THE ICONOGRAPHY OF DEATH IN MICHELANGELO'S LYRIC POETRY

In a letter to Giorgio Vasari, Michelangelo commented that death was sculpted in his every thought (*Rime* 628). Throughout his career as sculptor, painter and poet, Michelangelo was fascinated with the notion of death, which existed in a reciprocal affinity with life. Donato Giannotti, in one of his dialogues, describes Michelangelo's thinking as similar to Socrates in the *Phaedo*, searching for self-knowledge through the contemplation of death. Specifically, in an imaginary dialogue with Giannotti, Michelangelo affirms that human pleasure derives more from the contemplation of death than from earthly delights. He argues that death, while by its very nature destroying all things, makes it possible for humans to recognize and perfect themselves (Barolsky 14). Thus death is an appetite protecting us from our passions, it allows us to become complete human beings, and it is the only thought that moves us to recognize our true selves.

In the *Phaedo*, Plato states that the quintessence of true knowledge rests in the search for death, and "that true philosophers make dying their profession" (121). He believes that in order to seek authentic knowledge the soul must flee from the body, which is a hindrance to the very acquisition of knowledge. The soul, when imprisoned by the body, is not "free of all distractions" — distractions that restrain it from pursuing the very essence of true knowledge. Plato states that "the body intrudes ... into our investigations, interrupting, disturbing, distracting, and preventing us... from getting a glimpse of the truth " (119). Thus contemplation of death must be done with the desire "to get rid of the body" (120), so that one may "contemplate things in isolation with the soul" (120). According to Plato, the more one contemplates death the more knowledgeable one becomes about life. Specifically, the more perfectly one is able to visualize death, the more perfect the search for the perfect object becomes: "[because] you are likely to attain more nearly to knowledge of your object in proportion to the care of accuracy with which you have prepared yourself to understand that object in itself" (119). The realization of true knowledge occurs through a paradoxical process of
“two sets of opposites, going round in a sort of cycle” (127). Thus the purpose of life is to contemplate death because it is essential to self-knowledge, for “if there is such a thing as coming to life again... it must be a process from death to life” (127). The very process of the contemplation of death as a process of self-knowledge brings the philosopher closer to picturing the true essence of life. (119).

In his artistic production, Michelangelo represents death in a reciprocal affinity with life in much the same manner as Plato. In fact he comes to understand that this symbiosis of apparent opposites comprises a dialectical relationship, which follows Plato's exegesis of the paradoxical process of meaning within which “two sets of opposites” (127) co-exist. In Madrigal 124, Michelangelo states: "E così morte e vita, / contrarie, insieme in un piccio momento / dentro a l'anima sento [And thus, within my soul/ I feel both death and life, though opposites, / together for a brief moment].”

Giorgio Vasari affirmed that Michelangelo often spoke in vague and ambiguous terms, leaving those who spoke to him of two minds about what he had said. This ambiguity extended to Michelangelo's perception of death as an integral part of life:

Essendogli ragionato de la morte da un suo amico,... rispose che tutto era nulla perché se la vita ci piace, essendo anco la morte di mano d'un medesimo maestro quello non ci dovrebbe dispiacere (Vasari 912).
[He was imprecise and ambiguous in his speech, which often was doubled-edged... when a friend spoke to him about death, he answered that it was all one and the same. If we like life, we should not dislike death since both derive from the hand of the same master].

Thus for Michelangelo, in order for the human soul to experience pleasure—pleasure that allows the artist to create—it must acquire a taste for the contemplation of death.

