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1 Sandro Botticelli, *Idealized portrait of a woman (allegedly Simonetta Vespucci)*, ca. 1476-1485. Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum

THE HAIR IS FULL OF SNARES
BOTTICELLI'S AND BOCCACCIO'S WAYWARD EROTIC GAZE

Emanuele Lugli

Never again shall a single story be told as though it were the only one.
(John Berger, G.*)*

I. Hair, That Superfluous Thing

Sandro Botticelli painted hair as a differential element. He enveloped female faces and figures with pictorial fields that expanded across large areas, even larger than those of faces and figures, constructing them in great liberty. In the nature of a crown, a halo, or a shadow, Botticelli's free-spirited hair is there not simply to adorn or astound, but as a guide to genre. It distinguishes between realistic portraits, devotional subjects, and creatures of dreams (Fig. 1). It tells his viewers – male, educated, self-important viewers – what approach to adopt: what to think about the painting and what is off the mark. "Look at that hair! She's gotta be a whore!"[1] This essay expands on this signal to argue that many of Botticelli's hairdos do not only serve classificatory purposes. Rather, they also elicit a very specific form of looking. While explaining how Botticelli shaped his most dazzling hairstyles as molds for seeing, this study investigates why so many people, back then as well as today, have deplored hairstyling and offers some reasons for its cultural marginalization.

Botticelli was not the sole Florentine painter to devote tremendous attention to hair. Antonio del Pollaiuolo, who ran one of the most prominent workshops in the 1470s, represented female figures like caryatids, shaping their hairstyles like capitals.[2] Andrea del Verrocchio trained his pupils at devising

[1] Cf. the remarks on prostitutes' hairstyles by Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte de la pittura, scultura ed architettura*, Rome 1844 (Milan [1]1584), I, pp. 307f.: "I capelli annodati vagamente insieme, o acconci in treccie per diverse vie, con alcuni benacci per gl'intervalli e contorni, sono propri delle meretrici famose."

[2] Emanuele Lugli, "Metamorphic Heads: A Footnote on Botticelli's

2 Sandro Botticelli, *The calumny of Apelles*, ca. 1495. Florence, Uffizi, Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture

ever-different hairdos and made them trace, pounce, and copy his own.[3] One of his assistants, Leonardo da Vinci, continued applying this method for the rest of his life.[4] His drawings of hairstyles were much sought-after, long past his death.[5]

Still, while interest in the creative possibilities of hair was widespread – what is hair if not a mass of lines that can take any shape? – no one went as far as Botticelli in capitalizing on its intricacy. I would even say that Botticelli built his career in its first two decades also on distinctive hairstyles, a strategy that paid off since arresting locks became a prerequisite of female allure.

These two decades went from 1471 – the date of his Uffizi *Fortitude*, a female knight with long braids and curls spiraling around a winged coronet – to the mid-1490s.[6] Around that time, Botticelli painted *The calumny of Apelles* (Fig. 2), where two women style the

and Pollaiuolo's Mercanzia Virtues", in: *Source*, XXXVII (2017), pp. 26–36: 32f.

[3] Verrocchio's drawings of female heads "con bell'arie et acconciature, di capegli" are already mentioned by Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, ed. by Rosanna Bettarini/Paola Barocchi, Florence 1966–1997, III, p. 538.

[4] Emanuele Lugli, "Leonardo and the Hair Makers", in: *Leonardo in Dialogue: The Artist amid His Contemporaries. Forms, Themes, Methods*, ed. by Francesca Borgo/Rodolfo Maffeis/Alessandro Nova, Venice 2018, pp. 11–38: 15f.

[5] Jane Roberts, "The Early History of the Collecting of Drawings by Leonardo da Vinci", in: *An Overview of Leonardo's Career and Projects Until*

3 Sandro Botticelli, *The birth of Venus*, ca. 1485. Florence, Uffizi, Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture

hair of Slander (in the center, holding a torch) as a way to sway the judging prince, on the right. The women are not just generic maids but Treachery and Deceit according to the Greek satirist Lucian, whose description of a painting by the great Apelles served as the prototype for Botticelli's.[7] Art historians place *The calumny of Apelles* in Botticelli's late phase of moralized works.[8] While earlier he painted naked Venuses, moneyed merchants, and alluring Madonnas, he then dedicated his craft to edifying tales, reparatory works, and devotional panels. His approach to hair confirms such a shift. Starting in the early 1490s, he refrained from painting fabulous manes, covering hair under thick layers of cloth, or turned them into wavy streaks, as repetitive as they are long.

The calumny of Apelles represents Botticelli's last reflection on the power of hairstyling. It is also his most explicit and effective. Hair is a recurring fo-

c. 1500, ed. by Claire Farago, New York 1999, pp. 73–69: 76; Carlo Pedretti, "The Critical Fortune of Leonardo's Drawings", in: *Leonardo da Vinci: Master Draftsman*, ed. by Carmen C. Bambach, New York 2003, pp. 79–110: 84.

[6] For the *Fortitude* see Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, London 1978, I, pp. 31–33; Alison Wright, *The Pollaiuolo Brothers: The Arts of Florence and Rome*, New Haven 2005, pp. 230f.

[7] Yet Lucian's text was not the direct source, nor was its paraphrase by Leon Battista Alberti, as argued by Angela Dressen, "From Dante to Landino: Botticelli's *Calumny of Apelles* and Its Sources", in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, LIX (2017), pp. 325–339: 326f. See below, notes 156–157.

[8] Cristina Acidini, "Sandro Botticelli pittore del Rinascimento, tra i

cus throughout the painting. Slander drags the victim by his hair. The mane of naked Truth, on the left, flutters diagonally, echoing the direction of her chastising sash. As a way to emphasize its looseness, Botticelli represents the other outermost figure – the blond adviser whispering in the prince's hairy ears – from the back, so to show how laborious female hairstyles could be. Botticelli's thematization of hair is not generic. Rather, he uses hair to allude to specific episodes and figures of earlier works. Truth is a double of Venus in his famous *Birth of Venus* (Fig. 3).[9] Slander's dragging the accused by his hair is a play on his *Pallas taming the centaur*, today in the Uffizi (and a centaur dragged by his hair is also shown in the relief above the prince). The blond adviser's coiffure shows off the same degree of artificiality of one of Jethro's daughters in *The trials of Moses* in the Sistine Chapel, whom Botticelli also showed from the back. More importantly, the central scene (Fig. 4) epitomizes what Botticelli must have done for much of his career, that is thinking like a hairstylist who tightens ribbons and changes the positions of ornaments, elbows up in the air, so to turn masses of undisciplined hair into orderly compositions.

If *The calumny of Apelles* feels less like a revival than a re-examination of his career, though, it is because Botticelli pairs hairstyling with deception. Given that the textual sources about the adornment of Slander do not speak of hair, such emphasis must be seen as the painter's own contribution. I would go as far as to call it an act of repentance, given that, by coupling hairdressing with slander, Botticelli aligned himself with the attacks that preachers commonly voiced at that time.

In the winter of 1490, in the Florentine convent of San Marco, the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola lashed out against the mothers who let their daughters go to mass without wearing a veil. His reasoning? Hairstyles steal gazes, so a woman needed to cover her coiffure "out of respect of the angels and the priests that are in the church so that none of them would be caught by her beauty".[10] It was not the sparkle in her eyes who distracted officiants, but her hair: it entrapped men's gazes like a magical lasso.

While art historians have deconstructed Botticelli's *Calumny of Apelles* in tremendous detail, spending pages to even guess the subjects of those hard-to-see reliefs receding in the background, they have not commented on the importance of hair in its main episode: the visual entrapment of the princely judge, seated on the elevated platform like a priest on the chancel, losing his focus because of one girl's hairstyle. But their carelessness is excusable given that the cultural belittling of hair has lasted since at least the thirteenth century. That is, since Thomas Aquinas defined hair as a "superfluity", one of the bodily appendages that would not resurrect with the rest of the body on Judgment Day.[11]

Since then (but there is also a pre-history to Aquinas' description into which I do not venture now[12]),

Medici e il Savonarola", in: *Botticelli nel suo tempo*, ed. by *eadem*, Milan 2009, pp. 15–33: 29f.; Lightbown (note 6), I, pp. 122–126.

[9] This way, he retroactively changed its perception from erotic goddess to pure, honest beauty. On such a doubling, see Ernst Gombrich, "Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of His Circle", in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, VIII (1945), pp. 7–60: 10, note 1. Cf. Stéphane Toussaint, "'My Friend Ficino': Art History and Neoplatonism. From Intellectual to Material Beauty", in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, LIX (2017), pp. 147–173: 153–158.

[10] "Per la reverenza degli angeli e sacerdoti che sono nella chiesa, acciocché alcun non sia preso dalla bellezza di lei […]. E però voi, madre, non vogliate menar le vostre figliole a questo modo in chiesa, perché provocate l'ira di Dio contra di voi." Savonarola went on: "Onde san Pietro, parlando delle donne buone, dice in questo modo: l'ornamento delle quali sia non esteriore nella increspatura de' capelli" (Girolamo Savonarola, *Sermoni e prediche*, Prato 1846, p. 86).

[11] "Videtur quod capilli et ungues in homine non resurgent. Sicut enim capilli et ungues ex superfluitatibus cibi generantur; ita urina, sudor, et aliae hujusmodi faeces. Sed haec non resurgent cum corpore. Ergo nec capilli et ungues" (Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, IV, 44, 1).

[12] Aquinas' definition comes from Saint Augustine, *Sermones*, LXII, 14.

4 Sandro Botticelli, *The calumny of Apelles*, detail of Fig. 2

hair has been called an "excrement" and paying for its styling the equivalent of spending money on lumps of dung.[13] This may sound like the insult it was. Yet it was also theologically orthodox given that Aquinas included urine and feces in the categories of superfluities.

So talking about hair was talking about mortal things. The irrelevance of the former for eternal life was motivated by its (alleged) disappearance after death. And such reasoning did not go up in ashes with Savonarola's burning at a stake in 1498; it lived on, and it did so because of the philosophical insignificance to which hair was routinely relegated.

How could anyone, in the fifteenth or any other century, have possibly felt the need to speak in favor of female hair when so many authoritative voices described it as valueless? This essay recovers the very few voices that offered an alternative, but – I say it straight away – their points were whispered and short-lived. Even for Florence's intellectual élites, the cultural val-

[13] The definition as "excrement" is from a sermon by the Dominican friar Giordano da Pisa, published in *Racconti esemplari di predicatori del Due e Trecento*, ed. by Giorgio Varanini/Guido Baldassarri, Rome 1993, II, pp. 375f.

ue of hair was as thin as its width, its importance as epidermic as its locations, and its rejection as painless as its cutting. And over the centuries, disregarding hair has been as natural as its shedding in old age, and caring for it was the indicator of female vanity. The disparaging of hair was not only sexist, it hit all the targets of religious patriarchy: young rebels, who were labeled as effeminate, and foreigners, savagely lustful. By showing to care for hair, all those groups failed to subscribe to the hegemonic idea that hair's worth lay in its capacity to negate itself and indicate something else. This symptomatic function, which was especially put to use in the field of medical diagnosis, for which hair growth revealed the health of inner organs, became an unchallenged cliché. Hair was even thought to express human's emotions, and its role at indexing fear, for instance, is articulated by Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo in the sixteenth century and Charles Darwin in the nineteenth in the same way, as if the time in between them had never existed.[14]

Darwin's work is often said to have been instrumental to criminologist Carlo Lombroso, who thought that hair types could reveal whether a person had a delinquent nature or not.[15] And both Darwin and Lombroso inspired the influential connoisseur Giovanni Morelli, who assumed that Renaissance artists never put any thinking in their depictions of hair.[16] Hair, Morelli claimed, was one of painters' stylistic twitches: it was rendered mechanically and was thus useful to connoisseurs to attribute artworks as through it they could recognize an artist's touch. Morelli expected in art a passivity similar to the one that scientists attributed to real hair. But both approaches also attribute a kind of creative eloquence to hair: hair speaks where the criminal and the artist remain reticent about what they do.

It is, however, a mistake to present the passivity of hair as linearly descending from Darwin to Morelli. Considering hair to be somewhat important because of its capacity to express something hidden was not an idea shared by a small group of people, whose members can be named one by one. Instead, it was as pervasive as it went unnoticed. It can be found in many places, in different guises. Hair is a means of classification in Tacitus, who looked at the hair of British barbarians to estimate their ethnic provenances,[17] as well as in Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who taught that the hairstyles of classical sculptures gave away clues as to the figure's identity and provenance.[18] Such a capacity took up a moral dimension in the lectures on aesthetics by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, an admirer of Winckelmann, who blasted hair for having "the character of a plant production rather than of an animal one". "It is a sign of weakness rather than a proof of the organism's strength", he also declared.[19]

So it is hardly surprising to read that a connoisseur of the stature of Bernard Berenson considered Leonardo's bald heads, and not his beautifully detailed coiffures, as the most exquisite drawings of the Renaissance.[20] His judgment passes as an admiration for masterful sobriety and appears valid to his readers also because it is sustained by the patriarchal moralism that has shaped, as it still does, art historical scholarship. Interest in hair has until recently remained in the margins in art history, as well as histo-

[14] Lomazzo (note 1), I, pp. 305–307; Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, London 1872, pp. 67 and 294–297.

