A Comedia of Errors:
The Complicated Biography of the 1481 Incunable of
Dante’s Comedia
and Landino’s Comento Sopra la Comedia in
Wesleyan’s Special Collections

by

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More than a year ago, I was studying abroad in Italy when I received an email from the Director of Wesleyan’s Special Collections, Suzy Taraba, with information on Wesleyan’s incunable of Dante’s *Comedia* with Cristoforo Landino’s *Comento Sopra la Comedia di Dante*, published in Florence in 1481. I was immediately intrigued and would soon thereafter embark on a year-long intellectual journey to learn as much as I could about this fascinating book. It is my deepest pleasure to express my gratitude to all who have helped me with this project.

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I write this thesis in deepest gratitude to Wesleyan’s Special Collections and as a reminder that often the objects that we can learn the most from are those close at hand.

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INTRODUCTION

By 1481, Florentines had lived underneath a seemingly impossible architectural achievement—Filippo Brunelleschi’s majestic cupola—for almost a quarter-century. Constructed between 1420 and 1436, the dome of the Florence Cathedral was the largest masonry vault ever built. In 1436, in the prologue to the Della Pittura, Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) wrote that this newly completed feat of engineering “cover[ed] with its shadow all the Tuscan people.”¹ The sight of Brunelleschi’s dome carried connotations of Florentine excellence and a certain type of Florentine ingegno (cleverness), where old paradigms were rejected in favor of new ones.² To create something unfathomably difficult was to be Florentine; the more difficult an endeavor, the more worthy of praise it was considered to be. Forty-five years later, Florence would see another iteration of this ingenuity. With a new type of commentary and a new method of illustration, Cristoforo Landino (1424-1498) and Niccolò di Lorenzo della Magna (active 1470-1493), with the financial support of Bernardo d’Antonio degli Alberti (1435-1495), dared to reimagine what a modern publication of Dante’s Comedia could be. Their experimental and entrepreneurial spirit produced one of the most ambitious and interesting publications of the entire Florentine quattrocento.


² Crum and Paoletti, 11-12.
This thesis centers on the 1481 incunable of Cristoforo Landino’s *Comento sopra la Comedia di Dante* housed in Wesleyan’s Special Collections. Wesleyan University holds one of 166 extant copies. This remarkable object emerged at a moment in book history when the relationship between text and image was becoming redefined, as new methods of reproduction altered the centuries-old tradition of hand-illuminated texts. The 1481 incunable, which was the ninth printed edition of the *Comedia* and the first to be printed with images and a Renaissance commentary, marked a significant shift in the history of the illustrated book.

In this paper, I rely on D. F. McKenzie’s argument in *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, that “[book] forms themselves encode the history of their production” and reveal the “distinctive complex of materials, labour, and mentality.” In McKenzie’s expansive definition of bibliography, form, function, and symbolic meaning are all connected. For McKenzie, any book is a relational item, the outcome of different agents of production working in tandem. This thesis considers how different parties with separate interests came together to

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3 An incunable is a book printed in the early years of printing, prior to the year 1501. Both *Commedia* and *Comedia* are accepted Italian spellings of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. In this paper, I use *Comedia* because it is the spelling used in the 1481 incunable.

4 For the number of extant copies, see ISTC (Incunabula Short Title Catalogue) id00029000. [https://data.cerl.org/istc/id00029000](https://data.cerl.org/istc/id00029000) (accessed January 22, 2023).


create one specific book, the 1481 incunable of Dante’s *Comedia* with Landino’s commentary. My goal is to investigate what the Wesleyan copy can tell the modern viewer about the project as a whole, as well as the men, methods, and materials that brought it into existence.

In addition to McKenzie, I draw on the ideas of Robert Darnton. In his seminal 1982 study, “What is the History of Books,” Darnton examined the world of printing and dissemination of knowledge beyond the author, focusing on how interconnected trade networks, middlemen, and smugglers all influenced the transmission of knowledge. Authors worked in conjunction with printers, who in turn bought paper and ink, created type, and employed apprentices. Instead of viewing the Wesleyan incunable as the project solely of the commentary’s author, Cristoforo Landino, I examine the role of other participants in its production. I follow the updated model presented by Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker in their 1993 article “A New Model for the Study of the Book,” which focuses on the production of the physical book. By implementing both Darnton’s and Adams and Barker’s methodological approaches, I consider the Wesleyan incunable through the lenses of the people involved in its creation as well as its material production.

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7 I use the phrase “1481 incunable” to reference all the copies of Dante’s *Comedia* printed by Niccolò di Lorenzo della Magna.


This project is timely because the Wesleyan incunable has not been included in critical studies of the 1481 Comedia and is generally not well known. While much research has been done on the print run itself, the irregularity of the early processes created such unique objects that the Wesleyan exemplar cannot be fully understood solely in its relationship to an imaginary “ideal copy.” Past scholars’ tendency to discuss the print run as a totality is limiting given the highly individualized nature of early printing and engraving, which has made each copy a singular object that is both connected to the print run as a whole and stands as a product of its own unique biography.

In the first chapter, I begin with Dante’s exile from Florence in 1302 in order to understand the conflict between the poet and his native city. After establishing the strained relationship between the two, I jump forward to the late 1470s, first to Florence’s failed attempt to reclaim Dante’s physical remains, and then to the Pazzi Conspiracy, which spurred Landino to turn his commentary into a defense of his city. I continue with a textual analysis of Landino’s Proemio and his commentary on Dante’s first canto in order to understand the ideological purpose behind his project. Landino crafted his Comento as a celebration of Florentine excellence, with specific attention to the superiority of the local vernacular. By discussing the events and debates that lead up to the publication of the 1481 incunable, I outline the specific stakes of that project and explain part of the reason why the Wesleyan copy looks the way it does.

After a consideration of the textual aspects of the 1481 project, in the second chapter I shift my focus to the images present in the Wesleyan incunable
and in a selection of other copies of the book. After examining the total range of possible illustrations present in the broader print run, I consider what past scholarship has uncovered about the publication, tracing the study of this book from Giorgio Vasari’s 1550 “Life of Sandro Botticelli” (which remained largely unchanged between the 1550 and 1568 editions of his Lives) to the present day. I then seek to unravel the Vasarian myth that surrounds the 1481 project and consider the convoluted relationship of the engraved images with Botticelli’s drawings. Here, I am particularly interested in the way certain claims about this project have been accepted in scholarship without necessarily being supported by the material evidence present in the extant copies.

The third chapter traces the production of the 1481 project. Beginning with Landino, Niccolò di Lorenzo, and Bernardo degli Alberti signing a contract in 1480 to print the Comedia and the Comento, I examine the making of the incunable and the technologies behind its manufacture. While centering the Wesleyan incunable, this chapter covers the history of printing and engraving more generally to understand the background for this ambitious publication.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the Wesleyan incunable’s unique provenance and its relationship to the notorious book thief and forger Guglielmo Libri Carucci dalla Sommaja (1803-1869), arguing for the necessity to question even the material evidence this copy presents. By approaching the 1481 Wesleyan incunable from a number of different points of entry regarding Dante, book history, and the history of engraving, my goal is to shed new light on the
incunable’s historical place and importance for the history of the early illustrated book, as well as explain some of its more idiosyncratic physical qualities.

I include a catalog of all images present in the Wesleyan copy at the end of the thesis because understanding them fully necessitates seeing them in the order in which they appear in the incunable. The catalog provides an opportunity to discuss each of those images and their peculiarities in a level of detail that would be disruptive in the main body of the paper.
On January 27, 1302, Florence exiled a man who would become the most renowned Florentine poet of all time. After being expelled from his native city for being a White Guelph when the Black Guelphs seized power, Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) spent the rest of his life writing in exile in northern Italy, trying to clear his name.\(^\text{10}\) He wrote the *Comedia* during his exile, when to the continued embarrassment of its citizens, he portrayed Florence in an unflattering light. In fact, in the *Inferno*, the first part of his *Comedia*, Dante filled his Hell with Florentines. As Ernest Robert Curtius has demonstrated, of the seventy-nine men distinctly mentioned as confined to the *Inferno*, thirty-two were Florentines and eleven others were fellow Tuscans. Florentines make up the vast majority of Hell’s denizens and grow fewer the closer to Paradise Dante travels. In the *Purgatorio*, Dante encounters only four fellow citizens and eleven compatriots, and in the *Paradiso*, he meets only two Florentines. Indeed, the poet’s condemnation of Florence was not subtle.\(^\text{11}\)

In the fifteenth century, Dante’s embarrassing representation of Florence, coupled with the humanist Cristoforo Landino’s personal preoccupation with the Florentine vernacular, drove the latter’s attempt to recontextualize Dante’s


relationship with his native city. Along with his business partners, Bernardo degli Alberti and Niccolò di Lorenzo della Magna, Landino devised an expensive and expansive project as part of a bid to gain control of the official narrative on Dante. The result was the first printed Florentine edition of the *Comedia* with Landino’s *Comento*, published in 1481.

Five years earlier, in 1476, Florence had, for the third time, failed to secure the return of Dante’s physical remains from Ravenna, the place of the poet’s death.\(^{12}\) In Ravenna, Dante’s body rested in a sarcophagus inscribed with a Latin epitaph composed in 1366 by the Bolognese poet Bernardo Canaccio. The epitaph concluded with the verses: “*Hic claudor Dantes patriis extorris ab oris / Quem genuit parvi Florentia mater amoris*” (Here I, Dante, am buried, an exile from the fatherly shores, whom Florence, a mother of little love bore).\(^{13}\) Written in dactylic hexameter, the meter of epic poetry, Canaccio’s epitaph linked Dante to Virgil, who had written his *Aeneid* in that heroic meter. By ending the line with “*ab oris*” Canaccio referenced the first line of the *Aeneid* (*Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris*) about Aeneas’s exile from Troy, thus further linking Dante to Virgil and Aeneas.\(^{14}\) Dante himself had made that comparison in Canto

\(^{12}\) For an explanation of the Florentine Republic’s attempts to reclaim Dante’s remains, see Guy Raffa, “Bones of Contention: Ravenna’s and Florence’s Claims to Dante’s Remains,” *Italica* 92, no. 3 (2015): 565-581.


\(^{14}\) Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.1.
IX of his *Inferno*, where he placed himself in the lineage of the classical poets. Writing about his encounter with Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan, Dante proclaimed: “e piu d’onore ancora assai mi fenno, / ch’è’ si mi fecer de la loro schiera, / sì ch’io fui sesto tra cotanto senno” (and they did me an even greater honor, for [the poets] / made me one of their band, so that I was sixth / among so much wisdom).\(^{15}\) Canaccio’s epitaph confirmed Dante’s success as the torchbearer of the classical literary tradition. Less than fifty years after his death in 1321, Dante’s place in the literary canon was successfully established.

In the epitaph, Canaccio emphasized the fact of Dante’s banishment and declared Florence an unloving mother, thus making the shame of the exile forever immortalized alongside the poet’s body. This rather biting critique was another painful injustice for a city eager to reclaim its poet. At the end of 1465, Florence had symbolically revoked Dante’s exile, and Landino’s 1481 commentary on the *Comedia* became a means of continuing that repatriation.\(^{16}\) While Florence could not retrieve the physical remains of their poet, Landino’s commentary, written in the Florentine tongue, symbolically called Dante home.

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\(^{15}\) Dante, *Inferno* 4.100-102. All Italian quotes from the *Comedia* and the *Comento* come from Procaccioli’s critical edition, with minor adjustments to punctuation. I have chosen to preserve the spelling in the critical edition even when it differs from modern Italian. Cristoforo Landino, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli. (Rome: Salerno, 2001). The English translations of Landino’s text are my own. Unless otherwise noted, the English translations of Dante’s verses come from Durling and Martinez’s critical edition. Their critical edition uses a different version of the text than the printer’s copy of the *Comedia* included in the 1481 incunable, which differs slightly from the copy Landino used to write his commentary.

from exile. Florence’s expulsion of Dante unintentionally hindered the city’s ability to claim the literary prestige associated with the poet, a mistake that Landino’s commentary attempted to rectify.

While Landino’s commentary undoubtedly arose from a centuries-old uninterrupted exegetical tradition of Dante’s work in Florence, the precarious political situation of the late 1470s acted as the catalyst for its creation. Crafted as a defense and celebration of Florentine excellence, Landino’s work appeared during the grave political and military crisis that followed the Pazzi Conspiracy of 1478. Florence was under attack: the de facto leaders of Florence, Lorenzo de’ Medici (1449-1492) and his brother Giuliano (1453-1478), were the targets of an assassination attempt by the Pazzi family that unfolded during High Mass in the Duomo on April 26, 1478. Medici blood spilled on the sacred ground of the

17 Pertile, 20; Landino, vol.1, 221.
19 A competitor in finance, the old patrician Pazzi family had watched with envy as the Medici rose to power and prominence. Though connected in marriage through Lorenzo de’ Medici’s sister Bianca, the Pazzi and the Medici remained rivals. When Lorenzo attempted to prevent Pope Sixtus IV from securing funds to buy Imola, the pope transferred his account from the Medici bank to that of the Pazzi. The pope then alienated Federico da Montefeltro, the Duke of Urbino, from Lorenzo by bestowing him with honors and securing a marriage for his daughter into the pope’s family. On December 26, 1476, Lorenzo’s ally, the Duke of Milan Galeazzo Maria Sforza was stabbed to death in church. The fashion of murder in churches had begun. The pope’s nephew, Cardinal Girolamo Riario attempted to dispose of Lorenzo and Giuliano de’ Medici and sought the aid of Francesco de’ Pazzi. The conspirators gathered in Florence. On April 26, 1478, during High Mass at the Cathedral of Florence, Francesco de’ Pazzi and Bernardo Bandini dei Baroncelli killed Giuliano de’ Medici. Two priests, Antonio Maffei da Volterra and Stefano da Bagnone, went after Lorenzo who was able to escape with only a light wound on his neck. In the weeks after Giuliano de’ Medici’s assassination, more than a hundred more were executed. In the following months, Botticelli painted a fresco of the hanging of the conspiracy’s ringleaders on the walls of the Palazzo della Signoria and Lorenzo himself wrote the epitaph under the figures. This would later lead to Botticelli’s departure for Rome to paint the Sistine Chapel in the spring of 1481. This journey was at the behest of Lorenzo and marked an attempt by the Medici to mend ties with the papacy. See Harold Acton, The Pazzi Conspiracy: The Plot Against the Medici (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 24-112.
cathedral, but the attempt was only partially successful. Giuliano died that day and Lorenzo, standing on the balcony of the Palazzo Medici in his blood-stained clothes, warned his supporters to be careful in their wrath.\textsuperscript{20} The Medici’s vengeance fell swiftly, and violence engulfed the streets. Bodies hung from windows of the Palazzo della Signoria, the seat of the Florentine government. The Medici’s supporters mercilessly slaughtered anyone thought to have been involved in the plot. Francesco de’ Pazzi was hanged naked from a window of the Palazzo della Signoria, along with the Archbishop of Pisa. Others were hacked to pieces, their heads impaled on pikes and paraded around the city. In all, about a hundred suspects were brutally executed in the days following Giuliano de’ Medici’s assassination. In response to the executions of the archbishop and other priests, Pope Sixtus IV excommunicated Lorenzo and demanded his surrender. When the Signoria refused, the pope placed the city under an interdict, forbidding Mass and Communion. The Signoria refused to comply once again, and thus Florence entered into war with the pope and his ally, King Ferrante of Naples. By the summer of 1478, Neapolitan troops would camp outside the city of Florence and begin pillaging the surrounding settlements. This war, along with untimely bouts of the plague, proved disastrous for the city. Lorenzo de’ Medici sailed to Naples to sue for peace, and by the end of July 1480, Florence’s unlikely saviors arrived. The Turks had landed in the Kingdom of Naples and slaughtered the

\textsuperscript{20} Acton, 71.
inhabitants of Otranto. In the face of this external threat, Florence managed to secure a pardon from the papacy.\textsuperscript{21}

In 1480, in the shadow of this crisis, the Florentine humanist Cristoforo Landino wrote a commentary on Dante’s \textit{Inferno}. Not only was this the first printed edition of the text with an illustrated commentary, but Landino’s \textit{Comento sopra la Comedia} was also the first edition accompanied by a completely new literary commentary written by one of the foremost Florentine humanists. Landino sought to define a common Florentine identity to help foster internal cohesion in a shaken and unsettled city. He used his \textit{Proemio} and the figure of Dante, Florence’s most renowned citizen, in a calculated celebration of national pride. Landino’s commentary was an impassioned demonstration of Florence’s civic, military, and literary splendor—a message further amplified in his presentation of the text to the Signoria, Florence’s governing body, on August 30, 1481.\textsuperscript{22} The precarious political circumstances hastened Landino’s work. He wrote his introduction and commentary in a matter of months, rather than the many years a project of this magnitude typically required.

