Elisabetta Toreno

Netherlandish and Italian Female Portraiture in the Fifteenth Century

Gender, Identity, and the Tradition of Power

Amsterdam
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in the Fifteenth Century

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to Aurora and Marco

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Acknowledgements

In 2003, a small Italian curatorial establishment called Castel di San Michele (Cagliari) hosted an itinerant exhibition entitled *La Ricerca dell'Identità da Tiziano a De Chirico.* Dozens of faces gazed back at the visitors from their painted panels and canvases. Among them, the underrepresented category of women suggested the worth of an investigation that became a research project, thanks to the support of many, first among whom were Patricia de Montfort and Genevieve Warwick. That constituted the start of a journey towards this book.

The title of this book makes explicit the primary material of this study. To trace this material is a task that can only be described as unending. At the onset, my quest was helped by the James McNeill Whistler and Beatrix Whistler Scholarship, through which I was able to undertake archival research in museum collections. Therefore, I am also indebted to the assistance of the staff of the Departments of Curatorial Records at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona), Accademia Carrara (Bergamo), National Gallery (London), Museo d'Arte Antica e Pinacoteca del Castello Sforzesco (Milan), Museo Poldi-Pezzoli (Milan), Louvre (Paris), Archivi Capitolini (Rome), and the National Gallery of Art (Washington). To represent all, I should like to mention Marina Gentiletti (Pinacoteca Carrara) and Ann Halpern (National Gallery, Washington). During my visits, I was also honoured by the attentive ear of curators and directors Laura Basso, David Alan Brown, Margarita Euyas, John Hand, Elisabetta Mori, Giovanni Valagussa.

In studying these paintings, I had to pursue disciplines that were far beyond my comfort zone. I cannot thank enough John Findlay and Olivia Robertson, who helped me interpret aspects of legal history, and Ruth Karras, who saved me from misinterpreting embarrassingly the complexity of medieval marriages and the sacramental formula of marriage. And I must express my gratitude to Graeme Small for pointing me to the right direction as I navigated the complexity of the history of the Duchy of Burgundy. Each chapter is also indebted to the generous and fresh eye of scholars and friends, among whom I wish to remember Christopher Black, Peter Black, Warren Carter, Mary Garrard, Eleanor Gordon, Jill Harrison, Gary Kemp, Catherine King, Elizabeth Robertson, and Tom Nichols. On en dashes, sentence-structures, and opaque lexicon and more, special thanks must go to Chris Powici, Chris Reid, and Sheilagh Wilson. Last but certainly not least, I am thankful to Evelyn Welch for her encouragement in pursuing the publication of the catalogue in this book.

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Introduction

Abstract

With one hundred and thirty portraits, this book traces the aesthetic and conceptual conditions of fifteenth-century Netherlandish and Italian individual female portraiture on panels. Their unprecedented quantity and characteristics signal the genre's modernisation in European visual culture. Their provenance, both cultural and territorial, betrays relations with a new estate that was especially advanced in the urbanised regions of central-northern Italy and Flanders, and that rose to visibility from entrepreneurial capital. The androcentric organisation of powers, upon which societies operated across Europe, suited this new estate to an extent that deepened the gender dynamics of its patriarchal foundations. This book studies the relationship between life and imaging of women during this epochal moment in the European history. Its introductory chapter surveys the history of the genre until the fifteenth century and evaluates critically the studies on the subject. It explains the premise, method, and structure of the enquiry. It ends with technical clarifications.

Key words: Painting – Antiquity – Portraiture – Renaissance – Women

A late fifteenth century panel painting shows the half-bust silhouette of a young woman with greenish eyes, a distinctive nose and brown hair neatly arranged into headgear ending with a *coazzone.* She is wearing a brocaded *gamurra* with Sforza emblems. Above the ear, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, diamonds, and pearls are fitted in a pendant in the shape of a brush bordered by a banderole inscribed with a motto *merito et tempore* [Fig. I.1].[1] The design of this jewel was the *impresa* of Ludovico Sforza (1452–1508), known as the Moor.

The woman likely represents Ludovico's niece Bianca Maria, born on 5 April 1472, the daughter of the Duke of Milan, Galeazzo Maria Sforza (1444–1476). After her father's assassination on 26 December 1476, she and her brother, the new Duke Gian Galeazzo (1469–1494), fell under the wily tutelage of Ludovico, who de facto

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1   **Cat. 5.** This painting is detailed and referenced at www.nga.gov

ruled as the Duchy's Regent. After Gian Galeazzo's mysterious death on 21 October 1494, Ludovico assumed formal control, which he lost in 1499, when the French invaded the principality. Meanwhile, Bianca Maria would come close three times to wearing the bridal dress. Then, shortly before she lost her brother, her uncle succeeded in sealing her union with none other than the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I (1459–1519), whom she married on 30 November 1493. She brought to the marriage an excess of four hundred thousand ducats and a *corredo* of jewels, fabrics, and silverware of unsurpassed value. The extravagance of this dowry gives us an inkling of Ludovico's determination to be recognised as the legitimate heir to the Duchy of Milan by the dynastic powers of Europe.[2]

Bianca Maria went on to live an uneventful life in Innsbruck, where she died unloved and isolated on 31 December 1510. Yet, her likeness fashions her as a real catch in the competitive marriage market of the privileged classes. In such portraits, clothing and accessories formed a sign-system laden with symbolism that emphasised and romanticised the reasons for the commissions. For instance, around *Bianca Maria*'s waist a belt is studded with a lapidary-rich pattern that resembles carnations and there is also a red carnation tucked into the belt. Belts were nuptial gifts because their fasteners were seen as appropriate metaphors for the indissolubility of marriage and friendship, and carnations in Renaissance portraiture often symbolised marital love. Thus, this portrait was likely commissioned at the time of the sitter's marriage with Maximilian.

Jewels were indexes of material wealth and, simultaneously, of moral virtues. For example, pearls were routinely painted in female portraits because they symbolised Marian purity. The portrait format itself could carry symbolic values. The profile formula evoked ancient medallic portraiture and, in turn, the ideals of an ancient ruling patriciate.[3] Its continuous silhouette invited scrutiny, whilst denying ocular connection with the viewer. Combined with sufficient resemblance with the sitter, it exacted their acknowledgement and admiration. Put simply, *Bianca Maria*'s profile format, lapidary ensemble, and emblematic and marital references exemplify a take on portraiture, whereby a sitter's genealogical, moral, and financial pedigree prefigured momentous family alliances. In Europe, these were times of arranged marriages, and such characteristics encapsulated family ambitions because they stimulated discourses on kinship and lineage.

To understand why gender was conducive to these discourses we need not go far. Consider the extent to which photographs of women, from personal to professional,

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2   Luca Beltrami, "Gli Sponsali di Bianca Maria Sforza," in *Le Corti Italiane del Secolo XV*, Emporium vol. III, no. 14 (1896): 83–95.

