1 Sandro Botticelli, *Calumny of Apelles*.
Florence, Uffizi, Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture

FROM DANTE TO LANDINO
BOTTICELLI'S *CALUMNY OF APELLES* AND ITS SOURCES

Angela Dressen

The *Calumny of Apelles* (Fig. 1) belongs to the category of Botticelli's mythological paintings, and is based on an ancient ekphrasis enriched with a humanistic interpretation. The ekphrasis is part of a well-known Hellenistic text on slander, written by the Greek satirist Lucian of Samosata (ca. 125–after 180 AD)[1] and circulating in Florence in at least two versions, whose divergences derived from different translations (in both Latin and vernacular) and their reception. So far research has, almost without exception, considered Leon Battista Alberti's (1404–1472) vernacular rendering of the Apelles story as the principal literary source of Botticelli's painting, to which some authors have added other texts. This article, however, aims to demonstrate that the painter did not use Alberti's text and that instead his primary source was the commentary on Dante's *Divine Comedy* written by his contemporary Cristoforo Landino (1424–1498).[2]

Literary Sources for the *Calumny of Apelles*

Lucian's text basically concerns the influence of ignorance upon mankind. In translation the title of the Greek original reads literally *Slander – On not Being Quick to Put Faith in It*.[3] According to Lucian, Apelles had himself suffered from slander through a rival artist, and when publicly accused in front of Emperor Ptolemy IV he was rescued at the last minute by a helpful advocate.

[1] On the perception of calumny in Hellenism and in the Renaissance see Fosca Mariani Zini, *La calomnie: un philosophème humaniste. Pour une préhistoire de l'herméneutique*, Villeneuve-d'Ascq 2015, esp. pp. 15–27.

[2] Cristoforo Landino, *Comento di Christophoro Landino fiorentino sopra la Comedia di Danthe Alighieri poeta fiorentino*, Florence 1481; published in a modern edition: *idem*, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, ed. by Paolo Procaccioli, Rome 2001.

[3] The first Latin edition of Lucian was printed in 1494: *Luciani de veris narrationibus*, Venice 1494, cc. o 5r–p 2v ("Luciani sermo de calumnia"), esp. cc. o 6r–v.

He then composed the painting, which is described by Lucian as follows:

> On the right of it sits a man with very large ears, almost like those of Midas, extending his hand to Slander while she is still at some distance from him. Near him, on one side, stand two women – Ignorance, I think, and Suspicion. On the other side, Slander is coming up, a woman beautiful beyond measure, but full of passion and excitement, evincing as she does fury and wrath by carrying in her left hand a blazing torch and with the other dragging by the hair a young man who stretches out his hands to heaven and calls the gods to witness his innocence. She is conducted by a pale ugly man who has a piercing eye and looks as if he had wasted away in long illness; he may be supposed to be Envy. Besides, there are two women in attendance on Slander, egging her on, tiring her and tricking her out. According to the interpretation of them given me by the guide to the picture, one was Treachery and the other Deceit. They were followed by a woman dressed in deep mourning, with black clothes all in tatters – Repentance, I think, her name was. At all events, she was turning back with tears in her eyes and casting a stealthy glance, full of shame, at Truth, who was approaching.[4]

During the Quattrocento at least two different versions of Lucian's ekphrasis circulated in seven translations, which all diverge in small details. The two versions might have been introduced from Constantinople by two travelers. In the Byzantine school curriculum Lucian was a standard author, so when the renowned Greek teacher Manuel Chrysoloras (ca. 1355–1415) received a chair at the Florentine university in 1397 he immediately introduced the study of his texts in Florence, including the story of the calumny of Apelles. Many students of Chrysoloras composed Latin translations of that text.[5] Among them figured Guarino of Verona (1374–1460), who followed Chrysoloras during his journey home to Constantinople (1403–1407). Thanks to Guarino's Latin translation of *Slander*, composed around 1405/06 for Giovanni Quirino in Venice, the story of Apelles received wide attention in Italy, particularly because Guarino later became well known as a director of one of the most famous humanist schools in Italy, in Verona.[6]

The second important input came from the humanist Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481), who returned from his travels in Constantinople in 1427 with texts by Lucian, among them *Slander*.[7] In later fifteenth-century Italy, several authors proposed their own translations from Lucian.[8] Just to mention a few: Alberti's and Filarete's (1451–1460)[9] vernacular versions are very close and only differ in one detail. They may both have referred to Filelfo's version, though the majority consider Alberti to have been guided by Guarino's

[4] *Lucian*, ed. by A. M. Harmon, Cambridge, Mass., 1913, I, 365–367. This translation is faithful to the Latin and vernacular editions of Lucian published in Venice in 1494 and 1529 respectively. Harald Mielsch, *Die Verleumdung des Apelles: Ein frühhellenistisches Gemälde?*, Paderborn *et al.* 2012, p. 38, suggests Lucian as the inventor of the narrative, who is therefore describing a fictive painting, not composed by Apelles.

[5] Ioannis Deligiannis, *Fifteenth-Century Latin Translations of Lucian's Essay on Slander*, Pisa/Rome 2006, pp. 17–21, 31f.

[6] Guarino's version circulated widely in North Italy, but to a lesser extent in Florence itself. On Guarino's version see Rudolph Altrocchi, "The Calumny of Apelles in the Literature of the Quattrocento", in: *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, XXXVI (1921), pp. 454–491: 460–462; David Cast, *The Calumny of Apelles: A Study in the Humanist Tradition*, New Haven 1981, p. 199; Sara Agnoletto, "La *Calunnia di Apelle*: recupero e riconversione ecfrastica del trattatello di Luciano in Occidente", in: *Engramma*, 42 (July–August 2005), http://www.engramma.it/eOS2/index.php?id_articolo=2288, accessed 21 May 2016; Deligiannis (note 5), pp. 65–73, 262 (on Guarino's discovery of the original Greek text). Guarino's version follows Lucian very closely, apart from some tiny but significant alterations. For example, Calumny holds the torch in her right hand while in her left she holds a child. Penitence is dressed in funereal clothes. Guarino's version is printed in Cast (note 6), pp. 198f., and Deligiannis (note 5), pp. 113–137.

[7] See Altrocchi (note 6), p. 464.

[8] For an overview of these see *ibidem*, pp. 467f., who also gives a list of other names associated with translations from Lucian and demonstrates that there might have been very few original versions, while the others were mere copies. See also Deligiannis (note 5), p. 150.

