

# The look(s) of Love: Petrarch, Simone Martini and the ambiguities of fourteenth-century portraiture

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Simone Martini first met Petrarch soon after arriving in Avignon to contribute to the decoration of the new papal palace in early 1336.<sup>1</sup> The two men quickly struck up a friendly rapport.<sup>2</sup> Only a few months later – in late summer or early autumn – Petrarch penned two sonnets suggesting that he had already commissioned Simone to paint a portrait of his beloved Laura.<sup>3</sup> Although no trace of this work – if it existed – has survived, Petrarch was fulsome in his praise of Simone’s artistry.<sup>4</sup> Even if Polyclitus and all those who were famous in his art were to have looked for a thousand years, Petrarch claimed in *Canz.* 77, they would not have seen the smallest part of Laura’s beauty.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Simone must have been in Paradise when he

*I would like to thank Dr. L. B. T. Houghton for his comments on a draft of this article.*

<sup>1</sup> On Simone Martini’s arrival in Avignon, see Marthe Bloch, ‘When did Simone Martini go to Avignon?’, *Speculum*, 2/4, 1927, 470-2; André Peter, ‘Quand Simone Martini est-il venu en Avignon?’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 21, 1939, 153-74; John Rowlands, ‘The date of Simone Martini’s arrival in Avignon’, *Burlington Magazine* 107, 1965, 25-6.

<sup>2</sup> For Petrarch’s relationship with Simone in general, see, for example, Nino Quarta, *Studi sul Testo delle Rime del Petrarca*, Naples: s.n., 1902, 55-8; Ernest Hatch Wilkins, *The Making of the ‘Canzoniere’ and Other Petrarchan Studies*, Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1951, 83-7; ‘On Petrarch’s appreciation of art’, *Speculum* 36/2, 1961, 299-301; *Life of Petrarch*, new ed., Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1963, 12; Joel Brink, ‘Simone Martini, Francesco Petrarca and the humanistic programme of the Virgil frontispiece’, *Mediaevalia*, 3, 1977, 83-109; Marcello Ciccuto, *Figure di Petrarca: Giotto, Simone Martini, Franco Bolognese*, Naples: Federico & Ardia, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS Vat. lat. 3196 indicates that the portrait must have been completed by 4 November 1336: on which, see Francesco Petrarca, *Il Codice degli abozzi: edizione e storia del manoscritto Vaticano latino 3196*, ed. Laura Paolino, Milan and Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 2000, 100.

<sup>4</sup> The search for Simone’s portrait and various figures’ claims to have possessed the work are discussed in J. B. Trapp, ‘Petrarch’s Laura: the portraiture of an imaginary beloved’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 64, 2001, 55-192, here 102-8.

<sup>5</sup> *Canz.* 77:

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

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

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

captured her likeness, Petrarch opined, for such a work could not be imagined here on earth, where the body is a veil to the soul, but only in Heaven. So skilful and lifelike was his portrait, in fact, that it actually intensified the pain of Petrarch's unrequited love. His only regret was that the portrait remained inanimate. If only it had been given voice and intellect along with form, Petrarch explained in *Canz.* 78, he might have been relieved of many sighs.<sup>6</sup> Though Laura's image seemed humble and appeared to promise peace, even appearing to listen kindly when Petrarch spoke, it could not reply to his words. Truly, then, Pygmalion was happier, for at least his statue of Galatea came to life.

For many Renaissance commentators, Petrarch's encomium of Simone's artistry appeared to have been designed to redound to Laura's credit. If the portrait had been taken from life – as was generally assumed – Petrarch could hardly have admired Simone's capacity to capture Laura's divine countenance *in carte* without also celebrating the beauty of Laura's body and soul in reality. As Francesco Filelfo observed in the mid-1440s, the two went hand-in-hand. It was, he argued, Petrarch's

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cortesia fe', né la potea far poi  
che fu disceso a provar caldo et gielo  
et del mortal sentiron gli occhi suoi.

Text from *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: the 'Rime Sparse' and Other Lyrics*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling, Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1976. On this sonnet in particular, see Willi Hirdt, 'Sul sonetto del Petrarca "Per mirar Policleto a prova fiso"', in *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Vittore Branca*, vol. 1, *Dal Medioevo al Petrarca*, Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1983, 435-47. Petrarch's knowledge of Polyclitus is most likely to have been derived from Cicero, *Brutus*, 70; Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.* 12.10.7; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 34.19.53. Vitruvius may also have furnished some information (*De arch.* 1.1.13; 3 *pr.* 2): it is, however, doubtful whether Petrarch knew his works: Pierre de Nolhac, *Pétrarque et l'humanisme*, 2 vols., new ed., Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1907, 2:105. Rosanna Bettarini has also drawn attention to Polyclitus' appearance in Dante's *Commedia* (*Purg.* 10.32-3), but the reference is too fleeting to have been useful to Petrarch: *Canzoniere. Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini, Turin: Einaudi, 1995, 396. Petrarch mentions Polyclitus on several other occasions, often in conjunction with Phidias or Apelles, and more rarely in connection with other classical masters: *Fam.* 5.17.5-6; 8.4.4-5; 18.5.4; *Sen.* 11.17; *De remediis utriusque fortune*, 1.41.16. See particularly Ulrich Pfisterer, 'Phidias und Polyklet von Dante bis Vasari. Zu Nachruhm und künstlerischer Rezeption antiker Bildhauer in der Renaissance', *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, 26, 1999, 61-97.