3   John William Parker, "Some Account of Coins, Ancient and Modern," *The Saturday Magazine*, no. 556 Supplement (February 1841): 80–88.

are routinely altered. Their inauthenticity reflects the habit of identifying personal accomplishments with one's own body image.[4] This conflation reflects misconceptions, which today we call misogyny, and which originated in the Aristotelian theories on female psychophysiological deficiency, and the Judeo-Christian identification of woman with Eve.[5] As a result, women have been historically considered defective, morally corrupt, and fundamentally incapable of legal and social autonomy; and their worth has been codified under standards of appearance. Stanley Chojnacki has visualised this ideology as a "triptych of patriarchal, patrilineal and patrimonial principles."[6] These three 'Ps' converge in the practice of arranged marriages, in which women are transacted as the biosocial capital that increases family affiliations. As the humanist Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) put it, "[I]n this or that [woman], I could not desire more dowry, or more beauty, or a better family."[7]

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4   An outline of this debate is in Sheila Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices*, 2nd ed. (East Sussex and New York: Routledge, 2015), esp. 5–40.

5   E.g., Corinthians 11:3: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ: and the head of the woman is the man." From the vast scholarship on this subject see, Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Karen Raber, ed., *A Cultural History of Women in the Renaissance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Jennifer Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe, 1200-1500* (Edinburgh and London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001); Letizia Panizza, ed., *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society* (Oxford: Legenda, European Humanities Research Centre University of Oxford, 2000); James Grantham Turner, ed., *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Emilie Amt, ed., *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (New York, London: Routledge, 1993); Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, ed., *A History of Women in the West: II. Silences of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1992); Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari, eds., *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991); Margaret King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy Vicker, eds., *Rewriting the Renaissance: the Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986); Ian MacLean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Misfortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Aristotle and Woman," *Journal of the History of Biology* 9, no. 2 (Autumn 1976): 183–213.

6   Stanley Chojnacki, "'The Most Serious Duty': Motherhood, Gender, and the Patrician Culture of Renaissance Venice," in *Men and Women in Renaissance Venice: Twelve Essays on Patrician Society* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 169–82 (169).

7   "[I]n questa o quella nella quale io non ai da desiderarmi o piu dota o maggior belezze o migliore parentado." Leon Battista Alberti, "De Officio Senum Erga Iuvenes et Minorum Erga Maiores et de Educandis Liberis," in *In Questo Volume si Contiene Libri della Famiglia Composta da M. Batista degli Alberti da Firenze*, 1433–1440, Urb.Lat.229, The Vatican Library, DigitalVaticana, 7v–44v (19v). In contemporary Italian: Leon Battista Alberti, "Liber Primus Familiae: de Officio Senum Erga Iuvenes et Minorum Erga Maiores et de Educandis Liberis," in *I libri della Famiglia*, a cura di Ruggiero Romano, Alberto Tenenti, Francesco Furlan (Torino: Einaudi, 1994), 12–85. Trans.: Leon Battista Alberti, "The First Book on the Family: Of the Duties of the Old Towards the Young and of the Young Towards Their Elders, and of the Education of Children,"

Writing about women in the Renaissance in 1977, Joan Kelly called it "the bourgeois sex-role system" because it served the socio-political consolidation of an emerging middling class.[8] In Europe, this group came into existence as townspeople developed conditions of urban professionalism. It included the families enriched by entrepreneurial activities, such as commerce and banking, and was especially advanced in the urbanised areas of central-northern Italy, followed by the Low Countries.[9] By the early fifteenth century, it had also become the indispensable administrative force of the local plutocracies, and was intermarrying with the impoverished nobility. In improving socially through their own commercial and networking skills, these families challenged the historical association of power with the aristocratic and clerical estates. A medley of emotions, from pride to the anxiety about being legitimised among the high ranks of power, stimulated their desire to create a trail of personal and genealogical legacies. Portraiture encapsulates this pursuit because, by producing visual evidence of one's existence, it renders historically relevant both the sitters and the range of affiliations, cultural, ethical, civic, and so on, which arise from their social connections. Perhaps not coincidentally, the first portraits that today we call early modern are from central-northern Italy and Flanders. Among the media, those painted on individual panels date from the second decade of the fifteenth century.

After then, commissions for female likenesses on single panel rose quickly and significantly. This book presents one hundred and thirty individual images of women from these regions. The quantity reflects my effort to compile what is now the largest survey to date on Renaissance female portraiture. Some were conceived as marital companions, others as autonomous. Some will be known to the reader because they are key examples of Renaissance art, others are less known. Among them, the aristocratic subjects, albeit fewer, bear witness to the cultural shift that permeated the genre. Absent are the nuns, whose cloister imposed their invisibility, and sex or manual workers, exploited in the everyday but unworthy subjects of portraiture.

These portraits are in the Appendix, which also explains the rationale of their timeline. The catalogue is not complete because paintings have been lost to the inevitable damage of time or to the secrecy of private collections; or because

in *The Family in Renaissance Florence: Books One – Four*, intr. and trans. Renée Neu Watkins (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 2004 ed.), 33–91.

8   Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance," in *Women, History and Theory* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984 ed.), 19–50 (38).

9   Wim Blockmans, Bett De Munck and Peter Stabel, "Economic Vitality: Urbanisation, Regional Complementarity and European Interaction," in *City and Society in the Low Countries, 1100-1600,* eds. Bruno Blondé, Marc Boone and Anne-Laure van Bruaene (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 22–58 (28). For an overview of urbanisation in the middle ages, see Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonisation and Cultural Changes 950–1350* (1993; rep., London: Penguin Books, 1994).

information is too mismatched for a firm technical evaluation.[10] Even if we succeeded in completing the task, their quantity could not compete with that of their male counterpart. To show the extent of the gap suffices to say that, for every female image I found, I reviewed roughly five male likenesses. The explanation must be sought in the androcentric nature of patriarchy, where men, as an anthropological group, have multidimensional experiences based on age, marital, professional status and so on. Their need and desire for portraiture are commensurate with a kaleidoscope of related activities. In the same culture, instead, women's experiences are limited to the domestic and reproductive life. Early fertility, hence, marriageability is the quintessential, albeit not exclusive reason for a portrait. However, one hundred and thirty portraits are a considerable quantity to probe both the conceptual framework of the patriarchal culture and its feminine experience in the fifteenth century.

My investigation began by asking not why but *how* both genders' understanding of what it meant to be a woman, as an individual as well as a member of a community, shaped their pictorial characteristics. This Introduction explains, in sequence, the history of the genre until the fifteenth century, and the existing studies on Renaissance female portraiture. After a brief excursus into the practical implications of making a female likeness in the minefield of sexual morality, it explains the method and the structure of the book. It concludes with technical clarifications.

Portraiture from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century: An Overview

All agree that [the origin of painting] began with tracing an outline round a man's shadow and consequently that pictures were originally done in this way [...]. It was through the service of that same earth that modelling portraits from clay was first invented by Butades, a potter of Sicyon, at Corinth. He did this owing to his daughter, who was in love with a young man; and she, when he was going abroad, drew in outline on the wall the shadow of his face thrown by a lamp. Her father pressed clay on this and made a relief, which he hardened by exposure to fire [...]. This happened before 146BC because the likeness of this effigy was preserved in the Shrine of the Nymphs until it was destroyed with the destruction of Corinth by Mummius.[11]

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10   For instance, we have no portraits of Felice della Rovere (*ca.*1483–1536), the daughter of Pope Julius II (1443–1513) and the wife of Gian Giordano Orsini (d.1517). Yet, they must have existed because of her social prominence, and were also mentioned by Castiglione. See Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin Books, 2003 ed.), 252–53.