[9] Published in Cast (note 6), p. 203.

translation.[10] Guarino's version inspired the vernacular translation from 1472 by Bartolomeo della Fonte, a humanist at the court of Ercole d'Este in Ferrara.[11] Furthermore, Landino's narration and the vernacular poem from 1493 by Bernardo Rucellai also follow Guarino's model.[12]

Alberti integrated the story in his treatise on painting, which circulated in a Latin and a vernacular version (*De pictura*, 1435; *Della pittura*, 1436). As mentioned above, the majority of scholars have assumed that Botticelli's painting is based on this text, but, as most researchers have noticed, the picture does not coincide in all details with Alberti's version, and therefore it has been proposed that Botticelli in these instances either referred directly to the Greek original or, more likely, to the Latin *editio princeps* of Lucian's writings from 1494.[13] Other authors have suggested another source or maintained that the painter used a variety of texts.[14] In all instances he must have been helped by an adviser, since the majority of researchers share the opinion that Botticelli read neither Latin nor Greek.[15] However, some authors hold the assumption that Botticelli studied Latin and classical literature.[16]

Alberti's description of the picture is as follows:

> Era quella pittura uno uomo con sue orecchie molte grandissime, apresso del quale, una di qua e una di là, stavano due femmine: l'una si chiamava Ignoranza, l'altra si chiamava Sospezione. Più in là veniva la Calunnia. Questa era una femmina a vederla bellissima, ma parea nel viso troppo astuta. Tenea nella sua destra mano una face incesa; con l'altra mano trainava, preso pe' capelli, uno garzonetto, il quale stendea suo mani alte al cielo. Ed eravi uno uomo pallido, brutto, tutto lordo, con aspetto iniquo, quale potresti assimigliare a che ne' campi dell'armi con lunga fatica fusse magrito e riarso: costui era guida della Calunnia, e chiamavasi Livore. Ed erano due altre femmine compagne alla Calunnia, quali a lei aconciavano suoi ornamenti e panni: chiamasi l'una Insidie e l'altra Fraude. Drieto a queste era la Penitenza, femmina vestita di veste funerali, quale sé stessa tutta stracciava. Dietro seguiva una fanciulletta vergognosa e pudica, chiamata Verità.[17]

A hitherto unconsidered vernacular version of the story of Apelles was provided around 1481 in Cristoforo Landino's commentary on the *Divine Come-*

[10] See Richard Förster, "Die Verleumdung des Apelles in der Renaissance", in: *Jahrbuch der Preußischen Kunstsammlungen*, VIII (1887), pp. 29–56, 89–113: 33; Altrocchi (note 6), p. 469; Cast (note 6), pp. 32f.

[11] Printed *ibidem*, p. 207.

[12] For Rucellai's text see Altrocchi (note 6), pp. 476–491, and Cast (note 6), p. 208.

[13] Herbert P. Horne, *Botticelli, Painter of Florence*, Princeton 1980 (London [1]1908), pp. 257–259; Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York 1972, p. 158; Dominique Thiebaut, *Botticelli*, Cologne 1992, p. 136; Fosca Mariani Zini, "La calunnia della tradizione: a proposito di un quadro di Botticelli", in: *La polifonia estetica: specificità e raccordi*, conference proceedings Salerno 1995, ed. by Massimo Venturi Ferriolo, Milan 1996, pp. 71–87; *eadem*, "Le jugement suspendu: la calomnie à Florence", in: *Traditio*, LIII (1998), pp. 231–249; Hans Körner, *Botticelli*, Cologne 2006, p. 346; Michel Feuillet, *Botticelli et Savonarole: l'humanisme à l'épreuve du feu*, Paris 2010, p. 98; Bertrand Prévost, *Botticelli: le manège allégorique*, Paris 2011, pp. 33–40; Mariani Zini (note 1), p. 79. Assuming that Botticelli consulted the 1494 edition of Lucian, Körner and Feuillet date the picture to 1497.

[14] For Alessandro Cecchi, *Botticelli*, Milan 2005, pp. 302–306, the sources are Alberti, the Old and New Testaments, and Boccaccio. Frank Zöllner, *Botticelli*, Munich 2009, p. 106, proposes that Botticelli relied on several Renaissance versions of Apelles' story; for Mielsch (note 4), pp. 5f., and Mariani Zini (note 1), pp. 84f., his source was Bartolomeo della Fonte. Stanley Meltzoff (*Botticelli, Signorelli and Savonarola: 'Theologia Poetica' and Painting from Boccaccio to Poliziano*, Florence 1987, p. 106) holds the opinion that Botticelli followed the version of Alberti and Guarino; Förster (note 10), pp. 32f., and Yasunori Ishizawa ("Osservazioni sulla 'Calunnia di Apelle' di Sandro Botticelli: sua invenzione e lo sfondo sociale", in: *Bijutsushigaku*, XXII [2001], pp. 57–86) believe that Botticelli consulted Guarino's version directly.

[15] See for instance Zöllner (note 14), pp. 8, 106; *idem*, *Sandro Botticelli*, Munich 2015, p. 250.

[16] See especially Altrocchi (note 6), p. 474; Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier, "Paradox or Accord: A Note on Botticelli's Antiquarianism", in: *Storia dell'arte*, 97 (1999), pp. 294–298.

[17] Leon Battista Alberti, *Über die Malkunst – Della pittura*, ed. by Oskar Bätschmann/Sandra Gianfreda, Darmstadt 2002, p. 152. See also the Latin version, where, anyhow, Calumny holds the youngster with the right hand and the torch with the left. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, ed. by Rocco Sinisgalli, Cambridge 2011, p. 76.

dy.[18] The *Comedy* was commentated several times, and Landino's text, first published in 1481, was one of the best known and most influential versions. His commentary was – like Dante's poem – in the vernacular, although its composer was a professor of Latin rhetoric and literature at the Florentine university and was renowned as an outstanding latinist. In his commentary Landino singled out many virtues and vices and placed them in a contemporary, humanist, and Neoplatonic context. He also inserted Lucian's description of Apelles' painting, which is not mentioned in Dante's text. Compared with Alberti's version there are some evident variations:

> The calumny had been painted with great mastery by Apelles of Ephesus, a most capable painter, in this way: on the right is sitting a man, but with donkey ears like Midas, and is stretching his hand out towards Calumny, who is coming towards him. This man is flanked by two women, one called Ignorance, the other Suspicion; in front of them is Calumny, who is of excellent shape. But she is full of rage and scorn, and with her left hand she holds a torch, and with her right she drags a young man who holds his hands upwards to the sky and calls upon God to testify his innocence. In front of him Envy is walking with a sharp eye but looking pale, as somebody who has suffered a long illness. On either side of Calumny there are two [women] decorating and adorning her, and these are Deceptions, that is Traps, and Fraud. But behind she is followed by Penitence, dressed in black and torn clothes, full of tears and abashed by shame, and she looks at Truth, who comes to help the wrongfully slandered young man. This is the description of Calumny, which I have given with few words because, as I have said before, *diabolo* [devil] in Greek signifies slanderer, that is a person who accuses with lies; and from this originates [the word] 'diaball[e]in', which signifies 'to slander'.[19]

The textual comparison clarifies two points: despite the fact that all three recount the same scene, Lucian and Landino are closer in descriptive detail and in the context in which the narration is placed. To consider some of these details: in Lucian and Landino the person sitting on the right is characterized as having donkey's ears, like Midas; in Alberti he simply possesses large ears. In Lucian and Landino the man resembling Midas extends his arm towards Calumny, who approaches him; in Alberti such a gesture is not mentioned. In Lucian and Landino Calumny holds a torch in her left hand and seizes a youth with her right. In Alberti's Italian version the torch is in her right hand while she holds the youngster with her left. The latter in Alberti's version raises his hand, whereas in Lucian and Landino he gestures as if preaching and calls on God to witness his innocence. Penitence is described by Alberti and Guarino as wearing funeral garments, whereas Lucian describes her mourning in black. In Landino she wears a black dress and weeps uncontrollably. Last comes *Veritas*, who for Alberti is a woman, "vergognosa e pudica" – according to Cast this wording can be interpreted as an allusion to the *Venus pudica*.[20] Lucian gives no further characterization of Truth, while Landino describes her as coming to

[18] Landino 1481 (note 2).

