NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Portraiture in Italian Renaissance Art:
A Celebration of Marriage, Lineage, and Status

A Thesis Submitted to the
University Honors Program
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree
With University Honors
Department of Art History
By Suze Emma Tegert
DeKalb, Illinois
December, 2000
Student Name: Suze Emma Tegert

Approved by: [Signature]

Department of: ART

Date: 12/7/2000
HONORS THESIS ABSTRACT
THESIS SUBMISSION FORM

AUTHOR: Suze Emma Tegert

THESIS TITLE: Portraiture in Italian Renaissance Art:
A Celebration of Marriage, Lineage, and Status

ADVISOR: M. Quinlan
ADVISOR’S DEPT: ART

DISCIPLINE: ART HISTORY
YEAR:

PAGE LENGTH: 30
BIBLIOGRAPHY: 2
ILLUSTRATED: 6

PUBLISHED: No
LIST PUBLICATION: n/a

COPIES AVAILABLE: Hard Copy, Diskette

ABSTRACT:

In recent Art Historical writing, male and female Renaissance portraiture isfrequently discussed as two separate categories, which assume different functions and
purposes, based on the position of men and women within Renaissance society.

This paper, in particular, analyzes the feminist theory of the function of female
portraiture, which sees portraits of women as objects of the male gaze, created in a
society in which women’s claims were more limited than they were for men, and women
are seen as the passive objects of an extreme patriarchy.

Here a closer look is taken at more recent research, which supports a
view of a society in which men possessed a high degree of respect and appreciation for
women and the roles they fulfilled in everyday life. By looking at portraiture pairs,
depictions of husbands and wives, this paper suggests that female portraiture did not
provide an object for the male gaze, but rather served the same function as male
portraiture, a commemorative function, used to display lineage, wealth, honor, and status.
Renaissance portraiture is a topic which has received much attention in recent Art Historical writing. However, in most of these examinations either male or female portraiture is discussed, since the two are separated into different categories, which assume different functions and purposes.¹ This research attempts to offer a more balanced view of the subject by discussing portraiture pairs, depictions of husbands and wives, and their function and place within Renaissance art and culture.²

When looking at male portraiture, it is universally agreed that its role was commemorative, and consciously directed to a future when the living would no longer be alive. According to Pope-Hennessy the evidence shows that, "these portraits were first and foremost social documents and only secondarily works of art... and it is likely that they sprang up in obedience to the precept that, as a complement to the family tree, a visual record should be kept of the members of the family."³ A clear example of this tradition is outlined by Leon Battista Alberti in On Painting where he states, "Painting possesses a truly divine power in that not only does it make the absent present (as they say of friendship), but it also represents the dead to the living many centuries later, so that they are recognized by spectators with pleasure and deep admiration for the artist... through painting, the faces of the dead go on living for a very long time."⁴

¹ The most complete discussions of Renaissance portraiture without making gender distinctions are J. Pope-Hennessy, The Portrait in the Renaissance (New York, 1966) and I. Campbell, Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th and 16th Century (New Haven, 1990). J. Lipman gives an extensive overview of Florentine profile portraits in "The Florentine Profile Portrait in the Quattrocento" Art Bulletin, 18 (1936), 54-102. ² One of the main problems which should be kept in mind when looking at Italian portraits is that the wastage in private portraits was extremely high. Moreover, many of the surviving portraits are unidentifiable as to the sitter, and therefore merely labeled Portrait of a Man, or Portrait of a Lady. How many of these portraits were linked to a pendant remains a question. See also Pope-Hennessy, 59, and R. Hatfield, "Five Early Renaissance Portraits." Art Bulletin (47, 1965), 316. ³ Pope-Hennessy, 37. ⁴ L.B. Alberti, On Painting, trans. Cecil Grayson (London, 1972), 60.
On women’s portraiture, however, a variety of opinions exist. These are based on how the writer perceives the position of women in Renaissance society, since what is seen in a portrait is the public face of an identity, molded by the ideals of the society to which it belongs. The old view, as outlined by Jacob Burckhardt, is that of women who “stood on a footing of perfect equality with men in the Italian Renaissance.” Since “the educated woman, no less than the man, strove naturally after a characteristic and complete individuality”, “the education given to women in the upper classes was essentially the same as that given to men.”

Needless to say, concepts of equality and of equal opportunities are generally no longer accepted by historians. This “patriarchal, bourgeois, nineteenth-century vision” stands in stark contrast with the feminist view of a society in which “women’s claims to civic recognition, familial regard, entrepreneurial success, and intellectual worth, although not impossible, were more limited than they were for men.” It is in this light that feminists have identified a practice of positioning women as objects of the male gaze, “ordered, chaste and decorous pieces of property.” Patricia Simons in particular, explains the use of the profile in female portraits as a strategy to “cordon off” women, whom she sees as the passive objects of an extreme patriarchy. Furthermore, based on a psychoanalytical interpretation of the female gaze, Simons claims that it was important that the women not gaze back at a male viewer. “The power of the female gaze… was feared or denied when it was likely to be engaged with the male look” since it could lead to impotence or castration. The profile convention in women’s portraiture is therefore explained as

---

7 P. Simons, “Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization”, 266. For this feminist view see also J. Kelly-Gadol, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” Becoming Visible: Women in European History (Boston, 1977), 139-64.
the “de-eroticised portrayal of women.” It meant that female eyes could “no longer threaten the seeing man with castration.”

