

**The roots of portrait theory in fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Italian literature, before Leon Battista Alberti, in relation to artistic practice.**

This dissertation examines the beginnings of portrait theory in Italian literature of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and their artistic context. Its starting point is the question of the “roots of portrait theory,” that is, the ideas and observations found in texts from the Trecento and early Quattrocento that laid the groundwork for later treatises. The analysis focuses on the Florentine milieu, with occasional references to other centers.

The first chapter is devoted to the vision of Giotto as the precursor of the early modern portrait, discussing both the literary tradition surrounding the artist and the significance of his work for the development of portraiture. The second chapter centers on the presumed image of Dante in the Bargello, which serves as a starting point for analyzing sources that reveal the cultural functions of portraiture in late medieval Florence. The third chapter addresses Petrarch’s ideas on portraiture, his literary and visual self-portrait, and the role of Laura’s image in the poet’s reflections, with references to contemporary artistic practices. The fourth chapter examines Cennino Cennini’s *Libro dell’Arte*, especially his use of the term *ritrarre* and the significance of the chapters on plaster casts, comparing them with the practice of death masks, busts, and votive images. The conclusion discusses the role of the analysed texts in preparing the ground for Renaissance reflection on art and outlines the birth of a proper portrait theory, in which Leon Battista Alberti played a pivotal role.

In the corpus under study, the cultural conditions and the structure of recognizability enabling the Albertian articulation of portrait theory become apparent. The portrait functions above all as an instrument of fame, prestige, and memory, with similarity understood in a rather selective way. This dissertation traces the initial process of transition from the literary registration of artistic practices to a conscious theory, identifying the categories that would shape the Renaissance understanding of the relationship between image, nature, and the status of the individual.