The depiction of death in Michelangelo's lyrical production is a source of self-reflection on his inner life and on his contemplation of his place within the cosmos. Musing on death becomes a transcendent appetite allowing him to meditate continuously on the dialectical relationship between life and death, as he attempts to sculpture and transform his feeble flesh into a touchstone of eternal repose and peace. In his poetry, he relates this inner conflict in relation to Plato's Phaedo, the Christian tradition, Petrarch, and the neo-platonic humanists of the Renaissance. Past criticism of Michelangelo's lyric poetry—a body of more than three hundred sonnets, madrigals and
other poems—has questioned whether Michelangelo’s lyrical production possesses the same quality and depth of artistry as his sculptures and paintings. This tradition of criticism began with Michelangelo himself, who stated in a letter to Giorgio Vasari in 1557 that “lo scrivere m'è di grande affanno, perché non è mia arte” (writing is of great difficulty to me because it is not my art) (Michelangelo, Rime 628). However, Michelangelo’s poetry is a “significant body of artistic composition and possesses an integrity of its own” (Lucente 306). In order to appreciate fully his poetry, we should examine it from his depiction of the tensions inherent in it, tensions that are built on comparative paradoxes (Michelangelo, The Poetry 42). Specifically, we must capture his troubled dialogue with his inner soul, allowing his reflective conversation with himself to unfold the cultural and intellectual realities of his times.

In his poetry, Michelangelo negotiates historical fragments to represent for himself the true essence of death and its capacity for molding his own individuality as an artist, poet and human being. This rich tapestry of his poetic dialogue is built around Plato’s sense of the binary opposition between death and life; for Michelangelo it is both true and ironic that in death lies the beauty of creation, which is both individual and universal life. In sonnet 84, “Si come nella penna e nell’inchiostro,” written to Tommaso Cavalieri as his contribution to the Renaissance artistic dispute *ut pictura poesis* (as is painting so is poetry) (Clements 22), Michelangelo states that the search for the perfect word or the perfect artistic gesture resembles the arduous attempt to achieve clarity through the contemplation of the last things, i.e. death:

Si come nella penna e nell’inchiostro  
è l’alto e l’basso e ‘l mediocre stile,  
e ne’ marmi l’immagin ricca e vile,  
secondo che ’l sa trar l’ingegno nostro;  
cosi, signor mie car, nel petto vostro,  
quante l’orgoglio è forse ogni atto umile;  
ma io sol quel c’a me proprio è e simile  
ne traggo, come fuor nel viso mostro.  
Chi semina sospir, lacrime e doglie,  
(l’umor dal ciel terreste, schietto e solo,  
a vari semi vario si converte),  
però pianto e dolor ne miete e coglie;  
chi mira alta beltà con sì gran duolo,  
ne ritra’ doglie e pene acerbe e certe.
[Just as within pen and ink there exist
the lofty and the low and the middling style,
and within marbles are images rich or worthless,
depending on what our talents can draw out of them,
thus, my lord, there may be in your breast
as much pride as acts of humility;
but I only draw out of it what's suitable
and similar to me, as my faces shows.
As earthly rain from heaven, single and pure,
is turned into various forms by various seeds,
one who sows sighs and tears and pains
harvests and reaps from them sorrow and weeping;
and one who looks on high beauty from great sadness
is sure to draw from it harsh pain and suffering.]

With this sonnet, the poet enters into the Renaissance dispute over the aesthetic theory known as *ut pictura poesis*. The dispute concerned the similarities between poetry and painting and the aims of artistic creation. Michelangelo adopts a different approach from many of his contemporaries, who admit that parallels between painting and poetry existed, yet posited that one medium was superior to, or at least in competition with the other. Michelangelo, however, believes that marble and ink are essentially equal in their power. It is the artist's gaze, “chi mira [who looks]” that translates the raw material into creative expression, for it “... a vari semi vario si converte [is turned into various forms by various seeds].”

