

CHAPTER 3



Laura's Nobility and Greatness in Two Sixteenth-Century Florentine Speeches by Simone della Barba (1554) and Francesco de' Vieri (1580)

Guglielmo Barucci

1. Simone della Barba's *Sposizione*

In the cultural system of Cosimo de' Medici's regime, pivoting on Accademia Fiorentina and on Ducalis Typographus Lorenzo Torrentino, a minor but quite particular role is played by Simone della Barba.¹ In 1554, as an 'Accademico Fiorentino', he published for Torrentino the *Nuova sposizione del sonetto che comincia 'In nobile sanguine vita humile, et queta'*, a commentary to sonnet 215 of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.² Simone della Barba had previously read his *Sposizione* in the Accademia (in March 1552, according to the inscription, dated 28 April 1554). The transition of academy conferences to the press was, of course, definitely (though not necessarily) routine; nevertheless, della Barba's commentary is worth some attention, both for the social network to which it is connected, and for its specific key theme, which was quite unusual, as well as consistent with the political ideology of Cosimo's Florence.

Simone della Barba is, from many points of view, ancillary to his much more famous brother, Pompeo,³ and the little information we have about him leads to an

1 On the cultural agenda of Cosimo I, see Michel Plaisance, *L'Accademia e il suo principe. Cultura e politica a Firenze al tempo di Cosimo I e di Francesco de' Medici* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2004). Furthermore, Leandro Perini, 'Editori e potere in Italia dalla fine del secolo XV all'Unità', in *Storia d'Italia. Annali 4. Intellettuali e potere*, ed. by Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), pp. 765–853 (pp. 788–800); Claudia Di Filippo Bareggi, 'Tre tipografie fiorentine fra repubblica e principato', *Nuova rivista storica*, 58 (1974), 318–48; Antonio Ricci, 'Lorenzo Torrentino and the Cultural Programme of Cosimo I de' Medici', in *The Cultural Politics of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici*, ed. by Konrad Eisenbichler (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 103–19.

2 Simone della Barba, *Nuova sposizione del sonetto che comincia 'In nobile sanguine vita humile, et queta', ne la quale si dichiara qual sia stata la vera nobiltà di Madonna Laura* (Florence: [Lorenzo Torrentino], 1554). The only modern edition is in *Lezioni sul Petrarca. Die Rerum vulgariarum fragmenta in Akademievorträgen des 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Bernhard Huss, Florian Neumann, and Gerhard Regn (Münster: Lit, 2004), with a short introduction by Gerhard Regn, pp. 121–25.

3 Franco A. Meschini, 'Della Barba, Pompeo', in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–), 36 (1998), 673–76.

easily recognisable milieu:⁴ in 1554 three sonnets were published in *Il Paragone della Vergine, et del Martire, e una Oratione di Erasmo Roterodamo a Giesù Christo, tradotti per M. Lodovico Domenichi* [...] by Torrentino; in 1555 a few of his sonnets were published in the paratext to Giovanni Pico's *Heptaplus*, edited by his brother, still for the official Florentine printer; and, again, a sonnet was published in Varchi's *Sonetti* [...]. *Parte seconda*, for the same publishing house.⁵ Notwithstanding, his most important work, this time for Giolito, was probably the edition of Cicero's *Topica*, published in 1556 but with a letter dated 1550, at the very beginning of Simone's career. It was in some ways a collective work, with Pompeo providing a commentary on Cicero's work and the translation of Boethius's *De topicis differentiis*, and Simone supplying the translation of *Topica* and the dedication of Boethius's work.⁶ Quite interestingly, the volume is opened by Pompeo's dedication to Francesco Torelli, son of Lelio (first secretary of Cosimo and instrumental in the 'normalization' of the Accademia degli Umidi) and one of the five Accademici (along with Giambullari, Varchi, Lenzone and Gelli) called to 'far le regole del parlar toscano, et fiorentino'.⁷ The letter testifies how the volume also aimed at introducing the youngest (and still inexperienced) brother to Florence's cultural high society.⁸ In addition one should note that in 1554–55 Torrentino had moved to Pescia (where the two brothers were born and were still prominent)⁹ and that the *Nuova Sposizione* is dedicated to Giulio de' Medici, the cousin of Cosimo, and this short bio-bibliography is enough to understand how Simone, when his lecture was eventually published in 1554, was very close to the core of the Cosmian cultural system.

Simone's lecture, as already said, was just one of many held at the Accademia, roughly half of them on Petrarch. Quite surprising, nonetheless, is the text on which he chooses to comment. Sonnet 215 has never attracted much attention from critics, due mainly to its similarity to the much more famous 'Gratie ch'a pochi il

4 See Giuseppe Ansaldo, *Cenni biografici dei personaggi illustri della città di Pescia e suoi dintorni [...]* (Pescia: Vannini, 1872), pp. 289–95, and Giammaria Mazzucchelli, *Gli scrittori d'Italia [...]* (Brescia: Bossini, 1758), II, 237–38. See, *passim*, as well *Annali della tipografia fiorentina di Lorenzo Torrentino impressore ducale*, 2nd edn (Florence: Francesco Daddi, 1819). Furthermore, Simone della Barba was somehow on the fringes of the plot against Pope Pius IV in 1564; in fact, he was the man who gave the stiletto to one of the conspirators. Although he was never accused, the fact that his brother, Pompeo, was the doctor of Pius IV raised some questions. The political-religious breeding ground of the plot is too uncertain to assess any implication on Simone's side; on the plot, see Elena Bonora, *Roma 1564. La congiura contro il papa* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2011).

5 Two more sonnets were in the *Tempio fabbricato a Giovanna d'Aragona* (Venice: Plinio Pietrasanta, 1554), pp. 323–24.

6 On this peculiar miscellaneous work, which in any case had nearly no critical fortune, see Guglielmo Barucci, "'Chiosar con altro testo". Le Tre Corone per un commento rinascimentale ai *Topica* di Cicerone', *Parole rubate/Purloined Letters*, 1 (2010), 37–67, <<http://www.parolerubate.unipr.it/issues.php>> [accessed 28 April 2019]. A recent edition is *La Topica di Cicerone, col commento [...]*, ed. by Tobias Reinhardt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). By the way, the *Nuova sposizione del sonetto* hints at the forthcoming book for Giolito (p. 16).

7 See Plaisance, p. 217.

8 '[...] e pregola, che accetti mio fratello ancora nel numero de' Servitori fedeli di casa sua, la quale del continuo Dio felicità e conservi', in *Nuova sposizione*, fol. [ii^r].

