"Non sanza prima far grande aggirata". Turning the Pages in Dante and Botticelli

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Abstract:

The paper analyses the sequentiality of Dante's narrative in *Inferno* VIII–XI, and its pictorial translation by Sandro Botticelli. It intends to show the major intermedial differences of expression and their theological consequences. As a result, it argues that Botticelli's 'undramatic' representation of the journey eliminates the tropological meaning of Dante's poem and passes over the complexity of the compensational system. The drawings rather stress the organisational model and the *longue durée* of man's representation of hell.

Key Words: Dante Alighieri, Sandro Botticelli, Inferno, intermediality, narration, theatrical representation, moral philosophy

Riassunto

Il contributo analizza la sequenzialità della narrazione di Dante in Inferno VIII-XI, e la sua traduzione pittorica da parte di Sandro Botticelli. Si intendono mostrare le maggiori differenze intermediali di espressione e le loro conseguenze teologiche. Di conseguenza, si sostiene che la rappresentazione "non drammatica" di Botticelli del viaggio elimini il significato tropologico del poema di Dante e ignori la complessità del sistema di compensazione. I disegni sottolineano piuttosto il modello organizzativo e la *longue durée* di rappresentazione dell›uomo dell›inferno.

Parole chiave: Dante Alighieri, Sandro Botticelli, Inferno, intermedialità, narrazione, rappresentazione teatrale, filosofia morale.

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I

In the spring of 2014 the Museum of Modern Art of Frankfurt hosted an exhibition entitled *Die Göttliche Komödie. Himmel, Hölle, Fegefeuer aus Sicht afrikanischer Gegenwartskünstler* (*The Divine Comedy. Heaven, Hell, Purgatory Revisited by Contemporary African Artists*). The works on display referred to Dante's text in a broad sense and, and the most interesting of them pointed to parallels and differences between Western theological thought and the concepts and representations of the afterlife in other non-Western cultures and religions, or rather to the amalgams and hybrids formed by the (mostly colonial) encounters between these cultures. For Westerners, the exhibition invoked a feeling of confusion. Reading the exhibition's subtitle challenged their pre-existing familiarity with Dante's representation of Christian dogma. The exhibition not only reverses Dante's topography, but unfolds it; it is not simply the sequential order of the *Divine Comedy* that has been overthrown, but the very logic of his system collapses by means of this simple permutation within the relationship of the three realms. Twisting the holy number 'three' might even have consequences for the most important matter of Christian faith, i.e. the dogma of the trinity.

The exhibition's spatial structure twisted the order of the words again: visitors started their tour in heaven on the ground floor, proceeded upwards into purgatory, and ended in hell on the third floor. Reversal, twisting and folding – these devices could be described as typically carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense, degrading what is theologically serious and, by doing so, producing satirical relief. In spite of this, the symbolic value of hell, purgatory, and heaven remains intact; paradise does not, for example, inevitably lose its sublimity if you enter it at ground level but what comes into question is how one gets there. Purgatory, in particular, assumes a radically different position and meaning if it leads from heaven to hell, rather than the other way round. Reversing the order, generally, makes the visitor even more aware of the traditional order and its common projection into space. The moral values of above and below have been structured hierarchically, for all times, and follow a distribution in space inseparable from language itself. Estrangement or alienation ("остранение" – *ostranenie*), as elaborated by Viktor Šklovskij, would be the term most applicable here (Šklovskij 1969: 14). Visitors are induced to look upon familiar representations in a different way – through the eyes of a horse, for example,[1] or by climbing the stairs of a sober postmodern architectural space in which the itinerary of Dante's journey has been all mixed up. Dante's draft is thus destabilized in order to draw the attention of

1. Šklovskij's example for the estrangement-device is Leo Tolstoy's story, *Kholstomer – The Story of a Horse* (1886), where a horse tells of its tribulation in the human world.

the visitor or reader to the vectorial disposition of the movements inscribed in the *Commedia*.

