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The Etruscan *Inferno*: A Spatial and Synaesthetic Reading by Gabriele D'Annunzio

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ABSTRACT

In the novel *Forse che sì forse che no* (1910), Gabriele D'Annunzio provides an interesting contamination of suggestions from Dante's *Inferno* with ancient Etruscan art and, more generally, with the mystifying landscape of the Tuscan city of Volterra. In doing so, he productively combines his typical imaginative and synaesthetic style with scholarly and cultural trends of the time suggesting that a secret 'blood memory' might tie together Tuscan art of all times – from the Etruscans to Dante to the modern era. This essay explores D'Annunzio's rendering of the 'Etruscan Dante' by setting it in the wider context of the reception of Dante and of ancient Italian art with a particular focus on the synaesthetic contaminations between suggestions from the text and the visual and tactual features of ancient Etruscan art.

KEYWORDS

Gabriele D'Annunzio; Dante Alighieri; *Inferno*; Etruscan; Italian decadentism; Volterra

In the early twentieth century, the idea that an Etruscan legacy may have survived in Dante had some traction in literary circles. Such ancestry might contribute to explain Dante's interest in divination, which was a key feature of lost Etruscan culture, according to numerous Latin sources (the best-known of which was Cicero's *De divinatione*). Etruscan funerary archaeology – in particular the dark and mystifying frescoes of otherworldly creatures and menacing divinities – offered a visual counterpart to Dante's infernal imagery. These hypotheses travelled from archaeological writing to poetic and novelistic sources, to literary criticism, generating a relatively widespread (albeit unproven) genealogical myth. Arbitrary as it may seem, for some decades the idea of the survival of Etruscan elements in Dante acquired the status of a reliable interpretative hypothesis aimed at fostering original critical approaches to the *Commedia*, taking its cue from then-current archaeological research. Elsewhere I have reconstructed the story of the 'Etruscan Dante';¹ in this essay, I will briefly outline the origins and the short parable of this interpretative stance before moving on to analyse a section of Gabriele D'Annunzio's novel *Forse che sì forse che no* (1910, revised 1927), paying special attention to how material elements derived from Etruscan spaces and art are exploited in an original, multi-sensory, and synaesthetic reading of Dante's *Inferno*. As we shall see, D'Annunzio's experiment is in line with both the then-current 'dantismo' and pre-Roman studies, as well as with more general cultural tendencies such as the attention for genealogical myths and blood lineages, autochthony, and identity. This essay is part of my ongoing

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¹Martina Piperno, *L'antichità crudele. Etruschi e Italici nella letteratura italiana del Novecento* (Rome: Carocci, 2020), pp. 25–55.

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research on the reception of pre-Roman antiquities in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Italy, but aims to contribute also to studies on remediation, reception, and reinterpretation of Dante's *Inferno* in the *Novecento*.²

Dante, The Etruscan?

Ultimately, the story of the 'Etruscan Dante' is about the fortune of a verse by Carducci, who refers to Dante as an 'etrusco pontefice redivivo':

Ricordi tu le vedove piagge del mar toscano,
ove china su 'l nubilo inseminato piano
la torre feudal
con lunga ombra di tedio da i colli arsicci e foschi
veglia de le rasenie cittadi in mezzo a' boschi
il sonno sepolcral [. . .]?
e con me nel silenzio meridian fulgente
i *lucumoni* e gli àuguri de la *mia prima gente*
veniano a conversar.
E tu pascevi, o alivolo corridore, la biada
che ne' solchi de i secoli aperti con la spada
dal console roman
Dante, *etrusco pontefice redivivo*, gettava.³

The poet is talking to his horse as if it were the incarnation of poetry and looks back upon his Tuscan origins, in search of new inspiration. While 'etrusco' might be a simple synonym for 'toscano' in Italian lyrical language, the setting of the scene – with references to the *lucumoni* (Etruscan ministers), the *àuguri* (fortune-tellers and interpreters of divine signs), and to the Etruscan cities of Populonia and Roselle – suggests that Carducci is thinking of ancient Etruria as the source of a trans-historical Tuscan 'spirit' whose final offspring is his own poetry. In *L'opera di Dante* (1888), Carducci describes Dante as belonging to the 'tipo [razziale] etrusco' on the basis of his facial traits, and that 'il mistero d'oltre tomba' that he introduced in the Christian world came directly from 'una razza sacerdotale che pare visse per le tombe e nelle tombe, l'etrusca'.⁴ Carducci was interested in Etruscan studies and, as the Secretary of the *Deputazione di storia patria* in Bologna, he had interacted with the archaeologists Giovanni Gozzadini, Edoardo Brizio and Francesco Bertolini. In his report of the 1866 meetings, Carducci noted that 'un alito degli spiriti etruschi par ravvivarsi [. . .], nelle simboliche figure dei sepolcreti di Chiusi più d'una volta con dolce meraviglia si riconoscono *prenunziati i lineamenti di Dante*'.⁵

A possible source of this note is a study by the historians and experts of Dantean iconography Luigi Passerini and Gaetano Milanese. The Italian Ministry of Education had entrusted them with the task of 'rintracciare quale potesse essere la più vera effigie di Dante a norma dei ritratti che ci rimangono', in order to design the commemorative coins for the 1865 centenary.⁶ They came to the conclusion that the most realistic portraits of Dante are the ones included in the painting by Domenico di Francesco di Michelino, conserved in the Duomo di Firenze, and the one that adorns

²I carried out parts of this research at University College Cork (Ireland) and KU Leuven (Belgium) as two separate postdoctoral projects (Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship, GOIPD/2017/1081, and Flemish Research Council FWO Senior Postdoctoral Fellowship n. 196228). I would like to thank Alessandro Furiesi, Maurizio Harari, Carlo Leo, Daragh O'Connell, Bart Van Den Bossche, and Chiara Zampieri for their invaluable input in my work, and Federica Coluzzi for helping me to trace the connections between my research and late nineteenth-century 'dantismo'.

³Giosuè Carducci, 'Avanti! Avanti!' (1872; from *Giambi ed epodi*, 1882), in *Edizione nazionale delle opere*, vol. III: *Giambi ed epodi e Rime nuove* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1942), pp. II. 79–84, 107–12.

⁴Giosuè Carducci, *Edizione nazionale delle opere*, vol. VII: *Discorsi letterari e storici* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1941), pp. 326–27.

