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“Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Salutation of Beatrice* Pictures as Victorian Comics”

Michele Martinez

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Scholars writing about the combined act of reading and looking at the pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti have developed a vocabulary that treats his paintings and poetry as independent art forms “in dialogue” with each other. Maryan Ainsworth, Jerome McGann, Richard Wendorf have used the terms “double work of art,” “composite art,” and “iconic text” to characterize Rossetti’s poems (usually sonnets but not always), written initially for Old Masters pictures and subsequently his own paintings.¹ Rossetti is famous for his multipanel pictures, such as *Beata Beatrix* and *The Blessed Damozel*, which he created in collaboration with various framemakers in order to inscribe poetic lines, stanzas, or whole sonnets on the frames (Grieve; Roberts [1985] and [1995]; and Wendorf). In my view Rossetti’s word-and-image designs create a reading experience that is characteristic of mid-Victorian comics and cartoons, which narrativized events from modern life through the use of panels, gutters and verbal captions. While it might seem strange to focus on Rossetti’s renderings of scenes from the life of Dante and Beatrice, which epitomize a medieval revivalist goal, I argue that his selection and arrangement of scenes share much with contemporary picture stories and single-panel cartoons found in illustrated journalism.

¹ My argument challenges McGann’s claim that Rossetti’s images and texts “are riven by competing expressive urgencies that can be broadly classified as iconic and linguistic” (“Rossetti’s Iconic Page” 128). Comics theorists do not view these “urgencies” as competitive: rather, meaning arises when frame lines (and other drawn or painted boundaries) organize and sequence images and texts within a pictorial space. For a more general challenge to paragonal interpretation, see Mitchell (1994) 83-107.

Even though comics scholars and art historians claim a clear lineage from fresco painting and altarpiece objects to print cartoons and comics, Rossetti's place in this genealogy has hitherto been overlooked (Labio 329; McCloud; 2-23; and Goldstein 254-61). The problem arises in part from the tendency to discuss Rossetti's revivalist drawings and paintings in a strictly fine arts context.² Art historian Lew Andrews summarizes what appears to be a disciplinary resistance to addressing visual narrative in European art: "Quite often there is a lingering sense of embarrassment, or an air of apology; we cannot entirely escape, it seems, from the traditional attitudes and judgments according to which the continuous [narrative] method is child-like and naïve, akin to comic strips and cartoons" (84). But why dismiss the kinship between comics and the visual storytelling of altarpieces and frescoes? When teaching her students to interpret early Italian fresco narratives, art historian Claudia Goldstein starts with common comics elements found in Reformation broadsheet sequences, Marvel/DC comic strips, Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées*, and the contemporary graphic novel (259). Increasingly, scholars of print comics and those in the history of art and architecture are uncovering mutually illuminating interpretive ground.

Comics scholar Hillary Chute offers a definition of comics that helps avoid the problem of medium by focusing on "panels" and "gutters," the basic units of graphic narrative:

Comics might be defined as a hybrid word-and-image form in which two narrative tracks, one verbal and one visual, register temporality spatially. Comics

² Kooistra argues that Pre-Raphaelite book design and illustration sought to bring "the hand of the artist and the machinery of mass production closer together and to acknowledge the social practices and uses of art" (42). I explore how the graphic narrativity of Rossetti's painted pictures and artisanal frame relates in a similar way to the mass cultural products of illustrated journalism. See also Helsinger.

[a collective noun] moves forward in time through [...] its progressive counterpoint of presence and absence: packed panels [...] alternating with gutters [...]. Comics doesn't blend the visual and the verbal – or use one simply to illustrate the other – but is rather prone to present the two nonsynchronously; a reader of comics not only fills the gap between panels but also works with the often disjunctive back-and-forth of *reading* and *looking* for meaning. (Chute [2008] 452)

By looking at “packed panels” and the spaces in between them, Chute calls attention to narrative unfolding and progress, but her description also claims that the act of reading comics is “disjunctive.”³ The reader must look “back-and-forth” between two (or more) panels, between pictures and texts, and between foreground and background.⁴ Comics and art historians both discuss the interplay between panels and gutters, which may be constituted by blank space or frames with verbal captions (Lavin 10-11, Gardner 138; McCloud 60-93). Rossetti's panel-and-gutter renderings of *The Salutation of Beatrice* (ink and wash drawing, 1849-50; framed oil on board, 1859-63) possess both progressive and disjunctive dimensions [Figs. 1 and 2]. At first glance the drawn and painted panels represent Beatrice and Dante in two locations and temporalities: thirteenth-century Florence and the eternal spring of the Earthly Paradise in Purgatory. More complexly the gutters are inscribed with captions from Dante's poetry, particularly quotations that express the poet's amatory feelings and aesthetic observations from *Vita Nuova* as well as

³ Groenstein designates the gutter, or the space between comics panels, an “intericonic space,” a boundary that enables the reader to create meaning (44).

⁴ Andrews and Nygren examine narrative complexity in medieval and early Renaissance altarpiece pictures, attending to temporal and spatial disjunctions between panels and between foreground and background perspective within the each panel. Labio makes the unusual claim that “acquaintance with Netherlandish and Italian narrative visual art in particular accounts to some extent for the readability and rapid formal maturity of comics in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century” (317).