Following up with these considerations, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the questions raised by now a canonical subject, i.e. the relationship between text and image in Dante's poem and Sandro Botticelli's illustrations. This paper is going to explore this relationship by analysing the sequentiality of Dante's narrative, and its pictorial translation by Botticelli, using a strongly focussed example, that is, the 'strip' of *Inferno* VIII-XI. Two textual devices inform the choice of this part of the story; the crossing of the river Styx in canto VIII is preceded by a rather unusual, if not unique, narrative transition, and Virgil's theoretical exposé of the ethical and theological assumptions that structures the catalogue of sins, as well as the correspondent spatial dispositive of punishment, of canto XI. Both textual devices possess precise and significant narrative functions that, for obvious reasons, are not transposed by Botticelli.

The intermedial relationship is to be approached in three very modest steps here. Firstly, I will try to address questions relating to the narrative connections between different canti and also, if necessary, between different 'scenes' within the same canto. Secondly, and with respect to content, this paper aims to highlight not only what happens in these canti, but also their position in the sequence within the whole narrative itinerary and theological system of the *Inferno*. Thirdly, these aspects are to be compared to Botticelli's graphic representations in order to reach a possible conclusion that takes into consideration, not only the formalist point of view inherent in this kind of intermedial analysis, but also, more importantly, the temporal distance of almost 200 years between the two artists.

II

Very few preliminary remarks are necessary in order to orientate my argument along more general lines. Contextual information about Botticelli's illustrations is easily accessible and I assume that it is known. The pen drawings, with metalpoint sketches underneath, constitute a corpus of 92 sheets. Some of them are coloured, completely or partially, but most of them are incomplete or unfinished in the sense that they are not coloured. However, their original purpose, and Botticelli's motivation in creating them, is still speculated upon. The most probable hypothesis is that they were destined to form a luxurious codex in an innovative landscape format in which the drawings are placed above Dante's text. Independently from the original purpose of this supposed codex, its production must undoubtedly be viewed within the framework of cultural and religious politics that, to the end of Florentine self-

affirmation in the second half of the 15th century, adopted and used Dante's work (Meier 2013: 5). In this respect Botticelli's work – assuming that is was meant to be a private object of prestige – reflects a public Dante-'revival', most prominently epitomized by Domenico di Michelino's painting of Santa Maria del Fiore (1462), the first printed *Commedia* with Cristoforo Landino's commentary (1481), and Baccio Baldini's engravings probably designed by Botticelli. The period during which Botticelli worked on his illustrations is to be situated during and after these two dates. Michelino's representation of the poet directly associates the book's imaginary setting with the city of Florence, just as Botticelli does in his depiction of the walls of Dis. Similar to the reconstructed Botticelli-codex, Landino's glossed version of Dante's text shows hybrid pages too, putting – in the medieval tradition, of course – text, commentary, and illustrations next to each other. Nowadays the most accepted interpretation of Botticelli's drawings regards them as a 'commentary' in their own right and finds support, not only in terms of content, but also in terms of editorial composition.

Yet, as well as these features, the private character of Botticelli's illustrations, together with the new horizontal format, stands for an unofficial counterpart to cultural politics. In opposition to Landino's educational intention, the drawings show the result of an individualistic reading, that is, a private examination of the central questions of Christian dogma.

If one takes merely a superficial look at Botticelli's sheets, two particularities can immediately be noticed which are of major importance to my argument here. The first is that Botticelli in general does not illustrate single scenes but the whole canto.[2] The aspect of these pictures, therefore, differ from medieval illuminations, from Baldini's engravings, and from the later and more popular 'scenic' representations by Bonaventura Genelli (1798–1868) and Gustave Doré (1832–1883).[3] On the one hand, Doré, Genelli, and others isolate certain 'scenes', rendering them 'dramatic', by the reduction of space into a lively illuminated spot and by the reduction of time into a climactic moment. Botticelli, on the other hand, gives us panoramic images, where single scenes told by Dante can be made out perfectly. But he puts them on the same scale with other scenes and figures. If one compares the drawings with the Baldini-engravings, in which Dante and Virgil are made to stand out from the rest of hell due to their larger proportion, this is the most significant "narrative revision" Botticelli makes.[4]