[15] Carlo Lombroso/Guglielmo Ferrero, *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale*, Turin/Rome 1893, pp. 319f. Cf. Joseph Deniker, *Les races et les peuples de la terre*, Paris 1926, pp. 52–69.

[16] Giovanni Morelli, *Italian Painters: Critical Studies of Their Works*, London 1892–1893, I, pp. 107, 155, 181, 193, 230.

[17] Tacitus, *Agricola*, 11.

[18] Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art*, Boston 1880, I, pp. 326, 333–336, 399–401.

[19] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Oxford 1975, II, p. 737.

[20] Bernard Berenson, *The Drawings of Florentine Painters [...]*, London 1903, I, p. 154, and II, p. 61.

ry, and literary studies.[21] In the past, its examination has been occasionally taken up by some adventurous thinkers, such as Aby Warburg, whose reflections, however, have often been excluded from mainstream narratives.[22]

But then to re-examine Botticelli's hairstyles does not only offer a meditation on how he shaped looking through painting. It is also a way to subtly comb art history of its deeply-rooted Judeo-Christian biases and reflect on what they have suppressed. The marginality of hair, once again, has its benefits. It offers a vantage point from which to identify the patterning of thinking, the values that sustain it, and how it replicates itself. One such movement appears in the way female hair has come to be routinely discussed in relation to a few quotes plucked from Petrarch, as we are about to see.

2. Move Over *Petrarchismo*

The fact that, in *The calumny of Apelles*, naked Truth looks like Slander (Fig. 2) is Botticelli's way of approaching the female body. The crisp silhouettes of many of his women are typified, frozen in chiseled chins, sharp noses, and the opaque stares of those who could do without sleep. Their profiles are transferred from panel to panel, traced through sheets, to the point of indecipherability: Madonnas look like Virtues who look like Venuses. And yet, Botticelli excludes hair from this process. It is hardly ever repeated according to the same formula.

Take his *Venus* in Turin (Fig. 5) and its double, in Berlin (Fig. 6). While their bodies take similar poses, their hairdos do not. In Turin, her short, tight ponytails exude a beauty that is controlled. Even the curls that flutter loosely are compact rather than frayed: they look more like ribbons than hair. In Berlin, instead, her hair works as a framing device: it highlights Venus' shoulders and hips. It encourages a visual zigzag through her body, channeling the gaze from top to bottom and back, but in a way that is less centrifugal than in the prototype of both panels, the Uffizi *Venus* (Fig. 3). There, hair points to the environment, both physical and literary. Half of her mane unravels in the air, indicating the direction and fresh gentleness of the breeze.[23] The other half falls into thick coils that are pressed against her thigh, salt rubbing against her skin, which is how the poet Angelo Poliziano described Venus' drying herself.[24]

Botticelli's ever-changing hairstyles are an effect of the string of intensely idealized paintings of women that he made throughout the 1470s and 1480s. Botticelli deliberately blurred the contours between life and dream, in keeping with the desires of his clients, the *ottimati*: wealthy, learned Florentine men who entertained themselves with classical poetry and chivalric epics, taking both as inspirations for their lives.[25]

One such commission was a portrait, today in Frankfurt, often recognized as that of Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci (Fig. 1).[26] If the identification is cor-

[21] Only recently have some scholars started to dedicate in-depth studies to hair. See Elisabetta Gnignera, *'I soperchi ornamenti': copricapi e acconciature femminili nell'Italia del Quattrocento*, Colle Val d'Elsa 2010; Roberta Milliken, *Ambiguous Locks: An Iconology of Hair in Medieval Art and Literature*, Jefferson, NC, 2014; Julia Saviello, *Verlockungen: Haare in der Kunst der Frühen Neuzeit*, Emsdetten [2017]; Lorenzo Pericolo, "'Donna bella e crudele': Michelangelo's 'Divine Heads' in Light of the *Rime*", in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, LIX (2017), pp. 203–233; and the six-volume series *A Cultural History of Hair*, ed. by Geraldine Biddle-Perry, London 2019.

[22] Aby Warburg, "Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Spring*", in: *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, Los Angeles 1999, pp. 89–156: 93–107. Warburg, it may be worth pointing out though, reads hair as a visualization of movement, following Leon Battista Alberti's *De pictura* and classical authors such as Ovid and Claudian, not as a mold of seeing. On Warburg's take, see Spyros Papapetros, *On the Animation of the Inorganic: Art, Architecture, and the Extension of Life*, Chicago 2012, pp. 39–45 and 66–69.

[23] Alessandro Nova, *Il libro del vento: rappresentare l'invisibile*, Genoa 2007, p. 69.

[24] Lightbown (note 6), II, pp. 120–122. Poliziano's description is discussed in Charles Dempsey, *The Early Renaissance and Vernacular Culture*, Cambridge, Mass., 2012, pp. 77f.

[25] Maria Luisa Meneghetti, *Storie al muro: tempi e personaggi della letteratura profana nell'arte medievale*, Turin 2015, pp. 120–129.

[26] The Städel Museum titles the painting *Weibliches Idealbildnis (Bildnis der*

5 Workshop of Sandro Botticelli, *Venus*,
ca. 1485. Turin, Galleria Sabauda

6 Workshop of Sandro Botticelli, *Venus*, ca. 1485.
Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie

rect, Botticelli may have painted it after her death at twenty-three, in 1476, presenting her as a trophy of his patrons, the Medici.[27] Around her neck is a cameo, copy of a Roman engraved gem, a famous object that Lorenzo de' Medici bought in 1487.[28] She is crowned with four feathers, a reference to one of Lorenzo's devices.[29] And Botticelli pinned more than two hundred pearls to her head so as to construct a look as fabulous as it was prohibited. Showing off pearls was outlawed in Florence in the 1470s even if the ban could be lifted for well-connected ladies of high standing and, especially, for exceptional events, such as weddings.[30] But this is why Botticelli dolled Simonetta up. The background can remain black: Simonetta's appearance is enough to reveal that she is being paraded at a grand event, such as the joust organized in 1475, the year before her death, to mark the coming-of-age of Lorenzo's younger brother, Giuliano, and where Simonetta served as the tournament prize.[31] The Medici harnessed the event by commissioning from Poliziano a literary celebration, the *Stanze per la giostra*.[32] Poliziano transfigured Giuliano and Simonetta into, respectively, a noble knight and the divine woman whose sight gave him purpose. The Frankfurt panel may have sustained and continued such a transfiguration. Like Poliziano, Botticelli manipulated Simonetta's features into the idealizing, aspirational beauty that she was meant to incarnate. But it was not her profile that must have enchanted: it was her hair. And if this has gone unnoticed, it is also because her hair has been too quickly reduced to a Petrarchan trope.

Through Laura, Petrarch offered a powerful model for the divinization of women. Historians of art and literature have successfully explored the nuances and the fortune of such an operation, the way it both triggered endless variations and stereotyped female beauty.[33] Their efforts have exposed the misogyny and the power structure of such a pattern-

Simonetta Vespucci als Nymphe) as proposed by Hermann Ulmann, *Sandro Botticelli*, Munich 1893, pp. 54f.

[27] On Simonetta and her myth, see Monika A. Schmitter, "Botticelli's Images of Simonetta Vespucci: Between Portrait and Ideal", in: *The Rutgers Art Review*, XV (1995), pp. 33–57: 34–41; Paola Ventrone, "Simonetta Vespucci e le metamorfosi dell'immagine della donna nella Firenze dei primi Medici", in: *eadem*/Giovanna Lazzi, *Simonetta Vespucci: la nascita della Venere fiorentina*, Florence 2007, pp. 5–59: 29–49; Judith Allan, "Lorenzo's Star and Savonarola's Serpent: Changing Representations of Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci", in: *Italian Studies*, LXIX (2014), pp. 4–23: 7–12.

[28] Melissa M. Bullard/Nicolai Rubinstein, "Lorenzo de' Medici's Acquisition of the *Sigillo di Nerone*", in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LXII (1999), pp. 283–286. The gem had been known in Florence since at least 1428 when the sculptor Lorenzo Ghiberti provided it with a new mount, as he records in his *Commentarii*, ed. by Julius von Schlosser, Berlin 1912, I, p. 47. Ghiberti made some copies of the gem, which circulated in Florence. See Nicole Dacos, "Le rôle des plaquettes dans la diffusion des gemmes antiques: le cas de la collection Médicis", in: *Studies in the History of Art*, XXII (1989), pp. 71–91: 72f.; Francesco Caglioti/Davide Gasparotto, "Lorenzo Ghiberti, il 'Sigillo di Nerone' e le origini della placchetta 'antiquaria'", in: *Prospettiva*, 85 (1997), pp. 2–38.

[29] Jacob Hess, *Kunstgeschichtliche Studien zu Renaissance und Barock*, Rome 1967, p. 187; Adrian W. B. Randolph, *Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, New Haven 2002, pp. 111–113.

[30] For the sanctions against pearls, issued in 1464 and repeated in 1472, see Curzio Mazzi, *Due provvisioni suntuarie fiorentine (29 novembre 1464, 29 febbraio 1471 [1472]): per nozze Olschki-Finzi*, Florence 1908, pp. 5–7, and Ronald Rainey, *Sumptuary Legislation in Renaissance Florence*, Ph.D. diss., Columbia University 1985, pp. 516–519. A request to lift the ban is in the letter from 19 October 1473 written by Elisabetta Gaetani to Lucrezia Tornabuoni, mother of Lorenzo de' Medici. See Lucrezia Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, ed. by Patrizia Salvadori, Florence 1993, p. 125.

[31] The joust was held in Florence on 29 January 1475 as stated by the chronicler Giusto d'Anghiari (Nerida Newbigin, "I Giornali [1437–1482] di Ser Giusto Giusti d'Anghiari [1437–1482]", in: *Letteratura italiana antica*, III [2002], pp. 41–246: 184). The tournament was meant to celebrate the political alliance between Florence, Venice, and Milan. Yet it also served to cement the cultural politics of Giuliano's older brother, Lorenzo. By funding communal festivities, the Medici tacitly appropriated them, blurring the boundaries between republic and tyranny, and electing family members and associates to the rank of civic heroes. See Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, Ithaca, NY, 1991, p. 423. On Florentine jousts, see Paola Ventrone, "Cerimonialità e spettacolo nella festa cavalleresca fiorentina del quattrocento", in: *La civiltà del torneo (sec. XII–XVII): giostre e tornei tra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. by Maria Vittoria Baruti Ceccopieri, Narni 1990, pp. 35–53.

[32] The poem was composed for the joust but finished in 1478 to commemorate the second anniversary of Simonetta's death (26 April 1476). See Warman Welliver, "The Subject and Purpose of Poliziano's *Stanze*", in: *Italica*, XLVIII (1971), pp. 34–50: 34.

[33] Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women: Parmigianino, *Petrarchismo*, and the Vernacular Style", in: *The Art Bulletin*, LVIII (1976), pp. 374–394;

ing, not to mention the ways it served as an aid to political affirmation and Neoplatonic metaphysics.[34] And yet, while Botticelli's patterning of female bodies is eminently Petrarchan, I cannot help but feel that such tropes provide an inadequate commentary for his coiffures.

Admittedly, Petrarch did pay attention to Laura's hair. He wrote verses about the ways she styled it ("Son questi i capei biondi, et l'aureo nodo"), when she didn't ("Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi"), and how it served as a bodily marker ("le bionde trecce sopra 'l collo sciolte").[35] His remarks, however, are brief and sporadic. Laura's hair is captured in little more than the three states that I have mentioned despite Petrarch's lifetime of writing. His descriptions are also unspecific (hairstyling is often reduced to a *nodo*, or 'knot'), and it is so because, as many have pointed out, Petrarch considered indistinctness a poetical quality.[36] He even prefers describing the captivating effect that hairstyling has on him ("ch'a Laura il *vago* e biondo capel chiuda") rather than specifying the feature that produced it, thus letting his readers imagine whatever hairstyle they may find attractive.[37]

There is one feature of Laura's hair on which Petrarch insists, and that is her blondness. Petrarch's Laura's hair is as golden as Virgil's Dido's and Homer's Helen's.[38] And Petrarch saw more poetic possibilities in color than in shape, in keeping with standards of courtly love.[39] This preference is epitomized in the verse "L'aura che 'l verde lauro et l'aureo crine".[40] It is Laura's blondness, here, that holds the triplet of tongue-twisting alliterations together while conjuring up the vision of a divine mane that radiates like a halo because its color is reflected in the shiny leaves of her garland.