⁵Giosuè Carducci, 'Delle cose operate dalla R. Deputazione su gli studi di Storia Patria per le provincie di Romagna nell'anno 1865–66. Relazione del segr. Prof. Giosuè Carducci', *Atti e memorie della R. Deputazione di Storia Patria per le provincie della Romagna*, 5 (1867), 1–11 (p. 4); my emphasis.

⁶'Atti del governo italiano in relazione al Centenario di Dante' (not signed), in *Giornale del Centenario di Dante Alighieri*, 17 (20 July 1864), 133*.

the illuminated manuscript Riccardiano 1470. An 1864 issue of the *Giornale per il Centenario di Dante* announced the results of the study, in which Passerini and Milanese claimed that Andrea del Castagno's portrait could not be a realistic picture of Dante because it failed to represent those traits typical of the 'razza etrusca', which 'si riscontrano in grandissima parte degl'illustri fiorentini di quel tempo e degli anni posteriori'.⁷ These 'Etruscan' traits (we are not told what they are) are, in Passerini and Milanese's view, capable of resisting the passing of time. The authors did not specify if these traits are quintessentially Etruscan: they only suggest that there is a Tuscan 'race', whose features are easily recognisable.

These episodes are relateable to a widespread attention to Dante's body, triggered by the 600th anniversary of his birth in 1865 and by the rediscovery of Dante's remains in Ravenna that same year. An inspection of Dante's tomb – which had been found empty, thus confirming the authenticity of the newly discovered bones – took place shortly after: it involved, among others, historian and archaeologist Giovanni Gozzadini, Carducci's mentor and friend, and his wife, Teresa Serego-Alighieri, a descendant of the poet. At the time, Florence and Ravenna argued about where Dante's remains should be kept, a debate that gave new impetus to old issues about Dante's *florentinitas* or 'Tuscanness' as opposed to his Italianness, or national dimension. A new monument designed by Enrico Pazzi was inaugurated in Piazza Santa Croce.⁸ Dante's remains were already described and treated as those of a saint, but in 1921 they were also analysed – for the first time – through anthropological, phrenological, and biological lenses.⁹ The idea that genealogical data might be relevant for the study, interpretation, and actualisation of Dante gained momentum in the early twentieth century.

Additionally, Carducci's idea that there was an obvious connection between ancient Etruria and the Tuscan Middle Ages was relatively widespread at the time. George Dennis's *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* (1848, 1878) – one of the most-read travel accounts related to Etruria – is scattered with Dantean references and quotes connecting Etruscan places, remains, and relics to Dante's poetry, imagery, and geography. In 1898, Corrado Ricci published a *Divina commedia illustrata*, whose pictures of the Etruscan cities of Monteriggioni, Corneto, Cecina, and Asciano underlined the link between ancient Tuscany and Dante's places.¹⁰ Adolfo Venturi, in his *Storia dell'arte italiana*, speaks of a 'lascito etrusco' that survives until Michelangelo. The endurance of an 'Etruscan element' in Tuscan as well as Italian culture was also mentioned by Earl Brewster (writing under the pseudonym Brewster Jones), in a 1918 issue of the magazine *Atys* known also as the 'numero etrusco', and by D. H. Lawrence, in his account of his journeys in Etruria, *Etruscan Places* (published posthumously in 1932).¹¹ Pericle Ducati, author of one of the first handbooks of Etruscan studies, spoke of 'ricordi atavici dell'antica Etruria' that 'devono essere tuttora abbarbicati nella psiche della razza'.¹² Carlo Curto, an Italianist teaching at the University of Turin, explicitly attempted to turn Carducci's poetic Dante–Etruria connection into an interpretative tool: 'per questo nostro moverci entro un mondo sfuggente ove ogni conquista della scienza ha per necessaria alleata l'intuizione della poesia, la scoperta del Dante che chiamiamo etrusco, doveva restare primamente affidata all'intuizione di questa'. It was a poet, Carducci, who discovered 'questo nuovo

⁷Gaetano Milanese – Luigi Passerini, 'Lettera al Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione sul più autentico ritratto di Dante', *Giornale del Centenario di Dante Alighieri*, 17 (20 July 1864), p.135.

⁸Guy Raffa, *Dante's Bones. How A Poet Invented Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2020). On Dante's 1865 celebrations see Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, *City and Nation in the Italian Unification. The National Festivals of Dante Alighieri* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). See also Rossella Bonfatti, 'Performing Dante or Building the Nation? The *Divine Comedy* between Dramaturgy of Exile and Public Festivities', *Medievalia*, 38.17 (2017), 37–67.

⁹*Ricognizione delle ossa di Dante fatta nei giorni 28–31 ottobre 1921*, ed. Santi Muratori, Corrado Ricci, Giuseppe Sergi, and Fabio Frassetto (Rome: Accademia dei Lincei, 1923). See also Fabio Frassetto, *Dantis ossa. La forma corporea di Dante. Scheletro. Ritratti. Maschere e busti* (Bologna: Regia Università Istituto di Antropologia, 1933).

¹⁰Dante Alighieri, *La divina commedia illustrata nei luoghi e nelle persone. Con 30 eliottipie e 400 zincotipie*, ed. Corrado Ricci (Milan: Hoepli, 1898). This book was republished in a luxury edition in 1921, on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of Dante's death.

¹¹See Chiara Zampieri, 'Re-reading and re-writing Etruria. D. H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley', *Cahier voor Literatuurwetenschap*, 31 (2021, special issue *Modernisme/Modernism*), 85–93.

¹²Pericle Ducati, *Etruria antica*, 2 vols (Turin: Paravia, 1927), I, p. VII.

e fondamentale aspetto della fisionomia del nostro sommo poeta'.¹³ For Curto, Dante's 'Etruscan-ness' explains part of the iconography of the *Inferno* (e.g., that of Charon) and certain dynamics of the translation of the souls in the respective circles. It also contributes to explaining 'la disposizione di Dante verso l'occulto', which – according to Curto – sometimes takes the shape of a disquieting temptation:¹⁴ in order to combine an earthly and human interest in the interpretation of divine signs with refined, transcendent theology, it took Dante's 'anima primitivamente, dirò, religiosamente etrusca'.¹⁵

Giving voice to these cultural stimuli, Gabriele D'Annunzio provides a literary rendering of the idea of the Etruscan Dante in *Forse che sì forse che no* (1910), partly set in the Etruscan city of Volterra. A disquieting connection between Dante and the place's Etruscan heritage – landscape, remains, art – is in fact a crucial element in the construction of the central section of the novel. As we shall see, D'Annunzio on the one hand describes the creepy landscape of Volterra through references to the *Inferno* and to Etruscan civilisation and art; on the other hand, he elaborates on suggestions drawn from Etruscan art to interpret Dante's world in an original manner.