9 Carlo Fedeli, 'Lorenzo Torrentino e la sua dimora a Pescia', in *Miscellanea storico-letteraria a Francesco Mariotti [...]* (Pisa: Mariotti, 1907) pp. 73–87.

ciel largo destina' as a catalogue of Laura's virtues; even Vellutello's commentary is rather brisk in his comparison with *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (hereafter RVF), 213, thus making the forty-four pages of della Barba's *Spositione* even more surprising:

Seguita il Poe. nel presente So. come ha nel precedente fatto, nelle singolari et divine doti che dalla natura erano state a M.L. concesute, et quantunque sia in sé ingegnossissimo, non però giudichiamo che altra esposizione li sia di bisogno.¹⁰

As typical of Accademici Fiorentini, his lecture becomes an opportunity to thoroughly explore a cultural and philosophical issue; nevertheless, Simone della Barba handles an element usually unresearched, as its core is exquisitely political: nobility.¹¹

In some ways, the lecture reflects the importance and role of nobility in Renaissance society, as a multifaceted prism of different, even conflicting, meanings, values and forms.¹² The ambiguous complexity of the idea of nobility (an idea never devoid of clear and tangible implications) is recognizable in *La civil conversazione* by Stefano Guazzo, the most extensive Renaissance treaty on good manners and social relations. Here, the need to thoroughly represent the many perspectives on nobility leads to a cascade of forms, species, subspecies, levels, distinctions, opinions, mixtures and hybrids, with multiple implicit references (and one explicit). This digression is closed by Guazzo (twenty-four years after Simone's proposal) with his own formula, distinguishing half nobles, nobles, and very nobles:

ANNIBALE [...] io così in fretta vi dico che alcuni, venendo a definire la nobiltà, hanno detto ch'ella è degnità de' padri e predecessori; altri ch'ella è ricchezza antica; altri ch'ella è ricchezza congiunta con virtù: altri che è sola virtù. Oltre a ciò allegava l'altro giorno in un suo discorso l'onorato signor Giorgio Carretto, academico, l'autorità, se ben mi ricorda, di Baldo, il qual vuole che 'l nobile si dica in tre modi: il primo per sangue, come intende il volgo; il secondo per virtù, come intende il filosofo; il terzo per l'uno e per l'altro, e questi chiama perfettamente nobile.

CAVALIERE Vi si potrebbe aggiungere quell'altra sorte di nobiltà, che s'acquista per privilegio de' principi.

ANNIBALE Questa per avventura egli la incorporava con la nobiltà de' filosofi, perciocché si può dire che 'l prencipe con quel privilegio venga ad approvare la virtù e i meriti di colui ch'egli ingentilisce e nobilita. Ma l'eccellenza della

10 *Il Petrarca con l'espositione d'Alessandro Vellutello di novo ristampato [...]* (Venice: Giolito, 1560), fol. 60^v. Even Gesualdo, though lengthy explaining the sonnet, somehow subordinates RVF, 215, to RVF, 213; the former is a 'grande e meravigliosa laude' of Laura, while the latter is just not 'minore'; see *Il Petrarca con la spositione di M. Giovanni Andrea Gesualdo [...]* (Venice: Domenico Giglio, 1553), p. 242. It must also be noted that, in the note to sonnet 215, the whole section on nobility amounts to just twenty-seven lines.

11 See Regn, p. 121: 'Mit seinem Thema weicht Simone von den Präferenzen der *accademici* ab, die bevorzugt liebetheoretische *quistioni*, kunstphilosophische Fragen oder Probleme des Stils behandeln'. On the lectures by the Accademici, see Franco Tomasi, "'Cose nel vero tutte misteriose e belle": le forme dell'esegesi petrarchesca nell'Accademia Fiorentina', in *Dissonanze concordie. Temi, questioni, personaggi intorno ad Anton Francesco Doni*, ed. by Giovanna Rizzarelli (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), pp. 149–69.

12 See Regn, p. 121: 'ein Komplex von herausragender lebensweltlicher Bedeutsamkeit'.

nobiltà fu molto più ristretta da Diogene, il quale dimandato quali fra tutti gli uomini fossero nobilissimi, rispose: — Gli sprezzatori delle ricchezze, della gloria, de' piaceri e della vita, e i vincitori de' contrari, cioè della povertà, dell'ignominia, della fatica e della morte — .
[...]

ANNIBALE Or perché si trovano scritte molte distinzioni della nobiltà, secondo la diversità delle opinioni, io nonostante che qualche filosofo assegni quattro sorti di nobiltà e che qualche altro vi aggiunga la quinta, piglierò ardire [...] di farne io ancora un'altra a mio modo, se ben mi discostassi qualche poco dalle opinioni loro. Io adunque pongo tre gradi di nobiltà, dai quali deduco tre sorti di nobili: cioè nobili del primo grado, nobili del secondo e nobili del terzo. A quelli del primo grado, non avendo per ora altro termine più proprio, darò nome di seminobili. Quelli del secondo chiamerò nobili, quelli del terzo nobilissimi.¹³

Perhaps inevitably, in Simone's lecture, the sonnet is completely detached from its original context or aim, namely framing and softening (along with sonnet 213 itself) the religious stance of *sestina* 214.¹⁴ The subtitle 'ne la quale si dichiara qual sia stata la vera nobiltà di madonna Laura' alludes, on the contrary, to the Renaissance 'concretization' of Laura, probably seeking a wider and easier audience.

The topic of her nobility was in any case well debated, as proved by Fausto da Longiano who, recalling 'certe novellaccie né vere, né al vero simili' and the many discrepancies in circulation, states in Laura's biography: 'Molti credeno ch'ella fosse o villanella, o di bassa conditione; altri d'assai horrevole parentado, ma povera'. On the basis of *Epistolae metricae*, I. 6 ('Est michi post animi mulier clarissima tergum | Et virtute suis, et sanguine nota vetusto'),¹⁵ Fausto vibrantly supports the idea of Laura's nobility¹⁶ but, again, pays little attention to sonnet 215, considering it just a catalogue of her internal and external beauties.¹⁷ Vellutello himself, in the 'Origine di Madonna Laura', tackles the problem of Laura's family, status and place of birth, debunking the legend of a Laura belonging to the de Sade family. Although he challenges the commonplace of the birth in Avignon, insisting on the many references in the *Canzoniere* and *Triumphs* to the 'humile e basso luogo' where she was born, he does not deny her noble origins and, piling up circumstantial evidence from the *Canzoniere*, postulates that her father 'fosse stato povero Signore', thus accepting an idea of nobility without money.¹⁸ And Gesualdo, to cut a long

13 Stefano Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, ed. by Amedeo Quondam (Rome: Bulzoni, 2009), II, 124–25. See also II, 244–45, nn. 431–33; and Amedeo Quondam, 'La virtù dipinta. Noterelle (e divagazioni) guazziane intorno a Classicismo e *Institutio* in Antico regime', in *Stefano Guazzo e la civil conversazione*, ed. by Giorgio Patrizi (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990), pp. 227–395 (p. 312).

