

Leonardo and the Idealized Portrait in Milan

David Alan Brown

In the Renaissance Milan was a colossus whose shadow fell over the smaller states of Italy. By the time of Leonardo's arrival in the city about 1482, power had been consolidated in the hands of Ludovico Sforza, known as «Il Moro». Under Ludovico the Sforza court became the most sumptuous in Europe, and the needs of the court for portraiture must have been great. Although portrait painting was to be counted among his duties as ducal artist and engineer, only two certain portraits by Leonardo's hand remain from this period; these are not of Ludovico and his family, as we might expect, but of one of the duke's mistresses and of a musician. The two paintings, representing talented and attractive individuals, are not profile portraits such as were preferred by the court. Because his sitters were not rulers or distinguished personages, Leonardo evidently felt free to depict them in a more inventive manner. His innovations must be seen against a background of profile paintings of high-ranking sitters, in which other artists, Ambrogio de Predis, for instance, or Bernardino de' Conti, excelled. The literature on Milanese portraiture is preoccupied with preliminary questions of attribution and identification of the sitter. Here we are concerned with the impact of Leonardo's ideas about portraiture on the work of his pupils and followers.

¹ The case for identifying the sitter as Cecilia Gallerani, first made by Antoniewicz in 1900, is stated clearly by CLARK, *Leonardo da Vinci. An Account on his Development as an Artist*, Penguin ed., Harmondsworth 1967, 53-55.

² A dating of ca. 1490, based on the sitter's costume (in *Biuletyn historii sztuki*, vol. XXXI, n. 1, 1969, 3-40), as opposed to that customarily advanced of ca. 1485, is still not too late for the portrait to have represented Cecilia when she was younger, as she claimed in 1498. In April of that year Isabella d'Este had written to Cecilia Gallerani, asking her to send her portrait by Leonardo to Mantua so that she might compare it with examples by Bellini (L. BELTRAMI, *Documenti e memorie riguardanti la vita e le opere di Leonardo da Vinci*, Milan 1919, n. 88). Though reluctant because it no longer resembled her (BELTRAMI, 1919, n. 89), Cecilia complied, and by the following month the picture was gratefully returned (in

The *Lady with the Ermine* (Fig. 1) in the National Museum in Cracow is now unanimously accepted as a work by Leonardo. The better preserved parts of this badly damaged and repainted panel, namely, the lady's face and the animal, are indeed worthy of the master. And no other painter could be responsible for the extraordinary invention that the painting represents. The sitter is generally identified as Cecilia Gallerani, Ludovico's mistress after 1481, whose portrait by Leonardo was praised in a sonnet by the court poet Bellincioni; it was also the subject of an exchange of correspondence between the lady and Isabella d'Este in 1498. We may be given a clue to the sitter's identity in the ermine, which was an emblem of the duke, her lover, and possibly also a play on the Greek word for the animal, which is similar to Cecilia's surname¹. The pose of the lady, turning to look over her shoulder, unprecedented as it is in portraiture, may have been inspired by the *contrapposto* of the angel in the first version of the *Virgin of the Rocks*, completed about 1485. And her fashionable Spanish mode of dress is known to have been introduced in Milan by Isabella d'Aragona in 1489. Bellincioni, who celebrated Leonardo's picture, died in 1492. And in the letter to Isabella d'Este of 1498, already mentioned, Cecilia claimed that the portrait no longer resembled her, having been painted

L'Arte, 1969, 189-91). Having admired Leonardo's portrait, Isabella ordered one of herself from him that was never finished. It does not seem to have been noticed that a portrait of the Marchesa by Lorenzo Costa at Hampton Court (R. VARESE, *Lorenzo Costa*, Milan 1967, n. 47, 70, and fig. 31a [cropped]) is remarkably similar to the *Lady with the Ermine*. Costa's sitter is also shown in three-quarter view with her right hand resting on an animal's back. Isabella, who used to provide guidance for artists working for her, may have presented Costa with a record of the Milanese portrait as a model. In the Hampton Court picture, most likely the portrait by Costa of 1508 that Isabella is known to have particularly liked, she obtained the Leonardesque image of herself that she failed to get from Leonardo. The connection between the Hampton Court and the Cracow portraits tends to support the identification of the sitter in the latter as Cecilia Gallerani.

when she was immature. All of this evidence points to a date for the picture of around 1490². Whether or not the subject is Cecilia Gallerani, the portrait was certainly painted by Leonardo during his first Milanese period. It is enough for our purposes that it preceded the *Mona Lisa*.

Despite affinities with the ideal figure of the angel in the *Virgin of the Rocks*, Leonardo's *Lady with the Ermine* is essentially realistic. Before the background was repainted, the half-length figure stood in a space closed at the back by a wall with a window or door. The carefully observed twisting movement of the ermine extends to the lady herself: her head and body turn in a spiral, whose effect is diminished by the present condition of the panel. This is what we might call a character portrait, as Leonardo sought to grasp the sitter's nature in the revealing liveliness of her pose and features. Note the way the lady's hand rests caressingly on the back of the ermine.

The poet Bellincioni ventured to characterize Cecilia as «seeming to listen but not to speak». The important issue here is not what particular emotions the lady may seem to exhibit but the fact that she appears to have an inner life which engages the viewer's curiosity and prompts him to inquire into her nature as an individual. John Pope-Hennessy has rightly connected this work with an artistic revolution³. What Leonardo called the «motions of the mind» were now to be given expression not only in subject painting but also in portraiture. It is clear that the traditional Lombard profile portrait was not equipped to deal with such a task. How artists in Leonardo's circle attempted to incorporate his innovations in their own work we shall investigate presently.