[19] My own translation from Landino 2001 (note 2), pp. 834f. (*Inferno* XXIII, 142–148): "Onde optimamente fu dipincta la calunnia da Appelle Ephesio pictore nobilissimo in questa forma: alla mano dextra siede un huomo, ma con orecchi d'asino a guisa di Mida, et porge la mano alla calunnia, che a llui viene. Intorno a costui stanno ricte due donne, una decta ignorantia, l'altra suspictione; allo 'ncontro è la calunnia la cui forma è egregia. Ma piena di rabbia et disdegno, et chon la sinistra tiene una faccellina, et con la dextra si tira drieto un giovane, el quale alza le mani al cielo et invoca Iddio in testimonio della sua innocentia. Davanti gli va la 'nvidia con occhio acuto ma pallida, chome chi è stato oppresso da llunga malattia. Intorno alla calunnia sono due che l'ornano et adextrano, questi sono le insidie, cioè aguati, et la fraude. Ma drieto la sequita la penitentia di neri et lacerati panni vestita, di pianto piena, et da vergogna confusa, et raguarda la verità la quale viene per soccorrere el giovane a torto calunniato. Questa è adunque la descriptione della calunnia, la quale con brievi parole ho posta, perché chome ho decto diabolo in Greco significa calunniator, cioè colui che con menzogna accusa; et nasce da questo 'diaballin' che significa 'calunniare'."

[20] See Cast (note 6), pp. 45f., who thinks that Alberti might be referring to Seneca here. This would be one of the first appearances of the *Venus pu-*

help the wrongfully accused man. Only Landino and Lucian mention a wordless interaction between the last two figures, with Penitence glancing at Truth.

To summarize, in Alberti's version some important details are missing, which are however present in most of the other translations: these are Midas' donkey ears, the judge extending his hand towards Calumny, the young boy calling for God's help, the behavior of Penitence, who is weeping and glances backwards at Truth. What makes Landino's version unique is in any case the emphasis it places on the transcendental aspect, which is evident in the actions of the victim, who is preaching for help from God. The differences between Alberti and Landino are reflected exactly in the painting by Botticelli, who clearly follows Landino's version in every detail and not Alberti's.

It is equally important to consider the context of the story of Apelles, which in each version is framed differently. Alberti uses it to refer to one of the greatest painters in antiquity and to exemplify his idea of *historia*, a narrative inspired by literature with some standard compositional features.[21] In Lucian and Landino, however, the story has strong moral implications. For Lucian, it reveals the destructive power of ignorance and lies, which can destroy family bonds, cities, and indeed humanity itself. Ignorance is the first step toward this evil conclusion; a secondary topic is envy among artists.[22] Landino aligns himself with the theory of the destructive power of lies and describes Apelles' painting in his commentary in order to elucidate Dante's statement "[Il diavolo] è bugiardo et padre di menzogna" ("[The devil] is a liar and father of lies"). He explains that the Greek word for devil signifies slanderer, and that slander is nothing else but intrigue. So if one states bad and false things about another person, this would constitute an intrigue since it would lead to a false opinion of an innocent.[23] There is another passage on the devil in the *Inferno* commentary where Landino emphasizes that it is Satan's envy of men's blissfulness in earthly paradise that brings greed and every other evil to mankind. Envy and greed both come from hell, and it is man's free will ("libero arbitrio") to choose between these two and justice, which originated in Heaven.[24] Thus, Landino, like Lucian, provides an explicit description of the meaning and implications of calumny, while Alberti principally wished to illustrate his idea of *historia*.

A quick look at some Renaissance representations of Apelles' story at this point is useful to demonstrate the diffusion of the different literary traditions among the artists.[25] One of the first representations, and the only example that predates Botticelli's painting, is probably Bartolomeo della Fonte's sketch from 1472 (Fig. 2) illustrating his own Lucian manuscript, including *Slander*.[26] The small sketch shows the group of figures and their most important features. According to his own translation, which is close to Guarino's version, the judge is shown with normal ears, while Calumny holds the light with her left hand and a little boy with her right. Interestingly, Truth already appears as a naked woman. Shortly after 1500, when representations of the Calumny of Apelles suddenly became very popular, a series of drawings and etch-

dica in post-antique times. For an astrological interpretation of the Venus in Botticelli's painting as "Venus of the superior conjunction", see Frank Keim, *Sandro Botticelli: Die astronomischen Werke. Mit einem Anhang zu Raffael*, Hamburg 2015, pp. 44–47.

21 Several authors had indeed seen principally a representation of Alberti's idea of *historia* in Botticelli's painting. See for example Prévost (note 13), pp. 40–42, 57.

22 *Lucian* (note 4), I, 361–363.

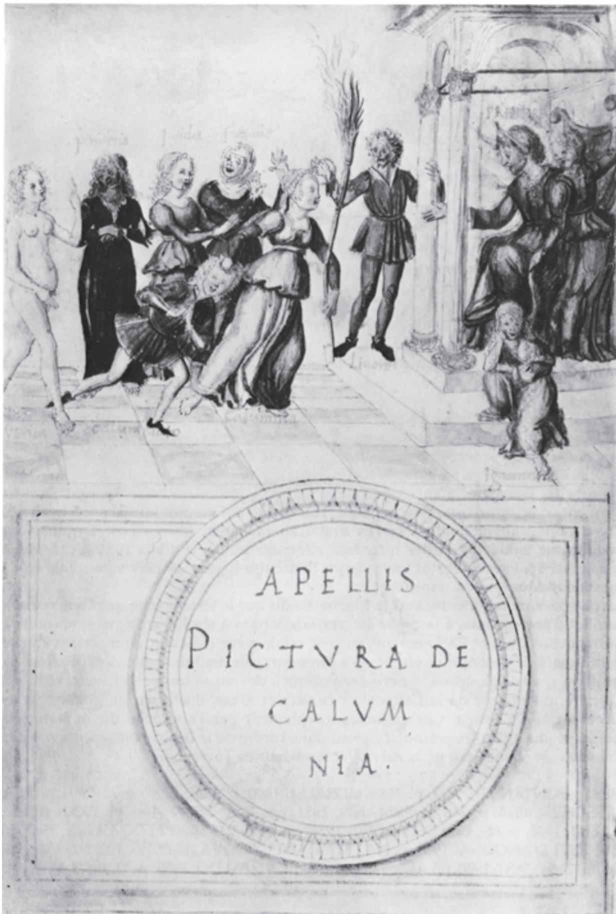
23 Landino 2001 (note 2), p. 834 (*Inferno* XXIII, 142–148).

