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Charles Eliot Norton's "Medicean Dante"

Rachel Jacoff

In one (Inc 6120A) of the Houghton Library's four copies of the first edition of the *Divine Comedy* printed in Florence in 1481, the first page of the poem is illuminated. It contains a graceful author portrait within the gold initial *N* (for *Nel*, the poem's first word), accompanied by an extremely high quality decorative border above and to the left of the portrait. The cross bar of the golden *N* is interrupted by the placement of the portrait on a sky blue ground. The inner border of the framing initial is outlined in red, with a paler red and gold edging forming the rectangle within which the initial and portrait are situated. Dante is wearing a fur collared red toga whose lighter red sleeves are trimmed in fur. The poet faces to the right, while pointing, with an elongated right hand, towards a closed green book held in his left hand.

The decorative border consists of brightly colored flowers and vines adorned with multiple gold dots. At the center of the border to the left of the initial is a golden kite-shaped coat of arms; amidst the floral decoration, just above and slightly to the right of the coat of arms at its center, sits an oddly garbed putto who resembles a leprechaun; this mischievous figure in bright green tunic and cap is placed on the angle formed by the upper tip of the initial *N*. The refinement and elegance of both the portrait and the decoration of this incunable are far superior to any other illuminated example of this edition in the literature, with the exception of the copy printed on vellum and presented to the Florentine Republic by Christoforo Landino, its commentator. The Houghton illumination was mentioned in a book published in 1911, but has never been cited in subsequent discussions of portraits of Dante and is, I believe, unknown in Italy.¹ This essay will explore some of the questions raised by this illuminated incunable and offer new information concerning its provenance, probable patron, and artist.

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, printed books were frequently treated as if they were manuscripts to be illuminated by miniaturists. Even though there has been to date no systematic study of illuminated incunables in fifteenth



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Figure 1: Putto. Detail of the title page illumination from Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Houghton Library Inc 6120A). By permission of the Houghton Library.

¹ Richard Thayer Holbrook, *Portraits of Dante from Giotto to Raphael: A Critical Study, With A Concise Iconography* (Boston and New York, 1911), 191-92. Research on this

article has led to its reproduction in color in Jonathan J. G. Alexander, *The Printed Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination, 1450-1550* (Munich 1994), 40.

CANTO PRIMO DELLA PRIMA CANTICA O VERO
COMEDIA DEL DIVINO POETA FIORENTINO
DANTHE ALEGHIERI : CAPITOLO PRIMO :



EL
ME
SO
DEL
CA
MI
NO
DI
NO
ST
RA
VI
TA

Ma ritorna per una felix obscura
che la diritta via era smarrita
Et quanto adire quale era / cosa dura
esta felix felix gga et alina et forte
che nel penier nuova lapura
Tanto era amata che poco e piu morre
ma per tractar del ben chio in trouai
diro dellaltre cose chio uo scorte
I non so ben ridire chomio uentrat
tantera pien disonno in su quel punto
che laurace uia abandonat
Ma poi chio fui appie dun colle giunto
la one terminaua quella nalle
che mbauea dipaur el cor compuncto
Guardai malto et uidi le fue spalle
coperte gia deraggi del pianeta
che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle
Alhor fu lapura un pocho quera
che nellago del chior nera durata
lanocce chio passai con tanta pietra

quale dormedo sopra el petto di christo redemptore habbe uisione delle cose celestia conuertere
pongho lanocce dimostrando lui haure comincato el suo poema dinocce nella quale rasono ledi
lanimo infemediano et abissandoli et librandoli da ogni cura meglio inceda. Ma benché tale
sententia quadral poeta inpredimento le parole non la dimostro non e tempo obliua a m
gita che non pare degna della elegancia di questo poeta. Prima perche non e uita che benché nelle
revolutioni del tempo tanto spazio occupin lenocce quanto e di rorquello dicensio lo scripi dince
te finceda lo scripi nel mezzo della mia eta parche et nel principio et nel fine della eta humana so
no lenocce come nel mezzo et similmente e di. Il perche per la medesima ragione si potrebbe fare
tale interpretatione per di chome per lanocce. Altridicono che nel principio del camino incede
re che nel mezzo dellera deve principio al suo poema. Ma non e questa opinione determinate
della nostra per che diuersi scriptori diuersamente sentono. Aristocle nel suo de republica