Beatrice's declaration in *Purgatorio*, canto 30. Rossetti also renders pictures and text in the central gutter in order to memorialize the moment of Beatrice's death. These elements not only chart the progress of Dante as a man and poet but also display the temporal and spatial disjunctions created by Beatrice's death, Dante's maturation and exile, and Rossetti's own mid-nineteenth-century moment. Comics and cartoons in English graphic journalism also possess the temporal and spatial complexity of Rossetti's revivalist pictures and share his interest in social types and moral action.

In this essay, two versions of *The Salutation of Beatrice* illustrate Rossetti's initial engagement with comics features on the page and his translation of those elements into his painted panel-and-frame designs. When we examine the composition of the 1849-50 drawing entitled *Il Saluto di Beatrice* and the subsequent framed oil-on-panel picture *Salutatio Beatricis*, it might appear that Rossetti's art moved toward early Renaissance altarpieces and away from the hand-drawn lines of comics.⁵ I argue, however, that Rossetti translated "picture story" conventions common to both medieval and Victorian art into the *Salutation* drawing and beyond to other multipanel pictures. According to Thierry Smolderen, the nineteenth-century picture story was "a new kind of [reading] experience" that "br[oke] down into visual stages the stereotyped social scripts they describe[d]" (79). Of course, Rossetti was familiar with the *vita* of saints and apostles narrativized graphically in early Italian art, but his depictions of Dante and Beatrice also reflect print journalism's interest in the careers of young men. Moreover, for Rossetti the

⁵ In addition to the two-panel *Salutation* compositions discussed here, other pictures include *The First Anniversary of Beatrice's Death* (1849 and 1853, watercolor), *Beatrice Meeting Dante at a Wedding Feast, Denies Him Her Salvation* (1851-55, watercolor), *Giotto Painting a Portrait of Dante* (1852, drawing and watercolor) and (c. 1859, unfinished watercolor), *Dante's Dream on the Day of the Death of Beatrice: 9th of June, 1290* (1856, watercolor), *Dantis Amor* (1860, oil on panel), *Beata Beatrix* (1871-72, oil on canvas), and several more single panel versions of *The Salutation of Beatrice* (1869, oil on canvas), (1869, 1872, watercolor), and (1880-81, oil on canvas).

face of Dante, uncovered by a family friend in a Florentine fresco in July 1840, exemplified a living presence animating the revivalist spirit of Pre-Raphaelitism.

I: The *Punch* Cartoon, Newspaper Picture Stories, and Rossetti's 1849-50 *Salutation*

Drawing

The active reading and looking that Rossetti's *Salutation* designs encourage in his viewer-reader would have been a familiar mental and visual process learned from looking at "cuts," or woodcut illustrations, which appeared in nineteenth-century graphic journalism.⁶ The visual sequence had emerged fully in France and Britain in the 1830s, and by the 1840s illustrated periodicals and newspapers carried regular strips and columns. Kunzle, Mainardi, and Gravett trace the origin of modern comics to both William Hogarth, famous for his progresses of "rake" and "harlot" in the 1730s, and Rudolphe Töpffer (1799-1846), a Swiss schoolmaster, who caricatured Continental social types, including the romantic hero in *Les Amours de M. Vieux Bois* (1837).⁷ Hogarth's engravings enjoyed an immediate and long afterlife in British periodicals, where they were redrawn and sequenced as panels on the printed page. James Gillray, George Cruikshank, and Thomas Rowlandson, following Hogarth's precedent, also created popular sequences that were reproduced in British newspapers throughout the nineteenth century (Kunzle 18-27; Gravett 79-96). According to Celina Fox, journal editors of the 1830s and 1840s gave illustrators and engravers free reign to develop regular features, including the "Gallery of Comicalities" from *Bell's Life in London and Sporting*

⁶ Patricia Mainardi traces four stages in the transformation of the popular print into newspaper comics and cartoons: "the traditional single-image broadside, then sequential narration applied first to religious imagery, and then to secular subjects. [...] in the final transformation [...] new stories were written and illustrated narrating the whimsical anecdotes that eventually became characteristic of comics" (Mainardi [2011] 12).

⁷ Although Töpffer is normally credited with inventing the first comic book (*Histoire de M. Jabot*, 1833), Thomas traces the origin of comics to seventeenth-century English print sources.

Chronicle and *Punch*'s "Pencillings" (231).

While the comparison might seem odd, it is worth considering how a *Punch* cartoon and a trecento altarpiece use gutters in order to organize visual and textual content and create a narrative: the former about labor reform and the latter church canonization. For example, the Irish illustrator Robert Jacob Hamerton (fl. 1830-91) pictorializes the allegory "CAPITAL and LABOUR" in *Punch* of July 29, 1843, a full-page cartoon that dramatizes the plight of the working poor, who toil beneath the notice of domestic and colonial capitalists [Fig. 3]. Gutters are created out of the ceiling and walls of the mine, the door between Charity and Labour, and the lush textiles dividing Capital from everyone else. Charity and Love seem obstructed by the door that leads into the mine, as a nasty overseer and his bags marked "GOLD" hold it closed. The arrangement of the panels narrativizes the interdependency and separation of Heaven and Hell to the exclusion of a charitable Purgatory.⁸ Hamerton's use of allegory might seem as medieval as Simone Martini's visual *curriculum vitae* of the Beato Agostino Novello's qualifications for sainthood [Fig. 4].⁹ In Martini's c.1324 altarpiece, four of seven panels, which flank the central devotional portrait, depict the power of an angelic Agostino after his death. Chronicling Agostino's purported feats, these panels portray the imagined rescues of children, who have fallen from balconies and out of cradles among other