Landino was a professor of poetry and oratory at the Florentine \textit{Studio} and one of the major intellectuals in Florence during the second half of the quattrocento. An author of prose and poetry in both Latin and the vernacular, as well as a moral philosopher, he was a close associate of Marsilio Ficino (1433-
1499), an influential humanist of the early Renaissance.\textsuperscript{23} In 1441, Landino began a lifelong connection to Leon Battista Alberti with his participation in Alberti’s vernacular poetry contest, the \textit{Certame coronario}.\textsuperscript{24} Landino became a part of this major political family when he married Alberti’s niece, Lucrezia di Alberto di Adovardo Alberti, in 1458.\textsuperscript{25} Leon Battista Alberti’s heir and nephew, Bernardo degli Alberti, would later finance Landino’s \textit{Comento}. In addition to the Alberti family, Landino cultivated the political protection of the Medici family through the dedication of his poetry (published under the pseudonym Xandra) to Piero de’ Medici (1416-1469) and his tutelage of Piero’s son, Lorenzo.\textsuperscript{26} Furthering this connection, he dedicated his \textit{Comento sopra la Comedia} to the Medici.\textsuperscript{27}

Landino had a longstanding interest in Dante.\textsuperscript{28} He first began publishing works on the \textit{Comedia} in 1456 and started lecturing on Dante at the \textit{Studio} shortly

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
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\item Bruce McNair, \textit{Cristoforo Landino} (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1-12. Landino was born in 1424 to a family long connected to Florence, but whether he was born in Florence or the nearby town of Pratovecchio remains uncertain. In the late 1430s, Landino studied law at Volterra before moving to Florence to study the humanities.
\item McNair, 2-3.
\item Simona Foà, “Landino, Cristoforo,” in \textit{Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani} (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1960), 428-29. McNair uses the wedding date of 1459, while the \textit{DBI} uses 1458. McNair, 9.
\item Roberto Cardini, \textit{La critica del Landino} (Florence: Sansoni, 1973), 113-115; Foà, 429. \textit{Xandra}, both the pseudonym and the title of Landino’s collection of Latin poetry, was first dedicated to Leon Battista Alberti in the 1440s, but was then revised and dedicated to the Medici in the 1450s. For additional information, see McNair, 3.
\item McNair, 166.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}

thereafter. While none of his lecture notes survive, the lectures certainly aided in the composition of the 1481 Comento. Landino’s other notable works included De anima (On the Soul, 1471), Disputationes Camaldulenses (Camaldolese Disputations, 1472), an Italian translation of Pliny’s Natural History (1473), and a commentary on Virgil’s Aeneid (1488).

More interested in the medieval Dante than returning to classical sources or studying Latin, Landino was not the typical fifteenth-century humanist. During the late Quattrocento, Florentine humanists were largely preoccupied with the correctness of Latin and Greek texts, aided by the discovery of less “corrupt” manuscripts. Rather than appreciating a continuity from the past, many Florentine humanists argued that the post-classical world represented an artistic decline and thus sought a return to classical culture. Anxious to surpass their predecessors, many of Landino’s contemporaries dismissed Petrarch and Boccaccio—the initiators of humanist interest in Latin and Greek—and especially Dante. Landino’s peers found Dante’s Latin deficient when (unfairly) compared to Virgil’s or Cicero’s. In contrast, Landino did not view the Middle Ages as the “Dark Ages” like the generation before him. He supported the effort, already underway in the 1460s and 1470s, to celebrate the Florentine vernacular with initiatives such as Lorenzo de’ Medici’s 1476-1477 Raccolta Aragonese (The

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30 McNair, 3-4; 166.

31 A “corrupt” manuscript is a manuscript that presents significant textual problems including lacunae and variant readings.
Aragon Collection) and Marsilio Ficino’s vulgarization of Dante’s Monarchia (On Monarchy).32

Landino was not, and never intended to become, a theologian. He also could not match other humanists in his knowledge of Greek, though he did have a solid understanding of ancient history and classical literature. Landino followed the humanist project of combining eloquence and philosophy but added his own allegorical analysis of poetry, which for him contained hidden philosophical truths. Through allegorical interpretations, Landino strove to create a cohesive ideology that could unify Florentines and deter any future occurrence of the turbulent events of the 1450s.33 Fundamentally a teacher and “maker” of Florentine citizens, Landino sought to establish a common Florentine identity through his writing.

With his commentary, Landino figuratively brought Dante home from exile, claiming to have removed from the Comedia all dialects of foreign commentators. Rather than solely introducing Dante and the text in his Proemio, Landino broke with the traditional format of a scholarly commentary and instead described Florentine greatness in the arts, commerce, and law. Furthermore, Landino established Dante’s lineage as the inheritor of a classical and biblical tradition. He firmly positioned Dante as a literary descendant of Virgil. More subtly, Landino attempted to both elevate the Florentine vernacular as a worthy

33 Field, 32-35.
medium for scholarly discourse on par with Latin and make Dante appealing to the Florentine humanist elite.34

Landino’s *Proemio*

In the rest of this chapter, I examine Landino’s *Proemio* and his commentary on the first canto of the *Inferno* in order to explore both the explicit and implicit aims of the scholar. Landino’s *Proemio* is divided into fourteen subsections which I discuss in sequential order. In the *Proemio*, Landino tells his readers that his aim is to return Dante’s words to the Florentine vernacular and defend his city from calumny. After considering the *Proemio* in its totality, I examine his commentary on Canto I. While Landino commented on every canto, I focus on the first because it is there that he first introduces the concepts that continue throughout his work. The implicit themes that emerge are quite telling: Landino wants to persuade his fellow humanists of Dante’s enduring greatness. To do this, he stresses the inherent excellence of the Florentine vernacular and repeatedly links Dante to classical poets beloved by his fellow humanists.

The subsections of the *Proemio* neatly articulate Landino’s argument that Florence was an excellent city with an illustrious pedigree that had been falsely maligned by non-Florentine commentators. The most innovative aspect of Landino’s *Proemio* is his deviation from the traditional structure of the *accessus*

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(introduction). The usual introduction to a commentary included the vita auctoris (life of the author), titulus operis (title of the work), intentio scribentis (intention of the writer), materia operis (subject matter of the work), utilitas (utility), and cui parti philosophiae supponatur (the branch of philosophy under which the work should be classified). Of these sections, Landino maintains only the vita auctoris. In six of the fourteen sections of his Proemio, Landino does not mention Dante even once. Deborah Parker has argued that Landino’s 1481 project was “a monument to Florentine nationalism and Neoplatonism.” The 1481 Comento sopra la Comedia redefined what a commentary could be, as Landino transformed his introduction into a history of Florentine excellence. To view Landino’s text as purely an explanation of the Comedia would be to vastly underestimate the broader scope of his project.

The goal of Landino’s commentary was to solve Florence’s “Dante problem,” reclaim the city’s most famous exile, and erase the stain that Dante’s own statements had left on Florence’s reputation. Landino aimed to refute and reinterpret Dante’s polemic against his native city. He claimed to have liberated Dante from exile: “questo solo affermo, havere liberato el nostro cittadino dalla barbarie di molti externi idiomi [...] sia dopo lungo esilio restituito nella sua patria” (this alone affirms that I have freed our citizen from the barbarity of many

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external vernaculars [...] after a long exile let [Dante] be returned to his fatherland). 38 Though Dante’s bones remained in Ravenna, through his commentary Landino vowed to recall the poet home to Florence and restore his text to the Florentine tongue.

Landino highlighted that Dante wrote “in lingua fiorentina” (in the Florentine tongue) with an emphasis on the Florentine nature of Dante’s vernacular. 39 Simon Gilson has argued how, beginning with Leonardo Bruni (ca. 1370-1444), many early quattrocento humanists were critical of Dante because of his use of the vernacular. During the 1460s and 1470s, the Medici used the Florentine dialect as a symbol of the city’s (and by extension their family’s) cultural dominance in fifteenth-century Italy to counter this slight. In his commentary, Landino, like Dante before him, elevated the Florentine vernacular. 40 In his section on the life of the poet, Landino wrote:

Ma innanzi a Danthe in lingua toscana nessuno havea trovato alchuna leggiadria, né indocto elegantia o lume alchuno; et excepto le rime, benché anchora quelle sieno inepte et roze, niente hanno gl’antichi in che si vegga un minimo vestigio di poeta. 41

(But before Dante, in the Tuscan language, no one had brought about any gracefulness, nor purposeful elegance nor any lightness, and except for the rhymes, although even those are inept and rough, there is nothing in the

38 Landino, vol. 1, 221. Landino describes his intention to rid Dante’s text from the “barbarie di molti externi idiomi” (barbarity of many external vernacular idioms), but he fails to explain what criteria he adopted for doing so or to specify which manuscripts he likely consulted in editing his text. In his critical edition, Procaccioli identifies a series of earlier commentaries that Landino likely read: the edition of Buti (whose segmentation of the text for the glosses Landino followed very closely), and the editions of Boccaccio and Benvenuto.

39 Landino, vol. 1, 252.


41 Landino, vol. 1, 253.
ancients [vernacular poets writing before Dante] in which we see the slightest vestige of a poet.)

Here, Landino argued for the full originality of Dante and his great contributions to the Florentine (Tuscan) language. According to Landino, Dante added elegance and grace to the Florentine tongue, which continued to maintain those traits into the fifteenth century. For Landino, Dante’s choice to write in the Florentine vernacular rather than Latin confirmed the Florentine language’s status as a prestigious and venerable tongue.42

Carlo Dionisotti has demonstrated that the humanist polemic against Dante and vernacular literature in Florence, while active during Antonio Manetti’s earlier investigations into Dante’s *Inferno*, had ceased by the late 1470s. Landino opened—and optimistically attempted to immediately close—a linguistic debate that had already become somewhat irrelevant.43 Landino’s argument for the merits of the Florentine vernacular did not exclude his acceptance of the importance of Latin instruction. In a bid to make the *Comedia* appealing for his fellow Florentine humanists, Landino carefully positioned his *Comento* to argue in support of the excellence of the Florentine vernacular, while still emphasizing the classical heritage of the *Comedia*.44


43 Dionisotti, 365; 373.

44 See Anne Dunlop, “‘El Vostro Poeta:’ The First Florentine Printing of Dante’s ‘Commedia,’” *RACAR: Revue d’art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 20, no. 1/2 (1993): 29-42. Within the humanist debate on the use of the vernacular, not all uses were considered equal. Many scholars considered the use of the vernacular in poetry, and especially in Dante, linguistically distinct from local use. Vernacular poetry was understood to have contributed to the growth of humanism and the expansion of literature, while local use of the vernacular was generally dismissed. Dionisotti, 366.
Simon Gilson has argued that Landino exerted a critical influence on Florentine culture in the second half of the quattrocento by both refining and promoting the “vernacular as a literary and learned language, capable of dealing with subjects which had been previously reserved almost exclusively for Latin.”\textsuperscript{45} Landino worked to destabilize the hierarchy of Latin over the vernacular by emphasizing the “perfectibility of the vernacular” as a more natural language than Latin.\textsuperscript{46} Whether Landino had access to Dante’s \textit{De vulgari eloquentia} (\textit{On Vernacular Eloquence}, ca. 1302-1305) remains uncertain, but he did follow in the footsteps of Dante when he described Latin as an artificial language.\textsuperscript{47} Craig Kallendorf has highlighted Landino’s belief in the “concept of linguistic transferal from the ancients, as the language of learning moved from Greek to Latin to Italian.”\textsuperscript{48} In this way, vernacular Italian–or more specifically, the Florentine vernacular– became the new language of learning.

Writing in the vernacular, Landino defends the city against who “\textit{giudica Fiorentia nobilissima città}” (judges the most noble city of Florence), using quotes from different cantos to prove that Dante loved his city.\textsuperscript{49} He highlights how in the \textit{Inferno}, Dante had the magnanimous Farinata degli Uberti refer to Florence as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{45} Gilson, \textit{Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy}, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Gilson, \textit{Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy}, 14.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Dante, \textit{De vulgari eloquentia} 1.1.1.2-3.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Landino, vol. 1, 222.
\end{itemize}
his “nobile patria” (noble fatherland). Landino further references Dante’s desire to return to Florence in the Paradiso, writing in his introduction, “nel canto XXV del paradiso disidera sommamente tornare in quella chiamandola ‘bello ovile’” (in Canto 25 of Paradise, Dante greatly desires to return, calling [Florence] a ‘lovely sheepfold’). In this passage, Landino emphasizes Dante’s desire to return to the place of his birth in order to dismiss the notion that he had censured his native city.

While Dante may have been exiled during his lifetime, Landino assures his readers of the poet’s standing as a fellow citizen of the Florentine Republic. Through his rhetoric and repeated declarations of Dante as “nostro poeta” (our poet) and “nostro cittadino” (our citizen), Landino claims Dante as Florence’s own. Even after his death in exile, Dante belonged to Florence. Landino reckons with the problem of Dante’s anti-Florentine polemic that continued to bring about the “vituperio della città” (disgrace of the city) by stressing Dante’s bias, criticizing his poor conduct, and blaming the vices of his contemporaries. In the next section, Apologia nella quale si difende Danthe et Florentina da’ falsi calumniatori (Apology defending Dante and Florence from false accusers), he writes:


52 Landino repeats the phrase “nostro poeta” throughout his introduction. Landino, vol. 1, 220; 222; 251.

53 Landino, vol 1, 222.
Leggono molti in vari luoghi di questa Comedia acerrime invective contro a’ Fiorentini, che in quegli tempi reggevono, et ripressioni acerbissime di vari et scelestissimi loro vittii. Il che non solamente pare che sia vituperio della città, ma ancora non sia sanza biasimo del poeta, obscurando la fama della patria sua, la quale chome officioso anzi piatoso figliuolo doverrebbe lodare.  

(Many read in various passages of this Comedia very bitter invectives against the Florentines who in those years ruled the city, and also many bitter rebukes of various and very evil vices of them [the Florentines]. This does not only seem to disgrace the city, but also it does not seem to be without blame for the poet, since it obscures the fame of his own motherland, which he should instead praise like a dutiful and pious son.)

Because of Dante’s criticisms of Florence’s rulers and citizens, Landino writes that the poet disgraced the city and should be ashamed of the slight to his homeland. In an otherwise celebratory account, Landino scolded Dante when it came to his critique of Florence. For Landino, contrary to early (non-Florentine) commentators, the Florentine people bore no fault in Dante’s exile. In suggesting that the responsibility for Dante’s exile fell on the “vitio de’ tempi” (vices of the times) and not on the “natura del popolo” (inherent nature of the Florentine people), Landino placed the blame for the embarrassment of Dante’s exile on one select group of Florence’s leaders, rather than the city as a whole.

Less an introduction to Dante, Landino’s Proemio functioned primarily as a blatant defense of Florentine superiority. In four sections detailing the city’s excellence in Teaching, Eloquence, Music, and Painting/Sculpture, Landino listed illustrious Florentines and highlighted the city’s success in the arts. For a commentary on Dante, these passages would seem out of place, but Landino was

54 Landino, vol. 1, 222.

55 Landino, vol. 1, 245.
not merely providing an analysis of the *Comedia*: he was celebrating Florence as a center of arts and learning. His next two sections—*lus civile* (Civil Law) and *Mercatura* (Trade)—continued this laudatory intent, as Landino defended his city by describing its many successes. After these passages, which markedly deviate from his discussion of Dante, he returned to the poet in the section entitled *Vita et costumi del poeta* (Life and habits of the poet), where he provided a brief summary of Dante’s biography and accomplishments. Landino highlighted “speranza in Danthe di potere tornare in patria” (Dante’s hope that he could return to his homeland). While the poet never returned to Florence in his lifetime, through this new commentary Landino and the city of Florence symbolically welcomed him home.

