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Bouguereau's Vampires: Navigating Transgressive Desire in *Dante et Virgile*

by

Angelina Diamante

A thesis submitted in conformity  
with the requirements for the  
Master's Degree in Art Business  
Sotheby's Institute of Art

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Words: 12,019

## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates William Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* (1850) in the context of nineteenth century vampire literature, emerging as the seminal text on the matter. Through a cross-discipline examination of Dante's *Divina Commedia* (ca. 1308–1321), and two canonical works of Gothic vampire fiction — John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), respectively — prominent affinities are articulated. Comprising a broad scope, this text propounds a panoptic argument that such consonance is demonstrative of a reconciliation between the classical and Gothic, forged by nuances of the composition's own nineteenth century — the Byronic hero, homoeroticism, Neoclassicism, and Gothic vampirism, amongst others — in tandem with propinquities to the antique and Renaissance. This paper provides a cross-disciplinary overview of an array of historical periods spanning over one thousand years and regions, analyzing the highly complex mechanics of the classical-Gothic relationship through the forging of others: classical-Italian Renaissance, Italian Renaissance-Neoclassical France, British Gothic-French Revolution, and post-reformation England-Gothic, for instance. Interwoven is the overarching role of the historical imagination, traced through these rich matrices, literature, and *Dante et Virgile*. Clarifying Bouguereau's enigmatic and single creation of a *terribiltà* with the pervasiveness of Gothic literature calls for an enhanced assessment of *Dante et Virgile*, proffering a comprehensive survey that divulges the abiding intricacies of transgressive desire within a tremendously overlooked composition.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. DANTE’S DIVINA COMMEDIA & INFERNO.....	2
III. ENGLISH GOTHIC & VAMPIRE FICTION.....	7
IV. THE PARIS SALON & ACADEMICISM.....	15
V. BOUGUEREAU & DANTE ET VIRGILE.....	18
VI. POLIDORI’S THE VAMPYRE.....	25
VII. LE FANU’S CARMILLA.....	36
IX. CONCLUSION.....	42
ILLUSTRATIONS.....	45
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	62

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile*, 1850. Oil on canvas, 280.5 x 225.3 cm., Paris, Musée d'Orsay. © Musée d'Orsay, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Patrice Schmidt.
- Fig. 2 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: Capocchio's bicep and fist, Schicchi's hair.
- Fig. 3 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: Schicchi's nails drawing blood from Capocchio's torso.
- Fig. 4 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: Schicchi & Capocchio's expressions.
- Fig. 5 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: Schicchi's protruding ribs.
- Fig. 6 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: Dante and Virgil.
- Fig. 7 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: fallen figure.
- Fig. 8 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: genitalia of fallen figure.
- Fig. 9 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: entanglement of bodies in background.
- Fig. 10 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: Schicchi's convoluted torso.
- Fig. 11 Apollonios, figlio di Nestore, ateniese, *Torso del Belvedere* (view from front), 1st century B.C. Marble, 159 x 84 cm., Vatican City, Pio-Clementine Museum. Courtesy Musei Vaticani.
- Fig. 12 Attributed to Agostino Veneziano or other Anonymous Artist after Marcantonio Raimondi, *The Nine Fragments*, ca. 1530. Pieces cut from seven engravings, mounted on board and extended in pen and black ink, ruled border 21.7 x 25.6 cm., London, British Museum. Courtesy James Grantham Turner.
- Fig. 13 Giulio Romano, *Sala di Psyche* (view of east wall), 1526-28. Fresco, Mantua, Palazzo del Tè. Courtesy of The Web Gallery of Art.

- Fig. 14 Giulio Romano, *Sala di Psyche* (as in Fig. 1, view of east wall), Detail: Jupiter seducing Olympias.
- Fig. 15 Jacques Joseph Coigny (after Agostino Carracci), *Jupiter et Junon*, c. 1798. Engraving in *Les amours des dieux: 'L'Aré tin' d'Augustin Carrache ou Recueil de postures érotiques*.
- Fig. 16 Jacques Joseph Coigny (after Agostino Carracci), *Achille et Briseis*, c. 1798. Engraving in *Les amours des dieux: 'L'Aré tin' d'Augustin Carrache ou Recueil de postures érotiques*.
- Fig. 17 Jacques Joseph Coigny (after Agostino Carracci), *Hercule et Dejanire*, c. 1798. Engraving in *Les amours des dieux: 'L'Aré tin' d'Augustin Carrache ou Recueil de postures érotiques*.
- Fig. 18 Jacques Joseph Coigny (after Agostino Carracci), *Alcibiades et Glycere*, c. 1798. Engraving in *Les amours des dieux: 'L'Aré tin' d'Augustin Carrache ou Recueil de postures érotiques*.
- Fig. 19 Gustave Courbet, *Le Sommeil*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 135 x 200 cm., Paris, Petit Palais. Courtesy Petit Palais.
- Fig. 20 William Bouguereau, *The Barque of Dante* (After Delacroix), ca. 1846-1850. Oil on canvas, 38 x 46.2 cm., Private Collection. Courtesy Sotheby's.
- Fig. 21 Eugène Delacroix, *The Barque of Dante*, 1822. Oil on canvas, 189 x 223 cm., Paris, Musée du Louvre. Courtesy Musée du Louvre.
- Fig. 22 Eugène Delacroix, *The Barque of Dante* (as in Fig. 21), Detail: writhing male figure in the water at left.

## DEDICATION

*LA MORTE NON È NIENTE!  
(DEATH IS NOTHING!)  
Sant'Agostino*

Dedicated to my mother, whose memory drives my pursuit of knowledge; your motivation and spirit continue to guide me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In reflecting on the completion of this thesis, I am filled with gratitude for those who have made the achievement of such a feat attainable. I offer my most sincere recognition to Sotheby's Institute of Art's accomplished faculty members, program coordinators, and Student Services directors.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

William Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgil* (1850), housed at the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, ostentatiously displays a harrowing, intimate, and voyeuristic perspective of infernal perdition (Fig. 1). An unambiguous representation of *canto XXX* from *Inferno* — the first component of Dante Alighieri's fourteenth century epic poem, *Divina Commedia* — *Dante et Virgile* serves as an homage to the canons of Renaissance humanism, rendered palatable to nineteenth century taste. Despite the prolificacy of the composition, few have considered the painting in any capacity; among the modest literature concerning the piece are three contemporary French articles by A.J. Dupays in 1850, Edmond Thierry in 1851, and Léon Plée in 1905. Furthermore, *Dante et Virgile* has scarce academic output; its only products are authored by former curator of the Musée d'Orsay, Philippe Saunier, and primarily pertain to the museum's acquisition of the object in 2010. While such scholarship has proven relevant to tracing the object's history, scholars have yet to venture beyond a cursory evaluation of Bouguereau's depiction of Dante's narrative.

This paper seeks to propose a newfound interpretation of *Dante et Virgile* by considering Bouguereau's appropriation of Italianate classical themes in accordance with the emergence of European vampire literature in the nineteenth century. Literary works to be consulted are Dr. John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1871) — the dates between which *Dante et Virgile* is satisfyingly nestled between. Thus, Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* can be appreciated as demonstrative of a rare harmonization between two seemingly antithetical schools — that of the classical and the Gothic — under notions of primary Neoclassicism, Romantic vampirism, transgressive desire, and theriomorphic homoeroticism.

## II. DANTE'S *DIVINA COMMEDIA & INFERNO*

The renowned *Divina Commedia* epic (henceforth, *Commedia*) is considered one of the finest works of Western literature and a pinnacle of Italian prose, authored by Florentine poet, writer, philosopher, and statesman, Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), between the years 1308 and 1321.<sup>1</sup> *Commedia* details a first-person account of Dante's guided journey through *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*: the three *cantiche* of the poem, each consisting of thirty-three *canti*, and furthermore the realms of the dead in accordance with Catholic canon. Offering insight into the beliefs of the fourteenth century Western Church and the greater medieval worldview, the allegory is representative of the emblematic journey of the soul ensuing one's death, commencing with the rejection of sin in Hell, subsequent repentance in Purgatory, and eventual union with God through divine ascendancy into Heaven. This paper will reference Columbia University's complete English translation of *Commedia* as a companion to the Italian Petrocchi edition. Existing as one of the most current and refined iterations of Dante's thirteenth century poem, "Dante Online" came to fruition through the collaboration of key contributors to the field: Dante specialist, Jen Hogan; Italian literary scholar, Teodolinda Barolini; and translator, Allen Mandelbaum.<sup>2</sup> "Dante Online" is moreover equipped with other resources of use to the Dante scholar, including in-text *Commento Baroliniano* — the first dynamic interpretation of *Commedia* to be examined in conjunction with the line-to-line translation.

This research prioritizes a proficiency in the circumstances and bouts that comprise the initial *Inferno*, with particular attention granted to *cantos* XVIII through XXX which are pertinent to Bouguereau's composition, in which what remains of *Commedia* ought to be

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Reinhold Ergang, *The Renaissance* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1967), 103.

<sup>2</sup> Dante Alighieri, Trans. by Giorgio Petrocchi, "Divina Commedia," *Dante Online* (Milano: Mondadori, 1966-67; 2nd ed., Florence: Le Lettere, 1994).  
<https://www.danteonline.it/opere/index.php?opera=Commedia%20-%20ed.%20Petrocchi>

familiar; this section aims to inform accordingly. Dante's descent commences on the eve of Good Friday: a Catholic day of mourning that commemorates the crucifixion and death of Christ. While apprehensive and lost in a canopied forest ridden with beasts — otherwise, spiritually astray from the path to salvation — Dante is visited by the *ombra* of Virgil, ancient Roman poet, who expresses his duty to lead Dante out of his rut on behalf of Beatrice Portinari, Dante's recurrent muse, who waits for him in Paradise. Virgil explains that the imperative, however indirect, route to Heaven entails a perilous journey to the underworld that lies within the pit of the Earth. Thus, Dante and Virgil venture throughout the nine concentric circles of *Inferno*, each declining ring harboring sinners with increasing aptitudes for irreverence and consequential unabating punishments. In a calculated perversion of the orderly nature of the Divine, Dante's hell is meticulously arranged. The delineation of prisoners in the hellscape is as follows: upper hell, encompassing circles one to five, harbors those culpable for venial sins of escalating gravity, consequences of a spontaneous surrendering to human passions: beginning with the un-baptised and virtuous non-Christians, succeeded by those guilty of lust, gluttony, avarice, and wrath. Circles six and seven constitute the fallen-angel-guarded city of *Dite*, a decaying, fiery fortress bearing tall red towers, brooding iron gates, defensive ramparts, and a moat — subsisting as the very antithesis of the archetypal, biblical heavenly city.<sup>3</sup> Those punished in *Dite* succumbed to *malizia* in life, or an inclination toward deliberate wickedness, resulting in offenses of heresy and violence. The division of the successive circle eight, in which the fraudulent suffer, boasts a further intricate design; *Malebolge*, comprising the aforementioned *canto* XVIII through XXX, is divided into ten descending *bolgia* ditches in which prisoners are designated by, and chastised to the same degree as, the nature of their crimes. Sinners are

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<sup>3</sup> Revelation 21:18-21 (KJV); H. Wayne Storey, "Dis," in *The Dante Encyclopedia* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2010), 306.

restrained in their respective *bolgia* by *Malebranche* demons who torture the souls in perpetuity: notably, scouring with whips, piercing and ripping bodies with pronged claws, hurling over inconspicuous ledges, and splitting open flesh with swords. In the center of *Malebolge* is a circular well that opens to the ninth and final circle, *Cocytus*, where betrayers are embedded and bound under unyielding layers of ice and denied from warmth and light in perpetuity, thereby contrasting the preceding circles marked by an underworld ablaze. The center of hell is reserved for Lucifer, an angel-turned-beast culpable for the most egregious offense of revolt against God, rendered powerless in a waist-high sheet of *Cocytus*' ice.