⁸ On the previous page, a scathing paragraph prefaces the cartoon: "It is gratifying to know that though there is much misery in the coalmines, where the 'labourers are obliged to go on all-fours like dogs*,' there is a great deal of luxury that results from it. The public mind has been a good deal shocked by very offensive representations of certain underground operations, carried on by an inferior race of human beings, employed in working the mines, but *Punch*'s artist has endeavoured to do away with the disagreeable impression, by showing the very refined and elegant result that happily arises from the labours of these inferior creatures. [...]" (48). The asterisk cites "Mr. Horne's Report," presumably the 1842 document produced by The Children's Employment Commission on Mines and Factories. Richard Hengist Horne was an appointed sub-commissioner of the report.

⁹ The Blessed Agostino Novello was a Sicilian monk who joined the Franciscan monastic community of Sant' Agostino in Siena at the end of his life. Martini's altarpiece was created as part of a campaign to beatify him. See Hoeniger on the significance of the "child miracles" depicted in the four "active life" panels of the altarpiece.

potentially mortal events. Both Victorian and early Renaissance visual narratives encourage the viewer to reflect on moral action of great concern to their respective communities.

In the 1840s as illustrated news and humor journals proliferated, the first monthly periodical emerged that was devoted primarily to graphic narrative: *Man in the Moon* (1847-48) attracted readers to its pages with humorous picture stories about social types, especially the young man in search of a career.¹⁰ Instead of constraining the sequence to the small, octavo size of the publication, editor Albert Smith and illustrator Henry George Hine innovated the large “pull out plate, which folded five times horizontally and vertically to fit the tiny dimensions of the magazine” (Kunzle [1990] 308). The popular Anglo-French illustrator known as “Cham” contributed the first two of these large-plate sequences that focused on his own adventures and follies in London.¹¹ However, it was Smith and Hine’s seven-part sequence “Mr. Crindle’s Rapid Career upon Town” (1847) that found popular success in England and France.¹² [Fig. 5] “Mr. Crindle” chronicles the vicissitudes of a London clerk, who upon receiving a fifty-pound legacy, becomes a reckless man-on-the-town. Each month’s insert featured twelve to fourteen panels of Mr. Crindle’s high-jinx, the result of his inability to handle his liquor or the indignation of city police, fellow boarding room tenants, local cats, angry shop-owners, etc. Simple lines form the gutters between panels, creating a sense of moment-to-moment and scene-to-scene action taking place in different parts of London. The panels and verbal captions

¹⁰ Kunzle considers *Man in the Moon* to be the “first major repository of comic strips in England” (308). Smolderen documents the rise of the “picture story” in the Christmas supplements of the *Illustrated London News*, beginning in 1851-52, and its popularity in weeklies for the next three decades (78-79).

¹¹ Cham’s nom-de-plume is an acronym of Charles Henri Amedée de Noé. His *Man in the Moon* sequence was *The Foreign Gentleman in London; or the English Adventures of M. Vanille*.

¹² “Mr Crindle” was reviewed favorably in the *Illustrated London News* (September 1848). The influential journalist and caricaturist Charles Philipon asked Gustave Doré to copy it for the *Journal pour Rire* (Kunzle 308).

highlight the protagonist's pretensions (e.g., trying on a monocle) and misadventures (e.g., losing his latchkey after drinking too much cider). "Mr. Crindle" concludes in Part 9 with the protagonist waking up from the nightmare of Parts 1-8. He quickly settles down to studying for the bar and marries a worthy lady. One *Punch* writer identified the typical *Man in the Moon* reader, as "restless, critical, dissatisfied – a 'fast,' raffish man" (qtd. in Kunzle 9).

In illustrated newspapers with an even wider readership, other versions of "Mr. Crindle" appeared in picture story form, including "The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green. An Oxford Freshman. — By Cuthbert Bede [Edward Bradley], B.A.," which was published in two parts in 1851-52 *The Illustrated London News*' Christmas Supplement [Fig. 6]. The bespectacled protagonist Mr. Green navigates the new, confounding argot and rituals of university life. High and low points include Mr. Green being greeted by the Head of the College (Part I) and being embarrassed by his Scout for leaving out money that might be mistaken for a "perquisite" (Part II). In a longer sequence serialized between December 1858 and May 1859 in the penny paper *Town Talk*, the illustrator William McConnell's "The Adventures of Mr. Wilderspin on His Journey Through Life" targets the ne'er-do-well gentleman. Each installment documents the protagonist's pursuit of games, acting, gambling, and women and his unintentional route into politics and marriage. Wilderspin is a poor judge of character and becomes prey to con men operating on the fringes of polite society. Ultimately, he settles into an expedient marriage with his financially sound landlady. Both Bradley and McConnell satirize the folly that accompanies a young person's pursuit of an education, vocation, social milieu, and marital union, treating his errors with a light touch. As the graphic counterpart of the

comics career narratives found in the illustrated press, Rossetti's 1849-50 *Salutation* pictures also present a young man's pursuit of a vocation and love and attendant feelings of excitement and shame.