h abbiamo narrato non solamente la uita del
poeta et el titolo del libro et che cosa sia po
eta. Ma etiam quanto sia uetusta et antica quanto
nobile et uaria quanto utile et icceda tal doc
trina. Quanto sia efficace a mouere humane
mexi: et quanto dilecti ogni liberali ingegno. Ne
giudicammo da tacere quanto in la ouata disa
plina sia stata la excellencia dello ingegno del
nostro poeta. Inche sisono stato piu bracte che
soste non si conuerrebbe: consideri chi legge che
lanumerosa et quasi infinita copia delle cose del
le quali e necessario tractare nullforza non uole
do chel aplyme cresca sopra modo: a inculcare
et inuolupare piuttosto che explicare: et diste
dere molacose et maxime quelle le quali quado
ben taceti non pero ne refiera obscura la expo
sitione del testo. Verren: o adunque aquella
sta perche sisono non esset lettore alcuno ne di
si habbe ingegno: ne di si pocho giudicio: che ha
nobile intello: quanto sia ex lapre fondita et ua
rieta della doctrina: et la excellencia et diuinita
dello ingegno del nostro toscano: et fiorentino
poeta: non si persuada che quello principio
del primo canto debba per sublimita et grande
za esser pari alla stupenda doctrina delle cose
che seguitano: pero con ogni industria in uel
gheremo che allegoriche sentio atochi sentio que
sto mezzo del camino: et che cosa sia felix. Diche
neggio non piccola differencia esser stata tra
giunterpreti et expositori di questa cantica. Im
pero che alcuni dicono: che il mezzo della uita
humana e el sommo mosti: credo dalla sententia
daristocle di questo lui nellethica nessuna diffe
rentia esser tra felici: et miseri nella meta della
uita per che lenocce che sono lamenti del tempo
cinouono sonno: et da quello nasce che ne bene
nemale sentio possiamo. Iperche uogliono que
sti: che el poeta ponga el mezzo della uita per la
noce: in lanocce persono: ad notare che questo
poema non sia altro che una uisione che giap
pauce dormedo per la quale habbe cognosce del
le cose delui: descriper l'ordine de tre comedie. Di
cono adunque che lui inceda nel principio della
noce: quale dormedo sopra el petto di christo redemptore habbe uisione delle cose celestia conuertere
pongho lanocce dimostrando lui haure comincato el suo poema dinocce nella quale rasono ledi
lanimo infemediano et abissandoli et librandoli da ogni cura meglio inceda. Ma benché tale
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te finceda lo scripi nel mezzo della mia eta parche et nel principio et nel fine della eta humana so
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re che nel mezzo dellera deve principio al suo poema. Ma non e questa opinione determinate
della nostra per che diuersi scriptori diuersamente sentono. Aristocle nel suo de republica



century Florence,² recent research on Florentine miniaturists of the period has identified the flourishing artistic milieu in which such work would have been done. The tradition of illumination was so strong in Florence that manuscripts went on being produced in significant numbers even after the invention of printing. Some patrons, as we know from the Florentine book agent Vespiano da Bisticci, even refused to have printed books in their libraries.³ Working on the manuscript model, late fifteenth century printers nonetheless set up many important books to be illuminated. Spaces were left blank for initials and borders were made wide enough to accept decoration. The first Florentine printed edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy* was prepared in this way.

The earliest printed editions of the *Comedy* had been published in Foligno and Mantua (1472). In the 1470s there were also printed editions in Venice (1472, 1477), Naples (1477, 1478), and Milan (1478), but none in Florence until 1481.⁴ The printer of the 1481 edition was Nicholo di Lorenzo della Magna (as his name is printed in the colophon), Nicolaus Lorenz of Breslavia, a printer who was active in Florence from 1477 to 1484. Among his other works was a famous edition of Antonio Betti's *Monte Santo di Dio* (1477) accompanied by engravings—most likely based on drawings by Botticelli—attributed to Baccio Baldini.