<sup>6</sup> Petrarch, *Canz.* 78: 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  
che ciò ch' altri à più caro a me fan vile.  
Però che 'n vista ella si monstra umile,  
promettendomi pace ne l'aspetto,  
ma poi ch' i' vengo a ragionar con lei,  
benignamente assai par che m'ascolte:  
se risponder sapesse a' detti miei!  
Pigmalion, quanto lodar ti dei  
de l'immagine tua, se mille volte  
n'avesti quel ch' i' sol una vorrei!

intention to praise ‘together with the beauty of the Lady Laura the talent and art of Master Simon of Siena, the most renowned painter of the age, who had depicted [Laura] from life, the said lady being visible to Master Francesco in Avignon.’<sup>7</sup> The conceit was later described in similar terms by ‘Antonio da Tempo’, Alessandro Vellutello, Giovannandrea Gesualdo, Bernardino Daniello, Giulio Camillo, Giovanni Battista Gelli, and – most notably – Giorgio Vasari,<sup>8</sup> and it would soon become a commonplace of vernacular love poetry to praise a lady’s beauty by extolling the merits of her portrait.<sup>9</sup>

But as more recent scholars have noted, Petrarch’s sonnets are rather more complex than they initially appear. Although he did indeed hail Simone as equal – if not superior – to the ancient masters,<sup>10</sup> he appears to have been rather more doubtful about the precise nature of the portrait itself. This has been discussed from a variety of perspectives, but in each case, a ‘disruptive tension’ between the two poems has been identified.<sup>11</sup> In *Canz.* 77, Petrarch appreciated the portrait as a visual staging of Laura’s virtues. In contrast to the statues of Polyclitus and his contemporaries, the

<sup>7</sup> Francesco Petrarca, *Rime*, Bologna: De Libris, 1476, *ad loc.*: ‘...comenda...insieme con la bellezza di M. Laura l’ingegno e l’arte di maestro Symon da siena Pictor in quella età sollemnissimo: il quale haueua ritratto [Laura] dal naturale essendo in auignone la detta donna contemplatione di messer Franescho...’. On Filelfo’s commentary, see, for example: Ezio Raimondi, ‘Francesco Filelfo interprete del *Canzoniere*’, *Studi petrarcheschi*, 3, 1950, 143-64; Enrico Carrara, *Studi petrarcheschi ed altri scritti*, Turin: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1959, 100-2; Carlo Dionisotti, ‘Fortuna del Petrarca nel Quattrocento’, *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 17, 1974, 61-113, here 78-88; Rossella Bessi, ‘Sul commento di Francesco Filelfo ai ‘*Rerum vulgariarum fragmenta*’, *Quaderni petrarcheschi*, 4, 1987, 229-70.

<sup>8</sup> These are discussed briefly in Trapp, ‘Petrarch’s Laura’, 100-2. A comprehensive survey may be found at Alessandro Bevilacqua, ‘Simone Martini, Petrarca, i ritratti di Laura e del poeta’, *Bolletino del Museo Civico di Padova*, 68, 1979, 107-50, here 131-2.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Elizabeth Cropper, ‘On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style’, *The Art Bulletin*, 58, 1976, 374-94; ‘The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture’, in Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers, eds., *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourse of Difference in Early Modern Europe*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 175-90; Mary Rogers, ‘Sonnets on Female Portraits from Renaissance North Italy’, *Word & Image*, 2/4, 1986, 291-305; Raymond B. Waddington, *Aretino’s Satyr: Sexuality, Satire and Self-Projection in Sixteenth-Century Literature and Art*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004, 26-8; Jesse M. Locker, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Language of Painting*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015, 153.

<sup>10</sup> Giuseppe Mazzotta, ‘Antiquity and the New Arts in Petrarch’, *Romanic Review*, 79, 1988, 22-41; Maria Monica Donato, ‘“Veteres” et “novi”, “externi” e “nostri”. Gli artisti di Petrarca: per una rilettura’, in Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, ed., *Il Medioevo: immagini e racconto. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Parma, 27-30 settembre 2000*, Milan: Electra, 2003, 433-55.