Contemporary with the popularity of "Mr. Crindle," Rossetti had begun to draw sequenced pictures from the life of Dante Alighieri, whose autobiographical *Vita Nuova* he was translating into English and whose "slow" rather than "rapid" career fascinated him.¹³ The 1849-50 drawing, titled *Il Saluto di Beatrice*, is Rossetti's first to bear the features of a comics sequence: the two-panel composition was drawn on a single, rectangular page complete with thin frame lines and a central gutter that features the winged figure of Amor, bearing a sundial and downturned torch [Fig. 1]. As is common in comics that represent a character in one place and time and then another, two panels represent Beatrice's salutation: one that occurred as an event on a Florentine street in *Vita Nuova*, and the other imagined long after her death in the Earthly Paradise of *Purgatorio*. Verbal captions below the two panels epitomize the relationship between Dante and Beatrice, which is strikingly different from the Petrarch and Laura version of unrequited love: the female beloved not only acknowledges her admirer but also speaks to him after she dies. The left-panel quotation from a sonnet in *Vita Nuova* recounts Dante's ardent feeling – his heart trembling – in response to Beatrice's greeting when he sees her with a small entourage.¹⁴ The right panel caption provides the stern words that Beatrice utters as

¹³ Published in 1295, *Vita Nuova* recounts Dante's youth and poetry in a narrative that combines prose, sonnets, and canzoni inspired by his love for fellow Florentine Beatrice Portinari (1266-1290). In the 1840s Rossetti translated the poetry of Dante and his circle of *stilnovisti* poets, including *Vita Nuova* [*The New Life*], which he compiled into a book *Dante and His Circle* (1861) and later revised and retitled *The Early Italian Poets* (1874). The English translations from *Vita Nuova* in this essay come from Rossetti's edition.

¹⁴ Dante first sees Beatrice when they are nine years old and trembles even at that tender age (*The New Life* 149). Beatrice's first salutation occurs nine years later (152-53). Below the left panel is written: "E cui saluta, fa tremar lo core" ["He whom she greeteth feels his heart to rise"] (*The New Life*, line 4 of the

she reveals herself to the pilgrim Dante in the Earthly Paradise. More captions appear in the central gutter above and below Amor. Together, the quotations and panels reproduce Dante's fantasy of being able to communicate with his beloved beyond death and recall Simone Martini's beatified, superhero Agostino from the Siena altarpiece. However, in detailing the earthly settings and the awkward feelings between individuals, Rossetti's art reflects the embarrassed or chagrined subjects of Victorian picture stories.

Rossetti's use of pictorial space in the *Salutation* drawing replicates fourteenth-century conventions, but the selected captions inscribed in the gutter present the voices of the characters, resembling less medieval *tituli* and more a comics speech caption or bubble [Fig. 1]. One-point perspective is evident in the left panel, which depicts in the foreground Dante clutching his copy of Virgil's *opere*, while bashfully gazing over his shoulder toward Beatrice. As the scene recedes Beatrice stands at the front of a triangular arrangement with two older female companions and a page dispensing perfume on a handkerchief. The three women form a screen that hides the bare legs of a bacchante, whose curvaceous, nude waist and shoulders draw the eye to her. Rossetti's addition of a half-clad woman to the first salutation narrative foreshadows the crisis portrayed in the next panel: Dante's faithlessness to Beatrice's memory. The sketch-like carving of a mounted knight on a flagstone at Dante's feet manifests the poet's courtly disposition, but the selected lyric caption voices his desire. The exchange of shy gazes and the prospect of titillation share more with the narratives of Mr. Crindle and Wilderspin than a trecento saint. Of course, Rossetti is not interested in representing Dante as virtuous; rather, the poet's self-reflection and self-criticism in his lyric and epic poetry are his focus.

sonnet "My lady carries love within her eyes") (Rossetti 177). Below the right panel, the text reads: "Guardami ben: ben son, ben son Beatrice" ["Look here! For I am Beatrice, I am!"] (*Purgatorio* 30. 73).

Moving from left to right, the reader-viewer's eye settles on the figure and text in the central gutter, which provides the life-altering moment of disjunction between the two scenes: the event of Beatrice's death on "9 GIUGNO 1290," a date that appears in light pencil over the head of Amor (*The New Life* 194). As a means of creating a scene-to-scene transition, the gutter charts a horizontal, temporal progression from daily life to afterlife. The captions in the central gutter, however, also contribute a vertical, spatial dimension. Across the gutter above and below Amor are the inscriptions: "Ita n'e BEATRICE in alto cielo" ["BEATRICE has gone up into high Heaven"] and "Ed ha lasciato AMOR meco dolente" ["And hath left LOVE below to mourn with me"].¹⁵ Both quotations come from "Li occhi dolente per pietà del core" ["The eyes that weep for pity of the heart"], the sonnet in *Vita Nuova* that commemorates the moment Dante learned of Beatrice's death.¹⁶ In short the gutter serves an important function in the visual narrative as an atemporal space of mourning between Florence and the Earthly Paradise. Victorian cartoons and comics often designate liminal space in their narratives in order to represent a character's dreams or an allegorical figure.¹⁷

Rossetti's choice of scenes in the right panel ostensibly emphasizes the poet's progress from young, aspiring student (reading Virgil in the left panel) to mature, laureled poet.¹⁸ The right panel of the drawing has a flatter aspect than the left side, as

¹⁵ See *The New Life*, lines 15 and 14, respectively (Rossetti 196).