2. The illustration of *If.* XXXI showing the "giganti" may be considered as an exception to this rule. However, the 'scenic' representation can be read as a mere illusion; as on the other sheets, Dante and Virgil are depicted several times following the stations of their wandering, whereas only six giants occupy the foreground because of their gigantic size.
3. See Antonella Ippolito's contribution to this volume.
4. Cfr. Watts 1995. As Watts points out, most of the narrative devices analysed here are due

The images of 19th-century illustrators such as Doré and Genelli clearly refer to theatrical practices unknown 400 years before. Botticelli's pictorial point of reference, rather, would have been contemporary cartography. The architectural similitude between Florence and Dante's hell in Michelino and Botticelli is certainly related to the *Commedia*'s Florentine *dramatis personae*, but it is also, on a formal level, related to famous and innovative city-views of the same period (for example, the so-called *Veduta della catena* from the 1470s, where a symbolically locked up chain frames the view of Florence). As a result of this representational choice, Botticelli must rely upon the medieval device of simultaneous narrative, depicting Dante and Virgil several times on one sheet as they wander about a *bolgia*. At the same time, however, he anticipates representational schemes like films and the comic strip (Schulze-Altcappenberg 2000: 32; Küpper 2006: 165; Meier 2013: 11).

Not all the pictorial representations of the couple correspond to particular scenes in the text; some of them are merely virtual stops on a vectorial line, dictating in advance the movement that the beholder's eye must follow. This becomes most evident in the coloured sheet that illustrates canto XVIII, whereby Dante talks to Alessio Interminelli. Here, the eye starts at the top left of the page and traces a large curve to the bottom right of the page, where it turns either to the text on the next page, or to the next drawing. The sixth realization of the poets positioned together in this image shows them ironically looking back at us – a gesture provoked by Virgil's words but absent from Dante's text[5] – as if they wanted to greet us before leaving the page. The movement of the eye is thus inscribed in the pictorial composition of the image itself.

As Botticelli guides the observer's eye on most of his sheets, the codex-hypothesis that combines image and text on two pages of the open book becomes all the more plausible. Furthermore, geometrical congruency between

to the invention of this horizontal format: "This change in spatial orientation significantly affects the narrative presentation. The narrative strip is omitted or placed in the middle distance rather than the foreground; Dante and Virgil do not proceed across the picture space but descend through it, moving from background to foreground. For the first time, therefore, illustrations for the *Inferno* accurately plot the direction of the poets' journey." (Watts 1995: 157) Beyond its important contextual information and its sharp reflection on Botticelli's originality, Watts' article presents a somewhat distorted interpretation of the intermedial relationship between Dante and Botticelli: "Following Botticelli's pictorial narrative, therefore, approximates the experience of reading Dante's poem. For Dante, the shifting narrative frame serves as a vehicle for establishing narrative context and for making dramatic juxtapositions. So to for Botticelli [sic]. In this regard, Dante's text provides a commentary on the drawings: not only does it explicate what is depicted, but it also indicates how each illustration should be read, guiding one's focus during the journey through it." (159) This is certainly the case from a strictly practical point of view, but it does not do justice, I think, to the pictorial character of the drawings as such. The reading method Watts describes can only be an auxiliary one because it precisely evades this character.