14 See Marco Santagata, *I frammenti dell'anima* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), pp. 310–11.

15 Francesco Petrarca, *Le epistole metriche*, ed. by Raffaele Argenio (Rome: Cicerone, [1984]), I. 6 37–38.

16 *Il Petrarca col commento di M.S. Fausto da Longiano, con rimario et epiteti in ordine d'alphabeto. Nuovamente stampato* (Venice: Francesco di Alessandro Bindoni, e Mapheo Pasini, compagni, 1532), fol. iiiif.

17 See *Il Petrarca col commento di M.S. Fausto da Longiano*, fol. 80v: 'Questo e quel di sopra narrano le bellezze interiori et esteriori della sua donna'.

18 *Il Petrarca con l'espositione d'Alessandro Vellutello*, fol. [viii]f.

story short, after mentioning in 'La vita di Madonna Laura' the erroneous opinions that saw in Laura 'una de le Contadine', states that in 'In nobil sangue' the poet 'apertamente significato egli n'habbia la nobiltà di lei';¹⁹ likewise, in the note to the sonnet Gesualdo rewords 'In nobil sangue'²⁰ with 'in sangue di nobilissime tempre senza veruna macchia', a paraphrase open to multiple interpretations summarized in a single sentence ('In M. L. anchor che la chiarezza de li antiqui avoli non splendesse sì come da vero in lei splendea, senza dubbio veruno ella era dal cielo di rara nobilitate ornata'),²¹ stressing much more individual than inherited nobility.

Nevertheless, a lecture supposed to focus on a current issue like the 'vera nobiltà di Madonna Laura' turns mostly to an analysis of the idea of 'vera Nobiltà de gl'huomini' according to the most authoritative scholars (p. 6). Actually, the topic of Laura's 'vera nobiltà' would be touched on only at the end of the lecture, as the third and last point (in only seven pages out of forty-four). Previously Simone, in order to prepare the field by uprooting errors and 'male opinioni' (p. 5), had to analyse what 'Nobiltà' and 'degna Nobiltà' were (pp. 6–7), as two logical premises for the definition of the issue of the *Spositione*. Indeed, nobility had been a matter of controversy since the Middle Ages, given the absence of any legal definition and the wide range of interpretations. Of course, della Barba benefited extensively from classical (mainly Aristotle and Cicero) and medieval theories (mainly Bartolus de Saxoferrato), but he preceded — and it is one of the reasons of interest for his *Nuova Spositione* — many of the most famous treatises on the subject (Muzio's *Il Gentiluomo* by in 1571; the wide specific section in Stefano Guazzo's *La civil conversazione* in 1574; Tasso's *Forno* in 1581).

One of the most important peculiarities of Simone's lecture, then, is the application of a socio-political issue to a sonnet, which comes indirectly to be seen as a case study. Emphasis should be given not only to the substantial indifference, on Simone's side, to the formal and aesthetical elements, much to the advantage of the cultural and philosophical core, but also the overall Florentine and Tuscan profile of the cultural background on which the lecture is built. Not only, as typical of Verino and Varchi, is the lecture structured into proposal, problem and solution, but Simone della Barba — and it is an element common to most Academy lectures — resorts to different methodologies and critical instruments. As first, Simone deploys the traditional methodology of universities, made up of a discussion of common ideas, definition, distinction, and classification; nevertheless, his approach backs up scholastic argumentation²² by use of many quotations from the classics (Justin, Plinius, Virgil, Varro, Diodorus Siculus, and Solinus, but also Giovio and, the only one in the vernacular, Dante) to the point that this very first section is a mosaic of

19 *Il Petrarca con la spositione di M. Giovanni Andrea Gesualdo* [...] (Venice: Domenico Giglio, 1553), fol. [bb 7^r].

20 The translations from Petrarch are from *Petrarch's Lyric Poems. The 'Rime sparse' and Other Lyrics*, translated and edited by Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

21 *Il Petrarca con la spositione di M. Giovanni Andrea Gesualdo* [...] (Venice: Domenico Giglio, 1553), fol. 242^v.

22 According to Regn, p. 122, we could speak of Neo-scholastic argumentation: 'Im Einklang mit dieser 'neoscholastischen' Orientierung steht der Aufbau der Argumentation'.

philosophy, prose, and poetry. It is a facet that will shape the *Nuova Sposizione* as a whole so that it comes to be a sort of digression on nobility in the literary tradition and not just a philosophical (even less juridical) treatise.

Nobility, as Simone points out, has indeed been recognized in all elements of life and nature. Simone della Barba thus tracks nobility from classical elements upwards to composites, plants, animals and up to arts, where, of course, the liberal arts are nobler than the practical ones. For men, at the summit of the hierarchy, nobility can imply wealth, ancestry, virtue, and manners, and such polisemy is evident in *Decameron's* Guiscardo (pp. 14–15). Consequently, after proving how much the concept of nobility is polysemic and deceptive, Simone turns from erudition to linguistics and dialectic ('per servar la regola che si tiene ne' vocaboli che [...] son detti Equivoci', p. 15) and to the tripartition by the most important modern jurist, Bartolus de Saxoferrato. Bartolus, discussing the section 'De dignitatibus' of the *Codex Justinianus*, had divided nobility into theological, natural (itself divided into one related to every natural form and one only related to virtuous and moral men, as defined by Aristotle), and 'civile' (that is, nobility granted by a prince to a commoner).²³

The peculiarity is that the reference to Bartolus goes well beyond the analysis of the most important and influential jurist on nobility. Given that the Latin treatise opens with a commentary on Dante's canzone 'Le dolci rime d'amor ch'i' solia', Simone della Barba, with his lecture on Petrarch's sonnet, aims to somehow recreate the Dante-Bartolus relationship, that is, a 'political' poem and its juridical commentary, of course in an innovative way. 'Le dolci rime d'amor ch'i' solia' is not, anyway, the only work by Dante that influenced Simone, since the fourth book of Dante's *Convivio*, though probably unknown to Bartolus, also offers Simone some ideas, problems, and examples. In general, the Dante-Bartolus influence on Simone's methodology and structure is clear: all of them start with the rebuttal of the most common ideas; both *Convivio* and the Latin treatise present, though with some differences, the same progression through biological kingdoms, species, and arts (often using the same examples); and Simone dismisses theological nobility with the same words as Bartolus and quotes Dante's metaphor of weed (*Cv*, IV. vii 3). It has furthermore to be stressed that the presence of Dante, unlike the quotations from the classics, is in no way just an erudite element; indeed, the poet is also the founder of the real cultural and ideological horizon of the discussion of nobility, so that della Barba takes full part in the archaeological recovery of the ancient Florentine culture fostered by Cosimo's propaganda.

