



FAKULTA
HUMANITNÍCH STUDIÍ
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Zadání cizojazyčného textu:

Metaphorical Painting: Michelangelo, Dante, and the Last Judgment

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Source: The Art Bulletin, Mar., 1995, Vol. 77, No. 1 (Mar., 1995), pp. 64-81

In the lower right corner of the *Last Judgment*, Michelangelo painted an unmistakable quotation from Dante's *Inferno*. The figures of Charon and Minos were easily recognized by sixteenth-century viewers, and to the present day no one has seriously questioned the reference, although occasionally additional meanings have been pointed out. It is not my purpose to overturn this rare bit of consensus, nor is it my purpose to contradict the many sources that tell us how well Michelangelo knew Dante's writings. Condivi, Vasari, Donato Giannotti, and Benedetto Varchi describe Michelangelo's deep knowledge of the poet's work. Condivi claims that Michelangelo had nearly memorized it, and Michelangelo is cast as a "gran dantista" in Giannotti's dialogue. Such statements may be exaggerated, but there is too much converging evidence to deny them. Indeed, Michelangelo himself wrote poems in praise of Dante, and he knew about a new commentary on Dante soon after it was published. The problem is that the references to Dante's poem are perhaps too clear and too certain. The Charon/Minos group points to Dante like a neon sign, instructing the viewer to use Dante's *Divine Comedy* in some way to give meaning to the *Last Judgment*. Art historians have responded by connecting many other figures in the *Last Judgment* to Dante's work, almost as if by showing two clear references to the *Inferno*, Michelangelo was supplying a key to the rest of his painting, just as in the Medici Chapel the attributes he gave to *Night* serve as a key to the meaning of the other three Times of Day. It may very well be that we are meant to see other references to Dante in the fresco, but certain art historians have taken this to mean that every figure can be correlated with Dante's characters, leading to some very unlikely identifications.

There are, however, other things that these references can indicate. For example, Leo Steinberg has introduced a provocative explanation for the quotations: in order to show his disbelief in a material Hell, Michelangelo presented Hell within "poetic parentheses" - as a fiction rather than as a theological truth. Although my own interpretation is a different one, I believe that Steinberg's proposal does something very important and substantially correct: it shifts our

attention away from seeing Dante as a source book of images, and instead directs it toward the value, or meaning, given to poetry itself. The question then becomes: what meaning does it have? Steinberg implies that poetry is fiction and therefore not true; consequently, Michelangelo's use of it suggests that Hell is a fiction, not an established truth within the Catholic faith. This argument recalls the words of Giovanni Andrea Gilio, whose dialogue *Degli errori de' pittori circa l'istorie* was published in 1564. One of the interlocutors objects to the inclusion of the "story of Charon" because it introduces a poetic fiction into the theological history of the Last Judgment. However, neither Gilio nor any other early critic suggests that Michelangelo does not believe in Hell; it is rather a matter of his drawing from a source that is not scriptural, therefore not "true." Gilio does not condemn Dante as propagating heretical beliefs, but rather as a poet who might mislead the unlearned. In doing so Gilio joins a long tradition of thought that opposed poetry to truth. There are many variations on the theme, beginning with Plato's banishment of poets from his ideal state. In the centuries closer to Michelangelo's own, poetry was condemned because it could undermine a correct understanding of dogma, in part because it directly appealed to the senses without control of reason, in part because the "poetic veil" could "make white appear black and black appear white." The fact that poetry suggested more than a literal meaning made it open to questionable interpretations, and this was particularly dangerous when the subject was religious and when the audience had only a weak grasp of theology.

Gilio was not alone in criticizing the *Last Judgment* as a work that might not be understood by the unlearned. Lodovico Dolce, writing in 1556 and inspired by the letters of Aretino, made much the same point. In Dolce's dialogue, the Florentine defender of Michelangelo claims that the *Last Judgment* contains "profoundly allegorical meanings understood by few." The fictive Aretino responds, "In this he would indeed deserve praise, since it would seem that he had imitated those great philosophers, who hid the greatest mysteries of human and divine philosophy under the veil of poetry, so that they would not be understood by the common people." [...]

(Shrnutí: 0 až 10 bodů)

Otázky k textu:

1. Co mohou, podle textu, Michelangelovy odkazy na Dantovo *Inferno* znamenat? (0 až 5 bodů)
2. S jakými podobnými a souvisejícími myšlenkami jste se již někdy setkali? (0 až 5 bodů)
3. Vyjmenujte pět knih z beletrie nebo humanitní vzdělanosti a pět filmů libovolného žánru, které jsou pro Vás významné (odpověď na tuto otázku sama nebude bodovaná, ale pomůže nám porozumět Vaším odpovědím na předchozí otázky).