Renaissance figure of virtue and beauty à la Beatrice and Laura. In another of Bernardo’s poems he figures Simonetta in Laura’s role as his Heavenly beloved after her death just as Laura functioned for Petrarch. And by extension, Giuliano becomes her beloved Petrarch. Just as she was compared to Athena by Poliziano, Simonetta was also posthumously glorified by Bernardo Pulci as an ideal Florentine heroine equal to Beatrice and Laura as “the ideal personifications of virtuous beauty.”

Interestingly it is Lorenzo’s voice, not Giuliano’s, that mourns Simonetta after her death in his *Comento dei miei sonetti*:

> In our city there died a lady who generally moved all the Florentine people to pity; it is no great marvel, for she was truly adorned with as much beauty and gentle kindness as any lady before her. And among her other outstanding gifts she had such a sweet and attractive manner, that all the men who had any familiar acquaintance with her believed that she loved them deeply. Moreover, the ladies and the young women of her own age not only did not envy this most excellent among her other virtues, but highly extolled and praised her beauty and kindness, so that it seemed impossible to believe that so many men loved her without jealousy, and that so many women praised her without envy.

Lorenzo’s poem, and the three others he wrote in Simonetta’s honor, reveal important information about his relationship with Simonetta and her Florentine reputation. Her superior beauty and virtue made her immune to human jealousy and allowed her to become a universal beloved for all of Florence.

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117 Weppelmann, *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini,* 121.

118 Angelo Poliziano, *The Stanze of Angelo Poliziano,* trans. David Quint (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1993), x. For Lorenzo’s original text see Lorenzo de’ Medici, *Opere,* ed. Tiziano Zanato (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), 17. (Mori, come di sopra dicemmo, nella città nostra una donna, la quale se mosee a compassione generalmente tutto il popolo fiorentino, non è gran maraviglia, perché di bellezze e gentilezze umane era verament ornate quanto alcuna che inanzi allet fusi su; e, infra l’altre sue excellenti dote, aveva così dolce e attrattiva maniera, che tutti quelli che con lei avevano qualche domestica notizia crc devono da essa sommamente essere amati. Le donne ancora e giovane sue equali non solamente di questa sua ex cellenza tra l’altre non avevono invidia aluna, ma sommamente essaltavono e laudavono la biltà e gentilezza sua: per modo che impossibile pareva a credere che tanti uomini sanza gelosia l’amassino e tante donne sanza invidia la laudassino.)
Evidence of Simonetta’s romantic association with Lorenzo is seen in the cameo around her neck. The gem is a reproduction of the ancient *Sigillo di Nerone*, or Nero’s seal, and features a relief carving of Apollo, Marsyas, and Olympus. The informed Florentine viewer would have recognized the reference to the cameo’s association with the Apollo/Daphne myth and the parallels between Apollo’s assessment of Daphne’s physical appearance in the *Metamorphoses* and Petrarch’s description of Laura. While art historians have considered the Daphnean associations in this painting, to my knowledge, no other art historian has specifically considered Apollo’s description of Daphne as it relates to Botticelli’s painting. According to Ovid, Apollo:

> Gazes on her hair without adornment:  
> “What if it were done up a bit?” he asks,  
> and gazes on her eyes, as bright as stars,  
> and on that darling little mouth of hers,  
> though the sight is not enough to satisfy;  
> he praises everything that he can see—  
> her fingers, hands, and arms, bare to her shoulders—  
> and what is hidden prizes even more.”  

Botticelli and his patron were no doubt aware of Apollo’s desire to “do up a bit” Daphne’s hair and its convenient compatibility with Petrarch’s obsession with Laura’s golden locks and Simonetta’s famed blond tresses. Like Daphne, who is literally both a woman and a laurel tree, Laura is simultaneously a representation of Petrarch’s carnal desire and his pursuit of a poetic laurel crown. This is relevant to a discussion of Simonetta’s portrait in that Botticelli incorporates the same duality into his image. Simonetta is a beautiful woman capable of seducing the entire Florentine populace, and she is also Daphne to Lorenzo’s Apollo.

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119 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 35. (*Spectat inornatos collo pendere capillos/ et "quid, si comantur?" ait. Videt igne micantes sideribus similis oculos, videt oscula, quae non/ est vidisse satis; laudat digitosque manusque/ brachiaque et nudos media plus parte lacertos;/ si qua latent, meliora putat.*)
Her beauty attracts his physical desire and his pursuit of her in poetry leads him to the poetic laurel and by extension brings Florence lasting fame.

A recent discovery of documents has led scholars to believe that Lorenzo did not acquire the cameo until 1487 when he purchased it from a Venetian jeweler while staying at in his villa in Spedaletto; however, the seal was well-known to Lorenzo and his circle much earlier. Lorenzo Ghiberti recorded it in his Comentarii of 1447-8 and Filarete again recorded that it was in the collection of the Patriarch of Aquileia, Cardinal Ludovico Trevisan, in his Trattato di architettura of 1464.\(^{120}\) This new discovery makes the portrait all the more curious. First, why would Simonetta wear a cameo that clearly claims her as Lorenzo de’ Medici’s beloved when by all accounts she belonged to his younger brother Giuliano? Second, if the cameo was purchased by Lorenzo as late as 1487, the painting would presumably date to around that time or a bit later as opposed the traditional belief that it was painted between 1475 and 1485.\(^{121}\)

In his poem in honor of Giuliano, Poliziano begins by praising Lorenzo’s protection of Florence in Apollonian terms: “And you, well-born Laurel, under whose shelter/ happy Florence rests in peace, fearing neither/ winds nor threats of heaven, nor irate Jove in/ his angriest countenance….”\(^{122}\) The fact that Lorenzo is celebrated first in a poem primarily dedicated to Giuliano clearly prioritizes Lorenzo as the most important of the Medici brothers and the ruler and protector of Florence. By extension, Lorenzo

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\(^{120}\) For more on this refer to Melissa Meriam Bullard and Nicolai Rubinstein, "Lorenzo de’ Medici’s Acquisition of the Sigillo di Nerone," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 62 (1999), 283-86.

\(^{121}\) If the portrait was painted as late as 1487, it would have been current with Botticelli’s even more famous painting of The Birth of Venus which has been convincingly associated with both Lorenzo and Simonetta by Charles Dempsey and others.

\(^{122}\) For the English translation see Poliziano, The Stanze of Angelo Poliziano, 3. The entire Italian text is found in ———, "Stanze di Angelo Poliziano," in Poesie italiane, ed. Saverio Orlando (Milan: Rizzoli, 1988), 3. (E tu, ben nato Laur, sotto il cui velo/ Fiorenza lieta in pace si riposa,/ nè teme i venti o ’l minacciar del celo/ o Giove irato in vista più cruciosa….)
represents the most famous of Simonetta’s many Florentine admirers. Her metaphoric association with *Fiorentina* and his as the protector of the city made a union between the two almost preordained. This, I believe, may in part explain the cameo around Simonetta’s neck and the suggestion that she is Lorenzo’s (aka Apollo’s) Daphne in a civic sense. Lorenzo’s agenda, Allan convincingly argues, was to weave obvious references to the great Tuscan poets, Dante and Petrarch, into his sonnets in honor of Simonetta in order to posthumously transform her into a symbol of Tuscany.  

Simonetta thus represents the preeminence of Florentine intellectual superiority, past and present.

The inclusion of the cameo, I propose, may also configure the sitter as a fusion of Lorenzo’s two loves; Lucrezia and Simonetta, with a nod to Laura herself. Lorenzo wrote in his *Commento* that his love for Simonetta ultimately led him to his true love. In Allan’s words: “Simonetta is, then, the ‘stella di Venere’ to Lucrezia’s ‘novello sole’, a star that announces the arrival of the Sun and then dies once this duty has been fulfilled.” Simonetta represents Lorenzo’s more mature, politically-minded approach to the beloved tradition, while Lucrezia is associated with the chivalric follies of his youth. Interestingly, however, contemporary poetry also anachronistically presented Simonetta as Lorenzo’s first love and Lucrezia as his second love after Simonetta’s death. Although the joust in honor of Lucrezia was a public event, and thus Lorenzo’s contemporaries knew the actual chronology of the relationships, Lorenzo nonetheless

124 Ibid, 54.
125 There is evidence to suggest that Lorenzo had more than a political interest in Simonetta. His concern during her illness and decision to send private doctors to her bedside and check on her condition on a daily basis has led Geronimus and others to believe he had real feelings for the Florentine beauty and therefore his poems were not entirely contrived. For the entire argument refer to Geronimus, *Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange*, 65.
posthumously claimed Simonetta as his youthful muse and Lucrezia was refashioned into his more mature, deeper love. Because Simonetta was safely removed to heaven where she could no longer be a threat to his reputation or to his relationship with his brother, Lorenzo could cunningly use her to demonstrate his Petrarchan journey from innocent young lover to serious Neo-Platonic beloved.

Recently Giovanna Lazzi and Paola Ventrone suggested that the Petrarchan events planned in honor of Lucrezia and Marietta earlier in the century gave the women more public visibility than was customary. This may well have been the impetus for Lorenzo’s focus on Simonetta after her death, when their relationship was safely removed from social impropriety. It also allowed Lorenzo, Poliziano, and others to mold her image according to Lorenzo’s political agenda and to present her as a universal Florentine beloved. She became a symbol of the flourishing literary and visual arts under the Medici’s influence.

Lorenzo loved the two most beautiful women in Florentine history, wrote sonnets in their honor, and ultimately brought glory to his city through his own poetic talent and the commission of a Beloved Portrait, just as Petrarch did before him. If my reading is correct, then the portrait would be the ultimate in Petrarchan Medici paragone and function simultaneously as a representation of Laura, Lucrezia, Simonetta, Daphne, and Minerva as well as Petrarch, Lorenzo, Giuliano, and Apollo. Given the Medici penchant for multiple, metaphoric meanings and name punning in their visual culture, this would

have delighted the assumed audience for the portrait and exhibited Botticelli’s sophisticated awareness of the Beloved Portrait genre.

**Simonetta as an Object of Desire**

A later dating of Botticelli’s portrait would make it contemporary or slightly later than another enigmatic portrait associated with Simonetta created in the early 1480s. Piero di Cosimo’s fantastical *Portrait of a Woman*, presumed to be Simonetta based on an inscription at the bottom of the painting, perhaps best represents the eroticized Petrarchan ideal in the late fifteenth century and is most closely linked in style and content to Botticelli’s Frankfurt portrait (fig. 102). The painting portrays a bare breasted Simonetta in left-facing profile with an asp around her long, white neck. Her hair, like in Botticelli’s portrait, is wrapped in an elaborate coiffure of golden braids, pearls, silk, and gems, and her only covering is a printed scarf that drapes across her right shoulder and a gold chain into which the serpent is intertwined.

Though art historians like Jennifer Craven have argued that Piero di Cosimo’s portrait represents a fantastical ideal, I propose that she is instead a Petrarchan Laura. Laura’s liminality as both a proper woman and a sensuous temptress, I believe, allowed Renaissance artists like Piero di Cosimo to take artistic liberties with idealized Petrarchan beauties. Not only did Laura straddle various facets of feminine ideals in the sonnets,

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129 It is odd that Vasari did not identify the sitter as Simonetta nor mentions the inscription since he identifies her as Giuliano’s *inamorata* in Botticelli’s painting. Though scholars have explained Vasari’s omission by assuming the inscription was added at a later date, an examination of the inscription in 1971 dated it to the original composition. The craquelure pattern matches the rest of the painting and the roman lettering associates it with Roman funerary sculpture. Geronimus dates the painting stylistically to the early 1480s. For more on this see Geronimus, *Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange*, 56-62.
from virginal to erotic, lingering doubts about whether she was a real woman or a fictitious character allowed her physical appearance to be eroticized without the risk of impropriety. This would have given Piero a Petrarchan foundation for interpreting her in the nude. Furthermore, when considered in a Neo-Platonic context, the nude female form in the guise of a goddess or historical figure was meant to lead the male viewer to the contemplation of the divine. Such an image, if meant to be a mythologized portrait rather than a true likeness, would have been acceptable in the context of its erudite audience.

Dennis Geronimus identified the inclusion of a golden chain in the portrait as a pun on Simonetta’s name, Cattaneo, which is similar to the Italian word for chain (catena). This had Medici connotations as well since an alliance between the Vespucci and the Cattaneo gave the Medici access to the iron mines of Elba via the Appiani lords related to Simonetta’s brother-in-law. Adding another dimension to the visual symbolism in the portrait, the vespaio in her hair refers to her maiden name, Vespucci, just as it did in Botticelli’s Frankfurt portrait. And like Botticelli who used golden braids to suggest a visual connection between his sitter and Laura, so, too, does Piero di Cosimo portray his sitter’s hair in a fantastical web of braids, similar to Leonardo da Vinci’s circa 1504-8 Studies for the Head of Leda (fig. 103) now in the collection of Windsor Castle.

Simonetta’s elaborate hairstyle is all the more accentuated by her comparatively bare bust. This nudity, according to Geronimus, was only possible because it was a posthumous image, meant for the private chamber or antechamber of the presumably male patron.130

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130 Ibid, 55-59. Though Petrarch carried Laura’s portrait in a very personal way, Renaissance Beloved Portraits, Wright argues, were intended for a much more public audience. Fifteenth century portraits of women were typically hung in the bed chambers of a palazzo, yet these spaces were not as intimate as the name suggests. In fact, these spaces often held the most prized objects in a patrician family’s home and
The inclusion of the snake and pearls has led many art historians to read Piero’s portrait as a metaphor for Cleopatra. Comparisons have been made to her hairstyle and a later presentation drawing of Cleopatra by Michelangelo (fig. 104), for example, yet the visual evidence is loose at best.\textsuperscript{131} According to Geronimus the portrait lacks the iconography that would typically be found in an image of Cleopatra, including a crown, servants, and figs. The snake, as well, does not appear aggressive in Piero’s painting it is typically would have been shown in a painting of Cleopatra on the brink of suicide.\textsuperscript{132} This is because the serpent in Piero’s portrait functions instead as both an apotropaic symbol and a metaphor for lust.\textsuperscript{133} Piero’s Simonetta, Geronimus concluded, “is closest to the idea of the poetic muse, donna ispiratrice, an intensely poetic evocation akin to Dante’s Beatrice Portinari, Petrarch’s Laura or Lorenzo de’ Medici’s own Lucrezia Donati.”\textsuperscript{134}
In support of Geronimus’s theory, I am the first to provide a visual analysis of Piero’s portrait and Simonetta’s fashioning in fifteenth-century literature, coupled with visual evidence from Antonio Grifo’s almost contemporary illuminated manuscript. I propose Cosimo’s Simonetta is fact intended to represent Petrarch’s lust for Laura in the Canzoniere. The snake thus provides a visual fusion of Petrarchan metaphors associated with Laura and Simonetta. It is simultaneously a symbol of Petrarch’s lust, Laura’s sensuality both inviting and dangerous, and a reminder of Simonetta’s association with Medusa in Botticelli’s imagery for the joust. Simonetta’s association with Minerva also had Petrarchian connotations. In Petrarch’s Triumph of Chastity, Laura is presented as Minerva protecting herself from Cupid’s arrows: “Her armour was a robe more white than snow;/ And in her hand a shield like his she bare/ Who slew Medusa.” Thus the snake in Piero’s painting can be interpreted through various Petrarchan lenses.

That the snake is used throughout Antonio Grifo’s manuscript as a symbol of Petrarch and his lust for his beloved is further proof of a visual relationship between the painting and the manuscript image. Though Grifo’s manuscript was completed in the late 1490s at the court of Ludovico Sforza and Beatrice d’Este, his handwritten inscription claims that he has completed his book at the request of his “Alma Minerva” (presumably Beatrice d’Este). This suggests that when he arrived in Milan he had already begun the illuminations, perhaps by the time he passed through Florence as a member of Roberto Sanseverino’s entourage. Grifo’s relationship with the famous Venetian condottiere and

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his family, I believe, may be the link between the poet and the Florentine influence on his images of Laura in the _Canzoniere_.

Though his biography is patchy at best, Antonio Grifo began following Roberto Sanseverino in the 1480s after he was exiled from his native Venice for a now unknown cause. Though he was a poet by trade, Grifo was also recognized for his success in a joust held in Padua in 1446, which undoubtedly ingratiated him to the famous military family. 136 Roberto commanded the Venetian troops from 1482 to 87 during which time Grifo likely accompanied Sanseverino to Florence where he would have been acquainted with Roberto’s ally, Lorenzo de’ Medici and his court. 137 Roberto’s relationship with the Medici was long established by the time Grifo was in Roberto’s employ. In fact, Lorenzo’s prized court poet and the author of _La giostra di Lorenzo de’ Medici_, Luigi Pulci, joined Roberto’s entourage in 1473 with Lorenzo’s blessing and remained in Roberto’s employ until his death in 1484. This adds another dimension to Grifo’s access to and the potential influence of Florentine models on his Petrarchan imagery. 138 Grifo would have likely seen in person (or at very least heard a description of) the few

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137 Ibid, 156.
138 An interesting visual comparison can be made between Botticelli’s images of his Petrarchan Simonetta and his drawings for Dante’s _Divina Commedia_ commissioned between circa 1480 and 1495, presumably by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici. Though Beatrice is portrayed by Botticelli as an idealized beauty, she is both literally and figuratively elevated about everyone else, either sitting on a chariot as she does in his image of _Purgatorio XXXI_, or seeming to float above _Dante in Paradiso II_. Unlike the images of Simonetta/Laura, Beatrice wears a flowing gown and laurel crown throughout the book, focusing the viewer’s attention not on her earthly beauty, but on her otherworldly angelic qualities. Antonio Grifo also illustrated a copy of the _Divina Commedia_, now in the Casa di Dante Rome. I plan to further investigate a relationship between Botticelli and Grifo’s illustrations in a future publication. Two excellent publications of the drawings with scholarly commentary are found in Hein-th. Schulze Alcappenberg, ed. _Sandro Botticelli: The Drawings for the Divine Comedy_, published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, shown at the Ausstellungshallen am Kulturforum in Berlin; the Royal Academy of Arts in London; and the Scuderie Papali al Quirinale in Rome (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2000); Sebastiano Gentile, ed. _Sandro Botticelli: Pittore della Divina Commedia_, 2 vols., published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, shown at the Ausstellungshallen am Kulturforum in Berlin; the Royal Academy of Arts in London; and the Scuderie Papali al Quirinale in Rome (Milan: Skira, 2000).
Petrarchan Beloved Portraits circulating at the Medici court in the early 1480s, including Verrocchio’s now lost portrait bust of Lucrezia Donati, Botticelli’s Portrait of Simonetta Vespucci, Leonardo’s Portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci, and the various Petrarchan portraits of real women by Pollaiuolo and others. He may also have seen at least the beginning stages of Botticelli’s Primavera (circa 1482) and Birth of Venus (circa 1484-86). Visual evidence of his knowledge of Botticelli’s work is provided in folio 42 verso of Grifo’s incunable in which he portrays Laura bathing in the nude under a fountain of falling red flowers (fig. 45). Laura’s golden hair cascades over her bare shoulders and her right hand rests under her left breast while her left hand holds out a veil of diaphanous material. Similarly, in Botticelli’s Birth of Venus, Venus stands in the nude with her right hand on her left breast and her left hand pulls her long golden hair over her private parts (fig. 97). On her right, the god of wind blows a scattered bouquet of flowers in her direction.

Though the images are not exact, the similarities are undeniable. In fact, it seems impossible that Grifo was unaware of Botticelli’s painting and its visual program when he composed his image. By visually quoting Botticelli, Grifo advertised his own erudition and sophistication while reminding the reader of Petrarch’s comparison of Laura to classical beauties like Pygmalion’s Venus. Simonetta, according to her own “words” in Poliziano’s poem, was “born in the lap of Venus.” Thus the visual relationship between Grifo’s Laura and Botticelli’s Venus should not be dismissed. The poet’s fusion of the goddess and Laura in the manner of Botticelli, occurred during a time when Simonetta reigned as the most idealized Florentine Petrarchan beauty.

Furthermore, Grifo and Luigi Pulci, were both employed by Roberto Sanseverino, Geronimus, Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange, 65.
making a connection between Grifo’s book and the painted images of Simonetta all the more convincing.\textsuperscript{140} The likelihood that Grifo was acquainted with these paintings, especially images associated with Simonetta Vespucci, is further strengthened by the poetic role of Luigi Pulci’s brother, Bernardo, in memorializing her as the ultimate Florentine Petrarchan beauty in his funeral elegy.

Piero di Cosimo was acquainted with Roberto Sanseverino, and according to Vasari, painted a portrait of him while assisting Cosimo Rosselli with his fresco of the \textit{Crossing of the Sea} in the Sistine Chapel circa 1480 to 81.\textsuperscript{141} Therefore, Grifo would have likely met the artist when they passed through Florence. Without documented evidence it is impossible to be sure whether Grifo was acquainted with Botticelli or Piero di Cosimo while in Florence, but the iconographic relationship between Grifo’s use of the unusual snake symbol to represent Petrarch and Piero’s equally strange incorporation of the serpent in his Petrarchan portrait begs further investigation. Perhaps Grifo brought his then partially illustrated incunable to Florence with him and showed it to the artist? Or did Piero’s portrait inspire Grifo’s creation of the symbol? In either instance, the prominent inclusion of a snake in both works, each related to Petrarchan subject matter, cannot be accidental.\textsuperscript{142}

Laura is also shown in the guise of Venus in a slightly later Florentine book of the \textit{Canzoniere}, now in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Rome (fig. 105). In this early

\textsuperscript{140} To fully explore Grifo’s time in Florence and his possible relationships with the Medici and their painters I will need to do archival research that will not be possible in the scope of this dissertation but I plan to pursue the topic at a later date.

\textsuperscript{141} Geronimus, \textit{Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange}, 35.

\textsuperscript{142} I intend to explore this further after completion of this dissertation. Baccio Baldini’s engraving of two Petrarchan lovers, possibly Lorenzo and Lucrezia, which was discussed earlier, also employs the snake device, but this seems to be more as a moralistic warning to the lovers below than a reference to Petrarch himself. Furthermore, both artists depict Laura in the nude. This, again, is extremely rare in fifteenth-century Petrarchan imagery and suggests a relationship between the portrait and the incunable.
sixteenth-century book Petrarch and Laura are shown nude, facing one another in the centerfold. The full-length figures are drawn in silverpoint on red prepared paper and labels above each figure identify them as Petrarch and Laura. The bow in Petrarch’s hand and python wrapped around his arm represent Petrarch’s classical persona as Apollo as doves link Laura to Venus. Though the manuscript dates to December 1444, predating Grifo’s illustrations by at least fifty years, the center images are likely contemporary to Grifo’s or added at the beginning of the sixteenth century.\(^\text{143}\) The similarities between the images of Laura in each book are so striking, and so unusual in the context of contemporary Petrarchan iconography, it brings into question whether these two images were related and/or whether Laura’s visual identification with Venus was more prevalent than we have previously believed.

I propose that the Petrarchan use of the snake imagery is borrowed from another passage in the *Metamorphoses*. In the story, the infant Apollo kills the Oracle of Delphi who is disguised as a python. After killing the Python with a bow and arrow, Apollo tells Cupid that the weapon is not suitable to such a “lascivious boy” and that he should instead use his torch to kindle love affairs.\(^\text{144}\) Cupid is so outraged by Apollo’s insult that he shoots Apollo with a golden arrow of love and simultaneously pierces Daphne with one that provokes her to flee his advances. The inclusion of the snake, therefore, in Piero di Cosimo’s *Portrait of Simonetta*, Grifo’s incunable, and the Florentine manuscript image of Petrarch as Apollo is a conflation of Apollo’s association with the python and Petrarch’s lust for Laura.

\(^{143}\) Trapp, “Petrarch’s Laura: The Portraiture of an Imaginary Beloved,” 87.
\(^{144}\) Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 34.
The serpent’s inclusion in Piero’s portrait also figures Simonetta as both Petrarch/Lauro’s Laura and Apollo/Lorenzo’s Daphne. If both portraits indeed portray Simonetta in the guise of Laura/Daphne, Piero’s inclusion of the snake would have been a more sophisticated and lesser known way to identify his sitter metaphorically. Renaissance artists and patrons enjoyed double entendre and would have easily recognized the dual meaning of the snake as a symbol of Petrarch’s lust and Apollo’s imminent pursuit of Daphne. When considered along with Grifo’s incunable, Botticelli’s standard, Poliziano’s giostra, and Simonetta’s posthumous association with the nymph Daphne, Piero di Cosimo’s strange iconography begins to be elucidated. Simonetta’s pose hides her lethal gaze from her lover, and the snake around her neck protects her chastity, just as Medusa’s shield protected Simonetta/Athena/Minerva on Botticelli’s standard.

Dennis Geronimus speculated that either Lorenzo de’ Medici or his ward, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici was the likely patron of Piero’s painting. Jennifer Craven-Madani has also proposed that the portrait was commissioned in order to symbolize the finally requited love between a Medici and a Cattaneo after the untimely deaths of Simonetta and Giuliano. Significantly, Pierfrancesco’s personal emblem was the serpent, as is seen on a commemorative medal of circa 1495/6 from the circle of Niccolò di Forzore Spinelli (fig. 106). This, as Geronimus I think rightly stresses, likely identified Pierfrancesco as the patron or recipient of the portrait. Furthermore, Grifo’s

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145 Pierfrancesco has also been identified as the patron of Botticelli’s aforementioned paintings of The Birth of Venus and La Primavera though recent scholarship disputes this association. For a complete discussion of this see Lightbown, Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work, 120-52. Pierfrancesco was wed to Simonetta’s niece, Semiramide d’Appiano in July of 1482, and Lorenzo provided the dowry of 2000 florins. For details see Geronimus, Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange, 65-66.
146 ———, Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange, 66.
use of the device throughout his *Canzoniere* provides visual proof that the snake was unmistakably associated with Petrarch as Laura’s beloved. The serpent around Simonetta’s neck, therefore, wittily identified Pierfrancesco as a beloved in the tradition of the great Medici Petrarchan lovers, Lorenzo and Giuliano before him. If Pierfrancesco was the beloved, he is now painted into the portrait, and literally claims his lady by wrapping himself around her long, Petrarchan neck. This could metaphorically be read as the ultimate Florentine Petrarchan conquest: a beloved able to consummate his relationship with his Laura, and a Medici able to wed a Cattaneo.

Geronimus provided visual evidence of another convincing argument for a Petrarchan reading of the portrait. Piero’s panel painting depicting an *Allegory of Chastity Triumphing over Lust* (fig. 107) was, he speculated, originally intended to be paired with Simonetta’s portrait as either a backing or a cover. The two paintings are compatible both in size and subject matter. Such a cover for Piero’s portrait would have allowed the painting to close and thus conceal the nude image. Pairing an *Allegory of Chastity* with Simonetta’s portrait, would, of course, have commented upon Botticelli’s standard and Poliziano’s description of her as Pallas Athena, as well as the slew of posthumous poems that presented her as a model of chastity and Petrarchan perfection. It would have also visually recorded the complicated dichotomy between Laura’s seductive beauty and her chaste virtue. In a *paragone* between painting and poetry, Piero would have been the victor with his clever ability to present a woman who is at once alluring and unavailable. He would have created a mythical representation of the greatest loves of

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147 Ibid, 71.
148 Ibid.
the greatest Florentine poets, and at the same time a celebration of his presumed patron’s ultimate conquest by turning his beloved into his bride.

After Lorenzo de’ Medici’s death in 1492, his son, Piero II was unable to sustain Medici rule, and the family was exiled by the Florentine Republic from 1494 to 1512. During this period Florentine artists migrated to other cities to find patronage for their work, primarily Milan, Rome, and Venice. With their migration, Florentine artistic styles spread throughout Italy, including the Petrarchan ideal and the Beloved Portrait tradition. Like Petrarchan manuscript illumination, different city-states interpreted the Beloved Portrait according to their own cultural and political agendas and aesthetic tastes, yet at the core of the tradition remained the spirit of competition and paragone that started at Lorenzo’s court.

