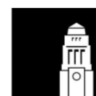
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Federica Pich

RVF LXXVII-LXXVIII and the rhetoric of painted words

In the Italian Renaissance, the relationship between lyric poetry and portraiture is always, to some extent, the relationship between Petrarch's poetry and portraiture; or, more precisely, between the *reception* of Petrarch's poetry and portraiture. Far from being modern, the idea of his *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* as a milestone in the lyric tradition is deeply engrained in the historical perception of the genre, as attested by mid- and late-sixteenth-century academic lectures on Petrarch's poems and mentions of his poetry in coeval treatises on poetics. The same can be argued for two concepts that are key to any modern discourse on the "transitive" quality of Renaissance portraits and more generally on the agency of images:[1] on the one hand, the notion of Petrarch's poetry (and hence of lyric poetry *tout court*) as the most accomplished and influential literary expression of inner *affetti*; on the other, the centrality of performance to the lyric, intended both as factual (poetry being read out or accompanied by music) and as virtual (structurally embedded in any lyric poem).[2] With regard to the first concept – lyric poetry as the genre of interiority – for example Agnolo Segni states Petrarch's excellence in the imitation of *costumi* and *passioni*, which must be defended as a genuine form of imitation, and hence as a true form of poetry:

> […] si mantiene al Petrarca il nome di Poeta, il quale ognuno gli dà, et egli stesso lo vuole, se imitare si può, come da noi è stato detto, altro che azzioni, dico l'altre cose immutabili, i costumi et le passioni dell'animo, le quali il Petrarca imita ottimamente […].[3]

The second concept – the notion of lyric discourse as a fictional utterance performed by a persona – resonates with ideas that can be found in Segni himself, as well as in Antonio Minturno, Sperone Speroni and Pomponio Torelli, and often comes to the fore in discussions about imitation "in persona propria", whose legitimacy is defended, for instance, by Minturno in his *Arte poetica* (1564):

> B. Se 'l melico il più delle volte ritiene la sua persona, diremo che egli allhora non fa imitatione alcuna? M. Non certo, percioché dir non si può non imitare colui che ben dipinge la forma del corpo overo gli affetti dell'animo, o dicevolmente nota i costumi, o qualunque altra cosa descrive talmente che espressa la ti paia vedere. quali sono la maggior parte l'ode Horatiane o le rime del Petrarca, ove niuno a parlare s'introduce […].[4]

The connection between these concepts and portraiture is established through the tradition of *ut pictura poesis*, whose motifs and *exempla* fuel the discourse on imitation developed in treatises on both art and poetics. The correspondence is particularly clear whenever the means ("mezzi" or "strumenti") of poetic and pictorial imitation are singled out and compared, as in Benedetto Varchi's *Due lezzioni* (1549) and in Lodovico Dolce's *Dialogo della pittura* (1557). In the case of Minturno, the comparison is extended to the kind of imitation performed by actors, who use voice and gesture:

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[1] J. Shearman, *Portraits and Poets*, in Id., *Only Connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 108-48, D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989, H. Bredekamp, *Theorie des Bildakt*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2010.

[2] The centrality of both dimensions of "performance" to the lyric genre has been recently emphasised by K. W. Hempfer, *Lyrik. Skizze einer systematischen Theorie*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 2014 and J. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2015.

[3] A. Segni, *Ragionamento ... sopra le cose pertinenti alla poetica*, Florence, Marescotti, 1581, p. 61.

[4] A. Minturno, *L'arte poetica*, [Venice], Valvassori, 1564, p. 175. "B" identifies Bernardino Rota, while "M" stands for Minturno.

Conciosia cosa che i pittori con li colori, e co' lineamenti la [i.e. "imitatione"] facciano; i parasiti e gl'histrioni con la voce e con gli atti; i poeti, com'ho detto, con le parole, con l'harmonia, con li tempi […].[5]

Significantly, actors are placed in between painters, who imitate with colours and lines (visible and silent), and poets, who imitate with words, harmony and times (invisible and musical); in fact, the use of voice and gesture implies a combination of invisible and visible features, of sound and movement, as in a moving and speaking portrait or in an embodied poem. However, in Torelli's *Trattato della poesia lirica*, poetic imitation tends to include the voice alongside the harmony; therefore, the process fostered by poetry in the listener is described as different and more powerful than the reaction produced in the viewer by painting:

[50] […] l'harmonia […] porta seco e l'affetto e l'animo di chi canta, co'l qual affetto di chi la fa move l'affetto e l'animo di chi l'ode, e con l'animo penetrando l'animo, così pian piano infonde i costumi. […] E perciò non niega Aristotele che la Pittura co'l dissegno i costumi non esprima, e che per questa causa non sia differenza tra un Pittor e un altro, ma che non infonde a quel modo i costumi, penetrandosi l'animo con l'animo e l'affetto con la passione. *Questo modo è proprio della voce*, essendo l'harmonia proprio instrumento a ciò, *non potendo il Pittor dar quello affetto alla figura che pò il cantore alla voce, ch'è instrumento più vivo e più animato*.[6]

Torelli rejects the objection that not all poetry is sung or set to music by stating that all poetry *potentially* is or could be ("potendosi anco perfettamente recitare aggiontovi il suono e 'l canto").[7] This argument, while not referring precisely to what I termed 'virtual performance', is indeed akin to its implications. Again blurring the distinctions set out by Minturno in his tripartite enumeration, the means of painters and actors are combined in a letter that the poet Veronica Franco sent in 1580 to Jacopo Tintoretto, who had painted her portrait:

[…] sì fattamente esprimendo ancora gli affetti dell'animo, che non credo gli sapesse così fingere Roscio in scena, come li finge il vostro miracoloso ed immortal pennello.[8]

The poet compares the painter's ability in rendering inner *affetti* to the mimetic talent of a Roman actor, the famous Quintus Roscius Gallus who had been defended by Cicero. While making no explicit reference to poets and poetry, her comparison implicitly suggests how acting could mediate between the verbal and visual expression of *affetti*, indirectly hinting at how the contrast between the invisible voice of the lyric and the visible silence of the portrait could be questioned through *actio*, the part of ancient rhetoric closest to performance.