The difficulty with the realistic portrait was that the painting remained the same while the sitter grew older. This is exactly the point made by Cecilia Gallerani. Writing to Isabella d'Este, who had asked to see the Leonardo portrait, on April 29, 1498, Cecilia was unwilling to send it, she said, as it no longer resembled her, not through any shortcoming of the master but because it was done

when she was immature and her appearance had changed⁴. A portrait like the *Lady with the Ermine* depicted the sitter at a certain moment or age. To remain valid as a likeness, therefore, the portrait would have to capture not only the sitter's appearance, which would be eroded by time, but also his or her unchanging character.

Even in the realistic portrait a certain degree of improvement is often present as a result of the artist's wish or obligation to flatter the sitter. The process cannot go too far, however, or the fundamental aim of portraiture — likeness — would be negated. Leonardo's *Portrait of a Lady* in the Louvre (Fig. 2), traditionally identified as *Mona Lisa*, cannot be explained in terms of mere flattery⁵. What is the relation between the lady herself and her image in the painting? Lisa Gherardini was the wife of Francesco del Giocondo, a merchant, who seems to have ordered the portrait of his wife after Leonardo's return to Florence in 1500. Begun by the artist between 1503 and 1506, the picture was finished, perhaps, during his second residence in Milan. Our concern is not with the style of the painting, as it relates to Leonardo's other works, but rather with the concept of portraiture that the picture embodies. According to Freud's famous psychoanalytical essay of 1910, in *Mona Lisa* Leonardo encountered a woman who recalled his mother, from whom he had been separated in childhood. In other words, for Freud the lady herself actually resembled her image in the portrait. This seems improbable, however, for Leonardo, to characterize his sitter, lent her the lovely female type and expression that he had already used for his ideal figures of saints and Madonnas⁶.

In a lecture on *Mona Lisa* the late Lord Clark argued that Leonardo had first portrayed the sitter realistically⁷. The artist's original conception in the form of a cartoon was copied, Clark claimed, in Raphael's well-known drawing resembling *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre. The drawing dates from the younger artist's Florentine period, about 1506⁸. Only later, according to Clark, did Leonardo take up the painting now in the Louvre, changing the costu-

³ J. POPE-HENNESSY, *The Portrait in the Renaissance* (A. W. Mellon Lectures, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1963), New York 1966, 101-105.

⁴ The term used was «età si imperfecta» (BELTRAMI, 1919, n. 89). According to Maria Teresa Binaghi Olivari, this would exclude identifying the sitter of the *Lady with the Ermine* of about 1490 as Cecilia Gallerani, then about twenty five years old («La moda a Milano al tempo di Ludovico il Moro», in *Milano nell'età di Ludovico il Moro*, vol. II, Milano 1983, 640-644).

⁵ The identity of the sitter is somewhat in doubt. It has frequently been hypothesized that she was a high-born lady like Isabella d'Este or Costanza d'Avalos. The identification as *Mona Lisa* is due to Vasari. See D. A. BROWN (with K. OBERHUBER), «Leonardo and Raphael in Rome», in *Essays*

Presented to Myron P. Gilmore, ed. Sergio Bertelli and Gloria Ramakus, vol. II, Florence 1978, 27-29.

⁶ Meyer Schapiro demonstrated that the smile was a convention in Leonardo's art (M. SCHAPIRO, «Leonardo and Freud: an Art-Historical Study», in *Renaissance Essays*, ed. Paul O. Kristeller and Philip P. Wiener, New York 1968, 303-36, originally published in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. XVII, n. 4, 1954).

⁷ K. CLARK, «*Mona Lisa*», in *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. CXV, n. 840, March 1973, 144-50.

⁸ About the drawing see Francois Viatte in R. BACOU, *Great Drawings of the Louvre Museum. The Italian Drawings*, New York 1968, n. 26.

me and adding the landscape. In particular, he re-created Lisa's face to agree with that of a second mysterious unidentified lady. Likewise, Martin Kemp in a recent Leonardo monograph has also proposed that Leonardo's first conception was for a more or less straightforward likeness, and that the idealized image in the finished painting evolved only later or gradually⁹. I believe it can be demonstrated, however, that the portrait is not idealized in the sense of a gradual metamorphosis of the sitter's physical appearance. Rather, as a parody of *Mona Lisa* suggests, an ideal type seems to have been imposed on the features of an individual. As E. H. Gombrich has stated, the painting «passes as a portrait and is at the same time a type that recurs in Leonardo's vocabulary, a type, we may assume, applied to an individual»¹⁰. This process is likely to have occurred at the design stage of the picture.

The explanations for *Mona Lisa*'s strange appearance, cited previously, fail to account for the fact that, as an idealized portrait, the painting is not isolated but belongs to a series of experiments begun earlier. Precedents in the work of Leonardo's Milanese circle during the years before the creation of *Mona Lisa* suggest that that painting was conceived and begun as an image which never corresponded to the way the sitter looked in life. One of the Milanese precedents for *Mona Lisa* is the *Girl with Cherries* (Fig. 3), plausibly attributed to Ambrogio de Predis, in the Metropolitan Museum in New York¹¹. Leonardo's collaborator in these years, Predis obviously took as a model the mistress portrait in Cracow. The pupil ignored the *contrapposto* of his source, however, and substituted a basket of fruit as a symbolic reference to the sitter. The ivy crown she wears, signifying fertility, and the cherries which she offers to her lover give the portrait a distinctly erotic flavor missing in the Leonardo prototype.

Our main concern is with the lady's head. Here, in place of Cecilia's fashionable coiffure and discreet expression, we find long undulating curls

and an alluring smile. The lady, whoever she was, has been made to resemble a Leonardesque type. Though there is obviously an enormous gulf between the two works, the basic concept underlying *Mona Lisa* is already present in the pupil's picture, dating from the previous decade. This extraordinary concept, in which an individual is made to conform to a type, can hardly be credited to an unoriginal imitator of the master like Predis. It must reflect Leonardo's own ideas about portraiture, as they were developing beyond the realism of the *Lady with the Ermine*. If in the Cracow portrait the sitter's external aspect reflects her inner nature, Predis's portrait, based on Leonardo's rapidly changing ideas, scarcely seems a likeness at all, as it records neither the lady's actual appearance nor her individual character. Rather, it portrays her according to a particular concept of beauty and in a specific role.