**From Lorenzo to Ludovico**

The last, documented fifteenth-century Beloved Portrait was commissioned by a Milanese Duke from a Florentine artist. In 1482, Leonardo da Vinci went to work for Ludovico Sforza upon the recommendation of Lorenzo de’ Medici. At Ludovico’s court he painted a portrait of the Duke’s mistress, Cecilia Gallerani, produced between 1488 and 1490 (fig. 62).¹⁴⁹ Ludovico and Lorenzo were friends and allies in 1470 when Ludovico and his brother Galeazzo Maria were the guests of the Medici. An exchange of letters between the rulers in 1487 reveals that Lorenzo was aware of Ludovico’s affair

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¹⁴⁹ The portrait was the focus of a 1998 exhibition held at the Palazzo Queriniale in Rome, the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, and the Palazzo Pitti in Florence. See Marani, *Leonardo: La dama con l’ermellino*. It was more recently included in an exhibition held in Berlin in 2011- Weppelman, *Gesichter der Renaissance Meisterwerke italienische Portrait-Kunst*, 70-76.
with Cecilia and he sympathized with Ludovico’s plight. The fact that Ludovico confided this to Lorenzo clearly meant he knew he would find a sympathetic listener in the Medici romantic.

Not only did Ludovico confide in his friend Lorenzo, he also consciously borrowed the Florentine Beloved Portrait tradition for a painting of his beloved Cecilia. It cannot be accidental that he chose Leonardo, a Florentine artist already associated with the tradition, rather than a Milanese court portraitist, when commissioning the portrait. It was also Leonardo’s friend, Bernardo Bellincioni, a Florentine poet working at the Sforza court, not a Milanese equivalent, who wrote Petrarchan sonnets in honor of the painting and the skill of the painter. In one poem Bellincioni refers to Leonardo as the “nuovo Apelli di Firenze (new Apelles of Florence)” and in another he specifically mentions Cecilia’s portrait:

Nature, with whom are you angry, whom do you envy?  
It is Vinci who has portrayed one of your stars!  
Cecilia, so very beautiful today, is the one  
Beside whose beautiful eyes the sun appears as a dark shadow.

The honour is due to you [Nature], even though with his painting  
She seems as if she would listen and not chatter.  
Consider, to the extent that she will still be alive and beautiful,  
The more will be your glory in future ages.

Give thanks then to Ludovico, or more  
To the ingegno and hand of Lionardo, which permit you to participate in posterity.  

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150 ([Lo pregava di felicitarlo a suo nome e di non] ‘se alienare per caso nessuno da questo gentile proposito, ancora che qualche volta diversi accidenti potessino turbare il content et piacere suo.) Walter and Zapperi, Il ritratto dell’amata: storie d’amore da Petrarca a Tiziano, 46.

151 Martin Kemp, Behind the Picture: Art and Evidence in the Italian Renaissance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 246. (Di chi t’adiri? A chi invidia hai Natura?/ Al Vinci che ha ritratto una tua stella:/ Cecilia si belissima oggi è quella/ Che a’ suoi begli occhi el sol par ombra’ scura./ L’honor è tuo, se ben con sua pittura/ La fa che par che scolti, e non favela./ Pensa, quanto sarà più viva e bella/ Più a te sia gioia in ogni età future./ Ringratiar dunque Ludovico or puoi/ Et l’ingegno e la man di Leonardo,/ che a’ posteri di lei voglion far parte.) For the complete Italian text see Bernardo Bellincioni, Le rime di
Bellincioni was a master of Petrarch’s sonnets and well aware of the paragone of the arts. First, he likens Cecilia’s seeming ability to hear with Petrarch’s description of Simone’s portrait in Sonnet 78 when he claims: “And then when I begin to speak to her,/ most kindly she appears to hear me speak—/ if only she could answer what I say!” He further intertwines the Petrarchan sun and star metaphors into his poem and emphasizes her beauty. His contribution to the paragone, however, comes from his championing of Leonardo’s ability to bring her eternal life with his painted portrait, as opposed to Petrarch’s assertion that only words can give Laura lasting fame. Furthermore, he positions Leonardo as superior to Ludovico in the final lines of this poem. This is a bold claim that Leonardo’s role in painting the portrait is even more important than Ludovico’s role as her beloved and the presumed patron of the painting.

Just as with his Portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci, in Cecilia’s portrait Leonardo accentuates rather than hides his sitter’s hands in order to imbue his painting with sensuality. This was no doubt because Cecilia Gallerani was not a young marriageable woman, but was instead Ludovico Sforza’s mistress and the mother of his soon-to-be-born son, Cesare. In the portrait Cecilia looks to her left and strokes a live white ermine with her right hand and her beautiful long white neck and exaggerated fingers visually parallel the weasel’s stretched features.153

Though Cecilia’s hand is bare, the veiling and unveiling of the hand with a glove is another Petrarchan conceit that is featured prominently in sixteenth-century

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152 Petrarch, Petrarca’s Canzoniere, 130-31. (Ma poi ch’i’vengo a ragionar con lei,/ benignamente assai par che m’ascolte:/ se responder savesse a’ detti miei!)  
153 Followers of Leonardo painted similar portraits of women holding animals in the style of Cecilia. Lorenzo Costa, for example, painted a portrait of Woman with a Dog, now in the Royal Collection at Hampton Court.
Renaissance portraiture. In addition to multiple mentions of Laura’s hands, Petrarch dedicated an entire poem to a description of her hand and the glove that hides it from his gaze.

O lovely hand that squeezes my heart tight,
enclosing in so little space my life,
hand upon which all art and care was spent
by Nature and by Heaven for its praise

with your five pearls of oriental hue
whose only bitter cruelty is to wound me,
those fingers long and soft which naked now
luckily Love shows me for my enrichment.

Pure white and gaily light, dear glove
that covers polished ivory and fresh roses,
who ever saw on earth such gracious spoils?

Would that I had as much of her fair veil?
O the inconstancy of human things!
But this is theft, and must be taken back.\textsuperscript{154}

He then lamented in Sonnet 200 that her “one lovely, naked hand/ that clothes itself again to my deep sorrow” is no longer visible.\textsuperscript{155} Gloves had long been a part of the chivalric tradition of courtly flirtation, and the inclusion of gloved hands in various states of “undress” was a favorite visual metaphor for Renaissance artists. Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones discuss the glove as a metaphor in Renaissance art and literature. An empty glove, they argue, was a vessel waiting to be filled by a human hand, and thus became a sexually-charged metaphor: gloves (and shoes) conform to the shape and smells

\textsuperscript{154} Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 290-91. \textit{(O bella man che mi destringi ‘core/ e ’n poco spazio la mia vita chiusi,/ man ov’ ogni arte et tutti loro studi/ poser Natura e ’l Ciel per farsi onore,/ di cinque perle oriental colore,/ et sol ne le mie piaghe acerbi et crudi,/ diti schietti soave, a tempo ignudi/ consente or voi per arricchirme Amore./ Cadido leggiadretto et caro guanto/ che copria netto avorio et fresche rose:/ chi vide al mondo mai si dolci spoglie?/ Cosi avess’ io del velo velo altrettanto!)}

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid. \textit{(Quell’ una bella ignuda mano/ che con grave mio danno si riveste….)}
of the body, thus imbuing them with sensual qualities. Following Derridean logic, Stallybrass and Jones read the lone, unpaired glove as a fetish because it no longer is a functional object and therefore is only important as an item that arouses the viewer’s sexual desire. The glove, therefore, can be read on multiple levels in these paintings, communicating the sitter’s social standing, an implied courtly ritual such as the kissing of a hand or the dropping of a glove, or perhaps the underlying sensuality of the naked hand and its actions within the painting.

In Parmigianino’s portrait of the courtesan, Antea (fig. 108), for example, the subject’s dark-gloved right hand is a stark contrast to the long white fingers that intertwine with her necklace just below her bust. In her left hand she holds her other glove, and a fur stole rests over her shoulder with the mouth of the weasel appearing to nip at her fingers. The “unveiling” of her right hand is classically Petrarchan in its suggestiveness, though it does not necessarily identify the sitter as a courtesan as some have proposed. The gloves do, however, seem to act as a fetish, with the pairing of one active and one limp glove in the sitter’s right hand; the opposite naked hand placed below her bust; and the mouth of the weasel resting on her gloved finger as his sharp teeth appear to bite the chain hooked inside the animal’s mouth. The weasel’s head and the chain dangling from her cintura, or girdle, both point toward her pubic area, as does her gloved pointer finger. Whether these visual cues identify her as Parmigianino’s mistress Antea, as scholars such as Lynne Lawner have suggested, or more subtly categorize her

157 Ibid, 123.
158 The chain was most likely attached to a ring in the weasel’s mouth that hung from the girdle and often was attached to gems or enamels and sometimes a glass or enamel head. Girdles were associated with marriage and childbirth and often given as a gift to a bride from her groom. See Jacqueline Musacchio, “Weasels and Pregnancy in Renaissance Italy,” Renaissance Studies 15, no. 2 (June 2001), 177 and 84.
as an anonymous beloved, there is little doubt that that the artist’s inclusion of the fetishized glove and strategically placed hands and ermine was intentionally meant to provide a sexual subtext in the painting. Considering the relationship between weasels and pregnancy in Renaissance art, it begs the question of whether Antea’s fur stole can be read as a symbol in her painting. Perhaps the weasel’s aggressive, biting teeth can be read as a cautionary tale if Antea is, in fact, Parmigianino’s mistress or a beloved courtesan? Since the animal’s teeth skim the chain of her girdle and its head overlaps with her unworn glove, this may also be read as a reference to her sensuality and the potential for an unwanted pregnancy in her line of work.

The weasel, also called an ermine, in Cecilia Gallerani’s portrait is also sexually charged as is her bare hand that strokes its fur. Since J.C Holmes first noted the connection with Cecilia’s name and the Greek word for weasel and ermine, γαλή (galle) in 1907, art historians have generally agreed that Leonardo intended for the ermine to “name” Cecilia in her portrait. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, this was not an uncommon practice in the Renaissance and Leonardo was one of the earliest artists to use name puns in his paintings. Further drawing a visual connection between Cecilia and beast is the fact that they are painted in the same three-quarter pose with shining amber eyes and long necks.

159 For more on Lynne Lawner’s argument see Lawner, Lives of the Courtesans: Portraits of the Renaissance, 123-27.
160 Cesare was born in May of 1491 after Ludovico was wed to Beatrice d’Este earlier that year. Though he was not legitimate, Ludovico recognized him as his son and provided for Cesare and Cecilia. See Musacchio, "Weasels and Pregnancy in Renaissance Italy," 173.
Though she is not a courtesan like Antea, the weasel/ermine’s association with pregnancy and childbirth through Ovidian legend is also relevant in Cecilia’s portrait.\textsuperscript{161} Jupiter had an affair with a mortal woman, Alcmene, resulting in the birth of their son Hercules. Jupiter’s wife, Juno, was so enraged by his adultery that she transformed Alcmena into a weasel and forced her to give birth from her mouth for the rest of her life.\textsuperscript{162} Furthermore, the animal was a symbol of chastity, purity, and moderation, three highly valued feminine traits.\textsuperscript{163} This myth not only linked weasels to childbirth, it also mythologized the weasel’s ability to conceive through the ear and birth through the mouth, thus suggesting the animal was able to procreate in a miraculous, non-sexual manner.\textsuperscript{164}

Cecilia was likely pregnant with Ludovico Sforza’s child at the time the portrait was painted, and Jacqueline Musacchio interpreted the inclusion of the ermine as a reference to her physical state and a talisman for a healthy birth. Musacchio also supported the theory first proposed by Carlo Pedretti in 1990 that the ermine is meant to refer to Ludovico, as the ruler was invested with the Order of the Ermine in 1486 by the King of Naples, and was sometimes referred to as “L’ermellino.”\textsuperscript{165} Ludovico adopted the animal as one of his personal emblems, evidenced by a model for a medal he had

\textsuperscript{161} In 1995, Krystyna Moczulska was the first to propose a relationship between the myth and the ermine in Cecilia’s portrait. See Krystyna Moczulska, “Najpiekniejsza Gallerani i najdoskonalsza Galen w portrecie namalowanym przez Leonardo da Vinci ” Folio Historiae Atrium 1 (1995).

\textsuperscript{162} Musacchio, “Weasels and Pregnancy in Renaissance Italy,” 180. Ovid was not the only teller of this myth. Variations were also recorded by Antonious Liberalis, Pausanias, and Homer. For a recent in-depth discussion of this myth see Maurizio Bettini, Women & Weasels: Mythologies of Birth in Ancient Greece and Rome (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

\textsuperscript{163} Musacchio, “Weasels and Pregnancy in Renaissance Italy,” 174. Emil Möller initially made the connection in 1916 and many scholars have since agreed.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid, 181-82.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid, 174.
designed in honor of his investiture. Bellincioni even referred to Ludovico as “Italico Morel, bianco Ermellino” (Italian Moor, white Ermine). The dominant role of the animal in the painting and the tender way in which Cecilia strokes its fur and cradles it in her arms, must certainly refer to her intimate relationship with L’ermellino and her cherished position as his favorite, in spite of the fact that Ludovico had been wed to Beatrice d’Este pro verba since 1480 and officially married her January 16, 1491. It could even be, as Musacchio proposed, a double portrait of Cecilia and her lover, made more convincing because of the inclusion of a live ermine during a time when contemporary portraits only depicted them as decorative furs.

Recently Stefan Weppelmann disputed the association between the ermine and Ludovico in Cecilia’s portrait. He argued that, though Ludovico adopted the ermine as one of his devices, he would never have agreed to have himself depicted as an animal “captured” by his lover. Furthermore, he read Cecilia’s grip on the ermine as appearing to hold the ermine with the intention of letting it go at any moment rather than stroking it as previous scholars have interpreted the gesture. While it is reasonable to question whether Ludovico would have allowed himself to be shown as an ermine in the arms of his mistress, I disagree with Weppelmann’s reading of the portrait. First, it

166 Ibid. Leonardo also drew an Allegory of the Ermine, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, and mentioned the animal three times in Manuscript H dating to c. 1494. Leonardo was interested in the weasel’s choice of a clear coat over a meal in the mud. For more on this see Janice Shell and Grazioso Sironi, “Cecilia Gallerani: Leonardo’s Lady with an Ermine,” Artibus et historiae 13, no. 25 (1992), 52-53.
168 This portrait, according to Pietro Marani, was likely meant to be hung in a private or semi-private space, thus allowing for the more sensual depiction of Cecilia. See ———, Leonardiana: Studi e saggi su Leonardo da Vinci (Milan: Skira Editore, 2010), 134-35.
170 Ibid, 70.
seems unlikely that the ermine was literally meant to represent Ludovico; rather that Ludovico would be associated with one of its many meanings. Moreover, Cecilia does not, to me, appear to be uneasy with the animal in her arms. On the contrary, while she does not display overt affection for the animal, neither does she seem willing to let it out of her arms. If, as Weppelmann suggested, the ermine’s sole purpose was to represent Cecilia as a personification of the ermine and by extension “Cecilia becomes the desired prey [of] Ludovico the hunter,” why would she protect her role as a hunted animal by holding the symbol against her chest?  

During a period ripe with metaphoric associations at a court known for wordplay and a penchant for heraldic symbolism and given what we know about Leonardo’s intellectual approach to his work, Weppelmann’s dismissal of the multivalent function of the weasel is not convincing. He writes: “Leaving aside supposed wordplays on the name Cecilia Gallerani and fanciful associations of the ermine with Ludovico il Moro, the animal can simply be seen as an attribute of the subject herself, as is common in both painted and medallic portraits. The ermine represents Cecilia’s inner nature, which she ‘carries’ and displays along with her beauty.” The ermine must certainly refer to Cecilia’s character, but since Leonardo’s audience was a learned one and thus aware of the other associations with the animal, how can we dismiss their symbolic messages? Weppelmann’s observation that the ermine’s pose is reminiscent of a heraldic device is, I think, a good one, and supports rather than negates its function as a representation of Ludovico, in my opinion. Leonardo brings Ludovico’s device alive with the inclusion of the ermine just as he illuminates the painting with Cecilia’s inner character. To me, this

171 Ibid, 74.
172 Ibid.
suggests a complicated *paragone* between painting and nature, and a comment on the ability of painting to enliven heraldic symbols in a way never seen in manuscript illumination.

Considering the context of the painting, Leonardo’s role at the Sforza court, and his relationship with both Cecilia and Ludovico, I offer another reading of the ermine. While Musacchio recounts the Ovidian story of Alcmena and her transformation into a weasel by the jealous Juno, she does not mention the connection between this myth and the Virgin’s virginal conception through her ear.173 David Alan Brown and others have associated Mary’s miraculous pregnancy with the covering of the ears of young women in Renaissance paintings in order to protect their chastity, as is seen for example in Antonio del Pollaiuolo’s mid-1460s *Portrait of a Woman* (fig. 70) in which the artist covered the Virgin’s ear with a veil in order to allude to the belief that she conceived Christ through her ear.174 I propose that the fact that both the weasel/ermine and the Virgin were impregnated through the ear should be considered in a discussion of the relationship between the ermine and Cecilia’s pregnancy.

If, as Moczulska and Musacchio suggest, the ermine refers to the imminent birth of Cecilia and Ludovico’s child, it cannot be dismissed that the child was conceived out of wedlock to the betrothed Regent of Milan. The subtle suggestion that Cecelia, like the ermine, could have been impregnated through divine intervention might function as a subliminal justification of Ludovico’s adultery. At the same time, given our knowledge of Leonardo’s penchant for multivalent and mysterious symbols and his sense of irony, it

173 The myth that Mary conceived Jesus through her ear is derived from psalm 45:10, which instructs Mary to “incline her ear” to God. The earliest evidence of the ear linked to Mary’s virgin conception dates to the seventh century.
174 Brown, *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, 67. The Virgin was told by angels that she would carry the son of God.
is hard to believe Leonardo did not see the humor in his inclusion of the animal for a portrait of his patron’s mistress. Likewise, as a metaphor for her purity and chastity (again, the irony of this would not have been lost upon Leonardo and his circle), the ermine reinforced Cecilia’s reputation as a respectable lady at court. Though most Milanese female portraits of the time necessarily hid the ears of their sitters in order to feature the fashionable hairstyle at court, Cecilia’s hair severely tucks under her chin like a bonnet, rather than for example, the hair seen in a contemporary donor portrait of Beatrice d’Este in the Sforza Altarpiece (fig. 60). If Musacchio is correct in her reading of the weasel as a symbol of Cecilia’s pregnancy, the painting would have to date to late 1489 or early 1490 (Cesare was born in May 1490). By then Leonardo would have been well-aware of the conflict between the two women as he was planning La festa della sua giostra, a festival and tournament hosted by Ludovico’s son-in-law and the head of the Milanese military, Galeazzo Sanseverino, in honor of Ludovico and Beatrice’s marriage.

Finally, given the depth of the ermine metaphor as has been already demonstrated by previous scholarship on the subject, one must consider the role of Ovid’s jealous spouse in the symbolism. If, as is likely, Leonardo painted Cecilia’s portrait in the midst of planning for Beatrice’s arrival at court and Cecilia’s imminent demotion from reigning queen to dismissed mistress, Juno’s jealous transformation of her husband’s mistress into an ermine seems a fitting subtext to the painting.176 There is historical evidence of

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175 The wedding was originally scheduled to take place in 1490 but postponed by Ludovico until January of 1491, perhaps because of his relationship with Cecilia. Leonardo was known for his set and costume design and was hired by Sanseverino to plan the festival. Even if Leonardo had not yet begun preparations for the festival at the time he painted Cecilia’s portrait, he certainly would have been aware of the Ludovico’s relationship with Cecilia and the inevitable problems that would arise after Beatrice’s arrival at court.

Beatrice’s jealousy through the Ferrarese ambassador, Giacomo Trotti. In a letter of November 1490 to Beatrice’s father, Ercole d’Este, Trotti told the Duke that Ludovico did not seem enthusiastic about Beatrice’s arrival at court because he had a mistress living at court who was “beautiful like a flower” and pregnant with Ludovico’s child. Ludovico later promised to Ercole, according to Trotti, to send Cecilia away from court and end their affair, but he continued to see her at her new residence. Nevertheless she was still a visible enough figure at court in 1492 that Beatrice insisted that Cecilia stop wearing a Spanish-styled dress that was similar to one owned by Beatrice, both of which were given to the women by Ludovico. Cecilia was a well-educated poetess in her own right and certainly was well versed in Ovidian myth. Would she and Leonardo (and even Ludovico) have enjoyed the private Ovidian joke inferred by the inclusion of the weasel during a time of inevitable upheaval in their personal world?

Though the Grifo incunable and Cecilia’s portrait were created at the same time and probably commissioned by the same patron, scholars have not previously recognized the relationship between them. After his exile from Venice in the 1470s or 80s, Grifo entered into the service of the famous Venetian condottiere Roberto Sanseverino and his sons. After the death of Roberto, the poet followed his sons, including Galeazzo, to Milan for the wedding of Ludovico and Beatrice in January of 1491. In 1489 Galeazzo was wed to Ludovico’s illegitimate daughter, Bianca Maria, and so his patronage of Grifo would have been well-known at the Sforza court. In 1491 Leonardo stayed as a guest of Galeazzo da Sanseverino to prepare for the festival thrown in honor of the couple by

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177 Ibid, 57. *(Bella come un fiore)*
178 Ibid, 58.
179 Furthermore, Roberto’s mother was the niece of Francesco Sforza and he aligned with Ludovico il Moro in 1479 after Galeazzo’s murder.
Galeazzo and no doubt was acquainted with Grifo upon his arrival in Milan through their mutual patrons. Further supporting their acquaintance is the note in Arundel discussed in the first chapter in which Leonardo refers to “messer Antonio Gri” for whom he designed a costume of gilded peacock feathers for the festival.

Cecilia’s portrait was groundbreaking in its composition, its symbolism, and its naturalism, but most unusual because of its sitter’s relationship to the patron. Cecilia was not a platonic beloved, but rather a recognized mistress of the Regent of Milan. Yet it could be argued that Cecilia had as much an influence on Grifo’s idealized Milanese Laura as Beatrice. Grifo was clearly interested in and aware of regional styles of female portraiture and dress, and he displayed this knowledge throughout his illustrations. Furthermore, he fashioned Laura as a Milanese courtly lady, not a mythic muse or a medieval princess. While there is no direct correlation between the iconography in Cecilia’s portrait and Grifo’s Laura, the poetic heroine is shown repeatedly in the Spanish style worn by Cecilia in her portrait. This dress was the source of the above-mentioned dispute between Cecilia and Beatrice at court.

Grifo’s manuscript is equally as unusual as Leonardo’s portrait in comparison to other contemporary manuscripts of the Canzoniere. Not only does it contain two of only three known images of Laura in the nude, Laura is the central character in the book unlike every other known example. Beatrice was at the center of a dynamic and progressive court that attracted artists and poets from all over Italy, and the Sforza were known for both their love of Petrarch and love of spectacle. Perhaps the Grifo manuscript was accepted in that context because it was so personal and intended for a

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small, erudite audience who would have appreciated the illustrations less for their artistic
merit than for their commentary on the text. And the fact that Grifo illuminated it in his
own hand while simultaneously writing his own commentary in the margins must have
made it a prized possession because of his unusual role as poet, artist, and Petrarchan
expert—the ultimate besting of the *paragone* of the Petrarchan arts. Thus both
Leonardo’s *Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani* and Grifo’s *Canzoniere* were exceptional
objects created for erudite patrons by artists so well-versed in the Petrarchan style that
they were able to push the boundaries of the genre to create something new.

Leonardo’s slightly later (circa 1493-94) portrait of a woman commonly referred
to as *La Belle Ferronière*, has often been linked to another of Ludovico’s mistresses,
Lucrezia Crivelli (fig. 109). This association, though never substantiated, began in the
nineteenth century, based on three Latin epigrams written by Antonio Tebaldeo on the
reverse of a folio 456 verso of Leonardo’s *Codex Atlanticus*. The first epigram
presents an interesting twist on the *paragone* between painting and poetry in Beloved
Portraits:

How well learned art responds to nature.
Vinci might have shown her soul here, as he has
portrayed everything else.
He did not, so that the image might have greater
truth,

182 The sitter is called *La Belle Ferronière* because of her eighteenth century association with a portrait of
Francis I’s mistress as it was in the French royal collection since Francis’s reign. Lucrezia was married to a
courtier working for Bona of Savoy. She bore two sons by Ludovico, Gian Paolo in March of 1497, shortly
124.

183 Carlo Amoretti was the first to connect the poems with Leonardo’s portrait. See Carlo Amoretti,
*Memorie storiche su la vita, gli studi e le opere di Leonardo da Vinci* (Milan: Classici Italiani, 1804), 123-
(<Ut> bene respondet naturae ars docta, dedisset/ Vincius, ut tribuit cetera, sic animam./ Noluit, ut similis
magis haec foret, altera sic est:/ possidet illius Maurus amans animam.) For the original text see Edoardo
1999), 106-07.
For it is thus: her soul belongs to Moro, her lover.¹⁸⁴

Though it is impossible to be sure that the author refers to La Belle Ferronière, the poem nonetheless confirms that Leonardo painted a second Beloved Portrait for Ludovico and his mistress. Furthermore, Tebaldeo cunningly infers that it is by choice that Leonardo does not portray the sitter’s soul in the painting, suggesting that it was within the artist’s abilities to capture the most elusive quality of all without the use of words. Both Martin Kemp and Pietro Marani have also argued that with La Belle Ferronière Leonardo commented on the *paragone* between painting and sculpture by creating a painted sculpture. The painted parapet acts as a plinth and the woman’s pose is suggestive of the three-dimensional qualities of a portrait bust. Leonardo famously took the side of painting in the competition of the arts, arguing that painting could incorporate elements such as light, color and volume into a composition unlike sculpture which relied only on a static, albeit three-dimensional, form. This, according to Leonardo, made painting the superior art form.¹⁸⁵

In the second epigram, Tebaldeo alludes to Bernardo Bellincioni’s sonnets in honor of Cecilia Gallerani’s portrait, thereby comparing Ludovico’s two mistresses as well as the two paintings. He writes:

Surely with this image, the painter has angered
    Nature and the goddesses above.
    Who were distressed that the hand of man can do
        so much.
And that such beauty which should so quickly
    perish
Has been granted immortality.

He offended them for Moro’s sake. Moro will defend him.
Both gods and men fear to anger Moro. 186

Like Bellincioni, Tebaldeo fears Nature will be angry with the artist for having captured her beauty as if she were alive. Both poets praise Leonardo for memorializing the sitter’s beauty for perpetuity and identify her as the property of Ludovico il Moro, against whom neither gods nor men have a chance.

Though Tebaldeo’s epigrams confirm the creation of a Beloved Portrait for Ludovico il Moro’s second mistress, there remains no definitive proof that The Belle Ferronière is the portrait to which Tebaldeo refers. Recently, another interesting theory was posited by Luke Syson in the 2011 catalog for the National Gallery of Art’s exhibition entitled Leonardo da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan. Based on a visual comparison to Gian Cristoforo Romano’s circa 1491 Bust of Beatrice d’Este (fig. 110) and a more dubiously attributed circa 1500-1510 Northern Italian drawing of a woman inscribed “Beatrice d’Este” by a collector in the seventeenth century, now in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Syson speculated that The Belle Ferronière may instead be a posthumous portrait of Beatrice. 187 The sculpture, the drawing, and Leonardo’s portrait all portray a fashionable young woman with her hair pulled back and bound in a style similar to the only secure portrait of Beatrice found in her donor portrait in the Sforza Altarpiece (fig. 60). Unlike Cecilia Gallerani, Syson argues, the Ferronière coolly gazes out at the

186 Keith, Leonardo da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan, 124. (Huius quam cernis nomen Lucretia, divi/omnia cui larga contribuere manu./Rara huic forma data est, pinxit Leonards, amavit/ Maurus, pictorium primus hic, ille ducum./Naturum et superas hac laesit imagine divas/pictor; tantum hominis posse manum haec doluit./ Illae longa dari tam magna tempora formae,/ quae spatio fuerat deperitura brevi./ Hae laesit Mauri causa, defendet et ipsum/ Maurus, Maurum homines laedere dixere timent.)


The bust was created to celebrate Beatrice’s marriage to Ludovico. Sebastiano Resta inscribed the drawing and wrongly attributed it to Leonardo. Though it is not by Leonardo, Syson believes it may, in fact, represent Beatrice.
viewer in a three-quarter pose with her hands tidily hidden beneath the parapet in front of her. She is idealized and beautiful, but lacks the sensuality suggested in Cecilia’s portrait.