For Michelangelo, the artistic process begins with the artist's contemplating his raw material with “si gran duolo [from great sadness].” This painful process hones the artist's gaze through “doglie e pene acerbe e certe [harsh pain and suffering,]” emptying him out and allowing him to experience a void. The void then provokes the artist to desire the object of contemplation through a paradoxical process of oppositions: desire and its lack of fulfillment. These oppositions create tension between the presence and absence of the highest beauty, “alta belta [high beauty].” Although Michelangelo does not mention death as a part of the artistic process, the theme of death prevails through the artist's creation of a void. In “Si come nella penna e nel l'inchiostro,” Michelangelo portrays artistic contemplation as an ascetical process. Although “death” is a thought, which allows the artist to recognize himself, “ma io solo quel c'a me proprio è simile / ne traggo, come fuor nel viso mostro [but I only draw out of it what's suitable / and similar to me, as my face shows,] it is also a passage to enlightenment. Furthermore,
Michelangelo argues that artistic gratification does not come from the delights and pleasures of life, but from suffering and pain. The suffering caused by the gaze on high beauty creates the void which is both desire and the inability to experience the complete pleasure of high beauty, as an object in itself of contemplation. This contemplation, in platonic terms, represents the search for perfect cosmic form and for the Christian the soul's return to God. This unfulfilled desire molds the process that lies behind the ink and marble. The writing, the setting down, the chiseling away, the picturing, and the framing that the artist, the poet, and philosopher discover emerge from the contemplation of the true essence of what the individual "I" can see and create. Perfection does not lie in the beauty of the final product. Rather it is a transcendent appetite, which induces the artist, poet and philosopher to contemplate eternal ecstasy.

Michelangelo's search for the perfect form recalls that of Lorenzo de' Medici, the Magnificent. In his Comento sopra alcuni de' suoi sonetti, Lorenzo states that the search for perfection is nothing but an appetite inducing the artist to contemplate formal perfection (De' Medici 34). Thus an artist is capable of representing this perfection of form only when his or her intellect can comprehend and decipher in Plato's sense, the "object in proportion." It is the artist's appetite/desire, which shapes this search for perfection, as Michelangelo portrays it in sonnet 151:

Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto
 c'un marmo solo in sé non circonscriva
 col suo superchio, e solo a quello arriva
 la man che ubbidisce all'intelletto.
 Il mal ch'io fuggo, e 'l ben ch'io mi prometto,
 in te, donna leggiadra, altera e diva,
 tal si nasconde; e perch'io più non viva,
 contraria ho l'arte al disiato effetto.
 Amor dunque non ha, né tua beltate
 o durezza o fortuna o gran disdegno,
 del mio mal colpa, o mio destino o sorte;
 se dentro del tuo cor morte e pietate
 porti in un tempo, e che 'l mio basso ingegno
 non sappia, ardendo, trarne altro che morte.

[Not even the best of artists has any conception that a single marble block does not contain within its excess, and that is only attained by the hand that obeys the intellect.]
The pain I flee from and the joy I hope for
are similarly hidden in you, lovely lady,
lofty and divine; but, to my mortal harm,
my art gives results the reverse of what I wish.
Love, therefore, cannot be blamed for my pain,
nor can your beauty, your hardness, or your scorn,
nor fortune, nor my destiny, nor chance,
if you hold both death and mercy in your heart
at the same time, and my lowly wits, though burning,
cannot draw from it anything but death.]

Michelangelo’s appetite leads him to desire perfection of form, but once
he realizes that this human appetite/desire is not capable of grasping the
perfect essence of the object, the artist experiences imperfection, emptiness,
a void. For Michelangelo this void is the very representation of death. This
particular sonnet written to Vittoria Colonna\(^9\) between 1538-44 has received
ample commentary,\(^10\) beginning in 1546 when Benedetto Varchi (1503-1564)
lectured on the sonnet in the first of his *Lezzioni* at the Academy of Florence.
Once again, as in the sonnet “Sì come nella penna,” Michelangelo ascribes
creative power to the artist, saying “solo a quello arriva / la man che
ubbidisce all’intelletto [by the hand that obeys the intellect.]” However, his
intellect is incapable of grasping fully the very perfection of Vittoria’s beau-
ty, thus his search for the ideal leads him to contemplate imperfection, the
void, death itself. He laments that: “contraria ho l’arte al disiâtó effetto [my
art gives results the reverse of what I wish.] He senses his impotence, his
lack of power when faced with the potential perfection hidden within his
raw material, in the excess of the marble. Thus the process of creation leads
him to experience the void of imperfection, powerlessness, death.