But Botticelli's hair is not a mere splash of color.[41] Rather, its network of ropes, levers, and cantilevers does the muscular work of pulling the spectator's attention in. Consider the Frankfurt portrait again (Fig. 1). The intertwining of braids and pearly strings is sometimes referred to a *vespaio*, a bejeweled net by which Florentine women held their braids in place and by which Botticelli may have alluded to Simonetta's acquired family name, Vespucci.[42] Yet this is not a regular *vespaio*.[43] Botticelli plays on the fashion accessory by making it out of braids, to which a precision maker has tied those strings of pearls. The result is unique. The regularity of the meshes implies a search for the fine calibration of distances and tensions, the labor of an invisible hand that did and undid knots until their heights and tensions were just right. In other words, the hairdresser's skill is matched by Botticelli's invention. Simonetta's overall coiffure is both an imaginative take on a hairstyle of the 1470s and a

Nancy J. Vickers, "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme", in: *Critical Inquiry*, VIII (1981), pp. 265–279: 265f.

[34] Dempsey (note 24), pp. 91f.

[35] Petrarch, *Rime*, CCCLIX, 56; XL, 1; and CXXVII, 77.

[36] Scholars (such as Cropper [note 33], p. 380) refer this interpretation to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. by Ellen Frothingham, New York 1957, pp. 126–133. Yet the point had been made by many, including Giacomo Leopardi, for which see Margaret Brose, "Mixing Memory and Desire: Leopardi Reading Petrarch", in: *Annali d'Italianistica*, XXII (2004), pp. 303–319: 309f.

[37] Petrarch, *Rime*, LII, 6. The emphasis is mine. On vagueness in medieval poetry, see Mario Marti, *Storia dello Stil nuovo*, Lecce 1973, I, pp. 159–182.

[38] Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, London 1996, pp. 362–366.

[39] James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, Chicago 2006, p. 31.

[40] Petrarch, *Rime*, CCXLVI, 1.

[41] Botticelli did use gold powder to paint Simonetta's hair. See Andreas Schumacher, in: *Botticelli: Bildnis, Mythos, Andacht*, exh. cat. Frankfurt 2009/10, ed. by *idem*, Ostfildern 2009, no. 4, pp. 160–163: 160. For the Frankfurt painting, see also Hans Körner, "Simonetta Vespucci: Konstruktion, Dekonstruktion und Rekonstruktion eines Mythos", *ibidem*, pp. 57–71: 67–69.

[42] Dempsey (note 24), p. 97. Simonetta married Marco Vespucci, son of Pietro Vespucci, Lorenzo de' Medici's ambassador in Piombino. See Rachele Farina, *Simonetta: una donna alla corte dei Medici*, Milan 2001, pp. 28f.

[43] Generally on the *vespaio*, see Rainey (note 30), pp. 450–453, and Gnignera (note 21), pp. 181–200.

pictorial field with its own compositional logic, where what is allowed and what is not allowed follow their own rules, where even gravity does not seem to matter. Simonetta's ponytail perfectly fills the gap between the edge of the panel and the silhouette of her back rather than lying flat on it, as it would be expected in real life. For Botticelli, hair offers a pictorial field where the reality content can be reduced to a minimum, a field for imaginative flights that flirt with the implausible. But such a space for experimental freedom has little to do with Petrarch. Rather, it finds a closer parallel in Boccaccio, and especially the young, innovative pre-*Decameron* Boccaccio of the *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*.

Such a reconsideration may seem weightless given that Boccaccio himself was an admirer of Petrarch's oeuvre.[44] Petrarch transformed the direction of Boccaccio's studies after the two encountered in 1350.[45] And this is why some art historians cite Boccaccio as they cite Petrarch when discussing hair. They collapse the two authors into a single position on this point.[46] Yet as Vittore Branca showed, considering Boccaccio an imitator of Petrarch is too coarse a simplification. While part of his production explored Petrarch's abstracting tropes, another part developed a flair for details and literary contaminations that is extraneous to them.[47] This second attitude is clearly illustrated in the hair descriptions of the *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*.

If I insist on this work in particular, it is not to propose a cosmetic revision: the substitution of one written source for another while keeping intact the idea that Botticelli's painting is an illustration of a text. Instead, to explore Botticelli's hair through Boccaccio's descriptions is a way to recover a mode of thinking and looking that is alternative to Petrarch's. In Petrarch's poems, after all, the act of gazing does not contribute to much; it is often discounted when it is not negated: Petrarch stares into Laura's eyes to be blinded, or to be transposed somewhere else. His abstract descriptions stimulate the acceptance of a contemplation that is less about looking than being spiritually fulfilled. But like Boccaccio in the *Comedia* (also known as *Ameto*, from the name of its observant protagonist), Botticelli is razor-sharp precise when it gets to hair. He shapes hair in such a way, stuffing so much in it so as to take his viewers on unprecedented visual wanderings. So to imagine Botticelli as an attentive reader of Boccaccio is to provide an alternative approach to his pictures, which, far from diluting what we see into textual references and metaphysical abstractions, uses those very references to alter people's feelings.

3. Boccaccio's Enrapturing Hairstyles

The *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* tells the story of the hunter Ameto and the nymphs who taught him the ways of love. It shows how love can transform an uncouth brute into a noble human and, at the same time, it is an allegorical discourse on the redeeming power of the virtues. Each of the seven nymphs corresponds to one virtue, and Ameto listens to their edifying tales one by one to prepare himself for Lia, the leader of the group and the embodiment of faith. She strikes him from the very start, when Ameto bumps

[44] Petrarch and Boccaccio's ideals of feminine beauty have been placed on the same plane by sixteenth-century critics such as Pietro Aretino. See his letter from 25 June 1537 to Ludovico Dolce, in: Johannes Hösle, *Texte zum Antipetrarkismus*, Tübingen 1970, p. 7.

[45] Martin L. McLaughlin, "Humanism and Italian Literature", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. by Jill Kraye, Cambridge 1996, pp. 224–245: 228f.

[46] Cropper (note 33), p. 387; Dempsey (note 24), pp. 56–62; and Körner (note 41), p. 59. In support of this operation, they quote passages from Boccaccio's *Ninfale fiesolano* (where Lauraesque gold and curling hair is mentioned in stanzas 11, 273, and 343) and *Teseida* (12, 54), two works where Boccaccio's treatment of hair is indeed Petrarchan.

[47] Vittore Branca, "Interespressività narrativo-figurativa e rinnovamenti topologici e iconografici discesi dal *Decameron*", in: *Boccaccio visualizzato: narrare per parole e per immagini fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. by *idem*, Turin 1999, I, pp. 39–74: 39.

into the nymphs bathing in a river and is captured by Lia's "blond hair flung over her ivory shoulders with graceful locks and gathered in a garland of oak, laden with acorns. And admiring all of her with an attentive eye, he praised every part of her to himself".[48] The *Comedia* starts as a celebration of daydreaming. Over and over Ameto listens to a nymph's tale only to be lost in what he sees.[49] And when disheveled Ameto looks at each nymph, his gaze starts from their magnificent coiffures.[50]

Scholars have remarked how conventional such an approach was, given that medieval romances describe female beauties from the head downwards. In the *Roman de la Rose*, Guillaume de Lorris glorifies Oiseuse from her "cheveux [...] blonds" and then continues by way of her "plus bel corps de femme".[51] Rhetorical manuals made such an approach normative. In his *Ars versificatoria*, Mathieu Vendôme portrays Helen from her hair and then proceeds to her forehead, eyes, mouth, neck, and bosom.[52] Boccaccio was familiar with Vendôme's work. He reworked one of his tales into the story of Lydia in the *Decameron*[53] and owned a copy of the *Poetria nova* by Geoffrey of Vinsauf, who also recommended a descending order when describing female beauties.[54]

Yet the *a capite ad calcem* sequence was not just a literary trope. Medical treatises followed it, too. The *Thesaurus pauperum* by Pedro Hispano – a much-copied study by a physician who became Pope John XXI – arranged recipes from hair to feet,[55] and so did the even more famous *Viaticum* by Constantine the African, head of the influential medical school of Salerno.[56] Such a structuring of the material continued in Botticelli's time. The *Practica de egritudinibus a capite usque ad pedes* (1479) by Michele Savonarola, the physician at the Ferrara court and Girolamo's grandfather, adopted it, right from its title.

These examples should suffice to get rid of the idea that the precedence of hair was merely a literary trope. Legitimized by medical practices as well, to examine people's appearance starting from their hair must have felt like second nature. But if Boccaccio's initial focus is conventional, his level of detail is not. Take Emilia, who represents justice:

> [Ameto] observed her very long blond hair, worthy of comparison to any splendor, which was gathered in part on top of her head without any artifice, and bound with a lovely knot of her same hair; and other locks, either shorter or not bound in the knot, were still more beautifully dispersed and twisted in a laurel wreath, while still others were blown by the wind around her temples and around her delicate neck, making her even more graceful.[57]

[48] "[...] i biondi capelli, con vezzose ciocche sparti sopra le candide spalle, ristretti da fronzuta ghirlanda di ghiandifera quercia discerneli; e rimirandola tutta con occhio continuo, tutta in sé la loda" (Giovanni Boccaccio, *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, V, 3). Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of the *Comedia* are from Giovanni Boccaccio, *L'Ameto*, trans. by Judith Powers Serafini-Sauli, New York 1985.

[49] Boccaccio states it plainly. Ameto "enjoys training his eyes no less than his hearing", and, at every new song, "he takes from it what he can, without ever averting his gaze from the newcomers" (Boccaccio [note 48], XII, 6: "Ameto, il quale non meno l'occhio che l'audito diletta di esercitare, quello che puote prende della canzone, senza dalle nuovamente venute levare la vista").

[50] In contrast, Ameto's chin is bearded, his chest hairy. Three times he is described as coarse, "rozzo" (Boccaccio [note 48], III, 7; V, 1; V, 21).

[51] Guillaume de Lorris, *Roman de la Rose*, 521–570.

[52] Mathieu Vendôme, *Ars versificatoria*, I, 56, published in: Edmond Faral, *Les arts poétiques du XII^e^ et du XIII^e^ siècle: recherches et documents sur la technique littéraire du Moyen Age*, Paris 1923, pp. 129f.

[53] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, V, 9.

[54] Antonia Mazza, "L'inventario della 'Parva libraria' di Santo Spirito e la biblioteca del Boccaccio", in: *Italia medievale e umanistica*, IX (1966), pp. 1–74: 16, 61. Generally, on the importance of the *Ars versificatoria* for Tuscan-Sicilian poets, see Marti (note 37), pp. 127–135.

[55] Pietro Ispano, *Il Tesoro dei Poveri (Thesaurus Pauperum): ricettario medico del XIII secolo*, ed. by Luca Pescante, San Sepolcro 2007, p. 14; Ilaria Zamuner/Eleonora Ruzza, *I ricettari del codice 52 della Historical Medical Library di New Haven (XIII sec. U.Q.)*, Florence 2017, p. vii.

[56] Mary Frances Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The* Viaticum *and Its Commentaries*, Philadelphia 1990, p. 35.

[57] "E di quella i biondi capelli, a qualunque chiarezza degni d'assomi-

7 Workshop of Lorenzo di Niccolò, birth tray with scenes from Boccaccio's *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, ca. 1410. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund

Or consider Acrimonia, the embodiment of fortitude:

> and gazing at her upper part, he saw her blond hair under a magnificent garland of the leaves of Pallas [that is, olive tree leaves], covered by a thin veil. And a small part of this veil would be carried off from under the garland by Zephyr if he were to blow so strongly as to be able to separate it from the rest. Her hair was gathered above her ears in a round braid and therefore did not fall over her even neck, but stretched out in turn – now toward one, now toward the other of her ears.[58]

gliare, sanza niuno maesterio, lunghissimi, parte ravvolti alla testa nella sommità di quella, con nodo piacevole d'essi stessi, vede raccolti; e altri più corti, o in quello [nodo] non compresi, fra le verdi frondi della laurea ghirlanda più belli sparti vede e raggirati; e altri dati all'aure, ventilati da quelle, quali sopra le candide tempie e quali sopra il dilicato collo ricadendo, più la fanno cianciosa" (Boccaccio [note 48], XII, 7). I changed the last word of Serafini-Sauli's translation, as *cianciosa* is 'graceful', not Serafini-Sauli's "delightful" (see Boccaccio 1985 [note 48], p. 27). Boccaccio must have learnt the term in Naples, where he lived for ten years before returning to Florence, where he wrote the *Comedia*. See Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron, Filocolo, Ameto, Fiammetta*, ed. by Enrico Bianchi/Carlo Salinari/Natalino Sapegno, Florence 1952, pp. 931f.