In the light of the two concepts I have introduced, I shall reflect on one understudied aspect of the visual legacy of Petrarch's famous sonnets on the portrait of Laura (*RVF* LXXVII-LXXVIII), and more generally of Petrarch's *Fragmenta*, by unfolding some rhetorical and communicative possibilities that are inscribed in them:[9]

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

[5] Ivi, p. 3. See Segni, *Ragionamento* cit., p. 30 ("Tutti coloro che contraffanno un altro o con la voce, o col volto, o co' gesti del corpo, o qualunque cosa nella persona loro esprimono […] fanno instrumento sé stessi et non imitano con altro. In questo modo imita la bertuccia et i recitatori delle tragedie et delle comedie, i quali si chiamano histrioni, non imitano altrimenti, perché ciascuno di loro si veste la persona d'un altro et fa sé stesso idolo et imagine di colui che e' rappresenta […]").
[6] P. Torelli, *Trattato della poesia lirica*, in Id., *Opere*, vol. I, *Poesie con il Trattato della poesia lirica*, a cura di N. Catelli, A. Torre, A. Bianchi e G. Genovese, Parma, Guanda, 2008, pp. 567-661, cit. on pp. 627-28.
[7] Ivi, p. 659.
[8] V. Franco, *Lettere*, a cura di S. Bianchi, Roma, Salerno, 1998, XXI, p. 69.
[9] The bibliography on the two sonnets is far too vast and diverse to be included here, even in selected form. In fact, the critical fortune of the diptych, from the Renaissance to the present day, could be an object of study in its own right.

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 giú del suo bel viso.

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

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

Quando giunse a Simon l'alto concetto
ch'a mio nome gli pose in man lo stile,
s'avesse dato a l'opera gentile
colla figura voce ed intellecto,

di sospir' molti mi sgombrava il petto,
che ciò ch'altri à più caro, a me fan vile:
però che 'n vista ella si mostra humile
promettendomi pace ne l'aspetto.

Ma poi ch'i' vengo a ragionar co llei,
benignamente assai par che m'ascolte,
se risponder savesse a' detti miei.

Pigmalïon, quanto lodar ti dêi
de l'imagine tua, se mille volte
n'avesti quel ch'i' sol una vorrei.[10]

Sonnet LXXVII focuses on the experience of the artist, whereas sonnet LXXVIII is centred on the relationship between the poet and the portrait, and on the condition of the viewer-lover in front of it. The former is a meditation in the present ("non *vedrian*") that gives way to a narrative of the past ("Ma certo il mio Simon *fu* in paradiso"), while the latter takes up that narrative, or rather moves from that moment in the past ("*Quando* giunse a Simon l'alto concetto") and from the peaceful appearance of the image in the present ("ella si mostra humile"), to imagine a purely hypothetical situation, impossible because already set in the past ("s'*avesse dato* […] voce ed intellecto"). The first tercet of LXXVIII describes the repeated experience of the silence of a sitter that looks benign but cannot reply, leading to the frustrated address to Pygmalion in the final tercet. Both sonnets are introspective, in the sense that they do not display an explicit address (if not to Pygmalion at the end), but the second revolves precisely around a communication, albeit a failed one. The thematic core of the impossible dialogue with the beloved's portrait will provide the inspiration for several later poems that transform Petrarch's lyric-narrative meditation on this lack of communication into a fully lyric *performance* of that communication, either directly speaking to the portrait or making the portrait speak. Both motifs are already attested in ancient poetry but their Renaissance fortune, especially in the vernacular, is mediated by Petrarch, while paradoxically contradicting the dominant "introspective" mode of his *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*.[11] For example, in a sonnet by

[10] F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere*. *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* [*RVF*], a cura di R. Bettarini, Torino, Einaudi, 2005.
[11] C. Giunta, *Versi a un destinatario. Saggio sulla poesia italiana del Medioevo*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2002, p. 418, noted that the ratio between "conative" and "introspective" texts in *RVF* is significantly different from that found, for instance, in Dante's *rime* (1:7 and 1:2 respectively).

Lorenzo de' Medici, "fatto a piè d'una tavoletta dove era ritratta una donna", the poet-lover addresses the portrait directly, cherishing an intimate and iterative ritual of solace:

Tu se' di ciascun mio pensiero e cura,
cara imagine mia, riposo e porto:
con *teco* piango e *teco* mi conforto,
se advien che abbi speranza o ver päura;

talor, come se fussi viva e pura,
teco mi dolgo d'ogni inganno e torto,
e fammi il van pensier sì poco accorto,
che altro non chiederei, se l'error dura.[12]

Pietro Bembo proposes a very similar scene in the first of two sonnets most probably dedicated to a portrait of Maria Savorgnan (1500-1501), which remains silent but at least does not hide from his view:

O imagine mia celeste e pura,
che splendi più che 'l sole a gli occhi miei
et mi rassembri il volto di colei,
che scolpita ho nel cor con maggior cura,

credo che 'l mio Bellin con la figura
*t'*habbia dato il costume ancho di lei,
che m'ardi, s'io ti miro, et *per te* sei
freddo smalto a cui giunse alta ventura.

E come donna in vista dolce humile,
ben mostri *tu* pietà del mio tormento;
poi, se merce' ten' prego, non rispondi.

In questo hai *tu* di lei men fero stile,
né spargi sí le mie speranze al vento,
ch'al men, quand'io ti cerco, non *t'*ascondi.[13]

Moving from sonnets speaking to the portrait to sonnets in which the portrait speaks, it can be observed that the motif tends to appear more often with reference to a sculpted effigy. For instance, around 1493, in composing a series of seven sonnets to celebrate a marble portrait-bust of Beatrice de' Notari, now lost or unidentified, Antonio Tebaldeo orchestrated the sequence as a fictional exchange between different voices and opened it precisely with the words spoken by the portrait itself:

Che guardi e pensi? *Io son* di spirto priva,
son pietra che Beatrice representa;
Leon che l'ama, e per amarla stenta,
vedendo me gli affanni in parte schiva.