However, like Plato in the *Phaedeo*, Michelangelo represents the search for
ture knowledge by means of a paradoxical process of “two sets of opposites,
going round in a sort of cycle” (127). In the last two lines of the sonnet, the
poet again laments the failed artistic vision. Michelangelo draws life from
death in the arduous process of creation, in the burning intellect in which
resides the desire for life. The artist’s sense of powerlessness, of the void,
moves him forward to understand the final powerlessness of death.
Paradoxically this contemplation of death allows the artist to understand life
itself.

Michelangelo’s concept that the contemplation of death is analogous to
reflecting on life itself is particularly notable in his unfinished sonnet 74:
I' piango, i' ardo, i' mi consumo, e 'l core
di questo si nutrisce. O dolce sorte!
chi è che viva sol della sua morte,
como fo io d'affanni e di dolore?
Ahi! crudele arcier, tu sai ben l'ore
da far tranquille l'angosciose e corte
miserie nostre con la tuo man forte:
ché chi vive di morte mai non muore.

[I weep, I burn, I waste away, and my heart
is fed by all this. O sweet destiny!
Who else is there who lives only on his death,
as I do, on suffering and pain?
Oh, cruel archer, you know just the moment
in which to put rest, with your powerful hand,
our brief and anguished misery;
for one who lives on death never dies.]

In this poem Michelangelo meditates on his own death and considers that
this self-reflection helps him determine who he is as a human being. The
reflection on his own death jolts him into thinking about the nothingness
facing all human beings at the end of their earthly existence. However, the
contemplation of the void allows him to measure the distance that separates
life from death thus, reinvigorating his desire to live more fully by keeping
the image of death before him—an image, which represents an ascetical
movement. In Plato’s terms, Michelangelo contemplates death as an “object
in itself.” This meditation illuminates his sense of self, allowing him to
glimpse himself sub specie aeternitatis. Through this illumination, the poet
sublimates the very idea of life and death, reframing his place within the
scheme of things when he claims that “... chi vive di morte mai non muore
[for one who lives on death never dies].”

Sonnet 74 is also reminiscent of Petrarch’s Canzoniere, bringing to mind
the duality between appearance and reality in Petrarch’s lyrical poetry.
Giuseppe Mazzotta noted this tension in Petrarch’s sonnet “Erano i capei:”

Erano i capei d’oro a l’aura sparsi
che ’n mille dolci nodi gli avolgea,
e ’l vago lume oltra misura ardea
di quei begli occhi ch’or ne son si scarsi;
e ’l viso di pietosi color farsi,
(non so se vero o falso) mi parea:
Therefore, poetry (61).
fundamental poet's to surrounding always exists the tion at essence unable because its
Mazzetta in Petrarch, because dislocation, image a thousand piaga uno qual
Her summer, in her face, what wonder is it if I suddenly caught fire? Her was not that of a mortal thing but of some angelic form, and her words sounded different from a merely human voice: a celestial spirit, a living sun was what I saw, and if she were not such now, a wound is not healed by the loosening of the bow.]11

Mazzotta states that, although Laura's beauty12 is the primary object of the poet's contemplation, it becomes "the pretext for raising what is perhaps the fundamental question of the sonnet, the meaning of appearance" (62). Therefore, "the poet's memory in a real sense... is the privileged metaphor" (61). Mazzotta continues that the most significant element in Petrarch's lyric poetry is the metamorphosis which occurs within the form of the narcissistic self: "Metamorphosis is for Petrarch the metaphor of spatial and temporal dislocation, the hint that no form is ever stable and that every form is always moving toward still other forms" (66). Petrarca professes himself unable to achieve serenity and calm in contemplating Laura's beauty and to arrive at a point of equilibrium within the turbulence of time and meaning surrounding his inspiration. Laura is the means through which the poet tries to achieve balance and serenity. The poet, aware of his own failure to arrive at a point of stillness, "by the act of memory... tries to give Laura's apparition a stabilized and fixed presence that may redeem and abolish time; but the image cannot be deciphered" (Mazzotta 63). In Petrarch, the self, who exists in the tension between appearance and reality, confronts its own limits because it cannot reconcile itself within its own true form. Thus the essence of desire is its existence in perennial tension.