[58] "E rimirandola nella parte eccelsa, sotto pomposa ghirlanda delle frondi di Pallade, vede i biondi capelli coperti da sottile velo; del quale parte, ma piccola, di sotto alla ghirlanda se ne porteria zeffiro, se sì forte soffiasse che dall'altro il potesse dividere; li quali sopra l'orecchie in tonda treccia raccolti e quindi di dietro non cascanti sopra lo equale collo, con piccolo viluppo stendentisi or verso l'una e poi verso l'altra orec-

Boccaccio takes his reader on rollercoasters around the women's heads. His descriptions mimic the movements of Ameto's eyes, which scrutinize the nymphs' hair as if it were landscapes that transformed from the ears to the neck. Boccaccio often uses bodily references as visual grips so as to specify how Ameto's eyes move around, holding onto braids as visual lianas. Such ocular restlessness is particularly clear in the case of Fiammetta. Dressed in green to symbolize hope, she has the most elaborate hairstyle of all:

> Carefully scrutinizing her, Ameto noted her hair, to which he could find no comparison in its blondness; and he observed a mass of her hair twisted by a masterly hand in a long shape over each ear; and for the rest he noticed full braids that fell over the top of her neck and, crossing there, returned, one towards the right and the other towards the left, up to the top of the blond head; and there the remaining lengths returned downward, and their ends were hidden in the same manner under the first climbing piece; and the braids stayed in their place adorned with shining gold and pearls braided together; nor did he notice a single hair that escaped from the imposed order.[59]

Boccaccio dwindles the difference between seeing and what is seen, showing that looking is no less laborious than the work of that invisible coiffeur's "masterly hand". He shifts his vocabulary from words of actions to connotations of effects, so to produce a symbiosis between Ameto's seeing and feeling.

Hair offers Boccaccio not only a way to reveal Ameto's visual and emotional revolutions, but also an opportunity for verbal gymnastics. Every description provides a way to test out the possibilities of language. Indeed, Boccaccio varies his vocabulary at each nymph, taking the virtue she symbolizes as a new semantic field for grammar and vocabulary.[60] When introducing Adiona-Temperance, Boccaccio's language is controlled. But when he jumps to Agapes-Charity, his rhythm accelerates to conjure up the passion of generosity. The *Comedia* experiments in the patterning of courtly love descriptions – Boccaccio even jokes that all seven heads are indistinguishable by color alone.[61] If Boccaccio makes the reader go through the description of hair seven times (and only in the case of Mopsa he does not start from it),[62] it is to emphasize difference over repetition and to reveal that literary patterns can be resources.

The *Comedia* was well known in Botticelli's time. Its episodes were painted on domestic objects (Fig. 7).[63] Its manuscripts were shared with others: Giovanni di Antonio Minerbetti's inscription at the start of his own asks his borrowers to "pay respect to this book and, for God's charity, return it quickly".[64] The number of copies available on the market was not enough and some merchants transcribed the text themselves.[65]

chia vicendevolemente ristretti, loda in infinito" (Boccaccio [note 48], XV, 13).

[59] "E particularmente come l'altre mirandola, vede i suoi capelli a' quali appena comparazione di biondezza puote in sé trovare, e di quelli grandissima parte, sovra ciascuna orecchia ravolti in lunga forma con maestrevole mano, riguarda; e degli altri ampissime trecce composte vede sopra l'estremità del collo ricadere; e quindi, l'una verso la destra parte e l'altra verso la sinistra incrocicchiate, risalire al colmo del biondo capo; i quali, ancora avanzati ritornando in giù, in quello medesimo modo nascondere vede le loro estremità sotto le prime salite; e quelle con fregio d'oro lucente e caro di margherite istrette stanno ne' posti luoghi. Né d'alcuna parte un sol capello fuori del comandato ordine vede partire" (Boccaccio [note 48], XII, 18–20).

[60] Jonathan Usher, "Boccaccio's Experimentation with Verbal Portraits from the *Filocolo* to the *Decameron*", in: *The Modern Language Review*, LXXVII (1982), pp. 585–596: 590–594.

[61] "Né dissimili ad alcuni delle prime li reputa […] in colore" (Boccaccio [note 48], XV, 13).

[62] *Ibidem*, XV, 24.

[63] Paul F. Watson/Victoria Kirkham, *"Amore e Virtù*: Two Salvers Depicting Boccaccio's *Comedia delle Ninfe Fiorentine* in the Metropolitan Museum", in: *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, X (1975), pp. 35–50: 38.

[64] "Chi lo legie lo riguardi, e rendalo presto in charità di Dio" (Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, ms. 1051, fol. Iv). A similar instruction ("Per che ti prego, quando l'arai letto, / tu mel rimandi, ch'è cosa dovuta") in a copy in Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, ms. Ashburnham 1346, fol. Iv.

The *Comedia*, however, was also turned into lavish volumes that entered courtly libraries, from Mantua to Naples.[66] The papal curia in Rome had a copy, too, thus showing that both clerical and mercantile elites craved the entertainment that the tale offered.[67] In 1449, Girolamo Morelli, who later served as Lorenzo de' Medici's correspondent in Milan, transcribed the *Comedia* on some twenty-five sheets, explaining that he did so "for my own pleasure".[68]

Such enjoyment did not derive solely from edification. The *Comedia* is a puzzle. It is the tale of a hunter searching for his way out of mediocrity that requires his readers to hunt for clues. Boccaccio never spells out the nymphs' allegorical meanings, and for the first seventeen chapters he does not even disclose their names.[69] The nymphs appear and disappear in the forest as nameless maidens, pretty indistinguishable besides the most elaborate hairdos. It is only from chapter eighteen that the reader gets to find out who is who. Starting from there, Boccaccio dedicates a couple of chapters to each nymph's tale, which, by means of anecdotes and mythological episodes, gives away the virtue that she symbolizes. In the introduction to each tale, moreover, Boccaccio reveals the nymph's name, but only once, and never at the same point of the narration. He also omits any information about her hairstyle, so that only the colors of their dresses provide the link between the nameless maidens of the first part and the storyteller of the second.[70] The type of information that Boccaccio reveals about each nymph and the timing of its disclosure reflect Ameto's evolution: from fatuous prier obsessed with hair to committed listener who sees beyond the surface of things.[71] Yet it is also a way to keep his readers on their toes, making them long for hints in a labyrinth of words.[72]

For Italo Calvino, an admirer of Boccaccio's capacity to write along and against patterns, the labyrinth should be seen as a cultural form ("forma culturale") that defies human scale.[73] It is a mode of

[65] Christian Bec, *Les marchands écrivains: affaires et humanisme à Florence 1375–1434*, Paris 1967, pp. 407–415; Rhiannon Daniels, *Boccaccio and the Book: Production and Reading in Italy 1340–1520*, London 2009, pp. 18–24; Marco Cursi, "Fare scrivere il Boccaccio: codici e copisti 'a prezzo' fra Bologna e Firenze all'inizio del sec. XV", in: *Studi sul Boccaccio*, XXX (2002), pp. 321–334.

[66] The Mantuan copy is now in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. it. 1106. See *Boccaccio visualizzato* (note 47), II, pp. 351f. In a Parisian private collection is a manuscript made (possibly in Florence) for Antonello Petrucci, secretary of King Ferrante I of Naples, as evidenced by the coat of arms on its frontispiece. See *ibidem*, II, pp. 124f. After Petrucci was killed in 1487, his library entered the royal collection, then dispersed from ca. 1494. See Raffaele Ruggiero, "'Homines talem scribendi qualem vivendi formulam tenent': la biblioteca di Antonello Petrucci, 'secretario' ribelle", in: *Biblioteche nel Regno fra Tre e Cinquecento*, ed. by Claudia Corfiati/Mauro de Nichilo, Lecce 2009, pp. 171–192.

[67] Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. Vat. lat. 5206. This copy was made for the pope sometimes before 1450 by Michele de Salvaticis, copyist "de regia ac papali potestate". See *Boccaccio visualizzato* (note 47), II, pp. 260f.

[68] "Schritto per mano di me Girolamo Morelli per la moria del 1449, per mio piacere" (Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, ms. 1071 [R. III. 1], fol. 25r). On this mutilated manuscript, see Salomone Morpurgo, *I manoscritti della R. Biblioteca Riccardiana di Firenze: manoscritti italiani*, Rome 1900, I, p. 59. On Morelli's correspondence with Lorenzo in the late 1470s, see Pier Giorgio Ricci/Nicolai Rubinstein, *Censimento delle lettere di Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici*, Florence 1964, p. 29.

[69] On Boccaccio's experimentation with and concealment of meaning in texts such as his *Amorosa visione*, see Victoria Kirkham, *The Sign of Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction*, Florence 1993, pp. 57–66.

[70] Such a construction has escaped the attention of most commentators. Here is how to identify the nymphs: Mopsa-Prudence ("di rosato vestita"; Boccaccio [note 48], XVII, 8); Emilia-Justice ("di sanguigno vestita"; *ibidem*, XX, 5); Adiona-Temperance ("di purpurea veste coperta"; *ibidem*, XXV, 4); Acrimonia-Fortitude ("di bianco vestita"; *ibidem*, XXVIII, 10); Agapes-Charity ("che di vermiglio vestiva"; *ibidem*, XXXI, 17); Fiammetta-Hope ("di finissimo verde vestita"; *ibidem*, XXXV, 107); Lia-Faith ("vestimenti di lei, d'oro simile in ogni parte"; *ibidem*, XXVII, 10).

[71] So challenging was the guessing game that the illuminator of the 1479 manuscript today in London's British Library (ms. C.6.a.10) painted each nymph as the initial of her tale. While the large illustrations make crystal clear who is who, they also ruined Boccaccio's riddle. A similar spoiler is in Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, ms. Plut. 41.35, fol. 2v, where a reader spelled out the virtue symbolized by each nymph in marginal glosses. See Antonio Enzo Quaglio's introduction in: Giovanni Boccaccio, *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine: Ameto*, ed. by *idem*, Florence 1963, p. iv.

[72] On early modern reading as an active practice, Marian Rothstein, *Reading in the Renaissance: Amadis de Gaule and the Lessons of Memory*, Newark 1999, pp. 70–78, 107–110.

[73] Italo Calvino, *Una pietra sopra: discorsi di letteratura e società*, Turin 1980, p. 96.

thinking, as well as a form of representation, that conveys the dizziness of losing oneself, which is what Ameto comes close to in his incapacity to stop looking at the nymphs' hair.[74] Calvino also insisted, though, that the labyrinth can lead to knowledge. In the *Comedia*, Ameto's constant looking eventually turns into physical and spiritual self-awareness. Whereas it is Ameto's eyes that first jump from one side of a nymph's head to the other, it is then his intellect that leaps ("salta con lo 'ntelletto").[75] Ameto soon reflects on what he sees ("cosi in se l'estima a vedere"); he predisposes his intellect more than his eyes ("piu lo 'ntelletto che l'occhio dispone"); and, by proceeding this way, he knows ("conosce").[76] At one point Boccaccio writes that Ameto "looks again, examines, distinguishes, and confirms the beauty of the nymphs" ("Ameto riguarda, essamina, distingue e conferma in sé delle venute ninfe la mira bellezza").[77] This is a play on the four stages of scholastic reasoning; their inclusion marks the moment that Ameto has entered philosophical inquiry. And at the end of the *Comedia*, Ameto's transformation is complete: "whereas the nymphs had [first] pleased more his eye than his intellect, they now delighted his intellect more than his eye."[78] Those shifts ask the reader to reconsider the erotic elements of the story. If Boccaccio initially emphasized the nymphs' bodily parts such as their hair (but also their mouths, their feet, and their breasts), it was to prepare for their dissolution. After chapter eighteen, their bodies cease to be deconstructed for the enjoyment of Ameto and Boccaccio's readers. The readers took notice of this shift. At the end of his copy, Minerbetti penned: "This book written by Messer Giovanni Boccaccio is not about nymphs, as it is titled, it is a book about virtue."[79]

Given the number of manuscripts copied, sold, and read there, mid fifteenth-century Florence was the time and place where the *Comedia* peaked in popularity.[80] Botticelli must have known the work even before its first publication in print in 1478, which shortly thereafter was followed by a second edition in 1479.[81] The Medici, for whom he started working around 1475,[82] ended up owning two copies.[83] And Poliziano, then tutor of Lorenzo de' Medici's son Piero, knew the *Comedia*. Scholars have commented on Poliziano's admiration for Boccaccio by tracing

[74] Boccaccio himself connects the labyrinth to the amorous passion in his *Corbaccio*, where the protagonist, suffering from an unrequited love, finds himself in a state that resembles the "laberinto, perché […] gli uomini, come in quello già faceano, senza saperne mai riuscire, s'avviluppano" (Giovanni Boccaccio, *Corbaccio*, ed. by Pier Giorgio Ricci, Turin 1977, p. 18).

[75] Boccaccio [note 48], IX, 17, and XII, 17.

[76] *Ibidem*, XII, 8, 24, 26.

[77] *Ibidem*, XIII, 1.