Of particular intrigue is that while illuminating the doctrines of medieval Catholicism, *Commedia* correspondingly sustains a reverence for classical thought by incorporating several influential works of antiquity as source texts, including Book Six of Virgil's *Aeneid*; Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*; and Cicero's *De Officiis*.<sup>4</sup> In a most rudimentary vein, Virgil, an ancient Roman pagan, is heralded as the quintessence of human reason, emerging as an omniscient, pre-Christian prophet that leads Dante both bodily and spiritually toward the path of salvation. Indeed, *Limbo*, the first circle of hell wherein the *ombras* of Virgil and other prominent Greco-Romans reside, is hardly equivocal to damnation; contrarily, *Limbo* hearkens to the *Elysium* in antique Greek myth, the serene final resting place of the gods, the virtuous, and the valiant. *Limbo*'s inhabitants dwell in a great citadel amongst viridescent meadows, however, suffer internally as a result of perpetual resignation from the divine satisfaction found in Heaven. Formerly, such *ombras* even inhabited the circle coevally with the souls of biblical figures who had foretold the coming of Christ, prior to their eventual ascension into Heaven, as well as those of the Christian unbaptised. Dante's sympathetic, impartial, and even laudatory treatment of the ancient thinkers in *Inferno* was a radical and ingenious

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<sup>4</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Inferno* 11.70-115; *Purgatorio* 21.97-99.

proposition in its time, contested and criticized by even his most resolute supporters, rendering such an inclusion all the more pertinent.<sup>5</sup> In further adulation of classical ideals, *Commedia* vindicates humanist scientific inquiry derived from Greco-Roman philosophy, principally with regard to Ptolemaic and Aristotelian geocentrism, interrogating the principles of climate, gravity, cosmological positioning, time zones, experimentation, and math as they had come to be understood contemporarily.<sup>6</sup> Hence, *Commedia* serves as Dante's purposeful and profound harmonization of the Catholic presage of divine redemption and the antique pursuit of knowledge, thereby reconciling the piety of the Middle Ages and the humanistic spirit of the Renaissance.

Completed in 1321, *Commedia* encapsulates a tumultuous period in the disjointed Italian Peninsula, with unification not achieved until the mid-nineteenth century. A distinctly Tuscan narrative, and the first to be written in the low Italian vernacular in lieu of the traditional Latin, the epic was crucial in establishing a national Florentine identity, and in henceforth shaping the cultural imagination of the Western world. Verily, contemporary scholarship has garnered compelling evidence of the importance of Dante, and *Commedia* in particular, in the construction of other national identities throughout Europe; worthy of mention is nineteenth century France.<sup>7</sup> It is plausible that the dissemination of Dante's texts in France began in the southeast city of Avignon as early as the mid-fourteenth century, by virtue of the papal curia. From 1309 to 1376, seven French popes reigned in Avignon instead of Rome, initiated by the allegiance of Clement V (1264–1314) to French monarch Philip IV (1268–1314); it was during this period that a substantial Italian inundation into France occurred.<sup>8</sup> Avignon was assuredly aware of Cardinal

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<sup>5</sup> John Marenbon, "Virtuous Pagans, Hopeless Desire and Unjust Justice," *Vertical Readings in Dante's Comedy* (2015): 77–95.

<sup>6</sup> *Inf.* 33.102–105; *Inf.* 34.76–120); *Purg.* 27.1–6; *Paradiso* 2.94–105; *Par.* 13.101–102.

<sup>7</sup> Aida Audeh, "Dante in the nineteenth century: visual arts and national identity," *Parola del testo: semestrale di filologia e letteratura italiana comparata* XVII: ½ (2013), 85.

<sup>8</sup> Eamon Duffy, *Saints & Sinners: A History of the Popes*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 165.

Bertrand du Pouget's (1280–1352) brutal condemnation of *De Monarchia* in 1329 — Dante's *Commedia*-preceding discourse on the contentious balance of power between the secular Holy Roman Emperor and religious pope — in which it was infamously stated that Dante's bones should be desecrated at the stake, in so certainly acquainting the region with the censured author.<sup>9</sup> It is likewise possible that *Commedia* was introduced and circulated throughout France by Charles V (1338–1380), a monarch who exhibited a distinct humanist reputation and demonstrated commitment to the common good; significant to the present research was Charles V's commissioning of linguistic translators to render influential texts into his native French for his vast library, and patronage of Italians at the courts of French princes as purveyors of literati.<sup>10</sup> Finally, it can be surmised that the dissipation of *Commedia* in France was moreover at the hands of French scholars, allured by Italy's universities and culture, where Dante and antiquity were by that time scholastic conventions. Though the manner in which *Commedia* was indoctrinated into French literary culture is contended and was assuredly achieved by aggregate means, it is certain that by the fifteenth century the epic was translated and read in France, prompting its later status of renown in the nineteenth century, serving as inspiration for over one hundred works of art exhibited at the esteemed Paris Salon between 1800 and 1930.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Gert Sørensen, "The reception of the political Aristotle in the Late Middle Ages," in *Renaissance Readings of the Corpus Aristotelicum: Proceedings of the Conference Held in Copenhagen April 1998*, ed. Marianne Pade (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2001): 21; Guy P. Raffa, *Dante's Bones: How a Poet Invented Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020): 38.

<sup>10</sup> Christine de Pisan, "Le Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V" in *Nouvelle collection des mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de France depuis le XIIIe siècle jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Guyot, 1851): 77-78.; Elizabeth L. Holekamp *Dante into French: The Earliest Complete Translation of the Divine Comedy* (Indiana: University Microfilms International, 1985), 70.

<sup>11</sup> Audeh, 86, table 1.

### III. ENGLISH GOTHIC & VAMPIRE FICTION

With the late-eighteenth to nineteenth century came a literary fever of the era's own authoring; in the context of the broader Romanticism movement rose that of the Gothic — a phenomena whose origins are ambivalent and contested.<sup>12</sup> Be that as it may, this paper affirms its indefinite inception in 1760s England, coinciding with reverberations of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) and the brooding French Revolution (1789–1804) — incidences that affirmed vested tensions between England and France that were established as early as the eleventh century as an implication of the Norman invasion of England (1066).<sup>13</sup> As in *Divina Commedia*, the assimilation and reception of English works of Gothic fiction into France undoubtedly relied on acts of translation; what's more, it has been convincingly argued that the Gothic genre was conceived and sustained by this climate of hostility between the countries, in which English authors cultivated output of their own inspired by that of the French tradition, complete with plagiarisms, translations, and reworkings from French writers of the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> The only constant being its fluidity, connotations, tones, and characteristics of the Gothic shifted from decade to decade in accordance with volatile political and social landscapes to which its authors were privy. It was not until the 1790s that the Gothic satisfied its notorious reputation as the “literature of terror”; contrarily, its original context in the 1760s and 1770s appealed to a bold register of English patriotism through the reclaiming of an erroneous, archaic past dating to the heralded Germanic Goths — the genre's namesake.<sup>15</sup> In the 1790s, however, Gothic literature abandoned its outright nationalistic associations to instead reflect the insurgent state of the

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Hume, “Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel.” *PMLA* 84: 2 (1969): 282.

<sup>13</sup> P. M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Penguin, 2004): 98.; Robert Gibson, *Best of Enemies* (Exeter: Impress Books, 2004): 5.

<sup>14</sup> Angela Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic, 1764–1820: The Import of Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Term used in: David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (London: Longman, 1996), n.p.; Philip Connell, “British Identities and the Politics of Ancient Poetry in Later Eighteenth Century England,” *Historical Journal*, 49: 1 (2006): 161–192, 165.

French opposition, then standing as the antithetical political mode.<sup>16</sup> Formative to the evolution of the Gothic was the period of French Revolution (1789–1799), particularly the commencement of *La Terreur* (1793–1794) in the early 1790s. It was in the midst of France’s massacres, public executions, treasons, turmoil, and sanctioned chaos that such Gothic fictions became truly “terrible,” emulating France’s genuine violence with jarring narratives crafted and contained between their bindings. English output from this period reflected the ubiquitous anxieties of Europe, providing consolation and catharsis through the invocation of heinous tales that evinced motifs of the supernatural, darkness, sacrilege, physical and psychological conflict, mystery, death, the demonic, blood, and horror that aimed to trump the accustomization to profanity that reflected the barbarity of reality.<sup>17</sup> Despite the necessity of French contexts to which the Gothic owed its relevance, French reception of the genre at the turn of the century was ostensibly abstruse, as the 1790s marked an apex of the fraught relationship between England and France, reinforced through the Coalition Wars (1792–1815) and the aforementioned *La Terreur*. In addition to physically engaging in battle with one another during France’s 1798 Egyptian Campaign, an aura of Anglophobia persisted throughout France onward and Francophobia vice versa; such an overtone seems scarcely conducive to cultural exchange between lucid adversaries, and the unforeseen feat of the Gothic novel to permeate rigid French society was recorded by civilians of the period.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the Revolution of 1789 ironically incited a physical Gothic demise, with the desecration, deterioration, and devastation of France’s pinnacle monuments of ogival style. Nonetheless, by the final years of the eighteenth century, the English

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<sup>16</sup> Clive Emsley, “Repression, ‘Terror’ and the Rule of Law in England during the Decade of the French Revolution,” *The English Historical Review* 100: 397 (1985): 801–25.

<sup>17</sup> Ronald Paulson, “Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution,” *ELH*, 48: 3 (1981): 532–554.

<sup>18</sup> Fanny Lacôte, “Gothic and the French Revolution, 1789–1804” in *The Cambridge History of the Gothic, Volume I: Gothic in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Angelina Wright; Dale Townshend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020): 264.; Joëlle Prunghaud, “La traduction du roman gothique en France au tournant du XVIIIe siècle,” *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction* 7:1 (1994): 17–18.



Gothic novel — itself a foreign retort to French history and culture — saw its height in France, kindling translations, imitations, and derivations. France’s intrinsic affinity to the Gothic prevailed throughout the nineteenth century, with the period following the July Revolution of 1830 being specifically lucrative toward a reawakening of interest in Medieval and Gothic-era monuments and literature, inciting a revival from which modern audiences could avail.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, the term “Gothic” as a more prevalent qualifier of eighteenth century literature has negligible connection to the Teutonic people from which its name was derived. Yet, what remains relevant is the resistant role of the Goths in the overthrow of the ancient Roman Empire and the successive emergence of modernism in the Middle Ages. Any pragmatic knowledge about the Goths is credible to a work of sole significance, written by Gothic historian, Jordanes, in 551 in Latin: *De Origine Actibusque Getarum* (henceforth, the *Getica*). Jordanes’ text outlines a record of the Goths from their mythical origins in Scandza, to their migrations into the Roman Balkans and across Italy, Gaul, and Spain, ending with their milieu in his own sixth century. A poignant stab at recontextualising the reputation of his people and legacy-fashioning, the glorifying motives of the *Getica* are evident.<sup>20</sup> However, in fostering a new self and collective remembrance, Jordanes put forth a most impartial history of the Goths — albeit less popular than the ensuing centuries’ obstinate misconceptions, to be addressed subsequently — that has garnered broad acceptance as veridical. As such, what is surmised from the accounts of the *Getica* is that in August of 410, a Visigothic army undertook imperial Rome, foregoing the eventual fall of the Empire and subjugation of the post-Roman West by the Goths at the turn of the century. This relationship prevailed until the early 700s, presupposing later connotations of

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<sup>19</sup> Julie Lawrence Cochran, “The Gothic Revival in France, 1830–1845: Victor Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Popular Imagery, and a National Patrimony Discovered” in *Memory & Oblivion*, ed. Wessel Reinink; Jeroen Stumpel (Dordrecht: Springer, 1999): 393–399.

<sup>20</sup> David M. Gwynn, “The Goths in Ancient History” in *The Cambridge History of the Gothic, Volume 1: Gothic in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Angelina Wright; Dale Townshend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020): 25.

the literary Gothic in the eighteenth century, when such conditions were interpreted to invoke imaginative tales of the macabre with which that past was closely intertwined. More appurtenant, however, is that the prevailing figurative discordance between the domains of the classical and the Gothic is beholden to this past temporal death to classical civilization at the hands of the Gothic people.

With the exception of the *Getica*, contemporary understanding of the origins and history of the Goths is otherwise limited and unresolved, with the few remaining relevant sources written by biased Greek and Latin authors. Such rhetoric, widely reinforced during the later Renaissance, was responsible for the construction of the myth of the Goths that marked them as virulent and inhuman barbarians from the north, blameworthy for the loss of classical civilization and modernity — and ultimately the crumbling of European culture, economics, and intellect during the subsequent Dark Ages (500 A.D.–10th century) — achieved by way of inconceivable and merciless destruction.<sup>21</sup> The concept of the Dark Ages itself was a retrospective reframing, credited to early Renaissance scholar, Petrarch (1304–1374), who posited the post-Roman period as one shrouded in darkness in contrast to the brilliance of antiquity.<sup>22</sup> In the absence of traces and output, the Goths came to be understood as merely a pejorative signifier of the non-Roman, and in specifically Greco-Roman history as the infamous corrupters of prospering Westernity.<sup>23</sup> Thus, connotations of the Gothic have prevailed to invariably signify its presence as a juxtapositional force to the classical.