More recent research, however, supports a view in which men possessed a “high degree of respect for, appreciation of, and trust in women,” even though they operate in a different world, concerned with marriage, the household, and childbirth, as women had an enormous effect on their children’s future. Moreover, this research cites evidence that women often made important decisions and transacted business independently of their men. The well-educated woman was seen as an asset, “fruitful and profitable unto her husband, for so shall his house be wisely governed, his children virtuously instructed, the affections less ensued and followed, so that they shall live in tranquillity and virtue.” In addition, “with increased education women no longer viewed themselves as burdens that their fathers must get rid of; nor did they conceive of themselves as the absolute property of their husbands. In the upper classes a voice in the choice of a spouse was often demanded by women.” Therefore, women’s portraiture can be seen not only as a celebration of the beauty of the sitter, but also of her very special social status, and as a visual demonstration of the respect accorded to women.

It is my opinion, based on evidence seen in portraiture pairs, depictions of husbands and wives, that the feminist aesthetic gaze theory has been over-interpreted. The basic function of portraiture was commemorative, and was used to portray social status in a culture where “authority, respect, and moral and political influence were gained through the visibility of those

13 Honig-Fine, 5.
signs which spoke of nobility and *magnificenza*, and therefore of virtue."¹⁴ The fact that men and women from the lower classes were not able to commission portraits of themselves is in itself indicative of status, and the right to be commemorated in independent profile portraits appears to have been a prerogative of noble persons.¹⁶ It is in the profile pose that the traits of beauty and fashion could be exposed and emphasized, and the sitter could be characterized through the attention paid to individual peculiarities. When the portrait pairs then were seen in their correct setting, husband and wife were gazing at each other.

Moreover, these portraits were mostly conceived for the semi-private setting of an aristocratic palace, or of a wealthy merchant’s town house, and were usually "covered by a shutter or by a veil, or kept in a chest and protected by a case or a bag to be brought out for special occasions. These relatively small portraits were painted to be seen only by a selected group of viewers – members of the family, their friends, their guests"¹⁷ and can hardly be considered as decorative objects free to be gazed upon by men or women who were not intimates of the pairs.

Based on surviving evidence, the history of the profile portrait to c. 1440 is believed to be a male history, and was closely related to portrait busts.¹⁸ Both were heavily influenced by antiquity, whose commemorative function was identical to that of Renaissance portraiture. Initially, portrait busts of marble or clay were more popular even than the painted portraits. Like those of the Roman Republican era, "they showed the individual who was portrayed plain and

---

¹⁶ See Hatfield, 321.
¹⁷ Tinagli, 60. See also Campbell, 66.
¹⁸ See Hatfield. It is thought that the profile genre began in Italy around the years 1425-50 with a cluster of five male portraits.
unaffected by any idealization."19 According to Simons, the first dated bust from the period is Piero de Medici's, the highly educated and intelligent eldest son of Cosimo and father of Lorenzo, executed by Mino da Fiesole in 1453 (figure 1)20. The bust was accompanied by one of his wife, Lucretia Tornabuoni (figure 2), one of the outstanding women of her time, and by one of his brother, Giovanni, by the same artist, a significant point not mentioned by Simons. All three were set on the architraves of doorways in the Palazzo Medici,22 which according to Pope-Hennessy, "sprang from a demand for self-perpetuation."23

Soon, however, the importance of the profile portrait surpassed that of the bust. Its utilization can be explained by the revival of the classical medal and the importation of conventions from the portrayal of courtly rulers, evoking the celebration of fame and individualism. When or for what occasion portraits were actually commissioned is not known, but according to James Lydecker, "it is not impossible that portraits were connected with weddings in some way."24 Moreover, without what Christiane Klapisch-Zuber calls 'publicity', the important alliance forged between two households or lineages by a marriage was not adequately established. A wedding procession, the vincolo vero, in which bride and trousseau pass from the father's house to the groom's, was needed to establish the marriage in the eyes of the community. This parade was the most public part of the entire marriage, since the wedding

---

20 The dating of the bust is based on an inscription on the back, Petrus Cos. S. aetatis anno XXXVII opus Mini sculptoris. As Piero was born in 1416, the bust must have been made in 1453.
22 The busts were mentioned in the inventory of the Medici palace of 1492 as being placed above the door of one of the rooms. According to W.R. Valentiner, Studies of Italian Renaissance Sculpture (New York, 1950), 76, the correctness of these reports speaks from the fact that neither bust had a base, as busts exhibited above doors did not need bases.
23 Pope-Hennessy, 74.
24 J.K. Lydecker from his unpublished doctoral dissertation "The Domestic Setting of the Arts in Renaissance Florence" (Johns Hopkins University, 1987), quoted in Tnaghi, 80.
party passed through public streets, and the bride’s visible presentation was required with an appropriately honorable degree of adornment.  