I have spoken of the *Girl with Cherries* as a portrait, and yet how can we be sure that it represents an individual and not a type? The notorious question of the «donne» of Giorgione and Titian — are they portraits or not? — thus arises a decade or so earlier in Leonardo's circle in Milan¹². To reach some conclusions in this lecture, I have chosen to focus on two Leonardesque portraits in which we know from other depictions what the sitters actually looked like. One is Boltraffio's *Portrait of Girolamo Casio* (Fig. 9) at Chatsworth, and the other is an anonymous drawing (Fig 15) of the scientist Petrus Bonus Advogarius, found in a manuscript. In this way, there is the possibility of comparing an idealized and an ostensibly realistic image of the same person. The comparisons demonstrate in each case that the artist deviated from the sitter's real appearance in order to show him with the characteristics of Leonardo's types. Relevant to our two idealized portraits are the master's contrasted profiles of youth and age, as we find them in a red chalk drawing (Fig 4), dating from the 1490's, in the Uffizi¹³. This sheet, one of the most important for understanding Leonardo's

⁹ M. KEMP, *Leonardo da Vinci. The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1981, 263-70.

¹⁰ E.H. GOMBRICH, «The Grotesque Heads», in *The Heritage of Apelles. Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, Oxford 1976, 69-70 (reprinted from *Leonardo. Saggi e Richerche*, ed. Achille Marazza, Rome 1954).

¹¹ The *Lady with the Ermine* was compared with the *Girl with Cherries* by A. SCHIAPARELLI, *Leonardo Ritrattista*, Milan 1921, 105-106. Schiaparelli attributed the latter painting, as did Malaguzzi Valeri and Venturi before him, incorrectly to Boltraffio. Though hesitantly ascribed by Wilhelm Suida on the basis of a photograph to Solaro (W. SUIDA, *Leonardo und sein Kreis*, Munich 1929, 194; 292), the portrait is more likely by an artist of an earlier generation like Predis, to whom it was tentatively given by B. BERENSON, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance*. Central Italian

and North Italian Schools, vol. I, London 1968, 108. Berenson elsewhere refers to the «gypsy prettiness» of the woman (B. BERENSON, *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, London 1952, 183).

¹² As F. David Martin has noted, in «idealized portraiture the style of the artist, reflecting his artistic conceptions, intervenes like a refracting glass and prevents our seeing the model as he or she really was» (F.D. MARTIN, «On Portraiture: Some Distinctions», in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. XX, n. 1, Fall 1961, 69 [61-72]). Idealized portraits are, of course, frequently encountered in ancient art in the case of Greek heroes or Roman emperors. In Renaissance Florence this kind of portraiture seems to arise first in connection with Simonetta Vespucci, Giuliano de' Medici's *innamorata*, who was immortalized after her death in pictures by Botticelli and his circle. For portraits stressing the sitters' qualities of feminine grace and virile force see A. CHA-

physiognomical investigations, features a beautiful curly-headed youth, opposed to a bald coarse-featured old man. The relation between the figures, both spatial and psychological, is ambiguous.

Before considering how such types affected portraiture, I want to discuss briefly the second of the two certain portraits which Leonardo himself created in Milan: the *Musician* (Fig 5) in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Though the attribution of this small panel was controversial in the past, it is now regarded, correctly in my opinion, as a work by Leonardo^{13bis}. The title is an admission that the sitter has not yet been firmly identified. We are given a clue to his identity, however, in the sheet of music he holds, unfortunately not clearly legible today. Whoever he is, the figure represented is a musician, not Ludovico Sforza, as was once fancifully supposed. The painting, of which only the face and part of the hair are finished, is in very good condition. It is datable several years after the *Lady with the Ermine*¹⁴. The way the planes of the head seem to be bound together internally indicates a knowledge of anatomy that Leonardo gained while working on the drawings of skulls of about 1490 at Windsor Castle¹⁵. And the emphatic modeling of the face suggests the second version of the *Virgin of the Rocks*, which was begun in the latter half of the 1490's¹⁶.

The pose of the musician, bust-length in three-quarter view, is simpler than that of the *Lady with the Ermine*, and the impact of the head is stronger, partly because the space is reduced. Likewise, the careful observation of light tends to focus attention on the face. The greater plastic force of the figure accompanies a greater psychological penetration: the sitter seems astonishingly close. It has been suggested that Leonardo was here responding to the work of Antonello da Messina¹⁷. The model in question may have been a portrait by the Sicilian painter which is known to have been admired some years earlier in Milan. Soon after the death of the court portratitist Zanetto Bugato in 1476, Galeazzo Maria Sforza wrote to his ambas-

sador in Venice, asking him to send Antonello to Milan. We do not know whether Antonello went there or not, but if he did, he remained only a few months, as he was already back in Messina later that same year. Having seen a portrait by Antonello, the duke wanted him to become court painter. The work in question has not been identified, but we can deduce its general appearance from Antonello's so-called *Condottiere* (Fig 6) in the Louvre¹⁸. From this painting, in the artist's typical three-quarter view and bust-length format, we can also gain some idea about the most advanced taste in portraiture at the Milanese court before Leonardo's arrival. In his letter to Venice, Galeazzo Maria praised the «truthfulness» of Zanetto's work, and Antonello's painting must have pleased the duke even more for its incomparable objectivity and painstaking attention to detail. Antonello's works also betray a psychological insight into character previously unknown in Italian portraiture. The planes of the face, set in relief by the light, and the bright eyes give an animated expression to what might otherwise be only a careful rendering of appearances. It may be that the Milanese ruler, like the Venetians, was quick to appreciate not only Antonello's skill but also his unrivaled ability to characterize his sitters. Although no external evidence supports the view that Leonardo's *Musician* was influenced by Antonello, the comparison of these two works reveals a similar concentration on the expressive features of the eyes and mouth. Like Antonello, Leonardo emphasized the uniqueness of his sitter.