Mystifying Volterra

Forse che sì, forse che no tells the story of ambiguous sentimental affairs, underage seduction and suicide. The female protagonist, Isabella Inghirami, lives a passionate love story with the pilot Paolo Tarsis, though at the same time being involved in an incestuous relationship with her younger brother Aldo; her sister Vana, on her part, is desperately in love with Paolo. Disaster looms when the characters' secret feelings are revealed.

The decadent city of Volterra is the perfect spatial counterpart to such a story: its topography, geography and history evoke feelings of guilt, remorse, sin, and punishment. Its ancient, lost identity as one of the capitals of the Etruscan federation gives it a sense of doom, while the Museo Etrusco Guarnacci – one of the most ancient museums in Europe (established by Mario Guarnacci in 1761) – devotedly collects relics and artefacts documenting the city's Etruscan heritage. The connection between such heritage and an infernal, uncanny dimension was already established in non-specialist culture: Etruscan archaeological remains are indeed prevalently funerary (necropolises, funerary urns) and Etruscan tombs frequently depict scenes in hell, colourful monsters, and damned souls. In addition to this commonplace reference, D'Annunzio's personal youthful memory connecting Etruscan art and the sin of lust may have come into play in the choice of Volterra as the setting for this novel: as the author recalls in the prose *La Chimera e l'altra bocca* (1924), one of his earliest sexual encounters, with the young Clemenza Coccolini ('Clematide'), happened precisely in the Museo Nazionale Etrusco of Florence, in the mystifying presence of the statue of the so-called Aretine Chimaera, an Etruscan bronze statue dating back to the fifth century BC.¹⁶

In addition to all this, in Volterra also stood a psychiatric hospital, the 'Reggia della follia',¹⁷ and a prison – the 'Casa di reclusione ed ergastolo', as Corrado Ricci describes it, which 'serba nel suo seno l'orrore di carceri paurose [...] che si conservano in grazia della loro storia e delle loro

¹³Carlo Curto, *Dante etrusco e romano* (Turin: Società Dante Alighieri, 1940), pp. 5–6.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁶Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Le faville del maglio*, in *Prose di ricerca*, ed. A. Andreoli and G. Zanetti, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, Milano 2005), I, pp. 1275–78. In this prose piece D'Annunzio portrays himself and his girlfriend as teenagers in search of intimacy. In an embarrassed silence ('intorno si rifece il silenzio delle necropoli') the young Gabriele is distracted by Clemenza's reflection in the Etruscan mirrors. When facing the terrifying Chimaera, he puts his hands in the statue's jaws 'con una specie di braveria puerile'; Clemenza seems to feel the burning breath of the mythical beast: 'hai sentito che le brucia ancora la bocca?'. This sensual awakening signals the start of sexual intercourse. The Etruscan artefacts and the Chimaera specifically are described as coming back to life and participate actively in the protagonists' carnal encounter through visual (the reflection in the mirrors) and tactual (the perception of heat) interaction.

¹⁷Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Prose di romanzi*, ed. A. Andreoli and N. Lorenzini, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1989), II, p. 708.

leggende'.¹⁸ Furthermore, Volterra stands in a rather disquieting corner of the peaceful Chianti environment: it is located on top of the so-called 'Balze', or 'cliffs', chasms that originated through erosion. Continuously crumbling, over time they have swallowed up necropolises, churches, and monasteries, provoking destruction and loss. In fact, a number of Etruscan artefacts have been found at the bottom of the slope; the characters of *Forse* will perform more than one *katabasis* in the Etruscan underworld (by climbing down the slope of the Balze and visiting the Inghirami Etruscan tomb). Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti, in his account of his travels in Tuscany (which D'Annunzio used for his novel), offers the following testimony: 'i Fiorentini quando sentono nominare Volterra s'immaginano subito il fondo d'una valle, d'aria pestifera, e tanto, secondo loro, è Volterra, che sepoltura'.¹⁹ Finally, Volterra was violently attacked by the Florentine army led by Federico da Montefeltro, at the service of Lorenzo de' Medici (1472). This is how Paul Bourget describes the attack in his travel journal *Sensations d'Italie* (1902), another source used by D'Annunzio:

Quand le Magnifique fût à son lit de mort, [...] [il] trembla devant son passé. [...] La prise de Volterra fut un des trois crimes que le moine refusa de pardonner au mourant, et ce dernier dut revoir, dans son imagination surexcitée par l'agonie, ces murs, ces places, ces palais, tels que mes yeux de promeneur paisible les contemplant aujourd'hui. *Quel cadre pour une obsession de remords pareille à celles que décrit Dante!* Il semble que malgré le clair azur il reste ici comme du tragique empreint partout.²⁰

At once a centuries-old cemetery, an archaeological site, and a sanatorium, Volterra is a city constantly looking at its own decay. To quote Bourget again: a 'ville perdue, dont l'approche m'a paru [...] strangely farouche et fantastique [...]. [M]alheureuse ville'.²¹ This is how D'Annunzio described it: 'mirabile e tragica città';²² 'una città condannata al saccheggio, come una signoria perduta'; 'città di vento e di macigno, tra spettacoli di duolo e di morte, col suo canto e col suo amore intenta di continuo a esaltare la sua disperazione'; 'città funesta de' cui peccati troppe volte Iddio trasse vendetta col ferro e col fuoco con la fame e con la pestilenza. Mentre in basso l'aria era morta, lei percoteva la sua bufera eterna'.²³ As Curto puts it, D'Annunzio's description of Volterra 'è tutto un paesaggio pauroso, ermetico, ritratto con un senso di allucinazione'.²⁴ In addition to this, Volterra's legends contain stories of famous suicides: in the early fourteenth century, a young nobleman called Neri Maltragi jumped on his horse and threw himself off the cliffs in order to escape punishment for homicide; in 1819, Giovanni Tacconi made a similar attempt, although his horse refused to jump, and he would eventually commit suicide by jumping out of a window.²⁵ D'Annunzio was originally tempted to set Vana's final suicide in the Balze,²⁶ and the characters' suicidal impulses often recall these antecedents. Real and legendary elements make Volterra a damned and haunted place, similar to other cases analysed by Paolo Orvieto; according to the latter, the town 'implica l'abbandono dei referenti, logici e oggettivamente percepibili, della nostra realtà, sostituiti da realtà aliene, spesso orrifiche'.²⁷