In many profile portraits, the age of the women, portrayed in early youth, along with the lavish presence of jewelry, fine costumes, and hair bound rather than free flowing, are all visible signs of her newly married state. Jewels and precious gowns were often part of the dowry or were wedding presents from the groom’s family, signifying both the husband’s rank and the woman’s honor. Heraldic devices often decorate the sitters’ clothes in the form of embroidery or jewelry, or were woven into the clothes to show the lineage to which the woman belongs – either that of her own family or her husband’s.

Display of wealth through detailed representation of jewelry and clothes was always a crucial sign of status, since sumptuary laws controlling not only women’s clothing, but also men’s, appear in the legislation of Italian towns from the thirteenth century on. Numerous anti-luxury decrees were issued to stop excesses, highlighting the differences between social ranks by outlining what ornaments could be worn in public. The members of the wealthiest families were allowed to use more expensive fabrics and jewels.

One of the earliest portrait pairs is the Portrait of a Woman with a Man at a Casement, attributed to Fra Filippo Lippi and dating from the mid 1430’s to the mid 1440’s (figure 3). The profiles of husband and wife are combined within the architectural space of an interior, complete with stone window moldings and a coffered ceiling. A detailed rendering of a landscape is seen

---


through a window in the background, which may show an actual view towards the walls of Florence. Its size is slightly larger than was customary for a portrait of this period.

The man’s profile, surmounted by a simple red berretta alla capitanesca, appears through a window on the left and barely intrudes into the space, which is dominated by the richly attired woman. She is dressed in a red fur-lined giornea over a dark cioppa with embroidered sleeves. Her headdress, called sella alla fiamminga or alla francese with an embroidered cap edged with pearls and a damask cappuccio, also embroidered and decorated with pearls, emphasizes her high forehead, a mark of elegance and female beauty during this period. She wears a string of pearls, symbol of purity and wealth, around her neck, a brooch, fermaglio, on her shoulder and another brooch, brocchetta da testa on her headdress, and her clasped hands are decorated with rings.27 On the cuff of the woman’s giornea, embroidered in gold and pearls, is a single word, LEALTA, loyalty, a declaration of her wisely duty and virtue. The composition of the work, by placing the woman within an enclosed space, further indicates the man as the socially superior of the two figures.28 The importance of lineage is indicated by the presence of an embroidered coat of arms placed on the window-sill under the man’s gesturing hand, stressing identification with his family. This coat of arms has been linked to the Scolari family.29

One of the most famous examples of portrait pairs are the portraits of the Count and Countess of Urbino, Battista Sforza (figure 4) and Federico da Montefeltro (figure 5), painted by

---

27 Detailed descriptions on clothing, are given in Birbari. For descriptions on jewelry, see J. Evans, A History of Jewellery: 1100-1870 (New York, 1953).
28 See J. Ruda, Fra Filippo Lippi: Life and Work with a Complete Catalogue (London, 1993), 385. The indication of social superiority of the man was linked to a tradition in English manuscripts of about 1400 in which the socially superior of two figures, in profile, gestures through a foreshortened window at left toward the second figure, who is enclosed by a window wall, a rear wall and the ceiling of a chamber. Later use of the window setting, also largely in manuscripts, reinforced the likelihood that the figure so framed was an authority figure.
29 The couple has tentatively been identified by Tinagli as Lorenzo di Ranieri Scolari and Angiola di Bernardo Sapiti, who married in 1436. See Tinagli, 53. However, since there is virtually no surviving information about the Scolari, and the only known wedding of a male Scolari is that of Lorenzo and Angiola, most scholars agree this event is too isolated to be used as a reference. See Ruda, 386.
Piero della Francesca, probably during the mid 1470’s. Battista Sforza married Federico da Montefeltro in 1460, when she was thirteen years old. She died in July 1472 at the age of twenty-five, a few months after the birth of her son, Guidobaldo, and “the probable function of the two portraits was to preserve for the couple’s son and heir, Guidobaldo, the memory of his parents.”

It is likely that Battista’s portrait was posthumous, which would confirm to posterity the importance of her place amongst the family, as she was the means through which the family name was transmitted to a new generation.

Although only in her early twenties, she was celebrated as a regent who acted wisely in Federico’s name during his absences from Urbino. She is dressed in a dark blue camora with a gold brocade sleeve. Her head is silhouetted against the light sky, with her light skin tones as a sign of beauty and rank. The idealized treatment of her face contrasts with the detailed representation of the hair and of the jewels. Her eyebrows have been plucked to form a fine, evenly arched line. Her hair, which was plucked from her forehead, then pulled back and coiled and woven with white bende at the sides of her head, covering the ears, was also well adapted to a clearly silhouetted profile in low relief. The pearls, the precious stones, the glitter of gold, and the precision of details in the representation of the brochetta da testa and of the bocchetta around Battista’s neck, invite the viewer to concentrate on these visual manifestations of the Countess’ high rank.

Federico in turn is shown in simple but expensive clothing, and the emphasis seems to be placed on his majestic bearing and dominating presence instead. According to Joanna Woods-Marsden, the prince’s head surrounded by light, air, and land, “was placed above the horizon and against the pale sky in such a way as to suggest Federico’s looming yet judicious power.”