In Petrarch, the elements of appearance and reality are irreconcilable because "the conceptual implication of the story is clear: whatever authen-
tic self-knowledge is possible, it is equivalent to death” (Mazzotta 65). In his poem, “I piango,” Michelangelo, like Petrarch confronts the problem of imagination and reality. However, while Petrarch, in T.S. Eliot’s words, cannot find the “still point of the turning world” in the contemplation of Laura’s beauty, Michelangelo reaches this point in his contemplation of death. For Michelangelo contemplating the end of his earthly existence grants him the transcendental illumination necessary for all self-reflection, since through this is how the poet fully understands himself within a cosmic perspective. Therefore, the transcendence made possible by the meditation on his own death creates the distance necessary for achieving eternal life through art.

Michelangelo’s poem 21 is a memento mori, a grim warning that death is the culmination of the inexorable passage of time; the poet describes time’s ravages, which leads inevitable to death:

Chiunche nasce a morte arriva  
nel fuggir del tempo; e 'l sole  
niuna cosa lascia viva.  
Manca il dolce e quel che dole  
e gl’ingegni e le parole;  
e le nostre antiche prole  
al sole ombre, al vento un fummo.  
Come voi uomini fummo,  
liei e tristi, come siete;  
e or siàn, come vedete,  
terra al sol, di vita priva.  
Ogni cosa a morte arriva.  
Già fur gli occhi nostri interi  
con la luce in ogni speco;  
or son voti, orrendi e neri.  
e ciò porta il tempo seco.

[Whoever’s born must come to death  
in the course of time, and the sun  
doesn’t leave a thing alive.  
Gone are joy and cause of sadness,  
and all thinking and all speech,  
and our ancient pedigrees,  
shadows in the sun, smoke in the wind.  
Once, we too were men like you,  
sad and joyful, just as you are;  
now we are, as you can see,
dust in the sun, deprived of life.
Everything must come to death.
Once our eyes were fully whole,
with a light within each cavern:
now they're empty, black, and frightful:
that's what time brings in its wake.]

In this poem, Michelangelo appropriates the Petrarchian image of Laura's eyes of "Erano i capei." In Petrarch's sonnet, Laura, the poet’s muse and inspiration, is a “vivo sole [living sun].” But the sun has been extinguished and the muse's beauty, the beauty of a young woman, lives only in the poet's memory. Petrarch elegiacally remembers Laura in whom, the “vago lume oltra misura ardea / di quei begli occhi ch'or ne son si scarsi [lovely light burned without measure in her eyes, which are now so stingy of it].”
The poet’s desire for Laura, the perfect image, dwells in the tension between the recollection in memory of a young Laura and in her reality as an old woman. In this shimmering tension, he tries, in dialectical terms, to fix in his memory the image of Laura, making her alive only through recollection.

Michelangelo however, revels in the void. In contrast to Petrarch's living sun, he contemplates the avenging of the “... sole / [che] niuna cosa lascia viva [sun [which] doesn't leave a thing alive]”. The eyes that in Petrarch's sonnet were once full of light and burned without measure, now become “... voti, orrendi e neri [empty, black and frightful].” In Michelangelo's poem, time plays a role as in Augustine's Confessions. Of time’s relentless passage, Augustine states that the passage of time does not turn uselessly through our senses, but transcends wondrous effects in our soul (IV.viii.13). Similarly, Michelangelo portrays the same movement of time, but also echoes Plato in describing its “wondrous effects.” Time’s very relentlessness, its continuous passage, creates a new space for the artist in which he is purified, emptied, and empowered to achieve greater self-knowledge.

