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Vertical Readings  
in Dante's *Comedy*

Volume 2

EDITED BY  
GEORGE CORBETT AND  
HEATHER WEBB



VERTICAL READINGS  
IN DANTE'S *COMEDY*



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*edited by*  
*George Corbett and Heather Webb*



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There are many people who have helped us during the different stages of the project. We are deeply grateful to you all and we regret that, in these brief acknowledgements, we can only thank some of you by name. Apart from the contributors to this volume, we would like to thank Pierpaolo Antonello, Theodore J. Cachey, Elizabeth Corbett, Mary Corbett, Robert Gordon, Ronald Haynes, Claire Honess, Vittorio Montemaggi, Helena Phillips-Robins, Federica Pich, Katherine Powlesland, Nan Taplin, and Matthew Treherne. Finally, we would like to extend our particular thanks to Simon Gilson for his support, advice and encouragement on this project from its inception.

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# Editions Followed and Abbreviations

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## A. Dante

Unless otherwise stated, the editions of Dante's works may be found in: *Le Opere di Dante*, ed. by F. Brambilla Ageno, G. Contini, D. De Robertis, G. Gorni, F. Mazzoni, R. Migliorini Fissi, P. V. Mengaldo, G. Petrocchi, E. Pistelli, P. Shaw, and rev. by D. De Robertis and G. Breschi (Florence: Polistampa, 2012).

### A.1 Vernacular works

<i>Inf.</i>	<i>Inferno</i>
<i>Purg.</i>	<i>Purgatorio</i>
<i>Par.</i>	<i>Paradiso</i>
<i>Conv.</i>	<i>Convivio</i>
<i>VN.</i>	<i>Vita nova</i>
<i>Rime</i>	<i>Rime</i>

### A.2 Latin works

<i>DVE.</i>	<i>De vulgari eloquentia</i>
<i>Mon.</i>	<i>Monarchia</i>
<i>Questio</i>	<i>Questio de aqua et terra</i>
<i>Epist.</i>	<i>Epistole</i>
<i>Ecl.</i>	<i>Egloge</i>

## B. English translations

Unless otherwise stated, the translations of Dante are adapted from these readily available and literally translated English editions:

### B.1 Vernacular works

*The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed. and trans. by Robert M. Durling; introduction and notes by Ronald L. Martinez and Robert M. Durling, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996–2011).

*The Banquet*, trans. with introduction and notes by Christopher Ryan (Saratoga, CA: Anma Libri, 1989).

*La Vita Nuova*, trans. by Mark Musa (Bloomington, IN and London: Indiana University Press, 1962).

*Dante's Lyric Poetry*, trans. by Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

### B.2 Latin works

*De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. and trans. by Steven Botterill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

*Monarchy*, ed. and trans. by Prue Shaw. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

*The Letters of Dante*, trans. by Paget J. Toynbee, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966); for the political epistles, however, *Dante Alighieri: Four Political Letters*, trans. by Claire Honess (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2007).

*Dante and Giovanni del Virgilio*, trans. by Philip H. Wicksteed and Edmund G. Gardner (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1970).

In most instances, the translation [in square brackets] follows the original passage. Where the sense of the original passage is clear from the main text, the original passage (in parentheses) follows the paraphrase. Discussion is always with regard to the passage in the original.

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**Robert Wilson** is Lecturer in the Italian Department at the University of St Andrews. He is the author of *Prophecies and Prophecy in Dante's Commedia* (2008), and has written articles on Dante and Ovid, inspiration in Dante, and Dante's early commentators' responses to their author's 'mistakes'. He is the co-organiser, with Claudia Rossignoli, of the *Lectura Dantis Andreapolitana* series, started in 2009 (<http://lecturadantisandrepolitana.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk>).





# Introduction

*George Corbett and Heather Webb*

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The programme of mosaics in the cupola of the Florentine baptistery, which illustrates the cover of this second volume of *Vertical Readings in Dante's 'Comedy'*, presents the complex history of Christian salvation in one unified vision. Imprinted on Dante's imagination as a child, it seems plausible that the programme might have served as a visual inspiration for his own Christian poetics. Dante, indeed, could not emphasize more strongly in the *Comedy* the connection between his faith, the Florentine baptistery, and his poetic vocation. In the upper reaches of *Paradiso*, and just before the staged encounter with Saint James, Dante opens the twenty-fifth canto as follows:

Se mai continga che 'l poema sacro  
al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra  
sì che m'ha fatto per molti anni macro,  
vinca la crudeltà che fuor mi serra  
del bello ovile ov'io dormi' agnello,  
nimico ai lupi che li danno guerra;  
con altra voce omai, con altro vello  
ritornerò poeta, e in sul fonte  
del mio battesimo prenderò 'l cappello;  
però che ne la fede, che fa conte  
l'anime a Dio, quivi intra'io, e poi  
Pietro per lei sì mi girò la fronte. (*Par.*, xxv. 1–12)

[If it should ever happen that the sacred poem, to which both Heaven and earth have set their hand, so that for many years it has made me lean, vanquish the cruelty that locks me out of the lovely sheepfold where I slept as a lamb, an enemy of the wolves that make war on it, with other

## 2 *Vertical Readings in Dante's 'Comedy'*

voice by then, with other fleece I shall return as poet, and at the font of my baptism I shall accept the wreath: for there I entered the faith that makes souls known to God, and later Peter so circled my brow because of it.]

When Dante writes these lines, he knows that he may never return to Florence in his lifetime. And yet he emphasises that, were he to return, he would do so in this way, as a poet crowned with the laurel wreath, and in this place, at the font of the Florentine Baptistery where he was received into the Christian faith.

If we too were to transport ourselves imaginatively into this extraordinarily beautiful space and look up, we would be struck by a particular feature of the central series of sixty mosaics that occupies five walls of the eight-sided cupola: namely, that it is arranged in four tiers of fifteen biblical scenes, thereby encouraging us to view the programme both horizontally and vertically.<sup>1</sup> Thus, at a 'horizontal' level, we are invited to follow the narrative of creation to the flood, the story of Joseph and his eleven brothers, the life of Christ, and the life of St John the Baptist, in a series of mosaics which synthesises accounts in various biblical episodes (from the Old and New Testaments). But we are also invited to read up and down, whereby one of these narratives foreshadows, enriches or completes another. For example, the first mosaics in the four storylines — God's creation of the world, Joseph's first dream, the Annunciation to Mary, and the Annunciation to Zachariah respectively — are clearly interrelated. Thus God created the world in time and then, at the Annunciation, entered into time to usher in the new creation through Mary. The Annunciation to Zachariah foreshadows that to Mary: while Zachariah fails to believe the angel's message that his elderly wife is pregnant and is consequently struck dumb, Mary believes the angel's even more astounding message that, although a virgin, she is to conceive. Joseph, moreover, is an archetypal figure for Christ, and the vertical perspective draws out these typological connections across the fifteen scenes. These vertical parallels, then, are intended as part of the baptistery's pictorial scheme.

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1 See especially Christopher Kleinhenz, 'On Dante and the Visual Arts', in *Dante for the New Millennium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 274–92 (p. 282). For a study relating the pictorial scheme of the Florentine baptistery to the historical-literal and spiritual senses of Scripture and to a vertical reading of Dante's *Comedy*, see also George Corbett, 'The Vertical Axis: *Inferno* x, *Purgatorio* x, and *Paradiso* x', in *Dante and Epicurus: A Dualistic Vision of Secular and Spiritual Fulfilment* (Oxford: Legenda, 2013), pp. 80–85.

If we transpose this visual mode of interpretation onto the poetics of the *Comedy*, the three canticles may be interpreted horizontally (reading each canto in turn) and also vertically (reading upwards from *Inferno* to *Paradiso* or downwards from *Paradiso* to *Inferno*). Beginning in 2012 and concluding in 2016, a series of public lectures held in Trinity College at the University of Cambridge has accomplished the task of applying ‘vertical readings’ systematically to the whole of Dante’s *Comedy*.<sup>2</sup> The first volume of *Vertical Readings in Dante’s ‘Comedy’*, published during the 750th anniversary of Dante’s birth, presented our series within the history of the poem’s reception, then, as a collaborative experiment. In the first volume’s introduction, we outlined the method, history and some interpretative justifications of vertical reading.<sup>3</sup> In the introduction to the second volume, it seems productive to explore some of the new directions that are emerging as part of this shared scholarly endeavour. In so doing, we draw especially on the round-table discussion that preceded the final lecture concluding our series on 21 April 2016.<sup>4</sup>

We asked the scholars involved to discuss what opportunities and limitations had emerged through the vertical approach, and to explore some possible implications for further work in Dante Studies. One of the most salient features of the series that arose from this discussion was how the exercise of vertical reading has challenged us to reconsider what might be the most effective ‘format’ for reading Dante’s poem. In particular, scholars have explored what we might be liable to miss in the ‘canto-by-canto’ reading characteristic of the conventional *Lectura Dantis* and the commentary tradition. The very notion of a ‘vertical reading’ immediately offers the opportunity to interrogate the structure, architecture and relationality of the poem, even requiring us to conceptualise a before, after, above and below: the dimensionality of the ‘di qua, di là, di sù, di giù’. Whereas art historians have many interpretative resources for these different kinds of perspectives, and for them it is normative to gaze on a painting or

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2 For videos of the public lectures, see ‘Cambridge Vertical Readings in Dante’s *Comedy*’, <https://sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/1366579>

3 ‘Introduction’, in *Vertical Readings in Dante’s ‘Comedy’: Volume 1*, ed. by George Corbett and Heather Webb (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), pp. 1–11.

4 We would like to thank all those who participated in the round-table discussion: John Bugbee, Ambrogio Camozzi Pistoja, K P Clarke, David Bowe, George Ferzoco, Robert Gordon, Malcolm Guite, Catherine Keen, Claire Honess, Robin Kirkpatrick, Geoffrey Kirkness, Corinna Salvadori Lonergan, Valentina Mele, Nicolò Morelli, Katherine Powlesland, Helena Phillips-Robins, Jennifer Rushworth, Brenda Deen Schildgen, Michael Tilby, Alessandra Tosi and Nicolò Crisafi.

cycle of frescos with a sensitivity to the horizontal, diagonal and vertical relationships, readers of the *Commedia* — especially when confronted with the narrative and hermeneutic complexity of the text — have often allowed themselves to remain within the confines of a section of the poem or a canto or a theme or a figure. The vertical reading method, by contrast, encourages readers to always keep the three canticles in dialogue with each other and can provide opportunities to search for interpretative answers (even to hermeneutical *crucis* of particular individual cantos) in relation to the poem as a whole.

Vertical readings have thus implicitly or explicitly addressed the question of structure, in this case, the way in which the three canticles relate to one another. Various essays in the first two volumes have worked through different metaphors to envision the poem and the interconnections between canticles. Historically, the poem has been spoken of as a 'gothic cathedral' or a spiral, or more specifically, a DNA-like helix. Catherine Keen's lecture spoke of staircases; Christian Moevs and Tristan Kay write of columns. Some scholars present at the discussion, most forcefully George Ferzoco, argued for Dante's 'systematic' vertical approach ('it is a vertical poem, Dante fully intended it in this way, and it has taken us seven hundred years to fully realize this'), while others were more comfortable with a 'partial' vertical reading. Whether in favour of a more systematic or partial interpretation of Dante's vertical strategy, scholars concurred in emphasizing that although some vertical 'columns' may be weight-bearing, not all verticals, of necessity, can bear the same structural burden.

Almost all scholars in our series seem to consider that Dante intended some of the same-numbered cantos to be read together, and that he therefore constructed particular connections between them. As Christian Moevs highlights in the first vertical reading in this second volume, however, we cannot know how many sets might have such intentionally conceived connections unless we first look systematically. While highlighting multiples of three ('the Threes, Sixes, Nines, Twenty-Sevens, Thirty-Threes') as particularly closely related, Moevs strongly affirms the value of exploring to what extent the other sets might have similar parallels. And he emphasises that approaching cantos through a vertical perspective 'brings new details and themes into relief' even where correspondences may not have been consciously constructed by Dante.

In freeing the vertical reader from the reiteration of the narrative as typical in the *Lectura Dantis* format, the exercise of vertical reading naturally

opens up more meta-poetical issues. In the second volume, a tendency to favour a broader vertical reading emerged particularly strongly: thus Simone Marchesi and Manuele Gagnolati consider the Fifteens alongside the Sixteens and Giuseppe Ledda interprets the Twenty-Twos in relation to the Twenty-Ones. The vertical may extend most fruitfully beyond the strictly co-numerary to include a wider 'column' of cantos (to continue with the architectural metaphors). Would it, then, be productive to broaden the scope of the vertical reading still further to include more varied kinds of retrospective modes of correspondence that emerge in the poem?<sup>5</sup>

A typology of some of the correspondences that have emerged so far in the series might include: theme, image patterns, shared metaphors, verbal echoing, situational parallels, prominent intertexts, shared rhymes and rhyme words, parallel liturgical situations, shared concerns with the metapoetic and modes of reader address, with time, eternity and prophecy, parallel names or family connections, inter-relationship of characters, place and geography, and numerological connections. Vertical reading, in this wider sense, may encourage a greater sensitivity to the multiple connections, both prospective and retrospective, across the poem as a whole. Even a single word (and not necessarily a shared rhyme word) in one section of the poem, as we know, can be more fully understood in relation to how Dante uses the word in other contexts; in many cases, indeed, Dante seems to enrich a word with meaning in the course of writing the poem. K P Clarke's focus on rhyme words in his chapter on the Tens has led him to focus on rhyme across the whole poem, and, indeed, to explore a list of key Dante words, as touchstones for the poem.

It has been a pleasure to see new vertical readings springing up outside the bounds of these volumes. For example, in the latter stages of preparing his chapter for this volume, Robert Wilson came across a vertical reading of the Thirteens as part of a *Lectura of Purgatorio* xiii in *L'Alighieri* (2015). Two recent 'Dante Notes', published online by the Dante Society of America, have also used vertical evidence to support their arguments. Matthew Collins works through the issue of Virgil's digression in *Inferno* xx and the poet's editing of Virgil in *Inferno* xxi by considering *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* xx and xxi as 'critical contextualisation'.<sup>6</sup> Filippo Gianferrari uses what we

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5 The term 'retrospective readings' is taken, of course, from John Freccero. See John Freccero, 'The Prologue Scene', in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 1–28.

6 Matthew Collins, 'Virgil's Digression and Dante's *Comedia*', *Dante Notes*, 7 February 2016, <https://www.dantesociety.org/node/99>

might call a 'flexible vertical', referring to *Inferno* xii and *Paradiso* xiii to support a political reading of *Purgatorio* xii.<sup>7</sup> There is, in this way, a sense that scholars are finding that verticals are providing another set of scholarly tools to be drawn upon for contextual or interpretative evidence.

Vertical readings are beginning to be discussed within scholarly work on Dante Studies pedagogy as well. It has long been the fate of students to begin reading *Inferno* in undergraduate classes and then never to move on from there. Vertical readings in the classroom can help to ensure that students develop the methodological skills to analyse the poem at a deeper level of complexity. And, at the very least, it leads them to learn something of *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, perhaps offering them a way into the concerns of the canticles that they often find, at first, most challenging. A special issue of the *Journal of Pedagogy* on teaching Dante, edited by Brenda Deen Schildgen, features four vertical readings that examine the pedagogical possibilities of studying the Fifteens, the Nineteens, the Twenty-Threes and the three antepenultimate cantos (*Inf.*, xxxii, *Purg.*, xxxi, and *Par.*, xxxi) together.<sup>8</sup>

This second volume comes into being, therefore, as vertical readings are proliferating and becoming part of the language of Dante Studies. 'Verticality' offers itself as a tool to engage with methodological concerns about modes of reading the poem, and as another way to ensure that studies of specific lines or cantos of the poem benefit from a broader consideration of the structuring concerns of the poem as a whole. The essays in this volume pick up on the theoretical questions of the first volume with the increased depth of reference that the cumulative conversation offers.

By highlighting the principal narrative and thematic elements of the Twelves, Christian Moevs is able to reflect, first of all, on the implications of these elements for the canto on its own terms. Thus he presents a reading of the Minotaur's distorted commingling of reason and animality in relation to the Incarnation, with further parallels between pagan heroes (such as Theseus and Hercules) and Christ. He then explores how these more descriptive elements may or may not be a feature across all three cantos. Moevs analyses a number of different kinds of correspondence. For

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7 Filippo Gianferrari, 'Pride and Tyranny: An Unnoted Parallel between *Purgatorio* 12 and *Policraticus* 8.20–21', *Dante Notes*, 12 May 2016, <https://www.dantesociety.org/node/104>

8 Brenda Deen Schildgen, ed., *Pedagogy* 17.3 (forthcoming September 2017). See also Brenda Deen Schildgen, 'Civitas and Love: Looking Backward from *Paradiso* viii', in *Vertical Readings*, I, pp. 161–80.

example, he emphasizes the numerical parallel of 1 + 12 in the Twelves and how this implies, in each case, a relation of comparison and contrast with Christ and his twelve disciples: in *Inferno* xii, twelve creatures (whether human souls or Centaurs) are subject to Chiron; in *Purgatorio* xii, the twelve individual examples of pride culminate in the paradigmatic example of Troy; in *Paradiso* xii, twelve blessed souls are introduced alongside St Dominic by Bonaventure. While registering many further parallels, in terms also of theme (violence or pride), type of personages (bloody tyrants), or particular events (two kings killed during worship), Moevs focuses on the nexus around the four terms of art, representation, language and pride. This, in turn, leads to an original interpretation of the theology of Incarnation in Dante's works. Contextualising his vertical reading within wider structural units and vertical columns, Moevs contrasts the prideful, and 'competitive' pursuit of excellence to inflate the self, with the collaborative enterprise of St Dominic and St Francis in directing souls to God.

Robert Wilson's contribution begins by addressing some of the key methodological issues involved in vertical or parallel reading in dialogue with previous studies, including the first volume of *Vertical Readings* (and with a particularly helpful analysis of Richard Kay's approach). For example, Wilson is the first contributor to compare line lengths or canto divisions in a vertical set of cantos. This methodological concern develops throughout the chapter, and there are a number of critical observations about issues involved in the conventional *Lectura Dantis* as well. The first main part considers a series of potential justifications for vertical readings and explores whether such justifications, or approaches, might be appropriate to the canto set of the Thirteens. The second main part analyses some potential connections between the Thirteens, including a sustained reflection on envy.

Catherine Keen's contribution is the first to privilege explicitly the spatial and geographical implications of the metaphor of vertical reading. The Fourteens, she suggests, each open 'an atlas page on which north-south and east-west axes are laid out with topographical precision'. Temporal, rhetorical and moral references serve further to locate, and interrelate, the three same-numbered cantos in her reading. Thus, for example, three temporal perspectives are brought to bear on a shared concern with politics: the rise and fall of pagan empires (*Inf.*, xiv), the Christian eternal perspective of crusading martyrdom (*Par.*, xiv), and the local, contemporary conflict in the Italian peninsula (*Purg.*, xiv). Keen contrasts the predominant



rhetorical emphases of the three cantos, with multiple classical allusions prevailing in *Inferno* xiv, the *sermo humilis* of Scripture informing *Paradiso* xiv, and a sharp historical, geographical consciousness, alongside the literary forms of satire and invective, shaping *Purgatorio* xiv. Although the vertical perspective lends a sense of the differing characters of the three cantos (and, arguably, of the three canticles), Keen also shows how the situation is more complex, subtle and multilayered. Thus, for example, a Christianized interpretation of the Old Man of Crete as the Old Adam is enriched through comparison with the presentation of Christ crucified as the New Adam in *Paradiso* xiv, and through reflection on the shared intertext of Paul's *i Corinthians*. Messianic and Christianised readings, in other words, are invariably implicit as interpretative possibilities in Dante's polysemous *Inferno*, while the more explicitly Christian themes of *Paradiso* cast an engaged, retrospective vista on the other two canticles.

Simone Marchesi's chapter opens by examining the apparent inconsistencies in Dante's text, inconsistencies that have led scholars to suggest that Dante changed his mind about the structure and order of the poem during its composition. Marchesi thus emphasizes the need to read the poem in relation to its precise 'timing', as contingent upon a particular compositional history. He contends, moreover, that it is only with the final instalment in place (*Paradiso*), that the vertical connections move from virtuality to reality, from potentiality to act. In common with a number of vertical readings in the series, Marchesi initially finds two of the three cantos to be more obviously related. In the case of the Fifteens, he shows how the outer, or 'external', cantos, *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xv, clearly present good and bad fathers and fatherlands respectively. Marchesi also addresses, nonetheless, the less-obviously related central vertical canto, *Purgatorio* xv. Marchesi shows how it is *Purgatorio* xv which, in fact, presents the Scriptural precedent for 'earthly and spiritual' fatherhood and, also, brings to the fore the fatherland city of Jerusalem, setting up complex and ambiguous interpretative relationships to the Old Florence-New Florence, and Florence-Rome dyads dominant in the outer Fifteens.