---

31 For a description of Battista Sforza’s jewelry see Evans, 86.
addition, Federico’s aquiline profile was accentuated, which in the Renaissance symbolized a “regal spirit.”

The two separate panels are united by glance, by size, and by a continuous landscape background, a feature introduced in Italy by the portraits of the Flemish painter Hans Memling. This work, however, does not rely solely on coats of arms or emblems to identify the roles of the sitters within the family, to give them status, and to celebrate their virtues. It relies on the power of allegory as well, since the reverses of the panels are painted with the Trionfi of the Count and Countess, subjects often used for the decoration of marriage cassoni as well. Procesional chariots on rocky ledges set against panoramic landscape backgrounds represent the virtues of the couple. Battista sits on her chariot pulled by two unicorns. These mythical animals could only be captured by a chaste woman according to legend. She is shown dressed in red and gold reading a small book, and is accompanied by the allegorical representations of virtues. Charity and Faith sit at the front of the chariot, with Hope hidden behind them, while Chastity and Modesty stand behind the Countess. Federico, on the other hand, is shown crowned by Fortune, wearing armor, and accompanied by virtues appropriate to a soldier and ruler, Justice, Prudence, Fortitude and Temperance.

Battista is celebrated as the exemplary wife. The need for chastity was emphasized in every guide or treatise written for women during the Renaissance. Four other virtues, modesty, humility, constancy and especially temperance, necessary to preserve chastity, were much praised in women as well. Praised by some as the greatest of all virtues in a woman were piety and humanity. Learning was an important virtue too. A woman needed to be cultured, an

33 See Campbell, 120.
34 For cassoni see Witthoft, 43.
accomplishment for noblewoman and man alike, both to charm others and to develop the self. A woman’s education was directed towards the cultural and social functions of the court.\textsuperscript{35} While women were mainly assigned to the domestic sphere, which was perfectly natural and necessary because of her function in bearing and nourishing children, this did not mean that she was not understood to have the mental capacity to perform all the offices of men. Such was a necessity, since it was the wife who ruled the court in her husband’s absence.\textsuperscript{36}

There is no doubt, that the Urbino diptych served as inspiration for another portrait pair with a commemorative function. Giovanni Bentivoglio, tyrant of Bologna (figure 6), and his wife Ginevra Sforza (figure 7) were painted by Ercole Roberti shortly after the portraits of Federico and Battista, Ginevra’s brother-in-law and sister. The couple is shown facing each other, their profiles placed against dark curtains, drawn back to reveal a narrow view of Bologna.

In another pair of portraits, now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, attributed to Bonifacio Bembo, the painter has placed the profiles of Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, and of his wife Bianca Maria Visconti against plain blue backgrounds. The paintings date from around 1460, and emphasize the physical peculiarities and characteristics of the sitters, who are shown sumptuously dressed.\textsuperscript{37}

The portraits of Alessandro di Bernardo Gozzadini (figure 8) and his wife, Donna Canonici (figure 9) were painted by Lorenzo Costa in the late 15\textsuperscript{th} century. Costa placed the figures against a common background of architecture and landscape, and emphasized their commemorative function by the inscription on the architecture which reads VT SIT NoSTRA… FoRMa SVERsTES, So that our… images may survive. The commemorative function is further

\textsuperscript{35} On the education of women in the Renaissance, see Sachs, 14-19.
\textsuperscript{37} See Tunagl, 60
emphasized by including the family arms of both the Gozzadini and Canonici families to show their lineage. The background of Donna’s portrait includes a unicorn and ermine, symbols of chastity, and two rabbits, representing fecundity. She is seen holding a fruit, perhaps a peach, which commonly symbolizes marriage. Bernardo holds a spray of pinks between the fingers of his right hand, which often occurs in the context of marriage or engagement portraits as well.³⁸ His background includes a pelican feeding her young and a phoenix. These symbolize charity and resurrection respectively.

When looking at these early portraits, it becomes clear that they were often idealized and usually highly schematized, however, the artist did strive to record the actual face. According to Bruce Cole, they “are more like anthropomorphic coats of arms; they are images of the sitter’s face and clothes reduced to their most essential qualities.”³⁹ Hatfield sees in these schematized images a perfect harmony of relationships, an intelligible order, which “is the emanation of a rational will, of an intelligence.” This physical regularity, furthermore, would signify the sitter as “a ‘balanced’ person, in whom reason rules over emotion,”⁴⁰ characteristics praised in a noble individual in Renaissance society.⁴¹

The profile portrait continued for decades more or less unaltered until the second half of the fifteenth century. Then important changes were developed in terms of the pose of the sitter, the position of the figure in relation to the picture plane, and the medium used. The strict profile was abandoned in favor of the three-quarter pose, which gave more prominence to the person in general, and especially to their inner psychology. This change of position was first seen in male portraiture around 1450, whereas portraits of women were still predominantly restricted to the

³⁹ Cole, 219.
⁴⁰ Hatfield, 322.
⁴¹ On idealization in Renaissance portraiture see also Woods-Marsden, 209-216.
profile. The first extant portrait of a female in three-quarter pose dates from approximately 1470. This trend may be explained by the fact that "the traits of the ideal female beauty fashionable during the fifteenth century seem to have been developed for the purpose of being represented in a profile portrait."\textsuperscript{42} The richness of head jewels, the complexities of the head-dresses and of the twisted and plaited strands of hair placed well away from the face to expose and emphasize the profile, can be depicted most clearly in this view.