[78] "Vede che sieno le ninfe, le quali più all'occhio che allo 'ntelletto erano piaciute, e ora allo 'ntelletto piacciono più che all'occhio" (*ibidem*, XLVI, 3).

[79] "Questo libro conpilato per messere Giovanni Bocchacci nonn è libro di nimphe, chome è intitolato, ma è libro di virtù. Amen" (Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, ms. 1051, fol. 78v).

[80] On the manuscripts of the *Comedia* that were produced or purchased by Florentines, see Sara Catalano, *La Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine: revisione dell'edizione e commento*, Ph.D. diss., Paris 3 and Rome, La Sapienza, 2019, pp. 46, 49–51, 54, 62–64, 66–68, 74, who builds on Vittore Branca, *Tradizione delle opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, Rome 1958, pp. 3–12 and 52. Twenty-eight manuscripts of the *Comedia* survive from the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. As terms of comparison, Boccaccio's *Ninfale fiesolano* is documented by thirty manuscripts and the *Decameron* by fifty complete manuscripts (made before 1500).

[81] Jane Tylus, "On the Threshold of Paradise (*Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, or *Ameto*)", in: *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. by Victoria Kirkham/Michael Sherberg/Janet Levarie Smarr, Chicago 2013, pp. 133–145: 133.

[82] Botticelli's first commission for the Medici was a banner for the 1475 joust. See Acidini (note 8), p. 19; Antonio Paolucci, "Botticelli and the Medici: A Privileged Relationship", in: *Botticelli: From Lorenzo the Magnificent to Savonarola*, exh. cat. Paris/Florence 2003/04, ed. by Daniel Arasse/Pierluigi De Vecchi/Jonathan Katz Nelson, Milan 2003, pp. 69–76: 73.

[83] The Medici copies are Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, mss. Plut. 41.35 and 41.36. While they are documented in the Medici possession from only 1589 (see Angelo Maria Bandini, *Catalogus codicum Italicorum Bibliothecae Mediceae Laurentianae, Gaddianae, et Sanctae Crucis*, Florence 1778, cols. 153f.), they were made in the fifteenth century in Florence. Plut. 41.35 was produced in the workshop of Bartolomeo Varnucci in the

his extensive borrowings throughout his oeuvre.[84] So I add little to the historical picture by noticing an echo of the *Comedia* in Poliziano's ode *In puellam suam*. That poem starts with a long description of a girl's locks, which "fall gracefully on either side of your face, gracefully bound with golden knots, or loosely blowing in the breezes created by the wings of frolicking cupids, locks curled into a thousand ringlets, made comely and vigorous by the morning dew and the aroma of myrrh".[85] Poliziano's inspiration for this passage is taken to be Petrarch.[86] Yet separating the mass of hair into locks, knots, and strands, whose directions are made explicit, is typical of Boccaccio.[87] Poliziano did not quote him literally but added extra layers of references. The mentions of dew and myrrh, for instance, comes from Ovid, who regularly mentions the two hair ointments.[88] Still, the specificity of Poliziano's description, which focuses on the shapes hair takes and its continuity with the environment, finds a closer parallel in Boccaccio's. And so is Poliziano's goal: to stimulate the reader's erotic desire and show how a girl can hold power over him.

But could this also be Botticelli's intention? His elaborate coiffures provide the ideal platforms for Ameto's visual journeys. There are direct, precise connections between his paintings and Boccaccio's descriptions in the *Comedia*. In each instance, hair is both shapeless matter and disciplinary knot.[89] In each instance, hair's tortuous paths defy nature.[90] By constructing mazes of hair in which the eyes get lost, Botticelli produced surfaces for visual vagaries. Boccaccio renders Ameto's unremitting stare with a telling expression: "occhio continuo".[91] Ameto keeps looking and looking. Even when he manages to stare away, his desire pulls him back in. And to pull his viewers' stares back, Botticelli makes his coiffures sprawl in many directions. Locks flutter against the background and braids merge with the costume so that even when spectators depart from the head, those tentacles act like paths that bring them back. His laborious compositions do not just reveal one of the pulls of desire, in which one gives oneself to someone who does not exist but is created in one's imagination.[92] Rather, by making them wander through coils and wonder about where they may start and end, Botticelli turns his spectators into lovers. For what are lovers if not those who are enslaved by their own looking, both source of pleasure and cause of perdition? This definition is not mine; it comes from Andreas Capellanus, who, in his treatise *De amore* – popular in Florence in the fifteenth century even if it was composed some three centuries earlier –, defines the paradoxical nature of love as a force that empowers as much as it imprisons.[93]

1460s (Teresa De Robertis/Roberta Miriello, *I manoscritti datati della Biblioteca Riccardiana di Firenze*, Florence 1997–2013, II, pp. 49f.; *Boccaccio visualizzato* [note 47], II, pp. 120f.). A third manuscript (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, ms. Hamilton 90) was possibly owned by Giuliano de' Medici, duke of Nemours (Catalano [note 80], p. 263).

[84] Vittore Branca, *Poliziano e l'umanesimo della parola*, Turin 1983, pp. 44–52. Stanley Meltzoff, *Botticelli, Signorelli and Savonarola:* Theologia Poetica *and Painting from Boccaccio to Poliziano*, Florence 1987, p. 245, claims that "of all the influences on Poliziano, Boccaccio was the most pervasive". See also Corrado Bologna, *Tradizione e fortuna dei classici italiani*, Turin 1993, I, p. 206.

[85] "Comas decenter pendulas / utroque frontis margine, / nodis decenter aureis / nexas, decenter pinnulis / ludentium Cupidinum / subventilantibus vagas, / quas mille crispant annuli, / quas ros odorque myrrheus / commendat atque recreat" (Poliziano, *Odi*, VIII, 17–25).

[86] Charles Fantazzi, "The Style of Quattrocento Latin Love Poetry", in: *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, III (1996), pp. 127–146: 135.

[87] The closest term of comparison seems to me to be Fiammetta's hairstyle in the *Comedia*: Boccaccio (note 48), XII, 18–20.

[88] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, V, 53, and *idem*, *Medicamina faciei feminae*, 88–91. Dew is also a biblical reference: Solomon 5:2.

[89] That is how Boccaccio ([note 48], IX, 13) describes Lia's hairstyle: "i capelli con maestria non usato avere alla testa rivolti e con sottile oro, a quelli non diseguale, essere tenuti con piacevole nodo alle soffianti aure".

[90] "I biondi capelli [...] non so come legati" (*ibidem*, XV, 24).

[91] *Ibidem*, V, 4.

[92] Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire*, London 1998, pp. 69–71.

[93] Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. by John Jay Parry, New York 1941, pp. 28–33, 187. A vulgarization of Capellanus' trea-

4. Bowknots

It is by now clear that love in the fifteenth century was not just an effect of reciprocal vision: a flowing of desire from eye to eye, an archery session in which the pupils are both Cupid's targets and shooting platforms.[94] Love was also the result of deflected vision: eyes pulled by hair, in whose tangles they got ensnared, like prey caught by a hunter's net.[95] Not all Florentines approached paintings with a mercantile eye that searched for geometrical shapes, assessed pigment amounts, and, generally, monetized what it saw, as Michael Baxandall argued.[96] Some of those men also looked to get lost, actively searching for a form of entrapment that had been sung by poets such as Cino da Pistoia. In his famous *Omè, ch'io sono all'amoroso nodo*, Cino reflected on the power of a woman's braids to catch and hold his heart, so effectively that the poet eventually surrendered: "love is killing me by beautiful hair alone."[97]

Boccaccio attended Cino's classes on law in Naples – Cino was a famed jurist, not just a respected poet – and reworked *Omè, ch'io sono all'amoroso nodo* into *Se quelle trecce d'or che m'ànno il core*.[98] This poem became a prototype for the hair descriptions of the *Comedia*, which Boccaccio completed after leaving Naples. His fascination for hair, however, was expressed through other early compositions. Among them I signal *Il Cancro ardea, passata la sext'hora*, in which he describes falling in love with a woman standing on a shore. She is surrounded by a group of girlfriends, but, despite the crowd, the distance, and the crepuscular light, Boccaccio catches a glimpse of her glistening coiffure, in which "no hair escaped from her beautiful bun"[99] (these are the words that also describe Fiammetta's hair in the *Comedia*).[100] And because of that hair, and that hair only, he felt stoned, both in the sense of 'petrified' like the rock on which he is sitting and 'intoxicated', as if visually drugged.[101] The poem can be read as a draft of the opening sequence of the *Comedia*, in which Ameto discovers Lia and the other nymphs bathing in a river from behind a rock.

Drawing not only from Boccaccio but also from Cino's much-read works, Botticelli devised pictorial solutions to render the *laccio d'amore*, the powerful hold of hair. In the alleged portrait of Simonetta (Fig. I), two large braids sprout from behind her neck and border the edges of her dress, framing her elongated neck. Giusto de' Conti, in his poem *La bella mano*, writes: "the loose tresses around her throat, from which her slow and kind words come out, so that, by listening, they steal my heart and my soul".[102] This canzone was fairly popular, but not as popu-

tise follows Boccaccio's *Comedia* in one of the Medici copies (Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, ms. Plut. 41.36, fols. 1–50 and 51–78). For the translation and circulation of Capellanus' treatise in fifteenth-century Florence, see Orazio Croce, *Influssi del* De amore *di Andrea Cappellano nella Scuola poetica siciliana: una revisione critica*, Ph.D. diss., Catania 2010, pp. 249–255.

[94] The metaphor is a trope of fifteenth-century poetry, from Francesco Accolti to Poliziano. For the former see Carlo Oliva, *Poesia italiana: il Quattrocento*, Milan 1978, p. 17; for the latter, Poliziano, *Stanze*, I, 41f.

[95] The simile is *ibidem*, I, 42 and I, 59.

[96] Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, Oxford 1988 ([1]1972), pp. 81–108.

[97] The poem is worth repeating in full: "Omè, ch'io sono all'amoroso nodo / legato con due belle trecce bionde / e strettamente ritenuto, a modo / d'uccel ch'è preso al vischio fra le fronde; / onde mi veggio morto, s'io non odo / l'umile voce ch'a Pietà risponde, / ché come più, battendo, istringe il nodo, / così credo ch'Amor più mi confonde. / Confondemi crescendo tutte volte, / sì come crescon nell'aureo colore / le belle trecce ch'al cor tengo avvolte. / Aiutami, Pietà, che n'hai valore; / ché, sanza l'altre gran bellezze molte, / solo coi be' capei m'uccide Amore" (Cino da Pistoia, *Rime*, XI).

[98] Martina Mazzetti, "Boccaccio e Cino: la costruzione di una poetica tra riscritture, echi e (false) parodie", in: *Cino da Pistoia nella storia della poesia italiana*, ed. by Rossend Arqués i Corominas/Silvia Tranfaglia, Florence 2016, pp. 209–232.

[99] "L'aureo vello le cingea 'l capo in guisa che capello / del vago nodo non usciva fuora" (Giovanni Boccaccio, *Rime*, XXII [XXIII]).

[100] Boccaccio [note 48], XII, 18–20, and above, note 59. For the connection, see Leuker (note 84), pp. 229f.

[101] As Giovan Battista Baldelli explains, Boccaccio's descriptions of the narrator's eyes as "adoppiati", that is "petrified", phonetically refers to the intoxication by opium. See Giovanni Boccaccio, *Rime*, ed. by Giovan Battista Baldelli, Livorno 1802, p. 180.

[102] "Le chiome sciolte intorno a quella gola, / onde vien quel parlare

lar as Lorenzo de' Medici's *Furtum Veneris et Martis*, in which "her white neck is enveloped by a braid, the hard chain of passionate lovers and the strong snare that never unties".[103] By painting them joined at the bosom, Botticelli takes his viewer to Simonetta's heart by means of chain-like braids.

And among the other poets that played on the *laccio d'amore*, I must mention Petrarch, who returned to the motif several times in his *Trionfi* as well as other poems, making hair and the snare of love converge by referring to both as *nodo*. In *L'aura celeste che 'n quel verde lauro,* he for once separated between the two, relinquishing their homonymy. There, Petrarch articulates the way he has been imprisoned by love, by specifying, "I mean the blond hair and the noose of curls that binds the soul".[104] The verses stimulated Lorenzo de' Medici to compose *Ch'è quel ch'io veggo dentro agli occhi belli*, in which the woman disarms her lover and ties him with her hair.[105]

These verses ought not to be seen as sources, as Botticelli was not merely illustrating poems.[106] Botticelli's paintings cannot be decoded only through texts: there is so much more in them. Still, those poems are useful for historicizing the means of falling in love (the hair, the snare, the eyes, the heart). Taken together, they offer ways into the large stream of associations about hair and love from which Botticelli drew and to which he contributed.