<sup>11</sup> The expression belongs to Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, Durham N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 1993, 29. Among recent studies, note particularly Maurizio Bettini, *Francesco Petrarca sulle arti figurative. Tra Plinio e sant’Agostino*, Livorno: Sillabe, 2002, 9-18 [originally published in a more abbreviated form as Maurizio Bettini, ‘Tra Plinio e sant’Agostino: Francesco Petrarca sulle arti figurative’, in Salvatore Settis, ed., *Memoria dell’antico nell’arte italiana*, vol. 1, *L’uso dei classici*, Turin: Einaudi, 1984, 221-67]; Giorgio Bertone, *Il volto di Dio, il volto di Laura: La questione del ritratto. Petrarca Rvf XVI, LXXVII, LXXVIII*, Genoa: Il Melangolo, 2008, 34-73.

beauty that it depicted belonged not to the earthly realm – *ove le membra fanno a l'alma velo* – but to the heavenly sphere alone. As such, it was almost iconic in form, representing not merely what could be seen, but also what could not be seen. In *Canz.* 78, however, the picture is initially admired for its 'lifelike' quality, or, as Gill has put it, for its 'almost-ness'.<sup>12</sup> Although Petrarch was pained that it remained inanimate, it seemed so 'real' that he spoke to it as he would to a living being. Yet it was not a strictly mimetic portrait. That it could be mistaken for a living being derived instead from the *alto concetto* that had moved Simone to take up his stylus. It was thus, in a sense, an idealised presentation of Laura's physical beauty that had been given the deceptive appearance of life. An object of sorrowful veneration in its own right, it was more of an idol than an icon.

What makes this 'disruptive tension' all the more striking – not to mention puzzling – is that Petrarch also explored it elsewhere in his writings. In the sections of the *De remediis utriusque fortune* dealing with paintings and statues, he drew a sharp distinction between icons and idols that owed much to the theology of St. Augustine.<sup>13</sup> Here, it was not so much the character of artworks themselves that was at stake, nor their 'lifelike' qualities, but the moral disposition of the viewer. Works that were composed merely to gratify the senses were, of course, execrable, and those who admired such tableaux for their own sake indulged a vain and futile pleasure akin to idolatry.<sup>14</sup> While they pored over tiny painted images and revelled in the liveliness of a portrait, they ignored their true selves and forgot the great artist who made the sun and the moon.<sup>15</sup> If they could find rapture in such counterfeited and shadowy things, 'Ratio' contended, how much more readily should they have turned their gaze towards Him that 'painted men's faces with feeling, the soul with understanding, the sky with stars, and the earth with flowers' and spurn the artists

<sup>12</sup> Meredith J. Gill, *Augustine and the Italian Renaissance: Art and Philosophy from Petrarch to Michelangelo*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 97

<sup>13</sup> This is explored most fully in Bettini, *Francesco Petrarca sulle arti figurative*. See also Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350-1450*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, 51-60; Gianfranco. Contini, 'Petrarca e le arti figurative', in Aldo S. Bernardo, ed., *Francesco Petrarca: Citizen of the World. Proceedings of the World Petrarch Congress, Washington D.C., April 6-13 1974*, Padua and Albany: Antenore, 1980, 115-31; Gill, *Augustine and the Italian Renaissance*, 97; Alessandro Roffi, 'Imago loquens e imago eloquens nel *De remediis petrarchesco*', *Camena*, 10, 2012, 1-13.

<sup>14</sup> *De remediis utriusque fortune*, 1.40.1-2: 'GAUDIUM: Pictis tabulis delector. RATIO: Inanis delectatio! Nec minor vanitas quod magnorum hominum sepe fuit nec tolerabilior quod antiqua...'. Text in *Les remèdes aux deux fortunes*, ed. and trans. Christophe Carraud, 2 vols., Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> *De remediis*, 1.40.4, 6: 'RATIO: O mirus humani furor animi omnia mirantis nisi se, quo inter cuncta non solum artis, sed nature opera nullum mirabilius!...Quid de hoc sentiam ex iam dictis intelligere potuisti; omnis quidem terrena delectatio, si consilio regeretur, ad amorem celestis erigeret et originis admoneret. Nam quis unquam, queso, rivi appetens fontem odit? At vos graves, humi acclives affixique, celum suspicere non audetis et obliti opificem illum solis ac lune tanta cum voluptate tenuissimas picturas aspicitis atque unde transitus erat ad alta despicitis, illic metam figitis intellectus.'

they admired.<sup>16</sup> But this was not to say that the visual arts could not also be viewed positively, particularly in the case of statuary, which, as Pliny had argued, was more sympathetic – or at least less inimical – to the virtues.<sup>17</sup> To take delight in images that recalled the mind to heavenly grace was, ‘Ratio’ suggested, a pious act that helped to stir the soul to the good. It was thus that Petrarch admired a portrait-bust of St. Ambrose in Milan. Writing to Francesco Nelli on 23 August 1353, he reported that it was carved ‘living and breathing’. It was, in fact, not easy to describe ‘the gravity of the face, the majesty of the aspect, the serenity of the gaze; it lacked only a voice, since you would believe that you were seeing Ambrose reborn.’ And since it made visible the saint’s holy qualities, it commanded veneration.<sup>18</sup> Profane images, too, could sometimes move the mind and stir it to virtue, provided they were not loved beyond the bounds of reason and duty.<sup>19</sup> It was for this reason that Petrarch was able to express his appreciation both of the quadriga standing atop St. Mark’s Basilica in Venice (which also seemed lifelike)<sup>20</sup> and of the Regiole in Pavia.<sup>21</sup> Yet even this had limits. However much an ‘iconic’ work pointed towards the divine, it would remain but a shadow of the heavenly archetype. If one truly contemplated God, one would still think little even of the statues of Polyclitus and Phidias, and the paintings of Apelles and Protogenes.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *De remediis*, 1.40.8: ‘RATIO:…Tu autem, si hec ficta et adumbrata fucis inanibus usque adeo delectant, attolle oculos ad illum, qui os humanum sensibus, animam intellectu, celum astris, floribus terram pinxit: spernes quos mirabaris artifices.’