In the next three sections, *Che chosa sia poesia et poeta et della origine sua divina et antichissima* (What is poetry and a poet and of its divine and very ancient origin); *Furore divino* (Divine rapture); and *Che l’origine de’ poeti sia anticha* (That the origin of poets is ancient), Landino maintained his focus on Dante as he argued for the divinity of the poem and highlighted the poet’s biblical and classical lineage to elevate him beyond popular entertainment, while making him more attractive to his fellow humanists.

The penultimate and only bilingual section, written first in Latin and then in Italian by the famed Neoplatonic philosopher Marsilio Ficino, further developed the notion of Dante’s symbolic return from exile and his reunion with

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56 Landino, vol. 1, 251.
An important name in Florentine academic circles, Ficino added further legitimacy, credibility, and nobility to Landino’s project. By signing his name in Latin as Marsilus Ficinus Florentinus, he emphasized his status as a Florentine, and a learned one at that. Ficino’s section was a call for Florentine citizens to praise their fellow citizen Dante, writing: “Florentia iam diu mesta, sed tandem leta, Danthi suo Aligherio post duo ferme secula iam redivivo, et in patriam restituto, ac denique coronato, congratulatur” (Florence, sorrowful for a long time but now finally happy, congratulates its own poet Dante Alighieri, who at the end of almost two centuries has finally been resurrected, and returned to his homeland, and finally crowned). According to Ficino, the return of Dante would bring happiness to Florence. He encouraged his fellow citizens to celebrate this event. The fact that Ficino’s entries were written in both Latin and the vernacular was significant. As a preeminent scholar of Latin, he lent his authority to Landino’s project and reaffirmed the Florentine vernacular’s status as a worthy counterpart to Latin. In addition, through his use of Latin and references to classical figures, Ficino repeatedly connected Dante to antiquity in an appeal to


58 Ficino had also previously worked with the printer Niccolò di Lorenzo.

59 Here Ficino was following the Renaissance trend of campanilismo (derived from the word campanile, or bell tower), which denotes an intense local patriotism.

his fellow humanists to recognize the poet as a participant in the classical tradition.\textsuperscript{61}

In the fifteenth century, Dante’s \textit{Comedia} had become a problem for the Florentine humanist elite. While interest in Dante remained relatively constant throughout the medieval period and the early Renaissance, as shown by the many extant manuscripts and incunabula, the dismissal of Dante gradually began in the early fifteenth century, leading to the decline of Dante as a literary, theological, and philosophical authority. While Dante maintained his position as an important figure for Florence’s “\textit{patrimonio civile}” (civil patrimony), many fifteenth-century humanists (apart from Alberti) disregarded the \textit{Comedia} because of its popular appeal and its use of the vernacular. In his fictitious \textit{Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum} (ca. 1406-1408), Leonardo Bruni had the famed Florentine humanist Niccolò Niccoli refer to Dante as a poet of “cobblers and bakers.”\textsuperscript{62}

Bruni’s position differed from that of Landino, for whom Dante was the “\textit{primo splendore del nome fiorentino}” (the first splendor of the Florentine name) and a poet on par with Virgil.\textsuperscript{63} The \textit{Comento sopra la Comedia} attempted to heal the divisive wound between official culture in Latin and popular culture in the vernacular by elevating the vernacular to the status of a literary language.

Landino used his commentary to interest humanists in Dante by elevating the poet above the interests of popular admirers and celebrating Dante as the

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{61} Landino, vol. 1, 270.

\textsuperscript{62} Gilson, \textit{Dante and Renaissance Florence}, 170-172; 192-211; 226-229.

\textsuperscript{63} Landino, vol. 1, 221.
\end{footnotes}
product of a lineage of classical thinkers. Landino emphasized the shared *patria* (homeland) of Virgil and Dante and established Dante as the inheritor of a classical tradition.\(^\text{64}\) As Dante himself implied in Canto IV, Landino affirmed Dante’s position as Virgil’s successor. Hypercorrecting, he inserted a non-etymological “h” to Dante’s name as a means of latinizing it as ‘Danthe.’\(^\text{65}\) He also suggested that “l’origine de’ poeti sia anticha” (the origin of poets is ancient) and confirmed the classical and Christian influence on Dante. Using many Latin quotations and allusions to classical events, Landino proposed that a true understanding of Dante required a solid background in the classics.\(^\text{66}\) The sheer number of untranslated Latin quotations in Landino’s commentary resulted in a text that would have been quite challenging for a reader unfamiliar with Latin.

Landino not only emphasized the classical inheritance of Dante, but also highlighted the classical inheritance of Florence herself, writing, “credo veramente poter concludere nell’ornato del dire Fiorenza sequitare la vestigie della greca Athena” (I truly believe that I can conclude that Florence in the *ornatus* of speech continues in the vestiges of Greek Athens).\(^\text{67}\) Referencing *ornatus*, one of the five virtues of good writing, Landino extended his argument past Dante, and past even the Roman world of Virgil, to give the city of Florence

\(^\text{64}\) Gilson, *Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy*, 18.
\(^\text{65}\) Landino, vol. 1, 261.
\(^\text{66}\) Gilson, *Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy*, 4; 61.
\(^\text{67}\) Landino, vol. 1, 238.
a classical heritage through a comparison to classical Athens. Landino affirmed that just as the excellence of Athens was rooted in literature, so could Florence and its vernacular take up the mantle to become the new center of arts and culture.

Landino concluded his introduction with the section *Sito forma et misura dello 'nferno et statura de' giganti et di Lucifero* (The site, shape, and size of Hell and the stature of the giants and of Lucifer), which referenced the popular fifteenth-century trend of mapping the physical dimensions of Hell on the basis of Dante’s *Comedia*. Here, Landino provided a synopsis of the calculations of his contemporary, Florentine architect and mathematician Antonio di Tuccio Manetti (1423-1497). Using Dante’s references to the dimensions of Hell, Manetti mathematically calculated its size and shape, treating Dante’s poem as a factual account of a physical place. By including mathematical measurements of Hell, Landino confirmed Dante’s status as an authoritative source on the afterlife.

**Landino’s Commentary on Canto I**

In his analysis of the cantos, Landino defaulted to the more traditional structure of a scholarly commentary. He opened his analysis of each canto by summarizing the main points he would make and then embarked on a word-by-word interpretation of the poem, paying attention to both its grammatical and

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68 The virtues of eloquence were first developed by Aristotle’s disciples Theophrastus and Demetrius and later expanded by Cicero and Quintilian. In his *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian presents his theory of the virtues of eloquence as including *latinitas* (purity of language), *perspicuitas* (clarity), *aptum* (appropriateness), and *ornatus* (ornament). Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 8.3.

allegorical significance. Not one to limit his digressions, Landino’s commentary on the first canto stretches across fifty pages of a standard-format modern book. The canto extends a mere 136 lines in comparison. Landino began his commentary on the first canto with the statement:

Habbiamo narrato non solamente la vita del poeta et el titolo del libro et che cosa sia poeta, ma etiam quanto sia vetusta et anticha, quanto nobile et varia, quanto utile et ioconda tal doctrina, quanto sia efficace a muovere l’humane menti, et quanto dilecti ogni liberale ingegno.

(We have narrated not only the life of the poet and the title of the book and what a poet is, but also how old and ancient, how noble and varied, how useful and light-hearted this doctrine is, how effective it is in moving human minds, and how it delights every open-minded intellect.)

In these sections, Landino continued reclaiming Dante for Florence. In the opening to his commentary on Canto I, he referenced “la excellentia et divinità dello ingengo del nostro toscano, et fiorentino, poeta” (the excellence and divinity of the genius of our Tuscan, and Florentine, poet). The doubling of descriptors was telling. First, Landino marked Dante as a Tuscan, and then reaffirmed his position as a Florentine, further linking the poet directly to the city.

Having persuaded the reader of both Dante’s merit and the poem’s importance, Landino could proceed with his line-by-line commentary on the Comedia. Almost immediately, he showed his hand. In the manner typical of a

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70 McNair, 166.

71 Gilson, Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy, 21-25.

72 Landino, vol. 1, 281.

73 Landino, vol. 1, 282.
medieval commentary, Landino supported his claims with the authority of the ancients. In his interpretation of Inferno’s very first line, he referenced Aristotle:

Imperò che alchuni dicono, che il mezo della vita humana è el sonno, mossi credo dalla sententia d’Aristotele dicendo lui nell’Ethica nessuna differentia essere tra felici, et miserì, nella metà della vita, per che le nocti che sono la metà del tempo c’’inducono sonno, et da quello nasce che né bene né male sentir possiamo.\(^{74}\)

(It is true that some say that half of human life is sleep, moved I believe by the judgment of Aristotle who says in his Ethics that there is no difference between the happy and the miserable, in half of life, for nights are half of the time, which induce sleep, during which we can feel neither good nor bad.)

In this passage, Landino reaffirmed the message he began in his introduction. The classics, embodied here by Aristotle, were essential to understanding Dante. Whether Dante was thinking of Aristotle when he wrote “il mezo della vita humana” (the middle of human life) was irrelevant for Landino, and admittedly, the connection between the philosopher and Dante’s introduction seemed weak. By using Aristotle, Landino established his own authority as a learned scholar who had mastered the classical texts. This was doubly important for Landino because of his incomplete mastery of the classics and his lack of proficiency in Greek. This want of classical training was likely a source of embarrassment for Landino since he was never hired to teach philosophy (only poetry and oratory), and never reached as high of a salary as some of his colleagues.\(^{75}\)

After initiating the pattern of classical references that he continues throughout the entire commentary, Landino cited Christian sources. He further

\(^{74}\) Landino, vol. 1, 282.

\(^{75}\) McNair, 6-7.
explained that Dante was imitating John the Evangelist who slept on the chest of Christ and had celestial visions. Landino firmly situated Dante within both classical authority, in this case Aristotle, and Christian authority, writing:

Et perché la imbecillità nostra fa che sia o impossibile, o molto difficile fare questo camino sanza duce et guida, però el poeta mostra havere preso Virgilio. Prima perché, re vera, molto soctilmente lo imitò in questa sua opera. Dipoi allegoricamente piglia Virgilio per la philosophia morale et per tutta la doctrina de’ gentili. Et per rispecto che tal doctrina assai basta a conseguire le due prime parti, cioè conoscere el vitio, et conoscuiuto purgarsene, ma non è sufficiente a darci vera cognizione delle cose divine, la quale d’altro fonte non si può attingere se non da quello della sacra theologia de’ cristiani, però pone che Virgilio lo guida solamente dell’inferno et pel purgatorio, perché pel paradiso, come vedremo nel suo luogh, gli fia mestiero di più docta guida.

(Because our weakness makes [arriving at Heaven] either an impossible or very difficult journey to make without a guide, therefore Dante has taken Virgil. First because he [Dante] truly imitated him [Virgil] in this work of his. Second because, Dante takes Virgil to allegorically represent moral philosophy and all the teachings of the gentiles. While respecting these teachings is quite sufficient to achieve the teaching and purging of vices, it is insufficient in giving us true knowledge of divine things, which can only be drawn from the Christian sacred theology. Therefore, Dante had Virgil as his guide only through Hell and Purgatory, because for Heaven, as we will see, he needs a more learned guide.)

Dante needed Virgil, and the classical doctrine that he represented, to teach him of the vices. Knowledge of the vices was one of the reasons that Dante began his journey in Inferno. But to know and then purge himself of vices alone would not bring about his salvation. For salvation, Dante required Christian theology. Here, Landino identified Dante as a poeta theologus (poet theologian), an idea

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76 “Dicono adunque che lui imita Iomni evangelista el quale dormendo sopra el pecto di Christo redemptore hebbe visione delle chose celeste” (others say that [Dante] imitates John the Evangelist who slept on Christ the Redeemer’s chest and had visions of celestial things). Landino, vol. 1, 282.


By arguing that Dante’s text had to be understood through both Christian and classical traditions, Landino followed in the legacy of medieval commentators. He favored Dante commentators Pietro Alighieri (the poet’s own son), Giovanni Boccaccio, Benvenuto da Imola, and Francesco da Buti. According to McNair, Landino “approaches ancient thinkers through their later interpreters, so that in many ways it is on a medieval, scholastic framework that his allegories are constructed, a framework into which he incorporates Platonic and Neoplatonic concepts as he learns of them.”

Landino encountered classical texts through their post-classical interpreters, and this medieval framework separated him from many of his fellow fifteenth-century humanist contemporaries. McNair furthers this point by noting how “Landino’s claim that Dante surpassed Homer and Virgil because he knew Christian revelation, and they did not, was not particularly Neoplatonic, but instead very much in line with a medieval scholastic such as Thomas Aquinas.”

Many of Landino’s Latin quotes

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79 Gilson, *Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy*, 41.

80 McNair, 1.

81 See Landino, vol. 2, 410: “Item quegli e quali essendo stati innanzi a Christo non adororono debitamente Idio, perché non credectono nella Trinità, Padre, Figliuolo et Spirito Saneto, né in Christo venturo. Questi perché vixono secondo le virtú civilis non meritavono supplicii, ma per la ragione già dexta non meritano gloria.” McNair’s translation: “those who were before Christ do
in his commentary likely came from his reading of Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Macrobius, Augustine, and Coluccio Salutati.\textsuperscript{82}

Landino was clear in his intentions. Dante was “il nostro poeta” (our poet) and to Florence he belonged. Landino reclaimed Dante and presented an interpretation of the \textit{Comedia} that his contemporary Florentine humanists would find palatable. Landino’s commentary acted as an elevating force where he treated Dante’s word like holy scripture with every possible hidden mystery explained and expounded upon with the requisite historical, literary, and political context. Throughout those pages, Landino took a decidedly less Florence-centric approach to Dante than in his \textit{Proemio}, while still highlighting Dante’s connection and sympathies for his native city. The ultimate achievement of Landino’s career, his commentary, would be reprinted more than twenty times before the end of the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{82} McNair, 174.

\textsuperscript{83} Gilson, “Notes on the Presence of Boccaccio in Cristoforo Landino’s \textit{Comento Sopra La Comedia Di Danthe Alighieri},” \textit{Italian Culture} 23, no. 1 (2005), 1.
CHAPTER TWO: THE BOOK AND ITS ILLUSTRATIONS

The product of five hundred years of alterations, the Wesleyan incunable merits a careful inquiry into its present form.\textsuperscript{84} I begin by describing its current state as a large parchment-bound folio. After detailing aspects particular to this copy, I shift my focus to the images, both broadly across the 1481 incunable’s print run and specifically to those present in the Wesleyan copy. I continue by considering how the fifteen images came to be included in this copy and to appear in their present state. One way to understand their current appearance is by examining the unclear relationship of artist Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) both to this project and to the presumed engraver Baccio Baldini, a relationship first described by Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) in 1550.\textsuperscript{85} By interrogating the Vasarian narrative of the book’s illustration program, I hope to unravel myths surrounding the project from what we can reasonably say based on the material evidence.

Wesleyan’s copy of the 1481 incunable is a large, lectern-sized folio measuring approximately 14.5 by 10 by 3 inches (Fig. 1). Made of stiff antique parchment with five ridges characteristic of raised bands, the binding, while

\textsuperscript{84} I use the phrase “1481 incunable” to reference all the copies printed by Niccolò di Lorenzo of Landino’s \textit{Comento sopra la Comedia} and the phrase “Wesleyan incunable” to reference the specific copy of that book in Wesleyan’s Special Collections.