11   Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 37 Books, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952) Book XXXV. IV. 13–V. 16, 270–71; and XLIII. 151–152, 370-72 and 371–73.

With this tale, Pliny the Elder (23/4–79CE) explained the birth of portraiture. Under its romantic cloak, the anecdote describes the power of portraits, in Graeco-Roman antiquity, to keep disbelief in a state of suspension by appealing to the imaginative faculties of the beholder. Like the images of the Gods, secular portraits stirred feelings in the beholder long after the death of the individual. Their style ranged quite radically, from veristic to classicising, depending on the social career of the person represented, and the purpose of the likeness. Sometimes, they were complemented by epigrammatic verses that spoke on behalf of the individual. By the time of Constantine the Great (*ca.*272–337CE), portraiture had become the privilege of the ruling elite, and had acquired schematic features that exuded authority and commanded fealty to an Imperial system that was otherwise crippled by short-lived rulers and civic dissents.[12] Their communicative power outlived the Roman Empire. The activities of Alfonso X of Castile and Leon (1221–1284) are representative and encompassing examples. In a compilation of his decrees, *El Espéculo*, a passage in Section 14 declares it is obligatory to honour his likenesses, whether painted or sculpted, and that it is a sacrilegious crime to damage these items. In 1258, Alfonso started commissioning what would eventually be thirty-eight polychrome statues of his ancestors, the kings and consorts of Oviedo, Segovia, and Castile up to his own father. This group would have resembled the genealogical sculptures that still survive in the interior and exterior of Gothic church buildings.[13]

    In Alfonso's time, portraits were acquiring naturalism, coinciding with the propagation of physiognomic theories. One evidence of this stylistic change is the textual account of the poet Ottokar von Horneck (*ca.*1265–1318/22), who chronicled how a painter updated a likeness of the Emperor Rudolf of Habsburg (1218–1291) to make it reflect his aged appearance.[14] From the fourteenth century, the genealogical portraiture of the type commissioned by Alfonso also became the subject

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12   Eric Varner, *From Caligula to Constantine: Tyranny and Transformation in Roman Portraiture* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2000); John Pollini, ed., *Roman Portraiture: Images of Character and Virtue*, exh.cat. (Los Angeles: Fisher Gallery, University of Southern California, 1990); James D. Breckenridge, *Likeness: A Conceptual History of Ancient Portraiture* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

13   Miguel Falomir, "The Court Portrait," in *Renaissance Faces: Van Eyck to Titian*, eds. Lorne Campbell et al., exh.cat. (London: Yale University Press for National Gallery Company, 2008): 66–79 (66); G. M. Diez ed., *Leyes de Alfonso X: I. Espéculo,* trans. Michelle Marie Homden (Avila: Fundación Sánchez Albornoz, 1985), 167.

14   Stephen Perkinson, *The Likeness of the King* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Erik Ingis, *Faces of Power and Piety* (London: The British Library and Los Angeles. J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008), 10. Stephen Perkinson, "Rethinking the Origins of Portraiture," *Gesta* 46, no. 2, Contemporary Approaches to the Medieval Face (2007): 135–157; Georgia Sommers Wright, "The Reinvention of the Portrait Likeness in the Fourteenth Century," *Gesta* 39, no. 2, Robert Branner and the Gothic (2000): 117–134.

of fresco paintings, perhaps inspired by the medieval representations of the Nine Worthies. Although seemingly naturalistic, these figures were essentially idealised in features and miens according to courtly tropes on beauty, elegance, and valour. Their identification was entrusted to cyphers such as heraldry.[15] The reliance on codes for this effect might have played a part in accelerating a more accurate type of resemblance in the fourteenth century. Now, with a growing demand for bespoke *insigna* by an equally growing number of social climbers, it must have caused some headaches to keep up with the who's who of coats-of-arms![16]

A growing demand for likenesses of contemporary religious figures such as St Francis (1181/82–1226), and a developing humanist culture also produced changes towards naturalistic portraits. The impact of humanism is epitomised by a text that the Paduan academic Pietro d'Abano (1246/57–1315/16) wrote sometime before 1310. This text discusses the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata Physica*, a vast collection of questions on natural science probably composed in the third century BCE.[17] In Book XXXVI, it is asked, "why do men make images which imitate especially the face of a man"? The text offers two answers: first, because a portrait represents the "structure" of the person represented, both in painting and in sculpture, "in order that thus we come to have the notion of that [person]." Secondly, this notion is possible because physiognomists pay great attention to the face, especially the eyes.[18] These claims reflected the coterminous political efforts to demonstrate cultural affinity with antiquity.[19]

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15   With the above, see also Julian Gardner, "Likeness and/or Representation in English and French Royal Portraits, ca.1250–1300," in *Das Porträt vor der Erfindung des Porträts*, eds. Martin Büchsel and Peter Schmidt (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2003): 141–51; Enrico Castelnuovo, "'Propter quid imagines faciei faciunt'. Aspetti del Ritratto Pittorico nel Trecento," in *Le Metamorfosi del Ritratto*, ed. Renzo Zorzi (Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia: Leo S. Olschki, 2002), 33–50; Herbert Furst, *Portrait Painting: Its Nature and Function* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head Limited, 1927). The courtly style influenced some non-aristocratic portraiture, as seen in Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini* discussed in the "Conclusions," as explained in Lorne Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 41–44.

16   E.g., M. Michel Pastoureau, 'L'effervescence emblématique et les origines héraldiques du portrait au XIVe siècle,' *Bulletin de la Société nationale des Antiquaires de France* Année 1987 (1985), 108–115. Pastoureau and others have suggested a connection between the rise of profile portraits on panel and the development of a more sophisticated visual code of anthroponomy. See also Perkinson, *The Likeness*, 21–22.

17   The part of this text concerning portraiture is published in J. Thomann, "Pietro d'Abano on Giotto," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 54 (1991): 238–244.

18   "Querit: Quare homines faciunt imagines representantes faciem hominis maxime." And "quia per imagines faciei representatur qualis fuerit dispositio ipsius cuius est imago. [...] Ut ea deveniamus in cognitionem illius ita. [...] quo percipitur differentia distincta [...], quod indicant physionomi attendentes magis ad signa que accipiuntur a facie ac ab oculis proprie." Thomann, *Pietro d'Abano*, 241.

19   See his example of the Greek Philemon's (*ca.*362–*ca.*262BCE) ability to recognise the character of Hippocrates from his portrait. Thomann, *Pietro d'Abano*, 243.