<sup>17</sup> *De remediis*, 1.41.8: ‘RATIO: Harum quippe artium manu naturam imitantium una est quam plasticen dixere. Hec gypso et ceris operatur ac tenaci argilla, que cognatis licet artibus cunctis amicior sit virtuti aut certe minus inimica, modestie in primis et frugalitati, que magis fictiles quam aureas deorum atque hominum formas probant.’ Cf. Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 35.12.43 §151-3.

<sup>18</sup> *Fam.* 16.11.12-13: ‘Iocundissimum tamen ex omnibus spectaculum dixerim quod aram, quam non ut de Africano loquens Seneca, “sepulcrum tanti viri fuisse suspicor”, sed scio, imaginemque eius summis parietibus extantem, quam illi viro simillimam fama fert, sepe venerabundus in saxo pene vivam spirantemque suspicio. Id michi non leve precium adventus; dici enim non potest quanta frontis autoritas, quanta maiestas supercillii, quanta tranquillitas oculorum; vox sola defuerit vivum ut cernas Ambrosium.’ Q. Seneca, *Ep.* 86.1. Text from *Le Familiari*, ed. Vittorio Rossi, 4 vols., Florence: Sansoni, 1933-42.

<sup>19</sup> *De remediis*, 1.41.16: ‘RATIO:…Delectari quoque sacris imaginibus que spectantes beneficii celestis admoneant, pium sepe excitandisque animis utile; prophane autem et si interdum moveant atque erigant ad virtutem, dum tepentes animi rerum nobilium memoria recalescunt, amande tamen aut colende equo amplius non sunt, ne aut stultitie testes aut avaritie ministre aut fidei sint rebelles ac religioni vere et precepto illi famosissimo: “Custodite vos a simulacris” …’ Q. 1 John 5:21.

<sup>20</sup> *Sen.* 4.3.30: ‘Iam dux ipse cum immenso procerum comitatu frontem templi supra vestibulum occuparat, unde marmoreo e suggestu essent cuncta sub pedibus; locus est ubi quattuor illi enei et aurati equi stant, antiqui operis ac preclari, quisquis ille fuit, artificis, ex alto pene vivis adhinnientes ac pedibus obstrepentes.’ Text in *Res Seniles, Libri I-IV*, ed. Silvia Rizzo, with Monica Berté, Florence: Le Lettere, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> *Sen.* 5.1. Text in *Res Seniles, Libri V-VIII*, ed. Silvia Rizzo, with Monica Berté, Florence: Le Lettere, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> *De remediis*, 1.41.16: ‘RATIO:…Profecto autem si hic quoque illum aspicias, qui solidam terram, fretum mobile, volubile celum fecit quique non fictos, sed veros vivosque homines et

Since the characterisation of Simone's portrait was evidently intended to testify to Petrarch's perception both of the artwork itself and of the model, it is perhaps tempting to suggest that the apparent disjunction between the two sonnets was deliberate, and was intended to mirror the two sides of his love for Laura. Petrarch was certainly not averse to presenting himself as having nurtured both 'spiritual' and 'worldly' forms of love. In the third book of the *Secretum*, for example, the character of 'Augustinus' turns to examine the 'adamantine chains' by which Petrarch's literary alter ego, Franciscus, is bound, and which are the source of his persistent unhappiness. Of these, love is the most troubling, and Franciscus is compelled to admit that he has allowed himself to be consumed by his love for Laura. She seems, however, to have two natures. Although she is a mortal woman and beautiful in appearance, her beauty is, Franciscus insists, more than merely corporeal. 'Do you not know that you have spoken about a woman whose mind, untouched by terrestrial concerns, burns with a longing for Heaven,' he asks Augustinus, 'in whose appearance (if there is truth anywhere), there shines the ideal of divine beauty; whose manner is the very model of grace; whose voice and the brilliancy of whose eyes show nothing mortal in them, and whose gait has nothing merely human about it?'<sup>23</sup> This echoes sentiments expressed in the *Canzoniere*. To Petrarch's eyes, Laura's physical attributes, though worthy of love in themselves, pointed towards heaven. While admiring her hair of 'fine gold', her face of 'warm snow', her eyebrows of ebony, and her star-like eyes, Petrarch found himself doubting 'if she were a mortal woman or a goddess'.<sup>24</sup> Echoing Virgil's description of Venus, he noted that her walk was 'not that of a mortal thing, but of an angelic form' and 'her words sounded different from a merely human voice', to such an extent that she seemed to be a 'celestial spirit, a living sun.'<sup>25</sup> Indeed, when he saw her 'divine

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quadrupedes terre, pisces mari, celo volucres dedit, puto, ut Protogenem atque Apellem, sic etiam Polycletum spernes et Phidiam.'