\textsuperscript{85} Prior to Vasari’s account, almost no documentary evidence survives about a Florentine goldsmith named Baccio Baldini. The scholarship is largely divided about his existence. Mark Zucker claims that Baldini was one of the most prolific engravers of the fifteenth century while other scholars, such as Peter Keller, cast significantly more doubt on his existence. Mark Zucker, \textit{Early Italian Masters}, vol. 24 of \textit{The Illustrated Bartsch}, ed. Walter L. Straus and John T. Spike (New York: Abaris Books, 1993), 89; Keller, 332-333.
significantly later in date, purposely complements the book’s age (Fig. 2).\footnote{The binding offers a window into a copy’s biography over time. As books were generally first sold without bindings, an owner’s decisions on how to bind a book often reflect the book’s function and value. When a book changed hands, later owners would often have it rebound to their own preferences. The current binding on the Wesleyan incunable is the latest iteration in a long series.} Attached to pasteboards (boards made from pasting together sheets of printer’s waste), the parchment at the spine’s joints has slightly lifted, exposing the raised bands as merely decorative, rather than as structural supports necessary for a fifteenth-century binding. The end bands (the sewn supports at the top and bottom of the book) are false as well (Fig. 3), which is now obvious from where the bands have pulled away from the text block. While the binding shows minor wear and surface marks, the overall integrity of its structure remains strong; it dates to the eighteenth century at the very earliest.\footnote{It is likely that this book was rebound numerous times over its history. Most recently, the binding was repaired and the spine rebacked. This repair is quite subtle, noticeable only through the cuts made to lift the parchment on the book boards and the visible ridges where new material has been inserted (Fig. 3). The binding has been reinforced with gauze strip joints, and the hinges attaching the text block to the book boards are visible under the pastedowns (Fig. 5a). On the final pages of text, some past critter has eaten through the upper right corners. The current end sheets show no similar damage and must have been added after the damage occurred.}

This book was designed to be read easily. The running titles and headings make navigating through the book simple, and the text of the Comedia is clearly distinguished from that of the commentary. Words from the Comedia, which Landino glossed, are always printed in capital letters so that the reader may more easily find the part of the commentary that corresponds to the individual word of Dante’s poem (Fig. 4). When the book’s present binding was added, new endpapers were added too, which differ from the paper in the rest of the book (Fig. 5). At some point when the volume was rebound (though perhaps not the
most recent time), blank leaves were added between the different canticles and sections of the text (*Proemio, Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*) (Fig. 6). The pages have been extensively trimmed.\(^8\)

The incunable contains three bookplates: the Vernon family bookplate (Fig. 5b), the *Ex libris* of George John Warren, the fifth Baron Vernon, and the bookplate of Wesleyan Special Collections.\(^9\) In addition to the bookplates, the endsheets have the raised seal of William E. Moss (pasted-in on a separate sheet of paper) and the Wesleyan Olin Library book stamp. The incunable also contains two inscriptions on the opening pages, of which the first reads “Vittorio Alfieri 1779,” the signature of a famed Italian dramatist on the flyleaf (Fig. 5c). The second inscription, located on the opening page of the *Proemio* (Fig. 9), is crossed out to the point of near illegibility (Fig. 9a). One possible interpretation for this inscription comes from the earliest known auction listing for this incunable, from 1847, which notes the presence of a signature by the eighteenth-century physician

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\(^8\) The incunable has certainly been trimmed, likely numerous times throughout the centuries. This has significantly reduced the book’s original dimensions; other copies survive with significantly larger margins and a complete first engraving, although these are more uncommon. The last major trimming of the incunable almost certainly occurred before the eleven line drawings were added. The drawing for Canto V (Fig. 7) is a telling example where the illustration has just barely been squeezed in. In all other drawings, the artist of the illustrations left at least 5 mm between the text or the catchword (depending on if it was present) and the image (Fig. 8). In the case of Canto V, the artist has left less than 2 mm between the catchword and the image. If the artist had a larger margin to work with, he or she would have followed the normal pattern and left more space; the image would have been cut off when the pages were trimmed.

and naturalist Antonio Cocchi.\textsuperscript{90} One problem quickly arises with this interpretation: the auction listing is by Guglielmo Libri, one of the most prolific and notorious book thieves and forgers of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{91} Because of Libri’s penchant for stealing books from French and Italian libraries and then falsifying their provenance, neither Alfieri’s nor Cocchi’s signatures can be trusted as genuine.\textsuperscript{92} Prior to its appearance in the 1847 auction catalog, the first three and a half centuries of the Wesleyan incunable’s life are largely a mystery.

\textsuperscript{90} The inscription appears to be in a seventeenth century hand but has been crossed out to the point where it is almost indecipherable. This is not unusual: inscriptions were regularly crossed out when a book was sold to avoid the embarrassment of selling off family books. In addition, signatures were sometimes removed to hide provenance. The identification of the inscription as Cocchi’s signature comes from the sale of the incunable by Guglielmo Libri. While Libri would not have added the inscription then crossed it out to illegibility, his interpretation of the signature as Cocchi’s cannot be substantiated. See \textit{Catalogue de la bibliothèque de M. L****. Dont la vente se fera le lundi 28 juin 1847, et le vingt-neuf jours suivants à six heures de relevée, rue des Bons Enfants n° 30, maison Silvestre, salle premier.} (Paris: L. C. Silvestre et P. Jannet, 1847), 90.

\textsuperscript{91} One major difficulty in studying the Wesleyan incunable is its connection to Guglielmo Libri Carucci dalla Sommaja or Guglielmo Libri for short. Libri was a highly successful counterfeiter, scholar, and one of the most notorious book thieves of all time. He stole tens of thousands of early books and manuscripts from public libraries in France and Italy as well as falsified provenance information, washed pages of identified marks, and altered the books he sold to avoid detection. Because the Wesleyan incunable was sold by Libri, all provenance information before 1847 is highly suspect, and its first three and a half centuries are largely a mystery.

\textsuperscript{92} Both Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803) and Antonio Cocchi (1695-1758) were important figures, whose signatures add to the value of the incunable and provide a plausible provenance. Alfieri was a famous Italian dramatist considered one of the most important literary minds of his generation while Cocchi was a physician, naturalist, and professor who published works on anatomy. The authenticity of Alfieri’s signature is especially questionable as the incunable does not appear in any of four catalogs of Alfieri’s books. While it is possible that the incunable was not included on a list, it does increase the likelihood that the signature is forged. For more on the Wesleyan incunable’s provenance, see Francesco Marco Aresu, “A Dantean (and Alfierian?) Incunable in the Olin Library at Wesleyan University (Middletown, CT),” in \textit{Interpretation and Visual Poetics in Medieval and Early Modern Texts: Essays in Honor of H. Wayne Storey}, ed. Beatrice Arduini, Isabella Magni, and Jelena Todorović (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 147-153. For more on Guglielmo Libri, see Jeremy Norman, \textit{Scientist, Scholar, and Scoundrel: A Bibliographic Investigation of the Life and Exploits of Count Guglielmo Libri} (New York: The Grolier Club, 2013).
From the onset, the Wesleyan incunable was an experiment. The 1481 project utilized the nascent technology of copperplate engravings to illustrate the *Comedia*. The printer left a blank space for an illustration before almost every one of the one hundred cantos of Dante’s *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. When present in the incunable, the engravings serve as a visual introduction to the text by condensing the essential elements of each canto into a single illustration. They combine the technique of continuous narrative, which had a long medieval tradition, with the naturalism and dynamism of the early Renaissance to create wholly innovative compositions. The illustrations are not in the margins nor at the end of the canto; instead, the printer has left a space for them, often in the middle of the page, directly preceding the canto they illustrate (Fig. 10). A Quattrocento Florentine reader would have certainly encountered Dante in some form before opening the book, but this layout ensured that before even beginning to read a canto, they would have already seen an image of the narrative it told.


94 The engraver repeats common motifs. For example, Canto I’s Dante emerging from the woods is similar to the illustrations in London, B. M. Add. 19587, fol. 2r (Neapolitan, ca. 1370) and Chantilly, Musée Condé 597, fol. 34r (Pisan, ca. 1345). The major difference lies in the complexity of the compositions: the 1481 engravings include significantly more figures and often more detail than many manuscript illustrations of the same scene. For more examples of illuminated manuscripts of the *Comedia*, see Peter Brieger, Millard Meiss, and Charles Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts of the Divine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

95 A rare example of a book where the printed left a blank space in the middle of the page for an engraving (for woodcuts, having the illustration in the middle of the page is normal because there is no technological incompatibility, as both are relief). It would have been extremely difficult to print the engraving directly on the page in an area only slightly bigger than the image itself. I am indebted to Suzy Taraba of Wesleyan’s Special Collections for this observation.
The *Comedia* has one hundred cantos, yet engravings were only completed for the first nineteen cantos of the *Inferno*. Of the 166 known extant copies of the book, almost all contain the engravings for Cantos I and II, a significant number of the books contain one or two pasted-in engravings, and a handful contain the complete nineteen engravings. The first two engravings were printed directly onto the text block. When present, the engravings for Cantos III-XIX were printed on separate sheets, cut down to size, and pasted onto the page. Two variants survive for the engraving of Canto III; the compositions are identical, but the line quality differs, and they appear to be by different hands.

Neither the color of ink nor the style of numeration remained consistent throughout the series. The first two engravings were usually printed in brown ink, while the rest were printed in ink with a blacker or greyer tint. All the engraved copper plates (except the plates for Canto I and II) have two states, with Roman numerals being added for the second (Figs. 11 and 12). No numbers exist in the

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96 I refer to the canto number and the engraving number interchangeably since they are almost always the same. In the few instances where this is not the case, I note the exceptions.

97 The presentation copy was printed on vellum and fully hand illuminated for its dedication to the Florentine Signoria on August 30, 1481. For more on the presentation to the Signoria, see Paolo Procaccioli, “Introduzione,” in *Comento sopra la Comedia*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli (Rome: Salerno, 2001), 17. Beside the presentation copy, there are some rare copies entirely without illustration. See Arthur Hind, *Early Italian Engraving: A Critical Catalogue with Complete Reproduction of the Prints Described* (London-New York: Knoedler-Quaritch, 1938-1948), 102.

98 In some special cases, the engraving for Canto II was repeated for Canto III for a total of three engravings printed directly on the page.

99 The presumably later variant was engraved with a slightly cruder hand than the rest of the series. The contours of the figures are more schematic and the modeling less subtle.

100 Hind, *Early Italian Engraving*, 100-101.
first state, except in the engravings for Cantos III and IV, which have Arabic numerals in the lower left corner of the engraving.\textsuperscript{101}

In his authoritative study from 1938-1948, Arthur Hind classified eighty-three extant copies of the book into different categories based on the number of prints present. He claimed to have identified only nineteen or twenty copies that contained the full set of engravings. Considering this variation, the 1481 edition makes clear that the incunable’s early integration of the intaglio process was not entirely successful. The Wesleyan copy does not fit neatly into any of Hind’s categories.\textsuperscript{102} Later owners’ alterations make any sort of generalization (such as Hind’s) difficult. Since the engravings were first added to some of the copies between 1481 and 1487, later owners have repeatedly moved engravings from one book to another in an attempt to “complete” certain copies.

As with any one of the extant copies of the 1481 incunable, the Wesleyan exemplar has its own telling assortment of illustrations. Of the nineteen possible engravings, the Wesleyan incunable contains some version of fifteen. The engravings for Cantos I and II were the only ones printed directly on the page, though neither are perfect examples. The engraving for Canto I (Fig. 13) survives only in a fragmented form (Fig. 13a), the victim of extensively trimmed pages. The engraving for Canto II is unusually poorly printed; a combination of worn plate, over-inking, and an error when laying the paper on the press. This produced an impression that is distinctively blurry (Fig. 14). In addition, the Wesleyan

\textsuperscript{101} Hind, \textit{Early Italian Engraving}, 101.

\textsuperscript{102} Hind, \textit{Early Italian Engraving}, 100.
incunable contains Canto X’s engraving pasted on a wrinkled and slightly torn page (Fig. 15), suggesting a sloppy and overzealous use of adhesive to attach the print.

While a varied assortment of engravings is not unusual in extant copies, the Wesleyan copy supplements those engravings with a peculiar twelve drawings (for an example see Fig. 16). The eleven “engravings” for Cantos III-IX and XI-XIV are actually line drawings made after the original printed engravings (though the drawings for Cantos XIII and XIV have been mistakenly inverted). The drawings appear to be traced, likely with a dip pen using diluted ink.103 As the drawings proceed, the ink grows fainter and less detailed, almost as if the artist had grown fatigued as the illustration campaign continued (Fig. 17).

The Wesleyan incunable is listed in an auction listing of Libri in 1847 (one year before his flight from Paris with half of his 30,000 books and manuscripts to avoid persecution for his thefts).104 The 1847 catalog entry on what presumably is the Wesleyan incunable reads:

Precious exemplar with fifteen illustrations belonging to Alfieri, to whom it seems to have been given by his friend Fr. Gori Gandellini. Some very touching words in Alfieri’s hand let us know this detail. Here is the note written by the illustrious author of tragedies beneath a drawing by Gori at the bottom of the old engraving placed before Canto 11—“These are the beloved characters of my unique friend Checco Gori Gandellini, whose memory, both bitter and dear, I will carry to the grave, carved in my hear.—Paris, 1792—I have been bereaved of him for eight years already.”

103 The exact alignment of the drawings with the dimensions of the original engravings and the replication of the contour lines makes the drawings appear traced. While the paper is relatively thick, tracing would be possible with sufficient sunlight. For more on the artist’s tracing, see the Catalog entry for Canto III. Since the drawings are noted in an 1847 auction catalog, they would have been created prior to the advent of light tables which would have made such additions easier.

The exemplars with more than two illustrations are very rare. Some illustrations in this volume seem drawn by hand. They are probably the original drawings upon which the illustrations found in other exemplars are based. This book, remarkable for many reasons, has the signature of A. Cocchi and Alfieri.105

The year 1847 is thus a terminus ante quem for the drawings. They must have been added to the book prior to the auction catalog sale. Libri is the first to mention the eleven line drawings. He boldly and preposterously claimed that “[s]ome illustrations in this volume seem drawn by hand. They are probably the original drawings upon which the illustrations found in other exemplars are based.”106 In addition, Libri mentions Cocchi as the artist behind one mysterious drawing at the bottom of the engraving before Canto XI. If there was ever a drawing at the bottom of an engraving placed before Canto XI, it does not survive. Furthermore, there is no engraving before Canto XI. By “before Canto XI,” Libri might have meant the space before Canto X. In the Wesleyan incunable, Canto X includes an engraving, likely original, which appears moderately damaged at the edges (Fig. 15a), almost as if it had been lifted from another copy.107

Libri’s auction catalog entry offers three potential origins of the drawings: 1) Cocchi added not one but all eleven drawings; 2) Libri added the drawings—he was a notorious forger and paleographer, likely with the necessary hand skills to


106 Catalogue de la bibliothèque de M. L****, 90.

107 For more on the movement of engravings, see the catalog entry for Canto X.
replicate the engravings; 3) an owner before Libri and Cocchi (if he was actually an owner) added the drawings. Of those three possibilities, Libri is the most likely candidate to have had the drawings added. Libri was known to alter his books to increase their value, and he certainly had access to the full set of engravings. His auction catalog mentions an additional 1481 incunable, complete with nineteen engravings. Whoever actually added the drawings would have needed access to the original engravings or very accurate copies, as the drawings follow the engravings almost exactly, though in a simplified form.

All twelve drawings in the Wesleyan incunable almost perfectly mirror the composition of the original engravings, but only the first eleven actually resemble drawings. The twelfth drawing, the illustration for Canto XIX (Fig. 18), is a so-called “deceptive” drawing: a drawing made to pass as an engraving.108 Drawn on a separate sheet in the style of an engraving, with even the plate mark drawn in pen (Fig. 18a), at first glance this drawing appears to be a later engraving. The underdrawing is visible below the sleeve and in the fingers of Virgil’s pointed hand (Fig. 18b) and in the circle of the furthest right hole (Fig. 18c). Since an engraving is made by inking a plate that has been incised with a burin, no print should necessitate underdrawing. In addition, the line, especially in the squiggle around the flames, does not taper like an incised mark on a copperplate would (Fig.18d). While a strikingly convincing copy, the quality and intensity of the lines do not fully match the style of the original engravings, nor does the color of the slightly paler paper match when compared to other copies of the Canto XIX

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108 I am indebted to Miya Tokumitsu of Wesleyan’s Davison Art Center for this observation.
engraving (Fig. 19). The deceptive drawing was the final major addition to the Wesleyan incunable added at some point after 1937, since it did not appear in the description for the Moss auction in which this incunable was sold.

Unable to secure copies of all the engravings, a past owner must have taken it upon themselves to “finish” this copy. However, if the complete pictorial cycle had been the goal, then he or she did not succeed, as Cantos XV-XVIII remain without an illustration.

While the Wesleyan’s copy has not been extensively studied, the print run as a whole has been. The 1481 incunable’s copperplate illustrations, relatively high number of extant copies, position as an important commentary on Dante’s Comedia, and presumed connection to Sandro Botticelli make it an important object of research in the fields of both Art History and Dante Studies. Indeed, the rich historiography of studies on this book goes all the way back to Giorgio Vasari.