D'Abano likened ancient Roman coins to exemplary sculpture portraits and bestowed on Giotto (1266/67/76–1337) the success of painted portraiture.[20] With the profile on the obverse and an emblematic or allegorical device on the reverse, Roman medallic portraiture had conflated physical recognition with moral ideals, with which the sitter was presumed to be synonymous.[21] By the mid-fourteenth century, ancient coins and medals had become collectable. New coins were also being produced featuring the likenesses of a new breed of Italian rulers, i.e., an elite emerged from imperial fealty and military appropriations.[22] Their medallic portraits became quickly personalised, the obverse evoking the immortal virtues of the ancient emperors, the reverse suggesting the chivalric qualities of the *miles Christianus* popular in court culture. The modernisation of these ancient symbols was the work of a clique of intellectuals conversed in the culture of antiquity, who moved between these courts and the wealthy families of the Italian city-states. They too exchanged their own medallic portraits but as tokens of friendship and using an *all'antica* style that befitted the civic and moral foundations of their ideals of commonwealth.[23] In the fifteenth century, female medallic portraits also circulated routinely, echoing the ancient items representing role models such as Faustina the Elder (*ca.*100–140CE).[24]

What D'Abano saw in Giotto's skills was unarguably their acute interpretation of a trend that had begun in around *ca.*1250 in the Italian city-states. There had become popular what Enrico Castelnuovo has called "republican portraits," viz. signifiers of the public offices or activities of the sitters.[25] The faces of living people that populate Giotto's frescoes are early examples of conspicuous collective portraiture in Italian Renaissance art. They are comparable to the northern dynastic images, as well as of the Nine Worthies, but with a republican twist. Seen alongside imaginary features of saintly figures, dressed in contemporary clothing, and surrounded by familiar sights, they enhanced the illusion that the frescoes were parallel realities, in which

20   Thomann, *Pietro d'Abano*, 241.

21   Michael Grant, "Roman Coins as Propaganda," *Archaeology 5* (Summer 1952): 79–85; Parker, *Some Account of Coins.*

22   Here, the term "imperial" refers to the Holy Roman Empire.

23   Luke Syson and Dillan Gordon, *Pisanello: Painter to the Renaissance Court* (London, National Gallery: Yale University Press, 2001), 109–130; Luke Syson, "Circulating a Likeness? Coin Portraits in Late Fifteenth-Century Italy," in *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance,* eds. Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 115–17. On chivalric culture in Italian courts, see Alison Cole, *Italian Renaissance Courts: Art, Pleasure and Power* (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2016).

24   Luke Syson, "Consorts, Mistresses and Exemplary Women: The Female Medallic Portrait in Fifteenth-Century Italy," in *The Sculpted Objects: 1400-1700,* eds. Stuart Santini and Peta Motture (Aldershot, Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1997), 43–54.

25   Castelnuovo, *Propter Quid Imagines,* 44–45.

the messages of good citizenship were reinforced by religious zeal. Furthermore, Giotto's renditions of men and women, lay and saintly alike, are endowed with the sturdy physicality and penetrating gaze, which, together, make manifest their psychological dimension.[26]

The earliest extant autonomous portraits on panel since antiquity date to the fourteenth century. They both represent kings, and both capture the features of the sitters: the profile of *King John of France (1319–1364)*, *ca.*1359, made possibly during the king's captivity in England by his *valet de chambre* Gérard d'Orléans (d.1361); and *Rudolph IV (1339–1365)*, *ca.*1360, in a three-quarter angle wearing a dubiously earned imperial crown.[27] No female counterparts have survived from this period, but they surely existed since they are the subject of coterminous poetry, and they were made in other media.[28] The formats of these two heads would dominate the panorama of portraiture in the subsequent century, when the socio-political consolidation of the urban middling class augmented demand for individual and autonomous likenesses. In central-northern Italy, the interest in antiquity caused the profile format to prevail until mid-century and with an unscathed popularity for female likenesses until the last quarter of the century. In Italy, the healthy quantity of portraits of women also suggests encomiastic factors that need to be understood. In Flanders emerged a three- to eight-quarter angle with veristic traits and sombre colours. Among these, female portraiture stands in a quantity that is significantly lower than is its Italian counterpart. Yet, it is unprecedented for a northern territory. This phenomenon also requires analysis.

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26 Julian Gardner, *Giotto and His Public: Three Paradigms of Patronage* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2011); Aby Warburg, "The Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie," in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, 2 vols., ed. Gertrud Bing, intr. Kurt Foster, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999 ed.), vol. I, 185–222; John Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance* (London and New York: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1963), 27.

27 Falomir, *The Court Portrait* illustrates this shift to naturalism, which might have seen its epicentre in France. See also Perkinson, *The Likeness;* Stephen Perkinson, "From 'Curious' to Canonical: Jehan Roy de France and the Origins of the French School," *The Art Bulletin* 87, no. 3 (Sep., 2005): 507–532; Andrew Martindale, *Heroes, Ancestors, Relatives and the Birth of the Portrait* (The Fourth Gerson Lecture, University of Groningen, 1988); Andrew Martindale*, The Rise of the Artist in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 42–43.

28 Catherine E. King, "Self-Portrait," in *Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy ca.1300–1550* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 129–83; the *Recueil d'Arras*, a sixteenth-century collection of sketches of individual and collective royal northern likenesses, from paintings to stained glass and sculptures, made during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries, in Lorne Campbell, "The Authorship of the Recueil d'Arras," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 40 (1977): 301–313.

Studies on Portraiture: A Critical Assessment

My familiarity with many of the works featured in this book predates my academic career. Such is the likely experience of colleagues and lay readers alike, who would have seen them in museums, art history manuals, and on digital platforms. Thus, it seems extraordinary that, to date, an exegesis of female portraiture of the Renaissance does not exist. Of course, categorisations on the portraiture of the period exist. For instance, it is divided into narrative and independent portraits with an internal division into "portrait series," "group portraits," "double portraits," and "single portraits."[29] It is classified by typologies, i.e. "donor portraits," "devotional portraits," and "independent portraits."[30] Or by the treatment of faces: "portrait features," which reflected the effort to achieve a true likeness; "type features," which evoked the traits of admired individuals, in order to create typecast images loaded with social and cultural implications; finally, "imaginary features" that were the products of the painter's imagination.[31] This treatment has also been subsumed under "idealisation" and "individualisation," terms that speak for themselves, and "characterisation." The latter intends to describe the process of enhancing, flattening, or distorting the most distinctive features of the sitter, such as eyebrows, nose, and lips, to improve their recognition.[32] These taxonomies have stimulated reflections on male portraits and their relationship with Aristotelian and neo-platonic philosophies, and Christian ideals of male fraternity.[33]

Regarding female portraits, one approach echoes the oversimplification by Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt that early modern Italy had been a haven of gender equality.[34] His theory peddled a pan-European psychobiographical enthusiasm for the Italian Renaissance artists, which fuelled an economy of misattributions and forgeries aimed at profligate art collectors, indifferent to and sometimes uninformed

29   This taxonomy is in Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*. John Pope-Hennessy had already distinguished between independent and collective portraits, where he considered the former a "statement of the sitter's personality," or a "direct statement [...] reinforced by literary means." Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait*, 205.

30   For example, Guy Bauman, "Early Flemish Portraits 1425–1525," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 43, no. 4 (Spring, 1986), 1–68.

31   F. David Martin, "On Portraiture: Some Distinctions," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 20, no. 1 (Autumn, 1961): 6172 (61–62).

32   Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits,* 9–22.

33   For example, Patricia Simons has classified male portraits into "overemphatic virility," "ambiguous sexuality," "melancholic sensitivity," and "wary vulnerability," in Patricia Simons, "Homosexual and Erotics in Italian Renaissance Portraiture," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (Manchester and NY: Manchester University Press, 1997), 29–51.