<sup>23</sup> *Secretum* 3: '... scis ne de ea muliere mentionem tibi exortam, cuius mens terrenarum nescia curarum celestibus desideriis ardet; in cuius aspectu, siquid usquam veri est, divini specimen decoris effulget; cuius mores consummate honestatis exemplar sunt; cuius nec vox nec oculorum vigor mortale aliquid nec incessus hominem representat?' Text in *Prose*, ed. Guido Martellotti, Pier Giorgio Ricci, Enrico Carrara, and Enrico Bianchi, Milan and Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1955, 21-215, here 136. Hereafter, all references to the *Secretum* will be given in relation to pages from this volume.

<sup>24</sup> *Canz.* 157.5-11:  
 'L'atto d'ogni gentil pietate adorno  
 e 'l dolce amaro lamentar ch' i' udiva  
 facean dubbiar se mortal donna o diva  
 fosse che 'l ciel rasserenava intorno.  
 La testa or fino, et calda neve il volto,  
 ebeneo i cigli, et gli occhi eran due stelle  
 onde Amor l'arco non tendeva in fallo...'

<sup>25</sup> *Canz.* 90.9-13:  
 'Non era l'andar suo cosa mortale  
 ma d'angelica forma, et le parole  
 sonavan altro che pur voce umana:  
 uno spirito celeste, un vivo sole  
 fu quel ch' i' vidi...'

Cf. Virgil, *Aen.* 1.314-20, 327-8, 402-5.

comportment and her face', he thought that she must have been born in paradise, and believed himself to be in Heaven.<sup>26</sup> As such, Petrarch's love too had a dual character. In reply to Augustinus' insinuations in the *Secretum*, Franciscus protests that he had not loved Laura's body any more than her soul. Even though she had grown older, and her looks had faded, the beauty of her mind – which made him love her in the first place – had grown more pronounced, as had his love for her.<sup>27</sup> And since her spiritual beauty marked her out as being of heavenly origin, Franciscus could even claim that loving her had made him love God more.<sup>28</sup> Only her indifference to his passion caused him grief.

As some have suggested, this almost platonic understanding of beauty and love would allow the apparent inconsistencies of *Canz.* 77 and 78 to be resolved without too much difficulty.<sup>29</sup> Just as Franciscus could claim that he loved Laura's soul no less than her body, and found in her physical beauty a mirror of the divine, so Petrarch could admire Simone's portrait not only for depicting her celestial virtues (*Canz.* 77), but also for showing the corporeal radiance that was itself a reflection of her heavenly form (*Canz.* 78). As such, Petrarch would have understood the portrait itself not as an icon *and* an idol, but merely as an icon, and its failure to take life, as Pygmalion's Galatea had done, only served to testify to her indifference towards him.

Attractive as such an interpretation may be, however, it is contradicted by Petrarch himself. For all the ardour of Franciscus' protestations in the *Secretum*, his claims to love Laura's body and soul equally rang hollow. After subjecting him to a barrage of searching questions, Augustinus compels him to admit that, while her mind and goodness may have added to his ardour, he had, in fact, loved only her body, or had at least fallen into the trap of seeking happiness in the unstable realm of

<sup>26</sup> *Canz.* 126.53-63: 'Quante volte diss' io  
allor, pien di sparvento:  
'Costei per fermo nacque in paradiso!'  
Così carco d'oblio  
il divin portamento  
e 'l volto e le parole e 'l dolce riso  
m'aveano, et sì diviso  
da l'immagine vera,  
ch' i' dicea sospirando:  
'Qui come venn' io o quando?'  
credendo esser in ciel, non là dove' era.'

<sup>27</sup> *Secretum* 3; *Prose*, 148: 'Hanc presentem in testimonium evoco, conscientiamque meam facio contestem, me (quod iam superius dixeram) illius non magis corpus amasse quam animam. Quod hinc percipias licebit, quoniam quo illa magis in etate progressa est, quod corporee pulchritudinis ineluctabile fulmen est, eo firmior in opinione permansi. Etsi enim visibiliter iuvente flos tractu temporis languesceret, animi decor annis augebatur, qui sicut amandi principium sic incepti perseverantiam ministravit.'

<sup>28</sup> *Secretum* 3; *Prose*, 146: '...Deum profecto ut amarem, illius amor prestitit.'