24 *Ibidem*, p. 323 (*Inferno* I, 100–111).

25 Researchers have not yet tried to divide the paintings by literary traditions, as Alberti was usually given as the common source. On the early representations of the *Calumny of Apelles* see Horne (note 13), pp. 258f.; Förster (note 10); Cast (note 6); Agnoletto (note 6). For a general survey see *eadem*, "Una galleria delle *Calunnie di Apelle*: fonti iconografiche e testuali (1408–1875)", in: *Engramma*, 42 (July–August 2005), http://www.engramma.it/engramma_v4/rivista/galleria/42/42_galleriacalunnia.htm (accessed 21 May 2016).

26 Bartolomeo della Fonte's text has been proposed as Botticelli's source by Mielsch (note 4), pp. 5f., and Mariani Zini (note 1), pp. 84f.

ings was produced, which derived from either Alberti's or Landino's version. The drawing by Mantegna (1504–1506) (Fig. 3), on which Girolamo Mocetto's engraving (ca. 1506) is based, is virtually identical to Landino's version (although research until now had claimed Alberti as the source) and only inverts the left and right, perhaps because it was intended for an engraving in the reverse.[27] Outside Italy Alberti's text seems to have been more popular as a source for this subject, as testified for example by drawings by Pieter Brueghel (1565) and Rembrandt (1652–1654).[28]



2 Bartolomeo della Fonte, *Calumny of Apelles*. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, Cod. 78.C.26, frontispiece

The Background Reliefs and Their Relation to Calumny and Fraud in Dante, Boccaccio, and Landino

Botticelli's lively and animated scene is located within an illusionistic architecture, a pagan place that lies structurally in between an ancient basilica, the place of judgments, and a triumphal arch with its sculptural decor. Although the architecture obviously follows antique models, this place is set apart from time and space, as outside the building the view embraces just the sea and the sky. This indeterminate, transcendental setting of the background might even point to the heavenly judgment to be made here.[29] The whole architecture is covered with gilded reliefs and white marble statues. The dominance of figurative motives in the background counterbalances the figures in the foreground and raises the question of what they add to the main scene. As some of the scenes are barely readable, either due to their challenging perspective or tiny dimensions, and their iconography has

[27] On Mantegna see Ronald W. Lightbown, *Mantegna: With a Complete Catalogue of the Paintings, Drawings and Prints*, Berkeley *et al.* 1986, pp. 486f. (suggesting that the artist followed Lucian and Alberti); Jack M. Greenstein, *Mantegna and Painting as Historical Narrative*, Chicago *et al.* 1992, pp. 60–65; Marzia Faietti, "Andrea Mantegna, la 'Virtus Combusta' e i colori di Apelle", in: *Schede umanistiche*, XXIV/XXV (2010/11), pp. 113–121.

[28] On Brueghel see Bertram Kaschek, "'Weder römisch, noch antik': Pieter Bruegels 'Verleumdung des Apelles' in neuer Deutung", in: *Antike als Konzept: Lesarten in Kunst, Literatur und Politik*, ed. by Gernot Kamecke/Bruno Klein/Jürgen Müller, Berlin 2009, pp. 167–179.

[29] On the architectonic characterization as an ancient juridical place see also Paul Schubring, *Cassoni: Truhen und Truhenbilder der italienischen Frührenaissance. Ein Beitrag zur Profanmalerei im Quattrocento*, Leipzig 1915, pp. 34, 119; Carlo Gamba, *Botticelli*, Milan 1936, p. 179; Gunnar Lötstam, "Die Verleumdung des Apelles von Sandro Botticelli", in: *Kunstgeschichtliche Studien zur Florentiner Renaissance*, ed. by Lars Olof Larsson *et al.*, Stockholm *et al.* 1980, pp. 374–393: 380.

[30] In particular, the stories of the ceilings are difficult to recognize and have been interpreted in various ways. For a summary of identifications see Sara Agnoletto, "Botticelli orefice del dettaglio: uno *status quaestionis* sui soggetti del

3 Andrea Mantegna, *Calumny of Apelles*.
London, British Library, Inv. 1860,0616.86

rightly been questioned, the following discussion concentrates on the more recognizable reliefs and figures, whose iconography is more generally accepted.[30]

There follows a brief review of previous research on the background reliefs, analyzed in particular by Lötstam, Meltzoff, Pons, Horne, Agnoletto, and Mariani Zini.[31] Lötstam connects them to the tradition of *uomini famosi* representations, but enriched with topics borrowed from ancient mythology, Roman history, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Boccaccio's *Decamerone*, although he acknowledges Neoplatonic influences, which might have been provided by texts like Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio de hominis dignitate*.[32] Meltzoff indicated as literary sources Dante, Boccaccio, and Alberti, but suggested that some scenes were Botticelli's own invention.[33] Mariani Zini considers Boccaccio's writings, which featured both the Bible and ancient mythology, as the major source for the reliefs.[34] Although the proposed identifications of single scenes and statues (Fig. 4)[35] are helpful, the variety of the

fondale della *Calunnia di Apelle*", in: *Engramma*, 120 (October 2014), http://www.engramma.it/eOS2/index.php?id_articolo=1635 (accessed 21 May 2016).

31 Both Meltzoff (note 14), pp. 95–98, and Agnoletto (note 30) provide schemes with an analysis of each panel. Agnoletto also gives an illustrated survey with high resolution images of the iconography established so far.

32 Lötstam (note 29), pp. 377f. Since Lötstam provides a variety of possible literary sources, he acknowledges that it would be difficult to find an overarching topic connecting all of these scenes. Moreover, he observes that similar themes and motifs are recurrent in *cassone* painting (*ibidem*, pp. 378f.). He also mentions various references to several texts by Ficino (*ibidem*, pp. 381–385).

33 Meltzoff (note 14), pp. 95–283, *passim*. Horne (note 13), p. 261, had already pointed out the similarities of the background scenes with Dante illustrations.

34 According to Mariani Zini 1998 (note 13), p. 246, and *eadem* (note 1), pp. 100–104, Botticelli referred to *De casibus virorum illustrium*, *De mulieribus claris*, the *Decamerone*, and the *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, and especially to the stories of Nastagio degli Onesti, Cimon and Iphigene, Diana, Africo and Mensola, Apollo and Daphne, Solon, and the Centaurs. See also Zöllner (note 15), pp. 250f.

35 The scheme by Meltzoff (note 14), p. 96, is used here for illustrative purposes alone, as some of the background panels are discussed differently in this study.

suggested literary sources is unnecessary; instead, it can be demonstrated that Botticelli focused on one principal channel.

In Landino's commentary we find plenty of references to other authors; apart from Dante, which is obvious, and Boccaccio, who often was the source for Landino's mythological interpretations, there are also citations from writings on ancient mythology and from the Bible. Therefore, we may suppose that almost all of the topics incorporated into the background scenes were transmitted through Landino. His explanations sometimes build on and sometimes diverge from Dante's examples of injustice, betrayal, and slander, with characters drawn from antique and medieval history or literature. When Landino concentrated on some of these characters, he included them in specific contexts, by either strengthening the plot of the story or changing it deliberately. While in Dante the characters were only briefly mentioned, in Landino they were explicitly charged with slander and fraud in a longer explanation.[36] Therefore, Landino's commentary was definitely more useful for the conception of Botticelli's reliefs than Dante's poem.