Manuele Gagnolati highlights that the Sixteens are not self-standing but, instead, either form part of a diptych (*Inf.*, xv–xvi) or a triptych (*Purg.*, xvi–xviii and *Par.*, xv–xvii). The 'horizontal' dimension, in other words, is especially important for these cantos which so clearly form part of larger narrative units beyond the single canto. Through a number of key themes, Gagnolati also emphasizes that the Sixteens are strongly related to other

parts of the poem and to Dante's other works. He focuses, then, on one theme that does seem particularly relevant to the vertical set of three cantos: the combined sense of nostalgia for the past and of the degeneracy of the present that prevails, he shows, in each of the Sixteens. Interestingly, as with Marchesi's chapter on the Fifteens, Gragnolati finds it productive to consider the *Purgatorio* canto last. Where *Inferno* xvi might seem to present a contrast between the courtesy and valour of Florence's recent past and the arrogance and excess characterizing a corrupt modern Florence, the vertical perspective of *Paradiso* xvi radically qualifies any over-valuation of the Florence of the mid-1200s. The idealization of Cacciaguida's Old Florence in *Paradiso* xvi suggests, instead, a terminal decline, and Gragnolati presents new perspectives not only on the causes Dante assigns for this decline but on how these may give us further insight into Dante's ambivalent relationship to the competing political systems of his day. Approaching the more theoretical discourses of *Purgatorio* xvi in light of the descriptions of different stages of Florence's history in *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xvi, Gragnolati highlights Dante's emphasis, not only on free will, but also on the necessity for political guidance if human beings are to be led to their earthly and heavenly happiness. This, in turn, sheds light back on *Inferno* xvi and the failure of the political leaders encountered there to guide their citizens to an eschatological goal (with a focus, instead, on earthly fame). On the other hand, even where the global institutions of Empire and Church are failing in the practical political arena, Gragnolati highlights that, for Dante, this does not excuse human moral failure.

Although the main themes and styles of each of the Seventeens are different, Tristan Kay shows how each canto — in its structurally privileged halfway position in each canticle — presents a narrative watershed. Withholding the 'intentionality' question, Kay articulates numerological points (via Singleton and Logan), and considers some thematic and lexical threads such as 'nautical imagery', 'weaving', 'alimentary metaphors', and questions about the 'pilgrim/poet autonomy'. The Seventeens, Kay shows, bear significant metapoetic weight for the poem as a whole. A reading of these conumerary cantos together reveals a sustained consideration of the poem's status as 'comedy' as a centrally located 'column' within the poem. In Kay's analysis, the surface appearance of thematic heterogeneity within this vertical overlays what is in fact a strongly linked series of metatextual considerations. In the final part of his contribution, Kay presents an 'integrated reading' of the Seventeens in terms of the key distinction between Christian 'comedy' and pagan 'tragedy'.

Anne Leone's chapter proposes new modes of vertical reading, including the comparison with an adjacent canto and the notion of a triangular correspondence with a canto of another number. The chapter is also the first to begin by exploring a series of *differences* between the three cantos (in terms of topography, characters and activities, central issues, imagery and motifs), before focusing on a single important issue, in this case the treatment of women in the poem. In her reading of *Inferno* xviii and *Purgatorio* xviii and xix, Leone situates Dante's representation of various seductresses in relation to classical sources. On the one hand, Dante seems to underline the positive reproductive roles of women while, on the other, he persistently presents the female sexual organs in order to evoke disgust and repulsion, rather than allure. In the second part, Leone brings in the figure of Lady Justice (or 'Drittura') from Dante's poem 'Tre Donne intorno al cor' as an important counterfoil to the presentation of the prostitute Thais (*Inf.*, xviii) and the Siren (*Purg.*, xix). Leone also shows how the polarity, in the Wisdom literature, between a personified Lady Wisdom ('Sapientia') and the figure of a harlot, between saints and seductresses, informs Dante's presentation. It is disconcerting that, with the notable exception of Beatrice, Dante eschews the opportunity to celebrate virtuous, wise women in *Paradiso* xviii and, instead, represents women also in this canto as obstructing seductresses whom men must overcome in order to pursue their heroic deeds. This portrayal only reinforces the predominantly negative image of individual women given in *Inferno* xviii and *Purgatorio* xix. Leone argues that, in light of these narrative choices, Dante cannot be excused from charges of misogyny on the grounds that such views were common within his wider culture.

Ambrogio Camozzi Pistoja's chapter on the Nineteens is the first reading in our series that takes a literary genre — satire — as its vertical thread. Camozzi Pistoja provides an outline of medieval satire as a distinctive genre at work in *Inferno* xix and *Purgatorio* xix. Both cantos, strongly linked by their parallel considerations of avarice and simonist popes, combine elements of the rustic and the tragic, a juxtaposition that animates Dante's brand of satire. Both cantos use the satirical image of the world upside down through the inverted bodies of the popes. *Purgatorio* xix thus reworks the material of *Inferno* xix in highly visible ways. The strong vertical between the first two canticles seems to disappear in *Paradiso* xix, but Camozzi Pistoja nonetheless shows that *Paradiso* xix provides a legitimisation of Dante's satire in terms of his prophetic investiture from God. This insight

provides an original way of considering Dante as prophet and satirist across the Nineteens and, indeed, throughout the poem.

Claudia Rossignoli's chapter on the Twenties also has strong intertextual and meta-literary dimensions. Rossignoli makes a strong case for the hermeneutic possibilities of vertical readings, linking formal and structural elements with the conceptual issue of the limits of human perception. As she shows, all three of these cantos interrogate the human mind's power and limitations as applied to poetry, prophecy, and the delicate mixture of the two that Dante sets forth between scriptural and epic parameters. Rossignoli charts the preoccupation of the Twenties with the semantic field of eyes and sight, powers related in different ways in these three cantos to divinatory, intellectual and sapiential modes of knowing. Rossignoli also opens up new perspectives on how Dante's poem relates to, and re-positions, its classical literary antecedents, emphasizing that a scriptural framework in the Twenties legitimizes the cultural and moral ambition of Dante's poetic discourse.

Corinna Salvadori Lonergan observes that all the protagonists in the Twenty-Ones are poets and, in Dante's terms, 'God's beloved': Virgil and Dante in *Inferno* xxi; Virgil, Dante and Statius in *Purgatorio* xxi; and Dante and Peter Damian in *Paradiso* xxi (with Virgil, in the preceding heaven of Jupiter, a great *innominato*). Through these central protagonists, Salvadori Lonergan explores issues of poetry, testimony, faith and preaching. In her analysis of the 'black comedy' of *Inferno* xxi, Lonergan pays close attention to the intricacies of language and speech, even down to the micro-details of the comic timing re-created by the rhythms of the hendecasyllables and hard-hitting rhymes. With regard to Virgil's misplaced faith in Malacoda, Lonergan articulates Virgil's limitations as a poetic guide as, more generally, a lack of scriptural knowledge. Sacred scripture is, then, the implicit subtext of *Purgatorio* xxi, and the vertical perspective allows new insights into the poetic relationship between Dante, Virgil and Statius. Finally, Lonergan presents Peter Damian as an alter-ego for Dante, drawing to a conclusion the chapter's macro-argument about models of poetry in relation to the up/down relationship of contemplation and active preaching.

The concluding chapter of the second volume fittingly brings together horizontal and vertical dimensions of reading the poem. Giuseppe Ledda highlights, indeed, that the twenty-second canto of each canticle forms a pair with the preceding one: the evil pocket ('malebolgia') of the barrators spans *Inferno* xxi and xxii, the 'Stadius cantos' customarily refer to *Purgatorio*

xxi and xxii, and the hagiographic diptych of the contemplatives St Benedict and St Peter Damian occurs in *Paradiso* xxi and xxii. While focusing on the Twenty-Twos, Ledda thus reads these three 'closely-connected canto pairs' together. Presenting a series of thematic correspondences and oppositions, Ledda exemplifies how inter-canticle analysis may lead to critical insights on each of the cantos and episodes examined. Ledda ties together intertextual interpretations of Dante's treatment of truth and fraud, revelation and concealment, virtuous and vicious relationships to wealth, the 'new preachers' and the ancient poets with a presentation of Dante's self-presentation and poetic mission.

## 12. Centaurs, Spiders and Saints

*Christian Moevs*

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A vertical link within each set of corresponding cantos in the three canticles may not always be obvious, or not always intentionally willed by the author. The way Dante constructs things is often not meant to be obvious; Dante is difficult, subtle. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to pursue such vertical links, even where they are not evident, for two reasons. The first is that in some cases there certainly is such a vertical correspondence, which Dante clearly means us to reflect upon, and to fail to do so would be a failure in our reading. A few such cases are the canto Ones, the Threes, the Sixes, the Nines, the Twenty-Sevens, the Thirty-Threes. These play on Dante's beloved three and nine, or mark great parallel transitions in the three canticles, or focus on one theme, and so on. But how do we know how many of these vertical correspondences there are, until we look? The second reason it is worth hunting for vertical links is that even where they may not be consciously constructed, looking for them makes us read the cantos in a new way, bringing new details and themes into relief. That too can lead to discoveries, or enrich our understanding. I think the Twelves fall into this latter category: they are not, as far as I can tell, linked vertically in any conscious way, and yet looking at them as a set has been intriguing, and perhaps fruitful.

Let us refresh the Twelves in our memory, and make some observations about them as we go. In *Inferno* xii, we have recently come through a key transition, passing through the gate of Dis in *Inferno* ix. This transition has immersed us in the realm of malice, or injury, or injustice (*malizia, ingiuria*) (*Inf.*, xi. 22, 23): of love so misdirected that it pursues as a good what is actually evil, the destruction of self and of others. In *Inferno* xi, Virgil and

Dante had paused at the edge of a high cliff, among a last group of heretics — apparently those who thought Christ has only one nature, only the human, and not also the divine — and there, while they accustomed themselves to the stench wafting up from lower Hell beneath the cliff, Virgil had given an account of how Hell is structured. In particular, he had explained that the first circle at the foot of the cliff contains the violent, arranged in three concentric rings. The first or outermost ring holds those who are violent against others, whether in their person or in their possessions; that is, it holds murderers, those who wound others unjustly, pillagers, arsonists, plunderers, spoilers, and the like, in distinct groups ('omicide e ciascun che mal fiere, / guastatori e predon', *Inf.*, xi. 37–38). This is brute force; it does not involve an element of fraud or cunning, of the misuse of intellect that will be punished further down in Hell, where the cunning thieves and swindlers and traitors are. It is this first ring of the circle of violence that we will be exploring in *Inferno* xii. *Inferno* xii is thus the first of five cantos treating the realm of violence; in the next four, the pilgrim crosses the other two rings, of the violent against themselves (suicides and squanderers), and of the violent against God and nature (blasphemers, sodomites, and usurers). Then at the end of *Inferno* xvi, the pilgrim will come to the edge of another cliff, beneath which is the realm of fraud.

*Inferno* xii begins at the very edge of the steep cliff that leads down from the area of the heretics to the circle of violence. At the edge over the chasm lies the Minotaur, half human half bull, conceived from Pasiphaë's lust. Virgil taunts the Minotaur, reminding him how Theseus had killed him. The Minotaur hops and bites himself in blind rage, making it easy for the travellers to get by him. The Minotaur was guarding a sort of passage down the cliff, formed by a landslide. Virgil explains that the landslide was caused by an earthquake that occurred just before someone came and harrowed Limbo; we understand that he means the earthquake at the Crucifixion. Virgil has his own explanation of the earthquake: he thinks perhaps the universe felt love, and he cites the theory of Empedocles, who maintained that order was caused by forces of discord or hatred, which held the elements separated in a balanced tension; when those forces were overcome by concord or love, the universe collapsed in chaos, in endless cycles. Now Dante and Virgil come to a river of boiling blood, the first ring of the circle of violence, boiling 'qual che per violenza in altrui noccia' [those who harm others with violence] (*Inf.*, xii. 48). The poet breaks into an invective against 'cupidigia' [greed] (and perhaps against 'ira folle'

[mad wrath]; the reading is uncertain) as the source of this violence and this boiling. Between the foot of the cliff and the river of blood, Centaurs armed with arrows run in ranks, shooting any sinners who rise above their allotted depth in the blood. A platoon of three of them comes to patrol, Chiron at the centre, flanked by Nessus and Pholus. Chiron is the grave teacher of Achilles and other classical heroes; Nessus is the impetuous figure who tried to make off with Deianira, and was killed by a poisoned arrow of Hercules; Pholus is kindred to Nessus, a wrathful type who was also killed, accidentally, by one of Hercules' poisoned arrows.

Nessus addresses Virgil and Dante, but Virgil says he will speak only to Chiron. As they come near, Chiron too draws his bow, uncovering his mouth with the arrow's notch, and observes to his companions that Dante is alive: his feet disturb the rocks. Now at Chiron's breast, where Chiron's two natures, of horse and man, conjoin, Virgil asks Chiron for a Centaur to guide them, and to carry Dante across the river on his back. Chiron appoints Nessus as the escort, and Nessus acts as tour guide. He tells Dante and Virgil that the souls sunk to their eyebrows are 'tiranni / che dier nel sangue e ne l'aver di piglio' [tyrants who put their hands to blood and to others' goods] (ll. 104–05). Nessus leads them to another group, sunk to their necks, and points out one soul set apart, Guy de Montfort, who for vengeance murdered his cousin Henry of Cornwall. Next they come upon other souls only immersed to their stomachs, and others only to their feet, all unidentified and nameless. At that shallow point, Nessus and his charges cross the river. Nessus explains that as the circle of the river progresses, it grows deeper again, back towards another group of five tyrants. His assignment accomplished, Nessus abruptly stops talking and re-crosses the river.

In this canto we have a kind of fracture in nature, a harsh cliff, a giant landslide, on which rests a monster of nature, the Minotaur. The Minotaur, who seems to preside over the entire circle of violence, is a composite creature, half bull, half man. He is a product of unbridled and debased human desire, the animal nature of man warring with and triumphing over the rational, manipulating the intellect to its animal ends. In fact, the Minotaur was conceived when Pasiphaë had the ingenious craftsman Daedalus make her a hollow wooden cow so that she could satisfy her lust for a bull. It is Daedalus then who makes the cunning labyrinth, the intellectual maze, that contains the Minotaur, who yet must be fed with human flesh, seven lads and seven lasses each year, until Theseus threads



the maze with Ariadne's help, and kills the monster. Theseus thus becomes a figure of Christ, a liberator who — following the intellect to its proper end — heals the destructive war between the animal and the rational dimensions of man. (The pilgrim Dante, slipping by the Minotaur here, becomes another Theseus.)

At the centre of the *Comedy* (*Purgatorio* xvii) Virgil will explain that everything in creation is moved by love, by the innate thirst of each finite thing to fulfil the potential of its nature, the greatest happiness possible for it. For humans that potential, and therefore that thirst, is infinite: as conscious — that is, rational — creatures, humans can come to know themselves as one with the ground of all finite reality (pure consciousness or intellect itself), thus encompassing and knowing as themselves everything that exists. That is perfect love, the fruition of human desire in perfect understanding and self-knowledge, union with God. Disaster, profound disharmony, and self-destruction come when humans seek to satiate their infinite thirst with finite things. But humans readily incur disaster, by their very nature as conscious animals, animals who can be satiated only by infinity. Hence the apparent divide, the war, between the rational and the animal in the human form. Humans seek to devour the world through the senses, instead of encompassing it by feeding on the divine within themselves.

So it is *cupidigia*, infinite thirst seeking to feed on the finite, that gives birth to the Minotaur, to violence and injustice. At the centre of the *Comedy*, and in *Inferno* xi, Virgil also explains that human desire focused excessively on finite goods is relatively innocent; it is simply incontinence, wanting too much of a good thing, too much stuff, too much food, too much sex. But the failure to know oneself, to understand one's true nature as a human being, can lead one to see everything and everyone as in competition in the quest to feed on the world, in a kind of zero-sum game. This is malice: it is to seek the destruction of others, that is, to seek evil or harm or injustice, as an end in itself. Hence violence and fraud: the world within the gates of Dis.

So the landslide, the *ruina*, that the Minotaur guards, and that provides the passage from those who could not recognize the divine nature of Christ to the circle of violence, takes on more significance. The landslide was caused by the earthquake at the Crucifixion, when the universe did indeed feel love, but not because of endless cycles of natural causes, as Virgil conjectures. The *ruina* is the infernal evidence of the self-sacrifice of Christ: the perfect love that satiates man, won by surrendering all attachment to the

finite, by being willing to sacrifice even one's own animal form. It is human consciousness shaking itself free from the obsessive attachment to finite things, so that it can discover its own freedom, its potential infinity. It is to know oneself as not only a mortal animal creature, but also as (one with) God. The mystery of Christ, the mystery of man, the mystery and centre of all the meaning of the world, is that those two — the human and the divine, flesh and spirit, the world and its ground — are not two: they are, in a profound sense, one. The manifest world — and the human in particular — is a sacrament, a theophany or self-revelation of the divine, consciousness made visible. This mystery is the revelation of the Incarnation.

So the Minotaur is a parody of the Incarnation, of the true nature of man, an emblem of a massive failure of self-knowledge, the eclipse of spirit by flesh, of the rational by the animal. This is frustration, rage, impotence, a blind, insane hopping around, a useless self-biting ('quando vide noi, sé stesso morse' [when he saw us, he bit himself], l. 14), that is killed/overcome by the true self-sacrifice of the pilgrim/Theseus/Christ. Virgil shouts to the Minotaur:

'Forse  
tu credi che qui sia 'l duca d'Atene,  
che sù nel mondo la morte ti porse?' [...]  
Qual è quel toro che si slaccia in quella  
c'ha ricevuto già 'l colpo mortale,  
che gir non sa, ma qua e là saltella... (ll. 16–18, 22–24)

['Perhaps you believe that this is the Duke of Athens, who put you to death in the world above?' Like the bull that frees itself at the moment it receives the mortal blow, that cannot run, but only hop here and there...]

The essence of the Minotaur is pride, to experience oneself as an autonomous, self-subsistent, finite entity, dependent on no one and nothing, for whom everything is other, and must be either devoured or destroyed.

Clearly, there is a political and social consequence to this blindness: it is injustice, strife, and violence, the failure of humans to become one, or in Dante's terminology, to form empire, a single united political order under the rule of law and divine justice (*imperium*). The result is even worse when such blind and greedy souls become rulers: they are tyrants, like the first four souls named (Alexander the Great and Dionysius of Syracuse from the ancient world; and Ezzelino da Romano and Obizzo d'Este

from contemporary Italy, ll. 107–12), or plunderers, leaders of ravaging, pillaging armies or bands, like the last five (Attila the Hun, Pyrrhus of Epirus, and Sextus Pompeius, all perhaps plunderers of ancient Rome; and Rinier da Corneto and Rinier Pazzo, highwaymen from modern Tuscany, ll. 133–37). Tyrants oppose empire through self-interest, subjecting law to greed, becoming counterfeit emperors.<sup>1</sup> They negate human freedom, the greatest gift of the divine to man,<sup>2</sup> and they cancel human identity by seeking to impose their own identity as supreme, in effect effacing it in blood.<sup>3</sup> In between the two groups of tyrants and plunderers are the mere murderers, emblematised by Guy de Montfort. De Montfort reduced politics to vendetta, and ‘cleft a human heart, that still drips blood, calling for vengeance, along the Thames’ at Mass (‘in the bosom of God’) at the very moment – the elevation of the Host – when the human, through Christian self-sacrifice, is revealed as divine (‘Colui fesse in grembo a Dio / lo cor che ‘n su Tamisi ancor si cola’, ll. 119–20). All these souls are faceless and do not speak: human identity and consciousness are drowned in blood. Language fails (along with all human community) when the soul of consciousness/spirit/meaning is eclipsed by the body/flesh/form it has assumed. The failure to recognize Christ – the divine in the human, the one manifest as many (as oneself) – leads to the ultimate act of violence, the Crucifixion; the blood of Christ’s unrecognised self-sacrifice is one with an inexhaustible human thirst for blood. Through greed and blindness, these souls drink blood instead of the water of life; their immersion is a parody of baptism.<sup>4</sup>

The Centaurs, who become the central focus of the canto, are an extension of the *contrapasso*, its completion. They are the only non-devil custodians in all of Hell,<sup>5</sup> assigned only to this ring of the violent against others, and here they hunt humans, as in the world they hunted animals (‘come solien nel mondo andare a caccia’, l. 57). Humans, indeed, have become animals

1 Italo Borzi, ‘Il Canto xii dell’*Inferno*’, in *Inferno: Letture degli anni 1973–76* (Rome: Bonacci, 1977), p. 309.

2 Pietro Mazzamuto, ‘Canto XXII’, in *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana. Purgatorio*, ed. by Pompeo Giannantonio (Naples: Loffredo, 1989), pp. 258–59.

3 Jeremy Tambling, ‘Monstrous Tyranny, Men of Blood: Dante and *Inferno* xii’, *The Modern Language Review* 98.4 (2003), 881–97 (pp. 889–92).

4 The point about baptism is made by Anthony K. Cassell, *Dante’s Fearful Art of Justice* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1984), p. 60, cited by Tambling, ‘Monstrous Tyranny’, p. 889.

5 Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, ed. by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 3 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1991–1997), I, p. 358.

here. As the early commentator Benvenuto da Imola and others point out, Centaurs, who are human to the navel and horse below that, look like mounted cavalry: they are an image of the mercenary mounted troops that pillaged Italy at the behest of tyrants, hunting men. It is as if the tyrants are being hunted by their own troops.<sup>6</sup> In fact, these Centaurs are a mini military: they run in ranks, they dispatch exploratory platoons, and they have a commander.