<sup>29</sup> This 'platonic' interpretation seems first to have been propounded by Giovanni Battista Gelli in 1549 (*Lezioni petrarchesche*, ed. Carlo Negrone, Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1884, 219-83, esp. 257ff.). Bettini, *Francesco Petrarca sulle arti figurative*, 11-12; Bertone, *Il volto di Dio*, 58-73.

mortality.<sup>30</sup> This had ruined whatever harvest he might have reaped from the seeds of virtue that had been sown in his heart,<sup>31</sup> and distracted him from the love of the divine.<sup>32</sup> And since true happiness was only to be found in the eternal company of God after death, it was his attachment to the fleeting and deceptive pleasures of the flesh, rather than Laura's indifference, that was the source of his sorrow.<sup>33</sup> For what lasting joy could be found in that which would one day grow old, fall sick, and die? 'That,' Augustinus told Franciscus, 'is why you are so prematurely pale and lean and languid, though you are in the prime of life; that is why your eyes are always pained and tearful, your mind confused, your peace disturbed while you rest; why you cry dolefully in your sleep; why your voice is weak and hoarse with lamentation, the sound of your words broken and hesitant; why you are altogether more miserable than can be imagined.'<sup>34</sup> As such, a 'platonic' resolution of *Canz.* 77 and 78 would seem implausible.

It may, of course, be objected that Petrarch's understanding both of his love for Laura, and of Simone's portrait had changed in the years that separated his sonnets from the *Secretum*. It has sometimes been suggested that Petrarch underwent a period of intellectual transformation in the early 1340s, and this may point to a change of heart. Building on the earlier work of Guido Martellotti, Pier Giorgio Ricci, and Ernest Hatch Wilkins, Carlo Calcaterra argued that Petrarch experienced a religious 'crisis' between 1342 and 1343 which marked the appearance of a more stringent attachment to Augustinian moral theology and the abandonment of his youthful flights of amorous fancy;<sup>35</sup> and though less inclined to think in such dramatic terms, Hans Baron and Francisco Rico, too, have endorsed the idea of a gradual shift away from enthusiastic classicism and towards a more pronounced

<sup>30</sup> *Secretum 3; Prose*, 148: '...si enim non nisi quod oculis apparet amare potes, corpus igitur amasti. Nec tamen negaverim animum quoque illius et mores flammis tuis alimenta prebuisse...'.

<sup>31</sup> *Secretum 3; Prose*, 146: 'Forma quidem tibi visa est tam blanda, tam dulcis, ut in te omnem ex nativis virtutum seminibus proventuram segetem ardentissimi desiderii estibus et assiduo lacrimarum imbre vastaverit.'

<sup>32</sup> *Secretum 3; Prose*, 154: 'Nichil est quod eque oblivionem Dei contemptum ve pariat atque amor rerum temporalium; iste precipue, quem proprio quodam nomine Amorem...Nec mirari conveniet tantum posse hunc affectum in pectoribus humanis; ad reliqua enim visa rei species, ac sperata fruendi delectatio et proprie vos mentis impetus rapit.'

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of this point, see Alexander Lee, *Petrarch and St. Augustine: Classical Scholarship, Christian Theology and the Origins of the Renaissance in Italy*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, 63-8.

<sup>34</sup> *Secretum 3; Prose*, 156: 'Hinc pallor et macies et languescens ante tempus flos etatis; tum graves eternumque madentes oculi, tum confusa mens et turbata quies in somnis; et dormientis flebiles querele, ac vox fragilis luctu rauca, fractusque et interruptus verborum sonus, et quicquid tumultuosius aut miserius fingi potest.'

<sup>35</sup> Guido Martellotti, 'Linee di sviluppo dell'umanesimo petrarchesco', *Studi petrarcheschi*, 2, 1949, 51-82; Pier Giorgio Ricci, 'Per il Petrarca storico e umanista', *Rinascimento*, 6, 1955, 166-7; Ernest Hatch Wilkins, *Petrarch's Correspondence*, Padua: Antenore, 1960; *The Making of the 'Canzoniere'*; *Studies in the Life and Works of Petrarch*, Cambridge MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1955; Carlo Calcaterra, 'La concezione storica del Petrarca', *Annali della cattedra petrarchesca*, 9, 1939-40, 1-26; *Nella selva del Petrarca*, Bologna: Licinio Cappelli, 1942, 1-18.

emphasis on the patristic ethics.<sup>36</sup> But in recent years, such interpretations of Petrarch's intellectual development have been called into question, and to treat the *Secretum* as belonging to a different moral paradigm to *Canz.* 77 and 78 would hence be incautious.<sup>37</sup>

Yet if the *Secretum* obliges us to reject a 'platonic' interpretation of *Canz.* 77 and 78, it also offers an alternative explanation for the apparently ambiguous vision of Simone's portrait in these pieces. Appropriately enough, the roots of this are to be found in what might perhaps be called the 'visual effects' of Petrarch's love.