At the same time, Simone considers improper both Dante's and Bartolus' concept of nobility. Dante's 'Le dolci rime d'amor ch'i' solia', indeed, with its idea that nobility is everywhere there is virtue, is considered insufficient to cope with the multiplicity of nobility. On the other hand, if Bartolus is the most important judicial reference on the subject, Simone — and here his judicial training is evident — points out how his work does not address the most important form of nobility in

23 By the way, one of the titles under which Bartolus' treatise was known (although improperly) was *Tractatus de nobilitate mulierum*, possibly easing the idea of a lecture handling Laura's nobility.

the past and in his own time: 'quella che consiste ne la stirpe generosa, e chiara, e ne la nobiltà del sangue' (p. 17). It is an idea of nobility as clearly aristocratic, consistent with the social and cultural transformations underway in Western society, and particularly in Cosmian Tuscany, where, according to Plaisance, 's'assiste à la liquidation des valeurs culturelles marchandes'²⁴ and where the Academy itself was instrumental in the diffusion of the new values.²⁵

In this regard, Simone references Cicero, specifically with *Topics*, VI. 29,²⁶ and Aristotle, with his fifth book of *Politics*,²⁷ as his authorities on nobility. The former mentions, as necessary conditions for nobility, a common surname, birth from free men, no ancestors ever enslaved and continuity of economic status; the latter, ancestors beautified by wealth and virtues (p. 20). It is interesting that if the quotation from Cicero begins with 'Gentiles sunt qui', Simone's translation reads 'Nobili son quelli', allowing him — on the basis of the identity of 'gentilezza' and 'nobiltade', stated in Dante's *Convivio* (IV. xiv 5) — to connect to early Italian poetry, mainly that of Dante and Petrarch himself (pp. 25–26). Francesco Alunno's gloss on the same sonnet 'In nobil sangue uita humile, e queta', however, reads the Italian adjective 'nobil' as 'gentile, cortese', consequently confirming the connection and at the same time showing how the 'political' reading by della Barba was somehow overstated.²⁸ On the other hand, Simone sides with Aristotle, refusing Dante's criticism of Frederick II's concept of nobility and his position that richness is unnecessary to nobility, first because it helps protect the state, and second because largesse, without it, is impossible (p. 20). Simone's idea of nobility is thus completely detached from any metaphysical or strictly moral dimension (as in Dante), while it is definitely the expression of a new specific social milieu.

Simone then proposes his own theory of nobility, aimed at including all options and forms (pp. 27–38). Dismissing, in the wake of Bartolus, the theological nobility, Simone recognizes a natural nobility (that is, as asserted by Dante, the natural perfection of a being or of a disposition), plus three forms of civic nobility (that is, nobility of wealthy and virtuous ancestors; nobility granted by a prince; and nobility consisting of personal virtue):

La nobiltà civile, poi, è di tre sorti: una è (come dice Aristotile nel primo libro de la *Retorica*) che consiste nella virtù, o nelle ricchezze, o in tutte quelle cose, che puon fare gl'antecessori chiari e famosi in cose honorate, e desiderate [...]. La seconda spetie di nobiltà civile è quella che è data dal Principe, o da chi tiene il principato [...]. La terza et ultima è la nobiltà causata da la virtù di colui che l'ha, et anch'ella è nobiltà civile, perché la virtù fa l'huom degno degl'honori civili [...]. (pp. 27–29)

24 Plaisance, p. 218.

25 It is not by chance that Simone evokes the importance of *Stemmata* in ancient Roman aristocracy, connecting them, doubtless improperly, with contemporary coats of arms; see Della Barba, *Nuova Spositione*, pp. 18–19.

26 Della Barba, *Nuova Spositione*, p. 17.

27 Della Barba, *Nuova Spositione*, p. 20.

28 *Le osservazioni di M. Francesco Alunno da Ferrara sopra il Petrarca* (Venice: Pavolo Gherardo, 1550), p. 295.

The three forms of civic nobility can occur alone or in combination with one or two of the others. Their different conjunctions are structured by the author in a clear hierarchy: the highest form happens with the concurrence of all of them; this is followed by the union of personal virtue and a title conferred by the prince, then by the union of ancestors with bestowal by the prince and, lastly, by personal virtue with inherited aristocracy:

E questa nobiltà composta di tutte tre precede tutte l'altre, e tiene il primo grado; nel secondo luogo è quella causata da le proprie virtù, unita con la nobiltà data dal Principe; nel tertio la nobiltà data dal Principe con quella della stirpe chiara; e nel quarto è la nobiltà di sangue con quella delle virtù proprie.
(pp. 30–31)

From this complicated system, the prevalence of nobility conferred by a prince is clear, as well as the priority of personal virtue over ancient ancestors. Della Barba's idea of nobility reflects, then, the politics of Cosimo and his curbing of the traditional Florentine aristocracy, much to the advantage of a new loyal élite. This is confirmed by the model proposed for the highest form of nobility overall, namely, the combination of all three forms of civic nobility plus natural nobility: inevitably, the real example of this nobility can be only Duke Cosimo I de' Medici (p. 31), as the real centre of the lecture, paralleled to Madonna Laura.

It is when only one form of civic nobility is present in a man that personal virtue prevails over a title granted by a prince, and then over ancestors, in the same way that the soul is nobler than the body or luck. In addition, della Barba proves the superiority of nobility grounded on personal virtues through multiple quotations from ancient authors and Dante (*Paradise*, XVI. 1–3), all of whom insist on the error of overestimating the importance of lineage, hence confirming a general consistency with the social and cultural programme of Cosimo's regime. Significantly, the last, long and conclusive quotation is, indeed, from Boethius's *Consolatio*,²⁹ with his idea that ancestry is just 'vento, e nebbia' (p. 37), well reflected in l. 7 ('Quid genus et proavos strepitis?') as the summary of the digression on nobility.

It is notable that della Barba, surprisingly, juxtaposes the quotation from Boethius with his own translation, in two mediocre stanzas:

Tutto l'human legnaggio in terra sorge
da una radice stessa; e un Padre è solo
che reggie il tutto, il tutto guida e scorge.
Egli già diede al Sole i raggi e 'l volo.
Diede e' i corni, onde i crin la Luna avvolge.
Ei l'huom diede a la terra, i lumi al Polo.
Questi ne i corpi human gl'animi infuse
da l'alto soglio, e dentro a quei gli chiuse.