The exploratory platoon that comes to investigate Dante ('de la schiera tre si dipartiro' [three split off from the company], l. 59) is a mini-Trinity: Chiron flanked by Nessus and Pholus (ll. 67–72). The latter two are your standard Centaurs, born from an attempted rape, Ixion trying to ravish a cloud that looked like Juno. Unruly sorts, they tried to carry off the women at the wedding of Pirithous, until stopped by Hercules. Nessus, who will carry Dante on his back, was trying to carry off Hercules' consort Deianira when Hercules killed him. But Centaurs are clever: Nessus tricked Deianira into giving Hercules a robe soaked with Nessus's poisoned blood, thus 'making of himself his own revenge' ('Fé di sé la vendetta elli stesso', l. 69). Humans consume themselves with their thirst for vengeance, which is a parody of justice, of divine vengeance. Again we have the tension or split between the two natures of man, the rational and the animal, the rational being made to serve the animal, to serve lust and vengeance. Hercules, the killer and subduer of Centaurs (and of all three of these Centaurs in particular), is another Christ figure: he is a healer and redeemer. Poisoned by Nessus, Hercules burns off his flesh to become deified, an image perhaps for the pilgrim's own transfiguration of matter into spirit through his journey.

Chiron is a little different: he is a son of Saturn, raised by Apollo, and expert in medicine, music, and archery. He is the teacher of heroes such as Achilles ('il gran Chirón, il qual nodrì Achille', l. 70), and he was killed by the arrows of Hercules, another of his pupils. In fact, the Chiron presented here is thoughtful, grave and wise; he alone notices that Dante is alive, asking his companions, 'Siete voi accorti / che quel di retro move ciò ch'el tocca?' ['Did you notice that the one in back moves what he touches?'] (ll. 80–81), and the other Centaurs are kept in line by him. But Dante emphasizes his double nature: Chiron gazes at his breast where the two natures are conjoined, or rather 'associated' ('consorti', l. 84), not fused as

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6 Cesare Federico Goffis, 'Canto XII', in *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana. Inferno*, ed. by Pompeo Giannantonio (Naples: Loffredo, 1986), pp. 225–26.

one. This divide is again an image of failed revelation, the failure to know body as the soul made visible, matter as spirit; the failure to recognize consciousness made flesh, the human as divine. Intellect dissociated from oneself, from one's animal being, is part of the torment of the violent, that both makes violence possible, and punishes it. Here, in effect, the rational dimension of the violent souls is running on the bank of the river alongside them, keeping them immersed in blood. As Dante observes in the *Convivio*, we must 'cavalcare' [ride] our primitive appetites with reason.<sup>7</sup> But it is only the fusion of reason and passion, of our higher and lower natures united as one, that drives the perfection of man, not their separation. One of the ironies of the canto, as Baldassaro points out, is that the bestial Centaurs have become human in order to guard the humans who have become bestial.<sup>8</sup>

While *Inferno* xii is the first of the five cantos of the circle of violence, *Purgatorio* xii is the last of three cantos devoted to the terrace of pride, the first terrace of Purgatory proper. Pride is the foundational vice, from which all others, and all sin, flows. As we saw, it is a failure of self-knowledge: it is to conceive oneself only as an autonomous and self-subsistent finite entity, resulting in insatiable desire, *cupidigia*, instead of knowing oneself as sharing consciousness itself, the reality that spawns and is all things. In the first two cantos of the ledge, Dante has seen a triptych of carved reliefs, depicting examples of humility, with David the singer of God at the centre; then he has met a trio of penitent souls, with an illuminator of texts, Oderisi da Gubbio, at the centre. The theme of the ledge is artistic representation and artistic pride, related to names and naming, to identity.

*Purgatorio* xii opens with Dante sharing in the penance of pride, bent low by the side of his fellow artist Oderisi, as if they were oxen yoked together. Prompted by Virgil's Ulyssean exhortation (he mentions the terms 'varca' [cross over], 'ali' [wings], and 'remi' [oars]: 'Lascia lui e varca; / ché qui è buono con l'ali e coi remi, / quantunque può, ciascun pinger sua barca' [Leave him and move beyond, for here it is best that each push his boat to the extent he can with wings and oars], ll. 4–5), Dante stands upright and looks at the ground he is walking on. There he sees that the pavement is 'figurato [figured] like the floor tombs in churches, except with greater

7 Christopher Bennet Becker, 'Justice Among the Centaurs', *Forum Italicum* 18 (1984), 217–29 (pp. 220–21).

8 Lawrence Baldassaro, '*Inferno* xii: The Irony of Descent', *Romance Notes* 19 (1978), 98–103 (p. 99).

verisimilitude because of their artifice or artistry ('sempianza / secondo l'artificio', ll. 22–23), given that they were made by God. With this artistically self-conscious *terzina*, Dante introduces the most artistically self-conscious passage of the *Comedy*: a verbal account of thirteen floor engravings, with exactly one tercet devoted to each (ll. 25–63). Inscribed in the account is an acrostic: the first four tercets each begin with the word *Vedea*; the next four with *O*, and the next four with *Mostrava*; the three lines of the thirteenth tercet begin with those three words in order, as a kind of summation. The initial letters spell VOM, man: the human is inscribed through verbal signs in the verbal representation of these visual images, whose subject is the punishment of human pride. The grouping of thirty-six verses plus three evokes the *sestina*, one of the most self-conscious of medieval literary forms, as well as the Trinity, whose image man is. The figures described alternate, as in parallel side-by-side columns, between Old Testament and pagan or mythological examples.

The first four examples are Lucifer, Briareus, the giants and Nimrod, heroic challengers of the divine, destroyed. The next four are presumptuous mortals: Niobe, who in maternal pride defied Latona and turned to stone when all her children were killed with arrows; Saul, who defied the prophet Nathan, led Israel to ruin and killed himself; Arachne, who challenged Minerva in weaving and hanged herself before being changed to a spider; and Rehoboam, a haughty king of Israel who fled in fear. The final four are mortals killing and killed through greed: Eriphyle, who betrayed her husband for a divine necklace and was killed by her son Alcmaeon; Sennacherib who besieged Jerusalem and was killed by his sons while at worship; King Cyrus beheaded by Tomyris, who immersed his head in blood and told him to drink it, since he was so thirsty for it; and the Assyrian general Holofernes, who was beheaded by Judith. The thirteenth engraving, summing up the whole acrostic, is proud Troy undone.

This tour de force is followed by the famous lines: 'Morti li morti e i vivi parean vivi: / non vide mei di me chi vide il vero' [Dead seemed the dead, and the living living: one who saw the true event did not see better than I] (ll. 67–68), and a bitter apostrophe to us, apostrophe to us as sons of Eve: 'Or superbite, e via col viso altero, / figliuoli d'Eva' [Now assert your pride, and stride on with haughty brow, you sons of Eve] (ll. 70–71). An angel then appears, who invites Dante and Virgil to ascend to the next ledge, lamenting that so few answer the invitation. He cancels a P from Dante's forehead, and Dante climbs a stair in the steep slope, which is compared

to that of San Miniato in Florence, made when the city still had law and justice. A beatitude is sung, 'Beati pauperes spiritu' [Blessed are the poor in spirit] (l. 110), and Dante feels much lighter, all the remaining Ps on his forehead having much faded with the conquest of pride. Dante feels with his fingers to see if the P is really gone, and Virgil smiles, as to a child.

There are a few, arguably incidental, links to *Inferno* xii: we have thirteen engravings, while in *Inferno* xii we had ten sinners and three Centaurs; we have a theme of tyrannous kings, of injustice and violence. We have lots of blood, including a head immersed in blood, because it so thirsted for blood. We even have a king killed at worship, like Guy de Montfort's victim Henry. The sociopolitical consequences of pride are evident here too: failed kings, strife, and the culminating image of Troy, the human city destroyed through pride. Troy becomes an image of Florence, evoked in the simile of San Miniato, a city whose pride is its own corruption. We have a steep slope between ledges. And Dante is yoked like an ox, subduing the animal under the yoke of Christ.

But a deeper key, for our purposes, is the nexus in *Purgatorio* xii among art-representation-language-pride, in relation to the human, to what a human being is. A human being is the art of God: it is the self-manifestation or language of the divine, consciousness or spirit made visible. Humans are language, they are art. But humans can only fully be that if they fulfil their nature: if they know themselves, so that through them the divine becomes conscious of itself in finite form, as in Christ. Then they are *logos*, spirit made body, the Word made flesh, consciousness or being made visible, sensible. But as a conscious being, that visible image itself speaks and says 'I', it signs and represents. The Word become image, becomes word. A human being is the perfect nexus or translation between consciousness and form, between word and image, which is why Dante assimilates himself and his poetry to the art of an illuminator.<sup>9</sup> The word or art of someone who is fully human (through whom the divine knows itself and speaks), is revelatory and authoritative, denoting the divine, the truth.

Pride undoes all this: it is a failure to know oneself as a manifestation of the divine, as consciousness or love made visible. This failure of human self-knowledge, not to know one's own form as the language or art of God, this alienation from the ground of one's own being, is an eclipse

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9 *Purgatorio* xii opens by pairing the pilgrim with the illuminator Oderisi da Gubbio: 'Di pari, come buoi che vanno a giogo, / m'andava io con quell'anima carca...' [Side by side, like oxen under a yoke, I was walking along with that burdened soul...] (ll. 1-2).

of consciousness: it destroys meaning, signification, communication, language, art. It undoes the Incarnation, and dissociates language from form, consciousness from body, the human from the divine, as in the Centaurs. It also destroys community, since it is only in the common consciousness of the one ground of being, recognizing the divine in or as oneself, and thus all possible others as not other than oneself, that humans can be one, that they can fully communicate. (Indeed we saw that pride is intrinsically oriented toward the destruction of others, seen as competitors in a zero sum game; one wants to see others lowered, so one can be superior.) Hence the pride of Nimrod results in multiplicities of tongues, a fracturing of community, alienation and exile. Hence almost every example of the acrostic depicts the destruction of the human form, of the language of God. The examples are all pre-Christian, emphasizing that only the awakening to Christ can undo pride.<sup>10</sup>

The centre of the triptych in *Purgatorio* x is David, the humble singer of God in words. At the centre of the trio of souls in *Purgatorio* xi we have Oderisi the illuminator, the counter-image of Dante; in fact at the exact centre of the entire ledge of pride Oderisi evokes Dante, unnamed, as one who may supersede his predecessors Guido Guinizelli and Guido Cavalcanti in the glory of language.<sup>11</sup> Here in *Purgatorio* xii, at the exact centre of this acrostic, as the seventh of thirteen images, we have the proud weaver of images Arachne, alienated from the divine, competing with it, and belittling it in her *textum*, her weaving. Dante has poised himself, unnamed, between a humble praiser of God in words (David), and a proud belittler of God in images (Arachne), while assimilating himself to an illuminator (Oderisi), one who translates between word and image. This is the balance of all human life, language, representation: poised between surrender and pride, our own body is either the language of God or its eclipse and disfiguration, and our own language or art is either the truth, the Word made flesh made word, or a false idol that eclipses and disfigures reality, its source. Art and poetry alone address and express the fullness of human nature as the fusion of spirit and body, as Incarnation, which is why they can be an instrument of revelation and purgation.

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10 John Scott, 'Canto XII', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Purgatorio* (Florence: Cesati, 2001), p. 177.

11 '...così ha tolto l'uno a l'altro Guido / la gloria della lingua; e forse è nato / chi l'uno e l'altro caccerà dal nido' [thus the one Guido has seized renown in language from the other, and perhaps one is born who will kick the one and the other from the nest] (ll. 97–99).



The verbal acrostic representation of images of human pride itself spells the word 'man'. The acrostic signifies, signs, human pride, as do the images it has translated into words, with Arachne at their centre. Thus, through this language, through these images, we can recognize ourselves, our own eclipse of language, of God's human image; this recognition is itself an awakening to the divine, a recovery of meaning. In the same way, the fall of Troy (the final image) leads to the birth of Rome, through which justice and revelation will be restored. (In fact acrostics are a scriptural form, from the Psalms, written by David: Dante is assimilating his text to Scripture, and himself to David.) After the acrostic, Dante meets a beautiful angel, in white like the angels at the tomb of the risen Christ,<sup>12</sup> who invites Dante, and us, to fly home.

*Paradiso* xii, like *Purgatorio* xii, is the last of a set of three cantos (*Paradiso* x–xii). We are situated in the Heaven of the Sun (*Paradiso* x–xiv), which is the fourth of the nine moving heavens, and the first to be out of the shadow cast by the earth. The Heaven of the Sun thus marks a key new start, and corresponds in some ways to the ledge of pride, the first in Purgatory proper, after the nine cantos devoted to Ante-Purgatory. In *Paradiso* x a ring of twelve dancing souls forms around Dante and Beatrice. These are wise, illuminated souls, that know themselves as nothing other than pure conscious being, the ground of all reality. Thus their form, their identity, is perfectly transparent to the light: they are a ring of lights, facets or sparks of the divine, as it projects, seeks, and knows itself. Aquinas, one of the lights, introduces the others, who are a mixed lot, including Albert the Great, Peter Lombard, King Solomon, Boethius, Richard of St Victor, and Siger de Brabant, Aquinas's polemical rationalist adversary. In *Paradiso* xi, Aquinas observes, on the traces of Joachim of Fiore, that God sent two guides to renew Christ's faltering bride (the Church), one seraphic in ardour (Saint Francis), and the other cherubic in wisdom (Saint Dominic). They worked to a single end; to speak of one is to speak of the other. Aquinas then embarks on a panegyric of Francis, bridegroom of Poverty, that is, of renunciation and humility, and he ends by condemning straying Dominicans.

*Paradiso* xii begins with a new circle of twelve lights forming around the first, like a double rainbow, perfectly corresponding to the first in movement and song, like the voice of Echo (ll. 4–21). One of the lights says that the love that makes him beautiful leads him to speak of the other guide: as warriors who, rallying the struggling army of Christ, fought to the same end, they should be praised together ('Degno è che, dov'è l'un, l'altro s'induca: / sì

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12 Scott, 'Canto XII', p. 193.

che, com'elli ad una militaro, / così la gloria loro insieme luca' [it is fitting that, where one is, the other be invoked, so that just as they fought to one end, so their glory may shine as one], ll. 34–36). The light is the Franciscan Saint Bonaventure, who (in a chiasmus with the Dominican Aquinas praising Francis in *Paradiso xi*) embarks on a panegyric of Saint Dominic, who was born in the Occident (Calaruega) as Francis was in the Orient (Assisi), accompanied by portentous dreams and names, that pointed to what he was, one who belonged entirely to God, the holy warrior of the Christian faith. Married to Faith at his baptism, elected by Christ to labour in his garden, messenger and intimate servant of Christ ('messo e famigliar di Cristo', l. 73), his first love was Christ's first commandment ('che 'l primo amor che 'n lui fu manifesto, / fu al primo consiglio che diè Cristo', ll. 74–75), to follow poverty and humility (or, as Ghisalberti thinks, to seek first the kingdom of God, and trust that all else will be given, which is, indeed, true faith).<sup>13</sup> St Dominic sought learning not for worldly ends, but for love of the true manna ('amore de la verace manna', l. 84), in order to patrol Christ's vineyard. From the pope he sought no worldly advancement, but only authority to fight for the seed that has flowered in the twenty four lights: the seed of faith or revelation (ll. 81–87). Like a torrent pressed by a rising spring, he unleashed himself upon the brambles of heresy (meaning the Cathars or Albigensians), striking most where there was most resistance (ll. 97–102). That same water then became, in his followers, life-giving irrigation for 'l'orto cattolico' [the Catholic garden] (l. 104). Dominic was one wheel of the war chariot with which the Holy Church defended itself; Francis was the other (ll. 106–11). But the Franciscans stray from Francis's track, weeds in a bad harvest, misled by the rigid polemical Ubertino di Casale and the compromising lax Matthew of Acquasparta (ll. 112–20).

The light then reveals itself as St Bonaventure, who always set aside worldly goals, and he names the other eleven lights of his ring (another chiasmus; the list of names is how Aquinas had started). The lights include early humble Franciscans, the mystic Hugh of St Victor, the prophet Nathan, St Anselm, the encyclopedist Rabanus Maurus and the grammarian Donatus; it culminates in Bonaventure's mystical adversary Joachim of Fiore, 'di spirito profetico dotato' (l. 141), whose spiritual-prophetic vision of history is, arguably, an inspiration for *Paradiso xi* and *xii*. Then, in *Paradiso xiii*, Aquinas explains why Solomon is the wisest of men: he is so as king. (One could say also that, as judge and author of the *Song of Songs*, Solomon

13 Alessandro Ghisalberti, 'Canto XII', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Paradiso*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2002), p. 184.

fuses the chiasmus between intellect and love, faith and renunciation, laid out in *Paradiso* xi and xii through Francis and Dominic, and enacts it in political-social reality.)<sup>14</sup> In *Paradiso* xiv, Solomon speaks of the resurrection of the body, and the ontological primacy of intellect to love, and of love to luminosity. After this, a third ring of souls, a *sfavillar* of the Holy Spirit, encompasses the first two, in a culmination of the trinitarian imagery that has permeated this heaven.

We have, then, some further incidental links among this set of vertical cantos. As with the Centaurs in *Inferno* xii, there is lots of military imagery in *Paradiso* xii: might the Centaurs be a parody of the straying army of Christ in *Paradiso* xii?<sup>15</sup> Where *Inferno* xii features tyrants and bad military leaders, and *Purgatorio* xii represents bad kings and generals, *Paradiso* xii celebrates a true military leader, St Dominic, in a true battle. We have a catalogue of names in *Paradiso* xii, as in the acrostic in *Purgatorio* xii and in the river of blood of *Inferno* xii. If one adds Dominic, the subject of the panegyric, to the twelve souls introduced here, we have thirteen names, as in the acrostic of *Purgatorio* xii (which is also twelve plus one), and perhaps as in *Inferno* xii (where Chiron is in charge of twelve creatures collectively, whether Centaurs or violent souls). Twelve plus one implies Christ and his disciples, suggesting that Chiron may be a counter-Christ and his brood in *Inferno* xii counter-apostles, Dominic an alter-Christ and the circle of sages in *Paradiso* xii alter-apostles (they flower from the seed he fought for).<sup>16</sup> Twelve is also the number of the tribes of Israel, the community of God's people, destroyed in the twelve examples of the acrostic of *Purgatorio* xii, and summed up in the thirteenth, the fall of Troy which issues in Rome, Christ and redemption. Strife and violence, represented vividly in *Inferno* xii and *Purgatorio* xii, are also clearly implicit in the battle against heresy evoked in *Paradiso* xii (in fact, of course, the Albigensian Crusade was a massacre). The plays on three and the triptychs of *Purgatorio's* terrace of pride are echoed in the insistent trinitarian imagery of *Paradiso's* Heaven of the Sun; as there are three circles of sages in the Heaven of the Sun, there are

14 Joanna M. Sciortino Nowlan, 'Dante and the Mystical Tradition: The Sphere of the Sun', in *Dante and His Literary Precursors: Twelve Essays*, ed. by John C. Barnes and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007), pp. 285–86.

15 'L'essercito di Cristo, che sì caro / costò a riarmar, dietro a la 'nsegna / si movea tardo, sospiccioso e raro...' [The army of Christ, which cost so dear to re-arm, was moving behind the ensign slowly, suspiciously, and scarce...] (ll. 37–39).

16 Bonaventure tells Dante that Dominic sought only 'to defend the seeds that bore the twenty-four plants that now surround you' ('combatter per lo seme / del qual ti fascian ventiquattro piante') (ll. 94–96).

three rings in Hell's circle of violence, and a trinity of Centaurs. Humility, the antithesis of pride on that terrace in Purgatory, is a key undercurrent in the meditation on wisdom in this heaven (pride is the most intellectual vice, and the Sun is a heaven of intellectuals). The torrent/river of Dominic's preaching of faith in *Paradiso* xii counters *Inferno* xii's river of blood; we have seen that the bodies immersed in blood are a parody of the baptism in faith, evoked in Dominic. The bull/cow of animality of Pasiphaë and the Minotaur in *Inferno* xii is echoed by the ox-yoke of Christ and humility in *Purgatorio* xii.

But I think the key to possible deeper vertical correspondences is Dominic as alter-Christus, as one belonging to God, as his name implies ('quinci si mosse spirito a nomarlo / del possessivo di cui era tutto' [hence the Spirit moved to name him with the possessive form of Him who wholly possessed him], ll. 68–69), one who fuses in himself the fruition of intellect and love (passion), consciousness and body, the divine and the human, spirit and matter, contemplation and action, word and deed ('fare' and 'dire', l. 44), all of which are one in a fully realized human being, in a human assimilated to Christ, as shown in the chiasmus between Francis and Dominic, between love and reason. (Giuseppe Ledda observes that at their absolute centre, both the panegyric of Dominic and *Paradiso* xii itself culminate in the first triple *Cristo* rhyme of the poem (ll. 71–75); Dominic is 'venuto a questo' [come for this], echoing Christ announcing his mission; he is 'agricola' [husbandman] of Christ's 'orto' [garden] (ll. 71–72), as Christ himself is the 'ortolano eterno' [the eternal Gardener] (*Par.*, xxvi. 65).)<sup>17</sup> In this sense, Dominic is at the other pole from the Centaurs and their violent charges, who together represent the sundering of all of these twin dimensions or attributes — fused in Christ and Dominic — into duality, into a negation of the Incarnation. In *Purgatorio* xii, we saw how that sundering happens: through pride, through the failure of man to be *logos*, to translate the Word into human image into word, into revelation. It is the failure to be a finite form through which the divine knows and reveals itself; it is to see oneself not as a sign or signifier, but simply as a material mark.