Jonathan Nelson has recently taken up a suggestion that in the 1470s, before painting Simonetta's portrait, Botticelli may have supplied an illustration for a copy of Petrarch's *Trionfo d'Amore* (Fig. 8); the manuscript is today in Ravenna's Biblioteca Classense.[107] The folio is filled by the chariot of fire, which Petrarch describes as pulled by four white horses. Botticelli is sticking to the text when depicting the studs. He, however, departs from it when he draws the five handcuffed slaves, since Petrarch describes the victims of Cupid as a horde of people that the chariot leaves behind. Botticelli's love float also has little in common with those elegant chariots painted on Florentine cassoni, where everything stands composed. His chariot is a machine of fury, pulled by out-of-control beasts, running like mad. The slaves' hands are tied behind their backs, their legs hang loose from the platform on which they sit, under the watchful eyes of putti-soldiers preparing arrows and thrusting spears from around a blazing fire. This frontispiece, in other words, thematizes physical violence and imprisonment, which Botticelli emphasizes through his use of ropes. Botticelli multiplies the number of horse bridles and the cords, going as far as imagining one that links all prisoners. Some of the chariot components also suggest that they may have been made out of cord. He renders the *lacci d'amore* as eminently physical, far from Petrarch's descriptions as abstract restraints. For Petrarch, a *laccio* does not even need a real encounter to catch its preys, as love can tie men without them noticing ("Tal per te nodo fassi, e tu nol sai") and even without them looking ("E tal che

umano e tardo, / che l'anima, ascoltando, e il cor m'invola" (Giusto de' Conti, *La bella mano*, Lanciano 1916, p. 146). The translation is my own.

[103] "Intorno al col suo bianco treccia avolga, / degli ardenti amator' dura catena / e forte laccio che già mai si sciolga" (Lorenzo de' Medici, *Tutte le opere*, ed. by Paolo Orvieto, Rome 1992, II, p. 849; my translation).

[104] "Dico le chiome bionde, e 'l crespo laccio, / che sì soavemente lega et stringe / l'alma, che d'umiltate e non d'altr'armo" (Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, CXCVII, 9–11; translation by Anthony S. Klein, available online at http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/canzoniere.html).

[105] "Perché l'arco e li stral' di man m'estorse, e mi legò co' suoi biondi capelli" (Lorenzo de' Medici [note 103], I, p. 169).

[106] Botticelli, for instance, painted similar braids in his *Fortitude* of 1471, that is before Lorenzo wrote his poem. Lorenzo's *Furtum Veneris et Martis* (see note 103) is considered a companion piece to Poliziano's *Orpheus* (on which see Mario Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano: storia e metastoria*, Lecce 1995, p. 93), and the latter is dated between 1475 and 1485 (see Matteo Bosisio, "Proposte per la *Fabula di Orfeo* di Poliziano: datazione, lettura tematica, occasione di rappresentazione", in: *Rivista di studi italiani,* XXXIII [2015], pp. 112–151: 115–130 and 139).

[107] Jonathan K. Nelson, in: *Botticelli e il suo tempo*, exh. cat., ed. by Alessandro Cecchi/Shigetoshi Osano, Tokyo 2016, p. 98. I am grateful to Jonathan Nelson for providing me with an English translation of his essay, published in Japanese. Before him, the proposal had been put forward by

8 Sandro Botticelli, *Triumph of Love*, ca. 1470–1475. Ravenna, Biblioteca Classense, ms. 143, fol. 141v

9 Jetton bearing device of Philip the Fair, 1492. Amsterdam, Nationale Numismatische Collectie (Koninklijk Penningkabinet)

mai non ti vedrà né vide / col bel nodo d'amor teco congiunge").[108]

Botticelli instead approaches the *lacci* as material ropes, such as those binding the initials of two lovers that appear on many fifteenth-century objects, especially made in France (Fig. 9). We know that some French manuscripts decorated with bowknots arrived in Italian courtly libraries, such as that in Naples.[109] But Florentine merchants traveling in Savoy or Burgundy would have also seen *lacs d'amour* in seals, stained glass, and tapestries.[110] Some of them probably noticed the bowknot on the cover of Hans Memling's *Triptych of Jan Floreins* (Fig. 10, see right margin in the middle) in the hospital of Bruges, the town which the Florentines elected as their northern European trading hub.[111] By the time Memling completed the painting, in 1479,[112] he had built an affectionate clientele of Florentine merchants, many of whom sent their portraits to Florence, where Botticelli used them as models for his own works.[113]

Annarosa Garzelli, "Un 'Trionfo dell'Amore' di ambito botticelliano", in: *Prospettiva*, 33–36 (1983–1984), pp. 83–92: 84.

[108] Petrarch, *Triumphus Cupidinis*, I, 96, and II, 23f.

[109] For instance, Estienne Chevalier's book of hours by Jean Fouquet (1452–1460).

[110] Margaret Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, New York 1976, pp. 155–174; Adolfo Salvatore Cavallo, *The Unicorn Tapestries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York 1998, pp. 34–36. On the relations between Florence and Bourges, see Michel Mollat, "Les affaires de Jacques Cœur à Florence", in: *Studi in onore di Armando Sapori*, Milan 1957, II, pp. 761–771. On the knots decorating the arms of the dukes of Savoy, see Michel Pastoureau, "L'emblématique princière à la fin du Moyen Age: essai de lexique et de typologie", in: *Héraldique et emblématique de la Maison de Savoie (XI^e–XVI^e s.)*, ed. by Bernard Andenmatten/Agostino Paravicini Bagliani/Annick Vadon, Lausanne 1994, pp. 11–43: 41f.

[111] Paula Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Painting 1400–1500*, New Haven 2004, pp. 45–51.

[112] Barbara G. Lane, *Hans Memling: Master Painter in Fifteenth-Century Bruges*, London 2009, p. 265.

[113] Memling was a member of the Madonna of the Snow confraternity, which counted many Italians. See Laura Galoppini, *Mercanti toscani e Bruges nel tardo Medioevo*, Pisa 2009, pp. 323–325. Botticelli's *Man holding a medal* is considered a rework of Memling's *Portrait of a man with a coin*. See Dagmar Korbacher, in: *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini*, exh. cat. New York 2011, ed. by Keith Christiansen/Stefan Weppelmann, New Haven 2011, pp. 330–332.

10 Hans Memling, *Triptych of Jan Floreins*, right wing, 1479. Bruges, Musea Brugge, Sint-Janshospitaal

We have no record that Botticelli ever painted bowknots, even if the motif was common, particularly for objects used in jousts.[114] Still, the large tufts ending Simonetta's three side braids (Fig. 1) are very similar to their tassels. Could Botticelli have included them to visualize the binding power of coiffures? Such tufts do not appear in any other portrait of the time and must have been Botticelli's invention. And they must have been striking given that they got registered in a drawing today in Oxford (Fig. 11).[115] While ignoring the cameo and neckline of the painting, the sketch pays tremendous attention to those tufts, which the draftsman highlighted with the same care he paid to the nose and the cheeks.

Voluminous and wavy, they also appear as the reversals of the flames that burn at the top of love floats (Fig. 8). Many of the texts that circulated in fifteenth-century Florence insisted on their connection. Antonio Beccadelli stressed that flames were an attribute of Venus; and Hymen, the god of marriage, holds a blazing torch.[116] Boccaccio describes Cupid's power as incendiary in the *Genealogia deorum gentilium*.[117] And in *La bella mano*, Giusto de' Conti explains that, once unleashed by looking, the *laccio d'amore* hidden in a woman's hair reaches the poet's heart and burns it.[118] With those fiery tufts, Botticelli evokes the erotic fire kindled by *lacci d'amore*.[119]

Giusto makes an enlightening comment in this poem. He says that the flaming *laccio* did not bring him death but rather burnt at the intensity that he set ("a mia voglia arsi e non soffersi morte").[120] While

[114] For an example, see the 'catalogue' of objects used in jousts that is London, British Museum, ms. Cart. Harl. Antiq. 83 H. I. Boccaccio's *Comedia* is not indifferent to the topos of the *laccio d'amore*: Leuker (note 84), pp. 226, 235, reads the *Comedia* as Ameto's quest for boundness. In Greek, after all, 'Ameto' means 'unbound' (*Ἄδμητος*) whereas Lia refers to the Siculo-Tuscan verb *liare*, 'to tie'.

[115] For this drawing and the question of its attribution, see most recently Lorenza Melli, "Botticelli als Zeichner: Seine Kopfstudien", in: *Botticelli* (note 41), pp. 99–109: 103–106. On the arrival of the drawing in England, see Mark Evans, "Whigs and Primitives: Dante and Botticelli in England from Jonathan Richardson to John Flaxman", in: *Botticelli Past and Present*, ed. by Ana Debenedetti/Caroline Elam, London 2019, pp. 94–115: 96.

[116] Antonio Beccadelli, *The Hermaphrodite*, Liverpool 1984, p. 46. Beccadelli dedicated *The Hermaphrodite* to Cosimo de' Medici, Lorenzo's grandfather. Hymen holding a torch decorates an oration, by Pandolfo Collenuccio, for the wedding of Costanzo Sforza and Camilla of Aragon, which took place in Pesaro in 1475. See Monica Meloni, "Il matrimonio di Costanzo Sforza con Camilla d'Aragona e l'orazione nuziale di Pandolfo Collenuccio", in: *Studia picena*, LXIX (2004), pp. 137–214.

strengthening the idea that hair inflames desire, his emphasis on utter control – it is him who chooses to look at the woman's hair and the extent to which to burn – implies that such a pleasure is egotistic.

In another illumination of Petrarch's Triumph of Love (Fig. 12), putti hold arrows whose burning tips are very similar to Botticelli's tufts. They stand on a platform topped by two female profiles whose back braids curl up and intertwine, forming two torches, which serve as the platform for Cupid. All around, putti's heads are on fire, torches blaze in all directions, a wife rides her husband by holding him by his hair. The manuscript is today in Madrid but was made in Florence by Ricciardo di Nanni, one of the Medici's most talented illuminators.[121] Ricciardo is largely forgotten today but should be numbered among those painters who revealed the transformative power of hair. In the copy of Cicero's works that he decorated for the Medici, he included a lady whose hair is styled by two cupids (Fig. 13). The scene could serve as an illustration of the verses by Poliziano I mentioned before, the ones about putti fanning a woman's veil.

If I insist on manuscripts, it is because Botticelli's inventive coiffures resonate with the book culture of his time. And by book culture I do not mean only tales such as Boccaccio's *Comedia* or the transcriptions of popular love songs, but also their frontispieces decorated with love chariots and covered in labyrinthine escalons.[122] Botticelli's Simonetta (Fig. 1) would find more cultural traction in a library than an art gallery. It has gone unnoticed, for instance, that, just because

11 Sandro Botticelli (attr.),
La Bella Simonetta,
ca. 1476–1487.
Oxford, Ashmolean Museum,
inv. WA 1863.613r

[117] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*, ed. by Vincenzo Romano, Bari 1951, V, 22, 2. Boccaccio's source is Apuleius' description of Cupid as "armed with torch and arrows" (Apuleius, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. by Edward J. Kenney, London 2004, p. 60).

[118] "Il laccio ov'io fui preso nel bel giorno / con nuova arte nascoso ha tra le chiome […] talché mirando appresso lor le chiome / a mia voglia arsi e non soffersi morte / sì mi rubaron dolcemente il core" (De' Conti [note 102], p. 27). See also Matteo Trillini, "*Topoi* di ascendenza classica nella *Bella Mano* di Giusto de' Conti", in: *Cuadernos de Filología Italiana*, XXI (2014), pp. 155–179: 165–168.

[119] Similarly, Boccaccio also sees the *lacci* as burning: "ch'offeso i' son sì forte da questi legami, che giorno e notte i' sto in fuoco acceso, senza speranza d'uscirne giammai" (*Ninfale fiesolano*, 173).

[120] De' Conti (note 102), p. 27.

[121] Annarosa Garzelli, *Miniatura fiorentina del Rinascimento: 1440–1525. Un primo censimento*, Florence 1985, pp. 55–66.

[122] See, for instance, Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. Vat. lat. 1743, fol. 1r, where Ricciardo includes a lady whose locks sprout in volutes that echo the escalons framing the page (cfr. https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.1743).

12 Ricciardo di Nanni, *Triumph of Love*, last quarter of the fifteenth century. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, ms. Vitr/22/4, fol. 12v

they are no longer three but four, now plumes also serve as the headgear of a winged woman in Piero de' Medici's breviary, his most sumptuous manuscript (Fig. 14).[123]

5. Ovid's and Apuleius' Alternative Voices

It is hair's indeterminacy – both its physiological in-betweenness and its pictorial abstractness – that enabled Botticelli to cluster forms with the freedom of manuscript marginalia. And yet, if Botticelli came to see hair as a field of possibilities, it was because of Ovid. Leon Battista Alberti, who recommended seeing hair as animated as flames and as pliable as leaves in his treatise on painting, did his part too, but while his passage has become, with Petrarch's verses, art historians' go-to commentary for Renaissance hair, it hardly had the reach and the richness of Ovid's descriptions.[124] No other author wrote about hair more attentively than Ovid, and his texts represented the most important alternative to the religious deprecation of hairstyling. His oeuvre showed hairstyling not as a depraved activity but as a source of erotic and aesthetic joy. By reading Ovid with such a focus – and the range of works for this is vast, from the *Amores* to the *Metamorphoses* – it becomes clear that Ovid was fixated with hair. He discovered its powerful complexity early on in his studies and kept returning to it for the rest of his literary life.