Natura, e non tu sol, crede ch'io viva
e qual sia l'opra sua dubia diventa;
e spesso a gli occhi Amor se me apresenta,

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[12] L. De' Medici, *Canzoniere*, a cura di T. Zanato, Firenze, Olschki, 1991, XLIX 1-8.
[13] P. Bembo, *Le rime*, a cura di A. Donnini, Roma, Salerno, 2008, 20 [XIX].

che ha il nido in quei de Bëatrice viva.

Ma poi che me ritrova un duro sasso,
scornato ride, e va cercando lei
col viso di vergogna tinto e basso;

e certo infusa m'arian l'alma i dèi
per far contento questo amante lasso,
ma stiman che sian vivi i membri mei.[14]

The sonnet is written from the point of view of the bust and addresses the passer-by – in fact a viewer-reader – just as an actual inscription carved beneath a statue would, offering a witty reason for its lifelessness. The latter example clearly suggests how the shift from the scene being remembered and narrated in *RVF* LXXVIII to the scene being *enacted* in the later poems has a significant counterpart in portraiture. In particular, there is a group of cultural objects, still largely overlooked and certainly never investigated in a systematic way, that embody and showcase, in their very structure, the issue of the lyric and pictorial expression of *affetti*, namely portraits bearing some form of poetic inscription. The 'painted words' of my title are the words materially present on a panel or canvas, and their 'rhetoric' is made up of several components (linguistic, material, visual), which contribute to the portrait's intermedial action. The diversity of Renaissance objects that share this feature is almost uncontainable: medals, painted effigies with devices and mottoes on the reverse, portraits with scrolls or *cartellini*, sculpted busts accompanied by carved epigrams, engravings followed by a poem in the layout of a printed page, and so on. What all these examples share, despite their different materials, shapes, dimensions and uses, is some form of combination of the verbal and the visual that takes place in their own body.[15]

On this occasion I shall focus on a specific sub-group within this wider realm, namely on *individual* portraits bearing a *poetic* inscription that can be seen *at the same time* as the sitter (therefore excluding, for instance, portraits with mottoes on the reverse). The reason for this selection is that the objects it identifies seem to react more prominently to a set of concepts that are essential to any argument about the relationship between lyric poetry and portraiture: the idea of 'address' (of 'speaking to', of addressed poetry), the distinction between person and persona, and the connection between voice and inner life (invisible). Each of these concepts finds a correspondence in portraiture: the direction of the sitter's gaze, the distinction between flesh-and-blood model and sitter 'in the portrait', and the connection between silence and the external, surface-like quality of the body (visible). This scheme is not to be intended as rigid and normative, rather as a tentative and flexible map to navigate the territory shared by the lyric genre and portraiture in a post-Petrarchan context, while fleshing out the two concepts I moved from (lyric poetry as expression of *affetti* and as virtual performance).

After the foundational studies by Elizabeth Cropper,[16] much has been written about the relationship between Renaissance portraiture and the literary and metaphorical repertoire of Petrarchism; more recently, Stephen Campbell has interpreted a number of "introspective" late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century male portraits as "poetic constructs", in which "the erotics of

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[14] A. Tebaldeo, *Rime*, a cura di T. Basile e J.-J. Marchand, Modena, Panini, 1989-1992, vol. II/1, 223.

[15] Within a vast but still unsystematic bibliography on the topic, see for instance M. Butor, *Les mots dans la peinture*, Paris, Flammarion, 1969, *Icons – Texts – Iconotexts. Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*, ed. by P. Wagner, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1996, *Der stumme Diskurs der Bilder. Reflexionsformen des Ästhetischen in der italienischen Kunst der Frühen Neuzeit*, hrsg. von V. Von Rosen, K. Krüger und R. Preimesberger, Berlin, Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2003, L. Barkan, *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013.

[16] E. Cropper, *On Beautiful Women: Parmigianino, "Petrarchismo" and the Vernacular Style,* in "Art Bulletin", 58, 1976, pp. 374-94, Ead., *The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture*, in *Rewriting the Renaissance. The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, edited by M.W. Ferguson, M. Quilligan, N. Vickers, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 175-90.

Petrarchan subjectivity are transformed and reorientated" and Marianne Koos has devoted a monograph to "lyric" portraits of male sitters, exploring in particular their relationship with the viewer.[17] However, in my own discourse the emphasis is on the address (of gaze and utterance) and on its source rather than on its addressee; on the lyric and pictorial expression of *affetti* rather than on the reaction of readers and viewers in response to it. It could be argued that the lyric discourse, and especially the short poetic form, as opposed to narrative prose and poetry, presents issues of address/lack of address to the viewer/reader/listener and issues of voicing/performance in their purest and perhaps most radical form. In fact, the opposition between first and second person or between first and third person is embedded in the lyric discourse more explicitly and more often than in others. This holds true for lyric poetry in general, yet all the more so for amorous poetry in the tradition of Petrarchism, which provided the Renaissance with an idiom and conventions to talk about love and inner life. Lyric poetry in this tradition rarely describes situations; rather, it *voices* subjects involved in those situations, expressing their emotions and reactions to them. It is the difference between showing a love scene and showing *love*, between narrating an amorous event and *expressing* an amorous feeling related to it. Once again, this seemingly modern notion can be traced back to the sixteenth century and is developed, for instance, in Torelli's above-mentioned *Trattato*:

Per hora ci basti che il Lirico ha per principal oggetto l'immitation de gli affetti [just as Segni], e se immita attioni, lo fa per esprimere per esse gli affetti, sì come al contrario il Comico e Tragico et Epico, di mente di Aristotele, immitano i costumi per l'attioni. […] Né l'Elegie, trattando attioni, per altro le trattano che per esprimere costumi et affetti e per ciò renderci megliori. Onde il Petrarca, e nelle canzoni e ne i sonetti, assai affetti e pochissime attioni trattò, e dell'attioni gli affetti si propose il fine, il che anco ne i Capitoli suoi chiaramente appare.[18]