Francis and Dominic re-reveal Christ, they are *sol oriens* and *sol occidens* (*Par.*, xi. 47–54; xii. 46–56), Incarnation and Crucifixion; they image Christ so that the straying bride, the Church, can come back to its groom (*Par.*, xi. 28–36). The chiasmus between them (the Dominican Aquinas praising

<sup>17</sup> Giuseppe Ledda, 'Osservazioni sul panegirico di San Domenico (*Par.*, xii. 31–114)', *L'Alighieri* 47 (2006), 105–25 (pp. 116–18).

Francis, and the Franciscan Bonaventure praising Dominic) and between *Paradiso* xi and xii (which makes the two panegyrics contiguous) indicates that perfect love (Francis) is perfect understanding (Dominic), and vice versa, and that perfect faith (Dominic) is perfect renunciation of all greed and worldly ambition (Francis), and vice versa. To know the ground of being in oneself, which is understanding, is to recognize all other things as oneself, which is love: it is to see the one in the many, the many in the one. This is the foundation of all harmony and social order, as epitomized in the dancing rings of the Heaven of the Sun; it is the negation of pride, and hence of all violence and strife. The harmony and parallel between the rings is linked to Iris the rainbow, the messenger or bridge between gods and men ('Come si volgon per tenera nube / due archi paralleli e concolori, / quando Iunone a sua ancella iube [...] [As two parallel and con-colored bows arc through a tender cloud, when Juno commands her handmaiden] (*Par.*, xii. 10–13); it is a link fulfilled in the rainbow that sealed the covenant between God and man (Genesis 9.12–17). The rainbow thus becomes an image of Christ, of the union between the divine and the human.

So why all the unsettling military imagery in *Paradiso* xii, and the indirect evocation of the slaughter of the Albigensians? (Just at Béziers in 1209, the entire population of more than ten thousand people was massacred, including all the children, and those who took refuge in churches.) It is intriguing that the Cathars or Albigensians were dualists, separating body and soul, matter and spirit, the world and God, as opposing forces: again, a negation of the Incarnation, a failure of self-knowledge. But as the Centaurs indicate, the battle of our double nature is already and always engaged: we are animals who are conscious, finite beings satiated only by infinity, in constant tension between, on the one hand, seeking to inflate our finite sense of self by devouring the world through the senses and, on the other, renouncing all greed and pride by feeding on conscious being, the all-encompassing divine reality at our core. Like the Albigensians, we experience that tension as a war between opposing forces of spirit and matter, good and evil. But, in reality, to fight for faith, the seed that flowers in the double ring in the Heaven of the Sun, is not to fight for a set of ideas, but for a deeper human self-knowledge, in which all matter, all finite reality, is revealed as the art or self-expression of the divine, apart from which it has no being at all. That battle can only be led by one who has such self-knowledge. That means one who has married Poverty like Francis, which is to have renounced all greed and ambition. This renunciation is to marry Faith like Dominic, which is to commit to the gamble that all that

exists is but the projection of a reality we can know as ourselves. To live that commitment is to come to understand the true nature of reality, which is to love all things as oneself. It is to have followed both Dominic and Francis, *alter Christi*, in the fruition of intellect and love. The true nature of reality is summed up in the Trinity. The ground of reality (pure consciousness) is not other than its manifestation as finite form (the world), because both consist in love: the power of conscious being to give itself to, experience itself as, finite form. The Trinity is what the rings of souls in the Heaven of the Sun both embody and sing: they are the self-manifestation of the Trinity, through which *what is* praises and loves itself. This is the fruition of all understanding, of all art, of all revelation. The singing souls are themselves the rainbow they are compared to: the self-revelation of God to man. Joachim of Fiore, the last soul to be named in the rings of souls, and thus in a sense their culmination (*Par.*, xii. 140–41), is ‘di spirito profetico dotato’ [endowed with prophetic spirit] (l. 141): he saw the Trinity in history, saw the spiritual meaning in the letter of Scripture, and announced an age of true human freedom and understanding beyond all institutions and doctrines, whose harbingers were arguably Francis and Dominic. This is the revelation of the *Comedy* itself.

This battle between humility and pride, between renunciation and *cupidigia*, between the divine and the animal in us, that we have traced through the Twelves, is the only battle there is: all others are merely corollaries of it, symptoms of losing this one true war. St Dominic is a torrent of water, pressed by an endless font: that torrent, which is self-knowledge or revelation itself, both destroys delusion, the illusory irrevocable divide between the world and its ground, and waters the garden of Christ, the faith and love that lead to the experience of all things, and God, as not other than oneself.<sup>18</sup> That alone is the end of the war, of all wars.

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18 The preaching of the Gospel is experienced as a destructive torrent by those who are opposed to it, and as healing water by those who open themselves to it (*Par.*, xii. 99–105); Ledda observes that this echoes Cacciaguیدا’s description of Dante’s own poem (*Par.*, xvii. 124–32). He further suggests that the idea of fighting for the seed that sprouts as the saved (*Par.*, xii. 95–96) unites the metaphors of ‘campione’ [warrior] and ‘agricola’ [gardener]; the torrent of Dominic’s preaching (l. 99) evokes a biblical image of Christ’s wisdom, of the power of the Spirit. Ledda argues, then, that Dante himself becomes a figure of Dominic when he undergoes his examination on faith in *Paradiso* xxiv; both Dominic and Dante fulfil St Paul’s mission (*Inf.*, ii. 29–30) of fostering faith as the first step of the journey to salvation (Giuseppe Ledda, ‘Osservazioni’, pp. 120–24). Manselli also observes that Dominic is a precursor to Dante himself. Raoul Manselli, ‘Il canto XII del *Paradiso*’, in *Nuove Letture Dantesche* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1997), VI, pp. 120–24. In celebrating Dominic, Dante is celebrating himself, the mission of the *Comedy*.



# 13. 'Would you Adam and Eve it?'

Robert Wilson

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The vertical reading is a problematic proposition which touches on some of the most fundamental assumptions about Dante and his text, as well as the critical study of literature in general. As a critical approach it is open to the charge of putting the cart before the horse insofar as it begins with a conclusion: that there is some special connection between similarly numbered cantos in the *Commedia*, and that attention to this fact will uncover hitherto unnoticed details and insights which are in some way peculiar to the cantos concerned, both individually and as a group. The reader is charged with proving this by finding these connections before knowing whether they actually exist. 'Seek and ye shall find' (Matthew 7.7). Is it worse then to find nothing, or to find something which is not really there (even if some people take the view that the latter is the very business of literary criticism)? I note that some of my questions about the approach have been shared by other readers in the series, including the editors, but I would like at least to signal them again as I believe they are important.

For the spoken version of this paper I considered various possible subtitles; *'Strange but True: Sights and Sounds in Dante's 13th Cantos'*, or *'Improbable Interlocutors'*, or *'Don't Jump to Conclusions, Even if You Think You See One'*, or the flippant but possibly more apposite *'Would you Adam and Eve it?'* (rhyming slang for 'would you believe it?'). Since the vertical reading approach applied to the whole of the *Commedia* is new, I also shared some of the ways in which I had tried to look for possible connections, albeit without success much of the time, and I will include those here as I think



they have some interest for the project as a whole. Following a brief survey of previous *lecturae* of the individual cantos, I will consider some further problems, and conclude by suggesting a few possible links across these cantos, though I leave the question of plausibility open.

There have been some readings of individual sets of cantos before, which have been listed in the introduction to the first volume of *Vertical Readings*, but there is no previous attempt to apply the method to the whole poem.<sup>1</sup> In that respect a full set of vertical readings shares a feature of the standard *Lectura Dantis* in obliging readers to address some of the less popular cantos in the interest of comprehensiveness. The self-contained study focussed on the isolated canto guarantees at least the possibility of a kind of equal treatment, however the vertical reading, positing as it does connections across three cantos, introduces a sort of unevenness, as it is clear that the approach works better in some cases than in others. We might say that the connective thread '*...risplende in una parte più e meno altrove*' [shines forth in one place more and less elsewhere] (*Par.*, i. 2–3). This is also evident in the simple fact that there have been prior readings of this sort for some groups of cantos, whilst others, to put it mildly, have not immediately lent themselves to this kind of reading.

Before we begin reading linked cantos there is a fundamental issue to be addressed, which was raised by Richard Kay in 1992, and noted again in the introduction to the first volume in this series.<sup>2</sup> Kay explains that he was prompted to pursue this approach by the very well-known detail that all three *cantiche* of the *Commedia* end on the same word, 'stelle'. We may note here that he opts for the term 'parallel' rather than 'vertical' in considering similarities. Taking the final word in each *cantica* of course gives a numbered set of *Inferno* xxiv, *Purgatorio* xxxiii and *Paradiso* xxxiii. This approach would exclude *Inferno* i, which fits well enough with the common understanding of the organisation of the *Commedia* that posits *Inferno* i as proemial to the entire poem and *Inferno* ii as the real beginning of *Inferno*. Following this methodology we would be looking at *Inferno* xiii, *Purgatorio* xii and *Paradiso* xii, or *Inferno* xiv, *Purgatorio* xiii and *Paradiso* xiii for the present discussion. As it happens, Kay includes an example drawn from the first of these

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1 George Corbett and Heather Webb, 'Introduction', in *Vertical Readings in Dante's 'Comedy': Volume 1*, ed. by George Corbett and Heather Webb (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), pp. 1–11 (p. 2). They list existing studies of the cantos vi, vii, x, xi, xv, xvi, xxv, xxvi and xxvii.

2 Richard Kay, 'Parallel Cantos in Dante's *Commedia*', *Res publica litterarum* 15 (1992), 109–13; Corbett and Webb, 'Introduction', pp. 3–4.

groupings. Pier della Vigna (*Inf.*, xiii) is contrasted with St Dominic (*Par.*, xii): both rhetoricians of different sorts, serving different masters, and the difference between them, pride, is revealed by *Purgatorio* xii, exemplified in the reliefs described there. Furthermore, Pier's speech is characterised by self-praise while Dominic is praised by another, St Bonaventure, from the 'rival' order of Franciscans no less.<sup>3</sup> Kay explains that, despite having established a great number of correspondences of this type, his purpose here is simply to demonstrate that the approach is able to yield fruit, and he provides ten examples to that end. These also illustrate the range of types of connections which might be posited, from simple verbal repetition or echo to looser groups of referents (which may be similar or contrasting), or instances where parallel reading in different directions has one canto reveal underlying principles in another, or provide a progressive clarification and so on.<sup>4</sup> The real difficulty which is beginning to emerge here is establishing the permissible range of types and methods of connection and deciding where to draw the line before we are pulled into a six stages of separation scenario in which everything is interconnected to everything else. Verbal echoes, rhyme repetitions, related characters, the interwoven nature of the text, all make for a particularly dense infratextuality. It is not surprising that such a highly self-referential work as the *Commedia* has a well-established critical tradition of reading Dante with Dante, modelled in many ways on the practices of reading scriptural texts.<sup>5</sup>

Another, more comprehensive, parallel reading is found in the second volume of the three-volume commentary and translation of the *Commedia* by Robert Durling and Ron Martinez.<sup>6</sup> At the end of the notes on every canto is an 'inter-cantica' section in which they discuss the poem's 'system of recall of the earlier *cantiche*, often in the form of parallels between similarly numbered cantos'.<sup>7</sup> The first such section largely examines links

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3 Kay, p. 112.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 111–12. The canto groups for these ten examples are (in order of discussion) 1. *Inf.*, xxxi, *Purg.* and *Par.*, xxx; 2. *Inf.*, xxii, *Purg.* and *Par.*, xxi; 3. *Inf.*, xvii, *Purg.* and *Par.*, xvi; 4. *Inf.*, xxiii, *Purg.* and *Par.*, xxii; 5. *Inf.*, vii, *Purg.* and *Par.*, vi; 6. *Inf.*, xxix, *Purg.* and *Par.*, xxviii; 7. *Inf.*, v, *Purg.* and *Par.*, iv; 8. *Inf.*, xvi, *Purg.* and *Par.*, xv; 9. *Inf.*, xiii, *Purg.* and *Par.*, xii; 10. *Inf.*, xxvi, *Purg.* and *Par.*, xxv.

5 See Amilcare A. Iannucci, 'Autoesegesi dantesca. La tecnica dell' "episodio" parallelo', *Lettere Italiane* 33 (1981), 305–28. Noted too by Corbett and Webb, 'Introduction', p. 4.

6 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed., trans. and notes by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996–2011), II (later cited as Durling and Martinez).

7 *Ibid.*, II, p. 33.

between *Purgatorio* i and *Inferno* i, although the discussion is not bound by a rigid adherence to same numbered cantos.<sup>8</sup> There is sometimes a matching similar to that proposed by Kay, so that the note on *Purgatorio* ii, for example, draws out many connections with *Inferno* iii, but reference is also made to *Inferno* xxiv, xxxii, i, ix, and xxvi.<sup>9</sup> In the preface to their edition of the *Paradiso*, Durling and Martinez explain that there will not be 'inter-cantica' sections in this volume since, with the preceding two *cantiche* now involved, the cross-references '...become particularly dense and frequent'.<sup>10</sup> The flexibility of the inter-cantica does respond to a potential problem with the matching of numbers suggested by Kay, which sometimes seems to work well, but would preclude parallel readings across all three cantos with the same number. The best-known matching of this type is probably in the cantos vi. The depiction of ever expanding evil and the infamous number of the beast from *Revelation* 13.18 seems to work well, although perhaps more obviously apparent in Arabic rather than Roman numerals.<sup>11</sup>

Authorial intention is one of the most fundamental questions in any study of literature, and must also be addressed in the vertical reading approach.<sup>12</sup> Not only must we find connections, but must we also then detect some intention on the part of Dante to put them there; the discovery of meaning as against its manufacture? 'Dante Studies' as an activity (or 'industry') has been criticized for its imperviousness to literary theory, not unlike the walled city of Dis, perhaps, in its self-reflexive circularity. These are larger questions than we can discuss here, and, of course, we are free to read a text however we please. On the other hand, particular attention to authorial intention is well-established in the Middle Ages, and particularly evident in the case of Dante's earliest readers: 'Intentio autoris est optima; intendit enim facere hominem bonum' [The intention of the author is excellent; for he intends to make man good] writes Benvenuto da Imola at the outset of his commentary, which prioritises the author throughout.<sup>13</sup>

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8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., II, pp. 46–47.

10 Ibid., III, p. v. Corbett and Webb note the 'intensive self-referentiality of the entire poem' ('Introduction', p. 3).

11 The vulgate text runs 'hic sapientia est qui habet intellectum computet numerum bestiae numerus enim hominis est et numerus eius est sescenti sexaginta sex', so the repetition of ses/sex is evident enough. *Biblia Sacra. Iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. by B. Fischer, R. Weber, R. Gryson, et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), p. 1895.

12 Corbett and Webb discuss this 'thorny question' ('Introduction', pp. 6–8).

13 Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam*, ed. by G. F. Lacaia, 5 vols (Florence: Barbera, 1887), I, p. 17. For the standard discussion of the position of the

## Numerology

A question as unavoidable for a number based approach as it might be unwelcome is that of numerological significance. Dante himself draws the numbering of the cantos into the poetic text in the well-known opening to *Inferno* xx: 'Di nova pena mi conven far versi / e dar matera al ventesimo canto / de la prima canzon, ch'è d'i sommersi' [Of a strange new punishment I must make verses / and take matter for the twentieth song / in this first canticle, which is of those submerged] (*Inf.*, xx. 1–3).<sup>14</sup> This is not the only time Dante refers to the formal structures of the poem but it is the only mention of the numbering and is enough of an *imprimatur* for us to consider the numbers, especially since they form the basis of the vertical reading of the poem.

Although 13, or XIII, might initially seem promising as a number of such ill portent that it has its own named phobia, the association of the number with bad luck seems to originate after Dante's time. According to Vincent Foster Hopper, the first mention of the specific idea of thirteen at table being unlucky is found in the late sixteenth century in what is almost a passing remark in Montaigne's *Essais* (III. viii).<sup>15</sup> A more general negative interpretation of the number is also found in the sixteenth century, in a work specifically focussed on numerology, the *Mysticae numerorum significationis liber* (1585) of Petrus Bungus, or Pietro Bongo, of Bergamo.<sup>16</sup> Each number is usually dealt with in a single section, but 'De numero XIII. et XIV'. puts thirteen together with fourteen in quite a short treatment, most of which is taken up with a discussion around the number fourteen as it relates to the dating of Easter.<sup>17</sup> Bungus links the number thirteen with the impiety of the Jews and gives a few examples from the Old Testament, beginning with the Jews murmuring against God in the desert when they set up camp

author see Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd edn (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

14 Noted also by Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Without Any Violence', in *Vertical Readings in Dante's 'Comedy'*, pp. 181–202 (p. 182). Dante also uses the term 'canto' at *Par.*, i. 12 (though here meaning *cantica*); v. 139; and xii. 6.

15 Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2000), pp. 131–32.

16 Pietro Bongo, *Mysticae numerorum significationis liber*, 2 vols (Bergamo: Comino Ventura, 1585). This edition can be consulted electronically in the digital library of the Münchener DigitalisierungsZentrum at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek: [http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb10147847\\_00001.html](http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb10147847_00001.html). This work forms the basis of the later *Numerorum Mysteria* (Bergamo: Comino Ventura, 1591).

17 Bongo, *Mysticae numerorum significationis liber*, II, pp. 31–35.

for the thirteenth time.<sup>18</sup> He states that since thirteen is the first number after twelve it denotes transgression of the teaching of the apostles and he concludes by quoting Hugh of St Victor's *Miscellanea*.<sup>19</sup>

It is in Hugh's *De Scripturis et Scriptoribus Sacris* that we find guidelines for numerological exegesis, in chapter xv *De numeris mysticis sacrae Scripturae*.<sup>20</sup> These take the form of nine principles: order of position, composition, extension to other numbers, disposition, computation, multiplication, aggregate parts, number of parts, and exaggeration. Russell Peck follows this list with a description of some of the more typical glosses on each number: one signifies unity, of course, and so God and everything to do with God; two represents 'the other' and can be negative, indicating the devil, division, cupidity and so on, but it can also be positive, in referring to the second person of the trinity for example; three is very positive, representing the trinity, perfection, the soul (man in the image of the triune God), and, by extension to thirty, the number of books in the Bible (according to Hugh of St Victor anyway); four denotes elements, humours, conditions, directions, gospels, evangelists, cardinal virtues, branches of knowledge (theoretical, practical, mechanical, logical) etc.; five is quintessence; seven, too much to mention here; and so on up to twelve, the number of months, apostles, tribes of Israel, completeness and the Apocalypse, with which his list ends.<sup>21</sup>

Numerological interpretation allows for almost infinite variations; virtually any number can be interpreted, often through manipulations themselves accepted as legitimate, so that it may represent almost anything

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18 The list begins: 'Haec numerus Iudaeorum taxat impietatem'. *Ibid.*, II, p. 131. Besides the murmuring against God, Bungus also notes that Psalm xiii illustrates the anger of the Jews, and that thirteen is the age of circumcision. The most relevant biblical texts are *Exodus* 16.1–35 and *Numbers* 20.1–5. See too Hopper, p. 131.

19 Bongo, *Mysticae numerorum significationis liber*, II, pp. 31–32. Bungus names Hugh as his source for a reference to the death of Christ, but the wording of the Old Testament examples immediately preceding this reference is also very close to the text of the *Miscellanea* vi, titulus xxvi, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by J. P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris: Garnier, 1844–55), 177, cols 826–27. The work is attributed to Hugh, but listed in the *Patrologia Latina* as *Incertus* since it is not known whether it was compiled by Hugh himself or others.

20 Hugh of St Victor, 'De Scripturis et Scriptoribus Sacris', in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by J. P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris: Garnier, 1844–1855), 175, cols 22–23. Russell Peck includes Hugh's nine guidelines in an appendix. See Russell Peck, 'Number as Cosmic Language', in *Essays in the Numerical Criticism of Medieval Literature*, ed. by Caroline D. Eckhardt (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1980), pp. 15–64 (pp. 58–59). Hopper also lists and discusses them (pp. 100–04).

21 Peck, pp. 59–62.

else. Hugh's methodology has been seen as an attempt to introduce some order, and place restrictions on the sort of 'free form' association which might otherwise result, although it does itself present quite a range of interpretative options.<sup>22</sup> So the number XIII, according to Hugh's rule six (factorization, including addition), may be interpreted as X, a number of perfection, plus III, associated with the Trinity among other things. Thirteen is also the number of St Paul as the thirteenth apostle, as Isidore of Seville explains in his *Liber de numeris*, on numbers in the Bible:

Denarius ternarius numerus propter tria et decem designat legem, et legislatorem, Decalogum, videlicet, et Trinitatem. Competenter autem hic numerus apostolo Paulo ascribitur, qui ejusdem tenet numeri locum in ordine apostolorum.