Among the passages that he dedicated to hair, the most substantial is in the *Ars amatoria*, where he examines hair's infinite versatility. "It is not possible for me to put a number to so many hairstyles",[125] Ovid writes. Hairdos can be fluffy or wavy, loose or undone.[126] He explains how a wig can both hide hair and amplify it

[123] Frances Ames-Lewis, *The Library and Manuscripts of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici*, New York 1984, pp. 358f.

[124] Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture: The Latin Texts of* De Pictura *and* De Statua, ed. and trans. by Cecil Grayson, London 1972, p. 87. See, for instance, Papapetros (note 22), pp. 45 and 68f. It may also be worth reminding that the circulation of *De pictura* was limited. This is argued by both Wright (note 6), pp. 227–250, and Patricia Lee Rubin, *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, London 2007, pp. 95f.

[125] "Nec mihi tot positus numero comprendere fas est" (Ovid, *Ars amatoria*, III, 151).

[126] *Ibidem*, III, 133–168.

through extensions, for which women should thank nature, "for having given you many ways to correct blemishes and achieve beauty".[127] By stressing the variety of hairstyles, which he culls from mythological figures (Ariadne, Diana, Laodamia), Ovid invites his readers to revel in their possibilities.

Ovid was widely read in the fifteenth century and many copies of the *Ars amatoria* circulated in Florence.[128] Yet Florentines encountered the text through a medieval prologue, which has been eliminated from modern editions:

> If you, young people, want to understand the doctrine to light up and nourish that amorous fire whose flames devour bone marrows and consume most of your soul's vigor [...] we [scholars who translate Latin texts in the vernacular] satisfy your requests [...]. The author [of this treatise] was Ovid and its subject is love. The treatise's order is explained by the rubric below and its utility is enormous as the youth who studies this book and follows its instructions will love wisely, and by loving wisely he will fulfill his desire.[129]

13 Ricciardo di Nanni, *Two putti style a woman's hair*, 1459. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Plut. 48.8, fol. 2r

14 Francesco d'Antonio del Chierico, marginal decoration in Piero de' Medici's breviary, 1461. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Plut. 17.28, fol. 398r

[127] "O quantum indulget vestro natura decori, / quarum sunt multis damna pianda modis" (*ibidem*, III, 159f.).

[128] Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century*, Cambridge *et al.* 2001, p. 247. Black recalls the Dominican friar Giovanni Dominici deploring that young people read Ovid's lascivious texts. On Ovid's textual tradition, see Edward J. Kenney, "The Manuscript Tradition of Ovid's *Amores, Ars Amatoria*, and *Remedia Amoris*", in: *The Classical Quarterly*, XII (1962), pp. 1–31: 13–20.

[129] "Se a voi, o giovani, dilecta d'intendere la dottrina d'accendere et nutricare l'amoroso fuoco, la cui fiamma divora le midolla dell'ossa e consuma gran parte del vigore dell'animo [...] soddisfacciamo a le vostre petitioni [...]. Autore fu dunque Ovidio e la matera è amore; l'ordine è cotale chente dimostra sotto la seguente robrica; l'uttilitade è grande, però che 'l giovane sappiendo questo libro e seguendo il suo comandamento amerà saviamente e amando saviamente verrà a effetto del suo desiderio" (Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, ms. Plut. 41.36, fol. 79r). The *Ars amatoria* corresponds to fols. 79r–99v of this manuscript. On its attribution to the notary Andrea Lancia (doc. 1297–1357), see Vanna Lippi Bigazzi, *I volgarizzamenti trecenteschi dell'*Ars amandi *e dei* Remedia amoris, Florence 1987, II, pp. 909–917. Cf. Guglielmo Gorni, "Notizie su Dante, Andrea Lancia e l'Ovidio volgare", in: *Studi medievali*, ser. III, XXIX (1988), pp. 761–769: 767. See also Egidio

I am quoting from a Medici manuscript, but the text returns in other Florentine copies with minimal changes.[130] The Medici volume, though, is particularly interesting as it combines Ovid's *Ars amatoria* with Boccaccio's *Comedia*, a pairing that brings out new meaning. As the prologue makes Ovid's poem pass as a treatise that converts love's destructive power into a path to wisdom, so the *Comedia* reads as a dramatization of the moralized *Ars amatoria*. Reading the two texts next to each other turns Boccaccio's hairstyles into applications of Ovid's theory: looking at hair is the first step to love (which the prologue specifies as wise, controlled love, not the carnal lust of classical gods). The Medici volume thus offers both a gallery of hairstyles and their philosophical justification, everything that a painter such as Botticelli needed to know to feel that his laboring on coiffures was well-spent time.

Boccaccio read Ovid. Yet his *Comedia* also depends on Apuleius' *Metamorphoses,* the tale of Lucius, a man obsessed with women's hair. Lucius' attraction to the slave Photis, whom he tries to seduce and who accidentally turns him into a hairy ass, is triggered by her hair, first and ultimate delight.[131] This is what the protagonist-narrator Lucius writes:

> As to the rest of her [body], I've nothing to say: it's only a woman's head and her hair that I'm really interested in. It's what I like to feast my eyes on first in the street, and then enjoy in private indoors. There are good and positive reasons for this preference. The hair is the dominant part of the body: it's placed in the most obvious and conspicuous position and is the first thing we notice [...].[132]

He adds that when "women want to show off their personal attractions, [they] discard their clothes altogether" and let their hair do the talking.[133] Lucius goes on and on, insisting on the pre-eminence of hair over all other features:

> If you were to despoil the head of even the most beautiful of women of its hair – though it's blasphemy even to mention it, and I devoutly hope that such a thing will never happen to make the point – though she had come down from heaven, though she had been born from the sea and reared among the waves, I say though she were Venus herself [...], if she were bald, not even her Vulcan would love her.[134]

Boccaccio also read Apuleius. Petrarch read it too and occasionally returned to it, borrowing some passages here and there, but did not admire it.[135] Boccaccio, instead, highly esteemed *The Golden Ass*, the title by which the *Metamorphoses* are better known.[136] He transcribed the poem in his own hand and, later in life, summarized the fable of Cupid and Psyche in his *Genealogia*.[137] He, however, must have kept a copy at close

Bellorini, *Note sulle traduzioni italiane dell'*Ars amatoria *e dei* Remedia amoris *d'Ovidio anteriori al Rinascimento*, Bergamo 1892, pp. 12–15.

130 Another version of the *Ars amatoria* with the medieval prologue is Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, ms. II.II.60, part 3, fols. 1r–57r.

131 Apuleius [note 117], II, 8.

132 *Ibidem*.

133 *Ibidem*.

134 *Ibidem*, II, 9. Here, Apuleius seems to refer to Propertius, *Elegies*, I, 2: "What avails it, my love, to step out with coiffured hair and flutter the sheer folds of a Coan dress? What avails it to drench your locks with Syrian perfume and to vaunt yourself in foreign finery, to destroy your natural charm with purchased ornament, preventing your figure from displaying its own true merits? Believe me, there is no improving your appearance: Love is naked, and loves not beauty gained by artifice" (Propertius, *Elegies*, ed. and trans. by George P. Goold, Cambridge 1990, pp. 41–43). The 'bald Venus' passage was well known in the fifteenth century. Francesco Barbaro cited it in the treatise *De re uxoria*, which he presented to Lorenzo de' Medici the Elder in 1416. See Cristina Fenu, "Una Venere calva: paradossi visivi tra allusività letteraria e mondanità veneziana nel 'De re uxoria' di Francesco Barbaro", in: *Archivum mentis*, IV (2015), pp. 15–40: 32f.

135 Robert H. F. Carver, *The Protean Ass: The* Metamorphoses *of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Oxford 2007, pp. 124–127.

136 *Ibidem*, pp. 127–141; Julia Haig Gaisser, *The Fortunes of Apuleius and the* Golden Ass*: A Study in Transmission and Reception*, Princeton 2008, pp. 99–121.

hand also when writing the *Comedia*, given the density of the borrowings. Apuleius' version of the judgment of Paris, which emphasizes the goddesses' nudity, returns in the *Comedia*.[138] Apuleius' description of the deception of Psyche's sisters is reworked by Boccaccio into Agapes' tale.[139] And Boccaccio returns more than once to Lucius' rapturous account of Photis' hair, cited above. When Boccaccio describes Emilia's hair, he is paraphrasing segments of that passage:

> Ameto recognized that the long abundant blond hair was the special beauty of this maiden; and if Venus, born and nourished in the waves and loved in heaven, were to find herself divested of such hair, though perfect in all other graces, she would scarcely appeal to her Mars. Therefore, he deems the beauty of her hair so important for a woman that anyone, whoever she may be, though she go covered in precious garments, in rich stones, in glimmering gems and bright gold, without her hair tressed in due order, she cannot seem properly adorned; yet in this maiden the disorder thereof renders her still more charming to Ameto's eyes.[140]

It is not just the commentary of the bald Venus that leads to Apuleius. Boccaccio's comparison of hair to gems and jewels is Apuleian, as is his playing on *ornato/disordinato,* a calque of Apuleius' "inordinatus ornatus".[141] Emilia's fetchingly casual hairstyle is Photis'. "As for my dear Photis", Apuleius had written, "it wasn't that she had taken great pains with her hairstyles – it was its casualness that was so fetching."[142]

But Apuleius' passage did more than simply provide Boccaccio with exciting ways of talking about hair; it equipped him with a mission. Lucius is the prototype not only of Ameto but also of Boccaccio's ideal readers and his narrating voice. At the very outset of the *Comedia*, Boccaccio states that his work will speak of love and that, to do so, he will write not as a poet but as the lover that he is:

> And so, with a voice fitting to my humble condition, and without fear of censure, with the help of her to whom I belong, I shall sing of her not as a poet but as a lover. […] Therefore let whoever loves listen; to the others, I pay no regard; their cares can keep them all.[143]

Boccaccio spends an enormous amount of time describing hair because Apuleius convinced him that, to a lover, hair was a ground for self-discovery. When concluding his long section on Photis' appearance, Apuleius commented on Lucius' "fascination of its [hair's] color and sheen: now vivid enough to outshine the rays of the sun, now gently reflecting them; […] sometimes […] perfumed with Arabian essences and delicately parted, it is gathered behind to give back to the lover's gaze a more flattering reflection."[144] What better word than reflecting, which recalls the metaphor of the mirror, to synthesize the intense scrutiny

[137] Boccaccio (note 117), V, 22, 1. Boccaccio is explicit as to his source.

[138] Apuleius (note 117), X, 30–34; Boccaccio (note 48), XXXI, 3–7.

[139] Apuleius (note 117), V, 9–10. Boccaccio (note 48), XXXII, 8–43, which ends with a direct reference to Psyche. On this borrowing, see Carver (note 135), pp. 129 and 213f.

[140] "A quelli con intero animo Ameto pensando, conosce i lunghi, biondi e copiosi capelli essere della donna speziale bellezza; de' quali se essa Citerea, amata nel cielo, nata nell'onde e nutricata in quelle, bene che d'ogni altra grazia piena, si vegga di quelli nudata, appena potrà al suo Marte piacere. Adunque tanta estima la degnità de' capelli alle femine quanta, se, qualunque si sia, di preziose veste, di ricche pietre, di rilucenti gemme e di caro oro circundata proceda, sanza quelli in dovuto ordine posti, non possa ornata parere; ma in costei essi, disordinati, più graziosa la rendono negli occhi d'Ameto" (Boccaccio [note 48], XII, 8f.).

[141] "In a nutshell, hair is so important that whatever adornments a woman may appear in – gold, jewels, fine clothes – unless she's made the most of her hair, you can't call her properly dressed" (Apuleius [note 117], II, 9). The opposition *ordinatus/ornatus* appears at II, 8.

[142] *Ibidem*, II, 8.

[143] "Per che con voce convenevole al mio umele stato, sanza paura di riprensione, non poeta, ma piuttosto amante, quella, di cui io sono, aiutandomi, canterò. […] E però chi ama, ascolti, degli altri non curo: la loro sollecitudine gli abbia tutti" (Boccaccio [note 48], I, 12–14).

[144] Apuleius (note 117), II, 9.

of a libidinous eye, which does not see much even if it cannot stop looking?