In both editions of his Lives of the Artists (1550 and 1568), Vasari crafted a myth around the 1481 project that has forever haunted it. In his “Life of Botticelli,” he wrote:

[Botticelli] returned immediately to Florence, where, being a man of inquiring mind, he made a commentary on part of Dante, illustrated the

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109 While it is possible that the deceptive drawing was mistakenly overlooked, the detailed description of the other engravings makes this unlikely. For more information on the 1937 auction, see Catalogue of the very well known and valuable library, the property of Lt.-Col. W. G. Moss of the Manor House, Sonning-on-Thames, Bers...comprising a most important and extensive collection of the works of William Blake and of books and mss. Relating to him...: the most well-known collection of rare and decorative book-bindings...: which will be sold at auction by Messrs. Sotheby & Co....on Tuesday, the 2nd of March 1937, and March 3-5, 8 & 9. (London: Sotherby, 1937), 82.
In the highly unlikely case that Botticelli did write a commentary on Dante’s text, it does not survive. Scholars have taken this statement to refer to the production of the engravings of the 1481 edition. Most probably, Vasari mistakenly believed that Botticelli, not Cristoforo Landino, wrote the commentary on Dante accompanied by the prints. In addition, Vasari implies that Botticelli printed the work himself, which was almost certainly not the case. If Botticelli indeed worked on the 1481 project, he would not have done more than design the engravings for an engraver to execute and a printer to print.

Vasari could never fully celebrate Botticelli. For him, the art of his own era (i.e., that of the mid-sixteenth century) progressed through three generations, achieving its ultimate realization in Michelangelo. As one of Vasari’s second generation of artists, Botticelli could not compete with Michelangelo’s accomplishments. Later in his biography of Botticelli, Vasari recounts a story about Botticelli accusing a friend of heresy. Vasari describes the friend as saying: “Does it not seem to you that [Botticelli] is the heretic, since without a scrap of learning, and scarcely knowing how to read, he plays the commentator to Dante

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111 Hind writes: “Vasari informs us that Botticelli devoted much time and energy to Dante not only as illustrator but as commentator. Of his performance in the latter field we have no remains, but the designs of the master to the inferno to which Vasari referred as having been engraved are doubtless the series of nineteen now to be described illustrating as many cantos of the Inferno. Vasari was also probably thinking chiefly of this series when he wrote of the engraver Baccio Baldini as working exclusively after the designs of Botticelli.” Hind, *Early Italian Engraving*, 99. [Italics added.]
and takes his name in vain?”\textsuperscript{112} Vasari had already referred to Botticelli as “a man of inquiring mind,” yet here he has a friend accuse him of heresy for daring to write a commentary “without a scrap of learning.” Vasari’s presentation of Botticelli as both learned and unlearned deserves some consideration. What kind of learning did the engraver have? Was he (unlikely) reading Landino’s commentary and creating an illustration in response? Was a scholar advising the design of the images? Dante’s poem was an oral text, recited in the piazzas, and many citizens would have been very familiar with it. Did the engraver highlight the key elements of the text based on his personal knowledge of the poem? Additionally, Vasari’s use of the word “heretic” is telling, suggesting that Dante’s \textit{Comedia} was being treated as a sacred text.

Vasari was not sympathetic to the 1481 project and judged it a poorly executed waste of Botticelli’s talent. Instead of admiring an innovative approach to the new medium of copperplate engraving, the writer was deeply critical. Vasari’s criticism did not end with the Dante project, since he chastised Botticelli for his other ventures into printing: “He also printed many of the drawings he had made, but in a bad manner, for the engraving was poorly done.”\textsuperscript{113} In what way the engravings were poorly done, Vasari does not explain.

While Vasari does not name the engraver of these “inferior” prints in his section on Botticelli, in his chapter on the “Life of Marc’Antonio Bolognese and of other Engravers of Print,” he is the first to tie Botticelli to the Florentine

\textsuperscript{112} Vasari, 541.

\textsuperscript{113} Vasari, 538
goldsmith Baccio Baldini. He mentions Baldini only once, writing: “Baccio Baldini, a goldsmith of Florence, who, not having much power of design, took all that he did from the invention and design of Sandro Botticelli.”\textsuperscript{114} Here, Vasari firmly connects Baldini to Botticelli, while snubbing Baldini as the mere craftsman and elevating Botticelli as the designer.

Vasari wrote the first edition of his \textit{Lives} in 1550, almost seventy years after the 1481 incunable was published; ever since then, those three sentences have influenced all scholarly investigation of this project. While the goal of this thesis is not to dismiss Vasari altogether, his words cannot be treated as fact. For one, no modern scholar believes that Botticelli actually wrote the commentary and printed it, nor does anyone still think that he stood over the engraver’s shoulder directing the work. So why then did Botticelli have to be directly involved in the project at all? No archival evidence survives that connects him to the 1481 publication. This thesis seeks to realign and correct certain assumptions about the direction of influence between a “great master” like Botticelli and a quasi-anonymous engraver.\textsuperscript{115} Among other issues, the exclusive focus on one authoritative creator of the engravings completely ignores the workshop model of collaboration.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{114} Vasari, 74.

\textsuperscript{115} I am indebted to Jason Di Resta of Wesleyan’s Olin Library for first suggesting that directions of influence are not as linear from canonical artists to engravers as scholarship often assumes.

\textsuperscript{116} For the collaborative workshop production, see Chapter 3.
The engravings have a notorious and frustratingly complicated relationship with Botticelli’s Dante drawings. Botticelli created 102 drawings (now preserved in Berlin and the Vatican), one for each canto of the *Comedia* plus two additional images, which have been tenuously dated to between the mid-1480s to the mid-1490s.\(^{117}\) For this project, Botticelli drew on nearly identical large sheets of sheep-skin parchment, with one image on each sheet and fragments of the text of the *Comedia* on the reverse (Fig. 20).\(^{118}\) The drawings were most likely intended to illustrate a luxury—if unusual—codex for Botticelli’s patron Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici. The drawings are far too opulent and the parchment too fine a quality to have been intended as designs for engravings. For one, some drawings have been partially or fully colored (Fig. 21); the ones that were not were simply unfinished rather than intended as designs for a larger project.\(^{119}\) If Botticelli ever executed preparatory designs for the printed edition, they do not survive.

Botticelli’s drawings have repeatedly confused scholars and necessitated incredibly complex timelines and the conjecture of projects spanning decades (on

\(^{117}\) Botticelli’s drawings include the cantos, the *Map of Hell*, and a two-page spread illustrating Lucifer. These drawings are not dated. There are two generally accepted date ranges for the cycle. The first, proposed in the early twentieth century by Herbert Horne and Bernard Berenson, ascribed the majority of the drawings to the 1490s. The second, proposed in 1887 by Friedrich Lippman, dates the cycle from the early 1480s to Botticelli’s death in 1510. See Hein-Thomas Schulze Altcappenberg, “‘Per essere persona sofistica’: Botticelli’s Drawings for the Divine Comedy,” in *Sandro Botticelli: The Drawings for Dante’s Divine Comedy* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2000), 24.

\(^{118}\) Altcappenberg, 19.

\(^{119}\) The coloring of some of the engraving further disproves the argument that the drawings were originally intended as designs for the engravings. Designs for a monochrome engraving do not require color, and furthermore, the drawings were made on sheets of similarly sized fine-quality parchment, an unthinkable expense for preliminary drawings.
the same sized parchment and in varying stages of completion). Because of the drawings, art historians have reckoned with overly complicated problems of authorship. Some scholars, such as Alessandra Baroni writing as recently as 2016, have claimed that Baldini was the sole author of the designs and attribute any similarity to the composition and style of Botticelli’s drawings to the use of common source material and perhaps the availability of some of Botticelli’s drawings. Other scholars, including Friedrich Lippmann writing in the late nineteenth century, believed that the engravings in the 1481 incunable were directly modeled after Botticelli’s drawings, despite the many differences between those drawings and the majority of engravings. Today, most scholars, including Arthur Hind, Mark Zucker, Peter Dreyer, and Peter Keller believe that the engraver, instead of having access to the finished studies by Botticelli, possessed a collection of different materials produced by him in connection with the *Comedia*. This included finished sketches for engravings I and XV- XVIII and, for the rest of the engravings, either solely compositional studies or nothing at all.

One problem with Botticelli’s possible involvement in the 1481 *Comedia* project is his absence: the artist was not living in Florence for much of 1481. In July 1481, after the printing had already begun, Botticelli left Florence for Rome.

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to work on the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. He returned to Florence only in October 1482, over a year after Niccolò di Lorenzo had finished printing the incunable.\textsuperscript{123} Hind suggests that Botticelli created a set of designs specifically for Landino’s \textit{Comento} prior to his departure for Rome in the spring of 1481. Those designs were interrupted by both Botticelli’s departure and by what Hind calls “material difficulties” (i.e., the problem of printing copperplate engravings directly on the page with the text).\textsuperscript{124} According to Hind, after Botticelli’s return to Florence, he also returned to the subject of Dante’s \textit{Comedia} and created a larger and more mature set of designs (i.e., the drawings now in Berlin and the Vatican) based on his earlier designs for the engravings.\textsuperscript{125} On those drawings, Hind writes:

\begin{quote}
It is far more probable also that the drawings presented to this patron should have been done as a whole and not begun for an entirely different purpose, that of supplying a publisher with illustrations for a projected book—a book which, moreover, they were in a size quite inappropriate, and would have required simplifying, reducing, and transforming in a degree surely beyond the capacity of a third-rate craftsman by whom the plates were engraved. It would have been quite in Vasari’s vein to have confused the two facts, as he seems to have done, in one vague statement.\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}

While Hind’s dismissal of the engraver as a poor craftsman is unsubstantiated, his observation that the drawings are too complex to be designed

\begin{footnotes}
\item[123] Keller, 326-330.
\item[124] Hind, \textit{Early Italian Engraving}, 99. While material difficulties should not have been a concern because the workshop had used the same processes before for Antonio Bettini’s \textit{Monte Sancto di Dio} in 1477, that book had only three illustrations instead of the one hundred planned for the \textit{Comedia}. For more on the printing of \textit{Monte Sancto di Dio}, see Chapter 3.
\item[125] Hind, \textit{Early Italian Engraving}, 99-100.
\item[126] Hind, \textit{Early Italian Engraving}, 99-100.
\end{footnotes}
for the small space left in the 1481 incunable for each engraving is not. Peter Dreyer largely follows Hind but specifies that upon Botticelli’s return in August of that year, he continued to work on the designs for the engravings. In Dreyer’s view, after completing the designs for the first three cantos, Botticelli entrusted Baldini with the nineteen engravings; Baldini worked on them from 1482 until his death on December 12, 1487, using materials from Botticelli’s drawing project.127

Keller argues that, even though the first two copperplate engravings were printed directly on the page, they could not have been added until at least 1482 or 1483 to allow for Botticelli’s return from Rome.128 This is more than a year after the incunable was printed; at that point, Landino and Alberti were about to go to court over financial disputes and Niccolò di Lorenzo was deep in debt.129 It seems unlikely that these men would have waited so long to begin selling the books when they desperately needed a return on their investments. Moreover, except for the presentation copy for the Signoria, surviving copies almost all have the first two engravings, confirming that the books were not sold until after those images were added.

As indicated above, the current state of research on the illustrations of the 1481 incunable has reached somewhat of a stalemate on certain questions of authorship, timelines, and influence. I propose that we wipe the slate clean and return to very basic questions, with possible answers rooted in the close study of

127 Dreyer, 112.

128 Keller, 326-333.

the physical object as well as comparative textual and visual research. I want to reconsider what we know about this object and propose new questions that, while at times simple, are arguably essential to understanding the 1481 incunable. Although some of these questions may never be answered, they do need to be asked.

That there is some relationship between the drawings and the engravings is evident. The assumption that Botticelli must have been involved in the 1481 project is not. If the line of influence runs in the opposite direction (i.e., from the engravings to Botticelli) the timeline suddenly becomes far less convoluted. Importantly, the most likely patron of Botticelli’s drawings was Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici. Based on an analysis of the coat of arms, Rachel Jacoff has suggested that one of Harvard’s incunables (HOU PF Incun. 6120A) was illustrated for Pierfrancesco.\(^{130}\) Thus, Botticelli’s patron likely had one of these incunables. Owned by the same person, why could the flow of influence not have been directed from this exemplar to the later drawings, rather than relying on a “lost model” by Botticelli on which the drawings were presumably based? Few scholars to date have been bold enough to suggest that this could actually be the link between Botticelli’s drawings and the incunable.\(^{131}\) Since his Dante drawings reflect Botticelli’s later style, this claim should not seem so preposterous.\(^{132}\)


\(^{131}\) Writing in the late nineteenth century, Alfred W. Pollard claimed that although many scholars considered the 1481 engravings to be by Baccio Baldini in imitation of Botticelli’s drawings, there was no actual basis for this opinion. However, his view has not been widely accepted in scholarship. Alfred W. Pollard, *Italian Book Illustrations* (London: Seeley, 1894), 26.

\(^{132}\) On the later style of Botticelli’s drawings, see Jacoff, 48.
Many recent scholars, including Peter Keller (2000), Deborah Parker (2013), Mathew Collins (2018), and Lucia Battaglia Ricci (2018) have repeatedly turned to medieval manuscripts to find a clear precedent for the engravings and have largely come up wanting. While some elements have been borrowed from the medieval tradition, the lineage of influence runs far stronger in the opposite direction. As Mathew Collins has shown, rather than a clear line of influence from extant manuscripts to the engravings of the 1481 edition, it was the engravings that profoundly influenced later manuscripts, which persistently reproduced the scenes from the engravings with differing levels of fidelity. This reversal of influence is telling of the first quarter-century of printing when distinctions between manuscripts and printed texts were far less rigid than we may think today. The Wesleyan incunable thus serves as a physical testament to the ambiguous categories of print and manuscript in the later fourteenth century.

During the first quarter-century of printing, the division between print and manuscript was much more permeable. As David Landau and Peter Parshall have argued,

[t]he luxury printed book was caught in a commercial and aesthetic struggle with the illuminated manuscript, a struggle that the former was destined to win for obvious practical reasons. But the period of competition led to experiments in which each mode of production adopted certain techniques and formal tendencies of the other.  

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133 Keller, 326-333; Parker, 84-102; Matthew Collins, “Text and Image in Dante’s Commedia and its Early Printed Illustrations (1481-1596)” (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2018); Lucia Battaglia Ricci, Dante per immagini: Dalle miniature trecentesche ai giorni nostri (Turin: Einaudi, 2018).

The large margins found in the 1481 incunable readily allowed for manuscript decoration.\textsuperscript{135} In fact, the presentation copy given to the Florentine Signoria in 1481 was printed on vellum and fully hand illuminated with no engravings.\textsuperscript{136} Each canticle began with an empty large space for an illuminated initial and smaller guide letters opened each paragraph to allow for manuscript decoration, which was never completed in the Wesleyan copy (Fig. 13). While the book allowed for dual illustrations (i.e., both printed and hand-illuminated), the presence of the printed illustrations seems to mostly preclude hand illumination except for the principal pages (Fig. 24).\textsuperscript{137}

My method of reading broadly and looking closely at the actual object has allowed me to spot moments in which the common scholarship on this book has been built a bit too much like a house of cards. Arguments, however beautifully articulated, fall apart with a detailed study of the physical object. This thesis seeks to recenter the study of the 1481 project on the study of the actual book. The current illustrations in the Wesleyan incunable can only be seen as a reflection of the object’s 1481 production in that the incomplete illustration cycle made the incunable especially vulnerable to alterations by later owners. A later owner’s decision to complete the pictorial cycle by hand speaks to my study of this incunable as a temporally stratified object. In the more than five hundred years since the Wesleyan incunable was first printed in 1481, later owners have

\textsuperscript{135} Jacoff, 47.

\textsuperscript{136} Hind, \textit{Early Italian Engraving}, 101.

\textsuperscript{137} The opening to Canto I is the page most frequently illuminated. The Wesleyan incunable does not contain any hand illuminations.
continuously altered the book. It was rebound several times, and the pages were drastically trimmed, with the margins slowly shrinking with each alteration. Some pages were entirely discarded, and new leaves were added to the text block. Worms have chewed through the text block, and owners have torn and dirtied the pages. Those tears were repaired, sometimes heavy-handedly (Fig. 23), and some of that dirt was bleached off the pages. The Wesleyan incunable, like many of the texts that survive from the fifteenth century, is a palimpsest. Printed books have too often been viewed as static objects, frozen in time the moment they left the press. The Wesleyan incunable is a product of five hundred years of alterations; by no means did the year 1481 mark the date of its completion as the object preserved in Wesleyan’s Special Collections today.
CHAPTER THREE: THE PRODUCTION

This chapter tells the story of how the 1481 incunable came to be by describing the historical and political framework surrounding its production and considering the particular technologies involved in its creation. The other side to this narrative is the history of printing and engraving in Florence and the processes behind those methods of reproduction. By discussing the specific way the book was made, I hope to explain the choices the printer made in creating the incunable and the likely reasons behind those choices. In order to fully comprehend an object, we must first understand its history and the relevant processes of making.