Whereas the Italian Renaissance held in high regard Rome's antiquated past and considered the ensuing Medieval period to be regressive, a contrary sentiment was maintained in

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew M. Reeve, "GOTHIC" *Studies in Iconography* 33: Special Issue Medieval Art History Today—Critical Terms (Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 2012): 233.

<sup>22</sup> Theodor Ernst Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'" *Speculum*, 17: 2 (1942): 226-242.

<sup>23</sup> Robin Sowerby, "The Goths in History and Pre-Gothic Gothic" in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012): 25-37, 26.

post-Reformation England (began 1603) — a region plagued by dissension following the refusal by Pope Clement VII (1478–1534) to grant an annulment of the marriage of Henry VIII (1491–1547) to Catherine of Aragon (1485–1536). Exacerbated by the permeation of humanist and Lutheran ideology into England, the dispute ultimately culminated with the separation of the monarchy and the Church of England from the pope and the Catholic Church. Foreseeably, it was during this period that the liberty and vigor of the Goths resonated with the English, precisely due to their rival reputation against Rome, and to such a degree as to insinuate and appropriate Goth selfhood by descent. By the eighteenth century, this spirit became so prevalent that one’s English identity was dependent upon it, coinciding with the Gothic novel’s original intent: to declare an incredible ancestral lineage between the Goths and Saxons.<sup>24</sup> Hence, the inherent strain between the classical and Gothic — posited on account of a complex past history — prevailed well into the seventeenth century as a consequence of an imposed and promoted contrariety.

With regard to the contrasting perversions of the historic record contained in Jordanes’ *Getica* that have been recounted in this chapter, it is evident how societal interpretations of the ‘Dark’ or ‘Middle’ Ages (the adverse coining itself an epitome) were constructed in hindsight, manifesting as ex post facto conjectures that more appropriately concerned themselves with a given civilization’s perceived physical and philosophical severance from the Germanic Goths, rather than the intricacies and realities of the Medieval period itself. Thereupon, it is conceivable how the Gothic can be regarded as a degeneration from antique prestige, however, simultaneously a liberation from classical restraint. Regardless of retrospective stance, what remains certain is the oppositional poles that the classical and the Gothic each occupy. By the

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<sup>24</sup> Samuel Klinger, “The “Goths” in England: an introduction to the Gothic vogue in eighteenth-century aesthetic discussion,” *Modern Philology* 43:2 (1945): 107–17.

advent of the Gothic in the nineteenth century, the genre had borne centuries of modern ideations in perpetuity, all derived from varying interpretations of antiquity.<sup>25</sup> Bearing in mind such adaptations, it is suitable to suggest that the nineteenth century procured yet another — one instead facilitated by a reconciliation between the Neoclassical artistic style and the Gothic literary genre that have as yet been partitioned. As a period successive, and candidly detrimental, to antiquity, the Gothic is intrinsically interwoven with the distant memory of the classical world that it dethroned. Verily, the Gothic rarely fulfills its opposite alias; ironically, sequestering warped and misshapen classical forms is among its most quintessential trope.<sup>26</sup> In this regard, literature from the Romantic era serves as an archetype; it was during this period that authors possessed the liberty to simultaneously express their affinity toward, or revulsion for, the antique by reanimating its attributes in Gothic taste, often assuming the guise of a Gothic narrative.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Romantic emotion and ingenuity are products reliant on the synthesis of the classical principles of order and reason and the Gothic hallmarks of obscurity and discordance; this philosophy can be further applied to the artistic compositions from the period.<sup>28</sup> The following chapters are written in accordance with the underlying conviction that the circumstances of the nineteenth century were conducive to the remarkable harmonization between the classical and the Gothic exhibited within Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgil*, thereby anteceding a thorough analysis of the work in the context of the vampire literature of the period.

Whilst the Gothic flourished in England between the mid-eighteenth to early nineteenth century, vampire fiction emerged as a prominent subsection throughout the genre's later years et

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<sup>25</sup> Reeve, 234.

<sup>26</sup> James Uden "Reassessing the Gothic/Classical Relationship" in *The Cambridge History of the Gothic, Volume 1: Gothic in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Angelina Wright; Dale Townshend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020): 161-162.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>28</sup> Hume, 282.

caetera.<sup>29</sup> Vampire novels exhibit incongruity with other derivatives of Gothic literature through the substantiation of deviant expressions of desire, shrewd immortality, [homo]eroticism, and certainly in the introduction and fashioning of the exotic vampire figure. Adapted from a commingling of folkloric superstition from Central Europe and illusory paranormal phenomena that plagued Serbia and Hungary in the early 1700s, the most rudimentary origins of the literary vampire can be traced to post-Enlightenment German ballad poetry. Suggestions of vampirism predated the dawn of the Gothic, with such circumstances recorded as products of the Austro-Turkish War (1716–1718) by Austrian soldiers occupying Serbia who became privy to the bizarre practice of exhumation to prevent unwanted activity on behalf of the deceased.<sup>30</sup> What ensued upon Western reception of these reports was an infatuation throughout Europe, prompting the vampire’s evolution into his present literary convention. First apprehended in a nod to the German Romantic, the vampire fell short of embodying its definitive archetype until appropriated by the authors of English Gothic fiction, with which the genre’s disposition and atmosphere were hitherto compatible. The vampire’s role as a conventional antagonist in the Gothic tradition was procured in Dr. John Polidori's *The Vampyre* — the first fully realized vampire story written in English. *The Vampyre* novella was inspired by the infamously unfinished *Fragment of a Novel* (1819) by poet and politician Lord Byron, to whom Polidori served as a primary physician.<sup>31</sup> Subject to analysis onward is Polidori’s reimagining of the misanthropic Byronic hero into the prototypic male vampire — for *The Vampyre*’s adversarial Lord Ruthven was crafted in the likeness of Lord Byron himself. Accordingly, this research

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Heide Crawford, *The Origins of the Literary Vampire* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016), 16-37.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew McConnell Stott, “The Poet, the Physician and the Birth of the Modern Vampire” *The Public Domain Review* (16 Oct. 2014) <[publicdomainreview.org/essay/the-poet-the-physician-and-the-birth-of-the-modern-vampire/](http://publicdomainreview.org/essay/the-poet-the-physician-and-the-birth-of-the-modern-vampire/)> (4 May 2024). ; William McKelvy, “200 Years On, 'The Vampyre' Still Thrills” *Washington University in St. Louis* (27 March 2019) <<https://humanities.wustl.edu/features/william-mckelvy-the-vampyre-200/>> (4 May 2024).

upholds that the Byronic vampire (hereinafter mentions of the “vampire” are in re) is a purely English conception, possessing distinct dissimilarities with the preceding vampiric subjects of German prose and Balkan historic record, whose qualities imprinted an indelible mark on European fiction and subsequently Romanticism.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> M. M. Carlson, “What Stoker saw: the history of the literary vampire,” *Folklore Forum* 10 (1977): 26–32, 27.

#### IV. THE PARIS SALON & ACADEMICISM

The austerity of the pedagogy and subsequent career trajectory of the aspiring artist in nineteenth-century France was indebted to the centuries-old tradition of the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, founded in 1648 to replace the medieval artisan guilds of painters and sculptors with a more adequate society based on merit.<sup>33</sup> Supervised by the ministers of Louis XVI and a select group of member artists, the *Académie* served as a decisive ruling body for the standards of French art. In support of a nationalistic proclivity to establish a stringent language of French visual culture, the *Académie* wholly oversaw the professional lives of those working in the arts in France, facilitating objective training and lectures in the official *École des Beaux-Arts*, determining a hierarchy of artistic subject and remuneration, prevailing a history of patronage from the royal circle and Versailles, and inciting and promoting pupil achievement through public exhibiting at the esteemed annual Salon de Paris. The *Académie* was dissolved in 1793 following the overthrow of the *Ancien Régime*, however, was reestablished in 1816 as the *Académie des Beaux-Arts*, coinciding with the peak of the Romantic period in France. Though somewhat rejuvenated, the new *Académie* was prized for its adherence to its fundamental precepts, most significantly in the conservative and circular approach to art production, display, and consumption — beholden to the *École* and the Salon (and thus, the French crown), respectively. By virtue, the Salon was regarded as the most significant art exposition in the West, garnering tens of thousands of visitors per year. Inclusion in the Salon not only marked an artist's entrance into the public domain as a performer of French culture, but was moreover crucial toward the establishment of a lucrative career; the Salon was virtually responsible for all state art

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<sup>33</sup> Henri Testelin, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de l'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, depuis 1648 jusqu'en 1664, I* (Paris: P. Jannet, 1853), 11-12.

transactions, commissions, and critical discussion and review during the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup>

Favorable exhibiting at the Salon rose an artist to prominence, denoting their “official” success, ideally culminating with the esteemed *grand prix* scholarship — an honor whose winner was to receive a three-year residence at the Villa Medici in Rome to refine their practice through the emulation of the works of classical and Renaissance masters.<sup>35</sup>

Hence, it follows that the intransigent crux of academicism was the reproduction of canonical sources drawn from these periods in exclusivity; the Neoclassical style itself owes its prevalence to the Italian-modeled *Académie* within which it was codified. However, the intent of academic art was not merely rooted in artistic imitation, but rather in the construction of a comprehensive visual ideology of its makers, marked by a distinguished aesthetic vocabulary that was achieved through an acquaintanceship with and reverence for such forebears, resulting in its own highly polished style, refined technique, and objective tastes.<sup>36</sup> Instilled with a dogmatic sense of realism, academic paintings are characterized by precise and concealed brushwork and exhibit a mastery of perspective and shading to evoke natural depth; yet, they ascend to an ethereal, otherworldly rank through harmony and perfection in execution and form. Compositions pervaded with allegory — which *Dante et Virgile* emerges as a prime example — occupy the highest echelon of the *Académie*’s edified hierarchical genres of painting, imbued with intellectual depth and moral consequence. Thus, the interaction of nineteenth-century artists with Dante’s *Commedia* implies a rekindling affinity for the literary breadth of the Renaissance — albeit by a domestication of the text through the implication of French *goût* — reinstating and prevailing a tradition of *Commedia*-inspired scenes dating as early as the late medieval

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<sup>34</sup> U. Van de Sandt, “*La fréquentation des Salons sous l’Ancien Régime, la Révolution et l’Empire*,” *Revue de l’art*, lxxiii, (1986):43-48.

<sup>35</sup> Allison Lee Palmer, *Historical Dictionary of Neoclassical Art and Architecture* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 5.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Duro, “Imitation and Authority: The Creation of the Academic Canon in French Art, 1648–1870” in *Partisan Canons* ed. Anna Brzyski (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007): 96-112, 96.



period.<sup>37</sup> To compound these intricacies, it was inevitable that these Neoclassical renditions of Dante's narrative were ascribed a level of Romantic flare through artists' corresponding interaction with contemporary literature of the period, promoting an intriguing landscape for interplays between elements of the classical and Gothic.

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<sup>37</sup> Audeh, 89.

## V. BOUGUEREAU & *DANTE ET VIRGILE*

Much of what is known about the life and career of William-Adolphe Bouguereau may be characterized as a form of historical revisionism; it was not until the early 2000s that a comprehensive biographical inquiry into Bouguereau commenced, primarily inspired by the imperative to rectify his adversely soured reputation as a principal antagonist of the Modernist movement — a negative delineation which arose from his prominent role as the leader of the *Société des Artistes Français* at the turn of the century, founded in 1881 due to the Salon's dissolution from the auspices of the subsidiary government. The subject of inquiry becomes further refined when a composition such as *Dante et Virgile* is the object of consideration; discrepant with respect to the remaining paintings that comprise Bouguereau's copious oeuvre, this painting presents a scarcity of source material from which to draw. Hence, the genesis of Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* will instead be delineated through the analysis of primary source news articles contemporary to the period.

*Dante et Virgile* was first published in 1850 in the widely circulated, bourgeois-focused *L'Illustration* magazine, accompanied by an article authored by writer and literary critic Augustin-Joseph du Pays.<sup>38</sup> At the time, Bouguereau, aged twenty-five, had commenced formal artistic training at the *Académie* merely four years prior. The *Salon de 1850* anthology provided intimate accounts of du Pays' visits to prominent artist's studios — Bouguereau one among many — offering exclusive insight into the functionality of the artists' workspace. By one year's succession, the painting again appeared in a seldom-encountered 1851 publication in *Journal de l'Assemblée nationale*, authored by Edmond Thierry.<sup>39</sup> The Musée d'Orsay maintains that this entry affirms that Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* was painted in a third, however failed, attempt

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<sup>38</sup> A. J. du Pays, "Salon de 1850," *L'Illustration*, Paris, 1850: 88.