¹⁸Corrado Ricci, *Volterra* (Bergamo: Istituto di Arti Grafiche, 1905), p. 156. D'Annunzio possessed two copies of Ricci's guide, one bearing signs of use. See Maurizio Harari, "Non si va senza duca in questo inferno". D'Annunzio e il mito etrusco, in *Secondo congresso nazionale etrusco (Firenze 26 maggio – 2 giugno 1985)* (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider, 1989), pp. 239–51.

¹⁹Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti, *Relazioni d'alcuni viaggi fatti in diverse parti di Toscana*, 6 vols (Florence: Stamperia Imperiale, 1751–54), II, p. 255.

²⁰Paul Bourget, *Sensations d'Italie* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1902), p. 9, my emphasis.

²¹Bourget, *Sensations d'Italie*, pp. 4, 10.

²²Letter to E. Treves, 25–26 October 1909, in Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Lettere ai Treves*, ed. G. Oliva (Milan: Garzanti, 1999), p. 378.

²³D'Annunzio, *Prose di romanzi*, pp. 693, 720, 763.

²⁴Curto, *Dante etrusco e romano*, p. 7.

²⁵D'Annunzio probably heard about Tacconi in Ricci, *Volterra*, p. 39. See Luigi Pescetti, *D'Annunzio a Volterra* (Milan: Mondadori, 1941), pp. 46–47. Both suicides are evoked in the novel.

²⁶Letter to E. Treves, 30 October 1909, in D'Annunzio, *Lettere ai Treves*, p. 379.

²⁷Paolo Orvieto, *Labirinti, castelli, giardini. Luoghi letterari di orrore e smarrimento* (Rome: Salerno, 2004), p. 313.

Hence, Volterra acquires a specific narratological role, namely that of being a land of sin and damnation (and therefore a national equivalent of the haunted cemeteries in Gothic literature), which immediately evokes tragic scenes of judgement, remorse, and sin. In other words, a Dantean setting. In constructing his novel, D'Annunzio was determined to take advantage of Volterra's allure:

Volterra, [...] le armonie discordi del suo *paesaggio dantesco*, le voci del vento, la dolce sonora liquidità delle musiche ora udite, accordate su gli eterni singhiozzi di questa 'doccia incavernata', tutto ciò che fa di questa vostra città decrepita, e pur sempre verde, una mostruosità ineguagliabile, fiammeggerà nelle pagine del mio libro. Volterra avrà in me il suo poeta.²⁸

D'Annunzio sets an important section of *Forse* in Volterra, exploiting its disquieting vibes and triggering the reader's textual memory of the *Inferno*. In fact, the city is constantly described through Dantean references, for example as the earthly counterpart to the City of Dis: 'una città di ferro rugginoso escita dall'istessa fucina ond'esci quella a cui Flegiàs tragittò l'Etrusco pellegrino e il duca suo'. The Balze are like the cliff of Gerion: 'strampiomavano dal cielo come la stagliata rocca al cui piede [Dante] si ritrovò scosso dalla schiena di Gerione'. The nearby river Possera is just like the Styx: 'le ripe incenerite della Possera biancicarono, come il tristo ruscello ove Filippo Argenti ingozza il fango'. The landscape looks like the forest of Pier Delle Vigne: 'gli ulivi nodosi ed involti somigliavano gli alberi strani che l'etrusco Pellegrino udi lagnarsi'.²⁹ Not only does D'Annunzio constantly play with the Etruscan element of the area, evoking mummies buried under the ground and recalling their damnation and loss, he also suggests that the Balze of Volterra are an actual entrance to Hell; he even describes Dante more than once as the 'grande Etrusco', or the 'Etrusco pellegrino', as we have seen above. He therefore contaminates the actual Etruscan heritage of the city through the Dantean suggestions it evokes: 'città costruita di quella pietra etrusca che imprigiona il sole, sopra una voragine infernale che sembra scavata dall'irosa fantasia dantesca'.³⁰ D'Annunzio is not the only one to describe Volterra through the *Inferno*: in addition to the above-mentioned *Sensations d'Italie*, Corrado Ricci's touristic-archaeological guide *Volterra* (1905), used by D'Annunzio, also contains this description of the Balze: 'Questa terribile e progressiva corrosione del terreno friabile, che s'avanza ed ingoia alberi, mura, sepolcri, case, chiese ha qualcosa del diabolico, quasi fosse opera d'un "mal voler che pur mal chiede con l'intelletto" [*scil.* "con lo "ntelletto", *Purg.* V, 112–13]'.³¹

Hence, it is possible to say that the *Commedia* – particularly the first cantica – is evoked as a reference (perhaps the main one) to help the reader to interpret Volterra as a place of disgrace; the space is read through the poem, with textual inserts, direct quotes, analogies, suggestions, comparisons, and name-dropping of places (Dis), spaces (Malebolge), and characters (Gerion, Flegiàs). However, the relationship that D'Annunzio creates between Volterra's Etruscan heritage and the *Inferno* is so strong that some features can be used the other way around in order to interpret Dante's verses. Specifically, the writer provides a series of sensory references that provoke a visual and material experience of the *Inferno*, as the following section illustrates.

²⁸Words by D'Annunzio recorded by Pescetti, *D'Annunzio a Volterra*, pp. 41–42, my emphasis. It is worth mentioning that the poet had dedicated a lyric poem to Etruscan Volterra already in *Le città del silenzio* (in *Eletra*, 1903; see below note 42).