On Christmas Eve 1480, Cristoforo Landino, the printer Niccolò di Lorenzo della Magna, and Bernardo d’Antonio degli Alberti signed a contract to print Dante’s *Comedia* with a new commentary written by Landino.138 After

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138 Niccolò di Lorenzo della Magna (active 1470-1493) was the “most prolific Florentine printer in the 1470s and early 1480s.” In his colophons, Niccolò di Lorenzo, who alternatively recorded his name as “Nicolaus,” “magister Nicolaus Laurentii alamanus,” and “Nicholaus dioecesis vratislaviensis,” tells the reader that he originally came from the diocese of Vratislava (or Wrocław in what is now Poland), an international urban center where Florentines traditionally had many business interests. Little evidence attests to his cultural and linguistic background, but he could certainly read and write. Arriving in Florence in 1464, Niccolò di Lorenzo proceeded to work in the court of the Mercanzia for over a decade, from 1464 to 1475. Beginning around 1474, he likely received his training as a printer from the German Giovanni di Piero da Magonza (originally of Mainz). He then entered into a partnership with the Florentine Cappone di Bartolomeo Capponi. This partnership provided five years of economic stability and gave Niccolò di Lorenzo the ability to accept single commissions from other citizens or institutions. After 1480 or 1481, he attempted to become an independent printer without a business partner. This choice would eventually lead to his bankruptcy. At the height of his success, Niccolò had four printing presses simultaneously in use and employed at least ten craftsmen. His other notable works include Marsilio Ficino’s *De christiana religione* (1476), Francesco Berlinghieri’s *Geographia* (1482), Leon Battista Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria* (1485), Aulus Cornelius Celsus’s *De medicina* (1478), and Niccolò di Lorenzo’s own final and disastrous commission of Saint Gregory’s *Moralia* (1483–1486), which ended in a long and complex legal battle. From 1475 to 1486, Niccolò di Lorenzo had frequent legal troubles, and after 1493, his name disappeared from the records. See Lorenz Böninger, *Niccolò di Lorenzo della Magna and the Social World of*
Bernardo degli Alberti paid Niccolò di Lorenzo 370 large florins for the printing, any profits were to be split equally between the three partners. The contract mentions a print run of no less than 1,125 copies to be sold at a pricey three florins a piece, the equivalent of thirty-three days of work for the average laborer. Since print runs were typically closer to 500 to 1000 copies in this period, Landino was likely counting on the popularity of Dante to drive sales. The contract stipulated three separate one-pull printing presses which were to produce one sheet or four pages a day for a total of twelve pages between the three presses. The project was completed eight months later, on August 30, 1481. With great haste came errors; indeed, each copy of the 1481 incunable contains its unique combination of textual and printing mistakes.

The 1481 project exploited the benefits of the new medium of the printing press. Johannes Gutenberg had invented his moveable type printing press around 1440 in Mainz, Germany, only forty years earlier. By 1462, German printers had

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140 Böninger, Niccolò Di Lorenzo Della Magna, 76. In 1475, the average daily wage of a worker was 10 soldi and 110 soldi was equivalent to 1 florin. The price of the Comento therefore equaled about 33 days of work. Richard Goldthwaite, The Economy of the Renaissance Florence (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 613.


142 Böninger, Niccolò Di Lorenzo Della Magna, 79.
brought the printing press into Italy.\textsuperscript{143} Printing came to Bologna, Florence, Milan, and Venice from Germany between 1470 and 1472, a few years after it had first appeared in Subiaco and Rome.\textsuperscript{144} By 1472, the cities of Foligno, Venice, and Mantua all printed editions of the \textit{Comedia} almost simultaneously.\textsuperscript{145} By 1481, Naples and Milan too would print their copies of Dante’s masterpiece. Florence was thus long overdue for its own edition.

Unlike most other Florentine industries, the printing industry was oriented toward production for foreign markets.\textsuperscript{146} In the fifteenth century, Florence had one of the highest literacy rates in the world and claimed a legacy of scholastic learning; however, high literacy did not generate a large book market. Florence’s book market was significantly smaller than those of Venice, Milan, or Rome.\textsuperscript{147}

As Lorenz Böninger has shown in his authoritative study on Niccolò di Lorenzo,

\textsuperscript{143} For the invention of printing, see Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, \textit{The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800}, new ed. (London: New Left Books, 1976), 49-56. The exact origins of printing in Italy still remain to be explored.

\textsuperscript{144} During the fifteenth century, most printers were young men in their early 20s who, as Böninger has shown, described themselves in their tax returns as without profession (“senza exercizio” or “non fa nulla”). Without a guild of their own, Niccolò, like all printers, belonged to the guild of doctors and medicine (along with painters) because the apothecaries sold the paper. Böninger, \textit{Niccolò Di Lorenzo Della Magna}, 1-11.

\textsuperscript{145} In 1472, three editions of the \textit{Comedia} were published: in Foligno by Johann Neumeister (ISTC id00022000), in Jesi (or Venice) by Federicus de Comitibus (ISTC id00024000), and in Mantua by Georgius de Augusta and Paulus de Butzbach (ISTC id00023000). The almost simultaneous printing is so peculiar that some scholars speak of \textit{editiones principes} (plural) instead of an \textit{editio princeps}. See A.E. Mecca, “La tradizione a stampa della \textit{Commedia}: Gli Incunaboli” in \textit{Nuova Rivista di Letteratura Italiana} 13 (2010): 33-77.

\textsuperscript{146} Böninger, \textit{Niccolò Di Lorenzo Della Magna}, 2.

\textsuperscript{147} Brian Richardson has shown that fewer Latin legal and theological volumes were produced in Florence because of the relatively modest size of the \textit{Studium Generale} (the Florentine university) prior to its transfer to Pisa. See Brian Richardson, \textit{Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text 1470–1600}, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 41-42.
Florentines were reluctant to invest in printing, especially when compared to investors in printing centers like Venice. Furthermore, Florence’s vernacular texts suffered from an insular market, and the printers of Florence tended to produce more ephemeral works. 148 The 1481 Comento was one of several exceptions.

As the printing contract’s careful distribution of funds suggests, Landino and the printer Niccolò di Lorenzo were striving to make a profit. Niccolò di Lorenzo had spent much of his nascent career as a printer in debt to the wool merchants’ guild and Landino’s finances were precarious as well. In the early years of printing, the debt economy functioned as a driving force behind printing and funded the assembly of the press, the purchase of paper, and the procurement of type and ink. 149 As setting up a printing shop was incredibly expensive and no profit could be expected for many months, every printing project required a financier. For the 1481 project, this man was Bernardo degli Alberti who helped front the initial costs. 150

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148 Böniger, Niccolò Di Lorenzo Della Magna, 3.

149 Böniger, Niccolò Di Lorenzo Della Magna, 6-7.

150 Bernardo degli Alberti’s life (1435-1495) coincided almost exactly with the period of Medici domination in Florence during the quattrocento. By 1474, Bernardo had secured a moderate degree of financial and political success. Unlike most of the Alberti family, Bernardo never had significant holdings in merchant or banking companies nor the production of the wool or silk. Instead, Bernardo’s income came from the careful management of his assets, which included a palazzo with renters. In 1474, he held the position of Prior, the same prestigious appointment that Dante himself had occupied prior to his exile. In 1477, Bernardo expanded his political career and was elected part of the Ufficiali del banco (Officials of the Bench), a position dedicated to the collecting of funds for warfare following the Pazzi Conspiracy of 1478. This position, along with his inheritance from Leon Battista Alberti (who died in 1472) and Francesco Altobianco Alberti (who died in 1479) ensured his financial success. These funds allowed Bernardo to finance Landino’s 1481 Comento and, in doing so, fulfill his responsibility by continuing the patronage Leon Battista and Francesco Altobianco had maintained in the city. Prior to his death, Francesco Altobianco had been one of Landino’s partners, and, in his will, left Bernardo with the task of liquidating two substantial legacies for Landino’s children. Bernardo’s partnership with Landino centered around both his hope for financial returns and his desire to gain favor with the city’s bourgeois and humanistic elite. The records repeatedly connect Bernardo degli Alberti to his uncle
In fifteenth-century Italy, printers were almost all going bankrupt at some point during their careers because of the difficulty and uncertainty of such expensive productions. Many months passed between buying the paper and finally distributing the book, which created a significant time gap between the dispersal of funds and the return of profit. Only upon the sale of the books would the cost, it was hoped, be recouped. The situation in Florence was especially problematic because, for a city of its prestige, printing began decades after other Italian cities. While there is no definitive explanation for this delay, one reason may have been that Florence’s predominant manuscript trade made texts readily available and investors’ reluctance to invest in printing. Niccolò di Lorenzo was one of the early printers in Florence whose many projects ran into funding problems and contained printing errors. From relatively early on, the 1481 project also struggled with financing. As early as 1482, Landino landed in court with Bernardo degli Alberti because of a squabble over expenses. Soon thereafter, Niccolò di Lorenzo ended up in court over not paying rent on the house where his workers lived. The whole endeavor was continuously plagued by court battles with creditors.151

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Leon Battista Alberti, Francesco d’Altobianco, Landino, Angelo Ambrogini (better known as Poliziano), and Lorenzo il Magnifico. From his uncle, Bernardo degli Alberti inherited an interest in the promotion of the modern Tuscan language. He continued this commitment in the printing of the Comento, which merged the medieval philosophy of Dante with the most innovative aspects of humanist culture. While no private letters or journals have been attributed to Bernardo degli Alberti, Luca Boschetto has recently reconstructed Bernardo degli Alberti’s biography from his presence in notarial, judicial, and financial documents from the quattrocento. Boschetto, 119-124.

151 Böninger, Niccolò Di Lorenzo Della Magna, 84.
For the 1481 incunable, Niccolò di Lorenzo used a great quantity of large and expensive paper. Good quality paper stocks in the fifteenth century were incredibly expensive and could amount to two-thirds of the total production cost. From 1470 throughout the early sixteenth century, Italian paper prices gradually rose. While printers sometimes bought paper directly from the mills, more often they acquired it through dealers. Printers needed to purchase large quantities of paper in order to print complete editions, since the books were printed page by page. The printer thus could not sell a single book until he had printed the very last book in an edition. Halfway through the production of 1,200 copies, the printer would not have 600 complete books, but rather half the pages of 1,200 books. This meant that any money used to cover the production cost could not

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152 To produce a book, the printer first needed to acquire a paper stock. Without the change in European cloth production from wool to linen, the printing revolution likely could not have occurred. From the medieval period through the Renaissance, the production of rag paper remained relatively constant. In the 1480s, paper required linen rags and clean water. In order to produce rag paper, linen rags were sorted for quality and then fermented with lime or another alkaline substance to break down the fibers. This fiber substance was then washed. Wooden hammers driven by a water wheel then mechanically beat this substance in troughs. The liquid linen pulp was then moved from the trough to a vat. Each vat was typically run by two men: the vatman and the coucher. After this, the vatman dipped a deckle frame with a fine wire mold into the vat of pulp and rocked the frame back and forth to leave a thin layer of fiber. When this was completed, the vatman removed the deckle from the mold and passed it to the coucher. The coucher further drained the mold and “couched” it by taking the sheet of fiber out of the mold and placing it on felt to absorb the moisture. Next, the stack of felts was placed in a press to squeeze out the remaining water. The sheets of paper were removed from the felts and piled directly on top of each other to be pressed again. Once they were pressed, they hung on lines to finish the drying process. After drying, the sheets were sized and any necessary treatment applied. To apply the sizing, the sheets were soaked in water mixed with lime and then polished with pumice. Printing paper was only lightly sized to hold the oil-based ink, while writing paper needed to be more sized to hold the water-based ink. In order to take a clean impression from type and especially from intaglio plates or wood blocks, the paper needed to be dampened. The more the paper was sized, the less flexible and the more resistant to dampening it became. Because of irregularities in the pulp and the handling of the mold, the thickness of individual sheets could vary by as much as twenty-five percent in a single lot. See David Landau and Peter Parshall, *The Renaissance Print, 1470-1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 15-16.

153 Landau and Parshall, 19.
even begin to be recouped before the whole project was finished. Because of this constant struggle for funding, efficiency and speed were essential. The longer the printing took, the larger the printer’s debts grew.\textsuperscript{154}

Because the text was printed in sheets that were folded into gatherings, the printer needed to know what type was supposed to be on the fourth page before he had printed the second. The size and topography of the book, including the spacing for illustrations, thus needed to be decided before the printing began.\textsuperscript{155} When printing in a folio format, each sheet had two pages of text on each side folded in half for a total of four pages per sheet of paper. While one side of the sheet was in the printing press, the type for the other side was being composed. Each page of text was set by a compositor who set each line of type character by character. He had to adjust the type so that it would be secure and correctly justified, meaning that the text was evenly lined up with the margin of the page (this was done by hyphenating a word, adjusting spelling, or changing the spacing). The type is a mirror image of what appears on the page (set upside down and read right to left). Once the type was set, it was locked tightly into a forme (a locked-up group of typeset pages inside a metal frame), which was filled with slim pieces of wood called “furniture” to eliminate gaps between the typeset page and the frame of the chase so that the type would not shift. The forme was then locked into position and adjusted. The pressman evenly covered the forme in ink. Already dampened and flattened, the paper was placed in the press, and the press


\textsuperscript{155} Werner, 33.
was pulled to lower the platen firmly atop the paper; that pressure was then released. The paper was removed, and the process continued.

After all the copies of a page had been printed, most but not all of the type was removed. The size of the page did not normally change, so the furniture could be reused, as could many of the headlines on the page which, in the Wesleyan incunable’s case, included the name of the canticle (Inferno, Purgatorio, or Paradiso) on the left verso of a sheet and the number of the canto on the recto. These reused elements are called the forme’s “skeleton” and served as the structural foundations of the text that remained relatively constant. The Wesleyan copy of the 1481 incunable shows the perils of this method: sometimes the printer forgot to update the text in the skeleton. For example, at the beginning of Canto XIII, the printer did not update the skeleton and the canto continued to read “Canto Duodecimo” (Canto Twelve) for multiple pages (Fig. 24). This incorrect running title likely confused the later artist of the pen and ink drawings, who accidentally switched the designs for Canto XIII and XIV.

Once both sides of the sheet were printed, the sheets were hung to dry before they were sorted into stacks. The stacks were sorted into signatures, assembled in order, and folded in half for storage. Often books were sold, unbound, in this form.156 The 1481 incunable was likely no exception.

Although the 1481 incunable did not realize its makers’ ambitious intentions of one hundred images, innovation was impossible without experimentation. The text and engravings are almost uniformly poorly printed,

156 Werner, 29-51.
marred by spilled ink, uneven text, and inked furniture. The extreme variation in the quality of the engravings was not only the result of worn plates, but also an unfamiliarity with the new process of copperplate engraving itself. The broader examination of the copies reveals the difficulty of aligning the relief printing of the type with the intaglio of the engraving. The combination of two separate printing processes left much room for error; in many cases, the border of the engravings overlapped the text below (e.g., the engraving for Canto II in Wellesley College’s Incun. P 781, Fig. 25). The Wesleyan copy has many examples of these inconsistencies as well. There are numerous pages where the text frame and wooden spaces were inked along with the text (Fig. 4). The lines were often poorly justified and unevenly inked (Fig. 26). The hasty production has left not only aesthetic evidence but also numerous textual deviations. One later reader of Harvard’s incunable Hou Gen WKR 10.2.4, corrected the copy (Fig. 27).