[The thirteenth number as three and ten designates the law and lawgiver, the Decalogue, and the Trinity. Moreover this number is properly assigned to Paul, who holds the place of the same number in the order of the Apostles].<sup>23</sup>

Three and ten have many other interpretations, and we might well share Hopper's assessment in his discussion of the equally polysemous number seven: 'In this twilight zone of symbolism, it is extremely hazardous to attempt or even look for an interpretation of such a widely significant number as 7'.<sup>24</sup> In the context of the vertical readings, the cantos iii and x must have a prior claim to any numerological significance those numbers may have, and whilst it may shed light on other cantos, the numerological approach doesn't appear to be particularly fruitful for the cantos xiii. Nonetheless, there is still perhaps a lesson in Hugh's concern to set some ground rules. The *Commedia* has the potential for almost infinite connection, so how can the vertical reading stay grounded? Must any suggested connection be demonstrable in all three cantos? Hopper notes that three as a number of proof has deep roots in human culture, certainly antediluvian, perhaps even primeval.<sup>25</sup> In addition, should there be some measure of exclusivity which limits the connection to the three same numbered cantos?

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22 Hopper (p. 103) suggests that the creation of such a list indicates Hugh's awareness of the problem of 'looseness' in the practice of numerological interpretation.

23 Isidore of Seville, '*Liber numerorum qui in sanctis scripturis occurrunt*', in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by Migne, 83, col. 193.

24 Hopper, p. 129.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.

## *Lecturae* of the Cantos xiii

The cantos xiii make up an unlikely trio at least as far as critical interest goes. *Inferno* xiii is one of the best known, mainly through the prominence of the character Pier della Vigna; Francesco De Sanctis titled his 1869 *lectura*, sometimes regarded as the first modern *lectura dantis* of the canto, 'Pier delle Vigne'.<sup>26</sup> For this discussion I have consulted some of the more well-known *lecturae* of the cantos xiii, beginning with *Inferno*.<sup>27</sup> The only actual occurrence of the name Pier in the cantos xiii comes not in *Inferno* but in *Purgatorio*, where the saintly Pier Pettinaio is named by the Sieneese noblewoman Sapia (*Purg.*, xiii. 128), who had informed Dante that despite her name, she was not 'savìa' [wise] (*Purg.*, xiii. 109).<sup>28</sup> For wisdom, we may

26 Now in De Sanctis, *Opere V. Lezioni e Saggi su Dante*, ed. by Sergio Romagnoli, 2nd edn (Turin: Einaudi, 1967), pp. 353–68. It is first in the list of *lecturae* of *Inferno* xiii in *Censimento dei Commenti danteschi. 3. Le "lecturae Dantis" e le edizioni delle Opere di Dante dal 1472 al 2000*, ed. by Ciro Perna and Teresa Nocita (Rome: Salerno, 2012), p. 115.

27 In alphabetical order of author for ease of reference: Cesare Angelini, 'Canto XIII' in *Lectura Dantis Scaligera. Inferno* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1971), pp. 425–45; Ignazio Baldelli, 'Il canto XIII dell'"Inferno"', in *Nuove letture dantesche* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1970), II, pp. 33–45; John C. Barnes, 'Inferno XIII', in *Dante Soundings: Eight Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. by David Nolan (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1981), pp. 28–58; Ettore Bonora, 'Da De Sanctis a Spitzer. il canto XIII dell'"Inferno"', in *Interpretazioni Dantesche* (Modena: Mucchi Editore, 1988), pp. 51–66; Patrick Boyde, 'Inferno XIII', in *Cambridge Readings in Dante's Comedy*, ed. by Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 1–22; Gabriele Muresu, 'La selva dei disperati ("Inferno" XIII)', in *Il Richiamo dell'Antica Strega. Altri saggi di semantica dantesca* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1997), pp. 11–71; Manlio Pastore Stocchi, 'Canto XIII. "Io son colui che tenni ambo le chiavi / del cor di Federigo [...]"', in *Lectura Dantis Romana. Cento Canti per Cento Anni. I. Inferno 1. Canti I–XVII*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno, 2013), pp. 410–23; Giorgio Petrocchi, 'Canto XIII' in *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana. Inferno*, ed. by Pompeo Giannantonio (Naples: Loffredo, 1986), pp. 231–42; Giorgio Petrocchi, 'Canto XIII: The Violent Against Themselves, in *Lectura Dantis: Inferno*, ed. by Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn and Charles Ross (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 178–84; Vincenzo Presta, 'In margine al canto XIII dell'"Inferno"', *Dante Studies* 90 (1972), 13–24; Gianvito Resta, 'Il canto XIII dell'"Inferno"' in *Inferno. Letture degli anni 1973–76* (Rome: Bonacci, 1977), pp. 319–60; Kurt Ringger, 'Pier della Vigna o la poesia del segno. Per una rilettura del canto XIII dell'"Inferno"', *Medioevo Romanzo* 5 (1978), 85–99; Olga Sedakova, 'Canti XII–XIII–XIV. Sotto il cielo della violenza', in *Esperimenti danteschi. Inferno 2008*, ed. by Simone Invernizzi (Genoa: Marietti, 2009), pp. 107–19; Leo Spitzer, 'Il Canto XIII dell'"Inferno"', in *Letture dantesche. Inferno*, ed. by Giovanni Getto (Florence: Sansoni, 1955), pp. 221–48; Claudia Villa, 'Canto XIII', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Inferno*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2000), pp. 183–91.

28 The *lecturae* of *Purgatorio* xiii consulted, by author: Salvatore Accardo, 'Il canto XIII del "Purgatorio"', in *Purgatorio. Letture degli anni 1976–79* (Rome: Bonacci, 1981), pp. 263–81; Pietro Conte, 'Il canto XIII del "Purgatorio"', in *Nuove letture dantesche* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1970), IV pp. 129–48; Violetta De Angelis, 'Canti XIII–XIV–XV. Gli invidiosi e l'ingresso nella cornice dell'ira', in *Esperimenti danteschi. Purgatorio 2009*, ed. by Benedetta

turn instead to *Paradiso* xiii and the discussion of Solomon, famous as the proverbial wise king and author of the biblical Book of Wisdom.<sup>29</sup> Unlike the other cantos xiii, however, *Paradiso* xiii has had a rather lukewarm critical fortune: 'Nella maggior parte dei casi, tuttavia, i lettori moderni non hanno amato il nostro canto' [In the majority of cases modern readers have not loved our canto].<sup>30</sup> I have listed the main individual *lecturae* of the cantos xiii in the footnotes here mainly to provide a sort of corpus for the general observation that they tend not to cross-refer to the corresponding cantos xiii in the other two *cantiche*. It is certainly the case that the practice of the *lectura Dantis*, with its focus on individual cantos might actively discourage cross-referencing, but many of these *lecturae* do mention other cantos throughout the *Commedia* with which they make connections; yet

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Quadrio (Genoa: Marietti, 2010), pp. 135–46; Andreas Kablitz, 'Canto XIII', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Purgatorio*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2001), pp. 199–209; Carmelo Musumarra, 'Canto XIII' in *Lectura Dantis Scaligera. Purgatorio* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1971), pp. 439–71; Emilio Santini, 'Il Canto XIII del Purgatorio', in *Lecture dantesche. Purgatorio*, ed. by Giovanni Getto (Florence: Sansoni, 1964), pp. 921–40; Mirko Volpi, 'Canto XIII. Dante tra Superbia e Invidia' in *Lectura Dantis Romana. Cento Canti per Cento Anni. II. Purgatorio 1. Canti I–XVII*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno, 2014), pp. 367–99; Albert Wingell, 'Among the Envious: Seeing and Not Seeing', in *Lectura Dantis: Purgatorio*, ed. by Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn and Charles Ross (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 129–40; Albino Zenatti, *Il canto XIII del Purgatorio* (Florence: Sansoni, 1909).

- 29 The *lecturae* of *Paradiso* xiii consulted, by author: Marcello Aurigemma, 'Il canto XIII del "Paradiso"', in *Nuove letture dantesche* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1973), VI, pp. 129–46; Courtney Cahill, 'The Limitations of Difference in Paradiso XIII's Two Arts: Reason and Poetry', *Dante Studies* 114 (1996), 245–69; Antonio Del Castello, 'Canto XIII. Il "re sufficiente" e la divina sapienza del governo' in *Lectura Dantis Romana. Cento Canti per Cento Anni. III. Paradiso. 1. Canti I–XVII*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno, 2015), pp. 382–407; Remo Fasani, 'Canto XIII', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Paradiso*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2001), pp. 193–202; Giancarlo Rati, 'Il canto XIII del "Paradiso"', in *Paradiso. Letture degli anni 1979–'81* (Rome: Bonacci, 1989), pp. 353–79; Carlo Sini, 'Canti XIII–XIV. Salomone e il cielo della luce', in *Esperimenti danteschi. Paradiso 2010*, ed. by Tommaso Montorfano (Genoa: Marietti, 2010), pp. 157–68; Ruggiero Stefanelli, 'Canto XIII', in *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana. Paradiso*, ed. by Pompeo Giannantonio (Naples: Loffredo, 2000), pp. 279–98; Giuseppe Toffanin, 'Canto XIII', in *Lectura Dantis Scaligera. Paradiso* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1968), pp. 447–74; Giuseppe Vandelli, 'Il Canto XIII del Paradiso', in *Lecture dantesche. Paradiso*, ed. by Giovanni Getto (Florence: Sansoni, 1964), pp. 1601–24.
- 30 Del Castello, p. 382; Rati also notes the negative response to the didactic nature of the canto (Rati, p. 353). Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi in her 'introduzione al canto xiii' offers this judgement: 'Se non ci fosse al suo interno la breve ma grande apertura teologica sul tema [...] della creazione dell'universo, il canto resterebbe forse il più povero, come qualità inventiva e drammatica, di tutta la cantica'. See Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, ed. by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 3 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1991–1997), III, p. 357. Cahill is more positive, but does acknowledge the canto's bad reputation in earlier *lecturae* (Cahill, pp. 245, 266).



there are almost no cross-references in the *lecturae* to the other cantos xiii.<sup>31</sup> There are only three exceptions to this in my list of *lecturae*.

Albino Zenatti's *lectura* of *Purgatorio* xiii mentions similarities with *Inferno* xiii: the hearing of voices whose source is unseen, though he does also acknowledge that the examples are very different, in keeping with the general dissimilarity between the two locations; a Sienese connection, with the appearance of Lano del Topo in *Inferno* and Sapia in *Purgatorio*; the mention of envy, 'the vice of courts' in *Inferno* xiii, now touching republics too in *Purgatorio*; and, finally, the similar request to be remembered to the living made by both Sapia and Pier, 'l'invidiosa e una vittima dell'invidia' [the envious woman and a victim of envy].<sup>32</sup> Francesco De Nicola's *lectura* of *Purgatorio* xiii in the *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana* notes Zenatti's mention of the unseen voices, concluding 'ma la situazione pare assai diversa' [but the situation seems rather different].<sup>33</sup> De Nicola also quotes *Inferno*, xiii. 64–66, but really as part of a list of references to *invidia*, which includes *Purgatorio* xiv, xv, xvii and *Inferno* vi.<sup>34</sup> He too later identifies in Sapia's request to Dante to be remembered to the living an echo of the similar concern of Pier della Vigna in *Inferno* xiii.<sup>35</sup> Although he does not make any reference to *Paradiso* xiii, De Nicola also mentions what may be the only previous study linking all three cantos xiii, which I will come to shortly.<sup>36</sup> Gabriele Muresu's is the third *lectura* to make a connection between separate cantos xiii, and mentions *Paradiso* xiii, 133–35 in the context of a wider discussion of the name of Pier della Vigna and the relative significance of different plants in the Bible and in Dante, in which the vine may be fruitful or sterile.<sup>37</sup>

Not part of any series, nor really a *lectura* as such, there is a 1969 study by Pietro M. Viola which sets out to read the three cantos xiii together.<sup>38</sup>

31 As a single example of cross-referencing, Musumarra, in discussing *Purgatorio* xiii makes reference to the following other cantos: *Inferno* iii, iv, v, vi, xv, xviii, xxix; *Purgatorio* xiv, xv, xx, xxxiii; *Paradiso* v, xiv, xxi, xxiii, xxiv, xxvii, xxxii. No connection is made to the other cantos xiii.

32 Zenatti, pp. 8–9, 19, 27. Zenatti acknowledges an earlier study as the source of his point on envy (p. 37). Not a *lectura* as such, the study is Giovanni Federzoni, *Rispondenze fra il canto XIII. dell'Inferno e il XIII. del Purgatorio. Una noterella sulla espressione dantesca Savia non fui* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1904).

33 De Nicola, p. 273.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 274.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 284.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 284, n. 52.

37 Muresu, p. 37.

38 Pietro M. Viola, 'Un trittico del comportamento politico. I tredicesimi canti della

Viola takes as his starting point for a political reading of the cantos what he describes as a symmetrical and unifying structure evident in the cantos vi, which progress through 'il Comune, la Nazione, e l'Impero' [the Municipality, the Nation, the Empire].<sup>39</sup> For the vertical readings it is interesting to note that Viola describes the case of the cantos vi as 'un unicum' [unique] although his intention is to demonstrate that this is not the case, and the political reading he proposes is presented as a counterpart to them, in a schema in which Pier represents the man of the court, Sapia the 'simple citizen' and Solomon the king.<sup>40</sup> He notes too other common features, such as the constant presence of references to seeing and sight in all three cantos, and the hearing of voices in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* xiii.<sup>41</sup> The main focus of the study is on the idea that these three characters offer a counterpart to the political presentation in the cantos vi; here we are presented with a 'fenomenologia del comportamento politico' [phenomenology of political behaviour] at the personal level.<sup>42</sup> This is an interesting reading of the cantos, but it does appear at times to be looking for evidence to support its argument rather than being led by the text. We might note, for example, that the rather neat progression to ever larger political realities pointed out by Viola in the cantos vi, does not straightforwardly apply to the cantos xiii as we move from empire, to city-state and then to kingdom. Another approach Viola uses is to trace what he calls an 'idea-parola' [idea-word] through the cantos, fixing on 'vedere' [to see] as the most promising, but the idea is reached by finding examples of sight and its opposites in the cantos, and through a rather metaphorical interpretation of wisdom as a form of seeing which is very loosely linked to the text.<sup>43</sup> Having said that, I am now very sympathetic to any reader faced with the difficulties of this endeavour.

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*Commedia*, *Trimestre* 4 (1970), 39–63. It also appears in the collection of articles by Viola, *Ricerche di metodo e di struttura su Dante e Manzoni* (Cagliari: Fossataro, 1969), pp. 229–66. Viola explains that the article was awaiting publication in *Trimestre* when the book came out, hence the unusual sequence of dates (p. 380). The page references here are to the article. I would like to thank Giuseppe Ledda for alerting me to the appearance of the article in the book.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 51–53.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 42–46.

## Structures

In looking for connections, I tried taking a structural approach of sorts, by placing the Thirteens side by side and looking across them, more parallel than vertical, I appreciate. (In the lecture my rather bizarre miniaturisation of the text to 3 point for the purpose of displaying it on a slide did attract some interest, or curiosity.) What was obvious was the difference in length: 151, 154, and 142 verses respectively.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately there were no immediately evident connections across the cantos xiii. Does the division of the cantos into sections reveal any parallels? Obviously there is some arbitrariness in drawing lines of this kind, but division into parts or units as a practice is at least as old as the fourteenth-century commentators, and Dante himself, of course. In one of the most popular modern editions (Bosco and Reggio), the Thirteens are divided and sections described as following. *Inferno* is divided into six episodes of varying length: the wood of the suicides (ll. 1–21); Pier della Vigna (ll. 22–78); Pier explains how the suicides are transformed into plants (ll. 79–102); the condition of the suicides after the final judgement (ll. 103–08); the appearance of the spendthrifts, Lano da Siena and Jacopo da Santo Andrea (ll. 109–29); and a Florentine suicide (ll. 130–35). *Purgatorio* is divided into eight episodes: the appearance of the second terrace (ll. 1–9); prayer of Virgil to the Sun (ll. 10–21); voices in the air calling out examples of charity (ll. 22–42); the condition of the envious (ll. 43–72); Dante turns to the penitent souls (ll. 73–99); conversation with Sapia of Siena (ll. 100–32); reply and confession of Dante (ll. 133–44); and the final words of Sapia (ll. 145–54). *Paradiso* is divided into three long sections of very unequal length: singing and dance of the two crowns of blessed souls (ll. 1–30); Thomas (Aquinas) explains what the wisdom of Solomon consists of (ll. 31–111); and Thomas's admonishment on the necessity of not making hasty judgements (ll. 112–42).<sup>45</sup>

From the structural outlines alone we can immediately see a real difference between the *Paradiso* canto and the others, and some similarities, but also differences, in the other two. Both *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* open with a description of the place, but this is because both mark a move from one location to another, and this liminality is not a feature of similar numbering but of the specific intersection with another of the organisational

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44 This approach may lay claim to an illustrious predecessor in Charles Singleton, 'The Poet's Number at the Centre', *Modern Language Notes* 80 (1965), 1–10.

45 Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. by Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio, 3 vols (Florence: Le Monnier, 2002), I, p. 210; II, p. 241; III, p. 229.

structures of the *Commedia*, the topography of Dante's afterlife. The formal arrangement into cantos sometimes fits and sometimes crosses the division of the geography of Dante's otherworld into circles, terraces, and heavens. *Inferno* xiii is located wholly within the second subcircle of the seventh circle of the nine circles of Hell, where violence against the self in the forms of suicide and profligacy is punished. *Purgatorio* xiii is on the second terrace of the mountain of Purgatory, or the third of nine divisions if we include the Ante-Purgatory and the earthly Paradise at each end, where envy is purged. The Heaven of the Sun in which *Paradiso* xiii is situated is the fourth in Dante's plan of ten heavens, where Dante encounters the blessed souls who are mainly philosophers and theologians. The topographical numbering, then, shows quite a striking lack of correspondence across the cantos xiii.

## Horizontal Gravity and Artificial Endings

The dissonance between the formal canto structure and the geography of Dante's afterlife, or the continuing narrative in a more general sense, can be problematic for the traditional single *lectura* format, especially when so many cantos do not neatly encapsulate clearly defined narrative blocks.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the individual canto may clearly form part of a group or run of consecutive cantos. In his *lectura* of *Paradiso* xiv in the *Lectura Dantis Turicensis*, Michelangelo Picone designates *Paradiso* x–xiv a 'lunga macrosequenza' [long macrosequence].<sup>47</sup> This approach also forms the organisational basis for the *Esperimenti danteschi* series.<sup>48</sup> This pull to the sides, or horizontal gravity so to speak, can be reasonably accommodated in the traditional individual canto reading but is perhaps more difficult when trying to match up three cantos vertically if they are being pulled into a stronger horizontal connection. None of the cantos xiii stands very clearly alone. As we have seen, *Paradiso* xiii in the Heaven of the Sun is an integral part of the longer run of cantos x–xiv, and so embedded in it that it is in large part taken up with a response to a question put in the first canto in the

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46 This has been fully examined by Luigi Blasucci, 'Sul canto come unità testuale', in *Leggere Dante*, ed. by Lucia Battaglia Ricci (Ravenna: Longo, 2003), pp. 25–38. See too Elena Landoni, 'Lectura Dantis tra Istituzionalità e Libertà', in *Dante in Lettura*, ed. by Giuseppe De Matteis (Ravenna: Longo, 2005), pp. 51–62.

47 Michelangelo Picone, 'Canto XIV', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Paradiso*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2001), pp. 203–18 (p. 203).

48 See Sedakova, De Angelis and Sini.

sequence. *Purgatorio* xiii is likewise part of a pair on the terrace of envy, xiii and xiv (and for some readers the beginning of xv too). *Inferno* xiii is closer to a single complete canto, although it does link with the cantos on either side, through the presence of the centaur Nessus at the beginning of the canto, but much more so in the way that it ends. The formal canto ending may be regarded quite reasonably as an artificial ending, but I would like to consider the term artificial in a different sense, and that is that it is evidence of Dante's artistic craftsmanship, his artifice at work. He chooses where and how to divide the material of his narrative, and we should pay attention to that. *Inferno* xiii is a striking example. The end of the canto is not the conclusion of the episode, although read on its own it might well be taken as such. The character stops speaking, and that could be the end of the encounter, but canto *xiv* picks up exactly at that point, still in the same subcircle of Hell, still in the same scene, with a change of tone which delivers one of the most moving tiny episodes in the whole poem: 'La carità del natio loco mi strinse...' [Love for the place of my birth gripped me...] (*Inf.*, xiv. 1). If only this were part of canto xiii, the contrast with Sapia's distinct lack of 'carità del natio loco' would fit perfectly, but this would definitely be the wrong place to indulge in canto envy. If Dante is then using the artifice of the formal canto division to emphasise the reality of suicide in its social dimension, with Dante literally left to pick up the pieces in the next episode, he offers a reminder that suicide is not the end that it might seem to be.