<sup>39</sup> Edmond Thierry, *Journal de l'Assemblée nationale*, Paris, 1851.

to at last secure the esteemed *grand prix de Rome*. In a 1905 editorial reporting on Bouguereau's death, appearing in *Les Annales Politiques & Littéraires*, author Léon Plée articulates *Dante et Virgile* as the artist's illustrious establishment of artistic independence in his youth, ambitiously exhibiting the work at the Salon in 1849 prior to the conferring of his master's degree.<sup>40</sup>

The subjects of Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* are two male sinners, entwined in an abhorrent, infernal struggle: each muscle of their powerful, bare bodies stimulated and engaged, keen on inflicting harm upon one another. Their vitality is conveyed through the vibrancy of their full heads of hair, flawless pale white skin, and remarkable musculature and physicality accentuated by the interplay of light and shadow on the contours of the body. The figure in the forefront of the composition succumbs to the offenses of his attacker, forcibly thrust into a posture of vulnerability: his left leg is contorted inward while the right is stretched outward, parallel to the rocky terrain beneath. His torso is agonizingly forced backwards, as the knee of his offensor lodges between the protruding muscles of his sacrum and buttocks. Through this concessive state, the involuntary counter-curve of his back conforms to the attacker's pose, stabilizing his aggrandized lunge. The right arm is strained upwards with biceps fully engaged and fingers clenched tightly around a lock of his assailant's fiery red hair, the pallor of his taut knuckles indicative of the intensity of his grip, while his left arm is restrained behind him by the wrist at an excruciating angle (Fig. 2). His neck is dramatically thrown back and exposed, exaggerated by lines of pressure on the pursed skin. The aggressor climatically hunches over his victim, holding him in an unrelenting grip, and embedding the nails of his left hand into the ribcage, drawing blood and marring the tender, lacerated skin (Fig. 3). As he sinks his widened jaws into his opponent's neck, his bestial expression seethes with sadistic rage and rabid abandon; the muscles of his neck, collarbones, and temples are strained with swollen veins, his

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<sup>40</sup> Léon Plée, "Études et croquis : William Bouguereau," *Les Annales politiques et littéraires*, Paris, 1905: 131-132.

thinned skin has prominent creasing around the mouth, nose, and forehead, and his sunken, piercing eyes maintain a resolute gaze on the object of desire (Fig. 4). The figure's appetency is conveyed through the presence of subtle ribs that jut from his right side (Fig. 5). His carnal nature and strength disrupt the façade of anthropomorphism that is otherwise believable by virtue of his stunning physique, rather tending toward an inhuman disposition. The facial expression of his prey conveys a menagerie of emotions, with furrowed eyebrows, pulsating and veined temples, unfocused eyes, and a gaping mouth — features that juxtapose his impermeable bodily response, thereby obscuring the boundaries between submission and restraint (Fig. 4). The sheer peril of the scene is reinforced by the sinister landscape in which it resides, which bears blazing orange skies fraught with ashen clouds, and a precarious and uneven bedrock channel that the subjects occupy, offering the only solace from the fuming coals and subsequent incineration beneath. Two figures — distinguishable as Dante and Virgil on account of their period garments — are poised off-center, standing privy to the horrors that surround. Dante, robed in crimson, sternly recoils and gazes downward, placing his hand on his counterpart, Virgil, who covers his mouth with an ivory toga, averting his eyes toward an undefined subject outside the boundaries of the work (Fig. 6). Making conspicuous their presence and behavior, Bouguereau incites spectatorship that prompts an active confrontation with and reaction to the content of the composition. Above them looms an unorthodox skull-faced demon, whose extended wingspan almost entirely encompasses the width of the canvas. He possesses a stout yet robust body that is gray in color, pointed ears, pronounced fangs, and two budding horns on either side of his forehead. With arms crossed and an ill-omened grin, the demon peers down at the figures, seemingly taking pleasure in their distressing reactions to the callous scene. Beneath them lies a fallen figure in anguish, demonstrated by a creased and clenched expression, stiffened posture,

and tightly fist ed hands (Fig. 7). The fallen's male genitalia is just visible, inconspicuous behind the eye-catching action of the subject figures (Fig. 8). A complex entanglement of writhing bodies occupy the background, grappling with one another as they aim to evade descension into the smoldering, magma-laden rubble below (Fig. 9).

In its humanist subject and pursuit of classical and Renaissance aesthetics, Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* does not deviate from the standard conventions and aspirations of academic painting in post-Revolutionary France.<sup>41</sup> Yet, Bouguereau surpasses a mere adherence to the typicalities of the Neoclassical, intensifying their effects in accordance with the intended vehemence and salacity of the composition — candidly, to the effect of perversion. These components are evident in Bouguereau's rendering of the central male nudes, commensurate with antique and Renaissance tastes, as pinnacles of masculinity. The figures embody a godlike nature and are without defect, effervesce dynamism, and exhibit an array of esteemed physical qualities that recall the idealized human forms employed in pre-nineteenth century Italian art, including chiseled musculature, immaculate proportionality, and a physical emanation of the psychological experience. Nonetheless, Bouguereau's execution of these qualities achieves a heightened severity, driving his subjects to unrelenting acts of aggression and perpetual dissatisfaction. Furthermore, Bouguereau dons his subjects' bodies with striking s-curves, especially with respect to the inflictor, whose elongated, twisting torso irrefutably harkens to that of the antique Belvedere (Figs. 10-11). Once more, the exorbitance of this contortion is quite disfiguring, imparting the body with a serpentine quality that more appropriately aligns with the mannerist attributes of the late Renaissance. Of further consideration is the vivid *chiaroscuro* bolstered by the use of deep red oils, a mastery of perspective and clarity of form as demonstrated by the recessed horde of figures in innumerable positions, and a meticulous

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<sup>41</sup> Reference IV: THE PARIS SALON & ACADEMICIS, p. 16-17 in re. what constituted the academic style.

apprehension of balance through the use of diagonals and radial symmetry. Defining Bouguereau's manipulation of these classical elements is requisite for considering their use in subsequently illustrating a discordant Gothic narrative in *Dante et Virgile* in the chapters to follow.

Bouguereau's composition offers a flagrant rendition of *canto XXX* from *Inferno*. The preceding *canto XXIX* provides context for this encounter, introducing first the identity of the bitten: Capocchio, a thirteenth century Sienese occultist. Upon entering the tenth and final *bolgia* of *Malebolge*, which harbors the *Inferno*'s falsifiers of the highest degrees, Dante and Virgil reach the first province, wherein reside the alchemists. It is in this ditch that they meet two Italian *ombras*, those of Griffolino and Capocchio, who endure the misfortune of lepers and are covered in irremediable sores.<sup>42</sup> The damned share their stories with Dante for the favor of renown in the physical world. The quartet continues their descent until they reach the second district, reserved for impersonators who have succumbed to lunacy. *Canto XXX* configuratively deviates from the poetic formula that has heretofore been abided, significantly composed of *terzinas* and executed in the low language. Whereas other *cantos* have commenced with Dante and Virgil bearing witness to the independent suffering of each circle's inhabitants, *canto XXX* delivers them to the vanguard of pandemonium. As articulated by Dante, the offenses that the sufferers of this *bolgia* commit toward one another eclipse even the most grotesque transgressions executed by the living. The *canto* unfolds in the wake of a deranged *ombra* driven mad from rabies, who irately wreaks havoc throughout the trench, biting other sinners who obstruct his direction. With Dante and Virgil observing, Capocchio is attacked by the rabid *ombra* who plants a bite on his neck, identified by Griffolino as Gianni Schicchi — a thirteenth century Florentine who assumed the identity of a progenitor of the wealthy Donati family to

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<sup>42</sup> *Inf.* 29.83-84.

falsely claim an inheritance for himself (his character later adapted in the infamous the one-act Puccini opera). Dante's text is as follows:

quant' io vidi in due ombre smorte e  
nude,  
che mordendo correvan di quel  
modo  
che 'l porco quando del porcil si  
schiude.  
L'una giunse a Capocchio, e in sul  
nodo  
del collo l'assannò, sì che, tirando,  
grattar li fece il ventre al fondo  
sodo.  
E l'Aretin che rimase, tremando  
mi disse: «Quel folletto è Gianni  
Schicchi,  
e va rabbioso altrui così conciando».

as were two shades I saw, both pale  
and naked,  
who, biting, ran berserk in just the  
way  
a hog does when it's let loose from  
its sty.  
The one came at Capocchio and  
sank  
his tusks into his neck so that, by  
dragging,  
he made the hard ground scrape  
against his belly.  
And he who stayed behind, the  
Aretine,  
trembled and said: "That phantom's  
Gianni Schicchi,  
and he goes raging, rending others  
so."

[*Inf.* 30.25-33, Mandelbaum  
Translation]

In sooth, the incident that inspired Bouguereau's monumental composition unfolds in merely eight rather vague lines of the full one hundred and forty eight that comprise the *canto*, leaving much to the visual imagination and recalling the question of from where an impression of such explicitness was derived. It is of note that *Dante et Virgile* is wholly unique in subject and execution when evaluated alongside its nineteenth century contemporaries, bringing to bear a brutal, yet prurient, and exclusive rendition of the Capocchio-Schicchi incident of *canto XXX*. Whilst there existed no precedent for the depiction of a neck bite-driven attack in the visual arts, it was moreover unconventional for such an encounter to be described in literature, no less in as early as the fourteenth century — for this was not commonplace until the dawn of the British Gothic novel nearly five centuries successive. Anteceding this development, *canto XXX* of

*Inferno* provided a rich foundation for the emergence of the Romantic vampire archetype, compellingly foreordaining their synthesizing within *Dante et Virgile*.



## VI. POLIDORI'S *THE VAMPYRE*

Bouguereau's nineteenth century hellscape advances antique elements through the invocation of a proto-Renaissance subject Renaissance motif — the result an undeniably Gothic, vampirically-charged homage to the classical. Hereby, Bouguereau is transhistorical, synthesizing French Neoclassicism, Dante's Tuscan *Commedia*, and the vampire of English Romanticism. Furthermore, Bouguereau is transnational, appealing to two autonomous literary factions: the classical Western canon through *Commedia*, and the dominant contemporary fiction informed by the English Gothic. The first text to be analyzed in this context is the seminal *The Vampyre* by Dr. John Polidori, earlier referenced in chapter III. Polidori's novella details the elaborate relationship between Lord Ruthven, an aristocrat, and Aubrey, a recently orphaned young gentleman in possession of a sizable inheritance. Straightaway, it is attested that Ruthven is mesmerizing: though the coloration of his eyes and face are akin to that of a corpse — emotionless and gray — they are nevertheless beautiful in silhouette and configuration. In addition to his nobility and eccentricity, his indignance is alluring: men and women alike sought his hard-earned attention and approval — for despite his physical peculiarities, he was quite the sensation at parties, possessing the reputation of a charming libertine. After briefly becoming acquainted with (to say nothing of being captivated by) Ruthven through their interactions in London's social scene, Aubrey received an unexpected invitation to join the nobleman on his travels, presenting an opportunity for his character to be further studied. As the trip progresses, Aubrey's initial flattery is overrun by disgust as he discovers that his new confidant is not what he once appeared, taking pleasure in others' degradation through the support of vice and acting in deceit, especially toward adoring and unassuming women. In southeastern Europe, Aubrey is introduced to the tale of the vampire — a monster whose features he realizes mirror the likes of his Ruthven. This apprehension coincides with the slaughter of the narrator of the legend,

Aubrey's short-lived paramour. After a fatal injury throughout the course of the expedition, Ruthven compels Aubrey to take an oath of silence with regard to his impending death. Upon Aubrey's sole return to London, he finds Ruthven miraculously alive and well — what is more, pursuing a relationship with his sister. Ruthven and Miss Aubrey are eventually married, resulting in a stress-induced fatality for Aubrey, whose attempts toward distance and the delivery of an admonition were no match for Ruthven's charisma. The story ends with the disappearance of Ruthven, and the subsequent discovery of the body of Miss Aubrey, drained of blood — the presumed victim of a vampire.