²⁹D'Annunzio, *Prose di romanzi*, pp. 746–47, 721, 764, 741. See also the notes in *Taccuini LVII LVIII LIX* (1909) written in Volterra: 'Imagini dantesche – il vento piega i vapori: e i corpi a un tratto sono avviluppati – accecati – soffocati'; 'una valle infernale – le acque che bollono – [...] il bulicame'; 'le balze terribili – un profilo di girone dantesco [...] Monticoli qua e là – biancastri – come tombe di dannati danteschi'; 'spettacolo terrificante – creato da una immaginazione dantesca – che fa tremar le vene'. Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Taccuini*, ed. E. Bianchetti and R. Forcella (Milan, Mondadori, 1965), pp. 562–63, 568–69, 581. See also M. Härmänmaa, *L'immagine dell'inferno: la rappresentazione metaforica di Volterra in 'Forse che si forse che no' di Gabriele D'Annunzio*, in *xvi Congresso de Romanistas Escandinavos / xvie Congrès des Romanistes Scandinaves / xvi Congresso dei Romanisti Scandinavi / xvi Congresso dos Romanistas Escandinavos* (Köpenhamn-Roskilde, 24–27 agosto 2005), ed. M. Olsen, E. H. Swiatek (Roskilde: Roskilde Universitet, 2006), pp. 176–90.

³⁰Letter to E. Treves, 30 October 1909, in D'Annunzio, *Lettere ai Treves*, p. 379.

³¹Ricci, *Volterra*, p. 35.

Interartistic Contaminations

Aldo and Vana, Isabella's younger siblings, are figures of sin and temptation as both constantly struggle with mysterious impulses: Aldo is sexually attracted to Isabella, Vana to Paolo. While visiting the Guarnacci Etruscan Museum in Volterra, Aldo and Vana are unable to disconnect from their tumultuous feelings and, therefore, walk between the artworks and archaeological remains and cannot help imagining their own suicides, thinking about hell, damnation, and suffering, and evoking Dante. The Etruscan relics that surround them are menacing and disquieting:

intorno, adagate su i coperchi quadrilunghi, poggiate sul cubito manco, le figure obese dei defunti dal grosso labbro semiaperto erano in pace [...]. Ma tutte quelle mani sinistre poste su i cuscini nell'attitudine immutabile, rozzamente tagliate, enormi talune, talune corrose, talune monche, davano a entrambi una vaga angoscia come se le sentissero premere su i loro cuori.³²

First, Aldo stares at an Etruscan urn depicting Ulysses as he listens to the Sirens, the 'tentatrici', and compares his sister's music to theirs (Vana, 'la cantatrice', is in fact a talented singer). Then, admiring another urn, he wonders:

Chi parte non piange; chi resta non piange. Si guardano fissi con la mano nella mano; si accomiatano senza parole, presso il limite sepolcrale. E il testimone alato non è se non la divina Tristezza; perché la Tristezza è la musa etrusca, è quella che accompagnerà per le vie dell'esilio e dell'inferno un grande Etrusco colorato dalla bile atra. Non hai mai pensato che Dante ha ripreso l'arte dei dipintori di vasi e l'ha ingigantita col suo polso strapotente? Quasi tutta la prima cantica non è di figure rosse su fondo nero, di figure nere su fondo rosso? E taluni suoi versi non li vedi rilucere di quel nero metallico che hanno certi fittili? E le sue ombre non sono simili ai Vivi, come i Mani scolpiti in questi alabastri?³³

What at first glance seems a mere ekphrastic passage, with a sketchy description of some Etruscan artefacts, is in reality a synaesthetic reading of Dante's *Inferno*. This page, in fact, contains a number of explicit references to the samples of Etruscan art that D'Annunzio himself had the chance to observe during his documented visit to the Museo, which, in turn, recall passages from the *Inferno*.³⁴ Dante's body seems contaminated by the same colours: 'colorato dalla bile atra'.³⁵ Here the reference to the colour recalls melancholy, whose root word *melaina kholé* means 'black bile'.³⁶

An interest in colour interpretation was present in Dante scholarship of the time. Thus, an 1889 short essay by L. Mary McLean attracted scholarly attention to the code of colours in the *Commedia*, noticing the prevalence of nuances of red ('rosso', 'vermiglio') and black ('fosco', 'nero', 'oscuro', 'perso') in the first *cantica*.³⁷ According to McLean, these were not mere visual references ('not only an aesthetic value'), but 'the colors that [Dante's] thought assume. There is true harmony between the inward state he describes and the outward appearance he portrays, for he tones down or enlivens his colouring in accordance with the shade of the idea' (p. 101).

³²D'Annunzio, *Prose di romanzi*, p. 647.

³³D'Annunzio, *Prose di romanzi*, pp. 646–47.

³⁴D'Annunzio, *Taccuini*, pp. 575–86. The visual and tactual features of Etruscan vascular painting (Figure 1) and of small-size funerary sculpture that are attributed to the text include: contrasting colours (red/black); material properties (the 'metallic texture' and the shininess of painted terracotta); design features (realism, mimetic quality). This visual suggestion clearly evokes the prevailing colours of the *Inferno* (i.e., Cerberus' 'occhi [...] vermigli' and 'barba [...] atra'; *Inf.* VI, 16; Dis, 'città roggia', *Inf.* XI, 73; the 'aere perso', *Inf.* V, 89). The rooms of the Museo Guarnacci, too, are 'piccole [...] rosse e nere'.

³⁵D'Annunzio, *Prose di romanzi*, p. 645. Cfr. *Taccuini*, p. 584.

³⁶On Sadness, or Melancholy, as the Etruscan Muse see Giovanni Cipriani, 'Il classicismo in Toscana all'indomani della Restaurazione (1814–1830)', in *Winkelmann, Firenze e gli Etruschi. Il padre dell'archeologia in Toscana*, exhibition catalogue (Pisa: ETS, 2016), pp. 273–88; Maurizio Harari, 'Narrare per immagini secondo Winkelmann', *Eidola. International Journal of Classical Art History*, 15 (2018), 145–50; and Piperno, *L'antichità 'crudele'*, pp. 40–41.

³⁷Cfr. Dante's note: 'Lo perso è uno colore misto di purpureo e di nero, ma vince lo nero, e da lui si dinomina' (*Convivio*, IV XX 2).



Figure 1. Etruscan vase (stamnos) MG 1505 with a black figure representing a horse rider with a spear (end VI - early V century. BC). Photo courtesy of Mario Guarnacci Museum, Volterra, Italy.