Né noi neghiamo che a conoscer l'interior bisogna procedere a qualche esteriore; ma ben affermiamo che l'affetto et il costume è il fine nella Lirica ancorché trattasse d'operatione.[19]

While fundamentally chiming with Segni's arguments in identifying the imitation of *affetti* as the main object of lyric poetry, Torelli's reasoning takes a step further in clarifying the functional and hierarchical relationship between "affetti" and "attioni" in the lyric genre: the actions and operations covered or handled by the lyric poet are by definition instrumental and subordinate to the expression of *affetti* and *costumi*; the lyric's ultimate aim is always to express what is internal and invisible, yet at times the internal and the invisible can be expressed only through the mediation of the external and the visible. If this happens for poetry, all the more it must happen for painting, whenever presented with the task of portraying inner qualities. Therefore, in writings on the *paragone*, it is precisely around the point discussed by Torelli that the distinction between invisible and visible tends to blur. For example, such a clear-cut distinction is partly questioned in Benedetto Varchi's *Seconda Lezzione* (1547) and especially in Lodovico Dolce's *Dialogo della pittura* (1557):

FAB. Ben dite, signor Pietro, ma questi [i.e. "pensieri" and "affetti"] *per certi atti esteriori si comprendono*; e spesso per uno inarcar di ciglia, o increspar di fronte, o per altri segni appariscono i segreti interni, tal che molte volte non fa bisogno delle fenestre di Socrate.
ARET. Così è veramente. Onde abbiamo nel Petrarca questo verso: E spesso ne la fronte il cor si legge [*RVF* CCXXII 12]. Ma gli occhi sono principalmente le fenestre dell'animo et in questi può il pittore isprimere acconciamente ogni

[17] S. J. Campbell, *Eros in the Flesh: Petrarchism, the Embodied Eros and Male Beauty in Italian Art, 1500-1540*, in "Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies", 35, 2005, pp. 629-62, cit. on p. 632, e M. Koos, *Bildnisse des Begehrens. Das lyrische Männerporträt in der venezianischen Malerei des frühen 16 Jahrhunderts: Giorgione, Tizian und ihr Umkreis*, Emsdetten, Imorde, 2006.
[18] Torelli, *Trattato* cit., p. 603.
[19] Ivi, p. 608.

passione: come l'allegrezze, il dolore, l'ire, le teme, le speranze et i disideri. Ma pur tutto serve all'occhio de' riguardanti.[20]

There is a degree of paradox in building on the authority of Petrarch, whose *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* mastered and modelled the *poetic* expression of amorous affections and passions, to claim the possibility of showing the soul by *painting* the external acts of the body and gazes. In fact, in treatises on art, the literary examples offered to painters in order to instruct and inspire them in the representation of passions tend to be stanzas taken from epic poems, which display the inner motions of characters through gesture and attitudes, rather than lyric verse, which voice the *affetti* of the poet-lover; for the same reason, even in quotations from narrative poems, descriptions of poses and gazes are largely preferred to soliloquies, which blend epic and lyric elements. It is here, in front of the paradoxical expulsion of the lyric from its own realm – the realm of *affetti*, that is – that portraits with poetic inscriptions start to show their specificity as a group of images informed by the Petrarchan legacy: these portraits go beyond the speechless *atti* normally attributed to painted effigies, and they do so by *performing* the fictional utterance of lyric poetry, thus *enacting* the discontinuity between each poem and the silence that precedes and follows it.

The history of portraits with inscriptions is inseparable from the long and more general debate in favour or against the use of inscriptions in paintings, to which Emmanuelle Hénin has devoted a monograph[21]. Against this wider backdrop, I have identified a number of elements that are involved in what I term the rhetoric of painted words – an embodied rhetoric, as it were, empowered and enriched through its relationship with material and visual components:

- the position and wider setting of the inscription;
- the physical 'orientation' of the inscription, especially with reference to the grammatical opposition between first and third person;
- the 'syntax' of the inscription, spanning the spectrum ranging from single letters and isolated words (with an emphasis on the fragmentary nature of the text and with a maximum of iconicity) to sentences and full texts (with an emphasis on the text as self-contained totality and with a maximum of readability);
- the content and source of the inscription (unidentified texts, quotations from famous authors, words that can be actually attributed to the sitter himself or herself as authors, etc.);
- the relationship between the inscribed words, the sitter and the viewer (for instance, how do the position and orientation of the inscription relate to the sitter? How does the content of the inscription influence its connection with the sitter?)

It is from the interaction of these elements that the close kinship between portrait and lyric utterance emerges more clearly. For instance, the connection between the grammatical direction of discourse and the visual orientation of the sitter has been effectively described by Meyer Shapiro with reference to the relationship between first-person wording and frontal view, third-person discourse and profile:

The profile face is detached from the viewer and belongs with the body in action (or in an intransitive state) in a space shared with other profiles on the surface of the image. It is, broadly speaking, like the grammatical form of the third person, the impersonal 'he' or 'she' with its concordantly inflected verb; while the face turned outwards is credited with

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[20] L. Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura, intitolato l'Aretino*, in *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento tra Manierismo e Controriforma*, a cura di Paola Barocchi, Bari, Laterza, 1960-62, vol. I, pp. 141-206, cit. on pp. 152-53.
[21] E. Hénin, *«Ceci est un bœuf: le débat sur les inscriptions dans la peinture (1550-1800)*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2013.

intentness, a latent or potential glance directed to the observer, and corresponds to the role of 'I' in speech, with its complementary 'you'.[22]

Shapiro's argument, and in particular his reflections on the first person and frontality, can profitably be combined with two categories that, although outdated from the strictly linguistic point of view, prove still productive as operative concepts, namely the concepts of "conative" and "emotive" as defined by Roman Jakobson:

The so-called EMOTIVE or "expressive" function, focused on the ADDRESSER, aims at a direct expression of the speaker's attitude toward what he is speaking about. It tends to produce an impression of a certain emotion whether true or feigned; […]. Orientation toward the ADDRESSEE, the CONATIVE function, finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative […].[23]

Both concepts are commonly used in studies on lyric poetry, for example to describe texts dominated by either introspection or address, with a focus on the first or second person respectively. As such, they can also be applied to individual portraiture, and especially to portraits with poetic inscriptions.