Se i mortai dunque tutti un nobil germe
produsse, a che la stirpe e gl'avi alzate?
Se 'l prio vostro natale, o menti inferme,
e Dio, di quello autor, talor mirate,

29 Boeth., *Cons.*, III. carm. 6.

non è più questo o quel vile human germe
 s'oltraggio e danno a voi da voi non fate
 co 'l mandar in oblio sì bel natale
 e sommerger l'eterno col mortale. (pp. 37–38)

The translation into Italian works somehow as a bridge to the last section of the *Spositione*, that is, that part of the lecture dedicated to the analysis of the nobility of Madonna Laura. The anomaly of the presence of Italian verses is confirmed, just two pages later, by the translation (again in ottava rima) of a few lines of one of Ovid's *Tristia*³⁰ (by the way, for a clearly minor and fringe element as the difference between nobility and 'generosity'). The Italian ottavas, indeed, introduce the core of the lesson, that is the commentary to sonnet 215, somehow easing the transition from ancient to modern poetry and culture:

In nobil sangue vita humile et queta
 et in alto intellecto un puro core,
 frutto senile in sul giovenil fiore
 e 'n aspetto pensoso anima lieta
 raccolto à 'n questa donna il suo pianeta,
 anzi 'l re dele stelle; e 'l vero honore,
 le degne lode, e 'l gran pregio, e 'l valore,
 ch'è da stancar ogni divin poeta.
 Amor s'è in lei con Honestate aggiunto,
 con beltà naturale habito adorno,
 et un atto che parla con silentio,
 et non so che nelli occhi, che 'n un punto
 pò far chiara la notte, oscuro il giorno,
 e 'l mèl amaro, et adolcir l'assentio.³¹ (*RVF*, 215)

In light of the foregoing ethical-political part of the lecture, Laura's nobility is connected to all three forms of civic nobility (recognized in the first quatrain) and, altogether, to natural nobility (in the first two lines of the second quatrain) (p. 40). Henceforth, della Barba detaches from the sonnet 'In nobil sangue', to reshape the nobility of Laura through tesseras extracted from other texts of the *Canzoniere*, so complying with the method typical of the Accademici, that is, analysing a poet through his other texts (according to Gelli, 'non si trovando o possendo trovare modo alcuno migliore nello esporre gli autori che esporgli con le loro parole medesime').³² As usual for the biographies of Laura in Renaissance editions of the

30 Ovid, *Tristia*, III. 5 31–36.

31 [In noble blood a humble and quiet life, with a high intellect a pure heart, the fruit of age in the flower of youth, and with thoughtful aspect a happy soul, have all been gathered together in this lady by her planet — rather by the King of the stars — and the true honour, the deserved praises, and the great worth that would weary any divine poet. Love has joined himself with chastity in her, with natural beauty gracious habit, and gestures that speak in silence, and I know not what in her eyes, which in an instant can make bright the night, darken the day, embitter honey, and sweeten wormwood].

32 Giambattista Gelli, *Lezioni petrarchesche*, ed. by Carlo Negroni (Bologna: Romagnoli, 1884), p. 127.

Canzoniere, della Barba recalls sonnet 4, ‘Que’ ch’infinita providentia et arte’, as evidence that the woman was born in an obscure hamlet (‘Et hor di picciol borgo un sol n’ha dato’, l. 12). Nevertheless, Simone disputes the idea of Laura as a humble shepherdess, siding with the commentators who attribute an ancient heritage to her:

Ma non però di vile, et oscuro legnaggio come mostra sì in questo presente, come in altri luoghi, il Poeta, dicendo che in quella sorte di nobiltà che è posta ne la chiarezza de gl’Antecessori, di che sogliono comunemente insuperbire gli sciocchi, il vero Principe Dio ottimo grandissimo havea raccolta una vita humile e modesta, la quale non la lassava insuperbire, né gonfiare, anchor che fusse di sangue nobile. (p. 40)

The first line itself of the sonnet ‘In nobil sangue’ and the aforementioned metric epistle to Cardinal Colonna prove, according to Simone, the ancient heritage of Laura (pp. 40–41). Nevertheless, God, the ‘re delle stelle’, that is the greatest prince of all, has bestowed on Laura a modest nature that allows her to neglect the kind of nobility only stupid people boast about. The ‘alto intelletto’ and ‘puro core’ mentioned in the second line lead her to disregard what is incidental and fortuitous, such as affluence and lineage. The latter, furthermore, is defined by Simone as the most despicable of all the forms of nobility (‘fra le altre nobiltà è la più infima’, p. 41), consistently with what had previously been assumed about the different levels of nobility. The same disdain for hereditary nobility is even traced by Simone in sonnet 263, ‘Arbor victoriosa triumphale’, whose first tercet mentions Laura’s indifference towards earthly and fleeting possessions (p. 41):

Gentileza di sangue, et l’altre care
cose tra noi, perle et robini et oro,
quasi vil soma egualmente dispregi.³³ (*RVF*, 263. 9–11)

Although dismissing a line-by-line commentary of the sonnet (‘le cose tocche a sufficienza da gli ispositori io le passo leggermente, perché ogn’uno se le può legghier da sé’, p. 42), Simone specifies — probably over-intellectualizing the text — that l. 2 ‘et in alto intelletto un puro cuore’ proposes a metonymy and should be read ‘high intellect in sincere heart’, given that Petrarch is here following Aristotelianism and its idea that the seat of the soul is the heart (p. 42). More importantly, Simone makes clear that the nouns in ll. 6–7 (‘e ’l vero honore | le degne lode, e ’l gran pregio, e ’l valore’)³⁴ are not just a case of *enumeratio*, but rather imply different meanings. Honour, indeed, is higher than praise, and the two apply to different objects: while the former is concerned with deeds, the latter is concerned with virtues, which are just the prerequisite for any virtuous deed to be performed (pp. 42–43). Consequently — as della Barba concludes — Laura has all three forms of civic nobility: ancient ancestry (again, disregarded, but still necessary for a full idea of nobility), that bestowed by a prince (in this case God, the king of the stars, and consequently she has this kind of nobility to the highest degree) and personal virtue, as proved by the presence of both virtues and deeds (as she has both praise

33 [Nobility of blood and the other things prized among us — pearls and rubies and gold — like a vile burden, you equally despise].

34 [and the true honor, the deserved praises, and the great worth].

and honour). Abruptly, then, Simone concludes his lecture by pointing out that the last five lines of the sonnet also prove the presence of natural nobility in Laura.