The significance of the vampire in Polidori's story is merely a veneer for an embedded moral truth — a cautionary tale against the irresistible allure of, and ruinous consequences that can be brought on by, a seductive *roué*.<sup>43</sup> It is through this form that the Byronic hero prevails, sharing with the Romantic vampire a compelling and sultry nature, nocturnal tendencies, a disregard for ethical and sexual boundaries, insurmountable physical strength, the status of an outcast yet undeniably assimilated, and a disconcerting compulsion to destroy the objects of his desire.<sup>44</sup> Simultaneously a villain and a victim, the Byronic vampire is a fallen being of his own volition; he covets the possibility for salvation, yet is never redeemed. Thus, Byronic vampirism is merely a continuation of debauchery by other means: that is, a physical indication and repercussion of poor moral character, as opposed to its cause. It is precisely through this nature that one may consider Bouguereau's intended reception of Schicchi as a Byronic figure in his own right. The accessibility and prevalence of both texts — that of the historic Dante as well as the then all-the-rage vampire prose of Polidori — likely elicited natural associations between

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Morrison; Chris Baldic, "Introduction," in *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, ed. Robert Morrison; Chris Baldic (Oxford: Oxford University Press), vii-xxii, xiii-xix.

<sup>44</sup> Conrad Aquilina, "The deformed transformed; or, from bloodsucker to Byronic hero – Polidori and the literary vampire," in *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representations of Vampires and the Undead from the Enlightenment to the Present Day*, ed. Sam George; Bill Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013): 28.

them in the midst of the construction of *Dante et Virgile* as a nineteenth century product of French Neoclassicism. As in Polidori's *The Vampyre*, Dante's *Inferno* moreover encourages readers to implore a moral conscience, forewarning the ignorance of self sin through an invocation of poetic irony. As such, the ramification of each fall from grace is a respective *contrapasso*, translating from Latin to verbatim "suffer the opposite."<sup>45</sup> Whereas Dante describes Schicchi's retribution for his rapacity in life as a fervent and undying hunger, Bouguereau takes artistic liberty in conveying this quality through the ascribing of vampiric attributes and mannerisms to him. In a kindred sentiment to Polidori, who implores the vampire as a scapegoat for the corrupt behavior of an already inherently flawed Byronic hero, Bouguereau likens Schicchi to this archetype, not only to nominally represent his consequential affliction in hell, but furthermore to underscore its role as a symbolic "mark of the beast": a manifestation of his defiled life. To this effect, the plague of the vampire becomes an overarching penance for amorality: acting as a vengeful fulmination caused by the repressed and covert transpiration of sin. All the more intriguing, however, is how, through the intercession of classicizing elements, Bouguereau's figures ascend to a status of exquisiteness despite being fashioned as bloodthirsty damned souls, thereby paradoxically removed from their mundane, mortal restraints that marked them as filthy heretics and cheating sybarites. Furthermore, as Byronic figures, Polidori's Lord Ruthven and Bouguereau's Schicchi are subject to analysis based on a number of archetypal qualities: haughtiness, temperamentality, cynicism, disagreeableness, lewdness, and vengefulness. Presently relevant is their inability to feel remorse, yet capability for deep and strong affection, thereby illuminating the mechanics of hyper-masculine (and to be considered

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<sup>45</sup> *Inf.* 28.142.

in-depth in the chapters to follow, homoerotic) desire that the vampire myth is rendered so poignant through.<sup>46</sup>

On account of this, it is yet necessary to recall the origins of the literary vampire and consider their associations with Bouguereau's depiction of his figures in *Dante et Virgile*. As the inaugural work of vampire fiction, Polidori's *The Vampyre* was the first to induce a clean break between pre-and-post nineteenth century connotations of the vampire figure, achieved through a reconceptualization of the bestial, bloodsucking *nosferatu*, or undead, into the dignified and mysterious aristocrat. While absolved of the absurdly repugnant conception of the traditional vampire of Eastern European folklore — that is, of a bloated and disheveled *revenant* corpse — the Byronic vampire still maintains a number of uncouth attributes. However, it is explicitly through Polidori's juxtaposition of these marked and subtly supernatural traits with those more desirable that his Lord Ruthven becomes so fascinating, thereby eliciting opposing perceptions of attraction and repulsion, desire and fear: notably, in his sunken eyes that yet produce an awe inspiring stare, or in his ability to charm in the midst of indifference. Despite his rank, Ruthven fails to fully assimilate into mortal life, especially with regard to his outwardly lascivious, and covertly homicidal, behaviors, thus embodying both the human and non-human realms. This dualism corresponds with the figures of Capocchio and Schicchi in Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile*, who at once incarnate both ethereal beauty and monstrosity. In consequence, Bouguereau's composition facilitates a rarity, hearkening to the creatures of legend that have lain dormant since Polidori's revisitation, offering a reincarnation of their original disrobed, feral, and hedonistic form. Whereas Polidori's imperfect Ruthven is bolstered through his Byronic appeal in the context of Romanticism, Bouguereau's sinners are correspondingly instilled with a sense

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<sup>46</sup> Rupert Christiansen, *Romantic Affinities: Portraits From an Age, 1780–1830* (Indianapolis: Cardinal, 1989), 201.

of elegance achieved by way of Dantean reference, thereby representative of a marrying between classical subject and Gothic execution.

Conceivably, the most striking feature of Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* is the forthright and explicit depiction of a calculated pursual of the neck, consummating with the prominent act of teeth and mandible meeting delicate flesh. Perhaps too-obvious a sentiment, it is this canonical act that distinguishes the attack of a vampire from that of any other. Though Polidori omits the explicit scene of assault that Bouguereau exhaustively seeks to convey, the cause of Ruthven's victims' demise is clear, as indicated by teeth-inflicted wounds on their necks intended to draw blood.<sup>47</sup> Accompanied by insatiable appetites, notions of interbreeding and exoticism, and the overt expression of deviant impulses, the innate relationship between vampirism and transgressive desire is indisputable. Though differing from human sexual libido in nongenital enactment and objective, the proclivity of the vampire is nonetheless highly erotic, characterized by a ravenous, displaced sexuality gripped by an oral fixation.<sup>48</sup> The inclination of the vampire to bite his victims transcends his necessity for nourishment, revealing its predilection as a source of pleasure. It can be asserted that the sexuality of the vampire itself is characterized by his license to treat depredated victims not only as wellsprings for life-giving blood, but moreover as means-to-ends through engaging in fatal, carnal delights. In the matter of Polidori, the status of Ruthven's victims as founts of both sustenance and gratification is so striking that it requires no further mention; however, this is less applicable to Bouguereau. As per Dante's source *Inferno*, it can be inferred that Bouguereau's figures of Capocchio and Schicchi are immortal, predeceased in their current state of perpetual damnation, thereby making void the precept of necessity to bite

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<sup>47</sup> John Polidori, "The Vampyre" in *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, ed. Robert Morrison; Chris Baldic (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1-24, 12, 23.

<sup>48</sup> Sarah Sceats. "Oral Sex: Vampiric Transgression and the Writing of Angela Carter." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 20:1 (2001): 107-21, 107.

for survival. In a corresponding vein, whereas Bouguereau's meticulous adherence to vampiric detail infiltrates all other aspects of the composition, he omits the presence of blood on the neck entirely. For the nineteenth century imagination, the act of drinking blood was commensurate with absolute resignation to one's carnal senses — the epitome of indecency. Through its absence, yet implicit insinuation, Bouguereau's composition straddles the threshold of respectability, sanctioning permissible viewership under the guise of virtue, while subtly tantalizing through the suggestion of eroticism. In addition to this aspect of risqué depravement, Schicchi's failure to elicit blood from Capocchio's neck entirely eliminates the query of his physiological necessity, therefore substantiating the nature of this act as purely pleasurable.

Necessary to consider in tandem is the climate of sadomasochism precipitated by the vampire figure. With respect to Lord Ruthven, Polidori explicitly delineates his emotional detachment, only enlivened through the opportunity to inflict harm. It is the obstruction of the boundaries between pain and pleasure — the bane of the victim and consequential rapture of the vampire — that renders the latter so threatening, however confoundingly enhances his sex appeal.<sup>49</sup> This sadistic tendency is mirrored and surpassed in Bouguereau's composition; the deathlessness of Capocchio renders the risk of fatality obsolete, barring him from adequately assuming the role of victim. By its very essence, Schicchi's inability to kill is erotic, thereby reframing the neck bite of the vampire narrative with regard to pleasure and play. Achieving a similar register in Bouguereau's composition, Capocchio's expression — reminiscent of the classical and Renaissance through its exuberant emotional depth and meticulous realism — is evocative of a resignation to bodily passions rather than an endurance of agony. In further promotion, while Bouguereau does not incorporate blood on the neck in accordance with Polidori's gruesome narrative, its presence nevertheless appears as a sole drop emanating from

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<sup>49</sup> Polidori, 7.

Capocchio's torso, derived from Schicchi's clenched fingertips. This unexpected detail appeases notions of deviance and temptation, illuminating unfulfilled and forbidden desire — in a sense, possessing pornographic appeal. This suggestion culminates with the presumptive positioning of another figure's genitals, rendered just fully visible from behind Capocchio's buttocks — a brazen allusion to homoerotic penetration.

The tensions present in the vampire novel serve to bolster these erotic nuances. Though sultry and powerful, the vampire is adversely defined by his voracity, arguably to the extent of eunuchism: for without the sacrifice of his victims, he is incomplete — and still yet so by way of his insatiability.<sup>50</sup> The push-and-pull between tension and warning, a motif now regarded as intrinsic to vampire literature, was established by Polidori's *The Vampyre*; notably, in Aubrey's inability to timely warn his sister against Ruthven, and the more dominant force that intercepts his injunction, thus rendering Aubrey himself a victim.<sup>51</sup> Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* emulates this suspense by drawing a fine line between pain and pleasure, sanctioning an idiosyncratic kind of reverie in which the likenesses of mortality and permanence, torment and bliss consort with one another.<sup>52</sup> The composition implements a number of allusions in accordance, including the looming, grinning *Malebranche* demon who acts as a proponent of physical and sexual vice, as well as the figures of Dante and Virgil themselves, who yearn to herald the lessons of the *Inferno* in the mortal world. The enduring connection between vampirism and deviant desire, originally established in Polidori's *The Vampyre*, was explicitly defined in Bram Stoker's seminal *Dracula* (1897) — a novel so prevalent that no modern discussion on vampires would dare omit it — published nearly half a century after Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile*. Stoker's association of the

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<sup>50</sup> Lloyd Worley, "Loving Death: The Meaning of Male Sexual Impotence in Vampire Literature." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 2:1 (1989): 25-36, 25.

<sup>51</sup> Morrison & Baldic, xiii-xix.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, xviii-xix.

vampire bite with sex and reproduction was supported by the earlier, covert insinuations of his predecessors.<sup>53</sup> Thus, Bouguereau's depiction of Dante's fourteenth century characters, Capocchio and Schicchi, as purely hedonistic vampires represents a significant modernization of classical motifs in appeasement of nineteenth century Gothic taste, forging a rhetoric of deviantism that were ahead of his time.

The inherent eroticism of Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* is substantiated by a series of explicit and rare early sixteenth century Roman engravings known as *I Modi* (ca. 1524) (Fig. 12). Made in collaboration by Giulio Romano (1499–1546) and Marcantonio Raimondi (1470/82–1534), students of Raphael (1483–1520), *I Modi* originally composed a set of sixteen illustrations that depicted couples engaging in sexual positions, their identities fashioned from antique history and myth. There are various contentions regarding the source of formal elements exhibited in *I Modi*; however, it is clear that its *all'antica* manner is indebted to classical paradigm, likely inspired in part by ancient Roman *spintria* coins, in addition to other erotic reliefs and sculptures from the period.<sup>54</sup> Ironically, the Vatican's highly frescoed apostolic palace indicates another plausible source of inspiration. In the early sixteenth century, Pope Julius II (1443–1513) appointed Raphael to decorate the papal apartments; upon Raphael's death in 1520, the project was complete with the exception of the largest chamber, *Sala di Constantino*, left to be overseen in accordance with his preliminary sketches by Romano, his executor. Usurping the intimate designs, Romano put them to use in a large-scale commission for Federico II Gonzaga's (1500–1540) *Sala di Psyche* (figs. 13-14). It is conceivable that Marcantonio — having previously ventured into the enterprise of printmaking with Raphael, committing the master's

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<sup>53</sup> John Allen Stevenson, "A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of Dracula," *PMLA*, 103:2 (1988): 139-149, 142.