Though there is no documentation of Leonardo and Antonio Grifo’s participation in the Beloved Portrait tradition after they left the Sforza court, their contributions to the genre were felt well into the sixteenth century. Beatrice d’Este died in 1497 and Milan was invaded by the French two years later in 1499. Ludovico Sforza was then exiled from Milan and Leonardo headed to Florence. After the invasion, Antonio Grifo also fled Milan presumably alongside the Sanseverino family. Leonardo was later employed by Giuliano de’ Medici, the son of Piero de’ Medici, nephew of Lorenzo, and father of Ippolito de’ Medici who adopted the Beloved Portrait tradition in Rome later in the century. In another interesting twist, Antonio Grifo is believed to have dedicated a book of his own Canzoniere to Giuliano’s father, Piero, written during the same years he and Leonardo were at the Sforza court.188 The relationship between Leonardo and Grifo and the Medici family both during and after their time at the Sforza court certainly must have influenced the future of the genre. In fact, Leonardo was acquainted with both Raphael and Ippolito de’ Medici who continued the Beloved Portrait tradition in Rome and will be discussed in the following chapter.

188 Marcozzi, "Antonio Grifo". Mss. It., Z.64 (= 4824), now in the Biblioteca Marciana, was composed by Grifo from 1490-97 and was dedicated to “un magnifico messer Pietro,” believed to be Pietro de’ Medici. Grifo’s sonnets are dedicated to a Padovan Laura who was born in 1438 and died between 1493 and 1495.
The Father of Petrarchismo: Pietro Bembo in Venice

Though the Beloved Portrait tradition continued well into the sixteenth century, the genre evolved with the changing times. Just as manuscript images in the *Canzoniere* evolved with shifting perceptions of Petrarch and the needs of his readers, so too did the Beloved Portraits and poetry reflect the artistic and political culture of Venice and Rome in the sixteenth century. Petrarchan themes adapted to the popular courtesan cultures in Venice and Rome, and the agendas of the Medici and Farnese cardinals and popes who controlled Rome in the first half of the sixteenth century.

Though Beloved Portraits were not exclusive to Florence in the fifteenth century, the last chapter demonstrated that the only two documented Beloved Portraits commissioned by foreign patrons, namely Bernardo Bembo and Ludovico Sforza, had a direct link to the city. Both were painted by the Florentine artist Leonardo da Vinci for allies of Lorenzo de’ Medici. With the exception of Leonardo’s two examples, the Beloved Portrait remained a Florentine convention until Bernardo Bembo’s son, Pietro, brought the tradition to Venice in 1500. Like his father, Pietro was a master of the

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1 In the case of Leonardo’s *Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani*, the artist was sent to Milan in 1482 by Lorenzo in order to secure peace with Ludovico Sforza. Similarly, Leonardo was presumably commissioned by Bernardo Bembo to paint Ginevra de’ Benci while in Florence as a Venetian ambassador and a guest of Lorenzo de’ Medici.

2 Pietro Bembo’s relationship to the visual arts has been the subject of two excellent publications; Guido Betramini, Davide Gasparotto, and Adolfo Tura, eds., *Pietro Bembo e l’invenzione del Rinascimento*, published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, shown at the Palazzo del Monte di Pietà in
Petrarchan style and a friend of the leading Florentine poets of his time. He wrote his first epitaph in honor of Petrarch at fifteen years of age while visiting Rome with his father, and in 1497, he hired the famous typographer, Aldus Manutius, to prepare an edition of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* that was completed in 1501. For the Aldus-Bembo edition, Pietro used his own manuscript, handwritten by Petrarch, and Bembo provided grammatical, spelling, and punctuation suggestions in order to present an accurate text in the Tuscan vernacular. The end result, entitled *Le cose italiane*, was the first of Aldus’s books to be printed in italics.

Although he was a Venetian, Bembo was a champion of the Tuscan vernacular and believed the version used by Petrarch in the *Canzoniere* and perfected in Laurentian Florence should be the official language of sixteenth-century Italian literature. Bembo’s support of the Tuscan vernacular, and by extension, the Medici, was politically motivated. In fact, he wrote most of his most important work, *Prose della volgar lingua* in 1511, when the Medici were allied with France against Pope Julius II’s Holy League with Spain and Venice. It was to Bembo’s professional advantage to align himself with Cardinal Giuliano de’ Medici whose brothers, ultimately Leo X and Clement VII, were the next in line for the papacy. By promoting Petrarch and his use of the vernacular he championed the Florentine dialect as the literary standard for all of Italy.

Bembo completed his *Prose* in 1525 and dedicated it to Pope Clement VII, formerly Cardinal Giuliano de’ Medici, who was also made a primary character in the

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1 Carol Kidwell, *Pietro Bembo: Lover, Linguist, Cardinal* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 17. Bembo invented a new form of punctuation at this time, which combined a full stop, comma, and apostrophe. It was originally used in his publication of *De Aetna* in 1496.

2 Ibid.

3 For a more complete discussion see ibid, 223.

4 Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch*, 83-84.
book. The *Prose* centered around a fictional dinner party at which Giuliano was a guest along with Pietro’s brother, Carlo, Federico Fregoso, and Ercole Strozzi. The men debated the merits of using Latin versus Italian for contemporary literature, and their ultimate conclusion was that the Tuscan vernacular should become the standard used for Italian literature. Bembo’s *Prose* became the grammatical standard for the Tuscan *vulgare* in the sixteenth century and Petrarch was once again heralded as the greatest Italian poet since Antiquity.

Even before Bembo published his famous vernacular works, he was a champion of Petrarch’s style and *oeuvre*. He even wrote his own Petrarchan love dialogue in the *vulgare* called *Gli Asolani* from 1497-1504. *Gli Asolani* was the first prose book written in Tuscan and was inspired by the Petrarchan love dialogues popular at the time. According to Petrarchan scholar, Leonard Forster, Bembo “established Petrarch as the canon of classic taste…he imitated him and was for that reason himself imitable. The Neo-Platonic idealism which inspired him was congenial to his contemporaries, and the style of balanced moderation he affected determined an important strand of Renaissance poetry in various countries until the early baroque.”

Like his father and Petrarch, Pietro had a Petrarchan beloved and wrote poems in her honor; however, Pietro’s relationship differed from Bernardo’s and Petrarch’s in one significant way—it was consummated. Pietro and Maria Savorgnan carried on a secret, physical relationship for many years, during which time they exchanged letters that explicitly revealed the nature of their courtship. Maria was widowed in 1498, and

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8 *Gli Asolani* was written while Pietro was involved with Maria Savorgnan; however he dedicated it to his subsequent beloved, Lucrezia Borgia, after his affair with Maria ended. Pietro and Lucrezia Borgia exchanged love letters and poems and may have been physically involved as well. There is no documented
during the same year began an affair with the young poet. Though her husband was deceased, Maria was closely watched by a guardian appointed by her brother-in-law in order to make sure she did not disgrace the Savorgnan name with any impropriety. Consequently, the couple was forced to rely upon trusted friends and servants to facilitate the exchange of their letters and their rendezvous.

During the same period, a portrait of Maria was commissioned from Giovanni Bellini, arguably the most famous artist in turn-of-the-century Venice. Surprisingly, the letters exchanged between the poet and his mistress reveal that Maria commissioned her own portrait from Bellini in 1500 as a gift for Pietro. The portrait and the sonnets were recorded by Giorgio Vasari in his Lives of the Artists:

For Messer Pietro Bembo, then, before he went to live with Pope Leo X, Giovanni made a portrait of the lady that he loved, so lifelike that, even as Simone Sanese [Martini] had been celebrated in the past by the Florentine Petrarca, so was Giovanni deservedly celebrated in his verses by this Venetian, as in the following sonnet: ‘O imagine mia celeste e pura,’ where at the beginning of the second quatrains, he says, ‘Credo che ‘l mio Bellin con la figura,’ with what follows. And what greater reward can our craftsmen desire than that of being celebrated by the pens of illustrious poets….”

Vasari’s specific mention of the connection between Bellini’s portrait and Simone Martini’s rendition of Laura proves that Bembo intended to include himself in the evidence of a Beloved Portrait exchange between the two, perhaps because Lucrezia was intent on promoting herself as a pious and chaste ruler in order to offset rumors about her dubious sexual conduct. For the letters refer to Pietro Bembo and Lucrezia Borgia, The Prettiest Love Letters in the World: Letters between Lucrezia Borgia and Pietro Bembo 1503 to 1519, trans. Hugh Shankland (Boston: David R. Godine, 1987).

Beloved Portrait tradition with his poems and Bellini’s portrait, and that the association lasted well into the century.

Pietro’s letters reveal that at first the poet felt the portrait was unnecessary, since Maria had already sent him her portrait by another artist and “the previous one was exact and beautiful, and although she does not like the shadows there, they do not matter since it is going to be made into a medal.” Nonetheless, he was apparently pleased with Bellini’s finished product and his sonnets prove that he regarded Bellini’s portrait as an independent work of art equal to Simone Martini’s Portrait of Laura. Upon receiving the portrait, Bembo replied: “Your portrait, since I always have it in my heart, I therefore hold most dear, above all the gifts I have ever had… I have kissed it one thousand times, instead of you, and I beg of it that which I would gladly beg of you, and I see that it appears to listen to me very kindly, more than you do.”

This is a paraphrase of Petrarch’s Sonnet 78: “And then when I begin to speak to her,/ most kindly she appears to hear me speak/- if only she could answer what I say!” It is also a reference to Leonardo’s Trattato della pittura in which the artist claimed that a painter “can place in front of the lover the true likeness of that which is beloved, often making him kiss and speak to it.” Bembo was obviously well aware of his implied comparison between Maria’s portrait and Laura’s, his reference to the ancient practice of substituting a portrait for an absent beloved, and Leonardo’s contribution to the Beloved Portrait tradition. In

10 Kidwell, Pietro Bembo: Lover, Linguist, Cardinal, 56. The letters suggest that Maria may have commissioned the first portrait specifically for this purpose. Bembo was known for creating mottos for medals and even suggested one for Lucrezia Borgia.

11 Ibid, 33.

12 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 130-31. (Ma poi ch’i’ vengo a ragionar con lei,/ benignamente assai par che m’ascolte:/ se respondesse a’ detti miei?)

13 Craven, “Ut pictura poesis: A New Reading of Raphael’s Portrait of La Fornarina as a Petrarchan Allegory of Painting, Fame, and Desire,” 371. (Mette innanzi all’amante la propria effigie della cosa amata, il quale spesso fa con quella, baciandola, e parlando con quella, quello che non farebbe con le medesime bellezze postegli innanzi dallo scrittore.) Vinci, Trattato della pittura, 21.
fact, Bembo had a portrait of Laura in his own personal collection, similar to an anonymous fifteenth century copy recently displayed in an exhibition held in Padua in 2013 and entitled Pietro Bembo e l’invenzione del Rinascimento (fig. 111).  

Just as his father and Petrarch had done before him, Bembo praised Giovanni Bellini’s ability to capture Maria’s beauty and the skill of the painter in capturing her likeness in two of his own Petrarchan sonnets:

O my image, celestial and pure, shining, to my eyes, more brightly than the sun, and resembling the face of the one that, with even greater care, I have sculpted in my heart.

I believe that my Bellini, as well as her face has given you the character of her, for you burn me, if I gaze at you, you who are cold stone, to which has been given great fortune.

In his second poem he also confirmed that Maria’s portrait followed the classic Petrarchan canon of sensual beauty:

Are those lovely eyes, in which as I gaze Defenselessly, I am forced to lose myself? Is this that fair brow, to which so oft I vainly beg pity for my sighs.

Are these those tresses, which bind up My heart, so that I swiftly die? O, face, imprinted on my soul Because I live always and ever in bonds….

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14 Betramini, Gasparotto, and Tura, Pietro Bembo e l’invenzione del Rinascimento, 53-56. The portrait, now lost, was recorded by Marchantonio Michiel after a visit to Bembo’s home. The copy now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum was one of many such portraits of Laura that circulated in the fifteenth century.

15 Rogers, “Sonnets on Female Portraits from the Renaissance North Italy,” 301. (O imagine mia celeste e pura,/ che splendi più che ’l sole agli occhi miei/ e mi rassembri ’l volto di colei,/ che scolpita ho nel cor/ con maggior cura,/ credo che ’l Bellin con la figura/ l’abbia dato il costume anco di lei,/ che m’ardi, s’io ti miro, e per te sei/ freddo smalto, a cui giunse alta ventura.)

16 Ibid. (Son questi quei bei occhi, in cui mirando/ senza difesa far perdei me stesso?/ È questo quell bel ciglio, a ciò si spesso/ invan del mio languir mercé dimando?/ Son queste quelle chiome, che legando/ vanno il mio cor, sì ch’ei ne more expresso?/ O volto, chi mi stai ne l’alma impress,/ perch’io viva di me mai sempre in bando….)
Though Bembo had both physical and psychological access to his beloved and Maria played an active role in the initiation of the Petrarchan Beloved tradition with the commission of her portrait, his poems are classically Neo-Platonic. They do not allude to the nature of Pietro and Maria’s relationship, nor their physical intimacy. One must assume this was because Bembo had a professional agenda with the poems that superseded his relationship with Maria. Though their relationship was never made public, the love letters were published posthumously in 1542 in a collection of Bembo’s Lettere. Just as he carefully edited his letters with the intention of eventually publishing them, he too clearly saw the poems and Bellini’s portrait as part of his legacy as a Petrarchan poet in perpetuity.

Sadly, Bellini’s portrait met the same fate as Simone Martini’s, and all that remains of the portrait are Bembo’s poems and its mention in the letters exchanged between Pietro and Maria. Although there is no extant image to analyze, the letters provide an important piece of information relating to the Beloved Portrait tradition. The fact that Maria commissioned both portraits as gifts to her beloved, and the lovers discussed the gift without any hint of surprise or impropriety, suggests that it was not unusual for a female beloved to initiate the portrait exchange. Art historians have long questioned why, for example, Bernardo Bembo did not bring Ginevra’s portrait back with him to Venice and this may offer some explanation. Perhaps Ginevra commissioned the portrait with the intention of giving it to Bernardo and the poet allowed her to keep it instead?

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17 It was not unusual for authors, including Petrarch himself, to write and revise personal letters with the intention of publishing them.
18 Walter and Zapperi, Il ritratto dell’amata: storie d’amore da Petrarca a Tiziano, 44.
The same is true in a discussion of Leonardo’s *Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani* (fig. 62). Again, though Bernardo Bellincioni’s poems suggest that Ludovico was the patron, it may equally be possible that Cecilia initiated the commission as a gift for her lover.\(^\text{19}\) If Cecilia was the patron, it might explain why the portrait was in her possession when Isabella d’Este requested to borrow it from her. Maybe Cecilia commissioned the portrait in order to remind her lover of their affair when he visited her chambers? Or perhaps Ludovico gave it to her as a commemoration of their relationship? Since Cecilia was Ludovico’s mistress, it would have been improper for him to display her portrait in the private chambers he shared with his (already jealous) wife, Beatrice d’Este, just as it was nearly impossible for Pietro Bembo to commission a portrait of a woman he was technically not allowed to see. Pietro’s letters support a flexibility within the tradition that allows for various possibilities and a less obvious gendered hierarchy between the male patron and the female sitter.

Though Bellini’s portrait of Maria Savorgnan is no longer extant, a near contemporary portrait provides evidence of how sixteenth-century Venetian artists interpreted the Petrarchan portrait. Not much is known about the sitter or the patron of Giorgione’s *Portrait of Laura* of 1506 (fig. 112). That she is supposed to recall Petrarch’s beloved is clear by the laurel that grows behind her, but she is not the ideal blonde beauty seen in fifteenth-century Florentine portraits. Her dark hair is parted in the middle and tucked under a simple veil and her neck is visually lengthened by her exposed white chest and bare breast. In contrast to her simple hair, Laura is wrapped in a sumptuous red cloak with a fur collar, and her veil creates a white banner draped across

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\(^{19}\) Rogers, "Sonnets on Female Portraits from the Renaissance North Italy," 301.
her naked flesh. This Laura is sensual and alluring and yet her expression is serious, facing forward but looking away from the viewer.

It has long been debated whether Giorgione’s Laura is a courtesan, a poetess, a wife, a mistress, or an idealized beloved. In 2006 the catalogue for the National Gallery’s exhibition, *Bellini, Giorgione, Titian and the Renaissance of Venetian Painting*, addressed this ambiguity and presented evidence for and against identifying her in these various roles. Her bare breast, for example, could communicate a sexual invitation or it could equally be a metaphor for the conjugal union of a bride and groom. 20 Also plausible is a more recent theory posed by Paul Holberton that the painting is meant to demonstrate that painting is superior to poetry. 21 This paragone may well explain the inclusion of the laurel behind the sitter’s head, which not only names her metaphorically, but also associates the painted sitter with the poetic profession. Did Giorgione ultimately intend to comment on his ability to paint the poetess (or the poet’s mistress) in a visual poem as multilayered as poetry itself?

Anne Christine Junkerman’s analysis of the portrait is also interesting in the context of beloved imagery. 22 She argued against reading the painting as a marriage portrait and instead believed it to be one of the first examples of erotic female portraiture in Venice. 23 However, according the Junkerman, whether or not the sitter was a courtesan or a bride is less important than the dichotomy between feminine beauty and feminine power communicated by Laura’s hand gesture and the masculine cloak she pulls

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23 Ibid, 51.
away from her bare breast. Her gesture, according to Junkerman, gives her an active role and allows the viewer to see or not see her naked flesh. The paradoxically masculine outer garment draped across her shoulders further accentuates this gesture. As no proper Venetian woman would have worn a man’s coat, the garment suggests that this is no ordinary woman. This, Anne Christine Junkerman concludes, is the ultimate Petrarchan paragone:

Giorgione takes up the painter’s side of the competition, alluding to the Petrarchan conventions and then overturning them. If she were constituted as an image of engaging beauty this woman might have been Laura, a chaste inspiration for poetry. But her brown hair, brown eyes, pale lips, pale brows and lashes refuse the high colour that by the sixteenth century had become the conventional sign of the Petrarchan beauty. And her gesture of seduction belies the chilly virtue of Petrarch’s lady. This woman, not-blonde, is not-Laura. Instead of being inscribed as poetry she has, with an active gesture, dared to inscribe herself.

Junkerman’s conclusion is that the masculine covering, exposed breast, and laurel backdrop must identify her as a courtesan poetess, able to straddle both genders with her feminine allure and masculine wits.

What Junkerman failed to consider is that there was already a precedent for “not-blonde” Petrarchan Beloved portraits well within the confines of the tradition. Cecilia Gallerani was a brunette, and her hands made her almost as erotically charged as Laura even without the exposed breast. It could also be argued that the use of brunette rather than blonde locks is seen more often in portraits of mistresses than Neo-Platonic beloveds, though there are enough exceptions to the rule in the sixteenth century to make this a loose argument at best. Though there is no visual evidence to suggest that a different style was used for a Petrarchan portrait of a mistress than a Neo-Platonic beloved, an argument could be made that Cecilia Gallerani’s hands stroking the ermine

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24 Ibid, 52.
25 Ibid, 55.
are more erotically charged than, for example, Ginevra de’ Benci’s presumed grip on a bouquet of flowers akin to Verrocchio’s *Lady with a Bunch of Flowers* (fig. 83). That said, the portraits of Simonetta Vespucci discussed in the previous chapter eroticized a woman who was never intimately involved with her beloved and was dead by the time the portraits were created.

The most likely conclusion is that a Beloved Portrait could be adjusted to meet the needs of the sitter, the artist, and the patron. Whether these needs were political, as in the case of Ginevra and Simonetta, romantic in the case of Cecilia Gallerani and Maria Savorgnan, or an intellectual *paragone* between erudite viewers such as examples by Raphael and Bronzino, the Beloved Portrait format lent itself to flexibility just as Petrarch himself was appropriated by various city rulers and intellectuals in order to pursue their own agendas. In fact, unlike Petrarchan portraits of proper ladies meant to represent brides or wives, true Beloved Portraits were very much intended to represent the sitter as a rival to Laura, not as a follower. This was as much about the painter as it was about the sitter and her beloved. The artist strove to elevate himself above Simone Martini as the greatest portraitist of his time, and to compete in the *paragone* of the arts. When read in this context, Giorgione’s *Laura* certainly fits into the framework of the sixteenth-century Venetian Beloved portrait. The painting is a visual poem about a female poetess able to use her own voice and control access to her own body. These freedoms were not allowed to Venetian women within the boundaries of proper society; however, famous courtesans were lauded for these very strengths.

A visual connection between Giorgione’s *Laura* and a Paduan Petrarchan manuscript discussed in Chapter One (fig. 11) has never before been recognized but
further supports an intended association with Petrarch’s Laura in Giorgione’s portrait. In both the painted portrait and the manuscript image, Laura wears red and in each the artist incorporates a fabric banner. In the manuscript image, Laura holds up a golden banner and in the painted portrait, the sitter’s head covering runs across her chest in a banner-like design and encircles her naked breast, drawing attention to her sensuality. Most significant in a comparison of the two images are the bay trees behind both the painted Laura and the manuscript image. In both examples, the trees create a halo of laurel around the sitter, simultaneously naming the woman and identifying her as a Petrarchan beloved. Though the use of natural imagery to pun on the name of the sitter was not uncommon in the Renaissance, to my knowledge, the Correr manuscript is both the earliest use of this device in a Petrarchan context and the only example found in an illuminated manuscript of the Canzoniere. While it is impossible to ascertain whether Giorgione or his patron had access to the manuscript, it is relevant to note that the imagery appears to be Venetian in origin.

Giorgione’s painting’s visual similarity to Leonardo’s Portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci (fig. 92) fifteen years earlier in 1474/5 must also be intentional. Like Giorgione, Leonardo named his Ginevra with the wild bush of juniper that encircles her head in a halo of green. The juniper simultaneously individualizes the sitter, by revealing her identity, and comments upon her chastity and virtue. Giorgione must certainly have been aware of Leonardo’s Portrait of Ginevra. Given Giorgione’s relationship with both Bellini and the Bembos, and his penchant for poetic subject matter, it seems likely that the painter intended his Portrait of Laura to be read as a comment on the Petrarchan paragone of poetry and paint. Perhaps the laurel suggests that his Laura was a poet in her
own right, and thus did not need to have sonnets written about her because she was capable of composing her own poetry. Or did Giorgione create a painted Petrarchan poem to his beloved that did not require words to communicate her inner and outer beauty?

Another interesting comparison can be drawn between the Giorgione’s *Laura* and a Paduan manuscript illumination dating to circa 1508 now in the Bodmer Foundation Collection in Cologny (fig. 113). The frontispiece of the book boasts an extraordinary full-page illustration of Petrarch and Apollo sitting on opposite sides of the Sorgue River with Avignon in the background. Each man is identified by his signature accessory; Petrarch holds an open book and pen and his mythological alter ego plays the lyre. Between the two figures is a visual fusion of Laura and Daphne as a bare breasted woman with her arms, hair and trunk transformed into a laurel tree. The boughs trap a naked Cupid who shoots his arrow at the seated Petrarch. Laura’s facial features are recognizably Petrarchan, as is the iconography, but the inclusion of both Apollo and Petrarch is new, as is the monochromatic camouflaging of Laura’s body within laurel leaves. Though this was clearly intended to represent the transformation of Laura/Daphne into the tree as was described by both Ovid and Petrarch, the laurel tree was also meant to name Petrarch’s beloved just as Giorgione and Leonardo used foliage in their portraits. The fact that the Paduan manuscript and Giorgione’s *Laura* were created during the same years further legitimizes a Petrarchan reading of Giorgione’s sitter as the manuscript proves that Daphnean iconography remained a popular theme in Petrarchan imagery into the sixteenth century.
In March of 1513, Lorenzo de’ Medici’s second son, Giovanni di Lorenzo, was elected as Leo X and became the first Medici pope. Leo immediately appointed Pietro Bembo in the powerful role of as his papal secretary and Bembo finally realized his professional goal of moving to Rome. Bembo’s period in Rome, now working for a Florentine pope, marked the second important phase of the sixteenth-century Beloved Portrait, during which time he directly or indirectly influenced every known Roman example to be produced in the first half of the century. During this period Bembo and his friend and colleague, Francesco Maria Molza, also advised Leo X’s nephew, Ippolito de’ Medici, to continue his grandfather’s tradition of the Petrarchan Beloved portrait, thereby bringing the tradition to Rome.

The first portrait to be reasonably identified as a Beloved Portrait during this period was not a Medici commission, but it was painted by Raphael Sanzio, a favorite Medici artist and admirer of Leonardo. Raphael and Pietro were close friends, and according to Vasari, Bembo brought with him to Rome Bellini’s *Portrait of Maria Savorgnan*, and surely showed it to Raphael who was known for his love of beautiful women as well as his penchant for Petrarchan poetry. Both men lived in Rome from Bembo’s arrival in 1513 until his departure in 1519, and Pietro wrote Raphael’s epitaph upon his untimely death in 1520.

Raphael’s Beloved Portrait of circa 1518/20 is commonly referred to as *La Fornarina* (fig. 114). Though the sitter’s identity remains in question, Raphael’s painting is commonly referred to as *La Fornarina* because of the sitter’s early twentieth-century

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26 Raphael and Bembo met while the painter was in Urbino in the early 1500s at the court of Elisabetta Gonzaga, during which time Raphael painted Bembo’s portrait.
association with Margarita Luti, the daughter of a Sienese baker who was believed to be Raphael’s mistress. She has also been identified as a bride based on the ring on her left hand, her emerald pendant, an object associated with marriage, and the red and white color scheme representing passionate love and purity. Raphael’s sitter sits in three-quarter view with her dark eyes slightly averted from the viewer and a coy smirk on her rosy mouth. Gone are the idealized Petrarchan facial features found in fifteenth-century Florentine examples. Though her skin is ivory and her checks are rosy, La Fornarina’s face is clearly that of a real woman and not a fantastical ideal. Her raven hair is tucked tightly into a golden turban and she pulls a transparent veil across her stomach and her right bicep, leaving her two breasts exposed. Her lower half is covered with billowing red material and her left arm is adorned with a band upon which Raphael signed his name. As in Leonardo and Giorgione’s Beloved Portraits, La Fornarina sits in front of a dark mass of foliage, probably a mixture of laurel, myrtle, and quince.

La Fornarina’s veil is perhaps the most erotic feature in the portrait. She appears to be caught in a liminal moment between covering and uncovering her bare flesh, simultaneously demonstrating her chastity and advertising her sexual availability.

Agnolo Firenzuela explored the sensual pleasure derived from the veiling and unveiling

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27 In 1936 Pietro Odescalchi identified the sitter as Margherita Luti based on marginal notes in a book of Vasari’s Lives of the Artists that mentioned her first name. Odescalchi discovered documents that placed Margherita Luti in a convent shortly after Raphael’s death and built the myth of the La Fornarina on that assumption. This identification has not held in recent scholarship. For more on this see the exhibition catalogue for The Frick Collection’s display of the painting, Claudio Strinati, Raphael’s Fornarina (New York: The Oliphant Press, 2004), 3. The portrait was dated to c. 1518 by Roger Jones and Nicolas Penny in their monograph Raphael (London: Book Club Associates, 1993), 177 and more recently c. 1520 by Jennifer Craven in 1994.  
28 Ibid, 6.  
29 Her turban is a capigliara made fashionable by Isabella d’Este. For a more complete discussion of the painting see ibid.  
30 The plants are a combination of laurel, myrtle and quince, symbols of love and fecundity. Since no one plant matter has been convincingly proven, the matter is still open to visual interpretation and I believe that Jennifer Craven’s argument that the laurel is a Petrarchan metaphor is compelling based on Raphael’s poetic pursuits.
of a woman’s private places in his discourse. His main character, Celso, laments that a woman’s hair must be bound and covered after she is married and, when La bella Selvaggia’s veil slipped off her bosom, Celso admits to experiencing pleasure at the accidental sight of her bare breasts. \textsuperscript{31} According to Mary Rogers, both Celso and Selvaggia participate in the act of courtly unveiling; she agrees to allow Celso to see her breasts and he, in turn, acts appropriately shocked. \textsuperscript{32}

Firenzuola’s discussion of the veil is based directly on Petrarch. In Sonnet 52, for example, he explicitly explores the pleasure afforded the poet by the opportunity to see Diana/Laura bathing without the translucent covering:

\begin{quote}
Diana never pleased her lover more, 
when just by chance all of her naked body he saw bathing within the chilly waters,

than did the simple mountain shepherdess please me, the while she bathed the pretty veil that holds her lovely blonde hair in the breeze.