Calumny and fraud are two of the central topics in the *Divine Comedy* and, consequently, also in Landino's commentary. Among the many passages in which these vices appear in Dante, one episode had special relevance for Botticelli's painting. There is a key passage in the *Purgatorio*, cantos X–XII, extensively commented by Landino, where Dante describes how those guilty of pride and arrogance were forced to look down at pavement reliefs with examples of reformed arrogance, whereas later, when they looked up once more, they saw wall reliefs with moralizing topics assisting them in their search for mercy and humility; the latter are explicitly described as executed of white marble ("marmo candido"),[37] a color fit for humility, as Landino explains.[38] This takes us to the painted background scene in Botticelli's *Calumny*, whose setup with gilded reliefs and white marble statues in niches might have been inspired by Dante and Landino: in a similar way, it displays examples of reformed arrogance and purification as well as moral models, mostly successful and unsuccessful biblical and historical leaders.

Throughout the niche statues and reliefs, the virtues of wisdom, capability of judgment, and true leadership are opposed to *superbia*, calumny, and fraud, following Dante and Landino. Turning to the white marble statues in the niches, all of these figures prominently overlooking the main scene may be found in Landino's commentary, where they are praised for their active life as virtuous warriors and exemplary biblical leaders. Judith, represented in the rightmost niche, is placed in Dante's paradise and referred to as "sanctissima femina" by Landino.[39] She was known for her virtuous and courageous commitment to her country, which she defended heroically against its attackers.[40] Botticelli thus added her as a virtuous political example various times in the niches, the plinth zone and the architrave (Fig. 4). Next to Judith is Boccaccio, who was praised by Landino for his learning and exemplary life and therefore quoted as a reliable witness of Dante's biography.[41] The next figure is an elderly man with a sword who looks down with obvious grief and pity. Landino mentions St Paul with his sword for his acute and vehement capacity for critique, yet possessing a tolerant mind.[42] Moses, standing in

[36] For example, when Dante refers briefly to Midas as being avaricious, Landino sets this account in the context of fraud (Landino 2001 [note 2], p. 1358 [*Purgatorio* XX]).

[37] Dante, *Purgatorio* X, 31.

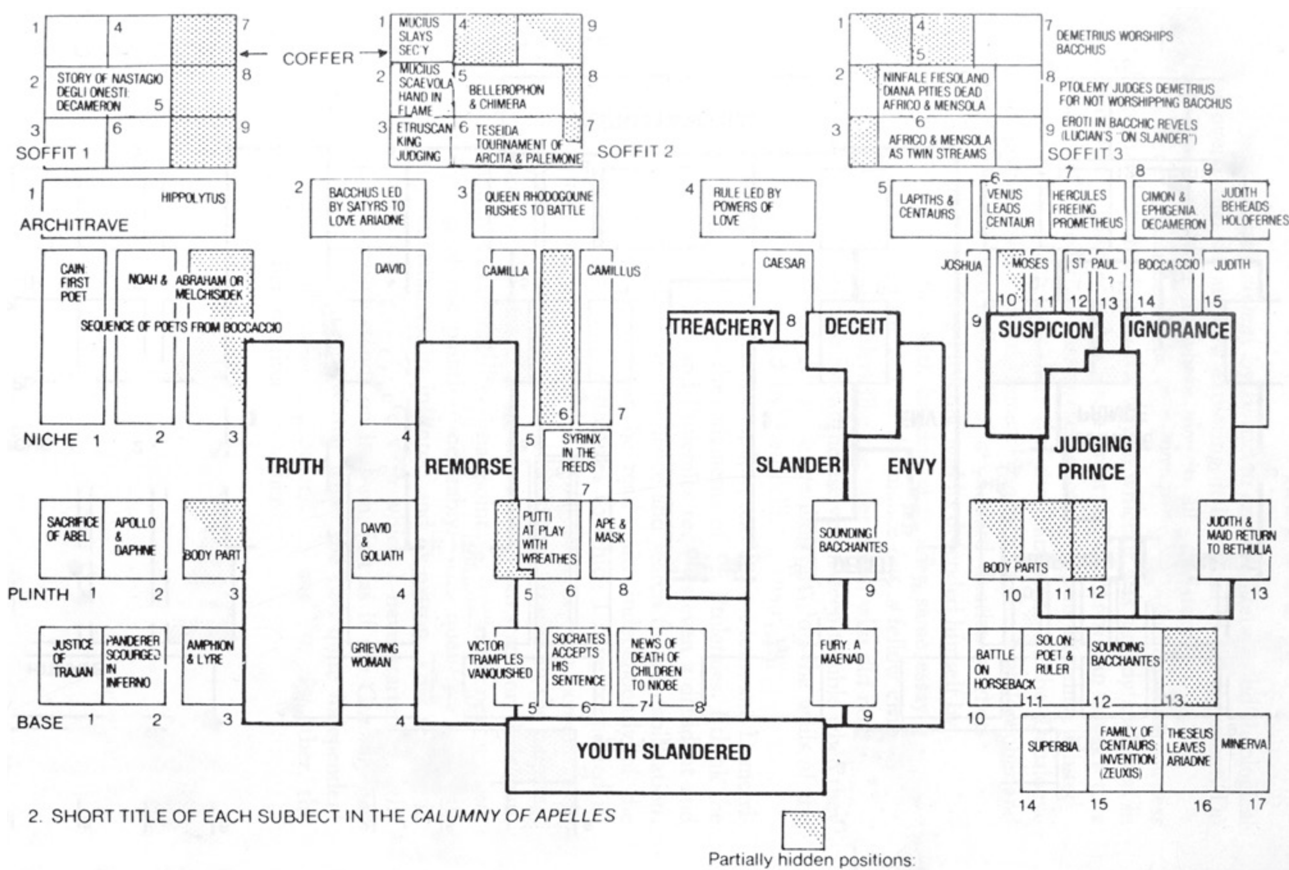
[38] Landino 2001 (note 2), p. 1202 (*Purgatorio* X); see also pp. 1229f. (*Purgatorio* XII).

[39] *Ibidem*, p. 2003 (*Paradiso* XXXII).

[40] *Ibidem*. In his comment to *Purgatorio* XII (*ibidem*, pp. 1234f.), Landino narrates the story of Judith and Holofernes. Zöllner (note 14), p. 253, sees this version of Judith as a mirror image of Botticelli's other illustration of Judith (*Return of Judith to Bethulia*, ca. 1467–1470, Florence, Uffizi, Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture).

[41] Landino 2001 (note 2), pp. 520f. (*Inferno* VIII).

[42] *Ibidem*, p. 1488 (*Purgatorio* XXIX).