34   Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, intr. Peter Burke, notes P. Murray, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (Penguin Books, London 1990).

about their purchases, so long as they had Italian charm and signature.[35] Consider how John Pope-Hennessy wrote on Renaissance portraiture in 1963. He placed extraordinary emphasis on the prominent patrons, sitters, and painters. As a result, he reduced the likenesses to court or allegorical fancies. Quite systematically, he emasculated female portraits by proposing, creatively if not unambiguously, artistic derivations from male iconographies.[36] In 1990, Lorne Campbell published *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries*, which to this day remains an essential research tool, because of its staggering wealth of primary material. The author establishes the trajectory of the book as "what kinds of portraits were produced during the period, who produced them and from whom, how were they painted, why were they wanted, and how were they used."[37] These questions are crucial for identifying how gender discourses are visualised. Yet, whilst the observations on male portraiture are compelling, female likenesses are treated with undeserving simplicity. A case in point is the comparison of the two likenesses of Maria Baroncelli Portinari painted by Hans Memling (active 1465–d.1494) and Hugo Van der Goes (*ca.*1440–1482) in the 1470s,[38] which claims that:

> [B]oth painters to some extent transformed Maria's features by subjecting them to some fashionable ideals of beauty, but Memlinc flattered, disguising as far as possible the strange shape of Maria's nose [...]. Van der Goes does not hesitate to stress the ugly nose.[39]

It is worth remembering that in Memling's rendition, Maria is fourteen or fifteen years of age, newly married and thus idealised, as images of young brides were. In Van der Goes' painting, her facial traits reflect her maturity after the strain of three pregnancies. Her emaciation is too conspicuous to be considered the painter's

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35 As outlined in David Alan Brown et al., *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, exh.cat. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 12–23. See also Evelyn Welch, "Engendering Italian Renaissance Art — A Bibliographic Review," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 68 (2000): 201–216; Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation, Identity* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 7–9.

36 For example, his interpretation of Titian's *Flora* as the "supreme example" of an implausible connection with Donatello's *David*, subsequently adopted for "self-dramatizing portraiture." Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait*, 240.

37 Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, 9.

38 Hans Memling, *Maria Portinari* (right panel of the diptych), 1470s, oil on oak panel, 42 × 31.8 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, (14.40.626–27); Hugo van Der Goes, *Maria Portinari and her Daughter Margherita presented by St Margaret and St Mary Magdalen* (right wing of the Portinari Triptych), 1477–1478, oil on oak panel, 253 × 141 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (1890, nos. 3191–3192–3193).

39 Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, 22. Memling is also spelled as Memlinc.

decision. It reveals a psychological dimension that is even enhanced by contrast with the idealised and imaginary features of the female saints behind her. Curiously, by placing aesthetic solutions solely in the artists' hands, Campbell ignored the very questions that he had originally posited.

Idealisation and characterisation in Renaissance portraits can deceive us as to their purpose. For instance, it is an established concept that the Italian female portraiture from this period reflects the *paragone* between painting and poetry informed by ancient texts such as *Essays in Portraiture* written by Lucian (*ca*.120–198CE),[40] and popularly debated in humanistic circles. Among the early proponents of this viewpoint, Elizabeth Cropper has argued eloquently that the Italian images from the 1470s gave rise to a conflict between the portrayal of beauty that is extrinsically evident, and that of an intrinsic beauty.[41] She has described this friction as the most "fertile paradox" that activated a permanent shift in focus from the sitter to her likeness, which became "a synecdoche for the beauty of painting itself."[42] However, as Cropper has also acknowledged, discourses on female beauty in the fifteenth century were influenced only partially by the revival of ancient ideas about portraiture. Medieval courtly love, Christian ideals, and overt misogynistic tropes carried as much weight. In other words, the synecdochal value of female portraiture suits more the early sixteenth-century attitude, redolent in the much-quoted manual on courtly etiquette *The Book of the Courtier* (pub. 1528) by Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529),[43] and confirmed by a literary genre that disseminated proto–eugenic fantasies about anatomical clues to a woman's inner beauty: nose, teeth, hips and more.[44]

Furthermore, discourses on portraiture in the sixteenth century became embroiled in the linguistic determinism that characterised the debates on artistic *bravura*. Thus, for example, the sculptor Vincenzo Danti (1530–1576) distinguished between "portraying," i.e., reproducing the likeness with exactitude, and "imitating,"

40   Lucian of Samosata, "Essays in Portraiture," and "Essays in Portraiture Defended," in *Lucian*, 8 vols., trans. A. M. Harmon (London: William Heinemann Ltd, and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961), vol. 4, 267–307 and 309–347.

41   Elizabeth Cropper, "The Beauty of Woman: Problems of Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe,* eds. Margaret W. Fergusson, et al. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 175–90; Elizabeth Cropper "On Beautiful Women: Parmigianino, Petrarchismo and the Vernacular Style," *The Art Bulletin* 58, no. 3 (September 1976): 374–394.

42   Cropper, *The Beauty of Woman*, 181 and 176.

43   As we know, this book was published in 1528, but the discussion it depicts took place in 1507.

44   For example, Galeazzo Flavio Capra, *Della Eccellenza e Dignità delle Donne*, ed. Maria Luisa Doglio (Roma: Bulzoni, 1988); Agnolo Firenzuola, *Opere* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1958). See also Mary Rogers, "The Decorum of Women's Beauty: Trissino, Firenzuola, Luigini and the Representation of Women in Sixteenth Century Painting," *Renaissance Studies* 2, no.1 (1988): 47–88; Cropper, *On Beautiful Women*.

i.e., producing a perfected version of the actual appearance of the original.[45] These distinctions abstracted the genre from the individualism prefigured by Giotto's works, which reflected the importance placed on social bonds among the property-tied classes before 1500. As the Florentine Paolo da Certaldo conveyed in *ca.*1360: "a body without soul is a man without friend."[46] Such a visceral psychosomatic parallel would grow into the Renaissance consideration of portraits as motions of the mind.[47] In western pictorial representations that include mirrors, Jonathan Miller has identified two categories: mirrors that reflect the individual and their surroundings in a factual way; mirrors that reveal the individual engaged on acts of self-improvement, in the self-conscious anticipation of moralising judgement.[48] In medieval and Renaissance paintings mirrors were associated with wide-ranging metaphors at the root of which, however, remained the basic fact that these objects' reflective properties help our real self approach our ideal best. My suggestion is, therefore, that idealisation and characterisation in fifteenth-century portraiture should be understood as technical strategies that met the anxieties associated with social conformity. The portraitist was at the centre of these anxieties, tasked with crafting the mirror image of our ideal best. As Roland Barthes outlined in 1980:

> In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words, a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture.[49]

I therefore analyse these portraits from the known description of fifteenth-century art as a "deposit of a social relationship."[50] This leads me to the crucial consideration, historically neglected, that women as social actors were active agents in the pursuit of their ideal representation, however entangled with the patriarchal culture. I propose that in fifteenth-century female portraits, idealisation and characterisation were the zenith of what Édouard Pommier has called "le problème des rapports

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45   In Paola Barocchi, *Trattati d' Arte del Cinquecento fra Manierismo e Contrariforma*, 3 vols. (Bari: Laterza, 1960), vol. 1, 246.

46   "Chente è il corpo senza l'anima, tale è l'uomo senza l'amico." Paolo da Certaldo, *Il Libro di Buoni Costumi* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1921), n. 46.