<sup>54</sup> Bette Talvacchia, "Classical Paradigms and Renaissance Antiquarianism in Giulio Romano's "I Modi"" *I Tatti Studies* 7 (1997): 81-118, 81.; James Grantham Turner, *Eros Visible: Art, Sexuality and Antiquity in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 39.



work to engravings for mass-production — got ahold of the fantastical drawings from Romano, only meant to be viewed by the Church's worthy prelates in clandestinity, and published them in a book.<sup>55</sup> Acting as the antithesis of the extolled rectitude of (howbeit, hypocritical) chastity, *I Modi* transgressed the bounds of permissibility in the Papal States. By 1530, Pope Clement VII sought the destruction of all copies of the engravings and imprisoned Marcantonio accordingly. Though none of the original drawings have survived, their content is conveyed through the likeness of various copies, and their controversy and influence from the recorded references of the artist's contemporaries.<sup>56</sup> A significant Romantic-era derivative was Agostino Carracci's (1557–1602) *Le Lascivie*, printed and circulated in Paris in 1798, indicating a prolonged interest in classicized eroticism apprehended well into the Victorian age. In assuming that such a copy would have been the most accessible to Bouguereau, objects of comparison will be derived accordingly.

The forging of an affinity between Marcantonio and Romano's Renaissance *I Modi* and Bouguereau's Neoclassical *Dante et Virgile* placates the composition's prurience, analogizing the postures of Cappochio and Schicchi to those of fornication. Despite that the entirety of the drawings that comprise *I Modi* depict a traditional male-female pairing, such couplings are reanimated in Bouguereau's androcentric *Dante et Virgile*. Of the various engravings in the series, within which a blanketing uniformity is achieved, the most complementary to *Dante et Virgile* are *Jupiter et Junon*; *Achille et Briseis*; *Hercule et Dejanire*; and *Alcibiades et Glycere* (figs. 15-18). Broad parallels include bent leg poses, restraint of limbs and grasping of torsos, tousling of hair, resignation and passivity in the receiver's expression, intertwinedness of pairs and skin-on-skin contact, proximity of faces, and active full-body engagement through muscular

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<sup>55</sup> Lynne Lawner, *I Modi: The Sixteen Pleasures : An Erotic Album of the Italian Renaissance (English and Italian Edition)*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989), n.p.

<sup>56</sup> Talvacchia, 81.

strain. Through this side-by-side examination, the similarities prove so striking that had Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* not been rendered in an opposing medium, it could plausibly be read as part of the *I Modi* set. To such a degree, *Dante et Virgile* partakes in this resistant classical and Renaissance tradition; however, utterly modernizes it through the implication of the Gothic and same-sex desire. Decisively, the sentiment of *Dante et Virgile* emulates that of *I Modi* in the conscious opposition of convention and appropriation of sanctified trope — that of classical mythology and nineteenth century vampirism, respectively — to fulfill a contemporary transgressive narrative.

Despite its affinity to *I Modi*, *Dante et Virgile* yet presents a digression from discrete and permissible Renaissance depictions of sexual vice — a faultless, ineradicable stain that situates the composition in its own nineteenth century. It has been convincingly argued that insinuations of erotic deviance in regulated Renaissance art were articulated through the presence of peripheral, inconspicuous homosexual pairs, poised apart from the central narrative and nonchalantly engaged with one another.<sup>57</sup> Although *Dante et Virgile* presents a stark contrast — wherein Bouguereau's audacious demonstration of same-sex deviants as the focal point of the composition is more redolent of the condemned *I Modi* — it likewise pays homage to this convention through the furtive appearance of the coupled and demure Dante and Virgil, whose postures and expressions, at any rate, are congenial to kinship and care. Indeed, the pair's gentle gestures of classical male intimacy are juxtaposed by Capocchio and Schicchi's savage concession to carnal copulation. Nonetheless, the four protagonists are united in their stunning physical appearance, as well as their expressions of contrasting homosexual modes. This

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<sup>57</sup> Joseph Manca, "Sacred vs. Profane: Images of Sexual Vice in Renaissance Art," *Studies in Iconography* 13 (1989-90): 145-90, n.p.

propensity for homosexuality plays a crucial role in the subsequent analysis, particularly in the nuanced exploration of the homoeroticism of *Dante et Virgile* in the context of Victorian culture.

It is furthermore necessary that the question of spectatorship be considered in conversation with the eroticism of Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile*. Polidori's *The Vampyre*, narrated solely by Aubrey, appeals to a common trope in early vampire literature — the vampires themselves on no account speak; instead, their utterances and behaviors are recalled by those around them. This pattern is easily interpreted by readers, who assume a similar role as witness by way of the primary source. At the novella's commencement, Aubrey is a victim of naïveté, lacking an apprehension of the corrupt world that surrounds. The innocent Aubrey iterates his perception of Ruthven's ignorance of social constraints, thereby tracing his gradual realization of his adversary's true form, culminating in the acceptance of a reality so afflicting that it costs him his life. In Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile*, viewers assume the spectatorship role of the onlooking Dante and Virgil — one multi-defined by horror, curiosity, fascination, and desire. The figure of Dante is likewise representative of a coming-into new knowledge, however, unlike the unfortunate Aubrey, he is spared and free to see to its annunciation by taking part in the action through scopophilia. The composition presents a crossfire of gazes: Dante and Virgil to Capocchio and Schicchi, the *Malebranche* demon to Dante and Virgil, and viewers beyond the fourth wall to the entirety of the composition. The directions and the axis of gazing evoke triangulated desire and create a layered and complex stage for ambiguous voyeurism, thereby emulating the intricacies of male desire in nineteenth century France.

## VII. LE FANU'S *CARMILLA*

To adequately examine Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* in the context of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, it is necessary to consider the reassessment of morality and sexuality that occurred in French mid-nineteenth century culture, of which such literature is a highly intricate product. Despite complex undercurrents of censorship and repression, discourses regarding sexuality proliferated during the nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup> Less than two decades following the French Revolution, France became the first country to make legal private same-sex relations under the Napoleonic Code (1804), marking a pivotal step towards a progressive social landscape in the forthcoming *fin de siècle*. Recalling chapter III, whereas the upheaving "new era" that succeeded the July Revolution of 1830 contributed to a Gothic resurgence, a reconstruction of social order was correspondingly sanctioned, responding to the disordered urbanization and industrialization of the period, thereby making permeable sexuality and gender. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, this fluidity became associated with discord and mayhem to the credit of the dawn of the Second Republic (1848–1952) and the ensuing June Days uprising (1848), besides the revision and subversion of the Code, resulting in a rejection of social mobility. The once-unbridled categories of sexuality and gender became increasingly rigid, prompting ascription to defined classes of binary gender and sexual orientation.<sup>59</sup> Discretion towards topics of sex and eroticism prevailed, especially concerning its deviant expressions, resulting in collective ignorance and the estrangement of non-conformists under the pretext of preserving public decorum.<sup>60</sup> Due to the fixed expectations concerning sexual identity and conduct, queer breaches became socially subjugated. The homosexual taboo nonetheless

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<sup>58</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I* (London: Penguin, 1976), 3.

<sup>59</sup> Victoria Thompson, "Creating Boundaries: Homosexuality and the Changing Social Order in France, 1830–1870" in *Homosexuality in Modern France*, Studies in the History of Sexuality, ed. Jeffrey Merrick, Jeffrey Bryant T. Ragan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 103.

<sup>60</sup> Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas: a Companion for the Modern Reader of Victorian Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973), 175.

prevailed; however was relegated exclusively to the nonpublic sphere, permissible only in underground brothels and behind intimate bedroom walls.<sup>61</sup> The Gothic vampire, in many ways, served as a cunning adversary to the Victorian zeitgeist, reifying apprehensions about sex and abstinence, monogamy and the bourgeois family, constructions of masculinity and femininity, and homosexuality. Granted less credit, however, was the vampire's role as an outlet for suppressed desires for which those considered deviant could have recourse.

Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, published in 1871, was one of the final significant works of vampire fiction whose narrative was deeply embedded within the sexual epoch of the nineteenth century. *Carmilla* is told from the first-person perspective of Laura, a teenager living in a remote Austrian province. Early in her testimony, which is said to have been derived from the compendium of a doctor, Laura recalls an imprinting incident from her early childhood; frightened after waking alone in her nursery, Laura is confronted at her bedside by a beautiful young woman who laid with and caressed her. Soothed, Laura fell asleep until she was once again awoken, this time abruptly, due to the sharp sensation of two punctures on her breasts that curiously yielded no wound by morning. In the present, Laura is lonely. Coincidentally, a carriage-drawn misadventure outside her home fostered an unforeseen companion, bringing the injured yet stunning Carmilla under the family's supervision. Upon meeting, Laura and Carmilla instantaneously recognize one another from their "dream" encounter many years prior and become very close friends. As the novel progresses, Carmilla's characteristics confuse and deeply trouble Laura; for instance, Carmilla often displays bouts of affection and makes romantic advances toward her. Furthermore, Carmilla is exceedingly reserved, does not disclose personal information, and exhibits odd behaviors during the family's conventional religious practices. She moreover lacks a typical circadian rhythm, sleeping throughout the day and repeatedly caught

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<sup>61</sup> Foucault, 3.

“sleepwalking” outside during the night. Throughout Carmilla’s stay, Laura begins to suffer from a series of night terrors, again plagued by a stinging in her breasts, now exacerbated by intense visions of monstrous animals, female apparitions, and, most notably, Carmilla drenched in blood. Laura’s father recalls that his friend’s daughter fell ill with the same symptoms under kindred circumstances after the young Millarca was invited into their home who, unbeknownst to them, was a vampire. It is eventually revealed that Millarca and Carmilla are the same, both derivative anagrams for the original name of Countess Mircalla. Mircalla’s grave is located and she is defeated, ridding the territory of vampires and curing Laura of her illness. In spite of this, the consequences of Laura’s confrontations with Carmilla are boundless, forbidding her from ever attaining a full recovery.

Although *Carmilla* emulates Polidori’s *The Vampyre* — and, therefore, Bouguereau’s *Dante et Virgile* — as opposed to recounting these parallels due to constraints of brevity and wariness of restatement, this section seeks to offer an interdisciplinary integration with queer studies. Firmly rooted in art historical and literary disciplines, *Carmilla* will be analyzed primarily with respect to its homoerotic iconology, which plays a central role in this discourse by virtue of the compelling depiction of the preeminent sapphic vampire character. A caveat of this section of the study is that it aims to proffer an in-retrospect queer reading, notwithstanding that the framework of queer theory was not established until the postmodern twenty-first century. Hence, the homoeroticism of *Carmilla* will be taken at face value, procured through an analysis of the primary text with consideration of the Parisian Victorian Age.

*Carmilla* precludes an entirely new category of vampire whose same-sex predilections seeped into literature and film of the twentieth century and beyond — a still-apposite agent for the expression of queer culture.<sup>62</sup> Beyond the dualities of monster-human and mortal-immortal,

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<sup>62</sup> Sceats, 108.

already examined with respect to *The Vampyre* and reproduced in *Carmilla*, Le Fanu moreover interjects a dichotomy of homosexual-heterosexual into the vampire's binary caches.<sup>63</sup> The homoeroticism of Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* has hitherto been implied — for such an ignorance prior to its explicit discussion would have been implausible, as his sensual Capocchio and Schicchi are discernibly men; however, it is through an association with *Carmilla* that the work's inherent homosexuality is brought to light. *Dante et Virgile* and *Carmilla*, with just over twenty years between them, are products of the incredulous Victorian era. Both present instances of adjournment wherein the pervading rhetorics of gender conformity, heterosexuality, and sequestration are fleetingly abrogated, instead subscribing to tabooed departures from these conventions — the result, provocative and conspicuous portrayals of same-sex encounters whose authors pursue the subject of vampirism to garner permissibility. For Le Fanu, this resulted in *Carmilla*'s mass publication as a serial penny dreadful in the Pre-Raphaelite magazine, *The Dark Blue* (1871–72), whereas for Bouguereau, this acceptability made possible the public exhibiting of *Dante et Virgile* at the venerated Salon. Thus, both Le Fanu and Bouguereau rely on the vampire archetype for the articulation of a subversive relationship that is otherwise incompatible with nineteenth century heteronormative hegemony.<sup>64</sup>

Accompanying Bouguereau's respectable pretense of vampirism, *Dante et Virgile* was furthermore held in high regard through its Neoclassical execution: its homoeroticism effectively palliated through its likening to a product of prescribed classical study at the *Académie*.