Despite the powerful realism of the features, however, other aspects of Leonardo's portrait have an ideal character. They recur elsewhere in his work. The most notable difference between the *Musician* and its possible Antonello models is that the sitter's eyes do not scrutinize the viewer. Failing to make psychological contact, Leonardo's figure is self-sufficient, like the angel, absorbed in his own emotions, in the second version of the *Virgin of the Rocks*¹⁹. The musician's long, curly hair, moreover,

STEL, *Art et Humanisme à Florence au Temps de Laurent le Magnifique*, Paris 1959, 314-16.

¹³ Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Uffizi, n. 423E. See *Mostra di Disegni Manoscritti e Documenti*, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence 1952, cat. n. 49.

^{13bis} I believe that the painting can be attributed in its entirety to Leonardo, despite the doubts recently expressed by Luisa Cogliati Arano in *Leonardo all'Ambrosiana*, Milan, 1982, pp. 88-90 (with bibliography). Numerous attempts have been made to identify the sitter, as Franchino Gaffurio or Josquin des Prez, among others. A secure identification would help to determine the precise nature of the portrait, whether realistic or idealized, if other likenesses of the same sitter were available for comparison.

¹⁴ The *Musician* inspired a host of imitations, one of which, the *Bartolomeo Archinto*, attributed to Predis, in the London

National Gallery, is dated 1494.

¹⁵ About the skull drawings see *Leonardo da Vinci. Anatomical Drawings from the Royal Collection, Windsor Castle*, Exhibition Catalogue, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence 1979, cat. nn. 8A-9A, 46-47.

¹⁶ About the date of origin of the altarpiece see D.A. BROWN, «The London *Madonna of the Rocks* in Light of Two Milanese Adaptations», in *Collaboration in Italian Renaissance Art*, ed. Wendy Stedman Sheard and John T. Paoletti, New Haven - London 1978, 167-77.

¹⁷ See SCHIAPARELLI, 1921, 98-100; and CLARK, 1967, 55 note.

¹⁸ The portrait is dated 1475 (*Antonello da Messina* [Exhibition Catalogue, Museo Regionale, Messina], Rome 1982, cat. n. 17, 118).

¹⁹ See BROWN, in *Collaboration*, 1978, 170.



1. Leonardo da Vinci, Lady with the Ermine, Czartoryski Collection, National Museum, Warsaw.



3. Ambrogio de' Predis, Girl with Cherries, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



2. Leonardo da Vinci, Monna Lisa, Musée du Louvre, Paris.



4. Leonardo da Vinci, Profiles of a Youth and an Old Man, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Uffizi, Florence.



5. Leonardo da Vinci, Portrait of a Musician, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan.



6. Antonello da Messina, Portrait of a Man, Musée du Louvre, Paris.



7. Leonardo pupil, Profile of a Youth, Cabinet des Dessins, Musée du Louvre, Paris.



8. Leonardo da Vinci, Study for Saint James the Greater in the Last Supper, Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Windsor Castle.

is a kind of Leonardo signature. As is well-known, the artist compared wavy hair to the movement of water²⁰; and, according to Vasari, he took much delight in the curls of Salai, the youth who came to serve him as an apprentice in 1490²¹. Significantly, it is the musician's golden curls, of special interest to Leonardo, which are the most finished part of the picture. Similar undulating curls are found in a pen and ink drawing of the profile of a youth (Fig. 7) by a Leonardo pupil in the Louvre²². The youth in this drawing resembles Leonardo's Uffizi profile, which we have already seen, not only in type but also in the fact that he opposes the face of an angry old man. The subject of the Louvre drawing is so close to the Ambrosiana portrait, in fact, that more than one writer considered it a preparatory study²³. The painted image of an artistic young man is not precisely descriptive, therefore, but stands somewhere between the realistic portraits of Antonello and the imaginary heads drawn by Leonardo and his pupils. The painting offers only an incomplete demonstration of the concept of the idealized portrait that we are about to examine in the work of two other artists.

In the 1490's Leonardo's portraiture was evidently veering from the realism of the *Lady with the Ermine* toward a somewhat more idealized portrayal of the subject. It may not be accidental that the *Musician* seems to have originated about the time the artist began work on the *Last Supper*. To judge from his notes, he used well-known personages as models for the figures in the mural. «Alessandro Carissimo da Parma per le mani di Cristo» and «Cristo, giovan conte quello del Cardinale del Mortaro», he wrote²⁴. Antonio de Beatis, who visited the refectory not long after the painting was completed, is specific on this point: «Li personaggi di quella son de naturale retracti de più persone de la corte et di Milanesi di quel tempo»²⁵. Thus, in a certain sense, the heads of Christ and the apostles (Fig. 8) in the *Last Supper* are portraits. While lacking the intense expression of the apostles, reacting to the betrayal announcement, the musician shares with them a quality of heightened realism, so far as we can tell from Leonardo's drawings for the mural and from early copies. The portrait enables us to form some estimate of the depth of characterization Leonardo brought to the protagonists

of the *Last Supper*. Equally, the practice of adapting the heads and hands of real persons for the ideal figures in the mural may have led him to experiment with a new kind of idealized portrait. Such a concept, in any case, was clearly current in his circle at the time the *Last Supper* was underway.