In the Phaedo, Socrates states that true “philosophers abstain from all bodily desires and with stand them and do not yield to them” (142). Thus a philosopher’s soul, in order to be set free by philosophy must follow reason and not “allow pleasure and pain to reduce it [the soul,] once more to bondage, thus condemning itself to an endless task” (143). Unlike Socrates, who in the Phaedo takes poison to terminate his life to arrive at the contemplation of the “true and divine and unambiguous” (143) form, Michelangelo chooses not to withdraw from earthly life. He prefers to live in the tension between life and death. In Canzone 22, the poet states:
[...] 
L'anima mia, che con la morte parla 
e seco di essa stessa si consiglia, 
e di nuovi sospetti ognor s'attristema, 
cl corpo di di in di spera lasciarla: 
onde l'immaginato cammin piglia, 
di speranza e timor confusa e mista.  
(27-32)

[My soul is in conversation with Death, 
and is consulting with him about itself, 
saddened by new anxieties constantly, 
the body hoping to leave it from day to day; 
so it sets off down the road it's had in mind, 
confused by its compounded hope and fear.]

Although Michelangelo's self-knowledge relies on and resides in the contemplation of life's ultimate end, death becomes sublimated within a never-ending dialectical process.

Furthermore, in poem 52 Michelangelo discusses the temptation to take one's own life in order to arrive at a higher form of existence:

S'alcun se stesso al mondo ancider lice,  
pò' che per morte al ciel tornar si crede,  
sarie ben giusto a chi con tanta fede  
vive servendo miser e 'nfelice.  
Ma perché l'uom non è come fenice,  
c'alia luce del sol resurge e riede,  
la man fo pigra e nuovo tardi el piede.

[If anyone's allowed to kill himself in this world, 
thinking to return to heaven through death,  
it would surely be justified for one who lives  
in such loyal service, wretched and unhappy.  
But, because man is not like the phoenix,  
which rises again and returns to the sun's light,  
I keep my hand slack and move my foot slowly.]

In this sonnet, Michelangelo affirms his belief that since we humans cannot rise like the phoenix from our own ashes, we are wise to refrain from ending our lives. Michelangelo, very much a part of Catholic culture, refrains from taking his own life. Furthermore, in order for the "object" of
death to continue to give meaning to his life as a human being and artist he must allow the void that he created by his very contemplation of death to persists so that he may gaze upon it indefinitely. Like Plato, Michelangelo recognizes that the human soul is “inconstant and variable” (137), but unlike the Greek Philosopher, he believes that the soul can become whole only through Christ’s redemption, as we can see in his poetry of meditation and prayer written at the end of his life. Michelangelo’s supplication in sonnet 293 shows his meditations on the soul; the poet prays:

Carico d’anni e di peccati pieno
e col trist’uso radicato e forte,
vicin mi veggio a l’una e l’altra morte,
e parte ’l cor nutrisco di veleno.
Né proprie forze ho, c’al bisogno sierno
per cangiar vita, amor, costume o sorte,
 senza le tuo divine e chiare scorte,
d’ogni fallace corso guida e freno.
Signor mie car, non basta che m’invogli
c’aspiri al ciel sol perché l’alma sia,
 non come prima, di nulla, creato.
Anzi che del mortal la privi e spogli,
prego m’ammezzi l’alta e erta via,
e fie più chiara e certa la tornata.

[Loaded down with years and filled with sins
and with bad habits, strong and deeply rooted,
I see that I am close to both of my deaths,
and yet I still nourish my heart with poison.
And I haven’t, on my own, the strength that’s needed
to change my life, love habits or destiny,
without your divine and shining companionship,
my guide and rein on every treacherous route.
It’s not enough, dear Lord, just to make me yearn
for heaven, for my soul to be remade,
and not as it was the first time, out of nothing:
Before you strip it of its mortal flesh,
I pray you, shorten by half the high, steep road,
so my way back may be more clear and certain.]

