PART TWO

THE RENAISSANCE AND THE ARTS
INTRODUCTION: SEEING IS BELIEVING?
THE RENAISSANCE AND THE ARTS

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At some point in 1336, Petrarch met Simone Martini, who had come to Avignon to contribute to the decoration of the new papal palace.\textsuperscript{1} The two quickly became intimate and it was not long before Petrarch commissioned a portrait of his beloved Laura from the Sienese artist. The result was clearly striking and before November, Petrarch had written two appreciative sonnets, pulsing with subtly flattering compliments. Even if Polyclitus were to compete with all the other Greek sculptors for a thousand years, Petrarch claimed in the first sonnet, he would not see even the smallest part of Laura’s beauty. Simone, however, was certainly in Paradise when he painted her. Indeed, the work was such that it could only have been imagined in Heaven. For Petrarch it seemed that Simone could only have completed it when beyond the reach of heat and cold, and when his eyes were free from mortality.\textsuperscript{2}


\textsuperscript{2} \textit{Canz.} 77:

\begin{quote}
Per mirar Policleto a prova fiso
con gli altri ch’ebber fama di quell’arte
mill’anni, non vedrian la minor parte
de la beltà che m’ève il cor conquisto.
Ma certo il mio Simon fu in paradiso,
onde questa gentil donna si parte;
ivi la vide, e la ritrasse in carte,
per la fede qua giù del suo bel viso.
L’opra fu ben di quelle che nel cielo
si ponno imaginar, non qui tra noi,
ove le membra fanno a l’alma velo.
\end{quote}