The first of the two idealized portraits we shall consider in detail is Boltraffio's likeness of the Bolognese poet Girolamo Casio (Fig. 9) in the Devonshire Collection at Chatsworth. In this portrait we discover the assimilation of Leonardo's ideas by an artist of great ability. Born in 1467, Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio is first recorded in Leonardo's notebooks in 1491. He is later referred to by Isabella, wife of Giangaleazzo Sforza, as «molto esperto» in portraiture, and this was, in fact, the focus of his activity as a painter. More of a cultivated amateur than a professional, Boltraffio has about his work an aristocratic refinement found in no other member of Leonardo's circle. Yet though he was a painter of real distinction, Boltraffio, nevertheless, lacked a powerfully original mind. Consequently, his portraits, like his Madonnas, owe a great deal in their invention to Leonardo.

The Chatsworth portrait, representing the sitter less than life size against a dark background, was first attributed to Boltraffio in the Lombard Exhibition at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in London in 1898. Earlier it had been given to Leonardo. The initials «CB», embroidered on the coat, have been interpreted as «Casio-Boltraffio» or «Casius Bononiensis». On the reverse is a skull with a Latin inscription reading «I am the mark of Girolamo Casio». The matter is complicated by the fact that another portrait (Fig. 10) in the Brera Gallery, Milan, larger though similar in format to the one at Chatsworth, is also attributed to Boltraffio and also believed to depict his friend Casio. An obvious problem is posed by the comparison of these two portraits: the sitters simply do not resemble each other. The youthful figure at Chatsworth has long curly blond hair, a long neck, and heavy lidded eyes. The contour of the face is firm. In addition, the figure is dressed in an elaborate costume. The sitter in the Brera portrait, on the other hand, has a compact mass of brown hair, a short neck, and unaccentuated eyes. His face is fleshier, and the

²⁰ J.P. RICHTER, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, 2 vols., London 1970, vol. I, n. 389.

²¹ G. VASARI, *Le Vite de' più Eccellenti Pittori Scultori ed Architettori*, ed. G. Milanesi, vol. IV, Florence 1878, 37-38.

²² L. DEMONTS, *Les Dessins de Léonard de Vinci*, Musée du Louvre, Paris 1921, cat. n. 21. The drawing, once famous as a work by Leonardo, was sold from the Jabach Collection to

the King of France in 1671.

²³ C. RICCI, «Il "Musicista" dell'Ambrosiana», in *Bollettino d'Arte*, 1913, 200-02.

²⁴ RICHTER, 1970, vol. I no. 667, and vol. II, n. 1403.

²⁵ Ludwig Pastor ed., *Die Reise des Kardinals Luigi d'Aragona beschrieben von Antonio de Beatis*, Freiburg 1905, 176.



9. Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, Girolamo Casio, The Trustees of the Chatsworth Settlement.



10. Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, Girolamo Casio, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.



11. Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, Profile Portrait of a Man, National Gallery, London.



12. Attributed to Antonello da Messina, Portrait of a Poet, Museo del Castello Sforzesco, Milan.

garment he wears is the ordinary dress of the time. How can the perplexing difference between the portraits be explained?

In a long article published in 1951 Maria Reggiani Rajna attempted to account for the discrepancies by attributing the Brera portrait to an artist other than Boltraffio, namely, to the Bolognese Francesco Raibolini, called Francia²⁶. Rajna further claimed that the subject of the Chatsworth portrait was not Casio²⁷. The elegant dress, long curly hair, and delicate facial features led her to believe that the sitter was a woman. Her candidate was Costanza, niece of Giovanni Bentivoglio, ruler of Bologna. The name Costanza Bentivoglio would not contradict the initials «CB». As for the inscription on the reverse of the painting, naming Casio, Rajna hypothesized that the picture was made for him. In an equally detailed study of the Boltraffio-Casio problem, published two years later, Carlo Pedretti accepted Rajna's attribution of the Brera portrait to Francia, as well as the identification of the Chatsworth sitter as Costanza Bentivoglio²⁸. Thus of the two dissimilar portraits it could be said: different artists, different sitters.

While Rajna's argument has never been widely accepted, it has not been refuted either, and as a consequence uncertainty prevails in the literature on the paintings²⁹. It appears to me, however, that the features of both sitters, the nose and mouth at least, are essentially the same, as is the gaze out at the viewer. The impression given by comparing them is that the Chatsworth portrait is an androgynous version of the one in the Brera. We can be sure that the subject of the Chatsworth painting is a man by noting the gesture of the hand half hidden in the garment. The same gesture, appropriate to a male figure, appears in Boltraffio's unequivocal likeness of a man (Fig. 11) in the National Gallery in London³⁰. Thus, the sitter of the Chatsworth portrait is not a young woman. His appearance does suggest otherwise, however. A portrait (Fig. 12), attributed to Antonello da Messina and more recently to Giovanni Bellini, in the Museo del Castello Sforzesco, Milan, likewise represents a

poet³¹. The subject is so identified by his wreath and antique garb. But the face is treated realistically. The Venetian portrait accentuates the distinctive features of the individual, in Antonello's manner. Boltraffio's depiction of a poet, by contrast, subordinates Casio's uniqueness in favor of a flawless type.

Precisely where it differs from the Brera portrait, the *Girolamo Casio* at Chatsworth agrees with the type of androgynous youth favored by Leonardo and his circle. A metalpoint drawing of such a type (Fig. 13), attributable to Boltraffio, in the Uffizi has the same conventional features and expression as Casio: cascading curls, heavy-lidded eyes (here lowered), smiling mouth, and slender neck³². The youth in the drawing even wears a vine wreath of the kind we have seen associated with a Venetian poet. Translated into portraiture, however, the type gives the sitter a rather vacuous look. In so far as he is specified at all, it is by other means. The poet's initials «CB» are one device referring to his identity. And his jeweled costume probably also alludes to the fact that Casio was a gem merchant as well as a poet. The skull, already mentioned, on the reverse signifies Casio's specialty, the writing of epitaphs. He even composed one for Boltraffio, in which he specifically praised the painter's idealizing tendency as a portraitist. «L'unico allievo del Vinci Leonardo», Casio wrote, «Beltrafio che col stile e col penello Di Natura faceva ogni uom più bello...»³³. Portrayed more than once by Boltraffio, Casio would have been thoroughly familiar with his friend's approach to portraiture. Like Casio's epitaph, Boltraffio's image of the poet forms a statement of his essential nature. Both the epitaph and the painting disregard specific traits or idiosyncrasies of behavior, presenting the subject instead in his ideal nature as poet or painter.