5. Cfr. After having pointed at the famous hetaira Thaïs, Virgil's closing address reads: "E quinci sian le nostre viste sazie."/"And let our eyes be satisfied with that." (*If.* XVIII, 136)

the upper page (image) and the lower page (text) link them aesthetically. In the picture for canto VIII in the reconstructed code-version (cfr. Dreyer 1986), the two towers on either side of the Styx in the middle of the sheet, and the two groups of figures on the left and on the right, correspond exactly with the four columns of the text on the page below. Here, the direction of the eye movement is opposite to canto VIII, starting on the top right and ending at the bottom left of the page. Botticelli, naturally, does not forget to transpose the most dramatic scene of canto VIII: Dante's nightmarish scuffle with Filippo Argenti on the boat that carries him across the gruesome river. He places it in the centre of the image, midway between the two towers. He does not, however, emphasize this episode in any other artistic way and, as a result, it almost disappears amongst the others. A comparison with the image of canto XVIII shows that this 'de-dramatizing' effect is not accidental, i.e. due to the unfinished state of the drawing. In Botticelli's fully coloured canto XVIII, the outstanding conversation-scene between Dante and Alessio Interminelli is clearly recognizable. Pictorially, however, it is as unmarked as the fight with Filippo Argenti, apart from the fact, of course, that these tiny figures are not recognizable as those described by Dante. One discovers these dramatic scenes following the representation of the narrative thread, although, in Dante at least, their 'dramaticity', including the spectacular staging of hell's horrors, have an important tropological function (Küpper 2006: 159 sq.). This tropological function gets lost in Botticelli's representation of the milling of hell.

III

Getting back to the first of the three steps of my analysis, I will now take a closer look at Dante's text, namely canti VIII–XI. At the end of canto VII, Virgil leads Dante to the bank of the river Styx. Anticipating the commercial technique of cliffhanger endings, the author leaves us just in sight of an image not yet decoded:

> Così girammo de la lorda pozza
> grand' arco, tra la ripa secca e 'l mézzo,
> con li occhi vòlti a chi del fango ingozza.
> Venimmo al piè d'una torre al da sezzo.
>
> Thus we made our circle round that filthy bog
> keeping between the bank and swamp,
> fixing our gaze on those who swallow mud.
> And we came to the foot of a tower at last.
> (*If.* VII, 127–130)[6]

6. The English translations in this paper are adapted from Dante 1996 and Dante 1997–1999.

Canto VIII that follows is, as mentioned before, unusual for the *Commedia* insofar as it begins with a succinct flashback that makes the turning of the page explicit and recapitulates a short episode which has been omitted previously, i.e. the poets' arrival at the first tower:

> Io dico, seguitando, ch'assai prima
> che noi fossimo al piè de l'alta torre,
> li occhi nostri n'andar suso a la cima
> per due fiammette che i vedemmo porre,
> e un'altra da lungi render cenno,
> tanto ch'a pena il potea l'occhio tòrre.
>
> To continue, let me say that long before
> we reached the foot of that high tower,
> our eyes had noted at its top
> two flaming lights displayed up there,
> to which another, so far off the eye
> could hardly make it out, sent back a signal.
> (*If.* VIII, 1–6)

The passage functions as a meta-narrative hinge because it not only relates with a past moment, but it serves, at the same time, the purpose of a flash-forward. The scarcely perceptible other flame Virgil and Dante see is the one on top of the other tower located at the opposite bank of the river, where they will arrive at the end of canto VIII. Yet, this second tower remains hidden by the unappetizing exhalations of the Styx, and only the light signals of this uncanny border station assure the continuation of their journey. Dante's poem, here, creates maximum suspense by using topographical hints in a blurred landscape, just like cinema photographers 700 hundred years later. However, in comparison to Botticelli's cinematographic devices, one could perhaps claim that Dante's suspense-making is a function of the wanderers' moving forward in space, similar to Deleuze's "movement-image", whereas Botticelli's strips of simultaneous action are closer to the "time-image" (Deleuze 1983–1985).