4 Scheme of subjects in Botticelli's *Calumny of Apelles*, according to Stanley Meltzoff

the following niche, is admired by Landino throughout his commentary explicitly for his discipline and doctrine.[43] While telling the story of Moses' exodus with his people from Egypt to the Promised Land, Landino mentions the ingratitude of Moses' people, who were lazy or unwilling and either wanted to turn back or even considered killing him.[44] The figure in the central niche above Calumny represents a Roman emperor; not Caesar, as suggested by Meltzoff, but rather Trajan, who in Landino's commentary is the example of a perfect leader, equally excellent in military discipline, justice, and humanity.[45] The three figures in the niches behind Penitentia have been commonly identified as Camillus, Camilla, and David, all praised by Landino for their exemplary commitment to their home countries.[46] David, furthermore, is an important figure in Landino's commentary to Dante's first canto, in which the author describes having lost the right way: the biblical hero is celebrated for his contemplative attitude, which connects him to God. It is worth

[43] See in particular *ibidem*, "Proemio", XII, p. 262.

[44] *Ibidem*, p. 1332 (*Purgatorio* XVIII).

[45] "Traiano fu imperadore di tanta excellentia, che è difficile giudicare, se fu più egregio in disciplina militare, che in iustitia, et humanità" (*ibidem*, pp. 1207f. [*Purgatorio* X]). Trajan is counted by Dante, in *Paradiso* XX, among the blessed, due to his extraordinary sense of justice and to divine grace.

[46] *Ibidem*, p. 1650 (*Paradiso* VI, 10–12), p. 322 (*Inferno* I, 103–109, and I, 114–126); pp. 284–299 (*Inferno* I, 1–21).

summarizing what Landino develops here on several pages in his commentary: he explains that the highest good is for us to find the right way and to contemplate and know the divinity. Bodily concupiscence and vices lead to the ignorance of God and to depraved straying, whereas the path to virtue is direct. In the end Landino points to David as one of the few able to see the highest divinity.[47] This might be why Botticelli places David on the left side, close to Veritas, who points heavenwards, whereas the judging prince, blinded by Envy, keeps his eyes closed. Meltzoff proposes identifying the last three niche figures as Cain, Noah, and Abraham or Melchisedek.[48] However, as these figures are barely visible, their identification is problematic; they will therefore be left out, although the proposed characters would all be traceable in Landino too.[49]

The background reliefs also participate in the topoi of true and false leadership, which are likewise connected to slander, fraud and *superbia* on the one hand, and wisdom and judgment on the other. For example, the passage in the commentary where Landino explicitly addresses art – following up on Dante's purification reliefs – mainly deals with the vice of arrogance, *superbia*, and the appraisal of its opposite, humility (and wisdom). Here, Landino adds some explanations to Dante's text. In accordance with general thinking, Landino states that arrogance is the worst of all the vices and should be healed through humility.[50] *Superbia* would finally meet divine justice[51] and would be overcome by the examples of humility in biblical and ancient history. In Dante and Landino these are, in addition to the Virgin Mary, David and Trajan, who both occur among the niche figures in the painting.[52] *Superbia*, furthermore, is a recurrent topic in the reliefs, for example in the panel below the feet of the judging prince, looking towards Envy. Above this relief we find the figures of Ignorance and Suspicion, both trying to influence the judge. Landino provides two major examples of punished *superbia*, the story of David and Goliath[53] and the beheading of Holofernes, king of Assyria, by Judith.[54] Both topics occur in the reliefs, namely on the second register of the plinth zone to the left, between Penitence and Truth, and in the architrave zone on the far right. *Superbia* is also the theme of the panel over the central scene above Calumny. Here, putti try to tame a lion. Landino categorizes the lion, who signifies ambitious desire of earthly honor and political power, as a symbol for *superbia*.[55] *Superbia* is therefore one of the central topics of the background iconography and mostly connected to wrong leadership.

There are more examples of wrong leadership to be found in the reliefs. The centaur story is particularly interesting: in Landino's commentary it serves as an example for tyrants and false leadership. While in the twelfth canto of the *Inferno* Dante does not explain the nature of the centaurs, Landino gives a full account of their history and meaning. He calls them "huomini mostruosi", monstrous men, and explains that they symbolize the insane thoughts and cruel desires of tyrants who acted against humanity and tried to take as servants those who by nature should be free themselves.[56] Returning to the picture, the evident presence of centaurs in several panels in the base zone and the architrave, most prominently under the feet of the judging king, cannot be casual. These reliefs all re-

47 *Ibidem*, pp. 284–299 (*Inferno* I, 1–21).

48 Meltzoff (note 14), pp. 96, 191–196.

49 For example: Landino 2001 (note 2), pp. 416f. (*Inferno* IV: Cain, Noah, Abraham), p. 1693 (*Paradiso* VIII: Melchisedek).

50 *Ibidem*, pp. 1197, 1202 (*Purgatorio* X).

51 *Ibidem*, p. 1209 (*Purgatorio* X).

52 *Ibidem*, pp. 1205–1208 (*Purgatorio* X).

53 *Ibidem*, p. 1209 (*Purgatorio* X).

54 *Ibidem*, pp. 1234f. (*Purgatorio* XII).

55 *Ibidem*, pp. 304–306 (*Inferno* I). Agnoletto (note 6) sees the lion and putti as a reference taken from Pliny (*Naturalis Historia*, XXXVI, 41), an opinion shared by Zöllner (note 14), p. 252. Meltzoff (note 14), pp. 96, 165, on the contrary interprets the relief as showing "rule led by powers of love".

56 Landino 2001 (note 2), pp. 623f. (*Inferno* XII, 46–66). Agnoletto (note 6) instead takes the family of centaurs as an ekphrasis of Lucian, an interpretation confirmed by Zöllner (note 14), p. 253.

fer to the bad thoughts that inspire tyrants to oppress and torture people.

As regards positive traits, wisdom and wise leadership are represented through characters such as Socrates and Minerva. In the lower base relief to the right of Penitentia we see Socrates, described by Landino as a man decorated with every virtue who disregarded *voluptas* and chose to live in poverty. The Apollonian oracle declared him the wisest of all men, which earned him great envy. He was falsely accused of condemning the Gods and depraving youth. Thus he was forced to take poison, which he consciously accepted.[57] Minerva is also mentioned by Landino, who calls her the goddess of chastity and wisdom and interprets her transformation of Medusa's hair into serpents as symbolizing wisdom that detects fraud and unveils its venom.[58] She appears in the painting in the base relief panel on the far right.

In Landino's explanations, as we have seen, all topics related to slander and fraud had a specific meaning Botticelli could easily rely on for his reliefs. The painter then displayed these scenes from right to left, with an increasing quantity of virtuous examples towards the left. Botticelli also provided thematic congruity between the background reliefs and the figures in the main scene. Overall, the artist insisted on a strong presence of virtuous historical and biblical figures who heroically defended their country, a topic already developed by Landino in the first part of his commentary.[59] Botticelli painted a similarly motivated panel a few years later (ca. 1496–1504), namely the *Story of Lucretia*, now in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. The figure of Lucretia, wife of the Roman consul Collatinus, represents an important turning point in Early Roman history, as her rape, shame, and subsequent suicide led to the rebellion against the Etruscan kings of Rome and consequently to the establishment of the Republic.[60] Dating Botticelli's picture to 1496 would make it contemporary to a comparable change of government structure in Florence itself, namely the expulsion of the Medici in 1494. As in the *Calumny of Apelles*, Botticelli depicted this scene with a similar antique-oriented architecture adorned with gilded figurative reliefs (this time however leaving out the challenging foreshortened parts). Interestingly, they likewise point to bad leadership and tyranny by again portraying scenes of Judith and Holofernes (front left) and David and Goliath (behind the central scene).[61] Both stories belonged to the common repertoire of Florentine iconography to symbolize the heroic defense of republican liberty against tyranny.