Moreover, it is not clear that the three-quarter pose was considered more desirable than the profile view by Renaissance women. The portrait of Isabella d'Este by Leonardo da Vinci (figure 10) from 1500, long after the transitional phase, presents an interesting case. In this work, Isabella, a woman of high rank and extremely influential as a cultivated lady with impeccable taste, had her body portrayed in three-quarter view, but has turned her head, maintaining the profile convention.

It is from the transitional phase that a paired portrait of a married couple by Sebastiano Mainardi, now in the Huntington Museum in San Marino, has survived. Here the husband (figure 11) is shown in three-quarter pose, whereas the wife (figure 12) is still depicted in the traditional profile pose. They are sumptuously dressed and united by a continuous landscape shown in the background.

A second pair (figure 13 and 14), also by Sebastiano Mainardi, in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin, is portrayed in an identical pose. The continuous background now shows a closer view in which a small town can be identified. This couple too is sumptuously dressed.

Based on the theory of the male gaze, and with these different poses in mind, Simons concluded that, "the male gaze continued its triumphal potency while the female gaze remained

\textsuperscript{42} Tinagli, 50.
repressed."\(^{43}\) One notices, however, that both males, instead of engaging directly with the viewer, have their eyes directed towards their wives. Therefore rather than speaking of a gaze with "triumphal potency," I believe this act emphasizes the close bond between husband and wife, and is visual evidence of the respect accorded to her.

It was not long before men and women were both being shown in three-quarter view. According to Pope-Hennessy, "the change that overtakes the profile portrait in the last decade of the fifteenth century reflects a change of a more general kind, the invention of the autonomous portrait."\(^{44}\) According to Cole, a new and more personal relation is achieved when the sitters begin to make eye contact "as the spectator begins to glimpse the personality and mood of the painted person."\(^{45}\) The autonomous portrait is believed to be created by Leonardo da Vinci, and it sprang from the belief that a portrait should portray what is described in his Notebooks as "the motions of the mind,"\(^{46}\) an idea clearly shown in his Mona Lisa (figure 15).

For Raphael the revelation of the Mona Lisa was of a portrait where the head and body had merged into one organic form. One can be certain that he studied it, since in the portrait of Maddalena Doni of about 1505, he imitates the pose of Mona Lisa’s body, the placing of the hands, and the direction of the glance. The companion portrait to Maddalena (figure 17) was of her husband Agnolo Doni (figure 16). There, according to Pope-Hennessy, the object of attention is not "the human phenomenon but the individual man, and his portrait is conceived as a psychologically truthful image based on conscious analysis of character."\(^{47}\)

It is in these portraits that the feminist theory of the male gaze no longer applies, since both male and female now gaze directly at us. The commemorative function of the Doni pair is

\(^{44}\) Pope-Hennessy, 101.
\(^{45}\) Cole, 220.
\(^{46}\) See Pope-Hennessy, 101.
still maintained, however. According to Vasari, these works could “be seen in the possession of his son Giovanbattista.” As in the older profile convention, social status is signaled by the clothing and jewels which seem to be emphasized by Raphael’s close observation of details.

Maddalena di Giovanni Strozzi married Agnolo Doni, a wealthy cloth merchant, in January 1504, at the age of 15. Agnolo was 30 at the time of the marriage, and was known as a patron of Raphael, Michelangelo and Fra Bartolomeo. Agnolo’s face is sculpted by heavy shadows and by highlights which give emphasis to the strength of his features, while the planes of Maddalena’s face, painted in a lighter skin tone, smoothly merge together, softened by fine shadows. Both are shown sitting high against a distant landscape. One can clearly see that Raphael has fused here the peculiarities of the sitter’s features with the idealization and ideals of femininity then popular. In comparison to Battista Sforza, Maddalena’s features are more regular, the eyebrows thicker and straighter, the forehead lower, the hair is not plucked, and it is treated as a simple mass, instead of being elaborately twisted and coiled with ribbons and jewels.49

Agnolo’s image shows a restrained awareness of his position and wealth, with simple but elegant and expensive clothing. It is the rendering of Maddalena’s fashionable gamurra and her jewels that emphasizes their joint status. The red-orange watered silk of the bodice and skirt, the dark blue velvet borders of the bodice, the blue damask of the sleeves, and the embroidered veil, demonstrate pride in the display of sumptuous fabrics used in the fashionable garments. The wide neckline emphasizes the large pendant, which hangs from her neck, and is not just a precious object, but speaks of the virtues proper to a young wife. The upper part of the gold setting is in the shape of a unicorn, symbol of chastity. The body of the mythical animal is set

47 Pope-Hennessy, 113.
with an emerald, a stone believed to possess healing qualities, and which was also linked to chastity. The sapphire was a symbol of purity, while the ruby was believed to bring prosperity and strength. The pearl signifies purity or virginity and was a customary gift to brides. While according to Lorne Campbell, “it is known that color symbolism was a subject which intrigued many,” it is not necessary to assume that “sitters had symbolic reasons for choosing the colors of the clothes in which they appeared in their portraits.”