Historically, and especially in nineteenth century France, male homosexuality generally faced more severe condemnation than its female counterpart — a likely consequence of which was the

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<sup>63</sup> William Veeder, "Carmilla: The Arts of Repression." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 22: 2 (1980): 197–223, 197.

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Signorotti, "Repossessing the Body: Transgressive Desire in 'Carmilla' and 'Dracula.'" *Criticism* 38: 4 (1996): 607–632, 609.

evident voyeuristic appeal of lesbians to straight men.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, women were socially perceived as the emotional sex, allowing them to more freely express affection for one another. As such, risqué portrayals of women in art were more readily available than those of men, requiring no special justification to prompt their creation. Courbet's *Le Sommeil* (1866) is a primary example, definitively affirming the interest in depictions of same-sex pairs in Bouguereau's time (Fig. 19). Commissioned by diplomat and art collector Halil Şerif Pasha, the composition was intended for private viewing, fortunately spared from the censure of the Salon. Indeed, the licentious painting was not permitted to be shown publicly until 1988, and prior to that its exhibition was even the subject of a police report.<sup>66</sup> Had the early modern *Le Sommeil* been a topic at the Salon, visitors would have been dumbfounded by Courbet's unvarnished, realistic, and voluptuous female nudes, which present a stark departure from the etiquette of academic painting. It is precisely through this notion that *Dante et Virgile* straddles the line between depictions of admissible homosocial behavior and those of absolute derogatory explicitness. Despite implicitly transporting *boudoir* into male domain, *Dante et Virgile* ultimately achieves permissibility through its adherence to respected Neoclassical conventions: namely, the classically-rendered, large-scale nude.<sup>67</sup> The content of *Dante et Virgile* is further legitimized through its intersection with its antique subject, for the setting of the *Inferno* sanctions ample opportunity for an irreproachable rendition of the male nude, considered appropriate by the figure's residence in an otherworldly and non-contemporary setting.<sup>68</sup>

Bouguereau's composition, while riskier, gains a higher degree of acceptability, underscoring the

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<sup>65</sup> Madiha Didi Khayatt, *Lesbian Teachers: An Invisible Presence* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992): 12.; Leslie Choquette, "Homosexuals in the City: Representations of Lesbian and Gay Space in Nineteenth-Century Paris" in *Homosexuality in French History and Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Merrick, Michael Sibalis (New York: Routledge, 2001): 149.

<sup>66</sup> Sarah Faunce; Linda Nochlin, *Courbet Reconsidered* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1988), n.p.

<sup>67</sup> Audeh, 92.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*



prestige associated with interpreting a classical narrative. Regardless, the discomfort surrounding depictions of male homosexuality persists, as evidenced by Bouguereau's treacherous hell contrasting Courbet's tranquil bedroom scene.<sup>69</sup>

The correspondences between Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* are embedded within a broader historical a priori that integrates notions of homosexual desire, deviance, and death; this is surmounted in Le Fanu's novel through the character of Carmilla, a supposed lesbian undead whose demise is brought about by her indulgence in homoerotic delights.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* achieves a heightened resonance in this regard; the composition's setting in Dante's infernal realm evokes an atmosphere suffused with damnation in death, thereby implying the presence of a punishable, reciprocal homosexual relationship between Capocchio and Schicchi. Their carnal behaviors serve to perpetuate and reinforce their fate, condemned to eternal chastising. Thus, the nuances of Dante's *Inferno* in Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* satisfy the complex relationship between transgressive homoerotic desire, vampirism, and death, underscoring the competency of interplays between the classical and the Gothic.

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<sup>69</sup> Choquette, 149.

<sup>70</sup> Carolyn Brown, "Figuring the vampire: death, desire, and the image" in *The Eight Technologies of Otherness*, ed. Sue Golding (London: Routledge, 1997): 114-128, 117.

## IX. CONCLUSION

Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile* can be regarded as the legacy product of an antecedent study, whose subject was also inspired by Dante's *Inferno*; the undated *The Barque of Dante*, after the 1822 masterpiece by Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), only recently garnered an attribution to Bouguereau — its inaugural public appearance this past winter at Sotheby's New York, where it was auctioned as part of the annual "Nineteenth Century European Paintings and Sculpture" sale from the estate of a private collection (Figs. 20-22).<sup>71</sup> Likely completed between the years of Bouguereau's studentship at the *Académie* (ca. 1846-1850), this transcribed work is demonstrative of the fundamentals of Neoclassical instruction. Whereas Delacroix's painting depicts a complete scene from *canto VIII* — comprising Dante and Virgil crossing the infested River Styx — Bouguereau's copy specifically hones in on the likeness of a tormented soul, a writhing male figure in the water at left, perhaps serving as the artist's very first experimentation toward a rendition of the male body. It is in *The Barque of Dante* that a number of empirical qualities are brought to light, later perfected through the figure of Capocchio in *Dante et Virgile*: the intricacies of male anatomy and its weight in motion, effects of light and shadow on musculature and bone structure, illumination of the body against a dark-neutral background, postures of clenched versus open hands, and, most significantly, expressions of resignation on the face that carries through the arms and upper torso. Delacroix's *The Barque of Dante*, exhibited at the Salon of 1822, marked the earliest portrayal of a scene situated in Hell as articulated in *Inferno* to appear at the Paris Salon. Prior, depictions of literary texts lied outside the bounds of appropriate subject matter for works at the Salon, only permissible in the French

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<sup>71</sup> "William Bouguereau: The Barque of Dante (After Delacroix), Lot 807, *Sotheby's* (2024) <<https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2024/19th-century-european-paintings-sculpture/the-barque-of-dante-after-delacroix>> (accessed May 4, 2024).

art tradition as small-scale illustrations.<sup>72</sup> Delacroix's work augmented the already-dignified Dante himself to the status of subject, making a spectacle of his experience in *Inferno*.<sup>73</sup> Looking toward Delacroix, Bouguereau's edition primed his confidence throughout the formative years of his artistic career, enabling him to rise to an occasion of avant-garde in his own Salon exhibiting. Surpassing Delacroix in unorthodoxy, the subject of Bouguereau's emblematic, Dante-inspired composition as defiled damned souls once more challenged this niche convention — this time radically bridging the once-insurmountable gap between illustrations of literary sources and large-scale academic Salon painting two-fold through its Gothic connotations. *Inferno* as a subject, through its Neoclassical execution, provided Bouguereau with a motif upon which the expressive capacity of the male body could be evaluated, beyond a literal sense: for this thesis has examined the associations between *Dante et Virgile* and the nineteenth century Gothic, thereby revealing an emanation of transgressive desire.

To fully interpret Bouguereau's *Dante et Virgile*, an interdisciplinary approach is vital. As the first source to impart a visual compendium to the rise of the vampire in the composition, and moreover in an effort to above-all remain rooted in the primary discipline of art history, the scope of this thesis was consciously limited. Furthermore, this study prioritized an evaluation of *Dante et Virgile* throughout the periods and societies that predated and were contemporary to the time of its creation. Despite these constraints, the present findings will be fundamental to research hereafter. It is worthwhile for future analyses of *Dante et Virgile* to come from a perspective of the ever-evolving discipline of Queer Theory, perhaps one rooted in its contemporary mechanics through the inclusion of post-structuralist critical discourses and theories. Themes that would benefit from further elaboration in this regard are the vampire's means of "reproduction" (or lack

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<sup>72</sup> Audeh, 92.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

thereof), the intersection of blood, and social attitudes on the matter. Considering the vampiric connotations of *Dante et Virgile* in the context of succeeding vampire literature, such as Stoker's infamous *Dracula*, may also prove lucrative for scholars interested in its twenty-first century applications. Such an integration would allow for the ascription of deeply embedded meanings not traversed presently.

In the preceding chapters, a relationship was forged between Bouguereau's Neoclassical *Dante et Virgile* and vampire literature of the nineteenth century, and thus between the contradictory schools of the classical and the Gothic. This study began with an exhaustive situating of the work's historical nuances, conveyed primarily through an analysis of the scope of Dante's *Inferno* and the English vampire novel in Bouguereau's time. Furthermore, each was defined by the terms of their corresponding relationships to the classical and Gothic, as the crux upon which the broader analysis relied upon. Then, comprehensive investigations into Polidori's *The Vampyre* and subsequently Le Fanu's *Carmilla* were orchestrated, bolstered by embedded comparisons to classical and contemporary artworks, divulging associations with *Dante et Virgile*. Finally, the introduction of Bouguereau's *The Barque of Dante* into this discourse situates his later *Dante et Virgile*, revealing a previously undisclosed muse, achieving resolve. In culmination: all routes converge to satisfy the grand presence of transgressive desire in the composition; Bouguereau's vampires are rendered in appeasement, defined by perverseness, tension, theriomorphism, sadomasochism, and homoeroticism.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile*, 1850. Oil on canvas, 280.5 x 225.3 cm., Paris, Musée d'Orsay. © Musée d'Orsay, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Patrice Schmidt.



Figure 2 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: Capocchio's bicep and fist, Schicchi's hair.



Figure 3 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: Schicchi's nails drawing blood from Capocchio's torso.

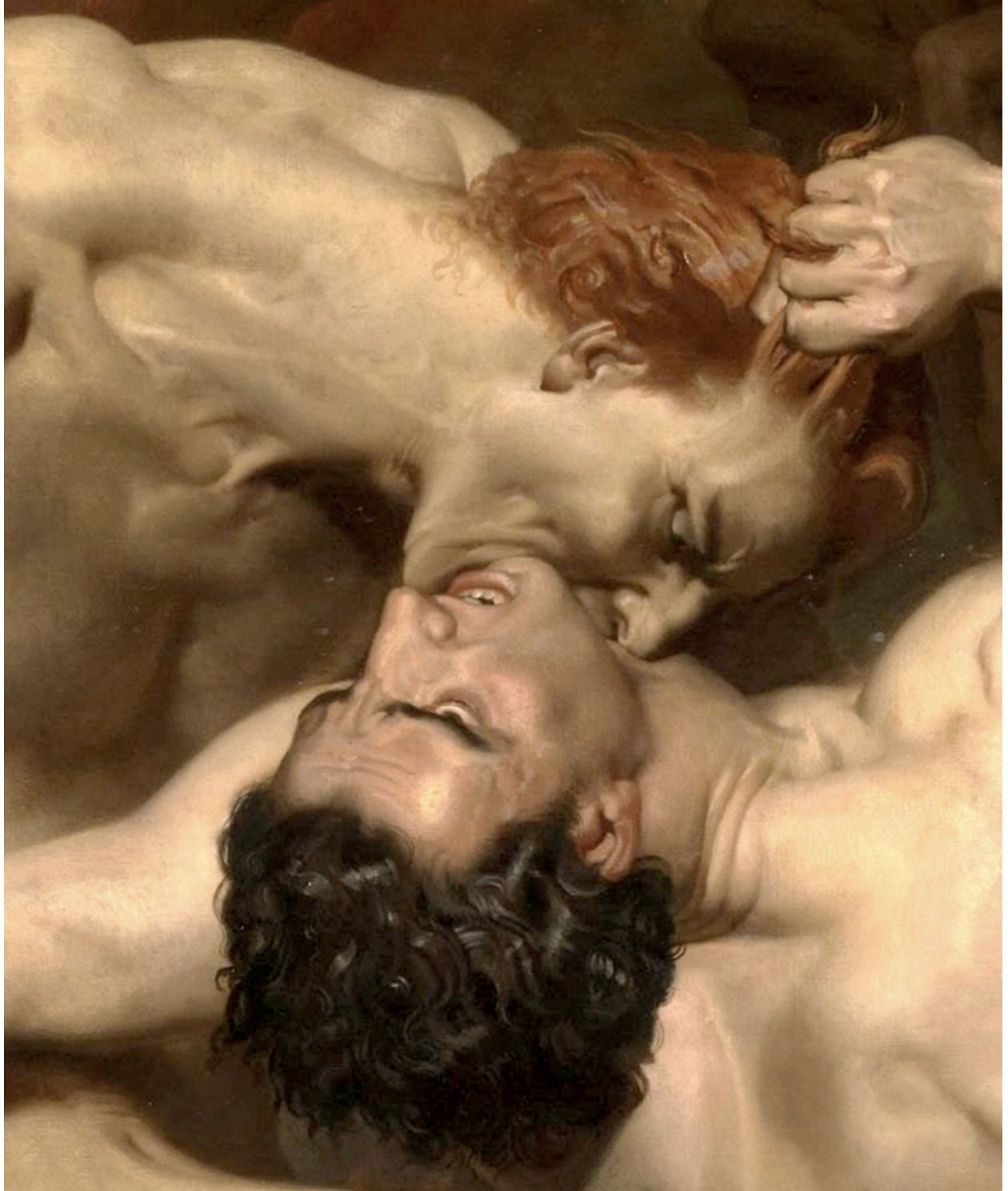


Figure 4 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: Schicchi & Capocchio's expressions.