47   A review on this point is in Frank Zöllner, "The 'Motions of the Mind' in Renaissance Portraits: The Spiritual Dimension of Portraiture," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 68. Bd., H. 1 (2005): 23–40.

48   Jonathan Miller, *On Reflections*. exh.cat. (London: National Gallery Publications Limited, 1998), 142.

49   Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage Books, 2000), 13.

50   Michael Baxandall, *Painting as Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1.

entre l'idée et la Forme qui apparaît."[51] This problem was resolved in portraiture, as elsewhere, by raising women to poetical subjects, in a dialectical relation with their own environment rather than as de-socialised entities in men's debates on art. To expand on this, the fifteenth century was a period of transition and of new balancing acts between the emerging urban elites and the impoverished aristocracies. Its cultural manifestations *mirrored* the ethical and practical preoccupations of these new realities. For instance, Italian portraits strove to visualise inner qualities by styling one's outer appearance accordingly. This "mimetic idealism" fashioned what Harry Berger Jnr. has described as the "fiction of the pose."[52] It was clearly an oxymoron: how could these visual conceits be truthful accounts of the sitters? Yet, their pictorial details were consistent with the language and material culture produced by social, economic principles and so on. That is, by a shared milieu that put sitters and spectators in "descriptive affinity," as John Shearman has explained.[53] They were therefore the symbolic products of common beliefs and aspirations. Netherlandish portraits, instead, were highly characterised and enriched by a mood of spirituality that turned them into still-lifes akin to memento mori*,* for reasons that I will explain. However, was this not also a mimetic ideal? Furthermore, I argue that the *imago feminae* altogether formulated visually the biological cycle upon which the very survival of these social groups depended, and its metaphysical antitheses, presence vs. absence, or life vs. death.

My rationale follows the versatility of portraiture in producing a visual mytho-poiesis of social realities by acting simultaneously as a simulacrum of the absent person, and of the social and moral conventions of their milieu. This is something that David Martin perceived in an article published in 1961, where he further subdivided the foregoing definition of types, into "face," "mask" and "effigy." For instance, he described the portraits of Federigo da Montefeltro (1422–1482) and Battista Sforza (1446–1472) by Piero della Francesca (*ca.*1415–1492) as respectively a face, for its qualities that mirrored the character and spirit of the sitter; and a mask, i.e., "a set of clichés" determined by typecast immobility, which Martin

51   "The problem of the relationship between the idea and the form which appears." Édouard Pommier, *Théories du Portrait: de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Luçon: Gallimard, 1998), 27. My translation is technical. Basically, Pommier highlights the challenge of the early portraitists to capture the essence of the person represented. This was resolved, in fact, through the visual interpretation of the ideas and beliefs that connected the sitter to larger socio-cultural networks.

52   Harry Berger Jnr., "Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture," *Representations* 46 (Spring 1994): 87–120 (99 and 96).

53   John Shearman, "Portraits and Poets," in *Only Connect... Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance: The A.W.Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1988* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 108–48 (142). Shearman further pointed out that the increasingly communicative quality of Italian portraiture relied on the cultural practices of Petrarchism and *imitatio*, as understood from the revival of classical texts. This aligns broadly with Cropper's interpretation.

interpreted as an index of genealogical and domestic virtues. In effect, he exposed the tension between her physical absence quite poignantly in fact, since Battista's portrait is likely posthumous, and the perpetuity of her likeness. Finally, he drew a connection between the gender of the sitter, her image, and its consumption.[54]

Martin's article came five years after Ruth Kelso's seminal study *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (1956).[55] Their insights prefigured the development of a feminist art history that seeks to understand the relationship between women and their representations.[56] However, results from this approach, which has produced significant outcomes elsewhere, are delayed in Renaissance portraiture by an essentialism that reduces female representations to the object status of male agendas and female collusion with them.[57] Such seems to be the conclusion of Patricia Simons' important study of the Florentine female profile. Simons has proposed that the profile's linear pattern abstracted the physical attributes of the sitters; that the refutation of eye contact marked her complete subservience to male control; and that the combined weight of these characteristics turned the painted surface into an emblem of patriarchal policies. Albeit appealing and, indeed, groundbreaking as an early microhistorical view on portraiture, the suggestion problematises how we should approach the existing male profiles, as well as women's perception of and reactions to patriarchal restrictions.[58] It also problematises how we should interpret evidence of female self-assertion. One such example is Isabella d'Este (1474–1539). The Marchioness of Mantua was a wise manager of her own identity.

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54   Martin, *On Portraiture*, 65, 66, and 68; and **Cat. 3.** On Battista Sforza: Marinella Bonvicini Mazzanti, "Per Una Storia di Battista Sforza," in *Piero e Urbino, Pietro e le Corti Rinascimentali*, ed. Paolo dal Poggetto, exh.cat. (Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 1992), 142–47. On this icon of Renaissance portraiture see Antonio Bertelli et al., *Piero della Francesca e le Corti Italiane*, exh.cat. (Milan: Skira, 2007); Ronald Lightbown, *Piero della Francesca* (New York, London, Paris: Abberville Press Publisher, 1992), 229–43.

55   Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956).

56   The development of a feminist art history cannot overlook Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1979); Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1971). And also John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1972), which maintains that women are perennially aware of being seen, hence conditioned into making themselves objects of gazes and judgements. Female representations in western art illustrate the standards of this conditioning, which encompass a range of provocations of male desire.

57   Limitations in feminist art history were already noted by the mid-1980s. See e.g., Griselda Pollock, "Women, Art and Ideology: Questions for Feminism Art Historians," *Women's Art Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring – Summer 1983): 39–47. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds. *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (New York: Harper and Row Publisher, 1982).

58   Patricia Simons, "Portraiture, Portrayal and Idealization: Ambiguous Individualism in Representations of Renaissance Women," in *Language and Images in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 263–311; Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," *History Workshop* 25 (Spring, 1988): 4-30; Patricia Simons, "A Profile Portrait of a Renaissance Woman in the National Gallery of Victoria," *Art Bulletin of Victoria* 28 (1987): 34–52.

What may appear like an innocuous commission, a medal with her own profile from Gian Cristoforo Romano (1456–1512), amplified her involvement in cultural patronage and, further, her position within the public circuits of power.[59]

It is true that from the late Middle Ages, legal and social restrictions on women became stricter. From the mid 1980s, studies of these effects on women's lives have been diverging, somehow mirroring the foregoing art historical reflections. On the one hand, there is the work of historians such as Margaret L. King and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber whose pioneering contextualisations have explained women's life stages, careers, and adversities in the Renaissance. The message of this scholarship is that such restrictions were signs that the female sex was being defeated.[60] It thus explains Simons' interpretation of the Florentine likenesses. Their detailed jewelleries and fabrics showcased the economic and social value of the dowries. Dowries were mandatory and regulated by guidelines that could become the battleground of cognatic and agnatic disputes. Simons' conclusion echoes Klapisch-Zuber's view that Florentine women were passive victims of such quarrels. Other research has, instead, focused on the mechanism of female dealings with men and, simultaneously, with women within the larger network of kin. This line of enquiry tends to view the same restrictions as efforts to control a group that, in reality was resilient and resourceful. Stanley Chojnacki, Heather Gregory, Elaine Rosenthal, Sharon Strocchia, and Catherine King are among the early scholars who have demonstrated that women manipulated their limited legal, social, and domestic role to exert cultural and social influence. Artistic patronage and a shrewd use of their dowry funds were efficacious tools towards this achievement.[61] At the time of writing, enquiries on this field are multiplying. With a more confident epistemological method, they demonstrate a successful navigation of the legal constraints that, however influenced by cognatic and natal ties, produced effective statements of personal agency.[62] The visual clues in the portraits analysed here