The 1481 *Comedy* was the first printed edition to envision a continuous visual commentary on Dante's poem, even though the complete series of projected engravings was never completed. Space was left for an illustration at the beginning of each canto up to *Purgatory* 24, although only nineteen engravings were made.

These engravings have been the subject of much interest for art historians for several reasons. Following Vasari, scholars have generally believed that the nineteen engravings in the 1481 *Comedy* were also made by Baccio Baldini working from designs by Botticelli. Vasari's brief description of Baldini alleges that his lack of drawing ability made him dependent on Botticelli ("non avendo molto disegno tutto quello che fece fu con invenzione e disegno di Sandro Botticello.")⁵ Because the first two engravings were printed on the same page as the text they illustrate, art historians have assumed that they were done at the same time or immediately after the text itself; they appear in nearly all copies of the 1481 edition. The difficulty of combining engraving with printing probably kept the printer from proceeding in this manner. The subsequent plates were engraved on separate sheets and later affixed to the text and only a few copies actually contain all nineteen known illustrations. Recently, however, a Botticelli scholar has called this widely accepted theory into question. He claims that none of the engravings was necessarily executed at the time of the publication of the book, dating them instead to the time of Botticelli's return from Rome in the autumn of 1482. According to

Figure 2 (opposite): Title page from Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Houghton Library Inc 6120A). By permission of the Houghton Library.

² There is no equivalent for Florence of the study of Venetian incunables by Lilian Armstrong, "The Impact of Printing on Miniaturists in Venice after 1469" in *Printing the Written Word: The Social History of Books, circa 1450-1520*, ed. Sandra Hindman (Ithaca, 1991), 174-202.

³ Writing in 1482, Vespiano states that Federgio di Montefeltro, the Duke of Urbino, "wished to create the finest library since antiquity. . . . In his library all the books are superlative, and written with the pen, and had there been one printed volume it would have been ashamed in such company"; quoted by Everett Fahy, Introduction to *The Medici Aesop* (New York, 1989), 9.

⁴ On the history of Florentine printing, see Dennis E. Rhodes, *Gli annali tipografici fiorentini del XV secolo* (Florence, 1988). On the history of Renaissance editions of the *Comedy*, see Deborah Parker, *Commentary and Ideology: Dante in the Renaissance* (Durham, N.C., 1993), 133-34.

⁵ Quoted by Maria Cristina Castelli in her description of the 1481 Landino in "Immagini della 'Commedia' nelle edizioni del Rinascimento," in *Pagine di Dante*, ed. Roberto Rusconi (Perugia, 1989), 134. Cf. Peter Dreyer, "Botticelli's Series of Engravings 'of 1481,'" *Print Quarterly* 1 (1984): 111-15.

this theory, the engravings were been added over a period of years (1482–87) before the edition had been bound and widely sold.⁶

There has also been much debate about the relationship between the Botticelli drawings used by Baldini for the engravings and the exquisite drawings on vellum, made by Botticelli for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, now in the Vatican and in Berlin. Scholars agree that these are the drawings mentioned by an anonymous commentator, the Anonimo Magliabechiano, who wrote of them “as something marvelous” (“dipinse e storiò un Dante in cartapecora a Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de Medici, il che fu cosa maravigliosa tenuta.”)⁷ Whereas these drawings were once assumed to be the source of the Baldini engravings, most scholars now hypothesize a missing model for the engravings, on the grounds that the vellum drawings reflect Botticelli's style in the subsequent decade.⁸ Since Botticelli was in Rome at work on the Sistine Chapel during the period that the edition was printed, the logistics of his connection with the edition remain difficult to ascertain.

Art historians have focused on the 1481 edition because of its engravings, but literary and cultural historians have found it significant because it contains the first Renaissance commentary on Dante's poem. Although there were a great number of manuscripts of the *Comedy* produced earlier in the fifteenth century, there were very few commentaries. The 1477 Venice and the 1478 Milan editions both reproduced the fourteenth-century commentary of the Bolognese Jacopo della Lana (1324–28). Cristoforo Landino's 1481 commentary was not only the first Renaissance gloss on the poem, but also the first Florentine commentary since that of Boccaccio, who had lectured on the poem in 1373. Landino's commentary was reprinted six times in the fifteenth century and several times in the following century; it was the only Renaissance commentary until those of Velutello in 1544 and Daniello in 1568, and remained the most popular throughout the sixteenth century.