Having been confronted with the true nature of his condition in the third book of the *Secretum*, Franciscus finally admits that his love for Laura is wrong. But even though he is aware that he will only find happiness when he concentrates entirely on God and his soul, he confesses that he feels torn.<sup>38</sup> Despite his advancing age and greying hair, he is unable to decide whether to choose the path of virtue, or to continue down the road of desire.<sup>39</sup> As he tells Augustinus, he has often tried to cure himself of his spiritual malady by taking himself far from Laura, into the hills and fields of the countryside, but to no avail.<sup>40</sup> Since he had moved to a new place without actually meditating properly on the fact of his own mortality, his worldliness remained deeply ingrained and followed him wherever he went, tormenting him all the while with memories of the woman for whom he still yearned.<sup>41</sup> So long as he was plagued by his passion, the landscape itself manifested

<sup>36</sup> Hans Baron, *Petrarch's Secretum: its Making and its Meaning*, Cambridge MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1985; 'Petrarch's *Secretum*: was it revised – and why? The draft of 1342-43 and the later changes', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 25, 1963, 489-530; Francisco Rico, *Vida u obra de Petrarca*, vol. 1, *Lectura del Secretum*, Padua: Antenore, 1974. Cf. also Charles Trinkaus, *The Poet as Philosopher: Petrarch and the Formation of Renaissance Consciousness*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, 27-51; William J. Bouwsma, 'The two faces of Renaissance humanism: Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance thought', in Heiko A. Oberman and Thomas A. Brady, Jr., eds., *Itinerarium Italicum: the Profile of the Italian Renaissance in the Mirror of its European Transformations. Dedicated to Paul Oskar Kristeller on the Occasion of his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, Leiden: Brill, 1975, 3-61.

<sup>37</sup> Lee, *Petrarch and St. Augustine*, esp. 31-112; Carol E. Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance: Petrarch, Augustine and the Language of Humanism*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.

<sup>38</sup> *Secretum* 3; *Prose*, 176: 'Video nimirum, multoque cum dolore distrahor tam diversis affectibus; ita enim alternis horis insultant, ut modo huc modo illuc turbine mentis agiter; quem toto sequar impetu nondum certus.'

<sup>39</sup> *Secretum* 3; *Prose*, 178-80.

<sup>40</sup> *Secretum* 3; *Prose*, 164: 'Quotiens enim, convalescendi avidus atque huius consilii non ignarus, fugam retentavi! Et licet varias simulaverim causas, unus tamen hic semper peregrinationum rusticationumque mearum omnium finis erat libertas; quam sequens, per occidentem et per septentrionem et usque ad Oceani terminos longe lateque circumactus sum. Quod quantum michi profuerit, vides.'

<sup>41</sup> *Secretum* 3; *Prose*, 164-6: 'Quia malum suum circumferenti locorum mutatio laborem cumulat, non tribuit sanitatem. Potest ergo tibi non improprie dici, quod adolescenti cuidam, qui peregrinationem nil sibi profuisse querebatur, respondit Socrates: "Tecum enim," inquit, "peregrinabaris." Tibi quidem in primis sequestranda vetus hec curarum sarcina et preparandus est animus; tum denique fugiendum. Hoc enim non in corporibus modo sed in animis quoque compertum est; quod nisi in patiente disposito virtus est agentis inefficax.'

his sorrow, a 'poetic fallacy' that he often explored using the language of the visual arts.<sup>42</sup> Although he was occasionally able to think on higher things in the comfort of the rosy wood, he saw Laura everywhere.<sup>43</sup> Sometimes, it was Love that 'painted' Laura onto the natural world,<sup>44</sup> or simply 'carved' her image onto his heart as he wandered through the valleys.<sup>45</sup> Love would portray Laura wherever he laid his eyes to keep his desires alive.<sup>46</sup> But more often, it was Petrarch who 'painted' her for himself. Early in the *Canzoniere*, he relates how he 'sculpted' her lovely face for his imagination, and carried the same image 'painted' in his breast, such that it took shape in the world around him. Indulging his fondness for playing on the similarity of Laura and *lauro*, he claimed that he saw his idol (*idolo*) carved in the living laurel tree.<sup>47</sup> As long as his mind remained fixed on her, indeed, he forgot himself and saw her in so many places, and in such a beautiful guise, that he felt almost content with the deception he had crafted for himself.<sup>48</sup> She appeared 'in the clear water and on the green grass and in the trunk of a beech tree and in a white cloud.'<sup>49</sup> Even when Petrarch remembered that it was forbidden to love a mortal thing with the faith that belongs to God alone, his 'bad habits' still caused him to depict Laura for himself.<sup>50</sup>

As Petrarch was all too keenly aware, his tendency to project his beloved onto the world around him was a form of idolatry that testified to his sinfulness. Indeed, since he both 'painted' her likeness and revelled in the image for its own sake, it was doubly idolatrous. But so severe was his moral 'illness' that this idolatrous artistry

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Alioquin ad extremos Indorum fines penetrare quidem poteris, semper Flaccum vera locutum fateberis, ubi ait: "celum non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt." Q. Seneca, *Ep.* 104.7; Horace, *Ep.* 1.11.27.