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59   Sarah D. P. Cockram, *Isabella d'Este and Francesco Gonzaga: Power Sharing at the Italian Renaissance Court* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

60   King, *Women of the Renaissance*; Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985).

61   Stanley Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice*; King, *Renaissance Women Patrons*; Sharon Strocchia, "Remembering the Family: Women, Kin and Commemorative Masses in Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* Vol. 42, No.4 (Winter, 1989): 635–654; Elaine G. Rosenthal, "The Position of Women in Renaissance Florence: Neither Autonomy Nor Subjection," in *Florence and Italy: Renaissance Studies in Honour of Nicolai Rubinstein*, eds. Peter Denley and Caroline Elam (London: Westfield College, University of London, 1988), 369–81; Heather Gregory, "Daughters, Dowries and the Family in Fifteenth Century Florence," *Rinascimento* 2nd series, 27 (1987): 215–237.

62   I wish to thank Rachel Delman for sharing her forthcoming *Mary of Guelders: Female Power and Architectural Patronage in Late Medieval Scotland*, which is an example of fresh research using this method.

point in this direction. Finally, we must not forget that the changing economies of the early modern period created differing realities according to social standing, indigenous customs, geographies, and family economies.[63]

In describing the bourgeois sex-role system, Kelly was probing whether women had a renaissance during the Renaissance. As we move forward with new research, nowadays the question is rather *what* representations of women can tell us about women's experiences of the period. In her 2013 essay on female portraits produced between the fifteenth and the sixteenth century, Mary Rogers has addressed this issue but with no answer, because, by her own admission, the task is too complex for the scope of an article.[64] Ultimately, although we have moved on from Burckhardt's inaccuracies, the principles that guide the studies on Renaissance female portraiture have yet to overcome the tacit argument that fifteenth- and sixteenth-century portraits, *and* male and female portraiture belong in one, broad, and androcentric category. Books and exhibitions, which have now popularised Renaissance portraiture, perpetuate this assumption; one which this book hopes to recalibrate.[65]

Method and Structure of this Book

Sitting for a portrait was not our predecessors' idea of fun. It could be hampered by territorial distance, forcing painters to resort to verbal descriptions or existing images. It was often shortened or outright refused for being tedious, and technical examinations, surviving items, and archival research show that painters quickened the process by sketching on paper or directly on the panel. The Christian norms of gender propriety might have also prompted the presence of male guardians when the sitters were women.[66]

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63   This point emerged with the seminal Jack Goody, Joan Thirsk, E.P. Thompson, eds. *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe 1200–1800* (Cambridge, London, NY, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

64   Mary Rogers, "Artistic Representations," in *A Cultural History of Women in the Renaissance*, 183–207.

65   From Campbell's *Renaissance Portraits* to the exhibitions illustrated by Brown et al. *Virtue and Beauty;* Keith Christiansen and Stefan Weppelmann, eds. *The Renaissance Portrait: From Donatello to Bellini*, exh.cat. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).

66   A host of examples are in Campbell, "Portrait Method," in *Renaissance Portraits*, 159–91. It has also been suggested that the treatises on limning that rose in the sixteenth century, when portraiture started acquiring the status of a specialised artistic field, may explain some of these conditions. Francisco de Holanda (1517–1585) advised that painters and sitters should be alone possibly conversing until a suitable pose was found. In Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, 180. Nicholas Hilliard (*ca.*1547–1619) advocated the painter's refinement of manners and intellect, fitting to entertain his clients. Nicholas Hilliard, *The Arte of Limning*, eds. R.K.R. Thornton and T.G.S. Cain (The Mid Northumberland Arts Group: Carcanet

An early sixteenth-century ceramic plate depicts a painter decorating a dish and observed by a man and a woman [Fig. I.2]. His concentration is on the lip of the dish and the well is still blank. The male onlooker pays close attention to the progress. His body language contrasts with the meek countenance of his companion, amplifying the visual effect of her mien and, with it, our perception of her respectability. Today's knowledge of the popularity, then, of maiolica dishes decorated with *belle donne* should make us consider whether the painter may also paint her likeness in the well; in turn, whether such were the practical arrangements pertaining to women sitters, and whether women had words and judgement about their own likeness. Direct agency might have not been habitual, but we have knowledge of direct commissions and exchanges of likenesses among the women of the aristocracy. We know less about those from the propertied classes. The most colourful clue is perhaps a Florentine carnival song that rhymes in tongue-in-cheek about portrait-painters and their wishes to satisfy women's search for their services.[67] It seems, however, safe to assume that they too commissioned, acquired, and admired portraits.[68]

This book is founded upon such a premise. To address the enquiry, the primary and secondary sources include anthropology, family law, literature, philosophy, theology, and women's studies. This span contextualises female portraiture within an established dual tradition of debates on women. One debate drew on the paradigm of Adam and Eve, and on influential pagan authors such as Aristotle (384–322BCE) and Galen (129–*ca.*200/16CE). It advocated the exclusion of women from the power structure because of their supposed biological and moral inadequacies, but it supported degrees of domestic agency. Another praised woman through the lens of Christian ideals and the etiquette of fealty in the medieval vassalage culture, directed to a lord, spiritual and lay alike. Although appearing encomiastic, this literature promoted but the two mono-dimensional models of bewitching and salvific beauty that were filial to the extreme examples of Eve and Mary. The revival of Platonism in the fifteenth century added further complexities, ultimately leading to the abstractions explored by Cropper and others. Because literacy was largely male, men were overwhelmingly the authors of the literature

Press, 1992)*, esp. 44 and 54. These suggestions echo the story reported by Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574) that Leonardo employed musicians, singers, and jesters to keep Mona Lisa engaged. Giorgio Vasari, "Vita di Lionardo da Vinci," in *Delle vite de' scvltori, pittori, et architettori che sono stati da Cimabue in quà*, 2 vols. (Fiorenza: Giunti, 1568), vol. 2, 1–11 (9).

67   "Canzona de' Dipintori," in *Canti Carnascialeschi del Rinascimento*, ed. Charles, S. Singleton, (Bari: Gius. Laterza e Figli, 1936), CXXXVI, 184–85.

68   Women also developed an attachment to their own likeness, as happened to Francesca Michiel, who took her own potrait with her, when she moved into her newly wedded husband's house. Although it happened in 1567, this episode must have been by no means unique. Anna Bellavitis and Isabelle Chabot, "People and Property in Florence and Venice," in *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, eds. Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis, exh.cat (London: V & A Publications, 2006), 76–85 (78 and note 9 [372]).

on these themes. Restricted access to literacy and different priorities meant that fewer women wrote. Those who became accomplished writers were mainly from humanistic circles. Religion was also a strong stimulus for literary expressions. The results were exhilarating both in a mystical and in a somatic sense. They were also very dangerous, as Margarite Porete was to experience. She was burned at the stake on 1 June 1310 because her *Mirror of Simple Souls* described the journey of the soul towards the union with God through love but not the aid of priests.[69] These issues are developed in Chapter One, The Cultural Background of Female Portraiture, which functions as the theoretical support for the subsequent chapters. In the conclusion it turns to story-telling to imagine the clatter of life around its protagonists.