¹⁶ In his translation of *The New Life* Rossetti cites Boccaccio as an authority to prove that Beatrice Portinari had been a real person and not simply an allegorical personification (149). Rossetti's father Gabriele had argued in commentaries published between 1825-42 that the Beatrice of the *Commedia* was a Masonic symbol.

¹⁷ See Figs. 3 and 6. In Hamerton's "CAPITAL and LABOUR," the mine overseer keeps Charity away from the workers by blocking a door that also serves as a gutter. In panel eight of "Verdant Green," the protagonist "passes a restless night" and "dreams of get[ting] a Treble First and [... of being] made a Bishop" (I.720).

¹⁸ Rossetti seems to represent a laureled Dante in Purgatory in order to signify his posthumous fame. In the opening lines of *Paradiso*, canto 25, Dante expressed the desire to be honored with a laurel crown, but the

Dante, Beatrice, and two young women with a stringed instrument appear in a line before a scrim of lilies in the Earthly Paradise.¹⁹ The drawing has more of a dreamlike quality than the left panel, owing to the lightly sketched distant *campagna* behind the lilies and the banks of Lethe below the figures' feet. Decades have passed after Beatrice's first salutation and her death, and the scene depicts the moment after Virgil has disappeared from Dante's side. As his guide through Hell and most of Purgatory, Virgil has helped Dante cope with terrible scenes of suffering and intense feelings toward the shade inhabitants. The right panel pictures the moment that Beatrice appears and unveils her face to her long, lost admirer.²⁰ In the text of *Purgatorio*, Beatrice asks Dante not to weep for Virgil's parting because even with his guidance the poet has veered from the path of virtue: "la via vera" (30.130). Her rebuke takes the form of a visual cue: "Look here! For I am Beatrice, I am!" (30.73). The words are harsh, and Dante's defensive pose belies Rossetti's gentle drawing of Beatrice's profile. Dante Alighieri's willingness to write his character's moral failings into his epic poem extends one of the central questions of *Vita Nuova*: what happens to the poet once death has removed his muse and guide from sight? Rossetti is fascinated by Dante's error and represents the unveiling of Beatrice's face as a key moment from his *vita*, as that narrative extended into the *Commedia*. The imaginary reunion of Dante and Beatrice in Purgatory is a clear departure from the contemporary picture story script that resolves in marriage. However, the *Salutation* sequence still represents a woman as a wayward, young man's guiding light.

rulers of Florence had denied him the honor as long as he refused the terms of his return from exile. Dante died in Ravenna in 1321 without his city's laurels.

¹⁹ The lilies are based on the lines that read: "All of them cried: '*Benedictus qui venis,*'/And scattering flowers upward and around,/'*Manibus, oh, date lilia plenis!*'" (30.19-21, Mandelbaum 279). The phrase "With full hands, oh, give me lilies" is a quotation from the *Aeneid*, Book VI, line 1179. Anchises utters the phrase as an expression of mourning, upon meeting his son Aeneas in the Underworld.

²⁰ Rossetti alters Dante's scene slightly: in the canto the river Lethe separates Beatrice and Dante, and she first speaks to him from behind her veil.

II. Rossetti's Fine Art Pictures and the *Punch* Page Layout

Rossetti never published the *Salutation* drawing as a print but instead translated the subject into a two-panel, framed, oil picture *Salutatio Beatricis* (1859-65) [Fig. 2]. Rossetti originally created the panels unframed for his friend and business partner William Morris, whose new wife Jane (née Burden) posed as Beatrice in 1859. The panels were originally part of a settle designed for Morris' Red House and in honor of their wedding.²¹ Beatrice's attendants are modeled by Frances (Fanny) Cornforth, Rossetti's housekeeper and model, and Morris' housekeeper Mary. Morris moved back to London in 1865 due to the demands of his furniture and design business. In that year Rossetti created the frame for the panels, using the drawing as a basis for the design and adding more quotations from *Vita Nuova* and *Purgatorio* to the top left and right rails of the picture. With the rendering of Jane Morris as Beatrice and the face of the Bargello Dante as the poet's, modern salutes medieval and signifies the moment that Rossetti had found a new model-muse.²² I argue that despite the artisanal developments that seem to move the *Salutation* narrative away from the hand-drawn lines of print comics *Salutatio Beatricis* continues to develop conventions of the young man, picture story script.

When the panels were detached from the settle in 1865, Rossetti decided to amplify the picture story by designing a reed-and-roundel frame, composing a more

²¹ A third panel depicting the figure of Amor with his sundial was also part of the settle. Rossetti altered the design of Amor radically from the drawing, taking out the verbal texts and adding two profile faces of the sun and moon. After the settle was dismantled, Rossetti designed a frame and gave the picture a new title *Dantis Amor*. See Marillier 354-55.