So that even now in hot sunlight she makes me tremble all over with the chill of love.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

By comparing the sight of Laura’s uncovered hair to the fatal Ovidian encounter between Diana and Actaeon, Petrarch infuses the veil with the power to protect the male viewer from the dangers of feminine allure. Though Celso is significantly more lighthearted in his discussion of Selvaggia’s veil, the basic message is the same: a man cannot be held responsible for the lustful thoughts elicited by an unclothed woman.

\textsuperscript{31} Firenzuola, On the Beauty of Women, 31.
\textsuperscript{33} Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 82-83. (Non al suo amante più Diana piacque/ quando per tal ventura tutta ignuda/ la vide in mezzo de le gelide acque/ ch’a me la pastorella alpestra et cruda/ posta a bagnar un leggiadretto velo/ ch’a l’aura il vago et biondo capel chiuda;/ tal che mi fece, or quand’egli arde ’l cielo,/ tutto tremar d’un amoroso gielo.)
Firenzuola also approached the issue of sexual desire within the parameters of Neo-Platonism. Celso explains:

One sees man forget himself for her, and, looking at a face adorned with this heavenly grace, his limbs shudder, his hair curls, he sweats and shivers at the same time, not unlike one who, unexpectedly seeing something divine, is possessed by divine frenzy, and when he is finally himself again, adores it with his thoughts and reveres it with his mind, and recognizing it as something like a god, gives himself to it as a sacrificial victim on the altar of the beautiful woman’s heart.34

The feelings described by Firenzuola, through Celso, reflect a common theoretical justification for the lustful thoughts provoked by contemporary mid-sixteenth century images of women.

Firenzuola’s playful approach to dressing and undressing the forbidden parts of a woman’s body was reflected in the Petrarchan portraiture of the period to various degrees. When viewed through a Christianized Neo-Platonic lens, sensual paintings of women were considered acceptable by sixteenth-century standards. Though it was painted twenty-four years before Firenzuola’s discourse was published, La Fornarina is reminiscent of Selvaggia’s semi-accidental revealing of her breasts.35 While Selvaggia lets her veil “slip” to tantalize Celso, La Fornarina appears to use her veil to partially cover her naked body and in the processing of covering herself she draws attention to her bare breasts and rounded stomach beneath the fabric. Her frontal stare and slight smile tell her viewer she is not embarrassed by his gaze, and the placement of her hands—one on her left breast and one across her lap—draw attention to her most private attributes. In

34 Firenzuola, On the Beauty of Women, 11. (Per lei si vede l’uomo dimenticarsi di se stesso, e veggendo un volto decorato di questa celeste grazia, raccapricciarsi le membra, arricciarsi i capegli, sudare e agghiacciare in un tempo, non altrimenti che uno, il quale inaspettatamente veggendo una cosa divina, è esagitato dal celeste furor, e finalmente in sé ritornato, col pensier l’adora, e con la mente e le inchina, e quasi uno Iddio consoscendola, se le dà in vittima e in sacrificio in sull’arte del cuore della bella donna.)
35 ______, Opere, 534.
Mary Rogers’ opinion, her hands draw the viewer’s gaze toward her uncovered areas and suggest that she may be purposefully undressing for the benefit of the viewer.\(^3^6\) Certainly this is the case in Raphael’s painting. The implied intimate relationship between the sitter and the viewer, and in this case the sitter and Raphael, was regularly explored and exploited in the Beloved Portrait tradition.

Recent discussion of the *La Fornarina* in the catalogue accompanying The Frick Collection’s exhibition in 2004 posited another interesting theory. The sitter, according to Claudio Strinati, may be the long-time mistress and eventual wife of Raphael’s patron, Agostino Chigi. Chigi fathered children with the beautiful Francesca Ardeasca and lived with her out of wedlock for seven years until he finally married her in August of 1519 at the urging of Pope Leo X.\(^3^7\) Raphael was hired by Chigi to paint scenes from *Amor and Psyche* in his villa, especially the goddesses and nymphs, in honor of Chigi’s wedding and Strinati recognized similarities between the goddesses in the Chigi villa and *La Fornarina*:

If versions of a woman’s portrait are everywhere visible in frescoes in Chigi’s villa, in the guise of goddesses, are they more likely to be images of the artist’s lover, or of the commissioning patron’s? And if that exquisite lady is to be found again in the misnamed *La Fornarina*, dressed as a bride, at once provocative and chaste, surely we may give her the same name and date: She is Francesca Ardeasca, whose beauty, disturbing and appealing, captivated a man of immense wealth and power.\(^3^8\)

This theory is certainly appealing, and is as plausible as any of the other entirely speculative identifications. In fact, according to Vasari, Agostino Chigi had to make

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\(^3^7\) Pope Leo X officiated at the marriage himself.

\(^3^8\) Strinati, *Raphael’s Fornarina*, 11.
arrangements for Raphael’s mistress to live with him at the villa while he was painting the loggias, including the scenes of *Cupid and Psyche* mentioned above:

Wherefore, when his dear friend Agostino Chigi commissioned him to paint the first loggia in his palace, Raffaello was not able to give much attention to his work, on account of the love that he had for his mistress; at which Agostino fell into such despair, that he so contrived by means of others, by himself, and in other ways, as to bring it about, although only with difficulty, that this lady should come to live continually with Raffaello in that part of the house where he was working; and in this manner the work was brought to completion.  

If Vasari’s account is correct, it is as likely that he would have painted his mistress’s face into the scenes as that he would have included Chigi’s new bride. Or perhaps both beauties are represented on Chigi’s walls? Raphael was no doubt aware through Pliny’s *Natural History* that Apelles used his own mistress, Campaspe, as a model for his *Aphrodite Anadyomene*. And the irony that Campaspe was the former mistress of his patron, Alexander the Great, may have appealed to both Raphael and Chigi if the artist fused the features of both his mistress and that of his patron into the paintings.  

Petrarch also compared Simone to Apelles in his writings. C. Jean Campbell has observed that by comparing Simone to Apelles, Petrarch implied that the poet gave Simone an opportunity to paint his beloved Laura, which resulted in a prestigious place at the Avignon court for Simone. Furthermore, in allowing Simone to paint Laura,

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39 Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors & Architects*, vol. IV (London: Philip Lee Warner, Publisher, 1912), 239. Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori, nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1558*, ed. Paola Barocchi and Rosanna Bettarini, vol. 4 (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1966), 200 (Onde facendogli Agostino Ghigi, amico suo caro, dipingere nel palazzo suo la prima loggia, Raffaello non poteva molto attendere a lavorare per lo amore ch’e’ portava ad una sua donna; per il che Agostinosi siperava di sorte, che per via d’altri e da sé e di mezzi ancora operò si, che appena ottene che questa sua donna venne a stare con esso in casa continuamente in quella parte dove Raffaello lavorava: il che fa cugione che il lavoro venisse a fine.)  


41 Petrarch compared Simone to Apelles in a marginal note in his copy of Pliny’s *Natural History* as well as in a letter to Petrarch’s friend, Guido Sette, the archdeacon of Genoa. See Jean C. Campbell, "Petrarch's Italy, Sovereign Poetry and the Hand of Simone Martini," in *The Transformation of Vernacular Expression in Early Modern Art*, ed. Joost Keizer and Todd M. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 32-33.  

42 Ibid.
Petrarch invited Simone to desire the famous beauty, just as Apelles fell in love with Campaspe. The exchange of Campaspe was also discussed in Castiglione’s *Il cortegiano* in which the Count explained to Cesare Gonzaga that “Apelles enjoyed the contemplation of Campaspe’s beauty far more than Alexander did: for we may easily believe that both men’s love sprang only from her beauty; and perhaps it was partly on this account that Alexander resolved to give her to him who seemed fitted to appreciate her most perfectly.”

Alexander’s gift to Apelles was, according to Elizabeth Cropper, more than just an exchange of the woman in question; it demonstrated that “the ability to represent perfect beauty is prized more highly than the beauty of the woman he represents.”

While he may not have been aware of Petrarch’s comparison between Simone and Apelles, Raphael was undoubtedly familiar with Pliny’s account of Apelles and Campaspe. Additionally he was likely aware of Pliny’s account of the painter Arellius who “was a famous painter at Rome… [who] was always attempting to ingratiate himself with the women he happened to desire at the moment, and therefore he depicted the goddesses with the features of his lovers. It was thus possible to keep track of his various prostitutes by observing his artwork.”

This story must have resonated with Raphael and his circle since the sixteenth century Roman painter had a great deal in common with his ancient predecessor.

Even more convincing, in my opinion, is the evidence presented in Jennifer Craven’s essay, *Ut pictura poesis: A New Reading of Raphael’s Portrait of La Fornarina*.

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43 Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, 87. (Apelle contemplando la bellezza di Campaspe, che non faceva Alessandro; perché facilmente si po creder che l’amor dell’uno e dell’altro derivasse solamente da quella bellezza; e che deliberasse forse ancor Alessandro per questo rispetto donarla a chi gli parve che piú perfettamente conoscer la potesse.)


as a Petrarchan Allegory of Painting, Fame and Desire (1994). Craven argued that the painting is less about the actual sitter than it is about the idea that a painter can elicit desire with a portrait that is unmatched in any other artistic medium. Leonardo famously explained this paragone in his Trattato della pittura:

> If the poet says that he can inflame men with love, which is the central aim in all animal species, the painter has the power to do the same, and to an even greater degree, in that he can place in front of the lover the true likeness of that which is beloved, often making him kiss and speak to it. This would never happen with the same beauties set before him by the writer. So much greater is the power of painting over a man’s mind that he may be enchanted and enraptured by a painting.

According to Craven, it was Raphael’s desire to compete in this paragone that inspired La Fornarina. With the portrait Raphael, like Verrocchio, Leonardo, Botticelli, Bellini, and Giorgione before him, inserted himself into the debate and asserted his preeminence above all the others. If Craven’s assumptions are correct, and I believe they are very compelling, Raphael would have been the first painter to bridge the paragone of the Petrarchan arts with his poetry and painting.

Not only was Raphael a great portraitist, he also fancied himself to be the preeminent Petrarchan poet of his time. He even inserted his self-portrait alongside Petrarch and Apollo in his depiction of Parnassus in the Vatican Stanza della Segnatura (fig. 115). Although only five of his own poems survive, they are all fashioned on Petrarch’s Canzoniere and address the poet/painter’s beloved. He describes his “Laura,” with classically Petrarchan features such as a “countenance of white snow and fresh

46 Martin Kemp, Leonardo on Painting: An Anthology of Writings by Leonardo da Vinci, with a Selection of Documents Relating to his Career as an Artist (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 26. (E se il poeta dice di fare accendere gli uomini ad amare, che è cosa principale della specie di tutti gli animal, il pittore ha potenza di fare il medesimo, tanto più ch’egli mette innanzi all’amante la propria effigie della cosa amata, il quale spesso fa con quella, baciandola, e parlando con quella, quello che non farebbe con le medesime bellezze postegli innanzi dallo scrittore.) Vinci, Trattato della pittura, 21.
roses… [and] white arms.”⁴⁷ While he does not specifically mention his beloved’s portrait in his extant poems, the laurel branches behind La Fornarina may well imply the reference to his poetic aspirations. Like Bellini and Leonardo, Raphael employed natural plant matter as a means to name his sitter metaphorically and perhaps allude to his own fame as a Petrarchan poet who would achieve lasting fame from the combination of his poetry to and his portrait of his own beloved.

Furthermore, considering that Raphael brazenly painted himself between Apollo and Petrarch in Parnassus, thereby suggesting that he was the Petrarch/Apollo of his generation, I propose that it is not unreasonable to read the laurel behind La Fornarina as a reference to Daphne as well as Laura. Because of his close relationship with Pietro Bembo and the Medici, Raphael was undoubtedly aware of the Daphnean imagery used for Renaissance manuscripts illuminations as well as Antonio del Pollaiuolo’s Apollo and Daphne painted for Lorenzo de’ Medici (fig. 31). I believe that like Giorgione’s Laura, La Fornarina’s nude body enveloped by the foliage behind her may be a visual reference to Daphne’s transformation into a laurel tree. This, in Petrarchan terms, would suggest that she is metaphorically Raphael’s fleeting attempt at capturing his beloved in poetry and paint. It could also be argued that because his sitter has not physically transformed into the tree as Laura did in the Canzoniere images, that Raphael is claiming that unlike Apollo and Petrarch, he is able to grasp both his Laura and his poetic lauro. Perhaps the bold signature emblazoned onto the band around La Fornarina’s arm is thus meant to advertise this: Raphael is simultaneously the woman’s lover, the creator of her visual image, and the poet responsible for her lasting fame.

⁴⁷ Craven, "Ut pictura poesis: A New Reading of Raphael’s Portrait of La Fornarina as a Petrarchan Allegory of Painting, Fame, and Desire," 392. (E s)face/ da bianca neve e rose vivace…./ [e] candida braci…..)
Though it is impossible for anyone to be certain who the sitter was, what is clear is that Raphael considered himself to be a Petrarchan painter and poet and was surrounded by the most influential Petrarchists of his time. And he, like Pietro Bembo and the others before him, had a professional motivation for following in the footsteps of Pope Leo X’s father, Lorenzo de’ Medici, with his rendition of a Beloved Portrait. Furthermore, Raphael was heavily influenced by the work of Leonardo and thus would have certainly been aware of his portraits of Ginevra and Cecilia, and the Petrarchan poetry that accompanied them, and seen himself as the legacy to Leonardo’s greatness.

Raphael is also believed to have painted a portrait of his friend, Baldassare Castiglione’s, Neoplatonic beloved Elisabetta Gonzaga circa 1504 (fig. 116). Elisabetta was the wife of Guidobaldo da Montefeltro and the sister-in-law of Isabella d’Este and Bernardo Bembo’s beloved Lucrezia Borgia. Though Elisabetta’s face is markedly unidealized in Raphael’s portrait and her dress and demeanor are far from provocative, Castiglione commissioned a mirrored cover for the painting in order to “evoke the literary topos of the lover admiring the relative beauty and verisimilitude of the picture that represents the beloved lady.” The metaphor of a mirror as a reflection of a beloved’s own desire, and deflection of that desire, was a theme central to Petrarch’s Canzoniere. The mirror was also a representation of the female beloved’s narcissistic infatuation with her own image, which ultimately alienated her from her lover. Castiglione wrote two Petrarchan sonnets in honor of the portrait, later found tucked

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48 Pietro Bembo and Lucrezia Borgia met during his time in Urbino. Elisabetta and her literary court were described Castiglione’s Il Cortegiano.
50 Ibid, 159.
between the mirror and the painting by Castiglione’s daughter-in-law.\textsuperscript{51} The first of his poems focused primarily on his lover’s absence, while the second sonnet addresses the lasting fame awarded his beloved from her portrait and her beloved’s undying love:

\begin{quote}
When time, that turns the sky with the years,
will have destroyed this fragile wood
as ancient marble now records,
like Rome, amid your ruins that everyone admires.

They will come, where now life does not breathe,
to contemplate the divine beauty expressed
in the beautiful disegno by human ingegno,
which will bring envy to one who still sighs.

Others, who recognize your appearance,
And from my hand together in another place
your valor and my painted martyr,
they will say, this is certain, that bright fire,
that was lit by desire more than hope, never
was extinguished in the heart of Castiglione.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

Castiglione’s Petrarchan tribute to his beloved Elisabetta is the ultimate gesture of a true courtier. He flatters his patron with the chivalric attention appropriate for the leader of a humanist court and in doing so inserts himself into the Laurentian tradition just as his close friend and colleague, Pietro Bembo, did five years before him.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 163.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, 166. (Quando il tempo che l’ciel con gli anni gira/ Avrà distrutto questo fragil legno/ Com’or qualche marmoreo antico segno,/ Roma, fra tue ruine ognuno ammira;/ Verran quel, dove ancor vita non spira/ A contempiar l’espressa in bel disegno/ Bellà divina dall’umano ingegno;/ Ond’alcuno avrà invidia a chi o sospira./ Altri, a cui nota sia vostra sembianza./ E di mia mano insieme in altro loco/ Vostro valore e ’l mio martir dipinto./ Questo è certo, diran, quel chiaro foco./ Ch’accesso da desio più che speranza./ Nel cor del Castiglion mai non fu estinto.)
Behind Every Great Lover is a Petrarchan Poet: The Fashioning of the Sixteenth-Century Beloved

While in Rome, Pietro Bembo and his friend and papal favorite, Cardinal Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena, were placed in charge of educating Leo X’s nephew, Ippolito de’ Medici. As a young child, Ippolito came to live with his uncle in Rome in 1514 with his father, Giuliano, and remained with Leo after his father died in 1516. Though Bembo left Rome when Ippolito was only eight years old, he had a significant impact on the boy’s exposure to the classics and vernacular poetry by Petrarch, Dante, and Boccaccio. Giuliano was already acquainted with Pietro Bembo from his time at the Urbino court and both men were the main characters in Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano*. Giuliano was also the dedicatee and a main character in Bembo’s *Il Prose*.

In 1529, Ippolito was made a cardinal by his other Medici uncle, Pope Clement VII. Although he was forced into a religious life out of familial obligation, Ippolito’s court in Rome was dominated by secular delights including an exotic zoo and visits by notable courtesans like Tullia d’Aragona, famous artists, and Petrarchan poets. That Pietro Bembo and his Petrarchan leanings had a direct impact on Ippolito is manifested in his commission of a Beloved Portrait of the beautiful and unobtainable Giulia Gonzaga who was famously described by Ariosto: “Giulia Gonzaga, wherever she puts a foot and lets her serene eyes wander, she is second to no other beauty, admired like a goddess, who descended from Heaven.” In the Medici tradition, Ippolito planned tournaments in Giulia’s honor and commissioned a portrait from Sebastiano del Piombo and

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53 Lawner, *Lives of the Courtesans: Portraits of the Renaissance*, 45-46. Ippolito wrote Petrarchan sonnets in honor of Tullia. Ippolito was not the first Medici transplant to be associated with the courtesans and mistresses, nor would he be the last. In fact, Ippolito’s mother, Pacifica Brandano, was his father Giuliano’s mistress whom he met in Urbino.

54 Maria Musiol, *Spurs and Reins: Vittoria Colonna, A Woman's Renaissance* (Berlin: Druck und Verlag, 2013), 131. (*Julia Gonzaga che dovunque il piede/ volge, e dovunque i sereni occhio gira,/ non pur ogn'altra di beltà le cede;/ ma, come scesa dal ciel dea, l'ammira.*)
accompanying Petrarchan sonnets from his literary advisor and Pietro Bembo’s friend, Francesco Maria Molza. Ippolito must also have been familiar with Leonardo’s Beloved Portraits as Leonardo accompanied him to Rome between 1514 and 1516 as the guest of his father, Giuliano.

Ippolito’s motivation for engaging in the Beloved Portrait tradition established by his grandfather, Lorenzo il Magnifico is obvious. As the illegitimate grandson of Lorenzo and the favorite of his uncle, Leo X, Ippolito was groomed to be a Medici prince by the best Petrarchists of his time. Yet, when Giulio de’ Medici was elected Pope Clement VII, Ippolito was forced to compete with his cousin, Alessandro, for the Medici legacy.\textsuperscript{55} Ippolito achieved his goal and was sent to rule Florence in 1524 where he aimed to resurrect Laurentian Florence and he insisted on being called “Il Magnifico” like his grandfather.\textsuperscript{56} Unfortunately, Ippolito’s reign was short lived, as the Medici were forced to evacuate Florence in 1527 after the Sack of Rome, and his cousin replaced him when Medici control was reinstated in 1530. In 1529 Ippolito was instead made a cardinal in Rome and commenced his Neo-Platonic relationship with Giulia Gonzaga.

By that time, Giulia was a widow, having lost her husband, Vespasiano Colonna, in 1528. From Colonna she inherited the town of Fondi and his fortune on the condition that she did not remarry and that she act as guardian for his daughter Isabella. Though she followed his wishes, Giulia gained fame and notoriety because of the attention paid to her by Ippolito de’ Medici.\textsuperscript{57} Ironically, Colonna intended to have his daughter marry

\textsuperscript{55} There has been speculation that Alessandro was Giulio’s illegitimate son, thus explaining the pope’s favoritism.
\textsuperscript{56} For more on Ippolito see Guido Rebecchini, 'Un altro Lorenzo': Ippolito de’ Medici tra Firenze e Roma (1511-1535) (Venice: Marsilio Editori S.p.A, 2010).
Ippolito; however, it was Giulia who attracted the young Medici’s attention when he visited as a guest of her late husband. And so began their Petrarchan affair.

Giulia was first acquainted with Francesco Maria Molza and Pietro Bembo in 1525 when she was a guest of her relative by marriage, Isabella d’Este, at the Villa Colonna in Rome. During this period, Isabella d’Este established her own court at the Villa Colonna in Rome where she surrounded herself with cultured people and beautiful women in order to attract the attention of Clement VII. Giulia recorded her experiences at Isabella’s court in a journal. The young Giulia was apparently impressed by meeting the most famous poets of her time, especially Pietro Bembo. In the same entry she also mentioned meeting Francesco Maria Molza the same evening:

The art of Apollo was represented for us by the poet Molza, who had recently come to Rome from Bologna, bringing letters to Madonna Isabella from her son Ercole, the budding Cardinal. He had written: ‘Knowing, dear mother, how you love the company of learned men, I ask you for my sake to receive Molza most kindly, and I am sure that he will soon make you and all your ladies love him for his own sake.’ The poet was persuaded to read us a new sonnet of his own, and with charming grace and courtesy to me, the youngest of the party, he chose some lines in which the gallant audacity of my brother Luigi in the chase was celebrated under the name Alceo.

Both of these encounters are significant in establishing the small circle of Petrarchan poets, artists, patrons, and muses, who were connected in Renaissance Rome. Both men were Ippolito de’ Medici’s closest literary advisors, and both men promoted Ippolito’s Petrarchan relationship with Giulia. Furthermore, in Bembo’s absence, Molza continued

59 For more on this see Hare, *A Princess of the Italian Reformation: Giulia Gonzaga 1513-1566, Her Family and Her Friends*, 17-18.
60 Isabella’s intention was to convince Pope Clement VII to make her son, Ercole, a cardinal.
62 Ibid, 37.
the tradition of the Petrarchan Beloved Portrait and advertised the fantasy of Ippolito’s Neo-Platonic love affair with Giulia Gonzaga through his own poetry.

Giulia was less than enthusiastic about the attention from Ippolito and was uncooperative when Sebastiano del Piombo arrived to paint her portrait on June 8, 1532. Correspondence among Sebastiano, Michelangelo, and the poet Francesco Maria Molza, documents her resistance to being commemorated for her beauty, already too celebrated in her opinion. In fact, Giulia recorded these sentiments in the same journal entry in which she documented her first encounter with Bembo and Molza in Rome. Upon noticing that her cousin, Camilla Gonzaga di Novellara, caught the attention of Francesco Maria Molza she muses:

As I watched them, a curious train of thought was started in my mind. Why is it that some women have such an extraordinary power of fascination over all the men who approach them? … It would be useless to pretend that I am not aware of my pleasing appearance, but I would far rather be admired for my mind than for my face.

This, in fact, appears to be the sentiment that obstructed Sebastiano del Piombo’s ability to finish her portrait. Giulia, though beautiful, was also powerful in her own right and very religious. This ultimately led to a lifelong friendship with Vittoria Colonna and Giulia’s retreat to a convent later in her life.

The portrait was eventually completed in 1533; however, its delay did not interfere with the commission of Petrarchan poems in its honor. In fact, in July, 1532, Francesco Maria Molza wrote a long Petrarchan sonnet about the portrait without actually seeing the painting. Molza’s long sonnet vaguely describes Giulia’s beauty and alludes to her portrait using generalized Petrarchan themes but without actually describing either.

Evidently, by the 1530s, the ritual of the Beloved Portrait was so formulaic that the poems could be written without visual evidence and still be considered a legitimate commemoration of the beauty of the sitter and the skill of the painter.

Just as Molza’s sonnets prove that Petrarchan Beloved poetry had by then become formulaic and widely recognized as a response to Petrarch’s Simone Martini sonnets, Giulia’s portrait also had mass appeal. Though the painting is no longer extant, Sebastiano del Piombo and his workshop made multiple copies of the portrait, and it was repeatedly commissioned by other buyers with variations made to the background, costumes, and pose. One such copy, now in a private collection, (fig. 117) portrays a lovely woman complete with the Petrarchan features described by Giulia’s friend, Bernardo Tasso: “Fair curly hair, lightly waving in wandering curls… above the high serene forehead… the two clear and luminous windows which open beneath the dark and tranquil eyebrows… the mouth which surpasses rubies and pearls in colour and beauty… the delicate neck white as snow…. “ If the original followed the format seen in the copy, Giulia was portrayed as lovely yet unavailable. In the copy, her head is veiled and her body is covered. Though it is not known which portrait was originally approved by Giulia Gonzaga, based on her religious nature Walter and Zapperi presume it was a simple version that would represent her pious and chaste character alongside her Petrarchan good looks.

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65 Walter and Zapperi, Il ritratto dell'amata: storie d'amore da Petrarca a Tiziano, 88.
66 Hare, A Princess of the Italian Reformation: Giulia Gonzaga 1513-1566, Her Family and Her Friends, 101-02. (Il biondo, crespo, inalletto crine.... / La fronte alta e serena.... / Due chiare e lucide finestre/ Sotto le nere sue tranquille ciglia..... / A quella bocca che perle e rubini/ Avanza di vaghessa e di colore..... / Picciol colle/ Di Bianca neve....)
67 Walter and Zapperi, Il ritratto dell'amata: storie d'amore da Petrarca a Tiziano, 88.
A comparison to an earlier Portrait of a Woman by Sebastiano del Piombo (fig. 118), now in the Uffizi, further underscores Giulia’s chaste and dignified portrayal. The second portrait of an unknown woman is every bit as alluring as the Beloved Portraits painted by Raphael and Giorgione. Sebastiano’s sitter, though clothed, holds a fur stole with one hand and looks invitingly at the viewer as if to challenge his attention. On her head is a subtle leaved crown, perhaps of laurel, and her long neck, pink cheeks, and exposed forearm are as alluring as Giorgione’s Laura’s bare breast. Painted in 1512, this portrait preceded Giulia’s portrait by almost twenty years, and the differences are undoubtedly as much about Sebastiano’s evolving style as they are about the two women. Nonetheless, the two portraits can be read as visual evidence of a shift in the nature of the Roman beloved portrait as well. Sebastiano’s earlier portrait was a contemporary of Giorgione’s and Raphael’s sensual examples, while his portrait of Giulia Gonzaga portrays a pious beloved stripped of her eroticism. The later portrait is a literal interpretation of feminine beauty as an avenue to divinity.

Though the next documented Beloved Portrait was not commissioned by a Medici, it does have a direct link to the tradition via Ippolito’s literary advisor Francesco Maria Molza. After Clemente VII’s death and following Rome’s recovery after its Sack in 1527, Alessandro Farnese was elected Pope Paul III in 1537. Though the Farnese family had Roman roots, Paul was educated in humanist Florence and was a supporter of the arts and Italian vernacular poetry. Just months after his election, Paul appointed his grandson and namesake, Alessandro Farnese, as a cardinal at the age of fourteen. After he was made cardinal, Paul housed Alessandro in the Cancelleria where Ippolito de’ Medici had lived before him. Pope Paul also assigned Francesco Maria Molza and Giulia
Gonzaga’s former secretary, Gandolfo Porrino, to be his grandson’s literary advisors. It was Molza, according to Walter and Zapperi, who introduced Alessandro to the Beloved Portrait tradition and suggested that he claim Faustina Mancini as his Neo-Platonic beloved.

Alessandro was forced into his religious profession by his grandfather who wanted to place Farnese relatives in powerful positions after he was elected pope. Since, like Ippolito, Alessandro preferred the company of women and courtesans to the celibate lifestyle, he had to hide his amorous relationships and secular interests publically. Thus, his Petrarchan relationship with Faustina was likely intended to distract the public from his less pious pursuits while at the same time advertising that the Farnese family was every bit as cultured as their Medici predecessors. Likewise, it was in the best interest of Molza and his circle to align with the reigning papal family and to promote the young cardinal’s Petrarchan sophistication.