Dark and bright shades (particularly red, but also green) ‘intensify the gloom’, revealing Dante’s ‘love and understanding of colors’ (p. 102), which he uses ‘with the artist’s precision and definiteness’ (p. 103).³⁸ Dante describes the *Inferno* as a black and red place, mostly in virtue of the colours’ symbolic value: black stands for the absence of light, hence damnation; red symbolises fire, hence punishment. It is unknown whether Dante was familiar with Etruscan art, but a number of early twentieth-century scholars played with the idea that he might have been; this would explain certain features of the representation of the *Inferno*.³⁹ D’Annunzio goes even further, suggesting that there was a direct genealogical relationship between Etruscan vases and Dante’s language (‘ha ripreso l’arte dei dipintori di vasi’) based on the synaesthetic impression that the lines of the *Inferno* do not just *represent* dark and red figures (‘figure’), but that they *are* black/red and shiny *like* an Etruscan vase. The subject of the cantica becomes the *matter* of the text.

³⁸L. Mary Mc Lean, ‘Dante’s Code of Colors’, *Modern Language Notes*, 4, no. 4 (April 1889), 101–104. See also H. D. Austin, ‘Heavenly Gold: A Study of the Use of Color in Dante’, *Philological Quarterly* 12 (1933), 44–53; Luigi Talamo, ‘I colori della Divina Commedia’, in *Risonanze* (Milan: Garzanti, 1953), pp. 129–150; Domenico Consoli, ‘Colore’, Antonio Lanci, ‘Nero’, Andrea Mariani, ‘Rosso’, in *Enciclopedia dantesca* (Rome: Treccani, 1970), a. I. An overview of the issue can be found in Carlachiarra Perrone, ‘I colori nell’opera di Dante: la ricerca in Italia’, in *Per correr miglior acque. Bilanci e prospettive degli studi danteschi alle soglie del nuovo millennio*, 2 vols (Roma: Salerno, 2001), II, pp.1025–54. Nowadays, it is believed that Dante’s expertise in colours was inspired by the art of miniature and dyeing: see Claudia Boscolo, ‘Dante as Late Gothic: The Artistry of Colour and Detail in the Commedia’, in *Nature and Art in Dante*, ed. Daragh O’Connell and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), pp. 25–50; Ottavio Brigandi, ‘Il color perso, Dante e la tintura medievale’, *L’Alighieri*, s.i., 47 (2016), 93–112; Ottavio Brigandi, ‘Nero lucente e profondo. Un’ipotesi sul color perso applicata ai testi di Dante’, *Bollettino Dantesco. Per il Settimo Centenario*, 5 (2016), 9–25.

³⁹For example Arturo Frova, ‘La morte e l’oltretomba nell’arte etrusca’, *Il rinnovamento. Rivista critica di idee e di fatti*, 2, no. 3, 2 (1908), 332–63. See Harari, ‘D’Annunzio e il mito etrusco’, p. 246.



Figure 2. Alabaster urn MG 121 representing a dead man on a horse preceded by Charun, probably the one described by D'Annunzio. Photo courtesy of Mario Guarnacci Museum, Volterra, Italy.

Dark and warm colours coexist with the brighter nuances of the alabaster funerary urn.⁴⁰ The one that Aldo describes is probably the urn MG 121 conserved at the Guarnacci Museum (Figure 2): '[u]n giovine cavaliere cavalcava tutto avvolto nel mantello, con la bocca nascosta dal lembo, pel lungo cammino senza ritorno'. This object polarises Aldo's attention ('fra tutti i viaggi agl'Inferi mi piace l'equestre') to the point of self-identification ('non è questa l'immagine mia?'), and it materialises the spectre of suicide in Vana's mind ('vede sé stessa intessere le mani dietro la schiena, chiudere gli occhi, inclinare la schiena verso la voragine'). The image of the Etruscan urn and the infernal knight is haunting.⁴¹

Pareva che quando a quando la polvere dell'*alabastro funebre* biancheggiasse in lui [Aldo]. Pareva ch'egli seco recasse l'alta malinconia del viaggio ultimo, dell'estremo congedo, quale effondono *le figure delle urne raccolte negli ipogei*. Vana rivedeva quel giovine cavaliere che cavalca agli inferi tutto chiuso nel suo mantello, coperto dal lembo la bocca ammutolita, e il Genio alato gli è presso alle briglie, e incontro gli vengono i Mani.⁴²

In iconographical terms, the journey to hell on horseback (or on a *quadriga*) is a typical feature of Volterran funerary art.⁴³ Although Dante crosses hell prevalently on foot or on Charon's or Phlegyas's boats, in the same chapter D'Annunzio describes Dante as 'scosso dalla schiena di Gerione'.⁴⁴ In doing so, he is focusing on one of the few occasions in which the Dante character *rides* an infernal creature, as happens to several dead souls represented in Etruscan funerary art – another example (not used by the novelist) could be that of Dante riding the centaur Nessus. Curto,

⁴⁰Bourget adds that the alabaster urn was once coloured with a yellowish paint resembling marble: *Sensations d'Italie*, p. 21.

⁴¹D'Annunzio, *Prose di romanzi*, pp. 646–47. I would like to thank Alessandro Furiesi from the Pinacoteca di Volterra who helped me identify the urn.

⁴²D'Annunzio, *Prose di romanzi*, p. 6361, my emphases. See Tacuino LVII: 'Lì presso sono le botteghe degli alabastrai, simili ad antri banchi di polvere. Il terreno è come nevoso' (*Taccuini*, p. 561). The urn's second description does not entirely correspond to the picture; the figure 'presso alle briglie' has no wings, and only one figure in the back follows the dead. What allows identification is the cape covering the soul's mouth: the Guarnacci 121 urn is the only one to feature this detail. The discrepancies can be variously explained: it is possible that D'Annunzio is fantasising about, rather than describing, the Etruscan funerary iconographic repertoire, or that Vana's agitated mind adds details to what the girl has just seen at the Museum.

⁴³D'Annunzio noted this iconographic detail in Tacuino LIX (*Taccuini*, p. 584). See Heinrich von Brunn – Gustav Körte, *I rilievi delle urne etrusche*, 3 vols (Roma-Berlino: Salucci-Raimeri, 1870–1896); and *Corpus delle urne etrusche di età ellenistica*, ed. C. Rampazzo and R. Da Vela, 4 vols (Florence-Pisa: Centro Di – Pacini – ETS, 1975–2012; particularly vol. 1, *Urne volterrane. Il Museo Guarnacci*).