Virgil's explanation of the light signals is in itself vectorial because it points to the imminent crossing of the foggy river. "[…] 'Su per le sucide onde/già scorgere puoi quello che s'aspetta,/se 'l fummo del pantan nol ti nasconde.'"/"[…] 'Over the filthy waves/you can already glimpse what is to come,/if the marsh-fumes do not hide it from you.'" (*If.* VIII, 10–12) Literally nonsensical, his announcement is all the more effective as his protégé and the reader knows that the unspoken refers to the City of Dis and, with that, the entrance to, colloquially speaking, the really tough part of hell. What eventually brings us back to the chronological axis the author left at the end of canto VII is the appearance of Phlegyas steering his boat like lightning and

picking up the poets. The scene with Filippo Argenti then takes place during the crossing. I do not want to address this episode in detail once again. It has been, of course, the subject matter of 'dramatic' representations like those of Genelli. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the *Commedia* becomes 'dramatic' in a theoretical sense here. The sin of anger is punished in the Styx; wrath, sullenness and arrogance are counter-balanced by dirt and mud. And Virgil tells Dante: "Quanti si tegnon or là sù gran regi/che qui staranno come porci in brago,/di sé lasciando orribili dispregi!"/"How many now above who think themselves great kings/will lie here in the mud, like swine,/leaving behind nothing but ill repute!" (*If.* VIII, 49–51) This is the exact formulation of the most important feature of the theory of tragedy. From the Christian Middle Ages on, tragedy is supposed to show the fall of great princes, because the fall represents the destiny of human agency in a post-lapsarian world.[7] As for the Inferno, Dante's *comedy* presupposes the tragic model for the higher purpose of divine justice. The happy ending for Dante comes after assisting, as a more or less uninvolved spectator, in the tragedy of those condemned. The absence of pity in Dante's reaction to the encounter with Argenti is, consequently, a symptom of the approach of more serious sins (unlike his vivid compassion for the fate of Paolo and Francesca in *Inferno* V). In a more Pagan than Christian manner, the narrator decides to punish Argenti again by erasing his memory: "Quivi il lasciammo, che più non ne narro […]."/"There we left him, of him I say no more […]." (*If.* VIII, 64)

Another metaphor of theatricality awaits us at the lower bank of the river Styx: "Non sanza prima far grande aggirata,/venimmo in parte dove il nocchier forte/'Usciteci', gridò: 'qui è l'intrata.'"/"Not until we'd made a wide approach/did we come to a place where the boatman bellowed:/'Get out, this is the entrance.'" (*If.* VIII, 79–81) The second tower has finally appeared, marking the closed gate of Dis. What happens here has been described as a "sacra rappresentazione" (Chiavacci Leonardi 1991: 268), i.e. an allegorical mystery play that gathers a crowd of mythological figures who deny access to the doomed city. Furthermore, a second flashback establishes both a topographical and a topological correspondence between the first gate of hell and the entrance to the City of Dis. The first gate is passed without difficulty because Jesus has already torn it down. The second one, however, is guarded by devils and other terrifying creatures so that Dante's narrator, only now, begins to fear that there shall be no happy end for him, i.e. that he will not be able to continue, or rather, that he will not be able to return having passed through the gate. The canto ends with the announcement of a *deus ex machi-*

7. Cfr. Euanthius 1992; Denores 1587; Benjamin 1963. The fall is a decisive device in Aristotle's *Poetics*, as well. I, however, insist on its Christian interpretation in the mentioned theoretical authors as the crucial point that makes the parallel with the *Commedia* pertinent.

na coming down from the first gate, i.e. repeating Dante's and Virgil's own way: "E già di qua da lei [sc. the first gate] discende l'erta,/passando per li cerchi sanza scorta,/tal che per lui ne fia la terra aperta."/"And already, on this side of it, there comes down the slope,/passing through the circles without a guide,/such a one that by him the city shall be opened." (*If.* VIII, 128–130)