The opposition between "conative" and "emotive" helps me introduce my first example, which illustrates the case in which the sitter's face or bust is accompanied by an isolated verse, inserted in an unrealistic space. In the *Bust Portrait of a Young Man with an Inscription* (c. 1560, London, National Gallery; fig. 1) painted by Giovan Battista Moroni around 1560, the inscription "DVM SPIRITVS / HOS REGET ARTVS" (literally "until this spirit keeps these limbs alive", that is to say 'as long as I am alive', 'until the end of my life') comes from the discourse addressed by Aeneas to Dido on the point of leaving her behind (*Aen.* IV 336).[24] It should be noted that these words, while not being technically lyric, as they belong to an epic poem, are taken from the direct speech of the hero and therefore allow for an intermedial alignment of poetic persona and painted sitter; at the same time, this alignment is contradicted by the reversal of content and meaning enabled by the fragmentary nature of the quotation: isolated and combined with the outward gaze of the sitter, the words pronounced by Aeneas leaving turn into a promise of amorous loyalty addressed to a beloved-viewer, for whom most probably the painting was intended. The specifically "emotive" quality of this portrait-utterance can be best highlighted by contrasting it with another portrait executed by the same painter, in which the format and structure are similar but the inscription is not poetic. Moroni's *Portrait of a man* at the Hermitage (c. 1565, St Petersburg, Hermitage; fig. 2), again painted in the mid-1560s, bears a prominent parapet with the inscription "NOSCE TE APHTON", which has been interpreted as a version of "Nosce te ipsum", in which the last word would be the Latin rendering of the Greek *afton*, according to the Byzantine pronunciation of *auton*.[25] The painting's powerful, almost intimidating apostrophe to the viewer is the result of the combined action of the imperative address in the inscription and the intense outward gaze of the sitter. In this case, the address and message conveyed by the portrait could be described as "conative", energetically providing moral advice in the form of an invitation to self-scrutiny. Despite the different tone and emphasis of the two portraits, it can be argued that, from the point of view of format and gaze, both are dominated by the communicative performance of the

[22] M. Shapiro, *Frontal and Profile as Symbolic Forms*, in Id., *Words and Pictures: on the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text*, The Hague, Mouton, 1973, pp. 37-49, cit. on pp. 38-39.
[23] R. Jakobson, *Closing Statement: Linguistic and Poetics*, in *Style in Language*, ed. by T. A. Sebeok, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1960, pp. 350-77, cit. on pp. 354-55.
[24] See the relevant entry in S. Facchinetti, A. Galansino, *Giovan Battista Moroni*, catalogo della mostra, London, Royal Academy of Arts, 2014.
[25] M. Gregori, F. Rossi, *Giovan Battista Moroni*, Bergamo, Poligrafiche Bolis, 1979. The odd wording of the well-known motto has been explained by Gregori with reference to the fact that the Latin *ipsum* is here substituted by the Greek *auton*, transcribed with Latin letters according to the Byzantine pronunciation (ivi, p. 269).

sitter (the sitter-*persona*, I would be tempted to write),[26] located in a flat and unrealistic space (a lyric backdrop rather than a narrative place). In this sense, they are close to the 'pure' situation of utterance; consistently, the inscription and its visual setting are not integrated into the space of the sitter, who appears to be engaged in an act of self-presentation rather than in an action.

The specific connection between the "emotive" or "conative" quality of portraits and the combination of full-face view and inscription in the first person can be confirmed, by contrast, by another painting by Moroni (1557, *Portrait of Fra Michele da Brescia*, Private collection), in which the inscription is in the first person but the sitter is turned to the side, almost in profile, and does not look out at the viewer. The prominent lack of alignment between the gaze and the utterance can be explained with reference to the public, celebrative and moral function of the portrait, whose sitter was to be presented to the viewer as an exemplary individual, to be emulated and, at the same time, to remain distant and superior, as emphasised by the ledge separating him from the beholder. Consistently, the inscription in Latin concerns the admirable actions of the sitter on a specific occasion ("IVSTITIA ECCLESIAM SERVAVI / ET INIMICOS PACAVI / M.D. LVII"),[27] and his effigy is both "physically believable" and "morally idealized".[28] Similarly, also the complementary combination of gaze directed at the viewer and inscription in the third person can both contribute to the identification of the sitter, as in Domenico Puligo's *Portrait of a lady with a music-book and a petrarchino* (c. 1525, also known as *Barbara Salutati*, Lewes, Sussex, Firle Place, Private Collection),[29] and serve a moral function, as in the case of Moretto da Brescia's *Salome* (c. 1540, Brescia, Pinacoteca Civica Tosio Martinengo; fig. 3). The female figure, often interpreted as a portrait of Tullia d'Aragona as Salome, is looking out from behind a pedestal but the inscription placed on the pedestal itself is in the third person, reading "QVAE SACRV[M] IOANIS / CAPVT SALTANDO / OBTINVIT".[30] The grammatical impossibility to attribute the words to the sitter emphasises the contrast between the direct and enticing gaze of the woman and the indirect warning about her dangerous power. More generally, inscriptions in the third person tend to play a mainly "referential" function, in Jakobson's terms, rather than an emotive or conative one.

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[26] "[…] a face addressing us in frontal view in an image fundamentally causes us […] to respond to an esthetic effect that could be described as a *confrontation* and which, almost inevitably, triggers an interaction, a kind of dialogue between image and viewer" (H. Schlie, *"In maestà or sem graça?" Aspects of the Frontal View in Early Modern Portraiture*, in *Inventing Faces: Rhetorics of Portraiture Between Renaissance and Modernism*, ed. by M. Körte, R. Rebmann, J. E. Weiss, S. Weppelman, Berlin, Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2013, pp. 99-121, cit. on p. 100).