## Connecting Threads

So far I have described different approaches to the vertical reading that have raised difficulties in trying to discover some commonality among the cantos xiii. I do not think that there is a single overarching critical exposition such as to reveal some central message or interpretative key or unifying principle not only present in, but also specific and distinctive, indeed exclusive, to these cantos (*pace* Viola). However, I think it is possible, as others have shown, to detect some less comprehensive connections or linking threads.

### Envy

The presence of envy in cantos xiii of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* is obvious and needs no lengthy elaboration here. One interesting if somewhat oblique

connection which has often been noted is the simile in the description of the souls being purged of envy, whose eyelids are sewn shut with iron wire '...come a sparvier selvaggio / si fa però che queto non dimora' [as we do to a wild sparrowhawk because it will not be still] (*Purg.*, xiii. 71–72). The blindness is linked with the blindness Pier della Vigna suffered as a punishment, and the reference to the sparrowhawk may be connected to *Inferno* xiii through reference to the treatise *De arte venandi cum avibus*, written by Pier's master, the Emperor Frederick II.<sup>49</sup> However, this appears to be a later observation, not one made in the earlier commentaries, and first appearing in Scartazzini's commentary in 1875.<sup>50</sup>

Can envy be linked with *Paradiso* xiii? Equally obvious is the fact that *Paradiso* will be no place for sin, and positing a connection to *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* through a principle of correction or opposition to sin may simply be such a generality as to apply to any and all cantos in the poem. Jacopo della Lana's introduction, his *nota*, to *Purgatorio* xiii discusses envy, and refers to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* book 2 as his source and authority, repeating a lot of what is there. Envy is looking at the achievements, the progress of *lo prossimo*, the person next to us. He says:

Or è da sapere che invidia non cade tra quelli che le sue facultadi sono molto distanti, ma cade intra quelli li quali sono per gloria vicini; e questi avviene perché quelli che sono così distanti non si aprovano da adeguarsi in gloria insieme. E però non si truova invidia da uno villano a uno re, imperquello che sono troppo distanti in facultà; similemente non si truova invidia tra quelli che sono in grande distanza di luogo, come de lo re d'Assiria a quello d'Inghilterra; similemente non si truova invidia tra quelli che sono distanti in tempo, come essere stato al tempo d'Aristotile ad essere mo'; ancora nullo ha invidia a quello ch'elli sa che non è sufficiente, sí come l'uomo ad essere uccello.<sup>51</sup>

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49 The inter-cantica for *Purgatorio* xiii of Durling and Martinez mentions this (Durling and Martinez, II, p. 221).

50 The Dartmouth Dante Project (<http://dante.dartmouth.edu>) gives Scartazzini as the earliest reference to the 'De arte venandi cum avibus', in his comment on *Purg.*, xiii. 70–72. *Dante Alighieri, La Divina Commedia*, ed. by G. A. Scartazzini, 6th edn, rev. by G. Vandelli (Milan: Hoepli, 1911), p. 474. Scartazzini refers to Frederick's *De arte venandi cum avibus* (II. 53). A more recent edition based on a particular manuscript gives II. 29 as the chapter on the method of sewing up of the birds' eyelids, 'De modo ciliandi', mentioning a 'filo' [thread], but not specifying what material it is made from. Federico II di Svevia, *De arte venandi cum avibus*, ed. by Anna Laura Trombetti Budriesi, 3rd edn (Rome: Laterza, 2001), pp. 312–15.

51 Jacopo della Lana, *Commento alla "Commedia"*, ed. by Mirko Volpi, 4 vols (Rome: Salerno, 2009), II, p. 1193.

[We should know that envy does not occur between those whose powers are very distant, but occurs between those who are close in glory; and this happens because those who are distant do not strive to make themselves equal in glory. So envy is not found between a king and a peasant, because they are too distant in power, similarly envy is not found between those distant in place, like the king of Assyria and the king of England; similarly envy is not found between those distant in time, such as living in the time of Aristotle and living now; and again nothing has envy for that which it knows is inferior, such as a man wanting to be a bird.]

So, the peasant doesn't envy the king, nor distant kings each other, nor the man the bird (*pace* Petrarch). Aristotle doesn't mention kings (he simply refers to 'great men'), but the interesting points here for the cantos xiii are precisely proximity and the example given (added by Lana, not in Aristotle) of kings. The absence of envy permits Aquinas in *Paradiso* xiii not so much to praise but simply to recognise, and then explain the superiority of Solomon in terms of 'regal prudenza' [the prudence of a king] (*Par.*, xiii. 104). In the (mean) spirit of Sapia we might notice that Thomas also spends some time, perhaps just a bit more than he does on Solomon, outlining the different and, it is perhaps implied, superior wisdom of the philosophers and theologians. The explanation given by Thomas is one of categorisation, so that being first in 'regal prudenza', does not make Solomon wiser overall than Christ or Adam. There is also perhaps a touch of humour in the way that Thomas almost plays down 'regal prudenza' as compared to the more abstruse intellectual questions which Solomon did not ask to know about (*Par.*, xiii. 97–102). In the terms used by Lana and Aristotle (putting aside the fact that being in Heaven means perfection anyway) we might even note that this explanation provides in a way the distance that we are told excludes envy, as their respective wisdoms belong to very different branches of knowledge.

The biblical account of Solomon's request has some points of interest for the other cantos xiii:

At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I shall give you'. And Solomon said, 'Thou hast shown great and steadfast love to thy servant David my father, because he walked before thee in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward thee; and thou hast kept for him this great and steadfast love, and hast given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people whom thou hast chosen, a great people, that

cannot be numbered or counted for multitude. Give thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to govern this thy great people?' It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, 'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days'. (i Kings 3.5–14)

It may be rather tenuous, contorted even, but it is possible to draw a connection between the things which Solomon rejected, and the most prominent souls of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* xiii. Long life and riches: Pier accumulated a great deal of the latter, but lost the former. Death to enemies: Sapia, not wise like Solomon, desired the death, not simply of enemies but even of those who should have been friends. The biblical text does have a lesson which might arguably be specific to the souls of the other cantos xiii.

### Aristotle and creation

Lana, in his discussion of *Inferno* xiii offers this explanation for the punishment of the souls here based on an Aristotelian model of the soul:

Or fa tale trasmutazion Dante per allegoria, ch'elli dice: l'omo quando è nel mondo è animale razionale, sensitivo e vegetativo: quando ancide sé stesso, el conferisce a cotale morte solo la possanza de l'anima razionale e sensitiva, e però c'hanno colpa di tale offesa son prive di quelle due possanze, romanigle solo la vegetative; sí che di uomini si tramutano in arbori che sono animali vegetativi solo.<sup>52</sup>

[Now Dante makes this transformation allegorically; so that he says: man when he is in the world is animal, rational, sensible and vegetative: when he kills himself, he consigns to death only the rational and sensitive power of the soul, and since the suicides are guilty of such an offence, they are deprived of

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<sup>52</sup> Lana, I, p. 411. A similar explanation is found in Benvenuto's comment on *Inferno* xiii, though with rather strange reasoning: 'Modo isti non possunt dici habuisse animam rationalem, quia ratio semper fugit mortem...' [But they cannot be said to have had a rational soul, because reason always flees from death...] (I, p. 424).



those two powers, only the vegetative is left to them; so that from men they are transformed into trees which are vegetative creatures only.]

Lana is given to some imprecisions, and it is not clear that 'per allegoria' is the right mode in which to read this, but the explanation does make partial sense. Where there is a problem, which he seems not to notice, is that the rational soul does not die with the body, and that is the essential nature of the punishment of the suicides, the removal of the sensible element, the body, so that the rational is imprisoned in a vegetative form. The text of *Inferno* xiii does not describe the condition of these souls in Aristotelian or scholastic terminology, but Thomas Aquinas in *Paradiso* xiii does outline the order and hierarchy of creation in his lengthy speech to Dante:

'Quindi discende a l'ultime potenze  
giù d'atto in atto, tanto divenendo,  
che più non fa che brevi contingenze;  
e queste contingenze essere intendo  
le cose generate, che produce  
con seme e senza seme il ciel movendo'. (*Par.*, xiii. 61–66)

[Thence it descends from act to act down to the last potencies, finally becoming such that it makes only fleeting contingencies: and by these contingencies I mean the things that are generated, which the heavens produce, with seed and without seed, by their motion.]

This takes us back again to Pier whose soul is rained down like a seed into the wood of the suicides where it then grows into a plant (*Inf.*, xiii. 94–100). Here *Paradiso* xiii sheds some light on what is happening in *Inferno* xiii, though there is no link with *Purgatorio* xiii.

### *Il pruno*

Although Pier is often casually referred to as being a tree (we can see the term '*arbori*' in Lana's commentary) Dante uses the term 'pruno' [thornbush], when he reaches out to break off the twig, 'e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno' [and [I] plucked a small branch from a great thornbush] (*Inf.*, xiii. 32), and when Pier himself talks about the resurrection of the body and reveals that the bodies of the suicides will hang on the bushes '*ciascuno al prun de l'ombra sua molesta*' [each on the thornbush of the soul that harmed it] (*Inf.*, xiii. 108). The word 'pruno' is used by Dante only four times

in the *Commedia*, twice here, once in *Paradiso* xiii, and, unfortunately, not in *Purgatorio* at all but in *Paradiso* xxiv.<sup>53</sup> This final instance is so suggestive that we might be forgiven for momentarily stepping outside of our allotted cantos to have a look.

'Se 'l mondo si rivolse al cristianesimo',  
diss'io, 'sanza miracoli, quest'uno  
è tal, che li altri non sono il centesimo:  
ché tu intrasti povero e digiuno  
in campo, a seminar la buona pianta  
che fu già vite e ora è fatta pruno'. (*Par.*, xxiv. 106–11)

[‘If the world turned to Christianity’, said I, ‘without miracles, this one miracle is such that the others are not a hundredth of it: for you came into the field poor and hungry to sow the good plant, formerly a vine but now become a thornbush’.]

This is during the examination on faith by St Peter in the Heaven of the fixed stars. Dante is talking about the Church, which should have been a vine but instead is a thornbush. The souls in Heaven, the ‘alta corte santa’ [the high and holy court] (*Par.*, xxiv. 112), so another court, this time high and holy unlike the envy-ridden court which led to the downfall of Pier (*Inf.*, xiii. 64–69), praises God for Dante’s statement. The description at *Paradiso*, xxiv. 111 encapsulates almost perfectly the situation of Pier della Vigna, once a vine now a thornbush. This example is a reminder of the particular difficulty for the vertical readings confronted with the wide-ranging infra-textuality of the *Commedia*, which does not rigidly follow its own well-defined schemata.

Nevertheless, a return to the cantos xiii, and *Paradiso*, does have an interesting thread to pick up. In Thomas’s final piece of advice to Dante, not to jump to conclusions or make premature judgements, we find the third use of the term *pruno*. This is the conclusion of the canto:

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53 Most of the *lecturae* of *Inferno* xiii do not mention these verses in *Paradiso* xxiv. The verses are briefly noted by Villa in her *lectura* of *Inferno* xiii (p. 191), and in more general studies of Pier, such as Anthony K. Cassell, ‘Pier della Vigna’s Metamorphosis: Iconography and History’, in *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio: Studies in the Italian Trecento in Honor of Charles S. Singleton*, ed. by Aldo S. Bernardo and Anthony L. Pellegrini (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1983), pp. 31–76 (pp. 35–36); and Muresu, pp. 77, 82–83.

'Non sien le genti, ancor, troppo sicure  
 a giudicar, sì come quei che stima  
 le biade in campo pria che sien mature;  
 ch'ì' ho veduto tutto 'l verno prima  
 lo prun mostrarsi rigido e feroce,  
 poscia portar la rosa in su la cima;  
 e legno vidi già dritto e veloce  
 correr lo mar per tutto suo cammino,  
 perire al fine a l'intrar de la foce.  
 Non creda donna Berta e ser Martino,  
 per vedere un furare, altro offerere,  
 vederli dentro al consiglio divino;  
 ché quel può surgere, e quel può cadere'. (*Par.*, xiii. 130–42)

[And let not people be too sure to judge, like one who appraises the oats in the field before they are ripe: for I have seen all the previous winter long the thornbush appear rigid and fierce, but later bear the rose upon its tip, and I have seen a ship run straight and swift across the sea for all its course, only to perish at last when entering the port. Let not dame Bertha and messer Martin believe, because they see one stealing, another offering, that they see them within God's counsel, for that one can rise up, and this one can fall.]

The final verse might well sum up the life of Pier and also the final repentance of Sapia. Although this could apply so generally to the *Commedia* as to encompass all souls in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, both these characters include quite detailed accounts of aspects of their earthly lives, a spectacular fall from grace in Pier's case, and a very blunt confession of sin by Sapia, albeit a vice not yet fully purged and which for some readers seems to exert its influence as she speaks.<sup>54</sup> If we read the *Paradiso* xiii examples more closely they can connect with the two characters; the 'prun' which brings forth a rose might well suggest that Pier's suicide was a hasty misjudgment and not an end to his problems. If he had indeed been 'giusto' [just] and not made himself 'ingiusto' [unjust] (*Inf.*, xiii. 72) perhaps he would have been destined for the 'candida rosa' [white rose] (*Par.*, xxxi. 1) in which Dante is

54 Conte mentions Sapia's 'aggressività urtante, bellicosa' [provocative and belligerent aggressiveness] (Conte, p. 139). Volpi finds Sapia to be the only soul in *Purgatorio* to offer a confession of this kind, 'a narrare con tale precisione la propria vicenda' [to tell her own story with such precision], making her seem more like the souls in *Inferno* (Volpi, 'Dante tra superbia e invidia', p. 389). On the other hand, Wingell argues for a more sympathetic interpretation of Sapia (Wingell, pp. 137–38).

shown the souls of the blessed. Some commentators, including Benvenuto da Imola, describe Pier as a sort of anti-Boethius, and Boethius himself happens to be numbered among those in the Heaven of the Sun, though not in our canto xiii (*Par.*, x. 124–29).<sup>55</sup> The other example of hasty judgement which Aquinas mentions, the ship sinking in port, might be linked to the concluding verses of *Purgatorio* xiii, though perhaps much less obviously in this case. There Sapia delivers a criticism of 'li ammiragli' [the admirals] (*Purg.*, xiii. 154) who have placed their hopes in money-making ventures which will come to nothing. The purchase of the sea port of Talamone and the search for the Diana, an underground stream, to provide Siena with sea access at least has a general nautical connection with the second example of the ship apparently safe in port.

### Would you Adam and Eve it?

The final connective thread I wish to present (rather than wholeheartedly propose) is a presence of the story of the fall in each of the cantos. Oddly enough, and I imagine purely coincidentally, the thirteenth *terzina* of each canto contains references, in varying degrees of strength, to the story in *Genesis*, however the presence is more general and I am certainly not arguing for a secret thirteenth *terzina* web of meaning, as alluring as that might be. *Paradiso* xiii is the most obvious and direct reference:

'Tu credi che nel petto onde la costa  
si trasse per formar la bella guancia  
il cui palato a tutto 'l mondo costa...'  
(*Par.*, xiii. 37–39)

[You believe that in the breast whence came the rib to form the lovely  
cheek whose palate is costly to all the world...]

The context is a discussion about Adam, Christ and Solomon, so the circumlocution used to refer to Adam is of interest as the details of the creation of Eve and allusive inclusion of the story of the fall are actually superfluous to the point at hand, but do very directly introduce the story of the temptation of Eve by the serpent.

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<sup>55</sup> On Pier and Boethius, Pastore Stocchi mentions Benvenuto's comment (*Pastore Stocchi*, pp. 419–21). Benvenuto, I, p. 441.

The mention of serpents in *Inferno* xiii is evident enough:

'Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi:  
ben dovebb' esser la tua man più pia,  
se state fossimo anime di serpi'. (*Inf.*, xiii. 37–39)

[We were men, and now we have become plants: truly your hand should be more merciful had we been the souls of serpents.]

The earliest mention of the story of the fall in connection with this verse appears to be by Lodovico Castelvetro in 1570, who makes much more sense of the reference by connecting it with *Genesis* 3.15: 'I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel'.<sup>56</sup> *Inferno* xiii has other connections with the *Genesis* story. The wood of the suicides is linked both with the 'selva oscura' [dark wood] (*Inf.*, i. 3) which opens the *Commedia*, and the only other wood in the poem, which is the actual Garden of Eden, the earthly Paradise, at the top of the mountain of Purgatory.<sup>57</sup> The voices Dante hears on entering the wood in *Inferno* xiii, which make him think there are people hiding, recall Adam and Eve hiding in the bushes after eating the fruit.<sup>58</sup>

Connecting *Purgatorio* xiii to this thread may be trickier, but there is a possible way ahead. This is the thirteenth *terzina*, which basically explains that 'invidia' [envy] is purged here:

E 'l buon maestro: 'Questo cinghio sferza  
la colpa de la invidia, e però sono  
tratte d'amor le corde de la ferza'. (*Purg.*, xiii. 37–39)

[And my good master: 'This circle whips the guilt of envy, and therefore the cords of the whip are braided of love'.]

Reading envy into the story of the fall is not difficult, but may well be a rather oblique path to say the least. However, we can find some texts to bolster this proposition. Commenting on *Inferno*, xiii. 66: 'morte commune

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56 'Se state fossimo anime di serpi. Riguarda la grande nemistà, che pose dio tra li serpi e 'l seme della donna, di che si parla nel genesi'. This is from a search of the Dartmouth Dante Project.

57 Noted by Boyde, p. 5.

58 Noted, amongst others, by Durling and Martinez, II, p. 221.

e de le corti vizio' [the common death and vice of courts], the fourteenth-century commentator Guglielmo Maramauro explains:

E questo dice però che Lucifer, vedendo che Dio avea creato Adam ed Eva per meterli al loco ove esso era stato caciato, per questa invidia esso argumentò de far peccare questi; e per lo dicto peccato, tuta la umana generatione meritò la morte.<sup>59</sup>

[And he says this because Lucifer, seeing that God had created Adam and Eve to put them in the place from which he had been chased out, because of this envy he [Lucifer] planned to make them sin; and for this sin the whole human race deserved death.]

The basis for this interpretation is scriptural, from the Book of *Wisdom*: 'But by the envy of the devil, death came into the world' (*Wisdom* 2.24), adding a further (and tenuous) link back to Solomon.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that this method of reading the *Commedia* highlights features of individual cantos which have hitherto gone unremarked or remained in the background. However, the question remains as to whether we are discovering connections and readings placed there intentionally by Dante or crossing a line between interpretation and creation. 'Would you Adam and Eve it?' I'm not sure.

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<sup>59</sup> Guglielmo Maramauro, *Expositione sopra L'Inferno di Dante Alligieri*, ed. by Pier Giacomo Pisoni and Saverio Bellomo (Padua: Antenore, 1998), p. 248.



# 14. The Patterning of History: Poetry, Politics and Adamic Renewal

Catherine M. Keen

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It is still an unusual endeavour to read Dante's *Commedia* in a systematically vertical manner, linking three single *canti* from *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* on the basis of numerical positioning, rather than following the extraordinarily well-determined linear pathway that Dante delineates for his narrative journey from Hell to Heaven. On first encounter with the *Commedia*, readers often feel directed towards horizontal rather than vertical approaches to a poem in which the exercise both of its writing and its reading are figured as linear progressions along tracks, pathways, or sea-routes. But the value of comparison and retrospection, to identify connections between episodes in different *canti* or *cantiche*, soon emerges. The narrative of the entire poem is, after all, cast as a recollection of lived experience in the protagonist-author's first-person voice, hence structurally retrospective from the outset. Its one hundred-canto, triple-*cantica* structure is clearly the product of complex planning, in which the unfolding assembly of parts and whole facilitates the establishment of parallels and echoes between its multiple elements.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Among studies that emphasize the importance of seeking parallels and retrospections when reading the *Commedia*, I have found especially productive the essays by Charles S. Singleton, 'The Vistas in Retrospect', *Modern Language Notes* 81.1 (1966), 55–80; Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Structural Retrospection in Dante's *Comedy*: The Case of *Purgatorio* xxvii', *Italian Studies* 41 (1986), 1–23 (especially pp. 2–3, 14–15, 23); and John Freccero, 'The Significance of *Terza Rima*', in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 258–71.



The exercise of vertical reading proposed in this series advances further questions about how patterns and intersections occur within Dante's poem. The alignment of *canti* on the single, strict criterion of number order creates its own discipline. This essay seeks to demonstrate that the spatial implications of the metaphor of vertical reading are, indeed, very apt to the Fourteens, where connecting all three of what initially appear to be somewhat disparate *canti* permits a new set of meanings to emerge, based around coordinates supplied individually within the three parts. Successively, *Inferno* xiv, *Purgatorio* xiv, and *Paradiso* xiv each open an atlas page on which north-south and east-west axes are laid out with topographical precision, matched morally and rhetorically by the coordinated temporal references that Dante plots to both secular and sacred history between the three same-numbered *canti*. Each canto of course offers its own mapping of moral concerns, consistent with its place within the horizontal narrative of the *Commedia*. But their vertical juxtaposition does more. The grandiose epic and scriptural dimensions evident in the poetry of *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xiv are at first sight out of scale with what look like rather parochial regional and genealogical surveys in *Purgatorio* xiv. Yet as this essay will show, this middle canto pays a form of attention to the minutiae of individual place, time, and personal biography that is central to Dante's understanding of how universal history links all humanity into the salvation narrative invoked more explicitly in the imagery of the Old and the New Adam in the infernal and paradisaical *canti*.