If Laura, consequently, stands out as a perfect example of nobility, comparable only to Duke Cosimo I, the abrupt, not to say brisk, conclusion of the lecture (and the sheer number of pages dedicated to Laura in comparison to the whole) is enough to assert that the sonnet is just an opportunity for a wider analysis of an issue central to Renaissance culture, and to integrate, as well and at the same time, not only Petrarch in sixteenth-century political culture, but also Laura's imaginary profile in contemporary society.

2. Francesco de' Vieri's *Discorso*

Quite surprisingly, a sonnet deemed important enough to be the basis for a lecture on Laura's nobility is not even mentioned, twenty-six years later and in the same cultural milieu of the Accademia Fiorentina, in a speech on Laura's greatness. Francesco de' Vieri, known as Verino Secondo, did indeed propose his own lesson on Laura's nature in the *Discorso della grandezza, et felice fortuna d'una gentilissima, et graziosiss. Donna qual fu M. Laura*, published by Giorgio Marescotti in 1580.³⁵ The work is dedicated to Pellegrina Cappello Bentivoglio, the young daughter of the first marriage of Bianca Cappello, wife of Francesco I de' Medici since 1579.³⁶ The name Pellegrina offers the chance for a weak play on words: as life is a pilgrimage on Earth until the soul is back in Heaven, Verino presents Pellegrina with the best model for her peregrination, that is, the portrait of the life of Madonna Laura, wishing her the same 'felice grandezza'³⁷ or, rather, an even greater 'grandezza', given her superiority as regards place of birth, parents and relatives:

Le bacio le mani, e le disidero dalla D.M. quella felice grandezza, la quale io qui ho riconosciuta in M. Laura, et tanto maggiore, quanto V. Excell. Illustriss. di maggior luogo quaggiù in terra, et di maggiori persone è nata, et con i parenti di maggiore splendore è imparentata. (fol. [A3^r])

It is clear that Verino is considering, with those elements, some pillars of the traditional idea of nobility on which, in 1574, he had published an essay, *Il primo libro*

35 On Verino, aside from Alessandra Gibba, 'Francesco de' Vieri Known as Il Verino Secondo, some Literary and Philosophical Themes in His Work' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1993), the critical bibliography is quite scarce: Simone Fellina, 'Platone a scuola: l'insegnamento di Francesco de' Vieri detto il Verino Secondo', *Noctua*, 2 (2015), 97–181; and Alessandra Gibba, 'Francesco de' Vieri (1524–1591) and his Teaching at the University of Pisa', *History of Universities*, 14 (1995–96), 143–55. Of some interest is Rosario Pintaudi, 'Il Platone di Francesco Verino Secondo (Laur. Acquisti e doni 706)', *Rinascimento*, 16 (1976), 241–44, on his handwritten annotations in a volume of *Opere di Platone* (1548) translated by Marsilius Ficinus. His *Lezioni d'amore* have been published by John Colaneri (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1973).

36 Pellegrina was also the dedicatee of the third part of Cesare Rinaldi's *Rime*, while Verino dedicated to Ulisse Bentivoglio, husband of Pellegrina, his *Lezione dove si ragiona delle idee e delle bellezze*. Cfr. Emanuele Cicogna, *Bianca Cappello. Cenni storico-critici* (Venice: Picotti, 1828), p. 43, n. 34.

37 *Discorso della grandezza, et felice fortuna d'una gentilissima, et graziosiss. Donna qual fu M. Laura, di M. Francesco de' Vieri, detto il Verino Secondo* [...] (Florence: Giorgio Marescotti, 1580), fol. [A3^r].

della nobiltà, dedicated to Eleonora di Garzia di Toledo, wife of Pietro de' Medici. It is a systematic treatise on nobility, in the wake of the best-known political theories, in some ways like the first part of della Barba's *Nuova spositione*; a peculiar aspect, nonetheless, is its strong and clear Platonic background (with many elements to be found again in the *Discorso della grandezza, et felice fortuna*), that leads Verino Secondo to identify nobility with virtue. In spite of that, the political dimension is still clear, and not only because of the many examples of the treatise derive from the ancient or, more frequently, the modern Italian aristocracy, but because the definition itself implies respect for the current social hierarchy:

[...] in poche parole diffinirò la Nobiltà, dicendo che ella è una inclinatione alla virtù et agli atti virtuosi, acquistata primieramente da cagioni naturali e da Dio in quelli che si chiamono e sono nobili, per la quale con facilità diventano felici, et la loro felicità via più illustre, et chiara diviene.³⁸

On the other hand, Verino's *Discorso della grandezza, et felice fortuna* is structured on the image of pilgrimage; the five chapters, indeed, handle five phases of Laura's life, seen as a pilgrimage on earth from heaven: prior to her birth ('innanzi che venisse al mondo'), the condition of her birth ('lo stato della nascita'), her earthly life ('mentre ella visse quaggiù in terra'), her death ('nel tempo che ella morì'), and her afterlife ('poi che l'anima sua è gita al Cielo'). Too many women, nevertheless, forget that life is just transient and that one day they will head to heaven, possibly taking with them the noblest and most distinguished things they found in their life:

Ricordatevi, ricordatevi, gentilissime donne, che voi siate venute dal Cielo come pellegrine per dovere al Cielo ritornare, e portarne tutto quello che qua troverete, che habbia del nobile, et del pellegrino. (p. 9)

If for Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans, Judith, Aspasia, Diotima, and Lucretia could work, separately, as female models for prudence, fortitude, chastity, doctrine, and temperance, for modern women Laura will be the best, indeed a unique, example of all the virtues necessary for a fully accomplished Christian life. Studying her life, women will find, assembled in one person alone, what is necessary to help them perfecting themselves and enhancing their souls in order to return one day to heaven: 'E acciocché in una sol donna famosa, e con nobil piacere possino far questo, riguardino a tutto il progresso della graziosissima, et onestissima Madonna Laura' (p. 10).

Verino's *Discorso* comes to be in some ways a Book of Manners (to be constantly read, by the way)³⁹ for noblewomen. At first, the author identifies his interlocutors as the 'graziosissime, et accortissime donne' (p. 7); furthermore, the preface clearly dialogues with the best-known literature on female dignity, polemicizing against both the idea that women have been created only for male pleasure and the even more misogynistic stance that they should do nothing but sew, spin and weave, but also questioning the 'sophistry' (spreading in contemporary treatises) of a natural

38 Francesco de' Veri detto il Verino secondo, *Il primo libro della nobiltà* (Florence: Giorgio Marescotti, 1574), pp. 72–73.