⁴⁴D'Annunzio, *Prose di romanzi*, pp. 746–47.

when commenting on the analogies between Etruscan infernal imagination and Dante's representation of hell, also evokes the representations 'tanto frequenti dell'estremo viaggio agli inferi, accompagnato il defunto verso la porta spalancata della città sotterranea, ora a piedi ora a cavallo ora per nave'.⁴⁵

Ever since the Etruscan era, Volterra has been known for the production of alabaster artefacts. It is the perfect stone to give material evidence to the souls' 'aerial body' or 'corpo fittizio' (*Purg.* XXVI, 12), which does not filter the light's rays. Alabaster ideally renders this feature in three dimensions, as a plastic material that – if modelled accordingly – is capable of letting light pass through. The fact that it was traditionally used in the Volterra region (mined in the area of Castellina Marittima) for the production of small-size funerary artefacts connects this material directly to the sphere of death and afterlife.⁴⁶ D'Annunzio had already made reference to some alabaster-like figures in Dante-related material, as in the lyric poem 'Canto del Sole'; here, in a neo-Stilnovistic style, he evoked an angelic woman from Fiesole, 'alta e sottile, qual già gli artefici / la sculsero in dolci alabastri / e la pinsero in tavole d'oro'.⁴⁷ The lyric Volterra (from *Elettra*, 1903), also refers to another Etruscan urn D'Annunzio had seen at the Guarnacci museum, representing the Homeric character Circe: 'la mia carne inerte si compose / nel sarcofago sculto d'alabastro / ov'è Circe e il brutal suo beverage'.⁴⁸ These references show that D'Annunzio was familiar with the qualities of the traditional stone and of the effects of its manufacturing. However, only the reference in *Forse* conveys the sensory parallelism with the experience of reading and remembering characters and atmospheres from the *Inferno*.

The figures evoked by Dante, Aldo says, are apparently as realistic and lifelike as those engraved in the urn; Dante's verse therefore takes on an almost *sculptural* quality. The idea that Dante was a 'painter and sculptor in / of words' is testified in the European tradition. The metaphor might have become topical after Benedetto Varchi drew a comparison between Dante's verses and Michelangelo's art, in his lessons on painting and sculpture (*Due lezioni*, 1549) – D'Annunzio's library still holds a copy of the *princeps*. Michelangelo is capable of creating 'quello, o nel marmo o con i colori, che aveva fatto egli [Dante] nelle sentenze et colle parole': additionally, in both Michelangelo and Dante, the figures have 'grandezza e maestà'; 'Et chi vede la sua [di Michelangelo] Pietà non vede egli in un marmo, viva et vera, quella sentenza di quel verso che mostrò Dante, non meno pittore che poeta: *Morti li morti, e i vivi parean vivi?*'.⁴⁹ It is worth noticing that Varchi quotes this verse from the *Purgatorio*, canto XII (67), which relates to the perfection of the engravings that contain examples of punished pride on the pavements of the Purgatory (the whole canto is about how art imitates life). For Varchi, both Dante and Michelangelo have a semi-divine capacity to make artefacts come to life. It is likely that D'Annunzio, too, is playing with the memory of that verse when he puts this rhetorical question in Aldo's mouth: 'le sue ombre [rappresentate da Dante] non sono simili ai Vivi?' The novelist is obliquely attributing a miraculous visibility and a sculptural quality – a divine 'visibile parlare' (*Purg.* X, 95) – to Dante's verses.⁵⁰

Similarly, Giacomo Leopardi commented on the 'pictorial' and 'sculptural' quality of Dante's verses in the *Zibaldone*: 'Ovidio descrive, Virgilio dipinge, Dante [...], a parlar con proprietà, non solo dipinge da maestro in due colpi, e vi fa una figura con un tratto di pennello; non solo dipinge

⁴⁵Curto, *Dante etrusco e romano*, p. 11.

⁴⁶Cfr. Ricci, *Volterra*, pp. 22, 86, 113.

⁴⁷*Canto novo*, 1881, now in *Versi d'amore e di gloria*, ed. A. Andreoli and N. Lorenzini, I vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1982), pp. 138–52, ll. 26–28. See Elena Borelli, 'Dante in Gabriele d'Annunzio's poetry and prose. From mystical lover to poeta-vate', *Medievalia*, 38 (2017), 111–27, (pp. 116–17).

⁴⁸*Versi d'amore e di gloria*, ll, pp. 399, ll. 12–14. An additional reference to Volterra's 'alabastri' (alabaster workers) can be found in Taccuino LVII (p. 561).

⁴⁹Benedetto Varchi, *Due lezioni* (Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1549), p. 116. I am quoting from the edition held in D'Annunzio's library, with modernised punctuation).

⁵⁰It is worth mentioning that D'Annunzio's library also holds a *Lezioni sul Dante e prose varie di Benedetto Varchi*, ed. Giuseppe Aiazzi and Lelio Arbib (Florence: Società editrice delle storie del Nardi e del Varchi, 1841); the first two lectures (1543) are dedicated to *Purgatorio* XXV, and specifically to Dante's knowledge of the genesis and formation of the human body and soul.