²² Both the drawing and the painted panel renderings of Dante's face resemble the Bargello portrait, a purported likeness that was uncovered beneath whitewash by the artist Seymour Kirkup and a Florentine restorer in July 1840. The hidden fresco was located in the chapel of the Palazzo del Podestà, which is now known as the National Museum of Bargello. In September 1841 Kirkup sent Rossetti's father Gabriele a chalk drawing of Dante's face and a watercolor of "the dress and heads" portrayed in the Bargello portrait (Bentley 55). Gabriele passed the watercolor to Rossetti, who kept it until his death. E. H. Gombrich and others have disputed the authenticity of the likeness, but the features have served as an official portrait of the poet since its discovery. On the portrait's popularity in England, see Ellis 119-20.

boldly adorned figure of Amor in the central gutter, and painting additional textual quotations (and citations) from Dante's texts on the frame rails. The title "SALUTATIO BEATRICIS" appears in a small, darkened square at the top of the central gutter, placement that gives the picture the air of an altarpiece. "IN TERRA ET IN EDEN" balances the title at the bottom of the gutter. The two-panel composition bursts with color and texture, as fabrics and flora compete for the viewer's attention. Adding to the drama, the figures in both panels appear in a shallower space and in closer proximity to each other than in the drawing. The arrangement of the figures also differs from the drawing (the pageboy and bacchante have been cut from the scene), even though the Dantean sources of the two salutation scenes remain the same. Finally, the top gutter inscriptions give parenthetical citations for the lines from *Vita Nuova* and *Purgatorio* and Latin *tituli* appear near the heads of Dante and Beatrice in both panels.²³ These developments point to Rossetti emulating features of an early Renaissance altarpiece.

Rossetti's turn away from the print medium and to painting may have been a reaction to the illustrated press, which incorporated more visual narrative into its pages with every decade (Fox 21-25). In 1841 *Punch's* first editor Mark Lemon introduced regular cartoons in "Punch's Pencillings," but in the following decade, sequenced comics panels appeared typically in a vertical arrangement on the page (231).²⁴ A brilliant staff of writers and illustrators contributed to the enterprise, including John Leech, a close

²³ The Latin names of Beatrice and Dante ("Domicella Beatrix de Portinaris" and "Dantes de Alghieris" appear above their heads in the left panel. Within the right panel, the inscription "Beata Beatrix" appears above Beatrice's head, and "Poeta Dantes de Alghieris de Florentia" hovers behind Dante's. The change in names from left panel to right reflects each figure's elevation from Lady to Blessed Beatrice and plain Dante Alighieri to Poet Dante Alighieri of Florence. The corner flowers appear to be roses, Dante's symbols of divine love.

²⁴ *Punch's Christmas Almanack* featured calendar title pages that contained multiple panels representing scenes related to each month of the year and signs of the zodiac. The January 1, 1854 *Almanack* has an elaborate gutter and panel arrangement, created by the long limbs of a tree, and has a circular orientation.

friend of PRB member John Everett Millais.²⁵ In the 1840s *Punch* cartoons tended to be single-panel designs with a text caption, but in the next decade illustrators and compositors found ways to integrate two-panel comics within a newspaper's printed columns often to a satirical effect. For example, in the January 1, 1855, issue, two cartoons by Leech appeared on the subject of daguerreotype portraits.²⁶ The first panel, captioned "Interesting Group Posed for a Daguerreotype. By a Friend of the Family," depicts a well-groomed, middle-class couple, posing with an impressive number of tidy children [Fig. 7]. The second panel, called "Interesting and Valuable Result" is separated from the first by a vertical print column that contains a satirical article called "Biographies for the Million."²⁷ The humor of the second panel derives from the blurred result of the daguerreotype, which transforms the handsome family into a distorted caricature. Although the panels and gutter address different subjects, they both satirize technologies of middle-class aspiration: the photograph and the encyclopedia. The interaction between text and illustration reflects contemporary society's trending preoccupations. Although Rossetti's arrangement of captions and panels in *Salutatio Beatricis* have a revivalist aim, they nonetheless reflect the rise of a modern art movement, featuring the faces of recognizable models and the bold colors and textures

²⁵ Among the editors, writers, and illustrators were Douglas Jerrold, William Thackeray, Horace Mayhew, Kenny Meadows, and Richard Doyle.

²⁶ The initials "JL" and style of the signature indicate John Leech as illustrator.

²⁷ The article begins: "We extract the following brief Biographies from a valuable work, shortly to be published under the sanction of the Society for the Confusion of Useless Knowledge." The satire's target is Charles Knight's "penny cyclopaedias" published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and aimed at a working-class readership.

produced by the designers and artisans of William Morris' commercial enterprise "The Firm."²⁸

As in the 1849-50 drawing, the central gutter and frame rails of *Salutatio Beatricis* bear hand-painted inscriptions, but their content evokes "nonsynchronous temporalities" (Chute 452). In the central gutter beneath the winged Amor, the inscription reads: "QUOMODO SEDET SOLA CIVITAS!" ["How solitary the city sits"]. Dante utters this exclamation from *Lamentations* in *Vita Nuova* upon learning of Beatrice's death (*The New Life* 195). The caption voices the sorrow of the Israelites, who were captive to Babylon, and amplifies Dante's grief. In contrast to the lament, the left bottom rail caption quotes the first line of the sonnet "Negli occhi porta la mia Donna amore" ("My Lady carries love within her eyes"), a line that describes a young Dante's response to Beatrice's gaze (*Dante and His Circle* 177). The right bottom rail caption rendering Beatrice's rebuke remains unchanged from the *Salutation* drawing. Yet Rossetti creates another purpose for these texts, when he paints two more inscriptions on the top frame rails. Over the top left panel, one reads: "Questa mirabile Donna apparve a me, vestita di colore bianco, in mezzo di due gentile donne di piu lunga etade: (VITA NUOVA: Cap. II)" ["the same wonderful lady appeared to me dressed all in purest white, between two gentle ladies elder than she: VITA NUOVA: Chap. II"] (*The New Life* 153).²⁹ In these new quotations Dante's words seem to authorize the bright colors of Rossetti's

²⁸ Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, & Co. comprised the Firm, which began trading in April 1861 (Marsh 225). Rossetti was an initial investor and a designer for several stained glass and painted furniture commissions in the 1860s. In 1874 Morris restructured the business, and Rossetti "relinquished all ties" (Marsh 234).