39 See *Discorso della grandezza*, p. 10.

female superiority (pp. 7–8). In the Platonic perspective typical of the author, women must instead emulate Laura and her search for that perfection for which God and Nature had prepared her: '[...] con atti di tanta virtù a quanta innanzi si generasse era da Dio eletta, et a quanta i cieli, et l'altre cagioni naturali nel nascere l'haveano disposta' (p. 10).

This handbook to learn perfection benefits, as optimistically specified by Verino, from pleasure ('vi doverrà dilettere') and brilliance ('harà dell'ingegno'). The *Discorso*, indeed, not only contains many quotations from Petrarch ('molte belle autorità del leggiadrissimo M. Francesco Petrarca'), but also tackles and answers many difficult questions and doubts ('molte, e molte sottili dubitazioni che si muoveranno, e si risolveranno chiaramente', pp. 10–11). The structure of every chapter is similar: first the definition of a specific kind of greatness, then the recognition of it in Petrarch's poems and, lastly, the answer to the philosophical questions that arise from some passages of the texts, so that the treatise comes to be a sort of unsystematic philosophical commentary on the *Canzoniere*. In many cases, anyway, and mostly in the third chapter, questions stem from each other on multiple levels, creating an elaborate tree of poetical, critical, and philosophical problems.

As a whole, the *Discorso* aspires, then, to be a spiritual biography of Laura as well as a worldly encyclopedia of philosophical questions 'for ladies'. If, for the former, Verino's work is indubitably of some cultural interest, for the latter it sometimes amasses otiose and hair-splitting curiosities. A clear specimen of such oddity, for example, is the question — while analysing l. 5 of sonnet 77 'Per mirar Policeto a prova fiso' ('Ma certo il mio Simon fu in Paradiso') — as to how Simone Martini could actually paint Laura in heaven while he was on earth (p. 18). Although the question might seem superfluous, the answer is — although unforeseen — illuminating as to the pervasive Platonism of the *Discorso*. Simone Martini, indeed, could go beyond matter and portray Laura's beauty in the real form it has in God's mind: 'Simone fu in Paradiso [...] per modo di similitudine quanto all'atto di ritrarla più a punto di quello che nella sensibile materia non è, come ancora a punto si ritrova nella mente di Dio'.⁴⁰

This is just a hint at the role played by Platonism (along with Plotinus, Hermes Trismegistus, Pico, Porphyry, and others) in the *Discorso*. Francesco de' Vieri, in the wake of Florentine Ficinism, was actually a committed proponent of the re-introduction of Plato in the University of Pisa, and in 1576 had been allowed to teach, on feast days, a special course on Platonism to complement his lectures on Aristotelian logic and natural philosophy. Verino aimed at reconciling Aristotle and Plato, as proved by his *Vere conclusioni di Platone conformi alla dottrina Christiana et a quella di Aristotile* (1589); in Verino's opinion, if Platonic dialogues lacked in orderliness (and Verino's goal was to provide them with recaps and a distribution in

40 Of course, all the lectures of the Accademici are steeped in Platonism (as well as in Aristotelianism); nevertheless, in his lecture (1549) on the two sonnets on Simone Martini's portrait, Gelli stresses in particular the importance of Aristotle for the comprehension of *RVF*, 78, and of Plato for *RVF*, 77 (analysing for example the problem, already summarized in Gesualdo's commentary, of the presence in God only of the universals, and not of the particulars, as Laura is): see Gelli, pp. 246–47 and 259–60.

chapters), they were better suited to popularization. It is therefore probably not by chance that the *Discorso* was published only two years after that de' Vieri, because of the harsh hostility of his colleagues, had been forced to abandon the course on Plato. In some ways, the lecture on Laura's greatness could be seen, then, as a continuation of the Plato-agenda outside university.

Platonism is undeniably already in the first chapter, on Laura's life prior to her birth. This opens with a preamble that is, in fact, a description of Neoplatonic cosmology, with a phenomenal world deriving, through ideas, from God. Consequently, mundane greatness and happiness are already in God's mind and are instrumental in guaranteeing a well-functioning society where the importance of aristocracy is undeniable: not only 'Chi dee essere grande e felice è prima tale nella mente divina, e per divino beneplacito a tanta altezza è eletto e disposto, perché imiti la D. Bontà, così nell'essere benefico a bisognosi, et a buoni', but also 'Ogni potestà e grandezza è da Dio' (pp. 16–17).

This Platonic system (and the role of nobility it implies) is proved, according to Verino Secondo, not only by the sonnet 'Per mirar Policleto in Paradiso', where Petrarch asserts that Simone Martini could portray Laura in paradise, but also by the first quatrain of sonnet 159 'In qual parte del cielo, in quale idea', where Petrarch wonders in which part of heaven or in which idea nature could find the model from which to craft Laura's visage:

In qual parte del Cielo, in quale Idea
Era l'esempio, onde natura tolse
Quel bel viso leggiadro in ch'ella volse
Mostrar quaggiù, quanto lassù potea?⁴¹

This chapter, so filled with Platonism, ends by properly and inevitably recommending Laura as a symbol of an innate and ontological nobility to women:

Vedete. Vedete gentilissime Donne, quale si fusse il principio della grandezza, et della grazia di M. Laura, poichè hebbe origine dalla Divina Essenza, dove come in un lucidissimo specchio ella molto più bella è conosciuta da Dio, che quaggiù in terra, et dove rimirò la natura per mostrare quanto lassù potea, et come da più eccellenti Pittori, et Poeti ella è espressa, et ritratta in carte. (p. 20)

The second chapter handles the next step of Laura's pilgrimage, her birth, which can be considered as the implementation of the form in God's mind through excellent tools and pure matter. In the creation of Laura, the tools were angels, spheres, and planets, as well as the place where she was born; matter, instead, were the four classical elements, which derived in turn from the four bodily fluids of her parents. This is a position that opens not only to, again, Platonism (and Aristotelianism), but also to a Christianized astrology: the position and influence of planets and stars, and consequently the nature and status of men and women, are because of God's loving providence. A propitious influence of the stars at Laura's birth is proved through the fifth stanza of canzone 325 'Tacer non posso' (p. 22):

41 [In what part of Heaven, in what Idea was the pattern from which Nature copied that lovely face, in which she has shown down here all that she is capable of doing up there].