In this sonnet, Michelangelo echoes Petrarch’s idea of the weight of sin as delineated in “Io son sì stanco sotto ’l fascio antico [I am so weary under the
ancient bundle.]" However, he also recollects the Christian philosophy of the two deaths seen in Paul's letter to the Corinthians (15:20-23). In this letter, Paul considers two types of death: the death of Adam, which represents the death of man as a sinner, and the death of Christ, which represents that of redemption. Death, for Paul, cannot be the consequence of sin and at the same time death in Christ. Death for the author of the letter to the Corinthians occurs as punishment for Adam's sin, but it also the occasion through which humans participate in Christ's death. Thus death is both human frailty and the means by which we partake of the divine act of redemption. Although Michelangelo sees himself "vicin... a l'un e l'altra morte [close to both deaths.]") he is aware that in order to be redeemed, he must die in God's grace. Furthermore, he recognizes that human transcendence is limited and that it is not sufficient for God to implant in him the will to aspire to heaven. Thus he asks God to strip him of all that is mortal, so that he may participate in Christ's Calvary, the "erta via [steep road.]") This is the road which separates man from God and which was bridged only when Christ died to redeem humankind. In this sonnet, once again we observe sin and redemption, exemplars of Plato's two sets of opposites go around in a sort of cycle. However, this circular movement from God to man and from man to God also recalls Augustine's sense of eternal yearning to be with God. For Michelangelo, the path to eternal happiness is open only to those who die in God's grace.

Michelangelo negotiates in his poetry his way through a wide variety of symbolic discourses and historical signs; he bridges the tensions of these many discourses ranging through the Platonic, Christian, neo-Platonist, Renaissance humanist traditions to represent the theme of death as a source of life and artistic production. Michelangelo's poetry emerges as a way station in which these historical fragments intercommunicate and unfold, weaving themselves into the rich tapestry of his poetic dialogue. Through his poetry Michelangelo embeds himself in both metaphysical and artistic speculation about the ends of life and the relationship of human life and philosophical speculation. Thus, his poetry possesses a richness of texture that both explicates and gives purpose and life to the cultural reality, which surrounds him.

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NOTES

1 For a general discussion of Michelangelo’s artistic relationship to Socrates see (Barolsky, Michelangelo’s Nose.)
2 Ascanio Condivi, Michelangelo’s biographer, stated that he heard Michelangelo praise Plato many times and, like Plato, he was in constant pursuit of universal beauty (Vita di Michelangelo, 80).
3 All passages from Michelangelo poetry follow Saslow’s bilingual translation (Michelangelo, The Poetry).
4 Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Italian are mine.
5 For a comprehensive bibliography on the controversy surrounding Michelangelo’s poetry, see (Lucente, “Lyrical Tradition.”)
6 For a discussion on Michelangelo’s Ut Pictura Poesis, see (Renssalaer, “Ut Pictura Poesis” and Praz, Mnemosyne.)
7 For a general discussion on Michelangelo’s Platonism see (Clements, The Poetry of Michelangelo.)
8 Michelangelo’s Christian Platonism comes from Francesco Petrarca. For a discussion of Augustine’s influence on Michelangelo’s poetry see, (Mussio, “The Augustan Conflict.”)
9 For a study delineating Michelangelo’s poetry written for Vittoria Colonna, see (Fedi, “L’immagine vera.”)
10 For a discussion of neoplatonic influences regarding this particular sonnet, see (Panofsky, “The Neoplatonic Movement” and de Tolnay, The Art and Thought of Michelangelo); and for a discussion of this sonnet in relation to Michelangelo’s artistic relationship to the concetto, see (Altizer, Self and Symbolism.)
11 All passages from Francesco Petrarca’s poetry follow Durling’s bilingual translation (Petrarch, Petrarch’s Lyric Poetry).
12 The inaccessibility of Laura’s beauty can be compared to Michelangelo’s concept of “altì beltà [high beauty] of sonnet 84.
15 Even though Michelangelo was in close contact with the Italian Reformation, he remained a devout Catholic who never abandoned the teachings of the Roman church. In fact, from some of his letters we can see that he believed in the Sacraments of the Church. See the letter written to his nephew Leonardo on January 21, 1548 in which he speaks of Giovan Simone’s last rights before his death in Michelangelo (552). For studies on Michelangelo’s religious poetry see (Eisenbichler, “The Religious Poetry of Michelangelo” 121-131); de Tolnay (The Art and Thought of Michelangelo 100-123; and Francese, Il ‘nicodemismo’ di Michelangelo 143-148).

WORKS CITED