Returning to Botticelli's *Calumny*, I hope to have made clear that the major source for the background reliefs and figures must have been the contemporary source of Landino's commentary, which relied on Dante, of course, but also Boccaccio. The latter is an important presence in Botticelli's painting, where he is the only post-antique poet (and in general the only post-antique character) depicted, even as a niche figure "a tutto tondo", while several panels in the ceiling refer to his writings. Whereas the majority of topics from Boccaccio in the background reliefs were probably transmitted through Landino, a couple of panels must have been suggested directly by Boccaccio's texts, as we will see. These topics have a connection

[57] Landino 2001 (note 2), p. 436 (*Inferno* IV, 130–144). The far-left side of the base reliefs, opposite the judging prince, shows again the *Justice of Trajan*.

[58] *Ibidem*, p. 553 (*Inferno* IX).

[59] The majority of characters taken from Landino come from the commentary to *Inferno* I.

[60] On this painting see for example Guy Walton, "The Lucretia Panel in the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum in Boston", in: *Essays in Honor of Walter Friedlaender*, ed. by Walter Cahn *et al.*, New York 1965, pp. 177–186; Cecchi (note 14), pp. 342–346; Zöllner (note 14), pp. 267f. It should be added that Botticelli might have been familiar with the story of Lucretia through the vernacular translation of Plutarch's *Lives* (where she appears in the "Life of Alexander the Great") printed in L'Aquila in 1482.

[61] Maria Louro Berbara, "Civic Self-Offering: Some Renaissance Representations of Marcus Curtius", in: *Recreating Ancient History: Episodes from the Greek and Roman Past in the Arts and Literature of the Early Modern Period*, ed. by

with Dante, Florence, and slander, and this – as mentioned – is precisely the context in which Boccaccio receives attention in Landino's commentary.

On the right above the judging prince flanked by Deceit and Suspicion, some panels show episodes from Boccaccio's *Ninfale fiesolano*, a vernacular poem from around 1344 set in the pagan age, at the time of the ancient gods, which were "bugiardi e viziosi" (liars and vicious).[62] The story of Nastagio degli Onesti covering five panels on the left above the figure of Truth is taken from Boccaccio's *Decameron*; Botticelli had painted it by 1482/83, perhaps on request of Lorenzo de' Medici, in four panels now divided between the Museo del Prado and a private collection. Nastagio degli Onesti, a young nobleman from Ravenna, fell in love with a girl who at first refused all his approaches. Only when Nastagio managed to have her assist a ghostly ritual of a young woman hunted to death by the lover she had refused, did she finally change her mind and reciprocate his love (*Decameron*, V, 8).[63]

The reason why Botticelli included this story might be due to the setting of Nastagio's love story in Ravenna, which could allude to Dante's unrequited love for Florence, his exile in Ravenna, and his sepulture in that city, a wrong that Florence always wished to remediate, especially during Lorenzo de' Medici's rule. On a more general level, however, the figure of Boccaccio and the scenes from his writings might have been introduced due to his role in the rehabilitation of Dante in Florence. Boccaccio was the first to lecture publicly on him in Florence in 1373, on appointment by the Signoria and the colleges.[64] For Landino – as well as for others – Boccaccio was one of the first to try to establish Dante as the official Florentine poet who inaugurated the erudite vernacular idiom; he praised Boccaccio for having started to write a commentary on Dante's *Divina Commedia* (which however remained unfinished) in the first *proemio* to his commentary.[65] Landino himself devoted part of the second *proemio* – entitled "Apologia nella quale si difende Danthe et Florentia da' falsi calunniatori" – to defending Dante against the accusation of having denigrated his hometown in his poem.[66] Therefore both Boccaccio and Landino must have appeared to Botticelli as a kind of apologists for Dante, and this might have induced him to combine motifs from their writings in his invention on calumny.

Botticelli and the Role of Vernacular Humanist Texts and Commentaries

It has commonly been assumed that renowned painters like Botticelli had a humanist adviser to interpret ancient literary sources for them. Such an advisor would have helped them to clothe the antique subjects in an appropriate contemporary humanistic vestment. In Botticelli's case the name of Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494) in particular has been proposed, largely on the grounds that both belonged to the Medici's inner circle.[67] What I wish to stress is that instead of relying on a learned adviser, the painter could have been aided in his literary choices by existing vernacular translations of classical and humanistic texts, as well

Karl A. E. Enenkel/Jan L. de Jong/Jeanine De Landtsheer, Leiden 2002, pp. 147–165: 159.

[62] Giovanni Boccaccio, "Ninfale fiesolano", ed. by Armando Balduino, in *idem*, *Tutte le opere*, ed. by Vittore Branca, Milan 1974, III, pp. 273–421: 292, *ottava* 6.

[63] The naked fleeing woman and the knight following her is also at the center of Botticelli's earlier treatment of the Nastagio degli Onesti theme.

[64] On Boccaccio's public lecture see Jonathan Davies, *Florence and its University During the Early Renaissance*, Leiden *et al.* 1998, p. 14.

[65] Landino 2001 (note 2), p. 220. On Boccaccio's efforts to re-elevate Dante's reputation (for example in the *Trattatello in laude di Dante Alighieri*) and on Landino's appraisal of this role, see Simon A. Gilson, "Notes on the Presence of Boccaccio in Cristoforo Landino's Comento sopra la Comedia di Danthe Alighieri", in: *Italian Culture*, 23 (2005), pp. 1–30.

[66] Landino 2001 (note 2), pp. 222f.

[67] On Poliziano as Botticelli's advisor see for example: Aby Warburg, *Sandro Botticellis 'Geburt der Venus' und 'Frühling': Eine Untersuchung über die Vorstellungen von der Antike in den italienischen Frührenaissance*, Hamburg 1893, pp. 2–5; Meltzoff (note 14), p. 225, p. 230 note 230, and pp. 234–283; Ishizawa (note 14); Körner (note 13), pp. 345–347; Cecchi (note 14), p. 298. Mariani Zini

as by vernacular philological commentaries on ancient sources.[68] In our case, following Landino's description of Apelles' painting, Botticelli could have easily devised his own version of the allegory, combining it with Dante's idea of purifying figurative wall reliefs; almost all of the subjects of these could have been derived from Landino's commentary, with a few additions by Boccaccio, the early Dante apologist.