senza descrivere (come fa anche Virgilio ed Omero), ma *intaglia e scolpisce* dinanzi agli occhi del lettore le proprie idee, concetti, immagini, sentimenti' (*Zib.* 2523, 29 June 1822).⁵¹ Vincenzo Gioberti, in his *Primato morale e civile degli italiani*, compared Dante to Ariosto, 'che si mostra pittore, e ritrae le bellezze naturali', whereas Dante 'è principalmente *scultore*, e si compiace delle idee, che sono l'anima delle due cantiche': both, however, are '*scolpitamente* italiani'.⁵² In his commentary on the *Commedia*, the historian and professor of literature Adolfo Bartoli claimed that Dante, 'grande sopra tutti i moderni nell'arte plastica [. . .], *scolpisce* i corpi'.⁵³ Perhaps inspired by Germaine de Staël, Stendhal – in *Histoire de la peinture en Italie* – recalls the Dante–Michelangelo comparison in the following terms: 'Si Michel-Ange eût fait un poème, il eût créé le comte Ugolin, comme, si le Dante eût été sculpteur, il eût fait le Moïse'.⁵⁴ These last three sources were available in D'Annunzio's library at Il Vittoriale. Finally, Auguste Rodin, when preparing the famously Dante-inspired 'Porte de l'enfer' (commissioned in 1880 for the Musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris, but unfinished), made the following claim: 'Dante est non seulement un visionnaire et un écrivain; c'est aussi un sculpteur. Son expression est *lapidaire*, au bon sens du mot. Quand il décrit un personnage, il le *campe*, avec son *attitude* et son *geste*'.⁵⁵ From the aforementioned examples it is possible to infer that the metaphor of the 'sculptor' is used to suggest certain visual and tactual elements of the style of Dante's *Commedia*: evidence, depth of perspective, presence of shadows and chiaroscuro, a material 'feel', concreteness, plasticity, roughness and unevenness. What Rodin pointed out, namely that *gesture* is key in Dante, is also noted by D'Annunzio. In fact, all the visual and artistic features are for D'Annunzio enhanced ('ingigantite') by Dante's 'polso strapotente', a metonymy for his plastic, mobile, and intense writing.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that D'Annunzio attributed the same Etruscan and Dantean characteristics that are evoked by the observation of the funerary urn – melancholy as well as fierceness and readiness – to Carducci as well. Apparently, the latter 'poteva [. . .] ricordare quegli Etruschi dalle gambe smilze e dallo stomaco prominente che si veggono accosciati su i coperchi delle urne funerarie. Pareva che la tenacia della bocca risalisse alla fronte. A simiglianza dell'Alighieri, aveva egli le labbra sottili e serrate'. In turn, Carducci's figure would be that of a 'figura toscana d'uomo di parte e di crucci, affocata dalla passione civica e dal vin frizzante, aspra e franca, che Donatello avrebbe figurata in *terracotta* dipinta, col collo nudo fuor d'un drappo scarlatta, *strapotente* di carattere, come il busto di Niccolò da Uzzano' (my emphases).⁵⁶ Carducci's portrait carries exactly the same features as Dante's 'Etruscan' side: a terracotta-like feel, the 'strapotenza' of his gesture, and a strongly emotional and expressive face (bearing the signs of worries, 'crucci', perhaps in contrast to the Olympic calm of some Classical sculptures). The bust of Niccolò da Uzzano, which has been attributed to Donatello and is now in the Bargello museum (Figure 3), is in fact made of colourful terracotta and features the expressive eyes, naked neck, and red cape that D'Annunzio describes.

⁵¹Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, ed. G. Pacella (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), p. 1360, my emphases. Published in 1898 and edited by his mentor Carducci, in theory the *Zibaldone* was available to D'Annunzio, although it is absent from the Vittoriale library.

⁵²Vincenzo Gioberti, *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani* (Bruxelles: Meline Cans, 1843–44), p. 226, my emphases.

⁵³Adolfo Bartoli, *Storia della letteratura italiana* (Florence: Sansoni, 1878–1889), vol. 6.2, *Delle opere di Dante Alighieri. La Divina commedia* (1889), p. 211. See also Enrico Mestica's commentary (Giuseppe Cesari Editore, 1909) on *Inferno* III, ll. 82–99: 'Virgilio descrive e dipinge con larga spiegatura d'immagini e di colori; l'Alighieri scolpisce: è un visibile parlare'.

⁵⁴Stendhal, *Histoire de la peinture en Italie* (Paris: Levy, 1854), p. 367. See Michael Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics* (Geneve: Droz, 1985), pp. 138–40. See Germaine De Staël, *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (Paris: Didot, 1846 [1807]), p. 206 for the possible source of Stendhal's inspiration.

⁵⁵Interview with Rodin by Serge Basset, 'La porte de l'enfer. A visite à l'atelier de Rodin', *Le matin*, 19 March 1900, p. 1, my emphases. See Isabelle Mons, 'De l'Enfer au baiser, ou la transmission du geste éternel. Paolo et Francesca chez Dante, Rodin, Brancusi et Han', in *Les funambules de l'affection: maîtres et disciples*, ed. V. Deshoulières and Muguraş Constantinescu (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2009), pp. 205–20 (pp. 208–11).

⁵⁶Quote from *Di un maestro avverso* (1907), dedicated to the memory of Carducci. D'Annunzio, *Prose di ricerca*, I, p. 1573. A similar hint at Carducci's 'Etruscan-ness' is contained in the 1907 poem *Per la tomba di Giosuè Carducci*: 'Tutta la morte della terra etrusca / sente il prodigio e freme di memoria / il bronzo vibra in fondo all'ipogeo?'. Gabriele D'Annunzio, *L'orazione e la canzone in morte di Giosue Carducci* (Milan: Treves, 1907), p. 48, my emphases.



Figure 3. Donatello, painted terracotta bust of Niccolò Da Uzzano, 1432. Photo courtesy of the Bargello Museum, Florence, Italy.

To conclude, it is clear that D'Annunzio is interested in navigating Dante's text through – and contaminating it with – visual, material and tactual features typical of (though not exclusive to) primitive autochthonous art. He seems to be in search of a trans-historical and trans-medial 'Tuscanness' whose consistence is alluded to also in purely genealogical terms: a 'blood memory'. There is an attempt to relate Dante's imagery and visual dimension to a pre- or anti-classical aesthetic repertoire, characterised by the material reference to terracotta (an earthly and domestic material) and alabaster (also domestic, fragile, and translucent). In sum, D'Annunzio's powerful synaesthetic exercise results in a multimedial and multi-sensorial amplification of the stylistic, visual and experiential suggestions of the *Inferno*. D'Annunzio contemporaneously stimulates the reader's knowledge of the Volterra landscape (on a visual level) and of its history (on a mnemonic level); the reader's textual memory of the *Inferno*, both in terms of imagery and of content; and the reader's memory of Etruscan art, both visually (in terms of colours and visual properties) and materially (i.e., touch, perspective, depth). All this seems aimed at giving the reader an intoxicating, hyper-stimulating, and multi-sensorial experience that recalls the overwhelming passions that the novel's characters feel. In other words, D'Annunzio's purpose may be to push the novel's limits beyond plain narration and to attempt an all-round, limitless synaesthetic experience.

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