Landino (1425–98) was a major figure in Florentine cultural life, with close ties to the Medicis and to the leading intellectuals of the Medici circle. Although he failed to become the Chancellor of Florence, in 1483 he was finally elected Secretary of the Republic. He had been professor in the Florentine Studio from 1458, where he offered a course on Dante in 1474 and lectured on both classical and vernacular poets. Landino's Dante commentary was written between 1480 and 1481, a pivotal moment in Medicean Florence. His Proem makes it clear that he conceived his project as the reconciliation and reappropriation of Dante within the context of Florentine civic and intellectual history. The recuperation of Dante's *fiorentinità* by Landino was of a piece with Lorenzo il Medici's strong interest in Dante and Florentine poetic traditions. It was also congruent with Lorenzo's efforts—after the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478, his skirmishes with the papacy, and his successful negotiations with Alfonso of Aragon in Naples—to foster and propagate emblems of Florentine political and cultural hegemony. It appears that Landino began work on the commentary in the climate of civic serenity and pride that followed Lorenzo's trip to Naples.⁹

⁶ Dreyer, “Botticelli's Series of Engravings,” 111–15. According to Dreyer, the edition was bound by 1483, and the later engravings were done at or after this time and needed to be pasted into the bound volumes. Dreyer identifies Baldini with a goldsmith named Baccio who was buried in December 1487 in San Lorenzo in Florence and attributes the interruption of the project to his death.

⁷ Cf. Castelli, “Immagini,” 134, and Kenneth Clark, Introduction to *The Drawings by Sandro Botticelli for Dante's Divine Comedy* (New York, 1976), 8.

⁸ Castelli, “Immagini,” 134.

⁹ Paolo Viti in his description of the 1481 Landino in “Il consenso della cultura,” in *Consorterie politiche e mutamenti istituzionali in età lawenziana*, ed. Maria Augusta Morelli Timpanaro et al. (Florence, 1992), 115. The presentation copy is reproduced in color on p. 117.

Landino's Proem, then, participates in Florentine civic polemic. His twentieth-century editor, Roberto Cardini, calls it a major rewriting of Florentine history, unique in its time ("un capitale riepilogo storico della intera civiltà fiorentina, dalle origini al 1480, che non trova termini di confronto con nessun altro apparso in età umanistica.")¹⁰ Landino carefully situates Dante within the larger perspective of Florentine political and intellectual history, reviewing and reframing that history while giving Dante a central role. Like other projects dear to Lorenzo, this vision of Florentine history emphasized the continuities between Florence's republican past and its Laurentian present.¹¹ The civic ambitions of the edition and its commentary are evident in Landino's careful contextualizing of it both in his Proem and in the lecture he delivered upon presenting it to the Florentine Signoria.

Landino's reading of Dante is also suffused with the ideals of Florentine neoplatonism. For him, Dante's journey reflects the liberation from the prison of flesh to contemplation of the divine. As one scholar puts it, "Dante became a pagan philosopher and the journey through the three realms became Everyman's struggle through the vices toward the virtues, and through the active virtues toward the contemplative ones."¹² Landino insists on the divine origin of poetry and celebrates its capacity to communicate the highest truths of philosophy. His vision of Dante as both predecessor and exemplum of avant-garde Florentine neoplatonic humanism made the *Comedy* congruent with contemporary culture ("un testo di assoluta attualità.")¹³ Dante's long exile had ended, and he was to take his rightful place at the forefront of Florentine culture.