Landino's commentary on Dante is written in the classical style of Renaissance philological commentaries. The two differences are that the original author does not belong to the canon of classical literature, the category of texts that usually received a commentary, and that both the author and the commentator wrote in the vernacular. In his commentary, Landino deliberately shifted the interpretation of both Dante's text and his antique references, making it sound more Platonic and more philosophically inclined to moral questions like the search for the common good (*summum bonum*).[69] It lies in the nature of the commentary – in Landino's time as well as nowadays – to compare an argument with the thoughts and theses of other authors, including earlier commentators from antiquity to the present and references to the Bible or to ancient mythology.[70] The result was a considerably expanded text, compared with the source. A painter reading the commentary would then find a detailed discussion and explanation of all the relevant issues, enabling him to choose the topics and combine them in a sequence appropriate for his painting. In Botticelli's case we can take his knowledge of Landino's text for granted not only because it was the most important commentary on the most important vernacular text from the Middle Ages but also because it was widely read throughout the Renaissance;[71] moreover, for the later editions from 1484 onwards the artist produced preparatory drawings for the woodcuts by Baccio Baldini. He also executed a separate set of drawings for all of Dante's *canti*.[72] It is therefore evident that Botticelli was familiar not only with the *Divina Commedia*, but also with Landino's commentary.

In the preface of his commentary Landino emphasized the value of the vernacular, stating that we should revere Dante for having ennobled the language of the people and writing it with stylish elegance: he was the first to demonstrate the power of the Florentine idiom, a language fit for every kind of argument.[73]

Many patrons and artists benefited from vernacular literature. Botticelli, who – like a good part of his clientele – belonged to the Medici circle, was one of those privileged painters who had a school education and access to a social environment that provided them with relevant literature and appropriate interpretations. However, his own textual studies could not comprise the whole canon of humanist literature. Landino was aware of this situation. He therefore

1998 (note 13), p. 248, also sees Poliziano as a direct help to Botticelli, as well as the humanist's *Panepistemon*. Zöllner (note 14), pp. 8, 106, 109, and *idem* (note 15), p. 250, argues strongly for a humanist adviser, although he does not propose a name. Therefore, he does not see the composition of Botticelli's painting as a result of the artist's own literary ambitions.

[68] The author of this article is currently finishing a monograph on the intellectual horizon of the Renaissance artist.

[69] On Landino's major interpretative shifts see Deborah Parker, *Commentary and Ideology: Dante in the Renaissance*, Durham/London 1993, pp. 78f. and 119.

[70] On the commentary tradition in the Renaissance see for example Anthony Grafton/Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, Mass., 1986, p. 15; Parker (note 69), pp. 36–39; Christina Shuttleworth Kraus, "Introduction: Reading Commentaries / Commentaries as Reading", in: *The Classical Commentary: Histories, Practices, Theory*, ed. by *eadem*/Roy K. Gilson, Leiden *et al.* 2002, pp. 1–27; Marjorie Curry Woods, "What Are the Real Differences Between Medieval and Renaissance Commentaries?", in: *The Classics in the Medieval and Renaissance Classroom: The Role of Ancient Texts in the Arts Curriculum as Revealed by Surviving Manuscripts and Early Printed Books*, ed. by Juanita Feros Ruys/John O. Ward/Melanie Heyworth, Turnhout 2013, pp. 329–341.

[71] On the importance of Landino's commentary see Parker (note 69), pp. 76 and 89.

[72] On Botticelli's and Baldini's illustrations see *Sandro Botticelli: Der Bilderzyklus zu Dantes Göttlicher Komödie. Mit einer repräsentativen Auswahl von Zeichnungen Botticellis und illuminierten Commedia-Handschriften der Renaissance*, Kat. der Ausst. Berlin 2000, ed. by Hein-Thomas Schulze Altcappenberg, Ostfildern-Ruit 2000; Körner (note 13), pp. 330–345.

recommended learned vernacular for everyone in his preface to the Dante commentary.[74] Botticelli was the most important artist to follow Landino's advice, as well as his vernacular explanations. Therefore, artists like Botticelli did not necessarily need a humanist adviser; it was sufficient for them to rely on the accessible vernacular literature or translations, possibly in a commentated version.

By the time Landino wrote his commentary, the vernacular based on the Tuscan idiom had spread all over Italy and beyond.[75] Furthermore, many important classical texts had already been translated and appeared in print: Ovid, Virgil, Lucan, Plutarch, Cicero, and Aristotle. Botticelli's literary choice must therefore have been driven by the topic of the *Calumny of Apelles* and his sympathy for Dante and his eloquent commentator Landino. The mere wish to illustrate ancient literature could have been fulfilled otherwise. By turning to the most celebrated Florentine poem, which deals explicitly with penitence and purification, and with the help of the most important Dante commentator of his time, Landino, the painter presented a challenging comparison with the ancient story: in referring to both the famous exiled and slandered poet and the most famous ancient painter, who himself had suffered calumny, Botticelli created his own intellectual memorial and established himself as the new Apelles.

[73] Landino 2001 (note 2), "Proemio", IX, p. 253. See also Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, Oxford 1972, pp. 114–117. For another interpretation of the vernacular see Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, Princeton *et al.* 1992; *idem*, "The Importance of Vernacular Style in Renaissance Art: The Invention of Simone Martini's Maestà in the Palazzo Communale [*sic*] in Siena", in: *Studies in the History of Art*, 74 (2009), pp. 189–205: 192; *idem*, *The Early Renaissance and Vernacular Culture*, Cambridge, Mass., *et al.* 2012, pp. 1–7 and 69–114. Dempsey sees the vernacular exclusively as a way of living. In his studies on vernacular influences on late medieval and early Renaissance Italian painting including Botticelli, he locates the vernacular in environments dominated by femininity, beauty, and naturalness. Dempsey's vernacular literary sources emerge from a different environment, starting with Petrarch, which leads him to a unique, lyrical interpretation of the vernacular, engaged closely with late medieval courtly life and its "lived experience". He thus wholly omits the other aspect of the vernacular, i.e. to be a means for humanists to make learning and knowledge accessible.

[74] Landino 2001 (note 2), "Proemio", IX, p. 255.

[75] On this see also Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Latin and Vernacular in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Italy", in: *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association*, VI (1985), pp. 105–126: 114.

Abstract

Botticelli painted the small allegory of the *Calumny of Apelles* after having completed his illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy* with the commentary by Cristoforo Landino (1481). The picture is based on Lucian's ekphrasis of a painting by Apelles, which circulated in the Renaissance in different translations and contexts. Leon Battista Alberti's vernacular version in his treatise on painting was usually considered the principal source for Botticelli's painting. This article aims to demonstrate that Botticelli instead relied on Landino's version of Apelles' *Calumny* in his Dante commentary, which shows a higher level of congruence in the details. The commentary also provided the stories for most of the niche statues and reliefs in the background architecture. Only a very few scenes from Boccaccio, Dante's early supporter, were added. Finally, the value of vernacular literature and commentaries as a source for painters in the early Renaissance is discussed. Through the use of vernacular humanist literature, Botticelli demonstrated his knowledge by visualizing complex humanist concepts, thus presenting himself as the new Apelles.

Photo Credits

Quattrone, Florence: Fig. 1. — From Cast (note 6): Fig. 2. — © Trustees of the British Museum: Fig. 3. — From Meltzoff (note 14): Fig. 4.