[27] In Facchinetti's translation, "I protected the Church with justice, and brought peace to enemies 1557" (Facchinetti, Galansino, *Giovan Battista Moroni*, p. 119).

[28] With reference to this portrait and to that of Lucrezia Vertova Agliardi (1557, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art), which includes a ledge with a long Latin inscription in the third person, Facchinetti argued that "Moroni has striven to represent physically believable but morally idealized figure, introducing a distance and separating them from the direct gaze of the spectator" (ivi, p. 51). Despite "physical defects […] included without modification", "the sitters are distant, and are introduced to the spectator by inscriptions emphasizing their deeds or general qualities. Such biographical details were intended to be exemplary to contemporary eyes" (*ibid.*). See also ivi, p. 119.

[29] The visible page of the open *petrarchino* shows the first quatrain of sonnet *RVF* CCXIII, which can be read as a laudatory description of the sitter. For this and the other three inscriptions included in this portrait see M. L. Doglio, *I versi dipinti. Il sonetto CCXL (e altri sonetti in ritratti)*, in Ead., *Il segretario, la cerva, i versi dipinti. Tre studi su sonetti del Petrarca*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 2006, pp. 39-72, in partic. 63-67.

[30] "She who by dancing obtained the sacred head of John", as translated by Ch. J. Nygren, *Stylizing Eros: Narrative Ambiguity and the Discourse of the Desire in Titian's so-called Salome*, in *Renaissance Love. Eros, Passion, and Friendship in Italian Art around 1500*, ed. by J. Kohl, M. Koos, A. Randolph, Berlin, Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2014, pp. 23-44, according to whom "The picture's inscription insists upon the dangerous and provocative nature of the girl's dance […]. These painters presented the beholder with the seductive female body, and their pictures […] thus challenge the beholder to fortify himself against erotic stimulation and visual delectation" (p. 39). See also *Alessandro Bonvicino: il Moretto da Brescia*, a cura di P. V. Begni Redona, Brescia, La Scuola, 1988, pp. 354-56 and J. L. Hairston, *"Di sangue illustre & pellegrino". The Eclipse of the Body in the Lyric of Tullia d'Aragona*, in *The Body in Early Modern Italy*, edited by J. L. Hairston and W. Stephens, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010, pp. 158-75, in partic. pp. 158-60.

The communicative processes activated by the presence of the inscription change when the painted words, rather than being located in an abstract space, appear more integrated into the fiction of the portrait in terms of placement (written on a scroll or on a *cartellino* held by the sitter) or of wider narrative setting (for instance, words pictorially identified as a letter or as a text in prose or poetry that the sitter seems to have been reading or writing); in other words, when the inscription tends to move from the status of *parergon* to that of *ergon*, from an extradiegetic role to a diegetic one. In one of the portraits of the poet Girolamo Casio painted by Giovan Antonio Boltraffio (c. 1495, Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera; fig. 4), the sitter places his ringed hand on an oblong sheet bearing an inscription in verse. The four lines have been identified as a passage from Casio's *Clementina* (1523), a collection of poems dedicated to Clement VII on the occasion of his papal coronation; as such, they have to be considered a later addition, clearly connected with the celebrative circumstances and the intention to boast the favours received from Popes Leo X and Clement VII, including the laurel crown that is mentioned in the verse and appears in the portrait as a further pictorial addition ("Il Decimo Leon fu quel Pastore / Che mi diè il stocco et gli speroni d'oro / Clemente il capo me ornò poi *de aloro* / Per dare il premio alla virtù di honore").[31] Originally, the lower right-hand corner was occupied only by a skull, an object that appears on the reverse of another famous portrait of Casio painted by Boltraffio (ca. 1493-94, Chatsworth House, Devonshire Collection), accompanied by the inscription "INSIGNE SVM IERONYMI/ CASII" and most probably alluding to the poet's epitaphs.[32] Significantly, Casio – or whoever commissioned the portrait – selected a part of a longer encomiastic text (a sonnet), including the names of both popes and tailoring it into a shorter, self-contained eulogy in the form of a quatrain, a form used by Casio himself in the same collection ("tetrastico") and common for epitaphs. If deciphered, the words redouble the experience of reading the poet's verse and become his 'painted' voice, again with a combination of first person and outward gaze. The binary mechanism activated by this interaction can be compared to the one described, in the relevant context of a late-fifteenth-century poetic exchange, by Tebaldeo:

Dapoi che la mia sorte adversa e dura
non vòl che teco cum il corpo io stia,
mandoti, Timotheo, l'effigie mia,
simile a quella che mi fe' Natura.

Ma perché è cosa muta la pictura,
mi son sforzato trovar modo e via
di far che al vero più propinqua sia,
agiongendo la voce a la figura;

alligato ho cum lei certi fragmenti
che per Flavia già scrissi suspirando,
aciò me vedi e che parlar me senti.

Sì che di questo don che hora ti mando
prego, Timotheo mio, tu te contenti
sin ch'io ritorno a te, che non scio quando.[33]

[31] I quote from the transcription provided in E. Berselli, *Un committente e un pittore alle soglie del Cinquecento: Girolamo Casio e Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio*, in "Schede umanistiche", 2, 1997, pp. 123-43, cit. on p. 134, note 33.
[32] On this portrait, see J. Pederson, *Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio's Portrait of Girolamo Casio and the Poetics of Male Beauty in Renaissance Milan*, in *Renaissance Love* cit., pp. 165-84.
[33] Tebaldeo, *Rime* cit., 119.