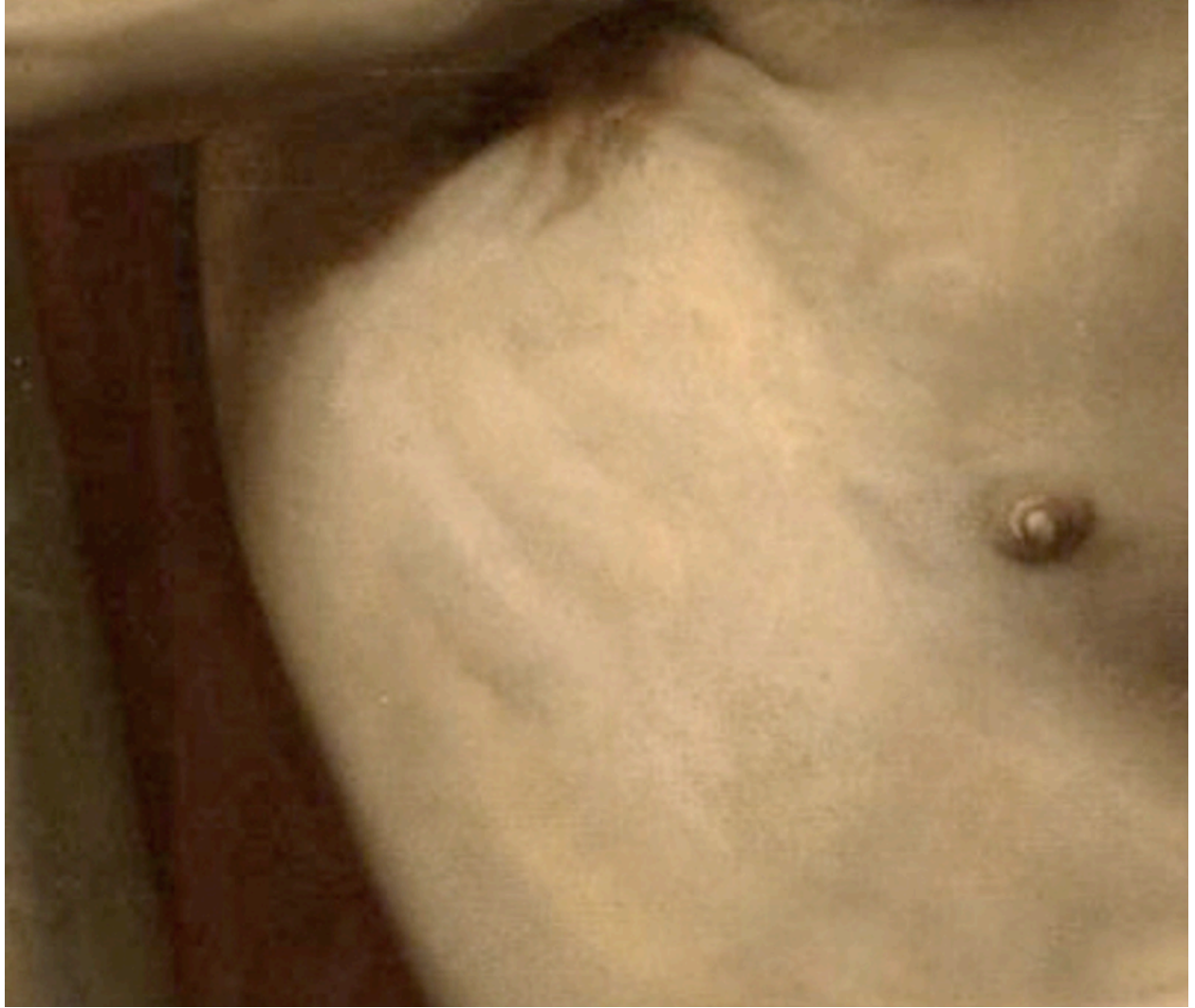
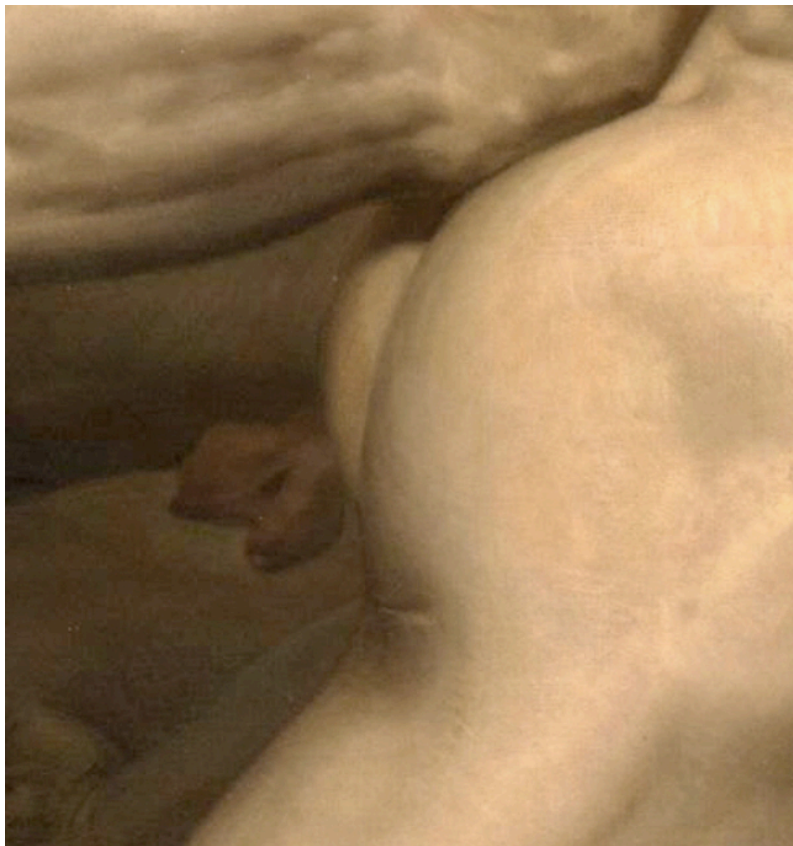


Figure 5 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: Schicchi's protruding ribs.



Figure 6 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: Dante and Virgil.



Figures 7-8 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: fallen figure & genitalia.



Figure 9 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: entanglement of bodies in background.



Figure 10 William Bouguereau, *Dante et Virgile* (as in Fig. 1), Detail: Schicchi's convoluted torso.



Figure 11 Apollonios, figlio di Nestore, ateniense, *Torso del Belvedere* (view from front), 1st century B.C. Marble, 159 x 84 cm., Vatican City, Pio-Clementine Museum. Courtesy Musei Vaticani.



Figure 12      Attributed to Agostino Veneziano or other Anonymous Artist after Marcantonio Raimondi, *The Nine Fragments*, ca. 1530. Pieces cut from seven engravings, mounted on board and extended in pen and black ink, ruled border 21.7 x 25.6 cm., London, British Museum. Courtesy James Grantham Turner.



Figure 13 Giulio Romano, *Sala di Psyche* (view of east wall), 1526-28. Fresco, Mantua, Palazzo del Tè. Courtesy of The Web Gallery of Art.



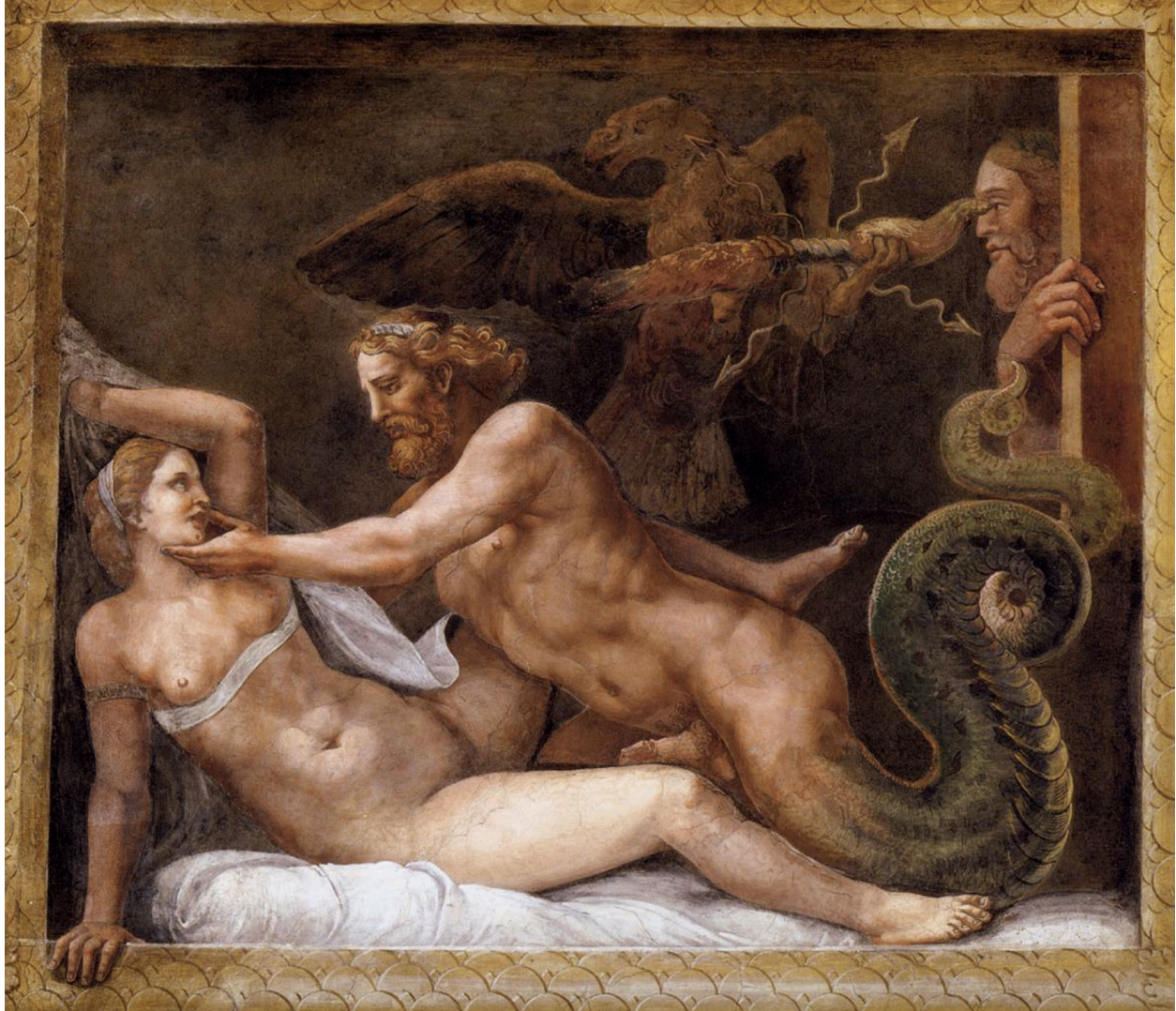


Figure 14 Giulio Romano, *Sala di Psyche* (as in Fig. 1, view of east wall), Detail: Jupiter seducing Olympias.



Figures 15-18: (top, from right to left; bottom, from right to left): Jacques Joseph Coigny (after Agostino Carracci), *Jupiter et Junon*; *Achille et Briseis*; *Hercule et Dejanire*; and *Alcibiades et Glycere*, c. 1798. Engraving in *Les amours des dieux: 'L'Aré tin' d'Augustin Carrache ou Recueil de postures érotiques*.



Figure 19: Gustave Courbet, *Le Sommeil*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 135 x 200 cm., Paris, Petit Palais. Courtesy Petit Palais.



Figure 20 William Bouguereau, *The Barque of Dante* (After Delacroix), ca. 1846-1850. Oil on canvas, 38 x 46.2 cm., Private Collection. Courtesy Sotheby's.



Figure 21 Eugène Delacroix, *The Barque of Dante*, Detail: writhing male figure in the water at left. 1822. Oil on canvas, 189 x 223 cm., Paris, Musée du Louvre. Courtesy Musée du Louvre.



Figure 22     Eugène Delacroix, *The Barque of Dante* (as in Fig. 21).

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