A third portrait of Casio (Fig. 14) by Boltraffio is now in the Timken Art Gallery in San Diego³⁴. Like the Chatsworth picture, it was given to Leonardo before the Lombard Exhibition of 1898. There can be little doubt that the same sitter is

²⁶ M. REGGIANI RAJNA, «Un po' d'ordine fra tanti Casii», in *Rinascimento*, vol. II, nn. 3-4, March 1951, 337-38; and «L'unico allievo del Vinci Leonardo a Bologna e i ritratti di Girolamo Casio», in *Bologna per il V Centenario della nascita di Leonardo da Vinci, Rivista del Comune*, April 15, 1982, 21-32.

²⁷ Doubts about the Casio identification had already been expressed. See RAJNA in *Rinascimento*, 1951, 359 note 1; and *A Commemorative Catalogue of the Exhibition of Italian Art*, London 1931, cat. n. 311, 106-07.

²⁸ C. PEDRETTI, *Documenti e Memorie riguardanti Leonardo da Vinci a Bologna e in Emilia*, Bologna 1953, 12-51. Earlier the author had given the Brera portrait to Boltraffio and identified the Chatsworth sitter as Casio (*Leonardo da Vinci e il Poeta Bolognese Gerolamo Pandolfi da Casio de' Medici*, Bologna 1951 [reprinted from *La Mercanzia*, 1950-51]).

²⁹ At the time of writing this article I was unaware of Elena Rama's study of the Chatsworth portrait, which she, too, interprets as an idealized likeness of Casio, though more in a courtly than an artistic vein (E. RAMA, «Un tentativo di riletura della ritrattistica di Boltraffio fra Quattrocento e Cinquecento», in *Arte Lombarda* 64 [1983] 79-92, especially 84). Rama's article, useful for its bibliographical references is one of the very few recent contributions to our knowledge about this insufficiently studied artist.

³⁰ See M. DAVIES, *The Earlier Italian Schools*, National Gallery Catalogue, 2nd rev. ed., London 1961, n. 3916, 89-90. The compiler rightly rejects any identification as Casio.

³¹ Antonello, 1982, cat. n. 48, 201.

³² The drawing is incorrectly attributed to Marco d'Oggiono

represented. Here Casio is evidently shown as Amor, wearing a laurel wreath and carrying an arrow, the attribute of the god of love³⁵. Though the composition of the two portraits is similar, the Timken version is simpler in style, and the sitter's costume is less elaborate. There is, too, a corresponding change in the treatment of the head: the eyes in the Timken portrait are less pronounced, the mass of hair is more compact, and the contour of the face is rounder. Whether or not as a result of overindulgence in the famed Bolognese cuisine, the poet appears to have gained a little weight. In general, the Timken painting is less Leonardesque.³⁶

Despite its poor condition, the Brera portrait (Fig. 10) also betrays the features of Casio, only here his appearance is even closer to reality. The scroll, with verses dating from 1525, and possibly the laurel wreath were added later. The head cannot have been painted later than 1500, to judge from its resemblance to a portrait of Casio in an altarpiece of that date by Boltraffio in the Louvre³⁷. Kneeling in profile on the right in the altarpiece, Casio, then aged thirty six, appears somewhat older than in the Brera portrait. Having been born in 1464, Casio might be less than thirty in the Chatsworth painting, which would date from the early 1490's. He looks a little older in the Timken picture of, let us say, the mid-1490's, and a little older still in the Brera portrait, painted, I believe, toward 1500.

There is no need to suppose that a great deal of time elapsed between the execution of the portraits of Casio. All three probably date from the last decade of the fifteenth century³⁸. The important point is that Boltraffio's approach to portraiture is likely to have changed more radically than did the sitter's appearance. Three paintings of Casio together describe a dialectic which took place in Leonardo's Milanese circle between the realistic portrait and the master's ideal types. In the first of the Casio portraits, the one at Chatsworth, the individual is transformed into an ideal type of youthful poet. The Timken portrait, next in order, represents a partial concession to the sitter's physi-

by SUIDA, 1929, fig. 264. For similar drawings of vine-crowned youths see his figs. 216, 229, 231.

³³ Quoted in PEDRETTI, 1953, 40-41.

³⁴ See A. and E. MONGAN in *Timken Art Gallery. European and American Works of Art in the Putnam Foundation Collection*, San Diego 1983, cat. n. 1, 16.

³⁵ A more ornate and evidently earlier figure by Boltraffio, again representing Casio, is in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow. The halo seems to have been added later to turn the subject into a Saint Sebastian. I would date the portrait, which I had the opportunity to study directly in 1979, earlier than Elena Rama, who suggest 1498-99 (RAMA, 1983, 82 note 16).

³⁶ Suida suggested that the more pronounced Leonardesque

cal appearance in the manner of Leonardo's *Musician*. The last of the Casio depictions allows us to see the poet's real aspect, his fleshy cheeks and jowls. The series of portraits that we have considered, with their progressive changes, betrays more than the aging process, however. The sequence demonstrates that the concept of the idealized portrait was inherently difficult, as the metamorphosis of the sitter into a type, however alluring, ran counter to the prevailing notion of portraiture as likeness. Boltraffio's conviction in the Leonardesque portrait was evidently wavering even before his master left Milan late in 1499.