In the reading that follows, both direct and oblique instances of vertical connection between *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* xiv will be examined. The essay begins by examining some linguistic and aesthetic common points between the Fourteens, in their shared and contrasting uses of imagery of water and of light. It then presents a series of thematic reflections on the three *canti*'s readings of both secular and providential history, and of moralized terrestrial topography. Examining in turn the historical, rhetorical, and eschatological range of Dante's concerns within and between the three *canti*, it is my hope that the vertically ordered reading opens new vistas onto the real complementarity that can be discovered between the Fourteens.

## Water and Fire

Probably the most evident vertical connection that a reader will initially identify between the Fourteens (or two of them, at least) is a topographical one, given the prominence, in both *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, of river imagery.

Roughly half the space of both *canti* is occupied by the starkly moralized description of waterways. In *Inferno* xiv, we begin with a ‘picciol fiumicello’ [little stream] (l. 77) flowing through a stony channel in the circle of violence, which recalls the Bulicame, a natural thermal spring near Viterbo. In *Purgatorio*, river imagery begins with an unnamed ‘fiumicel’ [little stream] (l. 17), which rises in the Apennines and flows more than a hundred miles down to the sea. The two speeches will both unfold at some length before the two rivers, infernal Phlegethon and Tuscan Arno, are finally named. They open with almost identical locutions:

‘In mezzo mar siede un paese guasto’,  
diss’elli allora, ‘che s’appella Creta,  
sotto ’l cui rege fu già ’l mondo casto’. (*Inf.*, xiv. 94–96)

[‘In the midst of the sea lies a ruined land’, he said then, ‘called Crete,  
under whose king the world once was chaste’.]

E io: ‘Per mezza Toscana si spazia  
un fiumicel che nasce in Falterona,  
e cento miglia di corso nol sazia’. (*Purg.*, xiv. 16–18)

[And I: ‘Through the midst of Tuscany there flows a little stream that is  
born in Falterona, and a hundred miles of flowing do not sate it’.]

Besides their lexical and structural symmetries, equally notable is the way that each river episode begins by describing an apparently harmless *fiumicello*, but develops into unsettling, monstrous imagery as it follows the river from source to end. In *Purgatorio* xiv, the Arno flows down through a series of communities metamorphosed from the human to the bestial, as if through Circe’s black magic (l. 42).<sup>2</sup> The Arno’s known course clearly identifies these unnamed locales, each symbolized by a more unpleasant animal, from uncouth swine in the Casentino, to whining dogs in Arezzo, wolves in Florence, and in Pisa cheating foxes (ll. 43–54). Confirming the explicit moral allegory of the bestial imagery, it has been noted since the

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2 Notably, the second part of the canto also uses rivers as important regional denominators, naming the Po and the Reno as the upper and lower boundaries of the protagonists’ region of origin, lying ‘tra ’l Po e ’l monte e la marina e ’l Reno’ [between the Po and the mountain and the sea and the Reno] (l. 92).

early commentaries that the Arno's 'maladetta e sventurata fossa' [cursed and baleful furrow] (l. 51) follows a scale of descending vices that matches the stratification of sin in *Inferno*, as it passes from swinish incontinence, through lupine force, to vulpine fraud.<sup>3</sup>

As for the rivers of Hell itself, in *Inferno* xiv they too follow a downward flow that is figured as both physically and morally degenerative. The Phlegethon has a sufficiently sinister appearance, with its sulphurous, boiling similarity to the Bulicame, and waters red with blood. As Virgil explains, it forms part of a continuous system of four rivers flowing through Hell (ll. 115–20): the Styx, Acheron, Phlegethon, and Cocytus, all names borrowed from classical poetry, including Virgil's own *Aeneid*. As noted above, before the rivers are named, a long circumlocution explains their origin in the familiar earthly world, on Crete's Mount Ida (ll. 94–114). Yet although the locale and mechanics of the river system's source are earthly, they are also uncanny. The bloody waters of the Phlegethon have their source in another bodily fluid: the tears weeping from the statue of an Old Man, hidden in a cave on the island of Crete. The tears flow not from the statue's eyes, but from wounds perforating its body, in a parody of the redemptive flow of blood from the wounds of Christ at the Crucifixion: 'Ciascuna parte, fuor che l'oro, è rotta / d'una fessura che lagrime goccia' [Each part of him, except his golden head, is broken by a crack that drips tears] (ll. 112–13).<sup>4</sup> The image carries a reminder that all the pain of souls in Hell has its origins in their sinful actions on earth. Within a vertical reading, there is also a parallel between the weeping wounds of *Inferno* xiv's Cretan statue, producing the rivers of Hell, and the weeping, wounded eyes of

3 Fourteenth-century commentators who highlight the infernal qualities of the Arno's description include Pietro Alighieri, Francesco da Buti, and the author of the *Chiose Vernon*. Commentaries consulted via the *Dartmouth Dante Project* (<http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu/reader>, later cited as *DDP*). See Gabriele Muresu for an incisive study of the canto's bestiary imagery, in *I ladri di Malebolge. Saggi di semantica dantesca* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990), pp. 51–82.

4 In a familiar medieval theological image, Christ's wounds themselves cured the wounded nature of postlapsarian humanity. See Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 35–36. Georges Güntert stresses that the water and blood flowing in the Phlegethon are also both materials of renewal in Christian theology — the water of baptism and the blood of the Crucifixion and the Eucharist. See 'Canto XIV', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis: Inferno*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2000), pp. 193–205 (p. 199); his interpretation moderates the perhaps overly broad statement of the baptismal significance of the infernal rivers and their source proposed by Anthony K. Cassell, *Dante's Fearful Art of Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 60–61, 65.

Guido del Duca, who produces the polluted, infernal image of the Arno in *Purgatorio* xiv.

The infernal rivers' relentless downward flow from the fissures in the statue make a single interconnected system out of, not only the abyss of Hell, but of the whole Mediterranean above ground, where Crete lies *in mezzo mare*. If the landscape imagery in the whole circle of the violent forms a negative counterpart to earthly landscape phenomena — sterile bushes in the wood of the suicides, the desert and rain of fire of blasphemy, the blood-filled Phlegethon — this reversal of natural order is consolidated in the Old Man image. Hell's rivers, in exact opposition to earthly ones, have their origins in salt waters and flow downwards into ice, in the frozen lake of Cocytus; whereas rivers in the human world rise in icy mountain regions and flow towards the salt sea. Nonetheless, at the end of the canto, a brief allusion to the fifth river of the classical afterlife, Lethe, reminds us that the flow of water can, and should, cleanse as well as contaminate:

'Letè vedrai, ma fuor di questa fossa,  
là dove vanno l'anime a lavarsi  
quando la colpa pentuta è rimossa'. (*Inf.*, xiv. 136–38)

[Lethe you will see, but outside this ditch, there where the souls go to be washed once their repented guilt has been removed.]

If the mountain island of Crete is the well-spring for Hell's rivers of pain, Dante will also provide a counter-balancing image in Purgatory of a mountain island where the Lethe rises with pristine Edenic origins, and produces consolation.<sup>5</sup>

The second part of *Inferno* xiv is dominated by this discussion of infernal rivers and their strange earthly origins, but the canto opens with another reversal of natural order, in a snowfall of flakes of fire:

Sovra tutto 'l sabbion, d'un cader lento,  
piovean di foco dilatate falde,  
come di neve in alpe senza vento. (*Inf.*, xiv. 28–30)

[Over all the sand there rained, with a slow falling, broad flakes of fire, like snow in the mountains without wind.]

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5 See Ambrogio Camozzi, 'Il Veglio di Creta alla luce di Matelda: Una lettura comparativa di *Inferno* xiv e *Purgatorio* xxviii', *The Italianist* 29 (2009), 3–49 (pp. 22–25).

The expressive beauty of the *terzina*, with its paradoxical image of fiery snow, carries direct echoes of lines from the love poetry of Guido Cavalcanti, and from a lyric sestina of Dante's own, as well as from earlier Italian love poets.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the image stresses the implacable flow of the flames, falling downwards in contradiction of the elemental nature of fire; while the silence of a true snowfall is inverted by the endless noise generated by the sinners' hands slapping at their burnt skin, sound and motion recalling the rhythms of a dance or *tresca* (and the *terzina's* sound-pattern here mimetically shifts from sweet lyricism to a harsher, consonant-heavy tone):

Sanza riposo mai era la tresca  
de le misere mani, or quindi or quinci  
escotendo da sé l'arsura fresca. (*Inf.*, xiv. 40–42)

[Without any rest ever was the dancing of their wretched hands, brushing away the fresh burning, now from there, now from here.]

The continuous shifting movement of the flakes of fire, and of those sinners capable of motion, contrasts starkly with the immobility of this canto's only named sinner, Capaneus. Like the statue of the Old Man, Capaneus is gigantic in size;<sup>7</sup> there is a compelling symmetry to the physical inertia of the two huge bodies that dominate the two halves of the canto. Capaneus retains violent energy in voice and thought, in spite of physical immobility. He shouts out defiantly persistent blasphemy, addressing the God of Dante's Christian universe with the pagan name of 'Giove' [Jove] (l. 52). Morally speaking, however, this vehemence is itself paralysed. There is a rigid continuity of rejection in the perfect rhetorical antithesis of his self-condemnation: 'Qual io fui vivo, tal son morto' ['As I was alive, so am I dead'] (l. 51). His physical immobility matches his internal, frozen determination

6 Guido Cavalcanti: 'bianca neve scender senza venti' [white snow falling when no wind blows] (*Biltà di donna e di saccente core*, 6); Dante: 'cade in bianca falda / di fredda neve' [falls in white flakes of chill snow] (*Rime*, 9, 20–21). See John A. Scott, 'Canto xiv: Capaneus and the Old Man of Crete', in *Lectura Dantis: Inferno*, ed. by Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn and Charles Ross (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 185–95 (p. 187); Massimiliano Malavasi, 'Canto XIV. Limiti e altezza dell'etica dei laici', in *Lectura Dantis Romana. Cento canti per cento anni. 1. Inferno. 1. Canti I–XVII*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno, 2013), pp. 424–58 (pp. 431–32); Emilio Bigi, *Forme e significati nella Divina Commedia* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1981), pp. 87–88.

7 In Statius's *Thebaid*, Capaneus' immense height is commented on frequently, including in the death scene directly recalled here, x. 897–xi. 20.

to maintain rejection and contempt for God, never shifting from his stifling pride and rage.<sup>8</sup> Both Capaneus's speech of defiance, and Virgil's forceful denunciation of his crimes, fill their dialogue with a vocabulary of sin and anger that closes the episode with expressions rhetorically opposite to the lyrical opening lines on snow and fire.<sup>9</sup>

The fire imagery of *Inferno* xiv, like that of its rivers, can be matched with elements in a vertical partner canto, this time in *Paradiso*. *Paradiso* xiv offers exceptionally frequent references to light and fire: there are at least forty separate uses of the vocabulary of light in the canto, with words such as 'luce' [light] used three times, 'raggio' [ray or radiance] four times, and 'lume' [light] five times.<sup>10</sup> Each of the canto's two planetary heavens is identified by a single atmospheric colour: intense brightness in the Sun, and flaming red in Mars. Against these light-filled backgrounds, the souls are perceived individually as single, more intensely glowing, sparks of light. Solomon tells how the lightning-bright intensity of the souls in their current state ('questo folgór che già ne cerchia', l. 55) will be kindled to greater intensity, like flame from coal, after the Last Judgement ('sì come carbon che fiamma rende', l. 52).<sup>11</sup> Collectively, the flame-like spirits cluster into fixed forms that symbolically reveal something of each group's special virtues. In the Sun, the souls of the wise draw together around Dante-pilgrim and Beatrice in circles. From one circle in canto x, to two in xii, and finally here in xiv a Trinitarian third, the souls flow into fixed geometrical forms that nonetheless leaves each of them a joyful freedom of movement, in a wheeling dance.<sup>12</sup> The heavenly round-dance composed of 'sempiterne

8 The element of pride, the paradigmatic root of sin, in Capaneus's damnation, is stressed by numerous commentators. See Bigi, pp. 88–92 and Güntert, p. 202.

9 Mario Marti stresses this rhetorical negative emphasis, arguing that Dante's Capaneus lacks the *magnanimitas* of the Statian epic source. See Mario Marti, 'Canto XIV', in *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana. Inferno*, ed. by Pompeo Giannantonio (Naples: Loffredo, 1986), pp. 243–58 (pp. 249–51). Malavasi also discusses magnanimity, in a detailed reading of the passage's ethical values and linguistic tenor (Malavasi, pp. 436–42).

10 On light imagery, see Muresu, *I ladri di Malebolge*, pp. 169–71; Edoardo Soprano, 'Canto xiv', in *Lectura Dantis Scaligera* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1971), pp. 479–504; and Carlo Sini, 'Canti xiii–xiv: Salamone e il cielo della luce', in *Esperimenti danteschi. Paradiso 2010*, ed. by Tommaso Montorfano (Genoa: Marietti, 2010), pp. 157–68.

11 On light imagery for the paradisaical souls, see Marco Ariani, 'Abyssus Luminis: Dante e la veste di luce', *Rivista di letteratura italiana* 11 (1993), 9–71; and Manuele Gagnolati, 'Paradiso xiv e il desiderio del corpo', *Studi Danteschi* 78 (2013), 285–309 (295–97). Ariani suggests that Solomon's *carbone* may have a double meaning as carbuncle/ruby as well as coal (pp. 33–41).

12 The dance simile is introduced in x. 79–81, and the circling movements of the souls are described here at xiv. 19–24 and 67–78.

fiamme' [sempiternal flames] (l. 66), accompanied by melodious choral singing (ll. 31–33), almost perfectly inverts the flame-tormented *tresca* and sound of hands slapping flesh from *Inferno* xiv.

In Mars, the souls form the shape of the cross, maintaining its perfect fixed symmetry even when they move around the form, as Dante describes with two similes: first comparing the whole cross to the celestial grandeur of the Milky Way (ll. 97–102); and second describing the single souls as glittering like motes in a sunbeam (ll. 109–17). The fixed new constellation of the cross in the Heaven of Mars is thus also a shimmering cluster of individual lights, the souls of holy warriors who died in service of the 'venerabil segno' [venerable sign] (l. 101). Between these two similes, there falls a vision that is also expressed in light imagery, appearing with the suddenness and transience of a lightning flash:

Qui vince la memoria mia lo 'ngegno;  
ché quella croce lampeggiava Cristo,  
sì ch'io non so trovare essempro degno;  
ma chi prende sua croce e segue Cristo,  
ancor mi scuserà di quel ch'io lasso,  
vedendo in quell'albor balenar Cristo. (*Par.*, xiv. 103–08)

[Here my memory outstrips my wit, for that cross flashed forth Christ, and I cannot find a worthy comparison, but whoever takes up his cross and follows Christ, will yet excuse me for what I must leave out, seeing in that whiteness the blazing forth of Christ.]

The triple repetition of Christ's name in self-rhyming sequence stresses the separateness of this momentary vision against the more continuous and meditative contemplation of the cross and its individual flame-like souls.

## Poetry and History

In the Heaven of Mars, the fixed icon of the cross and the momentary vision of the Crucifixion form part of an engagement with ideas about the history of redemption that run through *Paradiso* xiv as a whole. The canto covers a long arc of human history. In the Heaven of the Sun, Solomon, wise king of the Old Testament, speaks about the Last Judgement and the final resurrection of humanity in the flesh in the far distant future. In Mars, the vision of Christ on the cross stresses the doctrine of redemption, looking

back to humanity's original Fall in Adam and Eve, with the consequent need for atonement. Two other pivotal moments in redemption history are also explicitly cited in the canto. Solomon's 'voce modesta' [modest voice] recalls Gabriel's annunciation of Christ's incarnation (ll. 35–36), in the *sermo humilis* of biblical rhetoric, in his meditation on the universal re-incarnation of humanity at the Last Judgement.<sup>13</sup> The words 'Resurgi' and 'Vinci' ['Arise' and 'Conquer'] (l. 125) in the hymn of praise that follows the vision of Christ crucified clearly allude to the Resurrection in which Adamic sin and death were conquered.<sup>14</sup> It is an apt motto for the holy warriors who have 'taken up their crosses and followed Christ': in the biblical passages that provide the source for this phrase, which Dante translates exactly at line 106, the following verse tells how 'he that shall lose his life for me, shall find it' (*Matthew* 10.39), as in martyrdom and crusade.<sup>15</sup> Overall, the canto's punctuated series of allusions to death, atonement, resurrection, and judgement offers continuous echoes of Saint Paul in *i Corinthians* 15, with his central emphasis on the Resurrection as the foundation of Christian faith.

Just as much as *Paradiso* xiv is densely packed with allusions to Scripture and the *sermo humilis*, and rooted in a sense of biblical time, so the other two Fourteens each focus on a distinctive textual style and historical time period. In the case of *Purgatorio* xiv, this is the time of Dante's immediate historical past and present. The canto's two souls, Guido del Duca and Rinieri da Calboli, demonstrate a minutely analytical concern with the local history of Tuscany and Romagna over not much more than a hundred-year period.<sup>16</sup>

The Arno speech focuses on the present (that is, the spring of 1300), using present tenses throughout, even in its closing prophecy of the treacherous government of Florence by Rinieri's grandson in 1303. This event, future to the *Commedia's* time-scale but past to Dante at the time of *Purgatorio's* composition, is also presented with the present tense 'Io veggio' [I see]

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13 Sini, pp. 167–68; and Gragnolati, pp. 299–300.

14 Soprano, pp. 497–98.

15 'And he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life, shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for me, shall find it' (*Matthew* 10.38–39). The same words recur in *Matthew* 16.24–25, *Mark* 8.34–35, and *Luke* 9.23–24. Vulgate translations from the Douai-Reims text of *The Holy Bible: Translated from the Latin Vulgate* (London: Burns and Oates, 1914).

16 Guido del Duca (c.1170–1250) and Rinieri da Calboli (c.1226–96) were close contemporaries, both from the Romagna region.



(l. 58) of prophecy.<sup>17</sup> But although this prolongs the timespan, predicting that this period's ruinous consequences will extend 'di qui a mille anni' [a thousand years from now] (l. 65), the canto's primary historical emphasis remains focused on a narrow circle of space and time. The whole second part of the canto, with its survey of the Romagna region, is couched rhetorically as an elegiac *ubi sunt?*, cataloguing the transitory glamour of the region's noble families, and underpinned by precise knowledge of the intricacies of their family trees and the politics of marriage alliances and inheritance. The speech thus combines two rhetorical figures beloved of medieval moralistic poetry, *ubi sunt?* and *enumeratio*, listing nineteen separate names of Romagnolo people and places in just twenty-six lines (ll. 97–123).<sup>18</sup> The theme of decline, and the list of names, recalls the vernacular lyric form of the *sirventese*, typically concerned with current affairs or social morality, often with a satirical inflection.<sup>19</sup> Guido's indignation alternates with a more melancholic tone, which crystallizes in the sole *terzina* in the sequence that lacks a proper name:

le donne e ' cavalier, li affanni e li agi  
che ne 'nvogliava amore e cortesia  
là dove i cuor son fatti sì malvagi. (*Purg.*, xiv. 109–11)

[the ladies and the knights, the labours and the leisures that love and courtesy made us desire, there where hearts have become so wicked.]

Here the lament invokes another literary register, that of vernacular chivalric romance and love poetry, in which *amore e cortesia* are central themes.<sup>20</sup> The rhetorical tenor of the canto's entire second half thus matches its temporal emphasis: local, vernacular, contemporary frames of reference

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17 Gianni Grana, 'Canto XIV', in *Lectura Dantis Scaligeri. Purgatorio* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1971), pp. 479–535 (p. 515). Muresu also notes prophetic tones earlier in the passage: 'degnò / ben è che 'l nome di tal valle pèra' [it is surely fitting that the name of that valley perish] (ll. 29–30), recalling *Job* 18.17 (pp. 55–57).

18 Grana discusses the bravura rhetorical construction of Guido's speech (Grana, pp. 519–24).

19 The influence of lyric *sirventese* is suggested by several recent commentators, including Chiavacci Leonardi, Giacalone, and Bosco and Reggio.

20 Robin Kirkpatrick offers a magisterial reflection on the importance of *cortesia* to the construction of the whole canto. See Robin Kirkpatrick, 'Courtesy and Imagination: A Study of *Purgatorio* Canto XIV', *The Modern Language Review* 76 (1981), 67–80. See also Salvatore Accardo, *Capitoli Danteschi* (Rome: Bonacci, 1976), pp. 73–75; Muresu, pp. 74–81.

establish the historical and literary register as that of the medieval present and recent past. The first half of the canto, besides its traces of prophetic diction, likewise adopts a distinctive contemporary tone in its rhetoric of invective; while its allusion to Ovid's Circe as the source for the imagery of metamorphosed cities fits the fourteenth-century taste for moral allegorisation of the classics, attested by the commentaries of Arnulf of Orleans, John of Garland, and many others, and by the vernacular *Ovide Moralisé*.<sup>21</sup>

If *Paradiso* xiv's rhetorical emphasis is scriptural, and *Purgatorio* xiv's contemporary and Italian, *Inferno* xiv is strongly embedded within a framework of classical allusions, both historical and literary. Capaneus's opening words, describing his death from Jove's punitive thunderbolt, closely paraphrase the relevant episode from Statius's *Thebaid*.<sup>22</sup> The description of the underworld's rivers likewise derives from Latin epic, in the *katabasis* of *Aeneid* vi. The small deviation concerning Lethe permits Dante-poet to demonstrate his perfect familiarity with ancient authorities, even as Dante-pilgrim's question also briefly opens a larger perspective onto the profound way that Christianity has transformed human conceptions of the afterlife, when the river is reassigned to Purgatory.