Like the diptych of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino, the Doni diptych was planned as a double sided painting. The reverses of the panels show two scenes from Ovid’s Metamorphoses, the flood that overwhelms the earth and the story of the two survivors Deucalion and Pyrrha. Though these scenes were probably not painted by Raphael, they are closely contemporary with the two portraits. The diptych seems to have commemorated Maddalena and Agnolo’s marriage, and the paintings on the reverse therefore can be seen as a reference to the founding of a family.

Approximately one year later, in 1506, Raphael was commissioned to paint the portraits of Guidubaldo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino (figure 18), and his wife Elisabetta Gonzaga (figure 19). Once again, the commemorative function of portraiture becomes evident, since this commission took place the year Guidubaldo died. Here, Raphael has made an even bigger break with tradition by placing his sitters, again sumptuously dressed, in full frontal view, both gazing directly at us.

Another great portrait painter for families of the nobility and upper class from both Florence and elsewhere was Bronzino. Adhering to the earlier example of Raphael, Bronzino

---

49 On the ideals of femininity in the Renaissance, see Tinagli, 85-6.
50 Campbell, 132.
51 The scenes from the legend of Deucalion and Pyrrha express hopes for the fecundity of the newly weds by linking the mythical rebirth of mankind with the images of the new couple.
depicted Bartolomeo Panciatichi (figure 20), a rich merchant of Pistoian origin, and his wife Lucrezia de Gismondo Pucci (figure 21), whom he married in 1534, around 1543. Apparently much younger than her husband, she is shown gazing directly at the viewer, wearing a rich dress of red satin, placed brilliantly illuminated against a dark ground of architecture. She is depicted holding an open “Breviary of the Virgin” in her left hand and displaying her rich jewelry, including a long gold chain with enameled segments making up the French motto “Amour dure sans fin”, an allusion to the fidelity and affection of her husband. The use of the French language here is explained by the fact that Bartolomeo had spent his whole youth in Lyons, where the family had a house and warehouse that they used for trading, and had served as a page to Francis I.

Bartolomeo is shown at the age of about thirty-six to thirty-seven in an elegant black garment which Bronzino depicted with great detail. He is set against a backdrop of quite distinct buildings, from which the family coat of arms stands out to indicate the importance of lineage.

It is in the portraits of Cosimo I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany (figure 22), and his wife Eleonora of Toledo (figure 23) by Bronzino, both dated 1545, however, that the feminist male gaze theory seems to be most clearly contradicted. Here Cosimo I, a fearless and ruthless leader, is portrayed with his gaze directed away from the viewer, whereas Eleonora is shown almost fully frontal, gazing directly at the viewer.

The eighteen-year-old Cosimo I came to power in Florence in 1537, and laid the foundations of two centuries of stable Medicean government. In 1539, at age 22, he married the 17 year old Eleonora of Toledo, daughter of the Spanish viceroy of Naples, who brought to Florence the etiquette and formal manners of the Neapolitan court. Eleonora was instrumental in

---

the display of power and style necessary to Cosimo’s aims of creating an image and myths surrounding the figures of rulers. In order to secure his hold on the territory, first of Florence and then of Tuscany, and to turn his title into a hereditary one, he needed images of strength, courage and military value for himself, and of refinement, elegance and grace for his wife.

In order to achieve these images, patronage in painting was diverted to Bronzino, and it is through his eyes that the Medicean court is now visualized. His portrait of Eleonora shows the Duchess in three-quarter length, sitting against what at first seems a blue background, but is in fact a brilliant sky over a distant landscape. She is placed in front of a balustrade to give her eminence. From this position she is presented before a panoramic view. However, according to Campbell, “when Bronzino painted his portrait of Eleonora of Toledo, the arrangement was becoming dated: here Bronzino may have been almost parodying an archaic and expensive convention.”

The sky pales around her head, forming a halo of light. She has her arm around the shoulders of one of her sons, tentatively identified as Giovanni, born in 1543, but sometimes also identified as her eldest son and heir to the title Francesco, born in 1541. The portrait can therefore be seen as a dynastic portrait which celebrates not only her role as Duchess, but also her role as the mother of the future Duke, the heir on which Cosimo’s hopes for a new Medici dynasty were founded.

Eleonora’s hair is pulled back and held by a gold net decorated with pearls. The necklaces of large pearls reflect the light and complement her smooth skin tones, painted with no visible brushmarks. The use of wood as a support rather than canvas contributes to produce this enamel-like surface. Her elongated left hand points towards a pearl tassel which is part of a

---

34 Campbell, 120.
heavy gold belt studded with precious stones, an icon of power and elegance. The most striking
element of the portrait, however, is the elaborate gown, which seems to dominate the painting.
Bronzino, with much attention to detail, has rendered the precious cream brocade with black cut
velvet and gold bouclé floral motifs. The sleeves are bordered with gold cord and decorated with
gold buttons. Looking at this work, it is easy to understand why Vasari would repeatedly refer to
the realism of Bronzino’s portraits and why Pope-Hennessy stated that “Bronzino was certainly
an incredibly attentive painter of inanimate detail.”