Il dì che costei nacque, eran le stelle
 che producon fra voi felici effetti
 in luoghi alti et electi.⁴²

Again, Petrarch himself, with sonnet 154, is quoted to state that not only 'le stelle, e 'l cielo', but as well 'gli elementi a prova' were excellent in Laura while, on the popularization side, Verino has the chance to better explain the four classical elements, some aspects of Aristotelian physics (on which he had previously written a book in Italian, the *Trattato delle metheore*), and Hippocrates's humoral theory. Laura, thus, was happy in her birth because matter and spheres cooperated so that men could recognize God's role in her beauty. Furthermore, her birth, according to the second chapter of *Triumphus mortis*, in 'troppo humil terren'⁴³ is actually just further evidence of her greatness, because God always glorifies humility ('humiltate exaltar sempre gli piacque'),⁴⁴ and, of course, it is not by chance that the chapter on Laura's birth ends by mentioning Jesus's birth in a humble little town of Judea, a comparison authorized by the tercets of sonnet 4 'Que' ch'infinita providentia et arte'.

The third chapter, about Laura's life, is by far the longest and richest in quotations from the *Canzoniere*. It handles three specific issues: her beauties (of soul, body, and voice, which is a combination of them); the effects she produced in her lover; and the natural similes used by the poet to describe her. The three beauties, obviously, are easily recognizable in Laura, as stated by sonnet 213 'Grazie ch'a pochi il ciel largo destina'. Of striking interest, nevertheless, is the first question raised by the sonnet, namely why God, despite loving everybody in the same way, bestows his gifts upon few people. Verino's answer is that the different distribution of qualities is instrumental in structuring the world, so that those who are void of God's gifts recognize, love and imitate them in those who have instead been lavished with them, thus making their way to heaven. Again, it is a clear hint at Platonism; however, Platonism is also clear in the idea that a beautiful voice is important because melodious singing can lead to detachment from matter and contemplation of the beauty of the universe (and a few lines later, Verino adds as similar instruments mathematics and philosophy, syncretizing Plotinus, Plato, and Socrates) (p. 31). Lastly, it has probably to be underscored that, although without any explicit political dimension, the overall idea of an *a priori* hierarchy consistent with both God's will and the contemporary social context is quite significant in the chapter.

Nevertheless, the longest part of the treatise, and its core, is the second section of the chapter. Here, for twenty-two pages (out of a total of sixty-eight), Verino Secondo exhibits the whole phenomenology of love. We are faced with an extensive survey of feelings and reactions (both physical and psychological) on the side of the lover and of the dynamics of love that are clearly derived from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Florentine poetry, although in some ways through the filter

42 [The day she was born, the stars that produce among you happy effects [...], in high and noble places].

43 Petrarch, *Triumphus mortis*, II. 165.

44 *RVF*, 4. 11.

of Bembo's *Asolani* (though not expressly quoted, the dialogue emerges through the distinction of the effects of love into three categories: torment, happiness, and virtuous beatitude) (p. 32). Given that Platonism also remains clear in this section (as can be seen from the questions on how the lover can contemplate God through love for a mortal, p. 43), and that there are frequent philosophical digressions to better clarify Petrarch's difficult passages, the prominence of Florentine poetical tradition is anyway probably the element that most links Verino's *Discorso* to the Accademia Fiorentina, of which he was a member and which had been the breeding ground for della Barba's lecture. This perception could be confirmed by the fact that Verino mentions here his still unpublished commentary on 'Donna me prega' (p. 40): editorial self-promotion, doubtless, but the philosopher is also introducing himself as the heir to a tradition of philosophy applied to poetry.

The point is that such phenomenology is exemplified through fifteen extended quotations from Petrarch (plus some short references); indeed, according to Verino, Petrarch would have expressed the moods and feelings of any lover through the depiction of himself, in the same way as Laura stands for every beloved woman ('Francesco Petrarca, il quale non meno con verità et a pieno ha espresso ogni condizione degli amanti con lo esempio di se stesso, et le lodi et condizioni dell'amate donne, con l'esempio della sua M. Laura', p. 47). Peculiarly interesting is the string of excerpts from the *Canzoniere* aimed at describing the positive effects of love, from discharging every other pleasure to being incited to virtue, from the way to heaven being revealed to desiring one day to contemplate the divine beauty in paradise (pp. 47–53). One more time, these effects describe a Platonic ascension from matter to God, but the same can be said for the last section of the third chapter, where Verino Secondo analyses the similes applied to Laura with a sequence from magnet, to laurel, to phoenix, up to angels and eventually to God (with the first quatrain of sonnet 191 'Sì come eterna vita è veder Dio') (pp. 53–56).

Such a climax is the best transition to the fourth chapter (pp. 56–62), addressing the three forms of Laura's happiness in her death: the first are the astonishing signs that happened at her death, and it is quite peculiar both that Verino also mentions the signs that preceded the death of the two philosophers Plotinus and Pico, and that the six visions of 'Standomi un giorno solo alla finestra' are considered foreshadowings of Laura's death, and not just allegories; the second is the way she died, with a tranquility that, through quotations from *Triumphus mortis*, I, is compared to that of Socrates in *Phaedo*; third and last are the pain and praises of the people that loved her.

Finally, the last short chapter describes three kinds of happiness experienced by Laura in the afterlife: the first and second, unsurprisingly, are the presence of angels and the intellectual love of God; the third is, rather, fame through the centuries, naturally obtained thanks to Petrarch's poems (an earthly glory, then, fully coherent neither with Christianity nor with Platonism). In one of the latter two, Verino finds the definition of Laura's real and ontological nature and condition, thus closing the treatise in such a way that gives it a circular structure. In canzone 270, 'Amor, se vuo' ch'i' torni al giogo antico', l. 96 indeed reads: 'ma piango et grido: "Ahi nobil

pellegrina”’. That phrase triggers a comment by Verino that summarizes the main topics of the *Discorso*, that is the idea of pilgrimage, Laura’s virtues, and the concept of innate internal nobility:

Et è qui da sapere che questo bel nome, che il Petrarca col suo dire le acquista non è quello, che ella hebbe alle fonte, ma il nome concernente eccellenza di natura, di luogo, et d’operazioni, quale è questo nome Pellegrina con questo cognome di Nobile, et bene se le conviene perché è divina per l’animo, viene dalla celeste patria, e poichè nel suo pellegrinaggio di quaggiù ella così nobilmente e valorosamente combatté con l’amore, prima di tutte le più potenti passioni [...]. (p. 65)

We are very far, of course and inevitably, from the nobility analysed by della Barba. Simone, after all, was a lawyer lecturing in a public context in politically crucial years, while Verino was a philosopher struggling to introduce Plato into university curricula and writing in private form to an audience of women. Nevertheless, in this peculiar Platonic treatise an aristocratic social hierarchy often surfaces: in his final address, Verino again recommends Laura to the women as the best model for their pilgrimage in order to resemble, as much as they can, God, that is the ‘Principe de’ principi’. In the very last words of the treatise, the platonic and philosophical hierarchy comes to superimpose itself on the political hierarchy.