The proceeding canti, IX–XI, can be summarized more briefly. The plot here proceeds in a linear way; the transition from one canto to the next, the continuation of the journey, and the turning of the pages are less problematic. Dante and Virgil are allowed into Dis. The city in Dante's representation is nothing more than the walled-in sixth circle where the heretics are punished, or rather, the lowest part of hell from this circle downward. Dante seeks to bring a huge graveyard to the reader's imagination by comparing it, like a tour guide, to the famous antique necropolis of Alyscamp near Arles, France. After the encounter with Farinata degli Uberti and Cavalcante dei Cavalcanti – another very 'dramatic' scene represented by Genelli – the two poets continue their descent. Between the sixth and the seventh circle they halt on a scree slope which is, once again, compared to a real place in Tyrol. These references are mythological rather than topographical. According to the contemporary epistemological pattern, the landscape, including historic monuments like the one of Arles and geological phenomena like the mountains of Tyrol, bears witness to the effects of transcendent influence on the earth's surface. Earth and hell are thus assimilated into the same creational scheme.

According to the tale, the reason for their halt is the stench soaring up from the lower parts of hell. Interestingly, canti X and XI are linked olfactorily; the first ends with the word "lezzo" (*If.* X, 136), and the second continues with an explanation for the pause: "[…] per l'orribile soperchio/del puzzo che 'l profondo abisso gitta,/ci raccostammo […]."/"[…] because of the horrible excess/of stench cast up by the abyss/we moved back […]." (*If.* XI, 4–6) As a "compenso" (*If.* XI, 13) for the loss of time, and maybe, ironically, also as a diversion from their noses' displeasure, Virgil gives an in-depth talk in which he goes on to explain the whole structure of hell. Canto XI, consequently, marks a narrative pause as well, and its internal motivation appears almost playful.

The matter of Virgil's explanation, however, is absolutely serious. It allows me to proceed with the second step of my analysis, i.e. to the philosophical and theological content of canti VIII–XI. To briefly summarise, the above-mentioned distinction between the 'upper' and 'lower' circles (topographically illustrated by the difficult passage across the river Styx and through the gates of Dis) corresponds to the distinction between two fundamental categories of punishment in Dante's system of compensation. From the second to the fifth circle the sins of passion are punished. The last in this order is anger; in which a flare-up is counter-balanced by a 'pushing-down' into the mud.

By contrast, those who sinned with the help of reason are located from the gates of Dis downward – a distinction, I think, that has not lost its juridical brisance. The first of those who are reasonably bad are, unsurprisingly, the heretics, like Farinata and Cavalcanti. All Dante-readers know that the distinction between "*peccati di passione*" and "*peccati di ragione*", or better ""*peccati ideologici*" (Stäuble 2000: 179), goes back to Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*. Virgil, in canto XI, reminds readers of this inheritance by bringing it to the attention of his pupil:

> Non ti rimembra di quelle parole
> con le quai la tua Etica pertratta
> le tre disposizion che 'l ciel non vole,
> incontenenza, malizia e matta
> bestialitade? e come incontenenza
> men Dio offende e men biasimo accatta?
>
> Do you not recall the words
> your *Ethics* uses to expound
> the three dispositions that Heaven refuses,
> incontinence, malice, and mad
> bestiality? and how incontinence
> offends Gods less and incurs a lesser blame?
> (*If.* XI, 79–84)

Limiting the present argument to "incontenenza" and "malizia" (*incontinentia* and *malitia* in Aquinus' commentary on Aristotle, and ἀκρασία and κακία in Aristotle himself), the distinctive traits of "lack of self-control" and "malice" can be discerned in the relationship between affect and reason. That is, the sinner is overwhelmed by passion, and his or her sin is not premeditated, or the sinner acts on purpose according to reason, and his or her deed defies god. Two emblematic and very dramatic gestures show the difference in Dante's text. The first is that Filippo Argenti, furious after Dante has pushed him away from the boat's edge, literally sinks his teeth into his own body – "in sé medesmo si volvea co' denti"/"[he] gnawed at himself with his teeth." (*If.* VIII, 63) The second is that the heretic Farinata degli Uberti incorrigibly stands in his open grave in Dis, and thereby mocks hell itself: "com' avesse l'inferno a gran dispitto"/"as if he had Hell in great disdain." (*If.* X, 36) The criminal evaluation of the two categories of sin is perfectly obvious, and it is only against this philosophical background that the particularly difficult transitions between canti VIII–XI become allegorically meaningful. Dante's text stages awe and terror for the two wanderers precisely at this point because, only here, begins the real realm of evil.