²⁹ The quotation comes from the opening prose paragraph of *Vita Nuova*, section III, in which Dante recounts being greeted on the street by Beatrice, as she walks with two women. Over the right panel the inscription reads: "Sovra candido vel cinta d'uliva, Donna m'apparve sotto verde manto Vestita di color di fiamma viva. (DIV. COM: PURG. C. XXX)." ["A lady came in view: an olive crown/wreathed her immaculate veil, her cloak was green,/the colors of live flame played on her gown" (Mandelbaum 303)]. The green cloak and red gown recur in other versions of Beatrice, such as the original and replica of *Beata Beatrix*.

composition. The chapter and canto citations also attribute a kind of scriptural authority to Dante's verse. While these additions to the *Salutation* design might appear to medievalize the composition, I believe they have the opposite effect. Instead, the captions draw attention to the modernity of the figures. The resemblance of Beatrice and her female attendants to living persons invites the comics reader not only to perceive the frisson of looks exchanged between Bargello Dante and Jane Morris-Beatrice but also conceive of the fulfillment of the Pre-Raphaelite artist-and-muse script in the Morris-Rossetti circle. Moreover, the additional captions widen the temporal span of the voices (Jeremiah, Dante, Beatrice) and capture a form of nonsynchronicity found in the pages of *Punch* and other graphic journals.³⁰

While Rossetti's fine art designs in the 1870s reflect the Dantean preoccupations his patron William Graham, an avid art collector and close friend, they also chart the artist's ongoing experiments with comics gutters and temporality. In the version of *Beata Beatrix* (1871-73), commissioned by Graham, Rossetti employs a predella, a painted panel positioned below a larger primary one [Fig. 8].³¹ One important function of a predella is to present an action or event that relates to the primary picture, and the same can be said of single-cut cartoons, which sometimes contain divisions within a single panel (e.g., Hamerton), or appear as a two-panel sequence (e.g., Leech). *Beata Beatrix* combines both kinds of organization. The main panel represents Beatrice receiving a vision of God, which (as it appears in Rossetti's translation of *The New Life*) Dante

³⁰ Rebecca N. Mitchell has argued that *Punch* created meaning about Victoria's 1897 Jubilee through images "based in counterfactual synchronicity or drastic asynchronicity or is derived from the codification of imagery aligned with various moments in Victoria's reign" (246).

³¹ The Hon. William Cowper commissioned an oil version of *Beata Beatrix* (Tate Gallery) without a predella in 1870. The term *predella* derives from art historical descriptions of polyptychs, or multipanel altarpieces, which were created for northern European and Italian churches from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century.

wished he could have witnessed.³² Dante's text, however, does not describe such a scene in any detail. Thus, although Elizabeth Siddal-Beatrice dominates the foreground, sitting with her hands open to receive a white poppy from a red, haloed bird, Rossetti uses figural, architectural, and landscape gutters in order to create a narrative about Dante. The stonewall that appears at Beatrice's shoulder serves as a gutter dividing her seated body from the area of her upturned head, which seems to glow with light emanating from behind it. The profile of Beatrice's hair and the glimpse of a Florentine prospect behind it create a gutter between Amor, holding a flaming heart on Beatrice's left, and Dante, who on the right appears to gaze at Amor and stands between a well and a sundial. Both Dante and Amor are framed by rectangular panels of dense woods, which in combination with the Arno scene give the effect of a multipanel sequence behind Beatrice's body. Arguably, the visionary sequence captures Beatrice's hope for Dante, which is that he will pursue Love into the Earthly Paradise.

In contrast to the vision of the main panel, the predella depicts the now familiar scene from *Purgatorio* 30, in which Jane Morris-Beatrice rebukes Dante on the banks of Lethe.³³ Two beveled frame rails meet to form a central gutter that bears the painting's title in all capital letters and separates the main panel from the predella. The colors green, red, and gold create unity between the two panels, despite the difference between Siddal and Morris's faces. The narrow horizontal shape of the predella panel, however, crowds

³² According to Rossetti, the source is the conclusion of *Vita Nuova*: "[...] it is my hope that I shall yet write concerning her what hath not before been written of any woman. After the which, may it seem good unto Him, who is the Master of Grace, that my spirit should go hence to behold the glory of its lady: to wit, that blessed Beatrice who now gazeth continually on His countenance *qui est per Omnia saecula benedictus. Laus Deo*" ("who is blessed through all ages. Praise God" [*Early Italian Poets* 211]).

³³ Critics have yet to notice that Rossetti uses two different models to represent Beatrice in the Graham version of *Beata Beatrix*, a composition that the artist worked on for ten years after the death of his wife Siddal. Rossetti made preliminary studies for the picture in the late 1850s and modeled Beatrice on Siddal's features, particularly her auburn hair.

the figures of Dante, who bears the features of the Bargello portrait, and Morris-Beatrice in the composition. Stretching out his hands to Beatrice, Dante bows his head as she bends to reveal herself to him. The two figures are flanked by a band of women on her side and a floral landscape on his.³⁴ Unlike the earlier *Salutation* sequences, Dante kneels before Beatrice, his arms outstretched in a gesture of supplication. Not only does such a tableau run counter to Dante's text, which does not represent the poet as a supplicant, but also suggests a narrative disjunction between *Beata Beatrix* and Rossetti's earlier *Salutation* designs.