The type of gown represented in this portrait would only have been worn when attending
special occasions, like court ceremonies for important guests, where a display of wealth and taste
was crucial in the power game between rulers. In addition, it is a magnificent example of the best
Florentine production of exclusive luxury textiles, which could have helped to publicize the
quality of work produced by Florentine craftsmen. The velvet dress, furthermore, corresponds
exactly with the dress in which the Duchess was clad after death.

A more traditional pose is seen once again in a portrait pair of c. 1552 by Paolo
Veronese, portraying Giuseppe Da Porto with his son Adriano (figure 25), and his wife, Livia Da
Porto Thiene, with their daughter Porzia (figure 24), where the wife is seen gazing at her
husband. However, Livia’s importance becomes evident through its unusual format. Full-length
portraits of men had been a Brescian specialty for a quarter-century, and it is probable that
Veronese was familiar with these examples by 1550. However, it was unusual to see such a

55 Pope-Hennessy, 183.
56 For the Florentine cloth industry see G. Brucker, Renaissance Florence (New York, 1969) 52-68.
57 Mentioned by Pope-Hennessy, 321, n. 27. The tomb of Eleonora of Toledo was opened in 1857. For this see G.B.
grand format used for a woman’s portrait, and according to W.R. Rearick, Veronese after this “did not again assay a full-length portrait of a standing woman.”

Livia Thiene, daughter of one of Vicenza’s most distinguished families, married Giuseppe Da Porto, a knight of the Holy Roman Empire and one of the richest and most influential men in Vicenza, in 1545. By 1550 they had two children, Adriano, about five years old and Porzia, four. These pendant portraits by Veronese were probably commissioned for Giuseppe’s new palace commissioned from Andrea Palladio. The austere, undecorated setting would be in harmony with the interior of the palace, and according to Rearick, “it seems likely that the portraits were intended to assume an illusionistic role, each standing in a doorlike niche with an intervening window, since the light enters the paintings from a source between them.”

It is evident that Livia was intended to be placed on the left, as she gazes toward her husband at right. Little Adriano reverses that direction to look toward his sister.

Based on the evidence brought forward in this research, it becomes clear that in Renaissance society, a woman was not merely seen as “an object of exchange when she became a vehicle for display at the time of her marriage.” She was not merely an object of physical beauty meant to be the object of a gaze. More was expected of a woman, even though her priorities and values were different from what is seen in today’s society. In a world in which successive outbreaks of the plague from 1348 onwards in some cases reduced populations to less than half their original size, and could wipe out entire families, marriage and births were seen as extremely important, a process in which women played a vital part. It was Alberti who

58 However, in 1552, other pendant full-length images of married couples were produced in Verona, such as Domenico Brusasorzi’s Francesco Franceschini and his wife.
59 Rearick, 40.
62 On the role of women and the importance of marriage, see also J. Bryce, “Women’s Experience in Renaissance Florence: Some Recent Research.” Association of Teachers of Italian Journal (Spring, 1989), 3-16.
explained that “beauty in a woman must be judged not only by the charm and refinement of her face, but still more by the grace of her person,” and “In a bride... a man must first seek beauty of mind, that is, good conduct and virtue.”

It becomes evident that portrait painting during the Renaissance in form evolved from the profile pose to the three-quarter or occasionally even frontal view, while it continued to be considered as the means through which the living remembered the dead. Based on the evidence brought forward in this research, it is doubtful that the profile pose was used to shield the viewing man from the feared “power of the female gaze” in order to shield him from impotence or castration. Rather, the profile view was probably used since this pose most clearly emphasizes the traits of beauty and fashion, and the sitter could be easily characterized through the attention paid to his or her individual peculiarities. The couples portrayed in profile view, based on Meyer Schapiro’s theory, should be seen as detached from the viewer, “belonging with the body in action in a space shared with other profiles on the surface of the image,” or in this case with their pendants. Schapiro compares this with the grammatical form of the third person, “the impersonal ‘he’ or ‘she’ with its concordantly inflected verb.” When the profile view is abandoned, for a three-quarter or frontal view, the face, according to Schapiro, “is credited with intentness, a latent or potential glance directed to the observer” and corresponds to the role of ‘I’ in speech, with its complementary ‘you’. It is these images that seem to exist “both for us and for itself in a space virtually continuous with our own.”

---

List of Illustrations


Figure 2 – Mino da Fiesole: Marble Bust of Lucretia Tornabuoni, 1454, Campo Santo, Pisa. Reproduced in Valentiner, 75.


Figure 4 – Piero della Francesca: Portrait of Battista Sforza, Duchess of Urbino, mid 1470’s, panel, 47 x 66 cm, Uffizi, Florence. Reproduced in Caneva, Caterina et al. The Uffizi: Guide to the Collections and Catalogue of all Paintings. Boston: Sandak, 1992, 57.