Let us see how Botticelli depicts these difficult transitions. On the sheet illustrating canto VIII we behold the arrival at the first tower, the crossing

of the river, the arrival at the opposite bank, and the waiting in front of the second tower. Having turned the page we arrive again in front of the same landscape (*If.* IX), but the viewpoint has shifted slightly to the left. The first tower has disappeared; it has simply been left out because, unlike the second tower in *Inferno* VIII, it is no longer relevant for the story. Furthermore, Botticelli's standpoint is, in general, an impossible bird's-eye-view from the central axis of the cone.[8] The representation must be plausible from this perspective, rather than according to Dante's text. This is why there is 'fog' covering the other bank of Styx in *Inferno* IX when there is not in *Inferno* VIII. Following the narrative stages in *Inferno* IX, one can observe the angel approach and open the gate, the poets then pass through it and turn to the right (their descent, in general, follows a serpentine road),[9] and they then proceed along the wall. The illustration of *Inferno* X is a view from inside the walls; it depicts the graveyard of the heretics and anticipates canto XI by showing the tombstone of Pope Anastasius II. Dante and Virgil disappear at the lower left corner of the sheet. They reappear on the upper right of the illustration of canto XII, because the sheet *Inferno* XI is missing.

Botticelli's depiction of the "aggirata", and the corresponding movements and glances, can be understood very schematically; Dante and Virgil cross the Styx in an anticlockwise direction, a decision that must have originated with Botticelli because Dante does not mention it at this point. If Botticelli had let them cross the river from the right to the left, he would have been forced to let them travel from below to above inside the picture, just like in the Frankfurt exhibition. Given the fact that Dante and Virgil travel downward, this would have been counter-intuitive, i.e. against the common repartition of meaning according to our visual habits. The view Botticelli establishes in his drawings is thus radically different from the vectorial orientation Dante grants his figures. They can only look backward, up into the funnel, the lower parts of the funnel are veiled – from this perspective they observe the arrival of the angel at the gate of Dis. Their limited view certainly plays a vital part in Dante's creation of an existential and metaphysical anxiety, which is lacking in Botticelli's illustrations. His drawings, in this sense, are not meant to create the illusion of an eerie and yet edifying journey. Because the drawings are a secondary representation, and because of the painter's pictorial choices, they provide an intellectual pleasure that frequently exceeds

8. This is, of course, an approximation that cannot be reconciled with all the details, see, e.g., the wall of Dis in *If.* VIII and IX suggesting a standpoint on the slope above. Generally speaking, polyfocality seems to be a trait of particularly 'dramatic' canti (cfr. Schulze-Altcappenberg 2000: 54–56).
9. Cfr. canto XVIII and the clockwise movement I described above: "[…] e 'l poeta/tenne a sinistra, e io dietro mi mossi." (*If.* XVIII, 20 sq.)

that of Dante's text through microscopic details that take the viewer's mind off the principal narrative and anagogical thread.[10]

This – not simply representational – écart between Dante's and Botticelli's *Commedia* culminates emblematically with these two different renderings of the major transition between *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. The tropological dimension, i.e. the moral change Dante's narrator is subject to before he begins his ascent to the mountain of purgatory, is allegorized as a physical reversal. At the centre of the earth, he has to turn upside down and crawl along Satan's body. Botticelli depicts this movement on the last parchment of the cantica (*If.* XXXIV) but, naturally, the following pictures cannot show Dante's 'being-reversed', which is, after all, the central 'message' of the first part of the *Commedia* in terms of moral philosophy.