Like Boltraffio's paintings of Casio, the portrait we shall now examine demonstrates the complex interaction between one of Leonardo's ideal types and direct observation of the sitter. The Milanese manuscript of 1499, already mentioned, contains an extraordinary full-page pen-and-ink drawing (Fig. 15) of the noted Ferrarese scientist Petrus Bonus Advogarius³⁹. The manuscript consists of a lengthy commentary by Ponticus Virunius on Johannes Sacrobosco's treatise on spherical geometry, one of the standard textbooks of the Middle Ages. Advogarius, or Avogaro in Italian, the subject of the portrait, was one of the editors of the famous Bologna Ptolemy, the first geographical atlas ever printed. He also lectured on astronomy at the university of Ferrara. Ponticus Virunius, the Latinized name of Francesco da Ponte di Belluno, was the pupil of Advogarius in Ferrara before he became the tutor to the sons of Ludovico Sforza. Virunius seems to have begun the commentary, containing the portrait of his old teacher, early in 1499. But in September of that year the French invasion forced him to flee Milan. He continued to make additions to the manuscript as late as 1510.

The subject of the portrait, shown in profile to the right, wearing a cap and fur-trimmed robe, is identified by an inscription as Advogarius. But Ponticus does not name the author of the drawing. Another study in the manuscript, the castle and ship illustrating a discussion of the roundness of the earth, and the many astronomical diagrams,

accent of the Chatsworth portrait was due to the master's collaboration (W. SUIDA, «Das Leonardeske Jünglingsbildnis in Chatsworth», in *Pantheon*, vol. VI, 1930, 564-67).

³⁷ See PEDRETTI, 1953, 47-51, for the Louvre altarpiece.

³⁸ My dates for these paintings differ from those suggested by E. RAMA, 1983, 82, notes 16, 18 (Chatsworth: 1500-01; San Diego, ca. 1502).

³⁹ The manuscript was published in *Monumenta Codicum Manu Scriptorum*, Exhibition Catalogue, H.P. Kraus, New York 1974, cat. n. 43, 108-09. The portrait is on folio 61 verso. I am most grateful to Mr. Kraus for photographs and permission to publish the drawing.



13. Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, Youth with a Vine Wreath, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Uffizi, Florence.



16. Sperandio, Medal of Petrus Bonus Advogarius, Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington.



14. Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, Portrait of Girolamo Casio, Putnam Foundation, Timken Art Gallery, San Diego.



17. After Leonardo, Man Seated in Profile, Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Windsor Castle.



15. Milanese, Portrait of Petrus Bonus Advogarius, in Ponticus Virunius' Manuscript commentary on Sacrobosco's Sphera, H. P. Kraus, New York.

are presumably by Ponticus, who wrote the text. Yet the portrait drawing would seem to be beyond the capability of anyone other than a trained artist. I discussed the problem with Professor Heydenreich, the doyen of Leonardo studies, in 1977, and he agreed with me that the drawing is likely to be by a Leonardo pupil or follower. The technique of modeling in parallel lines and the use of wash for the shadows, as well as the anatomical knowledge of the face, point to an artist of considerable talent. In the present state of our studies, however, a definite attribution does not seem possible. The relevant point, in any case, is that the draftsman, whoever he was, must have had access to Leonardo's ideas. The drawing of Advogarius is based on the concept of idealized portraiture with which artists like Boltraffio were experimenting.

The portrait of Advogarius is evidently faithful to certain aspects of his appearance. We note wrinkles around the eyes, veins at the temple, sunken cheeks, and tousled hair. Yet the drawing does not conform to an ostensibly realistic depiction of the same subject on a medal (Fig. 16) by Sperandio of Mantua⁴⁰. The medallistic likeness, also in profile, betrays a coarse-featured man with a heavy brow, bulbous nose, and jutting chin. Though shown at an advanced age, Advogarius in the drawing is portrayed, nevertheless, as a keen-eyed intellectual with a smooth-contoured face and refined features. His profile does not resemble the grotesque type of old man Leonardo used to contrast with a youth on the Uffizi sheet. But we do find such a venerable type of mature wisdom in other drawings (Fig. 17) of philosophers or teachers from Leonardo's circle⁴¹. The realistic traits of the medallistic likeness have been suppressed in the drawing of Advogarius: they were not only disagreeable but also meaningless in terms of the type, representing the class of individuals to which the sitter belonged. This kind of type-casting was also adopted for Leonardo himself. As we see in a pupil's profile portrait of the master (Fig. 18), inscribed with his name, at Windsor Castle, Leonardo appeared to contemporaries like an ancient sage⁴². Indeed, allowing his hair and beard to grow very

long, the artist seems to have cultivated the image of himself as a classical philosopher, like Pythagoras or Aristotele, to whom he was, in fact, compared. In the portrait drawing Advogarius is clean shaven. Yet his image shares with Leonardo's the solemnity of an idealized profile. As a scholarly attribute, the deep-set reflective eyes are especially characteristic.

The profile of Advogarius is of exceptional interest, not only as a drawing. It forms one of the few cases in the Renaissance in which we know how a sitter responded to a portrait of himself. Unlike the other drawings in the manuscript, the profile is unrelated to the text. From the date June 19, 1499, on the previous page, we can deduce that Advogarius visited his former pupil in Milan on that day or shortly thereafter. Perhaps Ludovico Sforza had summoned him, as one of Italy's leading astrologers, to offer advice from the stars concerning the forces in league against the duke, which were to drive him from his state later that year. Virunius interrupted work on his commentary to record — or to have recorded — the likeness of his teacher. After the drawing was finished and shown to him, Advogarius reacted with disbelief. His response was noted in Ponticus's handwriting, beginning on the cap and running to the right margin. The inscription reads in part: «It is an augury of publishing this book; for it is the true life-like portrait of Petrus Bonus Advogarius. And he himself, looking at it said, "Am I then so young looking?"»⁴³. The exclamation attributed to Advogarius is not surprising, for at the time of his portrait he was seventy-five years old, having been born in 1425. Accustomed to the frank portrayal on the medal, Advogarius nearly failed to recognize himself in the idealized profile in the manuscript. His response raises the crucial problem of recognition in portraiture. For a work to function as a portrait, it would seem that the sitter must be represented specifically enough to be identifiable. The idealized portrait, on the other hand, is not a likeness in the ordinary sense of portraying someone in his own character. The images of Casio and of Advogarius on which we have focused in this

⁴⁰ G. POLLARD, *Renaissance Medals from the Samuel H. Kress Collection at the National Gallery of Art*, London, 1967 cat. n. 119.