Figure 5 – Piero della Francesca: Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, mid 1470’s, panel, 47 x 66 cm, Uffizi, Florence. Reproduced in Caneva, 57.


Figure 7 – Ercole Roberti: Portrait of Ginevra Bentivoglio, c. 1473, wood, 21 1/8 x 15 ¼”, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Reproduced in Shapley, fig. 233.


Figure 9 – Lorenzo Costa: Portrait of Donna Canonici, c. 1490, tempera on wood, 20 x 14 ½”, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Reproduced in Hibbard, 246.


Figure 12 – Sebastiano Mainardi: Portrait of a Young Woman, Late 15th Century, panel, 18 x 13", The Huntington Art Collection, San Marino. Reproduced in Wark, 92.


Figure 14 – Sebastiano Mainardi: Portrait of a Lady, Late 15th Century, panel, Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin. Reproduced in Marle, 213.


Figure 16 – Raphael: Portrait of Angelo Doni, c. 1505, panel, 63 x 45 cm, Palazzo Pitti, Florence. Reproduced in Pope-Hennessy, 113.

Figure 17 – Raphael: Portrait of Maddalena Doni, c. 1505, panel, 63 x 45 cm, Palazzo Pitti, Florence. Reproduced in Pope-Hennessy, 113.

Figure 18 – Raphael: Portrait of Guidubaldo da Montefeltro, c. 1506/8, tempera on wood, 70.5 x 49.9 cm, Uffizi, Florence. Reproduced in Caneva, 111.

Figure 19 – Raphael: Portrait of Elisabetta Gonzaga, c. 1502/3, tempera on wood, 52.5 x 37.3 cm, Uffizi, Florence. Reproduced in Caneva, 111.


Figure 21 - Agnolo Bronzino: Portrait of Lucrezia de Gismondo Pucci, c. 1543, 102 x 85 cm, Uffizi, Florence. Reproduced in Cecchi, 57.

Figure 22 - Agnolo Bronzino: Portrait of Cosimo I de’ Medici, c. 1545, panel, 57 x 71 cm, Uffizi, Florence. Reproduced in Caneva, 88.

Figure 23 – Agnolo Bronzino: Portrait of Eleonora of Toledo with her son, c. 1545, panel, 115 x 96 cm, Uffizi, Florence. Reproduced in Caneva, 88.


Figure 25 – Paolo Veronese: Portrait of Giuseppe Da Porto with Adriano, c. 1552, oil on canvas, 208 x 129 cm, Palazzo Pitti, Florence. Reproduced in Rearick, 39.
Figure 1 - Mino da Fiesole: Marble Bust of Piero de' Medici, 1453.

Figure 2 - Mino da Fiesole: Marble Bust of Lucretia Tornabuoni, 1454.

Figure 3 - Fra Filippo Lippi: Portrait of a Man and a Woman at a Casement, c. 1435-45.
Figure 4 - Piero della Francesca: Portrait of Battista Sforza, c. 1470.

Figure 5 - Piero della Francesca: Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro, c. 1470.

Figure 6 - Ercole Roberti: Portrait of Giovanni II Bentivoglio, c. 1473.

Figure 7 - Ercole Roberti: Portrait of Ginevra Sforza, c. 1473.
Figure 8 - Lorenzo Costa: Portrait of Alessandro di Bernardo Gozzadini, c. 1490.

Figure 9 - Lorenzo Costa: Portrait of Donna Canonici, c. 1490.

Figure 10 - Leonardo da Vinci: Portrait of Isabella d’Este, c. 1500.
Figure 11 - Sebastiano Mainardi: Portrait of a Young Man, Late 15th Century.

Figure 12 - Sebastiano Mainardi: Portrait of a Young Woman, Late 15th Century.

Figure 13 - Sebastiano Mainardi: Portrait of a Man, Late 15th Century.

Figure 14 - Sebastiano Mainardi: Portrait of a Woman, Late 15th Century.
Figure 15 - Leonardo da Vinci: Mona Lisa, c. 1503.

Figure 16 - Raphael: Portrait of Angelo Doni, c. 1505.

Figure 17 - Raphael: Portrait of Madallena Doni, c. 1505.
Figure 18 - Raphael: Portrait of Guidabaldo da Montefeltro, c. 1506.

Figure 19 - Raphael: Portrait of Elisabetta Gonzaga, c. 1504-6.

Figure 20 - Bronzino: Portrait of Bartolomeo Panciatichi, c. 1543.

Figure 21 - Bronzino: Portrait of Lucrezia de Gismondo Pucci, c. 1543.
Figure 22 - Bronzino: Portrait of Cosimo I, 1545.

Figure 23 - Bronzino: Portrait of Eleonora of Toledo with her son, 1545.

Figure 24 - Paolo Veronese: Portrait of Livia Da Porto Thiene with Porzia, c. 1552.

Figure 25 - Paolo Veronese: Portrait of Giuseppe Da Porto with Adriano, c. 1552.
Bibliography


---. “Women in Frames: the Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture.” *History Workshop Journal*. (Spring 1988), 4-30.