The Farnese family was clearly keen on continuing the tradition of artistic and cultural greatness established by the previous Medici popes, Leo X and Clement VII. Paul’s decision to appoint his nephew to the Cancelleria and align him with Ippolito’s literary advisors was no doubt intentional. And given the agenda of the Farnese pope, it was undoubtedly expected of Molza and Porrino to fashion Alessandro as a Petrarchan figure. In fact, Molza appears to have artificially arranged the Petrarchan relationship between Alessandro and Faustina, as well as memorialized it in Petrarchan terms. This is, I believe, the first instance in which a Beloved Portrait was created for the sole purpose of social, political, and cultural status without the male beloved directly participating in the relationship, either emotionally, physically, poetically, or artistically.

68 Ibid, 92.
This, I believe, demonstrates how important the Beloved Portrait tradition had become to the elite group directly or indirectly associated with Lorenzo’s legacy. The motivation for the Farnese clan was obvious, as they were inserting their name into the Petrarchan lineage established by the Medici. Their goals were different than those of Bembo and his circle, who wanted to be the supreme Petrarchan poets of their time and proponents of the Tuscan vulgare. They were equally dissimilar to those of the artists, the poets and some of the patrons, for whom the paragone of the arts fueled their desire to prove their preeminence in the genre.

Alessandro’s Petrarchan beloved was a married, Roman beauty from an old noble family. Like Giulia Gonzaga, Faustina Mancini was physically unavailable because of her marital status, and thus the perfect public object of attention for the young cardinal. Faustina became the subject of Petrarchan poetry by Molza, Porrino, and others. In fact, she was likely the “Faustina” mentioned in Molza’s Stanze sopra il ritratto della signora Giulia Gonzaga, in which he wrote: “Look, how much the world already thinks/ of Faustina’s immense beauty.” She was also the inspiration for Molza’s most famous work, La Ninfa Tiberina, which he dedicated to Faustina.

Francesco Maria Molza also wrote Petrarchan sonnets in honor of a portrait miniature of Faustina painted by Giulio Clovio. Clovio was the preeminent manuscript illuminator at the time, called “Little Michelangelo” by Vasari. He was also a favorite of Alessandro Farnese. After seeing Faustina in person in 1543 at the house of Bernardino

69 She was married to the condottiere, Piero Paolo Attavani.
Caffarelli, he requested permission to create her portrait for Alessandro.\textsuperscript{71} Though the miniature of Faustina is no longer extant, she was pictured in the \textit{Farnese Hours}, also illuminated by Clovio for Alessandro in 1546 (fig. 119).\textsuperscript{72} In fact, the presumed image of Faustina wearing a black mourning dress and a long white veil over her golden hair in Clovio’s illumination bears a striking resemblance to a copy of the now lost oil painting inspired by Clovio’s \textit{Portrait of Faustina} (fig. 120). The copy was commissioned by the historian and papal physician, Paolo Giovio, who was also a close friend of Molza and Pietro Bembo. In both the portrait and the \textit{Farnese Hours}, the pretty young woman wears a long white veil that is gripped modestly across her chest with her one bare hand. Though she is shown in profile in the oil painting and in three-quarter view in the manuscript, the similarities in facial features and costume are undeniable.

Faustina’s painted portrait and illuminated miniature are also strikingly similar to the copy of Sebastiano del Piombo’s \textit{Portrait of Giulia Gonzaga} (fig. 117). In each, the sitters are covered with head veils and boast porcelain skin, perfectly arched brows, and slightly pointed noses. Yet, these women are very different from their fifteenth-century Florentine sisters. Gone are the sensual golden curls, suggestive gestures, and bare skin seen in examples by Botticelli, Piero di Cosimo, and Leonardo. Nor do Giulia and Faustina appear to be related to the erotic examples produced earlier in the century by Giorgione and Raphael. Faustina’s hand is exposed in both her portrait and the miniature, but in contrast to Giorgione’s \textit{Laura}, who uses her bare hand to remove her cloak, Faustina’s hand demurely pulls her veil across her chest to avoid any impropriety. Similarly, in a contemporary marble portrait bust of Faustina sculpted by Girolamo

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{72} It is now in the Pierpont Morgan Library (M. 69, fol. 34v).
Zudeli da Faenza, the beauty’s head remains covered and she averts her eyes by gazing slightly downward (fig. 121). Her alabaster neck is exposed, highlighting its Petrarchan perfection, however her gown gathers across her chest with no suggestion of her breasts underneath.\(^73\)

Although Alessandro was careful to keep an emotional distance from his beloved, I believe he and Francesco Maria Molza were certainly aware of their contribution to the Petrarchan paragone of the arts when they commissioned a miniaturist to create Faustina’s portrait. Both men clearly knew Petrarch’s reference to Laura’s portrait as a “ritrasse in carte,” and to Simone Martini’s “stile,” or drawing pen, in his two famous sonnets. Thus, Faustina’s portrait was an even purer Petrarchan image because it was made from the same materials used for Laura’s portrait. Furthermore, in 1545, Dionigi Atanagi published the sonnets written about Faustina during her lifetime and after her untimely death during childbirth in 1543. Again, following Petrarch’s model, Atanagi divided the sonnets into two sections representing Faustina’s life and death, just as Petrarch’s sonnets were organized in the Canzoniere. Thus Faustina became the new Roman Laura, depicted by the greatest miniaturist of her time and commemorated in a book of sonnets celebrating both her life and her death. And by extension her beloved, Alessandro, was the ultimate Petrarchan lover—suffering from unrequited love for his beloved but ultimately resigned to a life dedicated to God. She, therefore, became the Roman symbol of Neo-Platonic beauty leading her beloved closer to divinity just as the Virgin ultimately saved Petrarch from his lust for Laura.

\(^73\) Walter and Zapperi, Il ritratto dell’amata: storie d’amore da Petrarca a Tiziano, 94. The bust was also celebrated in three sonnets, which were published posthumously in a book of Canzoniere in Faustina’s honor.
After her death in 1545, Gandolfo Porrino asked Michelangelo Buonarotti to paint a portrait of Faustina. Michelangelo declined, but wrote two Petrarchan sonnets of his own in honor of the great beauty. In response to Porrino he wrote Sonnet 178, entitled, *On His Mistress Faustina Mancina:*

Her beauty’s alive in heaven! I believe her without a peer even there- forget vile earth!
(where she was called “Left-handed,”) half in mirth by the common folk, too blind to fall adoring).

For you, just you, she was born; there is no restoring, chisel or stone, her beauty, pen on paper.
Far more divine than art of mine could shape her the image your memory treasures, charmed forever.

And if, the way or sun’s too luminous for all other stars, she dazzles the mind,
for you, so very close, she’s all euphoria.

Now for your peace, God makes her all the more lovely, beyond your highest hope. We’ll find only God- God knows not I- makes forms so glorious.74

Michelangelo’s response seems to be yet again another twist on the paragone of the Petrarchan Beloved Portrait. By refusing to take the commission because he claims he is unworthy of the task, Michelangelo evokes the classical Petrarchan trope of feigning ineptitude with false modesty. However, his tongue-in-cheek pun on Faustina’s surname, Mancina, meaning “left-handed,” suggests that his reason for refusing to create her portrait is not entirely genuine.75

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74 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *The Complete Poems of Michelangelo*, trans. John Frederick Nims (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 107. For the original Italian version see Forster, *The Icy Fire: Five Studies in European Petrarchism*, 30. (Nuova alta beltà che ‘n ciel terrei/ unica, non c’al mondo iniquo e fello/ (suo nome dal sinistro braccio tiello/ il vulgo, cieco a non adorar lei),/ per voi sol nacque; e far non la saprei/ con ferri in pietra, in carte col pennello;/ ma ’l vivo suo bel viso esser può quello/ nel qual vostro sperar fermar dovreste/ E se, come dal sole ogni altra stella/ è vinta, vince l’intelletto nostro,/ per voi non di men pregio esser dovea,/ Dunché, a quetarvi, è suo beltà novella/ da Dio formata all’alto desir vostro;/ e quel solo, e non io, far lo potea.)

that “from death’s foul blow her good right arm had kept her safe./ But no! Why didn’t it, poor girl? She was left-handed.” Perhaps Michelangelo thought he was above painting the posthumous portrait of Alessandro’s beloved. Or perhaps he did not want to follow in the footsteps of the “Little Michelangelo,” Giulio Clovio.

Though he does not specifically mention Clovio in his sonnet, given the regularity with which Clovio copied Michelangelo’s designs during the same period, it seems reasonable to infer that Michelangelo does not want to in turn copy Clovio. Though the two were friends and Clovio was lauded as one of the greatest artists of his time, Michelangelo acted as an advisor and inspiration for Clovio’s work, not the other way around. Regardless, the fact that Faustina was the subject of two of Michelangelo’s sonnets and that Gandolfo Porrino sought out the most famous Florentine artist at the time to paint her portrait makes it clear that she was a well-known and important figure in sixteenth-century Rome.

Ultimately, I believe that Giulia and Faustina became examples of a new type of Petrarchan beloved for sixteenth-century Counter-Reformation Rome. They were fashioned as appropriately desensualized Neo-Platonic Lauras befitting their (artificially) pious Petrarchan beloveds. Both Ippolito and Alessandro, though known for their penchant for carnal pleasures, were Roman cardinals representing their family’s public image under the scrutiny of the Protestant Reformation. And in both cases, I argue, their participation in the Beloved Tradition had as much to do with promoting themselves as the sixteenth-century extension of Lorenzo de’ Medici’s humanist legacy as it did with

76 Buonarroti, The Complete Poems of Michelangelo, 107. For the Italian see ———, Rime (Bari: Universale Laterza, 1967), 57-8. (In noi vive e qui giace la divina beltà da morte anz’il suo tempo offesa./ Se con la dritta man face’ difesa, campava./ Onde nol fe’? Ch'era mancina.)
their desire to enter into the intellectual *paragone* of the Petrarchan arts. Though both men were well educated in Petrarch’s *oeuvre* and respected patrons of the arts, neither actively participated in the act of commemorating his beloved in either poetry or paint. While creative participation was not an essential part of being a Petrarchan beloved—Ludovico Sforza, for example, was neither poet nor painter—I believe that the motivation for both cardinals’ participation in the tradition was primarily political.

Alessandro’s public Petrarchan image, however, was complicated by his less than appropriate relationship with a Roman courtesan named Angela in 1543. Alessandro’s affair was apparently well-known by his circle of literati and artists. In fact, it was his advisor, the Florentine Petrarchist and papal Nuncio, Giovanni della Casa, who suggested that Titian paint a Beloved Portrait of Angela as a gift for the cardinal. Della Casa was also a close friend of Pietro Bembo, and when Bembo died, Della Casa became the most famous Petrarchist of the time. His sonnets represented a new, harder style of Petrarchan poetry that became the new standard for mid-sixteenth century *Petrarchismo*.

Della Casa knew Titian was keen to win the favor of Alessandro in hopes of obtaining a benefice for his son Pomponio. Farnese had already asked Titian to produce a nude similar to his *Venus of Urbino*, probably resulting in the *Danaë* (fig. 122), and Della Casa recommended that the painter add the second portrait as a special gift to the cardinal.78 Since Angela was in Rome, Della Casa suggested he paint her from a sketch by Giulio Clovio. Though Della Casa and his circle were well aware of the Cardinal’s

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78 See Roberto Zapperi, "Alessandro Farnese, Giovanni della Casa and Titian’s Danae in Naples," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 54 (1991), 159-71. An excellent discussion of the Alessandro Farnese and Titian’s *Danaë* can be found in Goffen, *Titian’s Women*, 215-42. While Zapperi argued that Titian used Angela as a model for the Farnese *Danae*, Goffen provided a compelling argument against his identification. Walter and Zapperi proposed that perhaps the sitter does not read as a comely courtesan because Titian accommodated Farnese’s request to change her features so she was not recognizable as the well-known courtesan. See Walter and Zapperi, *Il ritratto dell’amata: storie d’amore da Petrarca a Tiziano*, 98.
association with Angela, Della Casa was careful to obscure her identity in his communication with Titian and only referred to her as “the sister-in-law of Signora Camilla.” Della Casa confirmed Titian’s offer to paint Angela in a letter to Farnese on September 20, 1544: “He is ready to paint the most illustrious household of Your Most Revered Lordship, everybody, everyone, including the cats, and if Don Giulio [Clovio] sends him the sketch of Signora Camilla’s sister-in-law, he’ll enlarge it and certainly [it will] resemble her….” In his letter to Alessandro, Della Casa also quoted Petrarch’s sonnet in honor of Simone’s portrait of Laura: “Quando giunse a Simon l’alto concetto.” Whether Titian’s offer to paint Angela’s portrait was sincere, or as Rona Goffen argued, the letter’s playful tone suggests his proposal may not have been serious, the inclusion of Petrarch’s quote at very least proves Angela’s portrait was associated with the Beloved Portrait tradition.

Titian brought his portrait of Angela to Rome in October, 1545. Roberto Zapperi identified the painting as Titian’s Portrait of a Venetian Lady (fig. 123), now in the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples, although Rona Goffen disputed this identification. If Titian’s Venetian Lady is, in fact, Angela, or if she was portrayed in a similar fashion, the allure of her gaze and the fondling of her necklace are the only source of her sensuality. The lovely, blonde woman with braided hair bound demurely at her head and wearing an appropriately feminine dress is significantly less erotic than, for example, Titian’s

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79 Zapperi, “Alessandro Farnese, Giovanni della Casa and Titian’s Danae in Naples,” 161. “Signora Camilla” was likely the madam of the house in which Angela was employed.
80 Goffen, Titian’s Women, 215.
82 The full text of the letter is included in ibid, 171. The letter is also discussed in Goffen, Titian’s Women, 218.
83 For more on this see Zapperi, “Alessandro Farnese, Giovanni della Casa and Titian’s Danae in Naples,” 167-68. Rona Goffen also addresses this in Goffen, Titian’s Women, 217.
slightly earlier half-length portraits of Mary Magdalene (fig. 124) or his Danaë commissioned from Farnese at the same time as Angela’s portrait.  

Titian’s portrait bears a closer similarity to Giulio Clovio’s miniature of Alessandro’s third Petrarchan beloved, Livia Colonna (fig. 125).  Alessandro Farnese’s relationship with Livia, like Faustina before her, was modeled on the Neo-Platonic Laurentian model and likely created to distract from his real courtship of Angela during the same period.  Although Livia was from the noble Della Rovere family and married to the condottiere Marzio Colonna, Pope Paul III nonetheless chastised his grandson for his relationship with Livia and his “vita amorosa (love life).”  

In 1543, another poet, Annibale Caro, wrote a letter to Molza stating that Rome was divided into two camps—those who though Livia Colonna was the most beautiful and those who favored Faustina Mancini.  Thus was established a paragone between Farnese’s beloveds, carefully omitting Angela from the competition.

Farnese commissioned various portraits of Livia, though the only extant image securely linked to Livia is Clovio’s frontispiece for the book of sonnets in her honor.  The portrait portrays a rosy-cheeked, buxom blond woman with ivory skin and golden hair.  Her blue eyes gaze out at the viewer in three-quarter view and her long neck ends draws attention to a hint of décolletage under her feminine dress.  Though Livia’s head is covered, her golden locks peek out under the veil, which drapes behind her back rather than modestly across her chest as Faustina was portrayed by Clovio in the Farnese Hours (fig. 119).  Other paintings of Livia are known through an inventory in 1644 of the

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

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84 Walter and Zapperi, Il ritratto dell'amata: storie d'amore da Petrarca a Tiziano, 98.
85 Ibid, 104.  Livia was married to Marzio Colonna after he raped her and forced her into marriage.  She was later murdered in 1554 by assassins hired by her father-in-law, Pompeo Colonna.
86 Ibid, 100.
Palazzo Farnese collection, which listed four portraits of Colonna in widow’s garb.\textsuperscript{87}

One entry documented a painting of “una dama vedova di casa Colonna (a veiled woman in the house of Colonna)” attributed to Titian, perhaps painted when Titian was in Rome in 1546.\textsuperscript{88}

Two more portraits of Colonna were listed in the inventory of the Spanish ambassador to Rome from 1548-1552, Don Diego Hurtado Mendoza, and may have been copies of Farnese’s pictures. Mendoza also commissioned a now lost or unidentified portrait of his own beloved from Titian. Pietro Aretino wrote a sonnet commemorating the painting entitled \textit{On the ‘favourite’ of Diego Urtado da Mendoza, Portrayed by Titian}: “Stealthily Titian and Love,/ having taken up their brushes and arrow in contest,/ have made two examples of a lovely lady,/ and dedicated them to Mendoza, the noble lord.”\textsuperscript{89} The portrait was kept covered by silk and Mendoza concealed it from everyone, including Aretino, “like a sacred reliquary.”\textsuperscript{90} Farnese’s relationship with his beloved and her portrait was markedly less intimate.

Farnese commissioned Gandolfo Porrino to write \textit{Stanze in lode della Signora Livia Colonna} in 1548, which included a group of stereotypical Petrarchan poems lauding her beauty and praising the artists who painted her portraits. Though Porrino does not specifically name the artist in his poems, he insists that “he [the painter] had surpassed all the others with his capacity to show her intellectual talents in her face.”\textsuperscript{91} Livia was also the subject of a second book of poems by Farnese’s court poets, including

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, 101.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Rogers, “Sonnets on Female Portraits from the Renaissance North Italy,” 303. (Furtivamente Titiano e Amore, prese a gara han fatto d’una donna bella/ e sacrati al Mendozz, aureo Signore.)
\textsuperscript{90} Goffen, \textit{Titian’s Women}, 50.
\textsuperscript{91} Walter and Zapperi, \textit{Il ritratto dell’amata: storie d’amore da Petrarca a Tiziano}, 102. (Che aveva superato tutti gli altri per la capacità di evidenziare nel volto di lei la finezza delle sue doti intellettuali.)
Gandolfo Porrino, Annibale Caro, and Bernardo Cappello written after Livia was afflicted with an eye disease. The poems were collected into a codex called *Composizioni latine e volgari di diversi authori sovra gli occhi della illustissima Signora Livia Colonna* with a frontispiece featuring Clovio’s above-mentioned portrait of Colonna.

After her violent death in 1554, Farnese commissioned another group of Petrarchan poems by Molza, Porrino, Della Casa and others called *Rime di diversi ecc. Autori, in vita, e in morte dell’Ill. S. Livia Colonna*. Reflecting his harder Petrarchan style, Della Casa described Livia as a woman so removed from her lover that she was like marble, and focused on the Petrarchan theme of a female beloved who inflicted pain on her lover by refusing his love. The most significant addition to the book were four sonnets composed by Alessandro Farnese, although he did not allow his name to be published in the anthology.

Livia was also a friend of the poet Laura Battiferra who will be discussed at length in the next chapter. In fact, Battiferra wrote three sonnets in Livia’s honor:

And those pages, rightly well prized,
that sang so sweetly of Laura and Bice [Beatrice] will be far less dear than they were before; and Livia Colonna’s lofty happy name will be heard resounding on all sides,
a worthy subject for the most pleasing laurel. 

Though Battiferra did not contribute to the anthology of poems published in commemoration of Livia, she was clearly aware of the Petrarchan adoration paid to her

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92 Ibid, 103.
93 Laura Battiferra degli Ammannati, ed. *Laura Battiferra and her Literary Circle*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 119. (*E quelle a grando ragion pregiate carte,/ che si dolce cantar per Laura e Bice,/ saran men care assai di quell che foro,/ e di Livia Colonna in ogni parte/ s’udrà sonare il nome alto e felice/ degno soggetto al più gradito alloro.*)
friend in life and death and believed that she, like Laura and Beatrice, was worthy of her poetic fame.

**The Counter-Reformation Petrarchan Beloved**

After Livia’s death, Alessandro Farnese did not publically pursue another Petrarchan beloved, though he had other lovers. Certainly Paul III’s involvement in the Council of Trent from 1545-1564 must have put excessive pressure on his grandson, and his court painters and artists, to produce images appropriate for a reformed Rome. Thus the Petrarchan Beloved Portrait ritual went out of fashion as Rome adapted to the reformist zeal of the Post-Tridentine Catholic Church. 94 What previous scholarship has not addressed is the impact of sixteenth-century Petrarchan commentaries on the end of the Petrarchan Beloved Portrait tradition. Literary commentaries also responded to the changing religious climate in Italy and Petrarch was once again refashioned into a figure appropriate for the times. Reflecting the Catholic Church’s response to Martin Luther’s *Ninety-Five Theses* and the subsequent Council of Trent, Petrarchan commentaries began to move from secular to moralizing interpretations of the sonnets.

Just two years after the first meeting of the Council of Trent, Tuscan-born Bernardino Daniello published a commentary in Venice in 1549 and an expanded *Life of Petrarch* in 1551. In both essays, Daniello’s emphasized Petrarch’s enlightened move from courtier to moralist. He wrote, “Having been informed of the customs and procedures of the court, seeing that neither the learned nor the virtuous but rather the...

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94 Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch*, 63-64. (Ma chiaritosi poi de’ costume e proceder de la corte, veggendo che non i dotti e vertuosi, ma gli’ignoranti & vitiosi vi si amavano, favorivano e premiavano, si partì da servigi del Papa, e se ne andò ad habitare in Valchiusa.)
ignorant and the wicked were preferred, favored, and rewarded there, he departed from the pope’s service and went to live at Vaucluse.”\textsuperscript{95} Less than two decades after Sylvano da Venafro presented Petrarch as a model courtier (1533), the poet became a foreshadowing of the Church’s response to the corruption at the papal court.

Commentaries written in the 1550s by Fausto da Longiano, Antonio Brucioli, and Ludovico Castelvetro were more obvious in their proto-Protestant leanings. Interestingly, all three authors were accused of having Lutheran or Calvinistic sympathies, and none of their essays became widely circulated because of it.\textsuperscript{96} The men did not openly reveal their Protestant beliefs in their commentaries, but rather presented an analysis of Petrarch’s scriptural references in the \textit{Canzoniere}, thereby suggesting the poet would have supported the Protestant belief that a greater emphasis should be put on the close reading of scripture itself, as opposed to its interpretation by the clergy. Fausto avoided overt political references to reform, and rather focused his \textit{Life of Petrarch} on a “psychological anatomy of the poet’s personality and behavior, a spiritual profile of the idealism and egotism, altruism and pragmatism that beset his inner life.”\textsuperscript{97} He excused Petrarch’s participation in courtly pleasures by focusing on the poet’s ultimate abandonment of secular life for a solitary existence during which time he was able to reevaluate his own spirituality. After Laura’s death, Fausto argued, Petrarch returned his attention to Scripture and living a spiritual life.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{95} Walter and Zapperi, \textit{Il ritratto dell’amata: storie d’amore da Petrarca a Tiziano}, 107.
\textsuperscript{96} Kennedy, \textit{Authorizing Petrarch}, 64. Brucioli’s commentary was reprinted, but only in Lyon in 1550, 1551, and 1558 and anonymously in Venice in 1558. The others were not published which Kennedy believes betrays the suspicions surrounding the authors and their beliefs.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid, 68.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid, 69.
Fausto included *a Life of Laura* along with his commentary; yet, unlike previous authors, he did not provide further proof of her existence, and instead referred to Petrarch’s famous letter to Giacomo Colonna in which he responded to suspicions that Laura never existed. Fausto did not make excuses for Petrarch’s amatory yearnings. However, by introducing the possibility that Laura may have been a figment of the poet’s imagination, he was able to shift the focus from Petrarch’s physical lust to the poet’s ultimate desire for salvation found through his disassociation from the papacy and personal contemplation of scripture.\(^9\) By dismissing Laura in his commentary, Fausto presented Petrarch’s love sonnets as a metaphor for the poet’s spiritual reform.

Rather than focusing on Laura’s biography, he instead alluded to the ambiguity surrounding her existence.\(^10\) Thus the flesh and blood Laura so popular in the earlier part of the century was replaced with a figment of the poet’s imagination. This functions in exactly the same way that portraits of Petrarchan beloveds were made increasingly more generic in the sixteenth century, as for example, Palma Vecchio’s Petrarchan *Portrait of a Blonde Woman* of circa 1520, now in the National Gallery of Art (fig. 126), and Titian’s *Flora*, circa 1515-20, now in the Uffizi (fig. 127). Each portrait portrays a classically Petrarchan blonde beauty with flowing blonde locks, white skin, rosy lips and cheeks, and bare breasts, yet neither can be identified as a specific woman. Likewise, each woman holds a bouquet of flowers in her left hand, leading most scholars to speculate that both sitters are meant to represent Flora, the Roman goddess of Spring. Yet, just as Andrea del Verrocchio’s *Bust of a Lady with Flowers* and Leonardo’s *Portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci* portray their sitters holding nosegays of flowers to recall

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\(^9\) Ibid, 72.

\(^10\) Ibid, 71.
Lorenzo’s Petrarchan tournament in honor of Lucrezia Donati and their beloved relationship, so, too, I believe, must Palma Vecchio and Titian have been aware of the Petrarchan connotations associated with a Petrarchan blonde handing flowers to her anonymous lover. The Venetian idealized beauties, like a fictional Laura, could be interpreted metaphorically, thus excusing their overt sexuality.

The incorporation of female sexuality into the canon of Petrarchan beauty was justified in a treatise published in Venice in 1554 by Federigo Luigini. In his *Libro delle bella donna* (Venice, 1554), Trissino described an anonymous beauty from head to toe in a most unregal fashion. Audience played a large role in the parameters of Luigini’s discourse. Instead of presenting a public figure, Luigini described an idealized all’antica beauty in a private villa with an audience of four men who gather after a day at the hunt to create an exphrastic portrait of a beautiful woman. The men avoided issues of social decorum by using examples only of fictitious and ancient heroines whose sensuality was acceptable because of their historical distance from contemporary women. Thus, just as idealized mythological subjects were often painted in the nude yet retained an elevated status, so, too, were Luigini and his characters able to describe the perfect woman and titillate their male audience while ultimately ending with a celebration of their subject’s inner virtues and chastity. Each author thus conformed to the social norms dictated by his audience within an overarching framework of Petrarchan idealism.

Antonio Brucioli is also important in a discussion of the relationship between Petrarchan commentaries and changing visual interpretations of Petrarchan beloveds. Like Fausto, Brucioli primarily focused his 1548 commentary on Petrarch’s internal and

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102 Ibid, 52.
political reform. To this end, he reinterpreted three of Petrarch’s sonnets as a comment on the poet’s criticism of Rome and its corruption.\textsuperscript{103} Brucioli’s criticism of Rome, through Petrarch’s eyes, was written in the same years that Pope Paul III was responding to the need for papal reform with the Council of Trent.

Also interesting is that Brucioli dedicated his commentary to Lucrezia d’Este. The granddaughter of the controversial figures Alfonso I d’Este and Lucrezia Borgia, Lucrezia d’Este represented an important lineage of Petrarchan sympathizers. To his dedicatee Brucioli wrote:

\begin{quote}
In such a way that whatever beauty, charm, high intelligence, and praise-worthy manners Petrarch has attributed to Laura, will seem wholly revived for us in you, more beautiful and marvelous than woman ever was, since your excellence, which she did not have because of her humble birth and low rank, derives its high and noble origins from Ercole, who has ruled over a good part of Italy for a long time, and the royal house of France, and directly from that king who ruled over the undefeated, chosen people of Christendom.\textsuperscript{104}
\end{quote}

In addition to being a member of the Este family through marriage, she was also linked to the French crown through her maternal grandparents, King Louis XII and Anne of Brittany. Lucrezia’s mother, Renée of France, was a Protestant sympathizer, offering safe-haven to Calvin and his exiled French followers at the Este court in Ferrara much to the dismay and ire of her husband, Francesco Maria della Rovere.\textsuperscript{105} Lucrezia was the perfect figure to serve as an idealized Petrarchan Protestant due to her familial connections to the Protestant Reformation along with her Petrarchan good looks. In fact, building on Vellutello’s claim that Laura was a poor country maiden, Brucioli argued that

\textsuperscript{103} Kennedy, Authorizing Petrarch, 75.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, 73-74. (\textit{In modo che, cio che di bello, di leggiardro, di alto intendimento, et lodati costume ha descritto il Petrarca in Madonna Laura in vosta signoria illustissima si vedra veramente ritornato in vita alla eta nostra, piu bello et piu mirabile, che mai fusse, aggiuntovi (quello che non hebbe ella, nata in humile e basso loco) che vostra eccellentia, tiene la sua origine alta e Signorile, dagli altissimi Herculei, di lungo tempo dominant a huona parte della Italia et della reale casa di Francia, et da quell Re, che de piu nomati, et de piu invitti, che mai habbia havuta la christianita.)}
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, 74.
Lucrezia’s rank, family ties, and beauty made her superior to Laura in every way. It is Lucrezia, not Laura, Brucioli suggested, who should serve as a model for contemporary women—a new Protestant Petrarchan role model. The claim that Lucrezia was superior to Laura was not a new one; in fact, such a *paragone* between two ladies was the basis of the beloved portrait tradition discussed in Chapter Four.