The 1481 edition was printed in 1200 copies, a rather large printing.¹⁴ Two copies were printed on vellum, without the Baldini engravings, and were clearly meant to be fully illuminated. One is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Vélins 569) in Paris; it has one handsome initial in blue ink with red pen flourishing, but neither a decorative border nor historiation.¹⁵ The other, the presentation copy given by Landino to the Signoria of Florence now in the Biblioteca Nazionale (B.R. 341), has a richly illuminated first page. Its border has a blue ground and elaborate gold vines enclosing a series of medallions. The medallions at the top and bottom enclose symbols of the Florentine Republic such as the Florentine lily, the red cross on a white shield, and a shield with the word *Libertas*; the central medallions show emblems associated with both the Republic and the Medici as well: the Hercules in the center medallion to the right, and the lion in the center medallion to the left. Landino's own *stemma* is painted under the bottom central medallion. The initial portrait of Dante shows the poet against a sky blue ground in a red

¹⁰ Introduction, *Cristoforo Landino: Scritti critici e teorici*, (Rome, 1974), 1:9. Cf. Cardini, "Landino and Dante," *Rinascimento* 30 (1990): 175-90. Both Cardini and Dionisotti, in his entry "Landino," in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, (Roma, 1970-78), 3:566-68, also see Landino in polemic with Nidobeato, the editor of the 1478 Milanese edition of the *Comedy*, whose choice of a Bolognese rather than a Florentine commentator seemed to denigrate Florence.

¹¹ See Annarosa Garzelli, *Miniatura fiorentina del rinascimento, 1440-1545. Un primo censimento*, (Florence, 1986), 1:162 for a succinct description of this cultural agenda. Garzelli provides the most complete study of Florentine miniaturists that we have.

¹² Arthur Field, "Cristoforo Landino's First Lectures on Dante," *Renaissance Quarterly* 39 (1986): 46. Cf. Arthur Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence*

(Princeton, 1988), 231-86, on the ideological implications of Landino's neoplatonic reading of poetry. See also Parker, *Commentary and Ideology*, 136.

¹³ Anna Chiavacci Leonardi, "Il libro di Dante dalle prime copie manoscritte all'edizione della Crusca," in *Pagine di Dante*, 59, calls it "un testo di assoluta attualità." She rightly sees Landino's edition as a symbolic return of Dante from exile.

¹⁴ This information is found in a letter from Landino to Bernardo Bembo; see E. G. Lidos, ed., "Lettere inedite de Cristoforo Landino à Bernardo Bembo," *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartres* 54 (1893): 721-24.

¹⁵ I am grateful to Lilian Armstrong for this description. See the discussion in J. B. B. Van Praet, *Catalogue des livres imprimé sur vélin de la bibliothèque du roi* (Paris, 1882), 4:120.

Florentine toga and cap. He wears a golden laurel wreath and is seen in profile holding his text open; the text itself emanates golden rays. The ornateness and elegance of this presentation copy is worthy of its public role. Since Landino composed a formal oration for the presentation of this copy to the Signoria, there is every reason to think that it was illuminated at the time of the edition's presentation. It has traditionally been attributed to Attavante.¹⁶ Although the border is of the highest quality, the author portrait is less refined than that in the Houghton Landino, particularly in the surprising crudeness of the facial features.

Few of the of the 1200 copies of the 1481 edition known to us were illuminated despite the initial spaces left blank by the printer precisely for that purpose; perhaps the presence of the engraving on the opening page of the text and the projected visual commentary discouraged further decoration. Two of the four copies in the Vatican Library are illuminated (S153 and Chigiana S111), but the work is quite crude and the author portraits are primitive. Of the four copies in the Biblioteca Nazionale other than that printed on vellum, only one is illuminated (B.R. 12), but it does not contain an author portrait. There are also many examples of copies that were decorated at a later period—colored in, as it were. Houghton has one such version (WKR 10.2.4), with watercolors that were done after the Renaissance; similar examples may be seen at Pierpont Morgan Library, the New York Public Library, and Stanford University.