The printers went through the incredible effort and expense of leaving space before almost every canto (with some exceptions) for an illustration. Engraving took time, and Landino needed to have this project ready sooner rather than later to recover the high start-up costs. The scale of the operation called for a large team of engravers to be working simultaneously on the project. Since only nineteen engravings were realized, it is likely that only one or two engravers were actually employed.
Niccolò di Lorenzo prepared to include 100 engravings, one image per canto for the entire *Comedia*, in the 1481 incunable. Although Landino’s 1481 commentary was so influential that it became the standard commentary, the identity of the engraver(s) who illustrated it remains uncertain. The engravings in the book bear no signature, and little archival documentation survives regarding the men behind the illustrations. While the printing contract mentioned Landino, Bernardo degli Alberti, and Niccolò di Lorenzo, no engraver is referenced. This absence may simply be a testament to the relatively low status of engravers in fifteenth-century Florence or it may suggest he was hired later. At this time, engraving was so unusual that, if it were the original intention, it is highly likely that an engraver would have been mentioned in the printing contract. Instead, I believe that the decision to use engravings for the illustrations must have come later as a result of Landino’s increasing ambitions and Niccolò di Lorenzo’s ability to print both the type and the engravings.

A consideration of the fifteenth-century Italian workshop model is essential to understanding the magnitude of the 1481 project. Unlike in Northern Europe, in Italy the printmaker and the artist were often two different people. One artist alone could never have completed the intended one hundred engravings in less than a year. While the style of Italian engraving echoed the

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158 For the collaborative workshop production, see Anabel Thomas, “The Workshop as the Space of Collaborative Artistic Production,” in Crum and Paoletti, 415-430.

style of monumental painting, there is no evidence that painters themselves created designs for book illustrations. If Botticelli had created designs specifically for the 1481 project, he would have been the exception. Short of new archival evidence, the exact identity of the engraver has likely been lost to time. What matters, in any case, is that someone made those images.

For the massive attempt at illustrating all the cantos of the Comedia, the printer dismissed the standard choice of woodcut prints in favor of the new and innovative technique of copperplate engraving. The 1481 engraver was an early practitioner of the intaglio process. The new technique of copperplate engraving dates from approximately the beginning of printing, as the first dated engraving is inscribed with the year 1461. While the early practice of woodcuts remained predominant, copperplate engraving began to appear in printed books in Italy in 1477. In that same year, Niccolò di Lorenzo himself printed an illustrated book using the copperplate intaglio process in Florence by producing Antonio Bettini’s Monte Sancto di Dio with three engravings printed directly onto the page (for one example, see Fig. 28). Prior to 1500, more than a third of printed books

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160 Landau and Parshall, 35.


162 Each engraving is remarkably detailed and exploits the benefits of the intaglio’s fine lines. The first two prints are full page, while the third has been positioned in the lower half of a page at the end of a section of text. Printed on the back of the table of contents and at the end of chapters, the engravings appear to be added after the printing with no specific space left for them in the printing. In this case, the engravings do not determine the layout of the text. With only three engravings, the doubling of printing processes would have been inconvenient but still doable. Already, the problems of printing intaglio directly on the page were quite evident. The ink from the engravings bleeds through the paper and obscures the text on the other side. This is an experimental technique, and the engravings are quite successful for an early attempt. However,
contained illustrations.\textsuperscript{163} Engraving first developed in Northern Europe and later arose in Italy, likely first in Florence.\textsuperscript{164} This early development allowed Florence to become the center of engraving in the latter half of the quattrocento.

Engraving differed greatly from its predecessor, the woodcut. Because the engraver’s line became the line seen on the paper in this process, finer, more detailed work could be visible. However, intaglio lent itself less easily to the printing process than the predominant practice of printing from woodcuts. With their raised print surface, woodcuts could be added to the printing press and printed with the type in a single process.\textsuperscript{165} For intaglio printing, if the images were to share the page with the text as in this edition, the paper had to go through two separate printings—one for the positive, raised type and another for the negative, incised engraving.\textsuperscript{166} The intaglio process, where the engraver carves lines into a copperplate with a burin, necessitated that the paper be dampened and run through a rolling press, which pushed the paper into the engraved plate to transfer the ink. This doubling of printing processes naturally left much room for errors. After the first two engravings, for reasons either of difficulty or timing, printing the engraving directly onto the page of text was abandoned. Instead, the

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\textsuperscript{163} S. H. Steinberg, \textit{500 Years of Printing}, 3rd ed. (Harmondsworth: Middlesex, 1974), 158.
\textsuperscript{165} Landau and Parshall, 5.
\textsuperscript{166} Landau and Parshall, 28-29.
\end{flushright}
engraving was printed onto separate sheets of paper and later pasted into the text block.

In the fifteenth century, the engraver bought refined copper in the form of cakes or ingots that needed to be hammered into sheets. Hammering the plate hardened it, thus increasing its longevity under the force of the press and making the plate more resistant to the burin. Once hammered, the sheets were polished to make the surface even as required for printing. Because these copper plates were expensive, they were typically trimmed to the edge of a design to prevent waste. After the plate was trimmed, the edges needed to be beveled to prevent sharp corners from tearing the paper. Plates were often recycled by re-hammering the plate or burnishing out the old design and were commonly engraved on both sides. While engraving on both sides would ideally occur after the engraving on one side had worn out, in order to prevent the additional stress of unnecessary printings, in practice both sides of the plate were often in use simultaneously.167 From their dimensions, the engravings for Canto I and II of the 1481 incunable may have been engraved on the two sides of one plate.168

Once the engraver had a prepared copper plate, he needed the proper tools. Early copper plate intaglio printmakers used two tools: the goldsmith’s burin and the drypoint needle. The earliest engravers incised their designs with the drypoint needle which created lighter lines ideal for modeling figures and tone. The burin, with its characteristic taper, created deeper channels which held more ink to

outline figures. In the 1481 engravings, the engraver used different marks to create texture, often using the lines characteristic of Italian engraving to produce a painterly effect (Figs. 29 and 29a). The printmaker then used a scraper to remove the raised burr from the lines. After the design was finished, the printer polished the plate to ensure that the printing surface was even.

During the fifteenth century, printmakers created their own inks. They made lamp back ink from wine yeast and boiled linseed oil. This ink was appropriate for woodblocks, and, when further thickened, functioned for intaglio printing. Another popular ink was carbon ink, which the printmaker made from burning pitch and scraping the soot off the sides of an iron tent positioned near the flame. If improperly prepared, carbon ink occasionally yielded a brown halo around the printed lines. Fortunately, the Wesleyan incunable avoided this fate.

Early engravers printed their works by either rolling large, weighted drums over an intaglio plate by hand or using a rolling press. By 1500, the rolling press was available in Italy, but whether or not a Florentine engraver had access to one in the early 1480s is unknown. The weighted drum method produced more uneven prints as it was difficult to apply pressure evenly. In Wesleyan incunable’s first engraving (Fig. 13a), the excess ink squished into the border suggests that the plate was printed left to right. However, whether this was done

169 Landau and Parshall, 71-73.

170 Saff and Sacilotto, 124.

171 Landau and Parshall, 21.

172 Landau and Parshall, 28-30.
with a rolling press is uncertain because the earlier method of rolling a drum across the plate would have produced a similar effect.

The 1481 plates were almost certainly recut during the printing process. Comparing prints reveals that the lines were recut perhaps numerous times to increase the longevity of worn plates. Scholars’ opinions vary widely about the number of impressions an early copper engraved plate could yield. While Alan Shestack claims that a plate yielded only about fifty impressions before fine lines started to fade, Friedrich Lippman suggests that a plate yielded approximately 1,400 serviceable images of decreasing quality: 200 excellent impressions, 600 good impressions, and 600 additional acceptable impressions.\textsuperscript{173} Arthur Hind is more optimistic than Lippman, suggesting that 1,000-3,000 impressions of constantly decreasing quality were possible.\textsuperscript{174} While written well after the Dante engravings were created, Heinrich Zeising’s 1622 encyclopedia of technology, \textit{Theatrum Machinarum}, claimed that a copper plate could yield 1,000 impressions whose number could be extended by recutting the lines.\textsuperscript{175} The contract for the 1481 incunable specified a total output of 1,125 books (of which each should have received one copy of every engraving). If the above estimates are correct, a plate should have been able to produce 1,125 impressions. Therefore, plate yield likely

\textsuperscript{173} Landau and Parshall, 31.

\textsuperscript{174} Arthur Hind, \textit{A Short History of Engraving and Etching}, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 15.

\textsuperscript{175} Landau and Parshall, 31.
does not explain why every printed copy did not receive the engravings intended for it.

Something went wrong with the engraving stage of the 1481 project. One possibility is that not enough engravers were available for a project whose magnitude had not been attempted to date because engraving only existed in Florence for about twenty years. How widespread the engraving process was and how many trained engravers or goldsmiths were available with the skill and desire to participate in such a project is another question. Collaborative projects took time because information traveled rather slowly in the fifteenth century. With experimentation added to the mix, that process slowed down even further. The movement of materials and the light needed to properly work all depended on the seasons. The presentation copy for the Signoria had no engravings. Whether this was a testament to the slow production of engravings or to the preference for more traditional hand illuminations in a formal copy remains uncertain. Certainly, the three men knew that the engravings were not all going to be ready by August 30, 1481, to present a copy to the Florentine government, so the traditional hand illumination was the safest choice for that official exemplar.

The engravings were added to the incunable from approximately 1481/1482 until 1487. A 1484 letter attached to the dedication copy sent to Bernardo Bembo in gratitude for having Dante’s grave restored indicates that the first two engravings had been finished and that in some copies the second engraving had been repeated for Canto III. As Landino would have sent Bembo the most complete copy at that time, the third engraving must not have been
completed yet. From the third engraving to the nineteenth, the engravings, when present, were printed on separate sheets and pasted into the text block. The chronology of the engravings is further complicated by the fact that in the more than five hundred years since this book was printed, owners have moved prints from one copy to another. These transpositions make it hard to determine when and in what order prints were added to a given copy. The engravings were likely never added sequentially.

As Niccolò di Lorenzo found with the printing of the second engravings for Canto II, printing directly on the page allowed the text to show through. While the engraving for Canto I always occupied the lower margin, a space had been left in the middle of the page for the engraving in Canto II. When printed directly on the page, the text shows through and disrupts the image. This could not have been the only reason to switch to printing the image on a separate sheet. Another reason to switch from printing directly on the page to printing on separate sheets was a concern over the quality of the paper. Paper with thick enough laid lines disrupts the register of fine lines. For intaglio printing, the thickness and surface texture of the paper were critical for creating a sharp image. Printing directly on the page did not leave room for corrections, as seen

176 Keller, 327.

177 Hind, *Early Italian Engraving*, 100.

178 Landau and Parshall, 20. Paper made during this period was called “laid paper” and showed the texture of the wire screen, and those lines are still visible if the paper is held to a light source. In addition to the laid lines, the paper shows the lines that support the laid lines, running perpendicular, thicker, and further apart. The paper also often bears a watermark, an impression in the paper where the mill had sewn a wire figure into the paper mold. Werner, 61.
in the engraving for Canto II in the Wesleyan copy (Fig. 14). The second engraving in the Wesleyan book has the misfortune of being both a bad printing and one from a worn plate. All the lines have blurred slightly and appear almost doubled from where the paper slipped during printing (Fig. 14a). These problems were self-generating, as a plate that is heavily reworked was hard to print. Recut lines are not as clean and appear heavier and darker than initial contour lines. The paper caught some extra ink which darkened the print, and other ink was purposely left on tonal areas with shallower lines (in lightly engraved areas, aggressively wiping the plate removes too much ink; Fig. 14b).

The 1481 engravings were initially high-quality works, but some of the delicacy was lost in subsequent re-workings of the plate for the engravings in the Wesleyan incunable. In the engraving for Canto I, the plate appears to have been slightly worn, and the fine lines have significantly faded (Fig. 13b), which suggests that this impression must not have been one of the earlier printings. In response to the wearing plate, the printer has reworked contours, most evidently in the bend of the second Dante’s elbow and the curve of his cheek (Fig. 13a). The reworked lines are significantly darker than the other lines and disrupt the modeling of the figures in order to sharpen the composition of a worn plate. The pasted-in engraving for Canto X (Fig. 11), also comes from a relatively worn plate; however, unlike the first two engravings, this plate does not obviously appear to have been reworked. This suggests that a significant loss of detail was acceptable before the engraver went through the trouble of altering a plate.
The presence of two different states of the engravings, with Roman numerals added in the second, suggests that the plates transferred hands at one point. One possibility is that after some impressions were made for the printed books by the publisher, the plates later entered different hands, were inscribed with numerals, and the prints were made available for purchase individually to be added to the book.¹⁷⁹ Perhaps the engravings were always intended to be available individually for sale. In a society less inundated with images, each engraving significantly increased the value of the book and was perhaps intended to entice new buyers. The fifteenth-century Florentine bookshop was not the common distributor of engravings. Rather, the printmakers sold their works directly to buyers.¹⁸⁰ However, the survival rates for ephemera like loose prints are much lower than the survival rates for books.¹⁸¹

Curiously, the engravings continued to be produced separately for some time after the printing of the book and were later added to copies. When the printing began in August 1481, none of the images planned for the edition had been made. As Peter Dreyer has persuasively argued, the engravings likely range from approximately 1482 to 1487.¹⁸² The engravings may have been intended to

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¹⁸⁰ Landau and Parshall, 30-32.

¹⁸¹ Wesleyan’s Davison Art Center has a loose print of the engraving for Canto I of *Inferno* (Fig. 29). Unlike the engraving in the Wesleyan incunable, this engraving has not been trimmed at all. When present in the incunable, the engraving for Canto I is always printed in the margin; therefore, it is uncertain whether this engraving was cut from a book or printed on a separate sheet since no text is on the reverse either way. If this engraving was originally printed for sale outside the incunable, this would be a rare surviving example.

¹⁸² Dreyer, “Botticelli’s Series of Engravings ‘of 1481,’” *Print Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (June 1984): 115.
be purchased individually, allowing owners to add engravings to already purchased books. Alternatively, the engravings may have been an attempt to spruce up unsold copies and make them more attractive to potential buyers.

The year 1487 marked the end of the illustration campaign likely due to the death of the (presumed) engraver Baccio Baldini that year, the looming bankruptcy of the printer Niccolò di Lorenzo, or because a new edition of the Comedia, printed in Brescia in 1487, made Florence’s 1481 edition obsolete. The Brescia edition, printed by Bonino de’ Bonini, contained copies in woodcut of the Florentine edition’s first eighteen engravings with the nineteenth added slightly later. This suggests that the first eighteen engravings had already been finished at this point and that Brescia’s printer was waiting for the nineteenth to be completed shortly.183

As influential as the commentary was, the project was ultimately exorbitantly expensive, and the copies were slow to sell at more than three florins a piece.184 The men likely hoped that by setting a high asking price, they would recoup the investment costs and make a profit. This hope did not materialize. By 1487, the price for this incunable dropped from three florins to one.185 Cristoforo Landino, Niccolò di Lorenzo, and Bernardo degli Alberti would not collaborate again.

183 Dreyer, 114.
184 Lorenz Böninger, “Il contratto per la stampa e gli inizi del commercio del Comento sopra la Comedia,” in Böninger and Procaccioli, 104.
185 Böninger, Niccolò Di Lorenzo Della Magna, 81.
CONCLUSION

The 1481 incunable occupies a pivotal moment in the history of the printed image as one of the very first books to be printed with copperplate engravings. An experimental object, its engraving program is notorious for its incompleteness; however, it is that lack of completion that encouraged later alterations. Rather than a corruption of the original, those alterations are themselves extremely meaningful avenues of scholarly investigation. The wear of the Wesleyan copy and its subsequent repairs all tell the story of how the book was used, valued, and preserved. The stiff parchment binding emphasizes its age. The rebacked spine suggests that this copy was frequently used (as spines often break when a book is laid open without adequate support under the boards), and the subtlety and skill of that repair indicate that it was highly prized. The addition of the drawings shows that a subsequent owner was aware of and had access to other copies of the 1481 incunable and thought that their exemplar was lacking without the full illustration program. That only eleven drawings—instead of the sixteen needed to finish the set—were ever completed, suggests that only eleven were available to copy or perhaps that the artist/owner ran out of money, time, and/or interest.