The disjunction is emphasized by the placement of Old Testament text inscriptions on the picture frame. The inscriptions on the top and bottom frame rail gutters might prompt one to seek altarpiece design as Rossetti's sole inspiration. Yet the selected quotations seem to voice the feelings of his pictured subjects as in a print cartoon. The top gutter over the main panel bears two inscriptions: "JUN: DIE 9. ANNO 1290" and "QUOMODO SEDET SOLA CIVITAS!" The first designates the date of Beatrice's death, and the other voices Dante's *Jeremiah* lamentation from *Vita Nuova*, the same words that appear on the frame in *Salutatio Beatrix* (*The New Life* 193). The inscription on the bottom frame rail gutter comes from *Purgatorio*: "VENI. SPONSA. DE LIBANO." ("Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse"), a line from *Song of Songs* 4:8, which is sung just before Dante sees Beatrice on the banks of the Lethe (XXX.11).³⁵ While the top caption expresses grief for the death of Beatrice (and possibly the model Siddal), the bottom caption seems to be a call from one lover to another. It may be that Dante's prophetic and lyric voices express the fraught emotions of Rossetti, who suffered

³⁴ Rossetti alters the gender of the "truthful band" (*la gente verace*) from men to women. See 30.1-12.

³⁵ According to Rossetti, the date that appears in the bottom gutter – "MART. DIE 31 ANNO 1300" – marks the moment when Dante meets Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise in *Purgatorio* (Horner 25).

a psychological breakdown at the time *Beata Beatrix* was made.³⁶ Presenting Beatrice in two unrelated but suspended moments, Rossetti reimagines Morris-Beatrice's salutation, which does not set him on a path to virtue but keeps him from the deathly waters of Lethe.

The autobiographical possibility in Rossetti's fine art pictures does not detract from the picture story of Dante's *vita* at the foreground. In fact Dante himself encouraged the allegorical interpretation of his texts – a liberty that Rossetti extends to his own Victorian moment as a herald of Pre-Raphaelitism.³⁷ If *Il Saluto di Beatrice* offers the noble counterpart to graphic journalism's erring, young man, then *Salutatio Beatricis* translates that narrative into a meeting of Bargello Dante and Jane Morris. The autobiographical significance of Amor and Death resonates in *Beata Beatrix*, where the complex gutters emphasize Rossetti-Dante's enshrinement of Siddal-Beatrice's memory and his search for consolation in Morris-Beatrice. By forging a connection between medieval and Victorian comics sequences and their emphasis on progressive and disjunctive visual storytelling, I hope that art historians and scholars of graphic narrative will continue to explore the kinship between Pre-Raphaelite art and the comics and cartoons of illustrated journalism.

³⁶ In the wake of Siddal's death in 1862, Rossetti set the design aside, not completing a first version of the picture (for William Cowper-Temple) until 1870. However, William Graham saw the progress of the picture, and expressing his admiration for the subject, commissioned a replica with the predella (Letter to DGR, 12 Jan 1871). Rossetti did not finish the Graham replica until after he recovered from a suicidal episode in the summer of 1872. He had been overwrought by deteriorating eyesight and felt that Robert Buchanan, author of the vitriolic pamphlet "The Fleshly School of Poetry," and others from his circle were out to scourge his personal life (Mancoff 80-81).

³⁷ See Dante's famous Letter to Cangrande della Scala, Epistole XIII.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Il Saluto di Beatrice* (or *The Salutation of Beatrice*). 1849-50. Ink and graphite on paper. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop.

Fig. 2. Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Salutatio Beatricis* (or *The Salutation of Beatrice*), 1859-63. Oil on panel. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Fig. 3. Robert Jacob Hamerton. “Capital and Labour. Cartoon, No. 5” *Punch* (Saturday July 29, 1843): 49. Reproduced with permission of Punch Ltd., www.punch.co.uk.

Fig. 4. Simone Martini. Altarpiece of the Blessed Agostino Novello: the Saint Surrounded by Two Angels and Four of His Miracles. Tempera on panel, c. 1324. Museo dell’Opera Metropolitana, Siena. Photo Credit: Scala/Art Resource.

Fig. 5. Albert Smith and Henry George Hine. “Mr Crindle’s Rapid Career Upon Town: Part the First.” *Man in the Moon*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1847). Folded insert. *EP8 M3116 A Vol. 1, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Fig. 6. Edward Bradley. “The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green. An Oxford Freshman—By Cuthbert Bede, B.A.—Part I.” *The Illustrated London News*. Christmas Supplement. Vol. XIX. No. 534. (Saturday, 13 December 1851): 720. © British Library Board.

Fig. 7. “Interesting Group Posed for a Daguerreotype. By a Friend of the Family” and “Interesting and Valuable Result.” *Punch’s Almanack* (Monday, January 1, 1855): n.p. Reproduced with permission of Punch Ltd., www.punch.co.uk.

Fig. 8. Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Beata Beatrix*. 1871-72. Oil on canvas, 34 7/16 x 27 1/4 in. (87.5 x 69.3 cm). Charles L. Hutchinson Collection, 1925.722. The Art Institute of Chicago.

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