Charles Eliot Norton bought the illuminated copy now in Houghton from a Bolognese bookseller named Gaetano Romagnoli in 1871. A handwritten notation in the flyleaf of the book indicates that it had earlier been part of one of the most distinguished private libraries in Italy, the library of Senatore Carlo di Tommaso Strozzi. Strozzi (1587–1670) had obtained in 1627 from Granduke Ferdinand II permission to oversee the sale and dispersal of all important manuscripts and historical data in Tuscany. According to Angelo Bandini, who wrote a biographical memoir of Strozzi, no one could sell or dismantle old books or documents without Strozzi's permission.¹⁷ Strozzi himself created a personal library that his sons, Alessandro and Luigi, cared for and expanded. At their death it became the property of the state and was subsequently divided between the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana and the Magliabechiana (in the Biblioteca Nazionale). We know from a note in the flyleaf that the Houghton incunable was acquired by Alessandro in 1728; it must have been sold off at some point during or after the division of the library in 1784.

A copy of the *Divine Comedy* so richly and brilliantly illuminated is likely to have had a very special owner. The classic flower and vine with gold dot border ornamentation that lies above and to the left of the decorated initial contains a clue to the book's original owner. Exactly at midpoint in the decorative material to the left of the portrait of Dante is a gold kite-shaped shield with seven red balls on it that is a variant of the Medici coat of arms. We know that Norton himself was aware of its presence because he refers to his "Medicean Dante" in a note he affixed

¹⁶ Cf. Viti, "Il consenso della cultura," 115.

¹⁷ Bandino, in *Novelle letterarie*, nos. 3–7 (Florence, 1786), writes, "Nessuno potesse vendere, disfare, o in altro uso ridurre antiche scritture, libri, contratti, istrumenti, membrane, e finalmente memorie, e volumi, scritti in

Greco, in Latino, in Toscano ecc. senza essere prima del medesimo visitati." Angela Dillon Bussi kindly made this text and other information about the Strozzi library available to me.

to another of his books, a manuscript of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* (MS Lat 176) that has similar decoration.¹⁸ The prominent presence of the Medici coat of arms does not in itself mean Medici ownership since families with strong ties to the Medici often included the Medici arms in their own possessions.¹⁹ The pattern, though, was to include the owners' family arms as well, whereas in this case only the Medici arms appear. Given the role of Landino in the intellectual and political agenda of Medici Florence, it was tempting to imagine this as Lorenzo's own copy. But recent research has shown that Lorenzo's arms almost always included, in addition to the six red balls, one gigliated blue ball. The arms containing only red balls are associated instead with the collateral branch of the family, and in this period (the early 1480s) with Il Magnifico's second cousin, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici.²⁰



Figure 3: Shield containing a variant of the Medici coat of arms. Detail of the title page illumination from Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Houghton Library Inc 6120A). By permission of the Houghton Library.

Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco is associated with Dante illustration for other reasons as well, since, as noted earlier, he is thought to be the patron of the famous Botticelli Dante drawings now in the Vatican and Berlin. Many of the miniaturists who worked for Lorenzo also worked for his cousin as well. Although there is no full study of illuminated books that belonged to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, his refined taste and adventurous intellectual and artistic patronage are well documented.²¹ Kenneth Clark characterizes him as a more enlightened patron of the visual arts than Il Magnifico.²²

The border decoration is typical of the style associated by that time with the workshop of Francesco di Antonio del Chierico, who was the dominant figure in Florentine illumination in the 1470s and who remained active until his death in 1484. The grace and subtle rhythms of the decoration are characteristic of Francesco, and of artists known to have worked with him, particularly an artist known as the Master of the Hamilton Xenophon.²³ The portrait itself is notable for the refinement of the dress, especially the delicately painted fur cuffs and collar and the understated laurel crown. Given the finesse of the portrait, the anatomical awkwardness of the hand holding the book is striking. Similar awkwardness shows

¹⁸ Norton compares both of these to another manuscript, his copy of the San Antonini *Summa* (Jenson, 1477), in a note written in 1885. He thought of the rayed gold dots as a "play upon the *palle* of the Medici," but this is unlikely given the ubiquity of such gold dots in Florentine illumination of the period. His complete note reads, "This manuscript is probably a fair representative of Florentine work of about the middle of the 15th century; such work as Vespiano had done for his great patrons. The illumination is of a common type. My copy of S. Antonini, *Summa Pars III* (Jenson, 1477), contains two or three illuminations so similar in design, color, and execution as to indicate that they were done in the same shop. The motive and the coloring of the illuminated borders in my Medicean copy of the Dante of 1481 are the same. The S. Antonini *Summa* came from the Medici Library. It seems possible that these rayed globes may be a play upon the *palle* of the Medici."