<sup>42</sup> Margaret Ann McMahan Flansburg, 'Landscape Imagery in Petrarch's 'Canzoniere': Development and Characterization of the Imagery and an Illustration in the Virgil's Frontispiece by Simone Martini', Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1986; Lee, *Petrarch and St. Augustine*, 182-9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ep. Met.* 1.6.144-51, 211-14, 226.

<sup>44</sup> *Canz.* 125.33-5: 'ch'aver dentro a lui parme | un che Madonna sempre | depinge...'

<sup>45</sup> *Canz.* 155.9-11: 'Quel dolce pianto mi depinse Amore, | anzi scolpio, et que' detti soavi | mi scrisse entro un diamante in mezzo 'l core.'

<sup>46</sup> *Canz.* 158.1-4: 'Ove ch' i' posi gli occhi lassi o giri  
per quietar la vaghezza che gli spinge,  
trovo chi bella donna ivi depinge,  
per far sempre mai verdi i miei desiri.'

<sup>47</sup> *Canz.* 30.27: 'l'idolo mio scolpito in vivo lauro'.

<sup>48</sup> *Canz.* 129.33-9: 'Ma mentre tener fiso  
posso al primo pensier la mente vaga,  
et mirar lei et obliar me stesso,  
sento Amor sì da presso  
che del suo proprio error l'alma s'appaga;  
in tante parti et sì bella la veggio  
che se l'error durasse, altro non cheggio.'

<sup>49</sup> *Canz.* 129.40-3: 'l' l'ò più volte (or chi fia che mi 'l creda?)  
ne l'acqua chiara et sopra l'erba verde  
veduto viva, et nel troncon d'un faggio  
e 'n bianca nube.'

<sup>50</sup> *Canz.* 264.99-108.

could not remain confined to the canvas of his imagination. As Augustinus reminded Franciscus in the *Secretum*, the ‘madness’ of his love had also induced him to commission a work from Simone Martini. ‘What is even more insane,’ Augustinus asks with unfeigned incredulity, ‘than that – not content with dreams of that face before you, which are the root of all your sorrows – you commissioned a portrait from a famous artist so that, by carrying it around with you everywhere, you would always have a reason for endless tears?’<sup>51</sup> Despite Simone Martini’s evident *ingenium*, therefore, there was no doubt that the portrait – like Petrarch’s own ‘poetic fallacy’ – had been elicited by the humanist’s sinful desire, and remained the object of idolatrous self-indulgence.

While this criticism may seem rigidly uncompromising, Augustinus’ broader argument in the *Secretum* actually offers a means of reconciling – or at least accommodating – the otherwise ambiguous views contained in *Canz.* 77 and 78. Rather than each enjoying an equally authoritative status, the two sonnets appear to have been intended to function as a sequence, and when read in this way, may be seen as a re-staging of Augustinus’ dissection of Franciscus’ claim to love Laura’s body and soul to the same extent. In suggesting that Simone must have been in heaven when he saw her in *Canz.* 77, Petrarch mirrors Franciscus’ initial contention that loving Laura had allowed him to love God more, and echoes other verses that speak to her supposedly ‘divine’ origins. *Canz.* 78, however, gives the lie to this. Simone’s *alto concetto* parallels Petrarch’s own imaginative and idealised portrayals of Laura, and the portrait’s unresponsiveness hints discreetly at Laura’s indifference; but that Petrarch wishes the image to come to life and embrace him as Galatea had embraced Pygmalion only serves to indicate that his love was, in fact, worldly – just as Augustinus had proved to Franciscus. As such, the two poems act as a form of self-indictment through art; and the portrait itself is revealed to have been not the icon Petrarch initially fools himself into believing, but the idol that Augustinus had condemned so forcibly in the *Secretum*.

It is, however, to Petrarch’s credit that he succeeded in combining this self-recrimination with an expression of his heartfelt and sincere admiration for Simone Martini’s skill as a portraitist, and it is perhaps only fitting that, while he condemned his own lust for glory, he contributed to securing the artist’s renown in his sonnets. This was, indeed, a fact upon which critics often reflected in the centuries that followed. Giorgio Vasari remarked that Simone had been fortunate to have lived at the same time as Petrarch, and to have been commemorated in the sonnets.<sup>52</sup> And in the early seventeenth century, Henry Peacham even went so far as to note that Simone ‘liveth eternally’ in Petrarch’s poems.<sup>53</sup> Yet while Simone may have been flattered by the effect that Petrarch’s esteem would have on his posthumous reputation, he may perhaps still have wished that the poet had looked at his portrait with a different – and less self-loathing – love.

<sup>51</sup> *Secretum* 3; *Prose*, 156: ‘Quid autem insanius quam, non contentum presenti illius vultus effigie, unde hec cuncta tibi provenerant, aliam fictam illustris artificis ingenio quesivisse, quam tecum ubique circumferens haberes materiam semper immortalium lacrimarum?’

<sup>52</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori: nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi, 6 vols. in 9, Florence: Sansoni, 1966-87, 2:190.

<sup>53</sup> Henry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman*, ed. George Stuart Gordon (London, 1906), 146-7.

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