The most overt refashioning of the *Canzoniere* as a moralizing tale was written by the Venetian Franciscan friar, Girolamo Malipiero. In 1526 Malipiero wrote *Petrarca spirituale* as a reaction to the common secular interpretation of Petrarch’s sonnets. His premise was a fictional encounter between the author and the poet’s ghost at Petrarch’s grave. During their meeting, Petrarch revealed that he was denied access to Heaven because of his love poetry and now cannot rest. This encounter is illustrated in one of only two woodcut illustrations in the book designed by Giovanni Britto (fig. 128). In the image, Malipiero faces Petrarch, who, wearing his laurel crown and poet’s mantle, stands lost in pensive thought. Behind the men is a lush landscape with a church atop a nearby hill with rabbits and Petrarch’s metaphoric stag running in the woods.

Rabbits were often associated with the solitary life of a disillusioned humanist taking refuge in nature. The stag also had metaphoric meaning for the Petrarchan reader. It is a reference to Petrarch’s Ovidian transformation in Sonnet 23. After stumbling upon a nude Laura bathing in a fountain she splashed water on his face and Petrarch was “quickly turned into a solitary,/ wandering deer that moves from wood to wood.”

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106 Six subsequent editions were printed from 1545-87 and it inspired many imitations. See ibid, 34.
108 The other image is a frontispiece for the book featuring a portrait of Petrarch in profile.
Importantly, it was for this same sonnet that Antonio Grifo portrayed Laura in the nude in folio 9 verso of the *Canzoniere*. Given Malipiero’s intention to demonstrate that Petrarch’s lust for Laura was the source of his spiritual demise, the reference to the stag, and perhaps his knowledge of erotic interpretations such as Grifo’s, would have made the singular image that much more meaningful to the learned reader.

Just as Grifo’s sensual interpretation of Laura mirrored similar interpretations in contemporary Petrarchan Beloved portraiture by Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo, Malipiero’s spiritualized Petrarch corresponded with a visual reinterpretation of female Petrarchan portraiture in the second half of the sixteenth century. The women pictured in Sebastiano da Piombo’s *Portrait of Giulia Gonzaga* and Giulio Clovio’s miniature of Faustina Mancini, with their widow’s garb and modest veils, are a fitting counterpart to Malipiero’s *Il Petrarca Spirituale*. What is interesting, however, is that to my knowledge no art historian has before now considered the impact of the Protestant and Counter-Reformations on interpretations of the *Canzoniere* as they specifically relate to changing Petrarchan imagery. While the deviations may be subtle and the Petrarchan canon of beauty remained intact, these shifting readings of the poems had a direct impact on demise of the Beloved Portrait genre.

After Pope Paul III’s death in 1549, the last great Renaissance Petrarchist, Giovanni Della Casa, left the service of the Alessandro Farnese and Pope Paul III to focus entirely on his literary pursuits, including a biography of his friend, Pietro Bembo. This marked the end of the Roman Beloved Portrait; however, the tradition remained alive in Florence for at least another decade at the court of Cosimo I de’ Medici. The

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110 Petrarca, *Petrarch’s Canzoniere*, 34-35. *(Et in un cervo solitario et vago/ di selva in selva ratto mi trasformo.)*
next and final chapter explores the revival of Medici glory in Florence under Alessandro and Cosimo I de’ Medici. I also explore the impact of the Mannerist style and building Antipetrarchan sentiments on the Beloved Portrait tradition in sixteenth century Florence. Florentine artists, patrons, sitters, and poets yet again manipulated and reinterpreted Petrarch tradition to reestablish the sixteenth-century Florentine Beloved Portrait started by their forefather, Lorenzo de’ Medici. This ultimately culminated in Agnolo Bronzino’s fusion of Petrarchan and Antipetrarchan sentiments in his Portrait of Laura Battiferra.
CHAPTER FIVE: LORENZO’S LEGACY: THE ANTIPETRARCHAN BELOVED PORTRAIT IN FLORENCE

When Ippolito de’ Medici’s rival and cousin, Alessandro, became the First Duke of Florence in 1532, questions about his parentage and legitimate right to rule Florence made it essential that he convince his consorts that he was the rightful heir to Lorenzo’s legacy. It has been speculated that Alessandro was the illegitimate son of Giulio de’ Medici, elected Clement VII in 1523, and an African slave woman, resulting in his darker skin and nickname “Il Moro.” This would explain why Clement was so keen to promote Alessandro as the first Duke of Florence rather than reinstate his nephew, Ippolito, after the Sack of Rome. Questions about Alessandro’s parentage, according to Patricia Simons, necessitated his use of his portraiture to present him as an “honorable, cultivated, measured man of Medicean ancestry.” This was, in part, accomplished with the commission of a unique Portrait of Alessandro de’ Medici by Jacopo Pontormo circa 1534-5 (fig. 129).

Just as Ippolito promoted himself during his short reign in the city as a new Magnifico in the manner of his grandfather, Lorenzo, so too did Alessandro use the visual arts to promote his Medici legitimacy. By showing Alessandro in the act of drawing his beloved in the painting, Pontormo cleverly linked Alessandro to the Petrarchan Beloved Portrait tradition begun by Lorenzo de’ Medici. Though his eyes gaze out at the viewer,

1 Kennedy, Authorizing Petrarch, 72. He may also have been the son of Lorenzo di Piero de’ Medici, the Duke of Urbino.
his hands are busy drawing his beloved on a white piece of paper in the forefront of the painting. Alessandro is enclosed in a wood-paneled room with a door slightly ajar behind him to symbolize the recent passing of Pope Clement.³ By symbolically referring to Lorenzo and Clement in Alessandro’s portrait, Pontormo visually inserts Alessandro into the lineage of great Medici rulers.

The act of drawing is also a nod to Castiglione’s recommendation in *il Cortegiano* that men of noble breeding should learn to draw and paint as did the ancient rulers as the skill was appropriate for a cultured prince.⁴ Alessandro, according to Leo Steinberg, was especially in need of the princely connotations associated with the act of drawing.⁵ His reputation as a womanizer was also in need of a Petrarchan makeover. Alessandro was known as the most sexually voracious of the Medici family, which resulted in many precarious relationships with the Florentine middle class.⁶ Thus Pontormo’s decision to present him as a Petrarchan prince pining for his absent beloved may have be an intentional distraction from his more unsavory sexual reputation.

When considering Alessandro’s portrait and his active role in drawing a portrait of a woman who has been identified as his mistress, Taddea Malpensina.⁷ In the accompanying catalog for the Philadelphia Museum of Arts exhibition, *Pontormo, Bronzino, and the Medici: The Transformation of the Renaissance Portrait in Florence* (2004-05), Elizabeth Cropper suggested that the drawing is meant to portray a testa\[^3\]

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³ Ibid, 658. The open door, according to Patricia Simons, is a symbol of Pope Clement’s recent passing to the heavenly realm, as is Alessandro’s dark clothing.

⁴ Ibid. It also helped rulers to sharpen their skills in warfare by enabling them to draft their own drawings of potential battle sites.

⁵ Steinberg, “Pontormo’s ‘Alessandro de’ Medici’, or I Only Have Eyes For You," 82-83.

⁶ Ibid, 83.

⁷ This identification is assumed by scholars but has not been confirmed. She could also be Alessandro’s fiancée, King Charles of France’s illegitimate daughter, Margaret. See also J.R. Hale, *Florence and the Medici* (London: Phoenix Press, 1977), 122.
divina of an idealized woman in the tradition of Michelangelo. Regardless of the sitter’s identity, the erudite viewer would certainly have recalled Pliny’s account of the first drawing, which was also a Beloved Portrait. That this story was specifically associated with the Beloved Portrait tradition at the inception of the Beloved Portrait tradition is evidenced by Francesco d’Antonio del Chierico’s 1458 illumination of Pliny’s Natural History (fig. 130) which was likely commissioned by Piero de’ Medici. On folio 4 recto the artist depicted two lovers in contemporary fifteenth century dress facing one another in a central medallion. Not unlike the many images of Petrarch and Laura in the same pose, the couple gazes into each other’s eyes with the man on the left and the woman on the right. This positioning was deliberate to associate the man with the superior, dexter side and the woman with the “liturgical sinister” position reserved for the lesser sex. Though Pontormo reversed the genders in his portrait, the connection would no doubt have been made by his audience as the story was well-known in the sixteenth century. So too would his viewers have considered the Petrarchan play on Alessandro’s name which compared him to Alexander the Great, the patron of Apelles’ famous portrait.

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9 The ancient drawing was created by the daughter of the Corinthian sculptor, Butades, who traced the shadow of her lover’s face on the wall so that she could remember him in his absence. This story is detailed in my Introduction. See also Simons, “Disegno and Desire in Pontormo’s Alessandro de’ Medici,” 667.
10 The Medici arms are emblazoned on the bottom of the page and there is an inscription identifying Piero de’ Medici as the patron on folio 426. The couple depicted in the margin may be the patrons of the manuscript. For more on this see Alexander, The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination 1450-1550, 120-21.
of his mistress Campaspe mentioned in Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* as was discussed in the previous chapter.\(^{12}\)

Alessandro’s drawing was also intended to refer to Simone Martini’s *Portrait of Laura*, which according to Petrarch’s sonnets, was drawn on paper. By visually connecting Alessandro to Simone rather than to Petrarch, Pontormo commented on the *paragone* of the arts, and specifically Pontormo’s own championship of *disegno* as the superior medium. With the profile drawing Pontormo “endow[ed] his craft with a distinguished pedigree, ranging from Pliny and Petrarch to poets like Lorenzo de’ Medici, activating also theories of the time about perceptual psychology, amorous imprinting and the conceptual basis of disegno.”\(^{13}\) He provided an intellectual and historical subtext that aligned Alessandro with the great Tuscan Medici rulers, the great Tuscan artists and poets, and simultaneously competes with the first classical Beloved Portrait, the first drawing, Alexander the Great, Simone Martini’s *Portrait of Laura*, and the first Florentine Renaissance Beloved Portrait of Lucrezia Donati commissioned by Lorenzo from Andrea del Verrocchio.

Though the subject of the portrait is a male beloved, Pontormo’s painting should nonetheless be read as a Beloved Portrait in the Laurentian tradition. It is a Petrarchan portrait within a state portrait, ultimately proving the importance of the Beloved Portrait tradition in fashioning the public identity of a Medici prince. Just as Lorenzo and Giuliano arranged public tournaments in honor of Lucrezia and Simonetta, and Ippolito de’ Medici publically celebrated Giulia Gonzaga, Alessandro de’ Medici used his courtly


\(^{13}\) Simons, “Disegno and Desire in Pontormo’s Alessandro de’ Medici,” 655.
Petrarchan persona to promote his rightful rule to the cultural hegemony of Medici Florence.

Alessandro’s rule was cut short by his untimely murder in January of 1537 by his distant Medici relative. Because Alessandro did not leave an heir, the Florentine Senate elected Cosimo I, the son of the great-great-granddaughter and the great-grandnephew of Cosimo il Vecchio, Maria Saviati and Giovanni delle Bande Nere, the famous condottiere and son of Caterina Sforza. Cosimo I became the Duke of Florence on January 9, 1537, and set about creating an empire encompassing all of Tuscany. Though Cosimo I was a proponent of the arts and created a thriving artistic court, his portraiture was primarily focused on promoting his dynastic image rather than his courtly persona. Thus the Medici Beloved Portrait tradition was not continued by the new leader. However his court portraitist, Agnolo Bronzino, did not let the ritual die with the passing of Alessandro. Instead, he painted his own personal interpretation of the ritual for his Neo-Platonic beloved, Laura Battiferra, and in doing so created the most complex example in the Renaissance.

Petrarchismo and Antipetrarchismo in Bronzino’s Portrait of Laura Battiferra

Agnolo Bronzino was an accomplished poet as well as painter and, within his intellectual circle at the court of Cosimo I de’ Medici, he was respected for both talents. As a painter, he inherited the Mannerist tradition from his teacher, Pontormo, and as a

14 He was murdered by Lorenzaccio de’ Medici.
poet, he worked in the style of Petrarch. A true Tuscan himself, Bronzino was born in 1503 close to Florence where he remained most of his life as the preferred Medici portraitist. In an effort to rebuild Florence’s cultural hegemony after years of political conflict, disease, and foreign occupations, Cosimo I replaced the Accademia degli Umidi begun by Cosimo il Vecchio, with the Accademia Fiorentina. As one of the original members, Bronzino counted among his friends an elite circle of Petrarchan poets including Michelangelo, Benedetto Varchi, Giovanni della Casa, Annibale Caro, and Antonfrancesco Grazzini. The influence of his relationships with this group translated directly into the subject matter of both his poetry and portraits, many of which were inspired by his circle of friends.

Under the direction of Cosimo I, members of the Academy were encouraged to translate ancient documents into the vernacular in a move to refine the Tuscan language, and by extension, to strengthen the Tuscan state. Bronzino was a proponent of the use of the vernacular and inflected both his poetry and his painting with a distinctly Tuscan style. He was recognized for his mastery of Dante and Petrarch’s oeuvre and composed his own group of sonnets following the canonical rules of imitation. Bronzino’s sonnets,

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16 Bronzino and Pontormo had a very close relationship, both professionally and personally. Bronzino’s poems written after the death of his master reveal the depth of their affection for one another and the younger painter’s genuine grief. For the sonnets see Katherine M. Poole, “The Medici Grand Dukes and the Art of Conquest: Ruling Identity and the Formation of a Tuscan Empire, 1537-1609” (Rutgers University, 2007), 5.
17 Parker, Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet, 70-76.
18 Bronzino joined the Academy when it was still called the Accademia degli Umidi on February 11, 1540 when he and forty-one other members were accepted in order to increase support within the organization for Cosimo I. He was expelled on March 4, 1547, when internal reformers purged all members not considered serious poets. However on May 26, 1566, Bronzino was finally reinstated after writing three sonnets in honor of Duke Cosimo I. See ibid, 17-18.
19 Working in the Petrarchan style was fashionable at the time, especially among Bronzino’s circle. See Firpo, “Bronzino and the Medici,” 94. For an interesting discussion of Bronzino, Andrea del Sarto, and Pontormo’s participation in the Accademia and various other cultural societies see Elizabeth Pilliod, Pontormo, Bronzino, Allori: A Genealogy of Florentine Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 84-85.
20 Parker, Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet, 8-9.
like similar works by Pietro Bembo, Francesco Maria Molza, and Giovanni Della Casa, wove together recognizable lines from Petrarch’s verse with original poetic phrases specific to Bronzino’s world.\textsuperscript{21} The majority of his sonnets were composed between 1540 and 1560, but unlike Petrarch’s \textit{Canzoniere}, which focused primarily on his love for Laura, Bronzino’s sonnets addressed a range of issues including art, love, friendship, his Medici patrons, and death.\textsuperscript{22}

Although Bronzino’s poems were not particularly innovative in their contribution to the literary genre, in Deborah Parker’s words:

Bronzino’s \textit{Canzoniere} testifies not only to his avid participation in Petrarchism but also to his desire to be considered among Florence’s engaged \textit{literati}. Those who mastered Petrarch’s refined linguistic code found they could take part in a sophisticated network of social and cultural relationships by exchanging poems with fellow men and women of letters. In this respect Petrarchism was tantamount to a social calling card…. His [Bronzino’s] lyric verse testifies to the painter’s commitment to securing for himself the higher social status accorded \textit{literati} and the durable fame attained by poets.\textsuperscript{23}

Bronzino’s agility with Petrarch’s works identified him as a cultured Florentine court artist and poet and allowed him a prominent role in the revival of Florentine artistic supremacy. He therefore had access to a social and artistic network that would have been otherwise unobtainable for a man like himself who did not receive a formal humanistic education.\textsuperscript{24}

Many of the sonnets exchanged between Bronzino and his circle are included in his collection of \textit{Canzoniere}.\textsuperscript{25} By the mid-sixteenth century the trend was no longer to focus on a single beloved, but rather to include works by multiple authors addressing

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Cropper, "Prolegomena to a New Interpretation of Bronzino's Florentine Portraits," 150.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Parker, \textit{Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet}, 46-53.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 47.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 43.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Only six of Bronzino’s traditional Petrarchan poems were published during his lifetime in books compiled by other poets. His complete book of \textit{Rime} was not published until 1822-23 when it was printed by Domenico Moreni. For more on this, see ibid.
\end{itemize}
various themes. Also new to this period was the inclusion of both sides of the poetic
dialog between a poet and his correspondent rather than just a one-sided
communication. Perhaps the most famous of these poetic exchanges were the sonnets
traded between Bronzino and his Neo-Platonic beloved, the poetess Laura Battiferra.

Laura Battiferra was born in Urbino in 1523, the natural daughter of an upper
class prelate and an aristocratic woman from a provincial family. Although she was not
legitimized until 1543, Battiferra’s father provided her with a good education in
literature, philosophy, and religion. She was widowed shortly after her first marriage and
remarried Florentine sculptor and architect Bartolommeo Ammannati in 1550. The
couple spent the first years of their marriage in Rome where Ammannati was employed
by Pope Julius III. Upon the Pope’s death in 1555, the pair moved to Florence, and
Ammannati became a favorite of Duke Cosimo I and Duchess Eleonora da Toledo by
whom he was chosen for many important Medici projects, including the *Fountain of
Neptune* and the renovation of the Palazzo Pitti.

Soon after arriving in Florence, Battiferra met Benedetto Varchi and became
acquainted with his circle of intellectual friends at the Florentine Academy, including
Bronzino. Battiferra exchanged Petrarchan sonnets with each member of the group,
however, with Bronzino she engaged in a Neo-Platonic relationship in the tradition of
Petrarch and Laura. Battiferra was an accomplished poet, publishing two books in her
lifetime, the first a collection of poems and eclogues published in 1560 and dedicated to

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26 Ibid, 40-41.
27 Ibid, 41.
28 Ibid, 42. I use the singular feminine form that Victoria Kirkham has identified as Laura’s own signature.
29 Kirkham, "Laura Battiferra degli Ammannati’s First Book of Poetry: A Renaissance Holograph Comes out of Hiding," 351-91. Laura Battiferra was not invited to join the Florentine Academy, although she belonged to the Accademia degli Assorditi in Urbino and the Accademia degli Intronati in Siena.

Although Battiferra was not a Tuscan by blood, she quickly fashioned herself as one in spirit, as is evidenced with the title of her first book, *Il primo libro dell’opere toscane*. Thus, she positioned herself at the Medici court as one of the premier poets working in the Tuscan vernacular on behalf of the Medici Empire.  

A selection of poems exchanged between Bronzino, Battiferra, and their friends refer to a portrait Bronzino painted of Laura Battiferra circa 1558 (fig. 131). The portrait, according to poet, Antonfrancesco Grazzini (called Il Lasca), was divinely inspired:

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It must have been an Angel, otherwise
It’s every effort, every work, and every art would have been in vain;
No divine thing in any way
Can be portrayed by mortal hand.

You alone, then, angelic and sovereign spirit,
Painting part by part can portray
The Graces diffused and scattered in her,
Where every other paintbrush would have been useless.

How could earthly eye
Ever have had the power to gaze
Intent and fixed on her serene eyes, her holy face?

Blessed are you, to whom alone Heaven allows
To make known and clear to posterity
The wisdom and beauty of Paradise.
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31 In the 1920s, American art historian and collector, Charles Loeser, first identified Bronzino’s profile portrait of a woman holding an open book of Petrarch’s sonnets as Laura Battiferra. Loeser’s identification has been generally accepted by art historians.

32 Kirkham, "Laura Battiferra degli Ammannati’s First Book of Poetry: A Renaissance Holograph Comes out of Hiding." (Angelo esser devea, se non che ‘nvano/ Era ogni sua fatica, ogni opra, ogni arte;/ Non può cosa divina in nulla parte/ Esser ritratta mai da mortal mano./ Dunque voi, spirit angelico, e sovrano./ Potete sol pingendo a parte a parte/ Ritrar le Grazie in lei diffuse, e sparte./ Ove ogni altro pennel sarebbe vano./ Come gli occhi sereni, e ‘l santo viso./ Occhio terren saria stato possente/ Poter mai rimirare intent, e fisso?/ Beato voi, cui solo il Ciel consente/ Il senno, e la beltà di Paradiso/ Far conta, e Chiara all future gente.)
In typical Petrarchan fashion, the “angel” to whom Il Lasca refers is a pun on Bronzino’s first name, Agnolo, a Tuscan derivative of Angelo. The divine ability of this “angelic and sovereign spirit” to capture his beloved’s image in paint while celebrating her “scattered” virtues in rhyme refers to Bronzino’s dual ability in both mediums. Il Lasca’s sonnet was clearly meant to be compared with Petrarch’s famous Sonnet 77 to Simone Martini: “For certain my friend Simon was in Heaven, the place from which this gracious lady comes; he saw her there and copied her on paper as proof down here of such a lovely face….” In Petrarch’s sonnet, he and Simone are each credited for grasping the elusive beauty of Laura with their art, but since her portrait can only come to life through Petrarch’s words, the two men have to combine their talents in order to capture her “angelic spirit.”

That Bronzino was conscious of the Simone Martini tradition is evidenced in his response to Il Lasca’s poem:

Kind Lasca, the favor from on High that put the stylus in my hand so that courteous and warm affection impels you to set pen to paper and make you stray in part from the truth because of too much love; is apportioned to me not because I am worthy, or because there might not be another human better than I, not by merit or art, but as a gift wholly from Him, who holds all grace at His disposal. He alone guides me, and so may He never be divided from me, but sustain my hand and my mind until I happily reach the preordained end—by this I swear to you,

33 Grazzini uses the word “sparte” which refers to the first line of Petrarch’s first sonnet in which he refers to his “rime sparse” or scattered rhymes.
34 Parker, Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet, 98. (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.)
35 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 132-33.
seated before so great a work, that of my own power my soul feels incapable of arising, but can only follow it humbly and reverently.36

He begins with: “Lasca gentil, l’alto favor, che ‘n mano/ lo stil mi pose,” a paraphrase of Petrarch’s second sonnet in honor of Simone’s portrait in which he writes: “ch’ a mano nome gli pose in man lo stile….”37 In both poems, the credit is given to the higher power who has inspired the artist to take up his stylus. Bronzino, however, is in the superior position as the creator of the art as well as the poet who describes it.

Unlike Simone Martini, who was unable to accept or deny the praise bestowed upon him by Petrarch, Bronzino is able to respond as a poet to the sonnet in praise of his abilities as a painter. He craftily denies his own skill by explaining that his art is a vessel for God’s creation, yet he does not deny that his work is worthy of the praise bestowed upon him by Il Lasca. Rather, he insists that the praise should be directed at God because He gave Bronzino his talent. In this short poem Bronzino not only reveals his comfort with Petrarchan poetics, but he also demonstrates his confidence in his own position as a poet and painter on par with Petrarch and Simone Martini. This formed the foundation of Bronzino’s personal paragone with the two masters, which he made tangible in his Portrait of Laura Battiferra.

According to fellow Petrarchist, Benedetto Varchi, Bronzino “memorized the whole of Dante and a great part of Petrarch, far beyond what would perhaps seem credible to people who do not understand that just as poetry is nothing other than a

36 Kirkham, “Dante’s Phantom, Petrarch’s Specter: Bronzino’s Portrait of the Poet Laura Battiferra,” 74. (Lasca gentil, l’alto favor, che ‘n mano/ lo stil mi pose, onde a verger le carte/ vi trae cortese e caldo affetto e ‘n parte/ del ver, per troppo amor, vi fa lontano:/ non perch’io degno, o che forse altro umano/ miglior di me ne fosse, a me comporte/ dono intero di lui, non metro o d’arte,/ c’ha d’ogni grazia a pien l’arbitorio in mano./ Ei sol mi guida, e se da me diviso/ non sia, ma regga e la mano e la mente/ fin ch’io giunga felice al fin prefisso,/ vi guiro, che per mio valor non sente/ d’alzarsi l’alma a si grand’opra assiso,/ se non d’umil seguirla, e reverente.)
37 Parker, Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet, 99-100.
speaking picture, so painting is nothing other than mute poetry.” In his Portrait of Laura Battiferra Bronzino applied this knowledge of Petrarchan tropes to create a visual poem dedicated to his beloved. However his Laura is far from mute. Though she does not open her mouth to speak, Bronzino cleverly gives her a voice by painting her with a large open book of Petrarch’s Canzoniere on her lap.

The book displays the legible text of two of Petrarch’s sonnets. Anyone familiar with Petrarch’s verse would have immediately realized that the poems were taken out of their original order and, given Bronzino’s penchant for including obscure double meanings in both his portraits and his poetry, the educated viewer would have pondered the meaning implied by the included texts. The audience for which the painting was intended, be it Battiferra and Ammannati, Varchi and his circle, or Bronzino himself, would have read the juxtaposition of the two sonnets as a witty comment on the sitter’s personality, as well as the painter’s play with literary tropes of the time. Thus, I believe that an analysis of the sonnets is essential to understanding the visual language of the painting. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, the poems function literally and metaphorically to communicate layers of meaning about both the sitter and the painter.

In her portrait, Battiferra’s two long, white fingers point to the easily identifiable text of Petrarch’s Sonnet 240 on the left side of volume, while her right hand rests on the top right page displaying Sonnet 64. The sonnets are painted as if they are pages of a hand-written manuscript, although Petrarch’s Canzoniere had been available in print since 1472. Scholars have long debated whose script is captured on the pages of Battiferra’s book, based on the study of extant writing samples. Art historians have

38 Kirkham, "Dante’s Phantom, Petrarch’s Specter: Bronzino’s Portrait of the Poet Laura Battiferra,” 76.
39 Parker, Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet, 17. Pietro Bembo also published an edition in 1501 with which Bronzino must have been familiar.
argued for and against an identification of Battiferra’s hand as opposed to Bronzino’s, but most scholars conclude that the book is meant to be a private working diary into which Battiferra would have copied her favorite poems as models for her own writing style and not a fashionable Petrarcho like those carried in courtly circles. 40 Regardless of whose hand wrote the script, Bronzino clearly intended for it to be read by the viewer and in doing so to add a layer of meaning to the painting. Even if the handwriting was Battiferra’s, Bronzino asserts his own voice into the book by signing his name along the loosened ties that hang below the binding. Interestingly, Bronzino signs his name to the book rather than on the body of his beloved, unlike Raphael who autographed his beloved’s arm in La Fornarina. This suggests that Bronzino claims his beloved’s intellect, rather than her body. This assumption is further supported in an analysis of the poetic text later in this chapter. By signing the book ties, Bronzino also autographs the new ordering of poems in the book, taking credit for having wittily juxtaposed two sonnets about Petrarch’s Laura, and in so doing, rewriting the Canzoniere so that they represent his own Laura instead.

Bronzino included hand-written manuscripts in other portraits, like in his Portrait of Lorenzo Lenzi (fig. 132), which a young male holds an open manuscript displaying a legible handwritten poem by Petrarch juxtaposed next to one by Varchi. 41 Here, it makes sense for the boy to hold a copy book because he was a young student of Varchi’s and thus would have transcribed poems by his tutor as well as by Petrarch. Petrarch’s poem

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40 Kirkham, “Dante’s Phantom, Petrarca’s Specter: Bronzino’s Portrait of the Poet Laura Battiferra,” 90. Victoria Kirkham argued that based on a comparison of extant examples of Battiferra’s script, the poems were meant to represent Battiferra’s own hand. See also ———, “Laura Battiferra degli Ammannati’s First Book of Poetry: A Renaissance Holograph Comes out of Hiding,” 352. Carol Plazzotta believed that the manuscript is more likely written in Bronzino’s hand, but stripped of idiosyncratic variations.