In order to counter the distance that separates them, the poets sends his own portrait to his friend and fellow poet Timoteo Bendedei; the portrait is all the more similar to the original because it manages to overcome the inherent limit of painting (which is dumb, according to Simonides' motto), giving voice to the picture by adding amorous verse to it, in order to produce a portrait of the body *and* the soul. The verbs "agiongere" and "alligare" suggest the physical juxtaposition of visual and verbal, revealing the binary model on which portraits with inscription are based. In fifteenth-century poetry, it is far from uncommon to write poems 'in the person' of someone else, ventriloquizing patrons or fictional personas, to the extent that, occasionally, the alignment of poet and persona has to be made explicit in the paratext: in fact, in the case of Casio's original sonnet, the relevant prose heading reads "Sonetto ove il Casio parla" ("Sonnet in which Casio *speaks*"). If we turn to the relationship between the sitter and the poetic inscription, in Boltraffio's portrait of Casio as well as in Tebaldeo's sonnet we find a poet who shows his own poetry, whereas in the case of the *Portrait of a gentleman* by Moroni in London we faced a lover, perhaps himself a poet, who appropriated the voice of a character through Virgil's verse.

A further communicative shift in the rhetoric of portraits with poetic inscriptions occurs when the isolated sheet or scroll is substituted by the book, either manuscript or printed; the presence of the book as object strengthens the allusion to the literary nature of the text and to the experience of reading in its duration. Novella Macola has studied the sub-genre of "figure con libro" in the first half of the sixteenth century, while Maria Luisa Doglio has focused more specifically on portraits with *petrarchino*.[34] Even the closed book, when clearly identified as a *petrarchino*, is significant for my discourse, in that it hints at the relationship with Petrarch and more generally with lyric poetry as a genre possibly read and perhaps practiced by the sitter. However, books with open and readable pages are more relevant to my argument; in particular, when displaying the full text of poems, they constitute the logical endpoint of the series I have been tracing: from isolated fragments of verse to individual sections of poems, and finally to complete poetic texts. The latter feature is shared by three famous portraits, Andrea del Sarto's *Lady with a* petrarchino (1525-28, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi; fig. 5) and Bronzino's portraits of *Lorenzo Lenzi* (1527-1528, Milan, Castello Sforzesco) and *Laura Battiferri* (c. 1560, Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, fig. 6), each showing the full and readable texts of two sonnets. If we consider the direction of gazes, the pose and gesture of sitters and the placement of texts, it can be argued that the least relevant of the three from the point of view of the relationship between portraiture and lyric utterance is that of Lenzi. It is a portrait-presentation, in which the visible poetic texts work like a caption aimed at the identification and celebration of the sitter and the probable patron of the painting, Benedetto Varchi.[35] In fact, the book is kept at the sitter's side and not offered directly to the viewer-reader, and the combination of the two sonnets, Varchi's *Famose Frondi de' cui santi honori* on the left and *RVF* CXLVI ("O d'ardente vertute ornata et calda / alma gentil cui tante carte vergo") on the right, suggests the master's homage to the young pupil praised in his own verse, as Laura was by Petrarch.

Del Sarto's anonymous young lady shows sonnets *RVF* CLIII (*Ite, caldi sospiri, al freddo core*) and CLIV (*Le stelle, il cielo et gli elementi a prova*), whereas Laura Battiferri, herself a poet, offers to the viewer-reader sonnets *RVF* LXIV (*Se voi poteste per turbati segni*) and 240 CCXL (*I' ò pregato Amor, e 'l ne riprego*), whose deliberate juxtaposition can be read as a comment on her own contradictory attitude in the painting, as well as in the light of the sonnets exchanged between her and Bronzino.[36] The different choice of texts (respectively continuous and discontinuous) and

[34] N. Macola, *Sguardi e scritture: figure con libro nella ritrattistica italiana della prima metà del Cinquecento*, Venezia, Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere e arti, 2007, Doglio, *I versi dipinti* cit.

[35] See Macola, *Sguardi e scritture* cit., pp. 64-69 e A. Geremicca, *Agnolo Bronzino. "La dotta penna al pennel dotto pari"*, Roma, UniversItalia, 2013, pp. 86-96.

[36] On the latter sonnets, see L. Bolzoni, *Poesia e ritratto nel Rinascimento*, testi a cura di F. Pich, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2008, pp. 211-17, F. Pich, *I poeti davanti al ritratto. Da Petrarca a Marino*, Lucca, Pacini Fazzi, 2010, pp. 305-08, and

the different set-up of the two portraits in terms of gesture, orientation and gaze are consistent with their respective intermedial rhetoric. Battiferri's portrait, emblematic and idealised, is built on the sharp contrast between the exhibition of the sonnets (possibly from her own Petrarchan selection and in any case intentionally combined in the painting) and the refusal to meet the viewer's eyes: as such, it displays or performs an identity rather than communicating with the beholder. On the contrary, the gaze, gesture and attitude of the lady with the *petrarchino* encourage a close contact and intimacy with the viewer, as well as a possibly shared experience of reading. Despite the different outcomes, both portraits depend on the identification of Petrarch's poetry, and its legacy in lyric poetry, as the expression of *affetti* and inner life. Furthermore, both of them embody the dimension of lyric as virtual performance. Their 'staging' of the lyric utterance is simultaneously less straightforward and more prominent than the one performed in Moroni's London portrait that we saw earlier on. This is due to three main reasons: first, the overall intermedial rhetoric of these female portraits is more complex, because it involves a three-quarter-length figure, performing a gesture with visible hands, and the presence of a book, as opposed to Moroni's simple vertical apposition of head-and-shoulder effigy and inscription; second, in the paintings by del Sarto and Bronzino poems are shown in their entirety, literally embedded in the portrait, replicating the process of writing-reading into the very heart of the visual experience; third, here two female sitters display poems that voice a male persona (that of the Petrarchan poet-lover), with a shift that per se emphasises the lyric utterance as fictional performance. As Battiferri's contradictory gesture suggests, the open book expresses her soul; such an expression is filtered through a code defined by a male poet, a code she mastered in her own poetry. Therefore, her portrait can be seen not only as a meta-portrait, but also as a 'meta-poem', a reflection on how inner life can be conveyed in both poetry and painting. In fact, in the second quatrain of a sonnet addressed to Bronzino, Battiferri attributed to his portrait the power to reveal her inner thoughts and *affetti* in spite of her own intention to hide them: "come la propria mia novella imago, / della tua dotta man lavoro altero, / *ogni mio affetto scuopre, ogni pensiero*, / quantunque il cor sia di celarlo vago" (5-8).[37]