¹⁹ Everett Fahy makes this point in his introduction to *The Medici Aesop*, 14.

²⁰ Angela Dillon Bussi, "Aspetti della miniatura ai tempi di Lorenzo il Magnifico," in *All'ombra del lauro: documenti librari della cultura in età laurenziana*, ed. Anna Lenzuni (Florence, 1992), 152. Recent exhibitions in honor of the anniversary of Il Magnifico's death in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana and the Archivio di Stato confirm this point.

²¹ Alison Brown, "Pierfrancesco de' Medici, 1430-76: A Radical Alternative to Elder Medicean Supremacy?" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* (1979): 102-03. Cf. Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work*, (Berkeley, 1978), 1:70-73 and 2:172-73. John Shearman, "The Collections of the Younger Branch of the Medici," *Burlington Magazine* 117, no. 862 (January 1975): 15, notes the absence of the library from the 1498 inventory of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco.

²² Clark, Introduction to *The Drawings by Sandro Botticelli for Dante's Divine Comedy*, 8.

²³ Garzelli, *Miniatura fiorentina*, 1:157-63.

Figure 4: Portrait of Dante. Detail of the title page illumination from Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Houghton Library Inc 6120A). By permission of the Houghton Library.



up in portraits attributed to Francesco di Antonio del Chierico,²⁴ but is also characteristic of another accomplished miniaturist named Francesco Roselli²⁵ who had worked in the orbit of Francesco di Antonio del Chierico. Since several books illuminated by Roselli contain Medicean shields with only red balls, one can assume that he executed other work for the collateral branch of the family.²⁶ It is likely that the portrait was done by one of these artists or by a collaborator who had worked with one or more of them. The green garbed putto in the border decoration is so unusual a figure that it would provide a clue to the artist were we to find it elsewhere, but at present it appears to be unique.

The portrait itself is very different in feeling from the type of austere and formidable profile portraits of Dante we are accustomed to seeing. Gombrich remarks that “Dante was the first person for almost a thousand years whose name immediately evokes a vivid image of his presence.”²⁷ That presence was becoming more fixed through the work of artists such as Michelino and Signorelli in this very period. The Houghton portrait does resemble the famous portrait by Domenico di Michelino in the Duomo because of its frontal view, but it is very different in tone; furthermore, where Michelino’s Dante faces left with a legible open book in his left hand, the Houghton Dante faces right, his head turned to the Medici arms in the border and his left hand holding a closed book. The Houghton portrait is, as Holbrook thought, “an apparently isolated type.”²⁸ What is most striking about the portrait is that its artist entered fully into the spirit and ambition of the commentary. Like Landino, he imagined a Dante who would be at home in the culture of Laurentian Florence.²⁹

²⁴ Ibid., 2:212–13 reproduces several author portraits attributed to Francesco Antonio del Chierico in which the anatomical oddness of the subjects’ hands is noticeable and comparable to the Houghton portrait.

²⁵ Especially in an author portrait of Quintilian (pl. 46.12 fi from the Laurenziana) reproduced in Ibid., 2:281; see also 2:286–87. The Quintilian portrait resembles the Houghton Dante also in the way the subject is placed within the gold initial and in its kite-shaped Medici coat of arms.

²⁶ See Ibid., 2:288–89.

²⁷ E. H. Gombrich, “Giotto’s Portrait of Dante?” *Burlington Magazine* 121, no. 917 (August 1979): 471.

²⁸ Holbrook, *Portraits of Dante*, 192. Holbrook is much more interested in the Attavante portrait which he thinks may be a source for Signorelli’s Dante in the Cathedral of Orvieto.

²⁹ I am very grateful to Lilian Armstrong, Margaret Carroll, and Stephan Wolohojian for their invaluable assistance and encouragement in my research for this essay. I would also like to thank Angela Dillon Bussi, Rodney G. Dennis, John Kleiner, Anne Anninger, and James E. Walsh.