41 For an excellent discussion of Bronzino’s use of text in his portraits see Cropper, “Reading Bronzino’s Florentine Portraits,” 245-55.
puns on Lorenzo’s name, which could be interchanged with lauro. Similarly, Bronzino’s Portrait of Ugolino Martelli (fig. 133) portrays another of Varchi’s students. Martelli’s portrait, like Lenzi’s, alludes to his scholarly pursuits. The boy holds a book by Pietro Bembo in one hand and points to a section of Homer’s Iliad with the other and a closed copy of Virgil sits behind him to his right. Bronzino captures Martelli’s intellectual character as well as his civic persona by placing him surrounded by books in the courtyard of the Palazzo Martelli with a statue of Donatello’s David in the background. David was a Florentine symbol that associated Martelli and his father, Bronzino’s patron, with the Medici circle and text associated with the championship of the Tuscan vulgare. Again, Bronzino uses text, and now objects, to layer meaning in his portraits and to infuse them with a distinctly Tuscan flavor.

There was also a Florentine precedent for painting a female sitter holding a book of Petrarch’s sonnets. More than thirty years earlier, Andrea del Sarto painted his enigmatic Portrait of a Young Woman with a Petrarchino (fig. 134). In his painting a young woman portrayed in three-quarter view and coquettishly tilting her head makes eye contact with the viewer while pointing to a book of Petrarch’s Canzoniere. Though the painting only shows the text of Sonnets 153 and 154, the girl’s finger appears to point at Sonnet 152 on the obscured left side of the book. Though most scholars have tried to

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42 Plazzotta, “Bronzino’s Laura,” 256. The Iliad is opened to a specific section, and like Laura Battiferra, Ugolino points to a passage of the text that is legible to the viewer. The text is from Book IX of the Iliad which tells the story of Agamemnon’s taking of Troy without Achilles and his proposal to return to Greece after failing his attempted reconciliation.
43 Cropper, “Prolegomena to a New Interpretation of Bronzino’s Florentine Portraits,” 155-56. The David statue at the Palazzo Martelli was thought to be by Donatello in the sixteenth-century, but is now attributed to Antonio or Bernardo Rossellino and is in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. Elizabeth Cropper explained in her essay Prolegomena (151-155) that Vasari attributed the Martelli David to Donatello and scholarship has accepted that the David stood in the Martelli courtyard from c.1540 until 1802, based on the identification of the courtyard and the statue by Meyer and Bode in 1878.
isolate one poem or the other in their analysis of the painting, I contend that Sarto intended the viewer to intermingle both texts in what James Mirollo describes as “an elaborate and sophisticated literary joke.” It must, then be assumed that Sarto intended for the viewer to contemplate all three sonnets when analyzing his painting.

In Sonnet 153 on the top of the right page, Petrarch refers to Laura’s icy heart, which brings him pain and suffering while she appears to be “full of peace and clarity.”

Sarto’s sitter’s finger hovers over Sonnet 154 on the bottom of the page, drawing attention to a poem that seems a more fitting poetic compliment to Sarto’s portrait:

The stars, the heavens, the elements in contest
Put all their art, put all the utmost care
Into that living light which Nature mirrors
And sun which finds its equal nowhere else.

This feat is so sublime, so new and charming;
That mortal sight cannot feel safe with it;
It seems that Love within her lovely eyes
Is raining grace and sweetness beyond measure

The air that’s struck by those sweet rays of hers
burns with her chastity, becoming such that our own thought and words it far surpasses;

no base desire can be felt therein,
only virtue and honor. Now when and ever
was vile desire quenched by highest beauty?

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47 Petrarch, *Petrarch’s Canzoniere*, 244-45. (Le stelle, il cielo, et gli elementi a prova/ tutte lor arti et ogni estrema cura/ poser nel vivo lume in cui Natura/ si specchia e ’l sol, ch’altrove par no trova. L’opra è sì altera, sì leggiadra et nova,/ che mortal guardo in lei non s’assecura,/ tanta negli occhi bei for di misura/ par ch’Amore et dolcezza et grazia piova./ L’aere percosso da’ lor dolci rai/ s’infiamma d’onestate et tal diventa/ che ’l dir nostro e ’l penser vince d’assai;/ basso desir non è ch’ ivi si senta;/ ma d’onor, di vertute. Or quando mai fu per somma belù vil voglia spenta?)
Sarto’s girl is, in fact, charming and sweet with her playful expression and fresh, young face. Though she meets the viewer’s eyes, her clothing and body language do not advertise any more than a clever young woman teasing her suitor with Petrarch’s words. However, the poem on the obscured page of the book to which the girl’s finger points presents a more aggressive persona. The first half of Sonnet 152 reads:

This kind, wild beast, this tiger’s heart or bear’s
that comes in human shape or form of an angel,
in tears, in laughter, amid fear and hope,
spins me around and makes my state uncertain.

If she won’t take me soon or let me free
Or keeps on holding me between the two,
From that sweet poison running through my heart
And veins I feel, Love, that my life is over.  

Just as the poem is literally hidden from view in the painting, Sarto seems to say that his sitter is not the innocent she appears to be in her portrait. Like Laura, she masks her inner “wild beast” with the face of an angel. Unfortunately, the identity of Sarto’s sitter is unknown as is the patron for whom it was painted. If it portrays, as some have speculated, is Sarto’s stepdaughter, Maria del Berrettaio, perhaps the poems were meant to wittily warn her suitors that beneath her sweet exterior lived a wild beast. In the absence of any known Petrarchan sonnets in honor of the portrait it could be argued that Sarto’s inclusion of the sonnets, visible and invisible, was his way of creating a Beloved Portrait that did not require the aid of a poet in order to bring its sitter to life. Rather,

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48 Ibid. (Questa umil fera, un cor di tigre o d’orsa / che ’n vista umana o ’n forma d’angelo vene, / in riso e ’n pianto, fra’ aurora et spene / mi rota si ch’ogni mio stato inforsa. / Se ’n breve non m’accoglie o non mi smorsa / ma pur come suol far tra due mi tene, / per quell ch’io sento al cor gir fra le vene, / dolce veneno, Amor mia vita è corsa.)

49 Ibid, 242-43. Maria was the daughter of Andrea del Sarto’s second wife, Lucrezia, and would have been around fifteen years old at the time the painting was created.
Sarto presented a painted poem within a portrait, thus asserting the supremacy of painting in the *paragone* of the arts.

It is possible that Sarto’s sitter was an aspiring poetess like Laura Battiferra, though the poems in her painting do not allude to her literary skills, and there is no evidence to suggest that she wrote poetry. Even if she were a poetess, Sarto’s sitter was not likely as well-known as Laura Battiferra, given the fact that the portrait was not mentioned in Vasari’s *Vita* of Andrea del Sarto. Battiferra, on the other hand, was by no means a novice poetess at the time that Bronzino painted her portrait. On the contrary, she was a well-respected author in the Petrarchan style, having published her first book in 1560, either slightly before or after the portrait was painted. Laura’s contemporaries, as well as her readers, were aware of her Petrarchan aspirations. In her dedication to Eleonora da Toledo, the wife of her husband’s primary patron, she writes: “And perhaps on par with him who lifted the fair laurel to such honor singing beside the Sorgue, I would ever go winging elsewhere.” More than “on par,” according to Bronzino, she was a fusion of the best of both Petrarch and Laura as a poet and a woman worthy of Petrarchan adoration.

Battiferra certainly would not have dedicated her book to Eleonora, unless she was sure it would be met with approval and enthusiasm. If, as Victoria Kirkham proposed, the portrait was painted in recognition of Battiferra’s first publication, it seems strange that Bronzino would have included a working diary, and not a copy of her own book. In the ancient tradition of author portraits, great poets usually carried their own

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50 Ibid, 85-86; (E forse a par di lui, che su la Sorga/ cantando also il bel laurao a tonto honore,/ n’andrei sempre colando ogni parte.)
51 Jaffe, *Shining Eyes, Cruel Fortune: The Lives and Loves of Renaissance Women Poets*, 218. Kirkham suggested that the painting should be dated between 1560 and 1561 because Battiferra did not include
texts. An example of this is seen in a pair of doors by Giuliano da Maiano and Fancione, commissioned in 1480 for the Sala de’ Gigli in the Palazzo Vecchio. On the doors, Dante and Petrarch face each other in profile, each holding open a volume of his own work. (fig. 135). Another example is found in Giorgio Vasari’s *Six Tuscan Poets* (1544), now in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (fig. 136). In the painting, Petrarch holds a copy of the *Canzoniere* and though he is in the company of three other poets famous for their love poetry, Guido Cavalcanti, Dante, and Boccaccio, Laura is the only beloved featured in the painting. Her image, painted in a profile medallion on the cover of Petrarch’s book, is brought to the viewer’s attention by Dante’s long fingers that point to the corner of the volume. Vasari includes various objects in the composition to allude to the poets’ various scholarly achievements, including several books, a globe, and a compass, so his inclusion of Laura was clearly intended to read as a commentary on Petrarch’s achievement.

It was not unusual, however, for poets to hold volumes that associated them with the lineage of great writers before them. In his *Six Tuscan Poets*, Vasari also depicts Dante holding a volume of Virgil, thus connecting him with the tradition of the ancient Roman authors. Bronzino adopted a similar conceit by having Battiferra hold a volume of Petrarch’s poems in her portrait. Her left middle finger distinctly points to the last part in the first stanza of Poem 240:

I have begged Love and I beg him again to beg your pardon for me, my sweet pain, my bitter bliss, if I with my complete sonnets that discuss the completion of the painting in her book. Because her book included a group of sonnets to and from Bronzino on other topics, Kirkham argued that it would be odd for her not to have included the other sonnets if they were written before publication.
In the last line of the first stanza Petrarch writes “dal dritto mio sentier, (deviate from the straight path)” paraphrasing the first line of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*; “la diritta via era smarrita, (the straightforward pathway had been lost)” Both poets lost the straight path on their poetic journey, although Dante’s way was lost because of the dark wood in which he traveled, while Petrarch “deviates from the straight path” in pursuit of his beloved Laura. Bronzino, as a man praised for his memory and complete knowledge of Dante and Petrarch, would have been absolutely aware of the double meaning this line would lend to Battiferra’s portrait and undoubtedly pointed her finger to the line for this very reason. He also must have intended to refer back to Vasari’s *Six Tuscan Poets* with the gesture and to thus visually identify Laura’s gesture with Dante’s since both poets point at Petrarch’s verse. With the gesture and the inclusion of the poem, Bronzino “affirms the supremacy of Petrarch” while giving a respectful nod toward Dante, the father of Tuscan vernacular. At the same time, he positions Battiferra as a poetess struggling with the same intellectual and spiritual issues as did the great Tuscan masters before her.

Laura Battiferra deviated from the straight path, in a gendered sense, by pursuing a profession as a poetess and by navigating the male sphere. Bronzino, too, deviated from the straight path professionally, as both a painter and a poet, and in the realm of the Petrarchan Beloved ritual as a Neo-Platonic lover able to commemorate his Laura in

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52 Kirkham, “Laura Battiferra degli Ammannati’s First Book of Poetry: A Renaissance Holograph Comes out of Hiding,” 80. ([Io pregato Amor, e ’l ne riprego,/ che mi scusi appo voi, dolce mia pena,/ amaro mio dilettio, se con piena/ fede dal dritto mio sentier mi piego.)
poetry and paint. I contend, however, that Bronzino intended for another, more irreverent level of meaning to be inferred from the line. Though Bronzino followed the classic Laurentian model in both his profile portrait of his beloved and the formally Petrarchan sonnets written in her honor, he was equally recognized for his participation in the very irreverent and Antipetrarchan realm of burlesque poetry, often celebrating the merits of male sexuality rather than Neo-Platonic feminine beauty. Burlesque poetry was meant to be rich with humor and sexual innuendo and attracted readers such as courtiers, church secretaries, poets, state rulers, and scholars.56

From its inception, Renaissance Petrarchism embraced a “counter-current” of Antipetrarchan poetry that parodied and subverted Petrarch’s love sonnets.57 According to Petrarchan scholar, Leonard Forster:

Petrarchan imagery was first systematically exploited in Italy. Petrarch’s own poetry had been profoundly serious, despite its use of oxymoron and hyperbole. Fifteenth-century poets neglected (or parodied) the serious core and elaborated the conceits into a quite characteristic and ingenious form of wit, the basic condition of which was that it could not be taken seriously (except by modern scholars).58

As the previous chapters have demonstrated, this spirit of intellectual wordplay and parody played a significant role in the imagery used in Petrarchan Beloved Portraits. And just as with burlesque poetry, the more the viewer knew about the sitter, her beloved, and Petrarchan tropes, the better he or she could fully appreciate the various subtexts in the portrait. This visual game, I believe, reached its pinnacle with Bronzino’s Portrait of Laura Battiferra, which skillfully fused the Petrarchan and Antipetrarchan qualities of both the sitter and her beloved Bronzino.

56 Kirkham, “Dante’s Phantom, Petrarch’s Specter: Bronzino’s Portrait of the Poet Laura Battiferra,” 84.
57 Parker, Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet, 19.
The majority of Bronzino’s burlesque poems were written and circulated between 1538 to the mid-1560s during the same years he was painting Battiferra’s portrait and composing his sonnets in her honor. Five of his poems were included in one of the most famous compilations of burlesque poetry, *Il secondo libro dell’opere burlesche*, published in 1555. Bronzino’s poems were included alongside similar compositions by other well-known poets, including burlesque works by Francesco Maria Molza, the Petrarchan literary advisor to Ippolito de’ Medici and Alessandro Farnese discussed in the previous chapter. This not only proves a professional connection between two men directly involved in the production and continuation of the Petrarchan Beloved ritual in sixteenth-century Rome and Florence, it also elucidates the blurred lines between formal and burlesque literary Petrarchism. Furthermore, both poets explored Laura’s dual persona as a seductress and a proper lady in their interpretations of the *Canzoniere*. Her double life, just like the double meaning of her name, allowed Laura’s image to be adapted for portraits of both patricians and courtesans. So, too, it allowed poets to exploit both proper and irreverent ways to mimic their master’s verse.

For example, Bronzino’s sonnet, *In lode della galea*, poked fun at the Petrarchan theme of the pain caused by love. The scene is set in a rowing galley on a boat rather than by the river Sorgue, where Petrarch lamented for his unrequited beloved. Though a rowing galley was typically associated with a form of punishment for prisoners, Bronzino’s rowers are a happy group of men in a world “devoid of the suffering occasioned by unrequited desire.”

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59 Ibid, 24. For another important discussion of Bronzino’s burlesque poetry see Nardelli, *Agnolo Bronzino: Rime in Burla*.
Love, with his flames and pains never comes near them so much as the length of an oar, and he really needs to fly. For everyone has seen a man driven over the edge, drenched, crushed, frantic, destroyed because of some woman, and bewildered and out of his mind. Once on board the galley he has no need for any other cure for this disease. A man recovers immediately with a teeny-weeny bit of quick rocking.61

Bronzino’s suggestion is that the men are happy because they are free to engage in sodomitric acts rather than participate in heterosexual courtly love games. Later in the poem, Bronzino explains that though some men are at first surprised by the sexual practices in the galley, they quickly adapt and find it to be “a dear and desirable abode.”62

A second sonnet also criticizes the Petrarchan courtly love rituals and specifically refers to the Petrarchan dangers associated with a woman’s gaze. In Della cipolla, Bronzino compares falling in love to the sting caused by an onion:

Love enters through the eyes and in the same way the onion enters through the eyes, and passes through the nose as well, and in this respect it scores an extra point over love…. Love shoots arrows, and the onion too attacks everyone without any regard for rank or condition. Love makes one become the beloved; and anyone who eats onions is turned into onions so that everyone can smell him.63

As a Petrarchist himself, Bronzino must have been familiar with manuscript images depicting arrows shot from Laura’s eyes into those of her beloved, like that shown on folio 33 verso of Antonio Grifo’s incunable discussed in Chapter One (fig. 46). He was also certainly aware of the use of the onion as a metaphor by Dante and Boccaccio in

61 Ibid, 28-9. (Amor, con le sue fiamme e co’ suoi duoli,/ mai non s’accosta quant’è lungo un remo/ a costoro e bisogna ben ch’e’ voli./ Ch’e’ s’è già visto un uom più ch’all’estremo,/ fracido, presto, sfegatato e morto/ per qualche donna e sbigottito e scemo;/ giunto in galea non bisogna conforto/ altro, a tal male:/ un guarisce in un tratto/ con un po’ po’ di dondol corto corto.)

62 Ibid, 28. (Parso una stanza divina.)

63 Ibid, 30. (Amor passa per gl’ occhi e questa appunto/ passa per gl’ occo e passa anche per il naso/ e ’n questa parte vince amor d’un punto.... Amor saetta e questa ancor s’avventa,/ né stato o condizion d’alcan riguarda./ Amor fa che l’amato si diventa/ e chi mangia di queste si trasforma/ in esse, sì che par ch’ognun lo senta.)
By comparing Cupid’s transformation of an unwitting person into a beloved to the pedestrian act of cutting an onion, Bronzino challenged the fundamental basis of the Petrarchan Beloved Portrait tradition. Yet he is the only known sixteenth-century Florentine painter to participate directly in the ritual as lover, artist, and poet. This irony was clearly not lost on Bronzino, Battiferra, or their audience. Recognizing Bronzino’s two-sided approach to Petrarchism, I believe, is therefore an imperative part of reading his implied meaning in Battiferra’s portrait. On the surface his sitter appears demure, chaste, and removed. Yet I believe the painting is as much about what can be inferred from the poems and the subtext of Bronzino’s deep understanding of the Petrarchan Beloved Portrait ritual and his participation in it, as it is about the sitter herself.

There was a Florentine precedent for Petrarchan burlesque poetry beginning with Lorenzo de’ Medici himself almost a century before. In his La Nencia da Barberino, Lorenzo described a rural woman as having classically Petrarchan coral lips but “inside them are her teeth, a double row,/ and whiter than a horse’s are, by far./ How many? Left and right some twenty show….” A seventeenth-century engraving by Michael van Lochem, after Crispijn de Passe, illustrates a similarly Antipetrarchan description of the young shepherdess described in Charles Sorel’s 1627 publication of Le berger extravagant (fig. 137). With suns as eyes, roses drawn upon her cheeks, pearl teeth, coral lips, and celestial globes for breasts, the artist wittily comments on the absurdity of the feminine ideal set by Petrarch in his sonnets. Even the purist Petrarchist recognized that, when combined, Laura’s beautiful parts as described in Petrarch’s verse, could create as monstrous an image as they could perfection. This added fodder to irreverent

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64 See Rossi, “…that naturalness and Florentinity (so to speak)” Bronzino: Language, Flesh and Painting,” 185.
65 Parker, Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet, 31.
interpretations in poetry and paint. Leonardo also poked fun at Petrarch, attacking his metaphoric use of laurel imagery: “If Petrarch was so fond of laurel, it was because it has a good taste with sausages and roast thrush: I cannot set any store by their twaddle.”

Francesco Melzi’s caricature of Dante and Beatrice after Leonardo, discussed in Chapter One, is a visual parody of the same sentiment (fig. 5).

Bronzino’s idol, Michelangelo, also played with Antipetrarchan conceits in his poetry. In Sonnet 20, dated circa 1518 to 1524, he parodies the classic Petrarchan canon of beauty by comparing a woman to an unappealing combination of common foods:

SWEETER YOUR FACE THAN GRAPES ARE, STEWED TO MUSH; 
LOOKS LIKE A SNAIL HAD SLICKED IT, TO AND FRO, 
THE WAY IT SHINES. LIKE RADISHES A-BLUSH, YOUR CHEEKS. TEETH, SWEET CORN BUTTERED, ROW WITH ROW. 
ON YOU THE POPE COULD GET A HEAVY CRUSH. 
YOUR EYES! THEY’RE BROWN HORSE LINIMENT AGLOW. 
HAIR PALE AS FRIZZY ONIONS IN THEIR BIN. 
O LOVE ME, LOVE! OR ELSE YOU DO ME IN.

Michelangelo’s description of a face composed of vegetables is reminiscent of a series of sixteenth-century portraits of the Four Seasons painted in the 1560s by Giuseppe Arcimboldo that fancifully substituted fruits and vegetables for the features of his sitters. Summer (fig. 138), for example, mimics the Florentine female profile portrait favored by Lorenzo de’ Medici and his circle. However, the sitter’s rosy lips are transformed into

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67 According to Deborah Parker, Bronzino may have modeled his Neo-Platonic relationship with Battiferra after Michelangelo’s relationship with Vittoria Colonna. See Garrard, "Leonardo da Vinci: Female Portraits, Female Nature," 63.
68 Parke r, Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet, 63. For the Italian text see Buonarroti, The Complete Poems of Michelangelo, 15. (Tu ha’ l viso più dolce che la sapa,/ e passato vi par sù la lumaca,/ tanto ben lustra, e più bel c’una rapa;/ e’ denti bianchi come pastinaca,/ in modo tal che invaghiresti ’l papa;/ e gli occhi del color dell’utriaca;/ e’ cape’ bianchi e biondi più che porri;/ ond’io morrò, se tu non mi soccorri.)
ripe cherries, her teeth into an open peapod, her nose a zucchini, and her hair a mess of berries, eggplants, wheat, and leaves with a sprig of flowers spraying out behind like the feathers in the hair of Botticelli’s Frankfurt Portrait of Simonetta (fig. 94). And like Botticelli’s Simonetta, Arcimboldo’s Summer faces to the right instead of left, setting her apart from the real women depicted in the typical Florentine profile portraits. Similar to the Beloved Portraits by Raphael and Bronzino, Arcimboldo signs his portrait on the body of his sitter by cleverly weaving his name into her dress made of wheat.

Another witty play on Petrarchan feminine imagery poked fun at the sixteenth-century practice of depicting idealized Petrarchan beauties on majolica plates. The plates, commonly referred to as belle donne, feature the bust of a woman, either forward facing or in profile, surrounded by a scroll containing her name or a motto exclaiming her virtues. One such example, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was created circa 1530 in Urbino or Castel Durante and portrays a blond woman wearing a gold brocade cap and a low cut bodice (fig. 139). She gazes out at the viewer from eyes dark as stars under perfectly arched eyebrows and her long white neck and exposed cleavage identify her as a woman worthy of the scrolling words which identify her as “Livia Bella.” A similar bowl portrays a woman in right-facing profile with a scroll behind her identifying her as “Silvia Diva 1524” (fig. 140). The woman’s image was intended to be displayed facing her male beloved who was portrayed on another bowl facing her in profile to the right.

A plate now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford also portrays a Petrarchan woman in profile, but with a burlesque twist. Painted by Francesco Urbini circa 1530-37, the woman’s profile is composed of a series of interlocking penises (fig. 141). A scroll
behind her head explains the joke: “OGNI HOMO ME GUARDA COME FOSSE UNA TESTA DE CAZI (Every man looks at me as if I were a head of dicks.) On the reverse of the plate another motto reads: “El breve dentro voi legerite come i giude se intender el vorite (If you want to understand the meaning, you will be able to read the text like the Jews do.) The text is written from right to left similar to the Hebrew language.

The phallic profile on the plate is a visual manifestation of the topic of the first burlesque poem written by Bronzino in 1538. Dedicated to “the paintbrush,” that is, the penis, Del pennello describes various sexual encounters depicted in paintings:

Some people are drawn on the bed or in tiring positions, standing, or seated – some hold something in their hands, some hide things, some want to be seen behind someone else, some want to be painted in front of someone, some people hold on tight, other look as if they are falling back…. Enough—to do it from behind, from in front, diagonally, foreshortened, or in perspective the paintbrush is needed for them all.69

While Urbini literally used penises to compose his sitter, Bronzino metaphorically applied his poetic “paintbrush” to sexualize both the act of painting and the paintings themselves. His reference to the variety of positions preferred by artists and their sitters, was a reaction to Giulio Romano’s near contemporary publication of I modi, a series of prints engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi after Giulio Raimondi’s erotic paintings for Federico II Gonzaga’s Palazzo del Te in Mantua. First published in 1524, the prints were highly controversial and well-known in artistic circles.

Though Battiferra’s portrait is far from erotic, I believe the lack of sexual double entendre, considering Bronzino’s penchant for such puns in both his poetry and his other

69 Bayer, Art and Love in Renaissance Italy, 81. (Chi si ritrae sul letto a faticose/ attitudin fa, ritto o a vedere;/ chi tien qualcosa in man, chi l'ha nascose;/ chi si vuol dietro ad un altro vedere;/ chi vuol esser dipinto innanzi ad uno;/ chi s'attien; chi fa vista di cadere....../ Basta, che a fargli o dirietro o davanti/ a traverse, in iscorcio o in prospettiva/ s’adopera il pennello a tutti quanti.)
portraits, is equally telling. Unlike the majority of female portraits, which by the sixteenth century typically followed a canonized formula of Petrarchan features as dictated by treatises such as Agnolo Firenzuola’s *Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne*, Bronzino’s *Portrait of Laura Battiferra* consciously varies from the norm.  

In keeping with the fashion of the day, Battiferra’s dress and jewelry are demure and modest as befitted a virtuous woman not of the ruling class. While not classically beautiful, she possesses some of the ideal features; a long neck, soft and ample shoulders, rounded arms, long, tapering fingers, a high forehead, curved eyebrows, dark eyes and alabaster skin. Her awkwardly long bust is covered in an opaque white pleated tunic with a high ruffled neckline that does not adequately cover her exceptionally long neck, yet the exposed flesh is more masculine than it is provocative with its muscular contouring. Her shoulders exaggeratedly slope almost halfway down her body and are covered in a thick black dress that hides her feminine shape. Though her skin is white and her forehead high, her facial features are noticeably unidealized, making her strangely proportioned body seem all the more awkward. A simple white headdress and veil cover her chestnut hair, and her profile draws attention to one rather large ear covered in the transparent material. Battiferra wears a veil, but her eyes are not obscured. It would have been customary for a married woman of her time to

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70 For example, in his double-sided portrait of Cosimo I’s court dwarf, Morgante, the man holds a bird in his hand and an owl sits on his shoulder. The word for bird (*uccello*) was a pun on a phallus and the owl was a burlesque euphemism for both the penis and a sodomite. Likewise, the pronounced cockpiece in his *Portrait of Lodovico Capponi* phallically enhances his sitter’s manhood, and the small bird in the hand of Cosimo I’s young son, Giovanni de’ Medici, may be a symbol of his small penis as *uccellino* was slang for little penis. For more on this see Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 6.

71 Bronzino was certainly capable of painting an idealized portrait of a beautiful woman, as he did in his Portraits of Eleonora da Toledo and Lucrezia Panciatichi, so it must be assumed that his decision to paint his beloved Laura in a less than flattering manner was intentional.

wear a veil, however, given Bronzino’s other Petrarchan symbolism in the painting, it is not unlikely that the painter also meant to suggest the Petrarchan veil metaphor as well, maybe to suggest that, while his Laura is married, she does not hide her soul from her Neo-Platonic lover. Battiferra is shown in right-facing profile, although the pose was long outdated by the mid-sixteenth century. With the exception of miniature commemorative paintings of the Medici, the Allegory of Venus and Cupid (fig. 142) and a Portrait of Dante (fig. 143), the portrait of Laura Battiferra is the only portrait of a living person that Bronzino painted in profile. A handful of portraits, like that of Ugolino Martelli, turn slightly to look away from the viewer, but Bronzino retains the surface of their faces, only slightly turning their heads and eyes to suggest they have been captured in a moment of intense thought or momentary distraction. With these exceptions, the majority of Bronzino’s sitters gaze directly at the viewer with little or no emotion on their aristocratic faces. This makes the profile of Laura Battiferra all the more striking.

On the right page of the Petrarch’s volume, Bronzino cleverly explains his beloved’s outdated pose with the opening line of Petrarch’s Sonnet 64: “If you were able by some angry signs—casting your eyes down, turning your head….” Along with removing her gaze, the profile pose draws attention to Battiferra’s most unpetrarchan feature- her enormous nose. The appendage is even more exaggerated in profile than it would have been if she were painted frontally as she is seen in Alessandro Allori’s 1585-

73 A profile painting of Dante has been attributed to Bronzino by some scholars, but is considered “Circle of Vasari” by the National Gallery, where it is now displayed. I have not been convinced by the scholarly or visual evidence so I have not considered as part of Bronzino’s oeuvre for the purposes of this paper. Most scholars link Battiferra’s nose to that of Dante based on this painting.
74 Cropper, “On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style,” 384. (Se voi poteste per turbati segni—/ per chinar gli occhi o per piegar la testa….)
92 painting of *Christ and the Canaanite Woman* in the Ammannati chapel in San Giovanni in Florence (fig. 141).  