The subsequent chapters are object-based, with further primary and secondary material specific to the themes developed. Chapter Two, Women in Marriage Portraiture, explains how the institution of marriage, its rituals and material culture shaped the sign-system of marital portraiture. It also introduces the novel theory that among the marital commissions one at least served to confirm the premarital virginity of the bride. I call it the "*Morgengabe* portrait," inspired by one of the descriptions of the medieval practice of a gift given to the bride on the morning after sexual consummation. Based on an assessment of fifty-six images, Chapter Three, Women in Profile Portraiture, investigates the enduring popularity of the profile format for female sitters in central-northern Italy. This chapter also presents the idea, developed over the course of the book, that the transalpine and the cisalpine image-spectator relations differed radically. To introduce this point, it compares the earliest surviving female profile portrait, a young aristocratic northern European woman, with the earliest Italian counterpart, also from a princely environment. The privileged reality of the sitter was to be seen–*in* the former. The latter was to be seen–*as* the configuration of the principles that defined the ideal commonwealth sought by the Italian urban elite. I call the Italian images "icons of *urbanitas*" to stress that they articulated an analogy between woman and the socio-political growth of these urban groups. Chapter Four, Netherlandish Female Portraiture in Context, evaluates the Netherlandish three-quarter female portraits, seventeen paintings, three drawings and one print which have hitherto not been studied as a group. It links their characteristics to the local socio-political complexities and the spiritual practices endorsed by the influential religious movement *Devotio Moderna*, with its epicentre in Flanders. Using this approach, I have discovered structural and aesthetic patterns aimed at illustrating an ideal elegance connected to religious morality. To describe these portraits, I have adapted into "icons of humility" the

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69   Margaret Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Soul*, trans. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., J.C. Marler, Judith Grant (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

term *ootmoed*, translatable as a "spirituality of humility," which Modern Devotion used to explain ideal female behaviours. *Ootmoed* became my matrix to understand the range of possible commissions, marital and not, among this stock. From it, one design stands out as the source of a pan-European representational development. In this chapter, I widen the parameters of seeing-*in*, which I bring to conclusion in Chapter Five by comparing it with the mode of seeing-*as.* In fact, Chapter Five, Netherlandish or not Netherlandish? Is That the Question?, assesses comparatively the modernity in Netherlandish and Italian portraiture. Its key concerns are pictorial styles, illusionistic settings, and mode of spectatorship. It concludes with the case study of *Ginevra de' Benci* [Fig. 5.7] painted by Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) in the 1470s, and the earliest European three-quarter female portrait against an expansive background. The analysis considers this painting's successful amalgamation of Netherlandish and Italian artistic features as one evidence of women's agency in defining their own mimetic identity. Chapter Six, Fifteenth-Century Venice: Performing Imaging, reinforces the trajectory of women's self-imaging with focus on Venetian female portraiture. Why Venice? Throughout Europe, female sartorial styles were marks of family distinction. Among the entrepreneurial groups, they were perceived as evidence of the socio-economic success of the community because they were purchased with the dowry funds. With its prominent patriciate, the Serenissima boasted a culture of display that competed with that of the richest northern courts. This chapter connects areas of legislative changes and dowry regulations to the increasing social anxieties of the local patriciate to protect is own privileges. Its purpose is to show how women could acquire power in the patriarchal system. Subsequently, it proposes that the contrast between women's everyday domesticity and formal public appearances amplified the symbolic value of the sartorial culture associated with each of these dimensions, and furnished platforms for acts of self-imaging that stressed the female immanence in the rhetoric of civic wealth and class distinction. The book ends with Conclusions that offer a critical summary of the overall contents and a novel analysis of the *Arnolfini* double portrait [Fig. 7.1].

   The chapter on marriage and that on Venice complement each other because they provide an overview of the history of this institution, its customs, and legal requirements. The central chapters explain the difference between the modes of seeing-*in* and seeing-*as* of the northern and southern portrait culture, and they probe the extent to which the contradictions between misogynistic theories and practical interests in the patriarchal culture help us understand the feminine experience of such conditions. For instance, women's agency in managing the domestic environment and the right to inheritance and to the dowry could result in forms of self-empowerment. Local women were idealised in poetical and visual imageries that encompassed what the humanist Vespasiano da Bisticci (1421–1498)

called their "dowry of virtues."[70] However contrived, such flatteries must have stirred feelings akin to the elation when selfies on social media receive Likes. Poignantly, women knew that these praises entwined them with family and civic honour. Finally, women's spiritual and literary endeavours created possibilities for personal accomplishments. Although these efforts were founded on internalised misogynistic biases, they sowed the seeds of a pro-women ideology.

Final Remarks

Many of the footnotes of this book are unusually long because they are designed with the hope that they will be used as a tool for research. They provide bibliographical references, and the historical and technical information related to the images in the catalogue. In the footnotes, the catalogue entries are highlighted in bold. When possible, I used the primary sources in their original form and, unless stated, the translations are mine. The lexicon also requires clarifications: 1. With the term Renaissance, I refer to the fifteenth century and not later, as in today's looser use. 2. To use the term middle class is historically premature, whereas middling class and attributes such as urban, civic, entrepreneurial, and propertied are more accurate reflections of the transitional characteristics of this social estate. At times, I also refer to this group as patriciate, or patricians. This denomination originated in ancient Rome to describe the oligarchy of families privileged by status, wealth, and legal protection. Social history has often borrowed it to designate the elites of the boroughs at the dawn of a European urban structure, and I follow this practice. 3. I describe the portraits as autonomous, independent, individual, in order to stress that they were conceived to be either alone or as companions but on separate panels. 4. Portraiture is often associated with the adjective "commemorative," which can be a tribute to a living as well as to a deceased individual. To avoid possible confusions, here I use it in the sense of remembrance. 5. To describe the portraits' backgrounds can also be a creative exercise. "Abstract" refers to a neutral background and when the background is not neutral, it means that it shows illusionistic settings, which, in the Conclusions, I also call "located." I would have adopted this term earlier in the book but chose to avoid possible misunderstandings. 6. To familiarise with the Italian language of clothing, I suggest the glossary in Carol Collier Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing* (2002). 7. Whilst it is possible to ascertain signs of idealisation and characterisation, we cannot gauge the accuracy of likenesses of sitters long gone, entailed by the idea

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70   Vespasiano da Bisticci, "Alessandra de' Bardi," in '*Vite di Uomini Illustri del Secolo XV Scritte da Vespasiano da Bisticci*, intr. Angelo Mai (Firenze: Barbera Bianchi e Comp., 1859), 531–58 (558).

of individualisation. Therefore, I have avoided it, to stress that these portraits are windows into coterminous socio-cultural ideals. As Barthes noted: "Resemblance is a conformity [...] to an identity. Now this identity is imprecise, even imaginary, to the point where I can continue to speak of 'likeness' without ever having seen the model."[71] With his remark in mind, in the chapters that follow I hope to to set new parameters and taxonomies for studies of female portraiture, and the experience of seeing and being seen in the patriarchal system.

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71   Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 100–02.