IV

Botticelli, therefore, is certainly a very faithful illustrator. It goes without saying that he follows Dante closely. Ironically, perhaps even too closely because, as he is willing to represent the totality of one canto rather than selecting outstanding dramatic scenes, he necessarily must deviate from Dante's text. Two categories of intermedial differences have appeared in my very short considerations. One category is of intrinsic necessity, i.e. Botticelli could not draw differently because what Dante speaks about is conceptual, not representational, for example, moral philosophy. This is the case with the moral 'reversal' at the foot of purgatory and with Virgil's philosophical talk in canto XI – it is a remarkable coincidence that this 'vacuous' parchment, showing the non-representational talk of the poet, figures amongst those lost. The other category is of conventional necessity, i.e. Botticelli chooses to follow pictorial habits where Dante's text lacks the spatial information a painter needs, for example, in the case of Phlegyas' boat describing a swerve to the right on the waters of the Styx, whereas in the text of canto VIII, the "wide approach", or the "turning to and fro" ("aggirata") is not described any further. But this is not all; Botticelli's representation surely depends on visual habits. However, the drawings establish a small repertoire of standard-trajectories (from upper left to lower right and vice versa, often drawing wavy lines with more than one 'narrative' curve) that guide the observer's eye across the page often, but not always, mimicking the movement of reading, and frequently indicating where to pick up the sheet in order to turn it. The similar geometrical setting in all drawings creates a certain iterability in the

10. The descriptions of Schulze-Altcappenberg and his collaborators pay particular attention to these anecdotal additions that, moreover, literally wink at the observer, for example, the representations of Phlegyas in *If.* VIII and IX (cfr. Schulze-Altcappenberg 2000 passim).

disposition of the images, hence the journey does not seem exceptional and unique, but repeatable according to the same vectorial model. The set-up of the experiment is unique, and what changes are the circumstantial details. Botticelli's representation thus tends to neglect the value of specific positions within Dante's compensational system. The pictorial landscapes are not mythologically encoded and hierarchically organized, but rather spread out like maps where all information is levelled. In such a scheme it does not make a difference if some accessory details are eliminated, and others added. The standard reading-trajectories, of course, maintain the narrative thread, and a selection of certain traits is more important than others. But these trajectories are embedded in an abundance of accessories that make them almost disappear, or at least make them unrecognizable, unless, of course, they are accompanied by a simultaneous reading of the text.

All this is *not* to say that Botticelli's illustrations are a secularized cartography of hell that evacuates Dante's system from all its religious meaning. On the contrary, it is evident, and not only for biographical reasons, that Botticelli's work is a *theological* commentary on Dante's text as well. He substitutes Dante's moral motivations for a proto-empirical scheme that emphasizes compositional laws over individual histories of damnation and salvation. If Dante's model can be called, in some respect, theatrical, Botticelli's dominant scheme is geometrical. He reduces Dante's dramatic devices into the sequence of events depictured by a storyboard, which faithfully records the theatrical episodes without representing their tropological 'dramaticity' as such. Far from pronouncing, by these terms, a judgement on the artistic quality of Botticelli's series, I argue that he produces plans, rather than illustrations, because of the constant technical dispositive of his representational model. On the one hand this may predispose Dante's episodic repertoire to be re-combined and re-interpreted, as seen in the Frankfurt exhibition, but on the other hand, his detailed overview-pictures stress the abstract meaning of the organisational model even more than Dante's linear narration does. The observation test that the beholder of these drawings undergoes is, at the same time, a meditation upon hell's undramatic *longue durée.*[11]

11. The term is borrowed from Fernand Braudel and its application can only be tentative. I think there is, however, a parallel between the difference of expression by Dante and Botticelli concerning the above-mentioned representational problems and the oppositions stressed by the French historian. On the one hand: "l'instant, toujours actuel, comme suspendu au-dessus du temps", and on the other: "les phénomènes de répétition qui ne sont d'aucun âge", or "l'événementiel", and "la durée la plus longue." (Braudel 1969: 79)

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