Significantly, Laura’s nose is the only facial feature that Petrarch does not describe in his poems.  

He repeatedly refers to other physical attributes, “her head fine gold, her face was like warm snow,/ her eyebrows ebony, her eyes two stars…,” but no nose.  

Sixteenth-century aesthetes like Firenzuola had a definite idea of how the perfect nose should look; small and narrow turning neither up nor down. In fact, Firenzuola concludes that “it is impossible for a woman without a totally perfect nose to appear beautiful in profile.”  

Firenzuola was one of many court intellectuals who attempted to define the perfect nose. Others, like Stefano Guazzo, were inspired by the absence of Laura’s nose in the *Canzoniere*. In his *Civil conversazione*, Guazzo ponders: “I do not know why Petrarch praises the other beautiful parts of Madonna Laura but never has mentioned this [her nose], maybe he does not mention it because it she had a squashed or snub or humped or crooked nose or [one] immense in size or length.”  

Guazzo’s musing, while meant to be playful in the context of his book, reveals that Bronzino’s contemporaries were interested in the mystery of Laura’s nose, and not against making up their own definitions.

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75 Petrarch, *Petrarch’s Canzoniere*, 100-01. This is the only other extant portrait of Laura Battiferra, painted sometime between the completion of the church in 1585 and Ammannati’s death in 1592. Ammannati and Battiferra are buried in front of this chapel. Another portrait, now lost, was said to have been painted by Hans von Aachen and was recorded in the Life of von Aachen by Karel van Mander, published in 1604. It is important to recognize the difficulty in comparing the noses in Allori’s portrait and Bronzino’s. Any arguments that are based on this comparison alone call for further evidence.  
76 The ears are also excluded, but are not technically considered facial features.  
77 Plazzotta, “Bronzino’s Laura,” 253-4. (Chi non ha il naso nella total perfezione, è impossibile che apparisca bella in profile.)  
78 Brock, *Bronzino*, 96. (Non sapeva per qual cagione il Petrarca nel lodar, l’alte parti belle di madonna Laura non avesse mai fatto menzione di questa, se forse egli non la tacque perch’ella avesse il naso o schiacciato o camuso o gibbuto o torto o smisurato in grosseza o in lunghezza.)
Although Bronzino must have anticipated that Battiferra’s nose would not be considered beautiful in Firenzuolan terms, he includes a poem that draws attention to her face in the painting. As a humanist and master of the Petrarchan style, Bronzino would have been aware of the absence of Laura’s nose in the Canzoniere and may have viewed it as a perfect way to add his own definition to the debate. Battiferra’s nose was also intended to recall Bronzino’s Portrait of Dante alongside Petrarch’s paraphrase of the Divine Comedy in Sonnet 240. The painter may also have been aware of Leonardo’s visual spoof in his drawing of the Three Old Poets in Profile to the Left (Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Dante?) (fig. 145). A copy of the drawing, now in the Mariette Album of Drawings after Leonardo in the Louvre, portrays the three famous Tuscan poets in profile, which exaggerates their elderly jowls and crooked noses.80 Just as Bronzino relied upon multivalent symbols and humor in his poems and paintings, he simultaneously associated Battiferra’s nose with both the regal Dante depicted in his portrait and the ridiculously unidealized noses portrayed in Leonardo’s caricature.

Battiferra’s profile also aligned her with the canonically Petrarchan Florentine profile portraits painted during Lorenzo de’ Medici’s reign. As has been discussed at length in the previous chapters, fifteenth-century virtuous women were almost always painted in profile with idealized Petrarchan features. Furthermore, Simone Martini likely drew Petrarch’s Laura in profile, as was to be expected for a lady in the fourteenth century.81 This suggests that Bronzino meant to engage in a competition with the great Florentine portraitists before him as well as Lorenzo de’ Medici himself. Yet, in Battiferra’s portrait, the severity of her pose and the jarring awkwardness of her body

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80 For more on this album see Amedeo Quondam, “Il Naso di Laura,” in Il Ritratto e la Memoria: Materiali (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1989), 11.
81 Bambach, Leonardo da Vinci: Master Draftsman, 680-701. This drawing is no longer extant.
remind the viewer not of the harsher sixteenth-century style of Florentine poet, Giovanni della Casa, whose poetry revealed “a clash of polished Petrarchan manner with harsh disillusionment in love…” rather than the more flirtatious courtly Petrarchan poetry written in Lorenzo’s time.\textsuperscript{82}

Like the fifteenth-century profile portraits discussed in Chapter Two, Battiferra’s reputation as a chaste and virtuous wife was certainly intended to be elucidated by her profile pose. Bronzino confirms this with Sonnet 240:

\begin{quote}
I can’t deny, I don’t deny, my Lady, 
that reason who restrains every good soul 
may be at times won over by desire 
who leads me there where I am forced to follow.

You, with that heart that the heavens have lit up 
with intellect so bright, with such high virtue 
—as much as ever poured from a good star—

should say with pity and no trace of scorn: 
“What choice does this man have? My face consumes him. 
Why is he greedy? Why am I so lovely?\textsuperscript{83}"
\end{quote}

Perhaps Bronzino wanted his viewer to see his Laura as above the banal eroticism allotted to Laura and other Renaissance beloveds because her intellect and virtue were her most attractive qualities. Or maybe he intended for the viewer to consider both sides of the dichotomy between Laura the seductress and Laura the virtuous by juxtaposing a sonnet revealing Petrarch’s desire for his beloved’s physical beauty with an image of a woman who attracts her beloved with her intellect rather than with an inviting gaze,

ond’ ei mi mena/ talor in parte ov’ io per forza il sego./ Voi con quel cor che di si chiaro ingegno,/ di si alta vertute il cielo alluma/ quanto mai piovve da benigna stella,/ devete dir pietosa et senza sdegno:/ “Che po questi altro? Il mio volta il consuma./ Ei perché si bella?”)
seductive hand gesture, or bare breast. Yet the last lines of his sonnet specifically refer to Laura’s face, which “consumes” her beloved. This line, like the profile pose, makes Bronzino’s intentional focus on Laura’s face undeniable. Her face, like Bronzino’s paintings and poetry, is intended to be read on multiple levels. She is both desirable and undesirable, male and female, virtuous and daring, Dante and Laura. Thus in Bronzino’s portrait, she is given the high honor that Varchi thought she was due as “a woman so blessed by the Muses for her own poetic flame that she should have been allowed a place up front with the men, instead of having to stand behind with the other women.”

Battiferra’s metaphoric duality is also insinuated in Petrarch’s sonnet. Like Petrarch’s Laura, Battiferra is both Laura and lauro, as the sixth line in Sonnet 64 puns: “del petto dove dal primo lauro innesta Amor più rami (from out my breast where Love from that first laurel grafts many branches.)” As his beloved, she is his poetic inspiration and represents the poetic fame he will achieve by commemorating her in print. However, unlike Laura, Battiferra was also able to earn her own lauro by writing sonnets in honor of her own Beloved Portrait. Her sonnets also brought Bronzino lasting fame so he inversely functions as her lauro.

Battiferra is thus portrayed as both Laura and the Anti-Laura and Petrarchan and Antipetrarchan, in Bronzino’s portrait. She does not need to rely upon her Petrarchan good looks to attract her beloved, nor does she need a man to commemorate her in poetry because she is a poetess in her own right. At the same time she is transformed into an object of desire though the process of being painted by Bronzino in the Petrarchan Beloved Portrait tradition and being commemorated by him in print. By boldly

84 Petrarch, Petrarch’s Canzoniere, 344-45.
comparing Battiferra to both the feminine muses and their poetic suitors, Bronzino claims that she is superior in both the masculine and feminine Petrarchan realms. Furthermore, by including the two Petrarchan poems in Battiferra’s portrait, Bronzino asserts that his Laura, unlike Petrarch’s, is actively engaged in a dialogue, albeit textual, with the viewer and with her beloved. And unlike her feelings, which she keeps hidden by averting her gaze, she makes her thoughts public by displaying a private selection of Petrarchan poems. By painting them, Bronzino visually publishes the reordered poems and in doing so transforms Petrarch’s sonnets into poems about his own Laura.

The second half of Sonnet 64 refers to the Ovidian personas adapted by Petrarch and Laura in the *Canzoniere*. The poem interchanges Laura with Daphne who transformed herself into a laurel tree in order to escape Apollo’s grasp:

> Or fleeing faster than another would,
> Or frowning at my pure and unworthy prayers—
> Ever to escape by these or other means
> from out my breast where Love from that first laurel
> grafts many branches, I would surely say
> this is just reason to show me disdain:

> a noble plant that grows in arid ground
> is badly suited, and so naturally
> is happy to depart from such a place.  

Bronzino and Battiferra also adapted the Apollo/ Daphne conceit in their poetic exchange. Each refers to the other’s mythic persona numerous times throughout their sonnets, both literally and metaphorically. In fact, Battiferra presents herself as Daphne in response to Bronzino’s portrait:

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86 Petrarch, *Petrarch’s Canzoniere*, 100-01. (*O per esser più d’altra al fuggir presta,/ torcendo ’l viso a’ preghi onesti et degni--/ uscir giamai, o ver per altri ingegni,/ del petto ove dal primo lauro innesta/ Amor più rami, I’ direi ben che questa/ fosse giusta cagione a’ vostro sdegni:/ ché gentil pianta in arido terreno/ par che sì disconvenga, et però lieta/ naturalmente quindi si diparte.*)
Just as your shepherdess, in her shining and fair face, openly shows you, bright Crisero, all that her chaste and sincere heart desires—be you then content and satisfied.

So my own new image, lofty work of your skilled hand, disclosed my every affection and every thought, however my heart longs to keep them hidden.

And thus may the sapling, which you love so much, worthy rival of Apollo, tended by you, grow high and ever green up to the sky,

Just as I, thanks to you, gird with double honor my lowly, little-known humble stem, so that South Wind or North Wind may not blow it away.  

In her poem, Battiferra responds to Bronzino’s claim, via Petrarch’s words, that she, like Daphne, has escaped her beloved grasp, yet she reassures him that he has, in fact, captured her inner thoughts and feelings in her painted image even though she has attempted to hide them from him by averting her gaze. Bronzino further plays with the Daphnean metaphor when he literally transforms Battiferra into wood by painting her image on panel. He refers “to his work ‘in legno’… and the portrait of Laura itself as a ‘dipinta Vetrice’, a painted willow, perhaps a reference to the support on which he painted the portrait.”

Bronzino painted his Laura in oil on panel, a much more lasting medium than the paper drawing produced by Simone, preserving her physical beauty for prosperity. Battiferra also incorporates the tree metaphor in various ways into her poetry. She refers to herself as an “unskilled and uncultured” tree, commenting on her continued pursuit of knowledge as well as her body’s inability to bear children.

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87 Ibid. (Così nel volto rilucente, e vago/ La Pastorella tua, chiaro Crisero,/ Quanto brama il cor casto, e sincero/ Ti mostri aperto, e sii content, e pago,/ Come la propria mia novella imago,/ Della tua dotta man lavoro altero,/ Ogni mio affetto scuopre, ogni pensiero,/ Quantunque il cor sia di celarlo vago./ E così l’Arboscel, ch’amit cotanto,/ Degno rival d’Apollo, in fino al cielo/ Colto da ta, mai sempre verde, s’erga,/ Com’io la tua mercè, di doppio vanto/ Cingo il mio basso oscuro umile stelo,/ Perch’Austro, od Aquilon non lo disperga.)

88 Parker, Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet, 100. As almost all of Bronzino’s portraits were painted on wood, his Portrait of Laura Battiferra is not exceptional in this respect.

Battiferra recognizes Bronzino’s dual ability to bring her fame in both poetry and paint in her sonnet. She acknowledges that in so doing, he has assured her fame will last for perpetuity. The marriage of these two mediums by one hand was something that neither Petrarch nor Apollo nor Apelles was able to achieve and thus her beloved supersedes both of his idols. 

Jacopo Sellori reiterated this accomplishment in a contemporary poem in honor of Bronzino: “And your learned, lofty and beautiful verses, and your dear and prized paintings make you a new Apollo, a new Apelles.”

Bronzino was a complicated and playful artist who thrived on using words and visual images to create multiple meanings. On the one hand, he was a poet in the Petrarchan tradition of the courtly lover, and on the other, he wrote bawdy burlesque poetry that was anything but decorous and conventional. His Portrait of Laura Battiferra is a premier example of Bronzino’s intellectual and artistic talent joining forces to create a complex portrait of an equally complicated woman. I propose that the portrait should be read as Bronzino’s contribution to the paragone of the Petrarchan arts and a manifestation of his artistic competition with the great Tuscan masters before him. He also gives a voice to his beloved through the sonnets included in the painting, which is something Simone Martini was incapable of doing without Petrarch. His beloved further supersedes the beauties portrayed in earlier Tuscan Beloved Portraits by Simone Martini, Verrocchio, Botticelli, Leonardo, Raphael, Andrea del Sarto, and Pontormo because she

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90 She also cunningly refers to Bronzino’s nickname, Crisero, probably chosen because of his golden-red hair, and her “chaste and sincere heart” may be a nod to the “high virtue” celebrated Petrarch’s sonnet on the opposite page of her painted book. In madrigal by Bronzino to Battiferra, he describes a scene in which Crisero “suddenly heard the woods ringing with Laura, so that, turning her steps toward that voice, she left Crisero, with parting gifts of envy and disdain (Ecco il bosco sonar Laura s’udiva. / Ond’ella volto a quella voce il piede/ Crisero lasciò d’invidia, e sdegno erede.) See Jaffe, Shining Eyes, Cruel Fortune: The Lives and Loves of Renaissance Women Poets, 218.

91 Parker, Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet, 62. E le tue dotte rime altere, e belle./ E le pitture tue pregiate, e care./ Ti fanno un nuovo Apollo, un nuovo Apelle.
does not need to rely on her physical comeliness in order to attract her beloved Bronzino’s attention. Instead she literally speaks back to her beloved through their exchange of verse, thus coming alive like no other sitter had before.

As a poet he superseded his Florentine forefathers. His ability not only to commemorate his beloved in Petrarchan verse, but to also appropriate Petrarch’s poems for his own Laura was new to the genre. Furthermore, Bronzino’s comfort with both burlesque and traditional Petrarchan verse allowed him to fuse Antipetrarchan visual cues within a traditional Petrarchan profile portrait. Bronzino thus presented himself on the winning end of multiple Petrarchan paragone as the New Apollo, the New Apelles, the New Petrarch, the New Simone Martini, the New Lorenzo, the New Leonardo, the New Andrea del Sarto, the New Pontormo, and the ultimate master of the Petrarchan paragone of painting and poetry. Bronzino’s complex interpretation of the Beloved Portrait tradition and his Portrait of Laura Battiferra visually justifies the high honor Bronzino paid his beloved in verse: “You [Battiferra], through your own valor, vanquish Laura and Beatrice, and you are above them in worth, and perhaps above their lovers in style and song.”

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\[92\] Ibid, 61. (*Voi per proprio valor Laura e Beatrice/ vincete, e sete a i lor pregi di sopra,/ e forse a i loro amanti in stile e canto.* As was discussed in the previous chapter, Battiferra extended a similar compliment to her friend, Livia Colonna, who she claimed was as worthy of the Petrarchan poems written in her honor as were Laura and Beatrice.)
CONCLUSION

The influence of the great humanist poet Petrarch on the development of Renaissance female portraiture cannot be over-emphasized. His poetic description of his beloved Laura in the *Canzoniere*, a book of sonnets extolling her grace and sensual beauty, became the standard of female pulchritude in the Renaissance. Ladies emulated and men adored Laura’s blond tresses, high forehead, creamy skin, and rosebud mouth, leading her to become the subject of numerous treatises on beauty and countless portraits of women, real and imagined. Art historians have previously considered Laura as a model for virtuous women whose portraits documented courtships, betrothals, births, and deaths, but until now no one has adequately examined how Petrarch’s conflicting description of Laura as an unobtainable beloved and a seductress provided a model for portraits of both ladies and lovers.

My dissertation has explored this issue by considering how Laura’s not-so-ladylike characteristics made her an object of male desire and inspired a genre of portraits modeled after Simone Martini’s *Portrait of Laura* and Petrarch’s accompanying sonnets in honor of the painting and its sitter. I also presented evidence that this group of Beloved Portraits and accompanying sonnets were commissioned and painted by a small elite circle of artists, patrons, and poets who consciously competed with one another. Unique to the genre, I believe, is this intentional visual dialogue and *paragone* between the participants in the Beloved tradition. I am also the first to provide an in-depth analysis of the relationship between specific Beloved Portraits and contemporary
illuminated manuscripts of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* in the development of a Renaissance Petrarchan ideal. I also identified and analyzed instances in which a manuscript and Beloved Portrait were commissioned by the same patron, as is the case with examples related to Lorenzo de’ Medici and Ludovico Sforza, for example. Furthermore, I considered how regional variations in manuscript imagery relate specifically to Beloved Portraits from the same city, as, for example, with Giorgione’s *Portrait of Laura* and the Correr manuscript discussed in Chapter Four.

New to the discussion of these Petrarchan Beloved Portraits is my thorough analysis of Lorenzo de’ Medici’s profound influence on the tradition. From its inception in the 1460s to the continued participation in the practice by his Medici descendants and allies throughout the next century, Lorenzo had a direct or indirect connection to each documented Beloved Portrait from the 1460s through the late 1550s. In each instance, the artist, poet, or patron intended to complement or rival the model established by Lorenzo and his court. Even in Milan, Venice, and Rome, where the tradition spread in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the portraits and their poems were primarily created by either Florentine artists, like Leonardo da Vinci, Florentine sympathizers like Bernardo and Pietro Bembo, or artists and poets employed by the Medici papacy in Rome.

Though literary scholars have historically associated the beginning of Renaissance *Petrarchismo* with Pietro Bembo’s championship of the Tuscan dialect in his publication of *Prose della vulgar lingua* in 1525, my research confirmed Aileen Feng’s theory that *Petrarchismo* began in the previous century at the court of Lorenzo de’ Medici. By adopting the guise of Petrarch and Apollo in his poetry and portraiture and
associating his Neo-Platonic beloveds, Lucrezia Donati and Simonetta Vespucci, with Laura and Daphne, he presented himself as a cultured and sophisticated Tuscan prince and chivalric lover in the tradition of the great poets before him. Lorenzo also used Petrarchan imagery to promote his personal and political cultural supremacy to establish the Tuscan vulgare as the superior Italian dialect and to present himself as an equal to Petrarch, the father of Italian humanism. By extension, his Petrarchan associations legitimized the Medici family as humanist rulers able to continue the legacy of the great Tuscan masters of literature.

Female portraiture was also used by Lorenzo as visual propaganda to advertise the preeminence of Medici humanism and the superiority of the Petrarchan canon of beauty as it was manifested in the Florentine female populace. As was demonstrated in Chapter One, Antonio Grifo’s Milanese illuminated incunable of the Canzoniere provides primary visual evidence of the contemporary association between Florentine profile portraiture and images of Laura even outside of Florence. The importance of Petrarchan imagery in female portraiture and poetry for the promotion of the Medici ideal continued into the sixteenth century with Lorenzo’s grandsons, Ippolito and Alessandro, as they attempted to establish their own right to the Medici legacy and to reestablish the magnificence of Lorenzo’s Florence under their own rule.

Though the Medici were not the only patrons of Petrarchan Beloved Portraits, their example was the catalyst for the genre and inspired the many paintings that followed. Leonardo painted the first Beloved Portraits for Milanese and Venetian patrons, and the first example painted by the Venetian artist, Giovanni Bellini, was for the well-known Petrarchist and Florentine sympathizer, Pietro Bembo. Bembo was not
only a promoter of the Florentine vulgare and an advisor to Medici popes and cardinals, he was also the son of Leonardo’s first Beloved Portrait patron, Bernardo Bembo. Though Giorgione’s sitter and patron are unknown, his portrait was influenced by Leonardo’s portrait of the Florentine beauty and Bernardo’s Neo-Platonic beloved, Ginevra de’ Benci, as is evidenced by the laurel bush that surrounds his sitter.

Roman examples by Raphael, Sebastiano del Piombo, Giulio Clovio, and Titian also had Florentine ties, either through their patrons or the literati active in Rome at the time. Pietro Bembo and Baldassare Castiglione, for example, were close friends of Raphael during the time he painted La Fornarina, and he was a favorite artist of the Medici Pope Leo X. Pietro Bembo’s friend and fellow Petrarchan poet, Francesco Maria Molza, wrote poems in commemoration of the beauties depicted in the Beloved Portraits by Sebastiano and Clovio, and was responsible for encouraging his patrons, Ippolito de’ Medici and Alessandro Farnese, to continue the Beloved tradition. Even when the Medici were not the patrons, as, for example, in the case of Alessandro Farnese, the cardinal employed the same advisors who had promoted the tradition under the Medici and intended to associate himself with the Laurentian tradition of cultural supremacy. Similarly, Giovanni Della Casa, another of Bembo’s friends and a Florentine Petrarchist, wrote on behalf of Alessandro Farnese’s portraits of Livia Colonna and Angela and requested a Beloved Portrait of Farnese’s courtesan mistress Angela from Titian on Farnese’s behalf.

This dissertation has demonstrated that at the heart of the Beloved Portrait tradition was a spirit of rivalry and competition between artists, patrons, poets, and city-states over their claims to Petrarch’s legacy. Also inherent to the genre was the paragone
of the arts of painting, sculpture, drawing, and poetry and the debate over which medium
could best bring a Petrarchan beloved to life. A close analysis of Petrarchan
commentaries and manuscript illuminations demonstrated that Petrarch was consciously
manipulated and appropriated by the rulers of the greatest Italian cities in order to present
themselves as the rightful heirs of Petrarch’s cultural hegemony. I have presented textual
and visual evidence from multiple fifteenth- and sixteenth-century illuminated
manuscripts and incunables to support these claims to Petrarch, as well as regional
interpretations of Laura’s features as they were described in Petrarch’s sonnets. Though
Laura is generally represented in a canonically Petrarchan way from region to region, her
interaction with Petrarch within the illuminations varies according to the agenda of the
commentator and his audience. She is, for example, presented as a fashionable courtier
throughout Grifo’s incunable in keeping with the thriving courtly culture under Ludovico
Sforza and Beatrice d’ Este. In contrast, she is portrayed as a demure and chaste admirer
in a fifteenth-century Florentine example (MS Strozzi 172, fol. 1, Biblioteca Medicea
Laurenziana) with no suggestion of sensual impropriety similar to the virtuous ladies
commemorated in contemporary profile portraiture.

I have concluded that just as the Petrarchan literary commentaries adapted to
changing religious, political, and social climates in Italy, from the humanist courts of
mid-fifteenth century Florence to the beginnings of the Counter-Reformation in Rome, so
too did images of Laura and her influence on the Beloved Portrait tradition change to fit
the expectations of the time. Though in some cases this meant that the portraits became
exceedingly modest and restrained, as, for example, Sebastiano del Piombo’s Portrait of
Giulia Gonzaga, the tradition also embraced the counter culture of burlesque
Antipetrarchan sentiments circulated among the elite *literati* in the mid-sixteenth century. This, I argue, was the impetus behind Agnolo Bronzino’s strange and complicated *Portrait of Laura Battiferra*, the last documented Beloved Portrait in the Renaissance.

Each of the Beloved Portraits discussed in this dissertation was intentionally meant to compete with the examples that came before it just as Petrarch sought to trump the classical examples by Butades, Apelles, and Pygmalion with Simone’s *Portrait of Laura* and his accompanying sonnets. Thus, I argue, by considering the entire group of documented Renaissance Beloved Portraits, art historians can better understand them individually. In most instances, the artist intended to present himself as superior to his artistic predecessors, classical and contemporary, and to prove that his artistic medium surpassed all others in the *paragone* of the arts. In a similarly competitive spirit, the patron chose the best artist of his (or occasionally, as was the case with Isabella d’Este and perhaps Cecilia Gallerani) her time to portray his/her beloved in order to rival Petrarch’s choice of Simone Martini. Patrons also aimed to position themselves as equal to, or greater than, the famous lovers before them and to prove that their female beloveds were more beautiful than their peers, past and present. Finally, poets sought to best Petrarch with their verse in honor of the portraits, and to confirm the supremacy of the written word in the Petrarchan *paragone*.

Especially interesting, and never before adequately considered, are Beloved Portraits that combine these competitions in more complex ways. Raphael, for example, was both a Petrarchan poet and a painter. He painted a portrait of his own beloved and commemorated her in poetry and paint. Though Pontormo was neither a lover nor a poet, he created an image of his patron, Alessandro de’ Medici, as a Petrarchan lover in the act
of drawing his mistress’s Beloved Portrait. Agnolo Bronzino ultimately improved upon his master’s composition by painting a portrait of his own beloved in the act of reorganizing Petrarch’s famous sonnets so that they personally related to her own Beloved Portrait. Furthermore, Bronzino wrote his own poems in honor of the painting he created. He was able to do the impossible in Petrarchan terms by bringing his beloved to life in his portrait with the inclusion of the poems which commented on her inner and outer virtues, as well as with an active exchange of Petrarchan poetry with his own Laura. He ingeniously combined Petrarchan and Antipetrarchan sentiments into his Portrait of Laura Battiferra to infuse it with an intellectual element that could only be understood by the most erudite of viewers.

Beautiful women, real and imagined, were inextricably linked to Petrarch and his beloved Laura in the visual culture of the Italian Renaissance. In various artistic mediums, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century ladies were compared and contrasted to Laura’s flawless image and expected to conform to the canonical feminine ideal established in Petrarch’s Canzoniere. Ironically it was the impossibility of achieving this standard of perfection that attracted artists, poets, and their patrons to the challenge of creating their own versions of the Beloved Portrait in Renaissance Italy.
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86. Anonymous Milanese artist, *Laura Crowning Petrarch*, c. 1475. Shropshire, Linley Hall, MS. fol. 9
87. Attributed to Baccio Baldini, *Ame Droit (Lorenzo and Lucrezia?)*, c. 1465-80. London, British Museum
91. Luigi Pulci, Opening Page of La giostra, c. 1500.
Sold Christie’s sale 8744, lot 83
94. Sandro Botticelli, *Young Woman in Mythological Guise (Simonetta Vespucci)*, c. 1480/1485. Frankfurt, Städelisches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie
96. Angelo Poliziano, Opening Page of *La giostra di Guiliano de’ Medici*, c. 1495-1500.
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
97. Sandro Botticelli, Detail of Venus from *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1485. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi
98. Sandro Botticelli, Detail of Chloris from *La Primavera*, 1477-82. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi
99. Sandro Botticelli, Detail of the Three Graces from *La Primavera*, 1477-82. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
102. Piero di Cosimo, *Fantastical Portrait of a Woman (Simonetta Vespucci)*, early 1480s. Chantilly, Musée Condé
Michelangelo, *Cleopatra*, c. 1533-34. Florence, Casa Buonarroti
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum
115. Raphael, Detail of Raphael from *Parnassus*, 1511.
Rome, Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican
122. Titian, *Danaë*, 1553-54. St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum
Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art
130. Francesco d’Antonio del Chierico, Detail of a Petrarchan Couple, from Pliny’s *Natural History*, 1458. Rome, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pluteo 82.3, fol. 4r
134. Andrea del Sarto, Portrait of a Young Woman with a Petrarchino, c. 1528. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi
 Giuliano da Maiano and Fancione, Detail of *Dante and Petrarch* on the Sala de Gigli Doors, 1480. Florence, Palazzo Vecchio
Anonymous, Low-Footed Maiolica Bowl with a *Bust of a Woman (Livia Bella)*, c. 1530, Urbino or Castel Durante. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
140. Anonymous, Low-Footed Maiolica Bowl with a Profile Bust of a Woman (Silvia Diva), 1524. Germany, Private Collection
Francesco Urbini, Maiolica Plate with a Profile Bust of a Woman comprised of Penises, c. 1530-37. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum
142. Agnolo Bronzino, Detail of *Allegory of Venus and Cupid*, c. 1545.
London, National Gallery of Art
Florence, Ammannati Chapel, San Giovannino
145. Mariette Album of Drawings after Leonardo da Vinci, *Three Old Poets in Profile to the Left (Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Dante?)*, binding dates to c. 1700. Paris, Département des Arts Graphiques du Musée du Louvre, RF 28744 (Caylus 19)