The Golden Ass was printed in Rome in 1469.[145] Yet, according to Julia Gaisser, it was not that printed edition but Boccaccio who made Apuleius' work famous. Its success was particularly impressive in Florence, where more than a quarter of the surviving manuscripts of *The Golden Ass* were produced.[146] Already in the 1420s Florentine humanists could compare multiple versions of Apuleius' text, something impossible for many other works and that would have been unthinkable fifty years earlier. The Medici ended up owning two copies. One, the Pluteus 54.13 of the Biblioteca Laurenziana, was made for Piero de' Medici in the 1450s and decorated by Francesco d'Antonio del Chierico, the same illuminator of the *Comedia* that was sent to Naples.[147]

6. Conclusion: Loving the Medusa

At this point, the historical picture is sharp enough. By mutual echoing and reflecting, a number of voices and visual comparisons have strengthened the idea that hair was not just a generic feature of female beauty but a threshold to erotic desire. Botticelli subscribed to this vision by creating paintings of women whose hairstyles took the eyes of men into labyrinths of lines. Wandering through them, their gazes transformed into the unremitting, cannibal gaze of lovers, exemplified by Ameto's *occhio continuo* and Lucius' visual 'feasting' on hair.

Botticelli carefully devised his compositions, but the culture that put them to use seems to have been inherently fragile. After *The calumny of Apelles*, Botticelli himself moved away from hairstyling. The only late painting in which he still shows an interest in hair is the Bergamo *Redeemer* (Fig. 15). There, shiny hair falls on Christ's shoulders, as symmetrical and repetitive as veined marble panels in churches. Christ does not interact with his hair, one hand blesses and the other measures his chest wound, a popular object of devotion at the turn of the century.[148] Only on his left shoulder does Christ's hair get a bit more animated: tiny curls go up in the background and its strands flare a little, one of them jerkily twisting in a couple of additional curves. But that's about it: nothing remotely resembling the volumes and the evolutions of a decade earlier.

The dullness of the *Redeemer*'s hair mirrors the Petrarchan tropes into which Boccaccio's hair descriptions fell, far from his early experiments. As Boccaccio confessed in his *Genealogia*, hair had no function outside of a love context:

> Of what use is the hair on the head? None, as all agree. Yet many claim such value for it that, if Venus were without it, she could not please Mars, for all her attendant graces. […] This is enough to show that a thing precious for no other reason may become so for ornament's sake.[149]

Once more, Boccaccio drew from Apuleius' example of the bald Venus even if, in this case, he mentioned it to launch an apology of poetry. "This is enough to prove my work a valuable one merely on the score of ornament", he stated.[150] Without ornament, poetry would not please.

[145] Carver (note 135), p. 163. On the success of this edition, see pp. 172f.

[146] Gaisser (note 136), pp. 130–132, 144f.

[147] *Ibidem*, p. 150, note 112. A second manuscript (Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, ms. Plut. 54.12) was made by Antonio di Mario in 1425 for either Piero de' Medici or his father Cosimo and is mentioned in the 1456 inventory (Ames-Lewis [note 123], p. 279).

[148] Martina Bagnoli, "Mary's Measure: Touch and Taste in Carlo Crivelli's Boston Lamentation", in: *Les cinq sens au Moyen Âge*, conference proceedings Poitiers 2012–2014, ed. by Éric Palazzo, Paris 2016, pp. 729–743: 731.

[149] Boccaccio (note 117), XV, 1. For the translation: *Boccaccio on Poetry: Being the Preface and Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio's Genealogia Deorum Gentilium in an English Version*, ed. and trans. by Charles G. Osgood, Princeton 1930, p. 104.

[150] *Ibidem.*

Such reasoning, however, was short-lived. Boccaccio did not persevere with the idea that ornate writing – that is, secular, poetical, mythological writing in opposition to religious commentary – could be justified by ornament's sake alone and, in the *Genealogia*, rushed to test other justifications. Poetry was useful, he added, and it was edifying too, two points that did not supplement the previous point but invalidated it.[151] Because, as Boccaccio himself reasons, there is nothing useful and edifying in hair and ornament.

Boccaccio wrote the last two books of the *Genealogia*, often published independently as a reflection on poetry, in response to attacks of cavillers and theologians. His portrayal of his critics remains fairly vague, but historians have identified one specific attack in the prophecy of the famous miracle-working Carthusian monk Pietro Petroni, who in 1361, when Boccaccio was at work on the *Genealogia*, dreamed of the poet's death and urged him to give up on his secular studies to prepare his soul for God.[152] The prophecy shook Boccaccio, who even thought to sell his library. He wrote to Petrarch to ask for advice and how he would price his books. And Petrarch, from whose reply we know of this series of events, dissuaded him from giving up on literature by arguing that there are multiple ways to find solace and virtue in life, the study of classical literature being one of them.[153]

Boccaccio's reasoning and his letter both point to hesitation in backing ornament for ornament's sake. But, then, his *Comedia* already betrayed a similar wavering, as Ameto's erotic gaze eventually led to a process of self-knowledge and spiritual refinement. Botticelli's shift in approach to hairstyles followed a similar trajectory. As he pairs hairstyling with deceit in his *Calumny of Apelles*, he presents it as the physical equivalent of vacuity. Boccaccio, too, reached a similar conclusion. In *Corbaccio*, which he wrote in 1355, he describes in great detail a session of hairstyling so as to exemplify the obsession of a vain woman, "who highly desires to be seen" ("sommamente desiderosa d'essere guatata").[154] And in his *Genealogia* he even articulates his own change of heart in his tale of Medusa, whose hair is first erotic means and then pointless vanity.[155]

15 Sandro Botticelli, *Christ the Redeemer*, ca. 1500. Bergamo, Accademia Carrara

[151] *Ibidem*, XV, 3.

[152] Guido Traversari, "Il beato Pietro Petroni senese e la conversione del Boccaccio", in: *Rassegna pugliese di scienze, lettere ed arti*, XXII (1905), pp. 76–82. On the chronology of the *Genealogia*, see Jon Solomon, "Introduction", in: Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, ed. and trans. by *idem*, Cambridge, Mass., 2011–2017, I, pp. vii–xxxvi: viii–x.

[153] Petrarch, *Seniles*, I, 5 (28 May 1362).

[154] Boccaccio (note 74), p. 55 (for the quotation) and pp. 51–54 (for the hairstyling session).

[155] Boccaccio (note 117), X, 11. Boccaccio repeats Medusa's story in *De claris mulieribus*, composed in 1361/62. See Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, ed. and trans. by Virginia Brown, Cambridge 2003, pp. 43–45.

Medusa, Boccaccio writes, was one of Phorcys' three daughters, the one with such arresting golden hair that Neptune fell in love with her only because of it. The god had sex with her in the temple of Minerva, who, offended, turned Medusa's most alluring feature into a mane of snakes. And Boccaccio is quick to explain why it was Medusa who deserved to be punished: her hair should be seen as representing the secular goods, whose oppressive and biting nature the wise Minerva eventually exposed.

Botticelli does not seem to have known Latin and it is thus debatable that he accessed Boccaccio's *Genealogia*, as Meltzoff proposed.[156] He did not need to, given that Cristoforo Landino recounted the story of Medusa in Italian in his commentary to Dante's *Comedy*. As Angela Dressen has recently demonstrated, Landino's popular commentary served as the main source for Botticelli's *Calumny of Apelles*.[157] It is there that Botticelli read of Lucian's description of Apelles' painting and where he found most of the sources for the reliefs and sculptures of his own remake. Yet in Landino's commentary, Botticelli could also read of how Neptune fell in love with Medusa because of her hair. Landino wrote that Neptune "loves above all her hair, that is the superfluities [...] and Minerva turned her beautiful hair into snakes because wisdom eventually unveils trickeries and reveals their poison".[158] Landino's description of Medusa's hair as a superfluity comes not from Boccaccio, who never employed the term, but, as we saw, from Dominican preaching. If Botticelli represented Slander engaged in a session of hairstyling, thus repudiating his own previous efforts at it, it is also because Landino contributed to promoting such a clerical position.

But I am getting beyond myself, as I cannot know if Botticelli's change of heart was triggered by reading Landino or by something else. Many historians, for instance, have suggested that he was deeply impressed by the preaching of Savonarola, who, besides attacking unveiled girls at church, said that in the verses of pagan poetry "is hidden the devil's great snare".[159] Maybe, as has also been proposed, Botticelli's change of style, and, with it, his deviation from hairstyling, should be related to the departure of the Medici, an event that forced him to reconsider what was opportune in painting.[160] The development of his late style would then stem from the pursuit of a taste alternative to that of his early patrons and that disparaged hair as a vanity rather than as a source of stupefaction.

Boccaccio's and Botticelli's parallel repression of hairstyling is symptomatic of the hardship of working with a material to which religious thought was so openly hostile. In a way, their lives mirrored each other in their doubts and self-control. After showing enthusiasm for the erotic excitement and the visual vagaries triggered by hairstyles, they both rejected them, whether abandoning their depiction altogether or belittling those who were seen to care about them. As Savonarola and other preachers wished for, Botticelli and Boccaccio censored hairstyling, and they did so by shifting its agency. While the edifying potential of hair in the *Comedia* and the Frankfurt portrait (Fig. 1)

The identification of the source of vanity in women's flawed morality was a commonplace in the fifteenth century. See, for instance, Laura Cereta's cursing against the time wasted on hair, for which she blames the "weakness of our sex, stooping to voluptuousness" (quoted from *Her Immaculate Hand: Selected Works By and About the Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy*, ed. by Margaret L. King/Albert Rabil, Jr., Binghamton 1992, p. 79).

[156] Meltzoff (note 84), pp. 191–195. For a critique of this view, see Frank Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli*, Munich *et al.* 2009, p. 8, and Dressen (note 7), p. 327.

[157] *Ibidem*, pp. 327–330.

[158] "Ama maximamente e capegli, cioè el superfluo [...]. Et Minerva gli muta e capegli begli in serpicelle, perché la sapientia finalmente scuopre simili fraude, et dimostra el veleno loro" (Cristoforo Landino, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, ed. by Paolo Procaccioli, Rome 2001, II, p. 553).

[159] "Tra i versi dei poeti pagani e dei nostri profeti c'è una distanza infinita: in questi [versi] c'è nascosto il grande laccio del diavolo" (Savonarola, [note 10], I, p. 264). On Botticelli and Savonarola, who counted the painter's brother among his supporters, Acidini (note 8), pp. 30f.; Meltzoff (note 84), pp. 224f.

[160] Paolucci (note 82), p. 76; James Hankins, "From the New Athens to

was unleashed by male onlookers, the emptiness that they eventually attributed to hairstyling was blamed on women. In *The calumny of Apelles* (Fig. 2) the hairdressers are female. And in Boccaccio's *Corbaccio*, as well as his tale of Medusa, females are the characters accused of taking pride in their hair. Both Boccaccio's and Botticelli's trajectories reveal the relentless pressures of religion, which identified in hair the ultimate female trickery. And while today some may still agree with fifteenth-century preachers that the self-gratification that men found in women's coiffed hair led to visual vagaries of vicious nature, the complexity of Botticelli's and Boccaccio's early takes on hairstyles have little in common with the stereotyping of modern pornography.[161] Intense instances of a fugitive episode of masculinity of early modern Italy, their works made men look more attentively than ever before, thus turning hairstyles, at least for a fleeting moment, into erotic threats to the disciplinary patterning of religious life.

Abstract

At the peak of his fame, Botticelli turned intricate coiffures into unique attention fields. Despite their complexity, such hairstyles have been read as instances of Petrarchan beauty and thus dissociated from the particular type of gaze that they solicited. Such a gaze, however, can be reconstructed through Boccaccio's *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, a popular work in Botticelli's times that, more than any other, called attention to the symbiosis of eye and hair in constructing erotic desire. In this work, Boccaccio recuperated an appreciation for female hairstyling as articulated by classical authors such as Ovid and, in particular, Apuleius. Such conceits, however, openly deviated from the hegemonic Christian depreciation of hairstyles. Clerics' incessant scolding of intricate hairdos eventually made both Boccaccio and Botticelli reconsider their approaches to female adornment. While revealing the fragility of their attempts, such reversals also highlight the role of hairstyles in constructing early modern notions of human perfectibility.

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the New Jerusalem: Florence Between Lorenzo de' Medici and Savonarola", in: *Botticelli's Witness: Changing Style in a Changing Florence*, exh. cat., ed. by Laurence Kanter *et al.*, Boston 1997, pp. 13–20: 19f.

[161] Paula Findlen, "Humanism, Politics and Pornography in Renaissance Italy", in: *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800*, ed. by Lynn Hunt, New York 1993, pp. 49–108: 53f., 59.

Umschlagbild | Copertina:

Giorgio Vasari, *Der hl. Lukas malt die Madonna* | *San Luca dipinge la Vergine*
Florenz | Firenze, Santissima Annunziata, Cappella di San Luca
(Detail aus Abb. 1, S. 234 | dettaglio di fig. 1, p. 234)

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