This material study, while essential, is also potentially perilous because objects can and often do trick the eye. The Wesleyan copy of the 1481 incunable was owned by one of the most notorious book thieves of all time who repeatedly altered the books he stole to avoid detection. Before the book appeared in Libri’s
auction listing in 1847, we can only guess its history. If the Alfieri signature is legitimate, that date gets pushed back to 1779. If Cocchi’s signature is legitimate, then the provenance extends back slightly earlier in the eighteenth century. While the book’s provenance before the eighteenth or, more likely, the nineteenth century, is a complete mystery, its later one is not. After its sale by Libri, the incunable entered the possession of George John Warren Vernon (1803-1866). Upon the sale of the Vernon library, the incunable entered the collection of William E. Moss (1875-1953), and from there the collection of George D. Davison (1872-1953), who donated his books to Wesleyan University, where the incunable still resides today.\textsuperscript{186} While the authenticity of this object is fortunately not under question, all the changes Libri possibly made to the incunable have yet to be uncovered. Moreover, Libri was not the only one to make striking alterations. The final image in the Wesleyan incunable was previously classified as an engraving. Though now uncovered as a drawing during the research on this thesis, the image is, at first glance, strikingly convincing. The addition of the deceptive drawing at some point after 1937 shows that, in very recent history, this book was still considered incomplete, and an attempt to increase its value was made through a skillfully drawn “engraving.”

The deceptive drawing emerged as an outlier through the close examination and comparison of the images in the Wesleyan copy. This thesis presents a detailed catalog of the images included in the Wesleyan exemplar whose individual study can shed light on the 1481 Dante project more broadly. A

\textsuperscript{186} Aresu, 147-153.
close study of the Wesleyan exemplar—from the ideology behind its composition, to its production, and finally its international movement—provides valuable information that is too often overlooked. Only by studying the context behind this book’s making, surveying its present state and past scholarship, and learning its complex history can we fully understand the object before us today.
CATALOG OF IMAGES IN THE WESLEYAN COPY

(listed in the order in which they appear)

Unless otherwise noted, all illustrations are from Dante Alighieri, *Comedia* (Florence: Niccolò di Lorenzo, 1481). Wesleyan University, Olin Library Special Collections and Archives, Dav. C2 Incun. 1481 D. Courtesy of Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown CT

**Canto I: Engraving (printed directly on the page), ca. 1481**

*Dante lost in a wood; escaping and meeting Virgil*

Located at the bottom of the opening to Canto I of *Inferno*, the first engraving is the only instance where the image does not precede the canto it describes. When the book was trimmed during a rebinding, the image was cut nearly in half (a common fate for the first engraving). This impression comes from a later plate as shown by the general “muddy” appearance and loss of fine details (see Fig. 29 for an example of an earlier impression). Many of the contour lines have been reworked (the outlines of the principal elements have been recut to darken them and increase the legibility of the composition). Of all the nineteen engravings created for the 1481 incunable, this engraving bears the closest resemblance to Botticelli’s corresponding drawing (Fig. 20). While the compositions are similar, they are by no means identical.
Canto II: Engraving (printed directly on the page), ca. 1481

Dante and Virgil, with the vision of Beatrice

Located in the middle of the page before the opening of Canto II, this noticeably blurry engraving suggests two reasons for why printing directly on the page was abandoned in succeeding cantos. 1) Printing directly on the page of text does not allow for corrections. While evenly spaced between the lines of text (a rarity in other copies), this impression is uncommonly poor. An unfortunate combination of wear, over-inking, and likely an error during the printing created a doubling of each line. 2) The text from the other side of the page is visible through the blank parts of the engraving, interrupting the image. All subsequent engravings (except for the instances where this image was repeated for Canto III) are printed on separate sheets and pasted onto the page of text. It is telling that the engraving only just fits in the space provided for it and extends out past the text on the left side. The engraving was not well-designed to easily slot into the space provided.
Canto III: Line Drawing, before 1847

*Dante and Virgil at the entrance of Hell: Acheron and Charon's boat*

The first of the line drawings, the drawing for Canto III is the clearest and contains the darkest lines. While the facial expressions generally depart from the 1481 engraving, the compositions are identical. This drawing has the same dimensions as the original engraving and appears to be traced. All the figures are drawn in their entirety, but many of the landscape details have been eliminated.
Canto IV: Line Drawing, before 1847

*Dante awakening and discoursing with ancient sages and warriors in Limbo*

The drawing for Canto IV reveals the limitations of traced images. In the second drawing, the pen and ink artist was still trying to figure out how exactly to simplify a relatively complex composition. The artist had to decide how much of the original detail to include. For the flowery meadow the ancient sages stand on, the artist began to delineate the uneven terrain before abruptly stopping that effort. The result of this aborted attempt is what appears to be a stray pen mark below one of the figure’s feet and three lopsided circles. When compared to the original engravings, the marks are appropriately placed, but the details only make sense in the context of a detailed meadow which the later artist failed to execute.
Canto V: Line Drawing, before 1847

The judgment seat of Minos: The punishment of Lust

As these drawings proceed, they grow fainter and generally lessen in detail. By the third drawing, the artist has further reduced the background detail. In the original engraving, the figures are positioned against a background of cliffs, which have been just barely defined here. Instead, the drawings emphasize the figures significantly more than the landscape.
Canto VI: Line Drawing, before 1847

*Cerberus*: *The punishment of Gluttony*

This drawing contains one of the strongest pieces of evidence that whoever designed the engravings (on which this drawing is based) had some knowledge of Landino’s commentary: Cerberus’ human head. Lucia Battaglia Ricci has shown that, in manuscripts, illustrators sometimes illustrated commentaries rather than the *Comedia* itself.¹⁸⁷ In the 1481 incunable, we see another instance of this tendency. Gianni Pittiglio has shown that the image of Cerberus with a human head in between two dogs’ heads has no known precedent and suggests that this image comes from Landino’s commentary where Landino describes Cerberus as the product of the “giant Typhon and the snake-women Echidna.”¹⁸⁸ If the engraver added the human head in response to Landino’s writing, then the images may be more firmly connected to the commentary than previously believed.

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¹⁸⁷ In her study of her study of the Chantilly MuséeConde’s Mid-Trecento MS 597, Lucia Battaglia Ricci demonstrated that one of the miniatures (Balthazae seeing a hand writing on the wall from the Book of Daniel) illustrates the commentator Guido da Pisa’s comparison of Dante’s writing to the Hand of Daniel. Lucia Battaglia Ricci, *Dante per immagini: Dalle miniature trecentesche ai giorni nostri* (Turin: Einaudi, 2018), 43.

Like the previous drawings, the artist has eliminated most of the background detail. The background cliffs have lost the majority of their definition. As in almost all of the engravings for this project, the figures extend outside the bounds of the frame. On the left, a figure’s arm reaches out to the frame, and on the right, a head just barely peeks in, giving the illusion that the narrative continues beyond the frame of the drawing. These composition choices come directly from the engraving on which this is based. It is worth noting that the figures’ expressions are markedly more comical than the expressions in the engravings. While this difference may simply be from the reduction of detail, it does significantly change the effect of the image to the viewer.
In this drawing, as with the others, the artist reckons with how much detail to include. The flames have been drastically simplified but still remain, while the masonry on the towers has been eliminated. Some floating heads are present in the river, but they have been significantly reduced in number. Instead of sharply delineating the border around the drawing, the artist copied the plate mark of the engraving and created a line that varies in thickness and intensity.
Canto IX: Line Drawing, before 1847

_The Styx and the city of Dis: The Furies and Medusa: The protecting angels_

This drawing follows much in the style of the previous as both compositions depict the city of Dis.
Canto X: Engraving (pasted in), ca. 1481

The city of Dis, and the punishments of Heresy

The engraving for Canto X, now present in the Wesleyan incunable, is most likely a transplant from another copy. The wear and small rips at the corners of all the incunables would have occurred during the process of moving the engraving from one copy to another. To move the engraving, the sheet would have had some sort of poultice applied to it to help soften the adhesive (likely an animal glue or wheat paste of some sort) and then a thin metal implement would have been gently worked under the edges of the engraving to lift it from the original sheet. During that process, the corners are the most often damaged and small rips can occur along the edges. In this print, we see both. The excessive amount of adhesive and the damage on the surrounding page suggest that, when this image was added, not enough care was taken, and extra adhesive got on the surrounding page, causing it to tear (Fig.15). Since the facing page sustained no damage, an additional sheet must have been temporarily inserted (perhaps as blotting paper to remove moisture) or the book must have been disbound. If this engraving had been present in the Wesleyan copy without first being attached to another book, there would be no explanation for the print’s damage. This engraving is one example of the relatively common practice of moving engravings from copy to copy. This practice has not been adequately accounted for in the scholarship on the 1481 incunable.
As Dante and Virgil sit by the tomb of Pope Anastasius, rocks dominate the composition, filling almost two-thirds of the frame with their jagged forms. In this drawing, the artist could not solely emphasize the figures. Still, the landscape that is shown is devoid of the detail present in the engraving. All the drawings lack any sort of shading which becomes especially apparent here.
Canto XII: Line Drawing, before 1847

*The Minotaur: The Centaurs and the punishment of Murder*

In the drawing for Canto XII, Dante and Virgil are surrounded by a herd of centaurs. In comparison to the engravings, the rocky background has all but disappeared.
Canto: XIII: Line Drawing (inverted for Canto XIV), before 1847

The rain of fire: The punishments of Outrage and Blasphemy: Capaneus: The banks of the Phlegethon

The drawing for Canto XIII in the Wesleyan copy is mistakenly based on the engraving for Canto XIV. Instead of the Harpies and punishments of the suicides which correspond to the canto, the drawing instead shows the rain of fire and punishments of Outrage and Blasphemy.
**Canto XIV: Line Drawing (inverted with Canto XIII), before 1847**

*The thorny wood: The Harpies: The punishment of Suicide*

The composition, intended to illustrate Canto XIII, was mistakenly switched with Canto XIV. Of the eleven line drawings, this final one is the faintest and most indecipherable. The figures are not clearly delineated and only the minimal details are included to render the composition intelligible.

**Cantos XV-XVIII: Blank**

Of the nineteen engravings made for the 1481 incunable, the Wesleyan copy contains some version of fifteen but is missing images for Cantos XV to XVIII.
Canto XIX: Deceptive Drawing, after 1937

The Malebolge continued: The punishments of Simony

The illustration for Canto XIX, is a so-called “deceptive” drawing: a drawing made to pass for an engraving. Drawn on a separate sheet and pasted-in, the drawing is a remarkable copy of the engraving. However, the paper is slightly yellower than the other pasted-in engravings and the ink is more brown than black. When compared to the engraving, the lines are often significantly thinner and lack the tonal quality of the engravings.
Unless otherwise noted, all illustrations are from Dante Alighieri, *Comedia* (Florence: Niccolò di Lorenzo, 1481). Wesleyan University, Olin Library Special Collections and Archives, Dav. C2 Incun. 1481 D. Courtesy of Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown CT.

Figure 1. Parchment on pasteboard binding
Figure 2. Spine with detail of false raised bands and the handwritten title “Dante / del / Landino”

Figure 3. Detail of the top edge with end bands and the cuts that indicate that the spine was rebacked
Figure 4. Detail showing running titles, differentiation between poem and commentary, and inked furniture

Figure 5. Endsheets with provenance marks
Figure 5a. Detail of Fig. 5 showing the gauze strip used to reinforce/repair the binding
Figure 5b. Detail of Fig. 5 with the Vernon Family bookplate
Figure 5c. Detail of Fig. 5 with the *Ex Libris* of George John Warren, fifth Baron Vernon, and the signature “Vittorio Alfieri / 1799”
Figure 6. Blank leaf before *Purgatorio*
Figure 7. Page layout of the drawing for Canto V of *Inferno*
Figure 8. Page layout of the drawing for Canto XII of Inferno
Figure 9. The first page of the *Proemio*
Figure 9a. Detail of Fig. 9 with illegible inscription, possibly the signature of Antonio Cocchi

Figure 10. First page of Canto XVII of *Inferno* with a blank space left for an image
Figure 11. Engraving for Canto X of *Inferno* (pasted in), first state with no Roman numerals, ca. 1481

Figure 12. Engraving for Canto X of *Inferno* (pasted in) showing second state, ca. 1481, Morgan Library, New York, Incun. ChL1104
Figure 13. Engraving for Canto I of Inferno (printed directly on the page, cropped), ca. 1481
Figure 13a. Detail of Fig. 13 with the engraving for Canto I of *Inferno*, ca. 1481

Figure 13b. Detail of Fig. 13 demonstrating plate wear, ca. 1481
Figure 14. Engraving for Canto II of *Inferno* (printed directly on the page), ca. 1481
Figure 14a. Detail of Fig. 14 showing the blurred lines in the engraving for Canto II of *Inferno*, ca. 1481

Figure 14b. Detail of Fig. 14 showing that ink was left on the plate to add tone to the impression, ca. 1481
Figure 15. Engraving for Canto X of *Inferno* (pasted in), ca. 1481
Figure 15a. Detail of Fig. 15 showing the damaged corner of the pasted-in engraving, ca. 1481

Figure 16. Image for Canto III of Inferno (line drawing), before 1847
Figure 17. Drawing for Canto XIV of *Inferno* (line drawing, inverted with Canto XIII of *Inferno*), before 1847

Figure 18. Deceptive drawing for Canto XIX of *Inferno* (pasted in), added after 1937
Figure 18a. Detail of Fig. 18 showing drawn plate mark, added after 1937
Figure 18b. Detail of Fig. 18 showing Virgil’s arm with pencil underdrawing, added after 1937 [lighting adjusted in Photoshop to show underdrawing]

Figure 18c. Detail of Fig. 18 showing underdrawing beneath “hole,” added after 1937
Figure 18d. Detail of Fig. 18 showing lack of tapering in the lines of the flames, added after 1937

Figure 19. Engraving for Canto XIX of *Inferno* (pasted in), ca. 1481, Morgan Library, New York, Incun. ChL1104
Figure 19a. Detail of Fig. 19 showing plate mark, ca. 1481, Morgan Library, New York, Incun. ChL1104

Figure 19b. Detail of Fig. 19 showing Virgil’s arm, ca. 1481, Morgan Library, New York, Incun. ChL1104
Figure 19c. Detail of Fig. 19 showing “hole,” ca. 1481, Morgan Library, New York, Incun. ChL1104

Figure 19d. Detail of Fig. 19 showing tapering in the lines of the flames, ca. 1481, Morgan Library, New York, Incun. ChL1104
Figure 20. Sandro Botticelli, drawing for Canto I of *Inferno*, ca. 1480-1495, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin

Figure 21. Sandro Botticelli, drawing for Canto X of *Inferno*, ca. 1480-1495, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican
Figure 22. First page of Canto I of *Inferno*, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, HOU PF Incun. 6120 A

Figure 23. Canto VII of *Inferno* with repair using an excessive amount of adhesive
Figure 24. A section of Canto XIII of Inferno with the running title “Canto Duodecimo” (Canto Twelve)
Figure 25. Engraving for Canto II of *Inferno*, printed directly on the page, ca. 1481, Special Collections, Clapp Library, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Incun. P 781

Figure 26. Canto XVII of *Inferno* with unevenly inked text and a poorly justified canto title
Mi ritrovaì per una selva oscura
che la diritta via era smarrita.
Et quanto addir qual e cose dura
esta selva seluaggia et aspra et forte
che nel pensier rinuova lapaura.

Tanto era amara che pocho e più morte
ma per tractar del ben chio un trouai
diro dell’altre cose chio ubo scorte.

Io non lo ben ridire chomio entrat
 tantera pien disonno in fu quel punto
che laveante una abbandonai.

Ma poi chio fui appie d’un colle giunto
da quell’uolte quella uolle
che mbauea disaur el cor compunto.

Guardai malto et uidi le sue spalle
coperte gia deraggi delpianeta
che mena dretto altrui per ogni calle.

Allhora fu lapaura un pocho queta
che nellago del chuor mera durata
lanocce chio passai con tanta pieta.
Figure 28. Engraving of *The Holy Mountain*, printed directly on the page. In Antonio Bettini, *Monte Sancto di Dio* (Florence: Niccolò di Lorenzo, 1477), Warburg Institute, University of London
Figure 29. Engraving for Canto I of *Inferno*, an early impression, printed directly on the page, ca. 1481, Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University, Middletown [loose print]

Figure 29a. Detail of Fig. 29 showing engraved lines
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Critical Editions


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*Catalogue of the very well known and valuable library, the property of Lt.-Col. W. G. Moss of the Manor House, Sonning-on-Thames, Bers...comprising a most important and extensive collection of the works of William Blake and of books and mss. Relating to him...: the most well-known collection of rare and decorative book-bindings...: which will be sold at auction by Messrs. Sotheby & Co....on Tuesday, the 2nd of March 1937, and March 3-5, 8 & 9. London: Sotherby: 1937, 82.

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