⁴¹ K. CLARK, *The Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle*, revised with the assistance of Carlo Pedretti, 2 vols., London 1968, vol. I, n. 12584, 115. For Leonardo's «heroic» portrait drawings of Gian Giacomo Trivulzio, see P. MELLER, «Physiognomical Theory in Renaissance Portraits», in *The Renaissance and Mannerism*, Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art, vol. II, Princeton 1963, 53-69. About the whole problem of Leonardo's grotesque heads see GOMBRICH, 1976, 57-75.

⁴² Clark 1968, n. 12726, 185. See also L. PLANISCIG, «Leonardos

Porträt und Aristoteles», in *Festscherift für Julius Schlosser zum 60. Geburtstage*, Vienna 1927, 137-44. In the woodcut portrait in the second edition of Vasari's *Vite* (1568), based on the type of Windsor profile, Leonardo wears a cap, as does Advogarius in the drawing.

⁴³ The inscription reads: «Augurium est huius libri edendi: est enim vera effigies domini Petri Boni Advogarii ac se vive-ret, in libro meo astronomico. Et ipse met se inspiciens dicebat: "Summe talis? tamquam iuvenis"? Aliud augurium etiam, quoniam habui eius Spheram, qua legebat in sella in gynasio Ferrarensi». The book referred to is evidently a copy of Sacrobosco's *Sphera* which Advogarius brought to Virunius.



18. Leonardo pupil, Profile Portrait of Leonardo, Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II Windsor Castle.

lecture do qualify as portraits, however, in terms of the artist's obvious intention to represent them. It is just that the portraits tell us little about the nature of their subjects as individuals.

We have seen that the concept of the idealized portrait grew up in Leonardo's circle in Milan in the 1490's. Leonardo himself must be responsible for the idea, which was explored in the work of his pupils and followers. The experiments carried out in Milan then culminated in *Mona Lisa*, begun after Leonardo returned to Florence. In the case of Advogarius, the moment was recorded when the sitter confronted his idealized portrait. Not so with *Mona Lisa*. We have no realistic likeness of the lady for comparison, but it seems fair to say that Francesco del Giocondo's wife did not look like her image in the painting. The provenance of *Mona Lisa* indicates that it did not belong to the sitter or her husband. Freud claimed that the artist kept the portrait because he became enamored of the lady. Vasari was closer to the truth when he implied that the painting remained with Leonardo because it was unfinished when he left Florence. There is a further and, perhaps, more cogent explanation for the fact that the portrait was never delivered: it did not resemble the sitter. It may be that, as an unsatisfactory likeness, it was rejected by her or her husband. If it seems incredible that anyone would refuse to accept the *Mona Lisa*, we need only recall that at this time another Florentine merchant quarreled with Michelangelo over the price of the Doni tondo.

In *Mona Lisa* Francesco del Giocondo's wife was immortalized as a paragon of feminine grace and loveliness. The intellectual context for her portrait cannot be discussed in this lecture⁴⁴. But the central element would seem to be proportion. In the rivalry between the arts, Leonardo champion-

ed painting over poetry largely in terms of its verisimilitude. He allowed, nevertheless, that beauty in portraiture lay in the harmonious relation of the sitter's features: «The poet's work may be likened to a beautiful face which is shown to you feature by feature», Leonardo said, «so that you can never appreciate the beauty, which rests entirely on the divine proportions relating the parts to one another. The features must react together and simultaneously to produce that divine harmony...»⁴⁵. Leonardo's emphasis on harmony and proportion in portraiture would seem to allow not only for flattery but also for the possibility of an idealized portrait of the kind described in this lecture.

The idealized portrait, in the sense in which I have used the term here of a type being applied to an individual, did not have a long life. The best known examples, aside from the *Mona Lisa*, are, of course, Michelangelo's portraits of the Medici dukes in the new sacristy of San Lorenzo in Florence. Both sitters conform to the sculptor's ideal of masculine beauty. When the validity of his portraits as likenesses was questioned, Michelangelo simply replied that a hundred years hence no one would know the difference. In general, however, portraits of a sitter's ideal being gave way to the psychological portrait, in which the distinctive features of an individual were made to reveal his unique character. The idealized portrait failed to satisfy the fundamental requirement of truthfulness. And yet in *Mona Lisa* it produced a portrait that many would consider the most perfect ever painted. Despite its fame, *Mona Lisa* is not typical of Western portraiture as a whole. Rather, as I have tried to show, it belongs to a special category. Leonardo's painting was the outgrowth of ideas which originated in Milan a decade before it was created.

⁴⁴ See KEMP, *Leonardo*, 1981, 263-270.

⁴⁵ RICHTER, 1970, vol. I, n. 35, 79-80. According to Pedretti's commentary (vol. I, 85), the discussion from which I have quoted took place about 1492. Compare the anecdote Leonar-

do told about King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, who, comparing a sonnet and a painted portrait, praised the latter as it captured the «proportions of the beautiful forms that compose the divine beauties of this face here before me...» (RICHTER, 1970, vol. I, n. 30, 65-67).