The case of the lady with the *petrarchino* is more ambiguous, even regardless of her debated identification either as an anonymous beloved painted for a patron-lover or as the painter's own daughter.[38] The two poems visible on the page partly hidden by her hand are *Ite, caldi sospiri, al freddo core* (*RVF* CLIII), a sonnet addressed to sighs and amorous thoughts, and *Le stelle, il cielo et gli elementi a prova* (*RVF* CLIV), in praise of Laura. The two poems hidden on the left page, invisible to the viewer but clearly indicated by the lady, can be reasonably assumed to be *Non d'atra et tempestosa onda marina* (*RVF* CLI) and *Questa humil fera, un cor di tigre o d'orsa* (*RVF* CLII); on the basis of this assumption, Shearman interpreted their presence as a sort of warning, with reference to the coexistence of bright and dark aspects of love, of amorous blessing and danger – an argument that was later taken up and developed in a spiritual direction by Del Bravo.[39] This reading prompts two interconnected questions: is the warning directed to herself or to the viewer, possibly her lover? Are the poems in the open book conveying her own bittersweet *affetti* or those of the addressee? This reversibility itself confirms the substantial lyric core of this portrait, in that such reversibility hinges precisely on the relationship between address and silence, between conative and emotive utterance.

Geremicca, *Agnolo Bronzino* cit., pp. 203-18 and 237. As pointed out by Doglio, *I versi dipinti* cit., pp. 52-53, *RVF* LXIV and CCXL have never been "accostati nella tradizione esegetica dal Cinquecento ad oggi […]. […] due sonetti, senza legami e neppure rimandi, composti in epoche diverse e lontane".

[37] I quote from my own transcription in Bolzoni, *Poesia e ritratto* cit., p. 213.

[38] For these two hypotheses and the relevant bibliography, see Macola, *Sguardi e scritture* cit., pp. 52-59.

[39] J. Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965, vol. I, pp. 123-24, C. Del Bravo, *Andrea del Sarto*, in "Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa", s. III, XXV, 1995, 1-2, pp. 463-83, in partic. p. 482, Doglio, *I versi dipinti* cit., p. 62.

On the one hand, the intermedial rhetoric of Bronzino's and del Sarto's portraits seems to connect them respectively to *RVF* LXXVII and LXXVIII. In fact, the portrait of Laura Battiferri is a sort of meta-portrait or manifesto-portrait, a portrait-presentation, theoretical and non-narrative, whereas the *Lady with the petrarchino* is first of all a portrait-situation, narrative and akin to a dialogue. In the former, the theme of the external expression of the inner realm is mainly entrusted to the deictic gesture of the sitter and to the first quatrain of the first painted sonnet, whose reference to Laura's "atti esteriori" (as Dolce could term them) as visible manifestations ("segni") of invisible thoughts and feelings reacts with what is happening (and is being commented upon) *in the portrait itself*: "Se voi poteste per turbati segni, / per chinar gli occhi, o per piegar la testa, / o per esser piú d'altra al fuggir presta, / torcendo 'l viso a' preghi honesti et degni (*RVF* LXIV 1-4). In the *Lady with the petrarchino*, the same theme is hinted at by the material connection between visible and invisible created by the inclined *petrarchino*, which shows and hides its content. On the other hand, the interaction between visible and invisible poems set up by del Sarto, although in the context of a less openly meta-pictorial portrait, does not fail to engender a complex allusion to themes that are of both *RVF* LXXVII and LXXVIII. The first of the legible sonnets, CLIII, invites the sighs to express the invisible soul of the lover, verging on the communication enacted in sonnet LXXVIII, albeit in reversed terms, because his thoughts reveal externally what the beloved's eyes cannot see: "Ite, dolci penser', parlando fore / di quello ove 'l bel guardo non s'estende" (*RVF* CLIII 5-6). In the second visible sonnet (CLIV), Laura becomes the object of gaze as Nature's masterpiece, as a work of art (*opra*), along the lines of sonnet LXXVII, which is also echoed in "a prova" at the end of the opening line: "L'*opra* è sí altera, sì leggiadra et nova / che mortal guardo in lei non s'assecura" (*RVF* CLIV 5-6). In the second of the hidden poems (CLII) the "opera leggiadra e nova" becomes the beast with a heart of tiger or bear, which imposes a ceaseless and painful mutation on the lover's *affetti*: "in riso e 'n pianto, fra paura et spene / mi rota sì ch'ogni mio stato inforsa" (*RVF* CLII 3-4). In the first 'mute' text (CLI), the gaze is still – or already, depending on the direction followed in reading the sequence – that of the lover who cannot bear the sight of the beloved's eyes, but in the last tercet the theme of showing and hiding emerges again, with reference to interiority and in particular to the experience of love: "Indi [i. e. in the eyes, Love] mi mostra quel ch'a molti cela, / ch'a parte a parte entro a' begli occhi leggo / quant'io parlo d'Amore, et quant'io scrivo" (*RVF* CLI 12-14). According to modern commentators, here Petrarch would not refer to Laura's interiority but rather to his own and to what Love shows and many do not see ('the amorous feelings of which I speak and write'); however, the fact itself that this verse could lend itself to both interpretations brings us back to the reversibility and undecidability I already noted in the portrait. Furthermore, the presence of the same metaphorical "reading" ("entro a' begli occhi *leggo*") that we encountered in the Petrarchan verse quoted by Dolce – "E spesso ne la fronte il cor si *legge*" (*RVF* CCXXII 12) – brings us back to the argument about the possibility of showing *affetti* through the painted body. However, crucially, in the *Lady with the petrarchino* that metaphorical reading becomes a *literal* reading, because the verse refers to love poetry ("parlo", "scrivo") and because the sonnets are *painted words*, amorous "frammenti" written "suspirando" just as those supposedly added by Tebaldeo in sending his own portrait to his absent friend.