Capaneus and the Phlegethon are both posited as materially present in this circle of Dante's Hell; but descriptions and similes bring numerous other classical reference points into view by allusion.<sup>23</sup> The burning desert sands bring comparison with Cato's desert campaigns in Lucan's *Pharsalia* (l. 15);<sup>24</sup> the snowflakes of fire, a reference to Alexander the Great's Indian conquests (ll. 31–39).<sup>25</sup> Equally, Virgil's description of the Old Man statue

21 Bodo Guthmüller, 'Canto XIV', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Purgatorio*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2001), pp. 211–24 (p. 216); Accardo, pp. 67–70.

22 Capaneus's speech, 52–60, recapitulates several key elements of *Thebaid* x. 897–910.

23 Elisabetta Tarantino identifies an elaborate and precise set of intertextual references to Virgil, Lucan, and Ovid, as well as Statius, underpinning both the canto's literary classicism, and its satirically-inflected but deeply serious theological concerns. See Elisabetta Tarantino, 'Fulvae Harenae: The Reception of an Intertextual Complex in Dante's *Inferno*', *Classical Receptions Journal* 4 (2012), 90–126.

24 The mention of Cato is elliptical, but the term *veglio*, used for the Cretan statue here and for Cato in *Purg.*, i. 31, suggests a wider relationship, for which see Mazzotta's ample discussion, pp. 14–65 (especially pp. 37, 60–65).

25 Dante's source is probably Albertus Magnus's *De meteoris*. Brenda Deen Schildgen points out that the Alexander elliptically mentioned here has elements of the hubristic Capaneus or Ulysses, in overstepping the divine boundary of the Ganges into a zone unfit for human habitation. See Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Dante and the Orient* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 97–98. See also Tarantino, pp. 104–05.

on Crete opens with a dense sequence of classical allusions.<sup>26</sup> In describing Crete as a site 'sotto 'l cui rege fu già 'l mondo casto' [under whose king the world once was chaste] (l. 96), Dante recalls the opening passage of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where Saturn is king of a Golden Age of justice. (Virgil's fourth eclogue opens with the same Golden Age legend.) In Ovid, the Golden Age is followed by increasingly corrupt ages of silver, bronze, and iron, a sequence of metals also followed in the body of the *gran veglio* statue (ll. 106–11). Finally, the metamorphosis of Crete from a fertile land 'lieta / d'acqua e di fronde' [happy with water and foliage] (ll. 97–98) into a 'paese guasto' [ruined land] (l. 94) recalls the *Aeneid's* account of how plague and famine cut short the Trojans' attempt at Cretan settlement, driving them onward to Italy.

The textual and historical emphases of the Fourteens could thus be stratified as follows: *Inferno* xiv is shaped primarily by involvement with the literature and history of pagan antiquity; *Purgatorio* xiv is preoccupied with contemporary Italian local history and the intricacies of current affairs, adopting the language predominantly of medieval satire and invective; while *Paradiso* xiv highlights the biblical *sermo humilis* and offers a scriptural, Christocentric survey of history encompassing the whole arc of human experience, from the Adamic Fall to the far future of the Last Judgement, and giving special emphasis to the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ in the flesh on earth.

## The Old Man of Crete and Redemption History

This is not to say that there is not inevitably a mixture of classical, contemporary, and scriptural elements within individual *canti*, even if one of these aspects proves preponderant. In *Inferno* xiv, for instance, although Dante-poet underlines the classical derivation of his images both of the rain of fire and of the Old Man statue, they also inevitably evoke episodes from the Bible. In the former case, the circle of the violent against God has been earlier identified by Virgil as housing the sinners of 'Sodoma e Caorsa / e chi, spregiando Dio col cor, favella' [Sodom and Cahors and whoever speaks with scorn of God in his heart] (*Inf.*, xi. 50–51). Although Sodom is not mentioned in xiv, the rain of fire irresistibly recalls how 'the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrha brimstone and fire from the Lord

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26 Summaries in Scott, p. 189; and Malavasi, p. 445.

out of heaven' (*Genesis* 19.24–25). The comparison of Phlegethon to the sulphurous Bulicame springs, and their association with 'le peccatrici' (l. 80) — according to early commentators, prostitutes who used the spring for bathing or washing<sup>27</sup> — further extends the implied allusions to the story of Sodom, and the creation of the sulphurous Dead Sea in punishment for sexual sin.

Likewise, despite the classicising surface referents in Virgil's speech, he describes the Old Man of Crete with details that almost perfectly match a source in the Old Testament book of *Daniel*. Divine revelation enables Daniel to interpret correctly the mysterious dream of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon:

Thou, O king, sawest, and behold there was as it were a great statue: this statue, which was great and high, tall of stature, stood before thee, and the look thereof was terrible. The head of this statue was of fine gold, but the breast and the arms of silver, and the belly and the thighs of brass. And the legs of iron, the feet part of iron and part of clay. (*Daniel* 2.31–33)

Daniel reveals that this symbolizes the golden period of Nebuchadnezzar's own reign, his succession by weaker kings, and the fragmentation of his territories, until finally:

the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed [...] and itself shall stand for ever. (*Daniel* 2.44)

The historico-political elements of the biblical prophecy, with the succession of kingdoms through gold, silver, bronze, and iron, match so well with the Ovidian myth of the Golden Age, that Dante's Old Man image has long been read in similar vein. The statue's different metals are taken to represent different epochs, either running from Adam (the prelapsarian golden head) through Noah, Abraham, Moses, to the sinful present;<sup>28</sup> or from Saturn, through the empires of the Medes and Persians, of Alexander, of Rome, again up to the present.<sup>29</sup> The feet of clay and iron fit Dante's well-known obsession with the division of authority between the papacy

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27 See, for example, Jacopo della Lana, Ottimo, Boccaccio and Benvenuto da Imola.

28 A succession of ages dominated by biblical figures is favoured by Jacopo Alighieri, the Ottimo, and several other early commentators.

29 A classical or secular series of leaders or empires, in varying combinations, is suggested by Bambaglioli, Jacopo della Lana, Guido da Pisa, Pietro Alighieri, and several others. See Malavasi, pp. 446–47.

and the empire, the statue's imbalance indicating the evils of contemporary papal corruption.<sup>30</sup>

The confluence of the political prophecy in *Daniel* with the Golden Age legend of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is suggestive. The story of the Old Man may well be intended to awaken ideas about the succession of historical time, and the rise and fall of ages or empires. Yet as Mario Marti notes *à propos Inferno* xiv, Dante's allegorical passages tend towards polysemanticism, including many possible layers of meaning within a single poetic element.<sup>31</sup> Another potential meaning of the statue is clarified by the practice of vertical reading, when *Inferno* xiv is brought alongside *Paradiso* xiv. This is the hypothesis, first proposed by Giovanni Busnelli, that the Old Man of Crete is a symbol of postlapsarian humanity, the *homo vetus* or *primus Adam* corrupted by sin.<sup>32</sup> In the mystical language of *i Corinthians*, Christ's death and resurrection made this Old Adam into the *homo novus*, or *novissimus Adam* (*i Corinthians* 15.20–28, 45–49).<sup>33</sup> In this ethico-religious interpretation, the composite body of the statue represents the vitiation of original human perfection by the wounds of sin, whereby free will (golden) may be corruptly exercised in four ways in fallen man: ignorance and error wound the silver of reason, malice the bronze of will, infirmity the irascible appetite (iron) and cupidity the concupiscent appetite (clay).<sup>34</sup> The categories of sin, divided between indulgence of incontinent appetite, violent exercise of the will, and fraudulent corruption of reason, also correlate with the structural organization of the whole of Dante's Hell.

The allegory of the *gran veglio* in *Inferno* xiv thus generates parallels and echoes with the vision of Christ on the cross in *Paradiso* xiv. A vertical

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30 Fourteenth-century commentators almost unanimously see the clay foot as representing the corruption of the Church (often citing the Donation of Constantine), regardless of how they interpret the statue's other elements.

31 Marti, pp. 251–54, 257.

32 Giovanni Busnelli, 'La concezione dantesca del gran Veglio di Creta', in *L'Etica Nicomachea e l'ordinamento morale dell'Inferno di Dante* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1907), pp. 159–91.

33 Mazzotta (pp. 23–37) reviews and extends this conception of the statue as a figure of the *homo vetus*, requiring redemption, and notes that Dante's omission of the dream's ending, when the statue is destroyed without human intervention (*Daniel* 2.34–35), makes its negative connotations more overt. Malavasi (pp. 449–53) and Camozzi (pp. 18–24), both explore symmetries between this episode and *Purgatorio's* earthly Paradise sequence. Cassell (pp. 57–65) extends the Old and New Adam symbolism to argue for baptismal allegory in the statue's wounds.

34 Busnelli follows an allegorical scheme derived from Richard of St Victor and Thomas Aquinas. See Busnelli, pp. 178–84 (the wounded elements) and pp. 184–88 (the intact golden head). See also Scott, pp. 193–95; Güntert, p. 202; and Bigi, pp. 96–100.

reading of both reveals how symmetrically *i Corinthians* underpins the *Inferno* canto as well as the *Paradiso*. Paul's words on the Old Adam and the New Adam (*i Corinthians* 15.22), and on the victory of Christ over death and sin (*i Corinthians* 15.55–57), clearly inform the language and imagery both of the Old Man of Crete passage and of Solomon's discourse on the Resurrection of the flesh. The same Pauline passage also closes with a prophecy on the Last Judgement and Kingdom of Heaven that echoes the Messianic prophecy of God's future kingdom in Daniel's gloss to Nebuchadnezzar's dream:

The God of heaven hath given thee [Nebuchadnezzar] a kingdom, and strength, and power, and glory. [...] But [...] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed [...], and itself shall stand for ever. (*Daniel* 2.37, 44)

Afterwards the end: when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God and the Father: when he shall have brought to nought all principality and power and virtue. (*i Corinthians* 15.24)<sup>35</sup>

The Old and New Testament passages were already linked in exegetical tradition: Dante enriches this connection with his mirroring of the Pauline themes of the Old and New Adam, transmuted via his poetic images of the *gran veglio* in *Inferno* and the lightning-flash vision of Christ in *Paradiso*.

Yet the political or historical potential of the *Inferno's* overt classical intertexts with Virgil and Ovid is not overturned by this pairing: the polysemous text generates meanings by accretion, rather than elimination. The classical legend of the Golden Age was indeed already well established with Christological meaning thanks to Messianic readings of Virgil's fourth eclogue, with its opening reference to the return of Justice and a renewed age of Saturn. Dante cites and translates the eclogue's opening lines in *Purgatorio*, xxii. 70–72, appropriating Virgil's historical and imperial poem into a text that converted Statius-character, through its fit with the evangelization of the early Christians (*Purg.*, xxii. 79–81). The historical Statius is also vividly present in *Inferno* xiv, as author of the *Thebaid* and source for Dante's Capaneus. So the Virgil and Statius whose epic poetry provides so much of the classicising surface patterning of *Inferno* xiv can be drawn into a wider relationship that embraces their function as protagonists

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35 Paul's text also draws on a second passage from *Daniel* relating to the dream of the four beasts and the Last Judgement (*Daniel* 7.14, 27).

within Dante's own poem. The flash-forward to *Purgatorio* xxi–xxii further underlines the creative outcomes of cross-reading classical and scriptural texts, a process that Dante claims effected Statius's conversion.

## Geography and Eschatology

Each of the Fourteens, in its own way, brings to attention concerns with the problem of conflict within the political sphere. Through the figure of Capaneus, *Inferno* xiv showcases the story of Thebes, with the fraternal conflict that led to the war of the seven Greek kings against the doomed city. Additionally, political readings of the Old Man statue make it a symbol of the successive rise and fall of great kingdoms, biblical or classical. *Purgatorio* xiv gives us a close-up analysis of regions, cities, and families where internal rivalry and faction-based alliances have brought devastation to contemporary Italy, turning Tuscany into a metaphorical sewer and Romagna into an imaginary wasteland. *Paradiso* xiv offers a view of warfare sanctified by faith, and begins to explore the paradox that violence, so destructive in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* xiv, can serve the cause of peace and unification within a universal Christendom.

The interest Dante shows in all three *canti* concerning political conflict is further underscored by considering their shared emphasis on topography. Like the theme of the Old and New Adam, this is something that perhaps emerges best from the retrospective viewpoint of *Paradiso*. From here, one can see that several leading images in the three *canti* have sketched an intriguing to-and-fro between the symbolic compass points of east and west.

*Paradiso* gives us the principal city of the medieval western imagination of the east: Jerusalem. In Dante's afterworld geography, Jerusalem lies at the antipodes to Mount Purgatory and Eden; and he follows medieval convention in placing the city at the central meeting-point of the three known continents of the northern hemisphere, as *umbilicus orbis*. Solomon, builder of Jerusalem's first Jewish Temple, dominates the first half of *Paradiso* xiv, in the Heaven of the Sun. In the second half comes the vision of Christ, who spoke of his crucifixion as the destruction of the Temple (*John* 2:19–21), and whose tomb in Jerusalem was the primary goal of medieval Europe's pilgrims and crusaders. The presence of the crusader Cacciaguida throughout *canti* xv–xvii means that the entire Mars sequence privileges Jerusalem. Cacciaguida's story also serves to underline a second primary

characteristic of crusade: that it was launched from west to east, sanctioned by the Church of Rome and led by the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>36</sup>

From Jerusalem, the Fourteens also look further eastwards, to Babylon. According to Old Testament history, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Solomon's Temple, and carried its treasures to Babylon (*ii Kings* 25–26). The captive Jews deported to Assyria included the prophet Daniel. This makes a vertical link between the scriptural history of Solomon and Jerusalem in the first part of *Paradiso* xiv, and the biblical allusions in the second part of *Inferno* xiv, with the Old Man statue. The statue itself has a significant orientation, being set along a roughly east-west axis:

che tien volte le spalle inver' Dammiata  
e Roma guarda come s'io specchio. (*Inf.*, xiv. 104–05)

[with his back towards Damietta, looking toward Rome as to his mirror.]

In some of the early commentaries, Damietta — an Egyptian port on the Nile delta — is glossed as Babylon, the Bible's supreme example of hostility to Jerusalem and the chosen people.<sup>37</sup> The reading gives obvious moral symbolism to the statue's gaze, looking away from the east towards the west and Rome, the city of both ecclesiastical and imperial greatness (but which is also the new Babylon of Augustine's *City of God*).<sup>38</sup> The orientation of Dante's statue thus asserts the supremacy of the Roman church and the states of western Christendom, whilst also recalling the crusading impetus towards the east and Jerusalem that focused on capturing the city from its Muslim (typologically 'Babylonian') rulers.

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36 The warriors named in *Par.*, xviii. 37–48, however, recall the very broad reach of medieval crusade activity: only Godfrey de Bouillon and Cacciaguida were in Palestine; Charlemagne and Roland fought in Iberia; William of Orange and Renouard in southern France; and Robert Guiscard in southern Italy.

37 In, for example, Jacopo Alighieri, Jacopo della Lana. Benvenuto da Imola follows them in noting Dante's intention to allude to the Assyrian Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar, though he finds Dante's historical geography faulty: 'autor videtur hic facere eundem errorem, quem videtur fecisse in *v* capitulo, scilicet quod capit Babyloniam AEgypti pro Babylonia magna antiqua' [here the author is seen in the same error as in canto *v*, that is, he takes Babylon in Egypt for the great Babylon of ancient times] (*DDP*). But compare Camozzi (pp. 4–5) on the contemporary fame of Damietta as a major Muslim port and crusade objective.

38 The Rome-Orient symbolism functions politically, as alluding to the *translatio imperii* with Aeneas from Troy to Rome, and religiously, with the Jewish Exodus from Egypt to Jerusalem fulfilled, for western Christendom, in the establishment of the papacy at Rome. See Scott, pp. 189–90, 194.



Crete, meanwhile, located mid-Mediterranean *in mezzo mare*, was the umbilical point of ancient Rome's legendary geography; the site of Saturn's just kingdom in the Golden Age. The statue, with its Old Adam associations, is thus located at the symbolic centre of a pagan, postlapsarian topography. The reference to Lethe at the end of *Inferno* xiv however displaces this pagan world view, and looks towards the new geographic centre-points of Dante's Christian afterworld. The true centre-points of the southern and northern hemispheres will prove, respectively, to be the prelapsarian Eden of Mount Purgatory, and the redemptive Jerusalem lying at the junction of the three known continents.<sup>39</sup>

The grand east-west and north-south sweep of the imagined geographies of these two Fourteens thus matches the ambition of their literary relationships with classical epic and biblical sources, and the regal splendour of their allusions to Solomon, Capaneus, Alexander, Nebuchadnezzar, and the rest. The exercise of vertical reading, however, requires a return to *Purgatorio* xiv, to different and salutary effect. There is conflict here, and east-west geography: but on the localized scale of the Italian regions. Romagna and Tuscany lie on the opposing eastern and western sides of the Apennine range that runs down the centre of the Italian peninsula. According to Guido del Duca, in the years around 1300 both regions were suffering the violent consequences of failed leadership; while his single portrait of a figure who crosses between east and west, the Forlivese Fulcieri da Calboli, portrays him as a butcher motivated only by greed and prejudice. Dante's acute sensitivity to contemporary politics makes his portrait of Fulcieri chillingly unforgettable:<sup>40</sup>

'Io veggio tuo nepote che diventa  
cacciator di quei lupi in su la riva  
del fiero fiume, e tutti li sgomenta.  
Vende la carne loro essendo viva;  
poscia li ancide come antica belva;  
molti di vita e sé di pregio priva.

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39 Camozzi, pp. 11–14, 26–28; and Malavasi, p. 452. Matelda's comment that the ancient poets' notion of the Golden Age was perhaps a dream of Eden (*Purg.*, xxviii. 139–42) in part confirms this radical relocation of universal moral topography.

40 It is worth remembering that Fulcieri's actions in Florence reconfirmed the supremacy of Dante's own historical political opponents, strengthening the improbability of ending his exile.

Sanguinoso esce de la trista selva;  
lasciala tal, che di qui a mille anni  
ne lo stato primaio non si rinselva'. (*Purg.*, xiv. 58–66)

[I see your nephew become the hunter of those wolves along the bank of the fierce river, and he terrifies them all. He sells their flesh while it is still living; then he kills them like old cattle; he deprives many of life and himself of praise. All bloodied he comes forth from the wicked wood; he leaves it such that a thousand years from now it will not be reforested to its original state.]

The description underlines the horror of warfare as an expression of human sinful fragility, however small-scale the episode may be. The canto's sketch of local Italian tumults does not attempt to parallel them with civilization-changing episodes of crusade, or the battles of classical epic. Equally, though, Dante-poet does not let his audience forget that local clashes spring from the same fatal human tendency to sin and error that are expressed in grand images such as the Old Man of Crete or the vision of Christ crucified.<sup>41</sup>

Warfare, and family or faction rivalry have combined, *Purgatorio* xiv tells us, to produce the metamorphosis in Tuscany of city communities into packs of wild beasts, and to distort the family trees of Romagna's nobility into 'venenosi sterpi' [poisonous thickets] (l. 95). Dante-poet's familiarity with these two regions permits detailed analysis of the destructive consequences of such rivalries for the social microcosms of city and castle, village and family. His conclusions cast light on the grander, but more remote, conflicts that *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xiv both contemplate. Warfare in Thebes and Jerusalem, although we know about it primarily through epic poetry and the sacred word of Scripture, must also be counted in the kind of individual losses and single moments of mistaken choice, folly, or corruption that Dante has at his fingertips for central Italy in 1300. The intimacy and intricacy that he summons in these surveys remind his readers that despite the complexity of relationships in any human community, large or small, all are founded on simple encounters between individuals. We know our neighbours when we can name them, place them in their localities, remember their family relationships and personal preferences.

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41 These themes, with the intuition that Dante's local history accords with an eschatological history of postlapsarian humanity, are reviewed by Muresu (pp. 73–74).

These concerns inform my final vertical perspective, linking forward to *Paradiso* xiv. In *Paradiso*, the canto's first part emphasizes the collective harmony and happiness of the celestial community of the wise. Individuality is scarcely marked as the souls cluster into circles, to dance and perform choral hymns. Even the episode's main speaker, Solomon, is not directly named in the canto; he does not leave the circle to address Dante-character; and despite earthly kingship and pre-eminent wisdom, he speaks with a *voce modesta*, conveying the truths of an authority higher than his own.<sup>42</sup> Equally, what he has to say focuses on the future, collective experience of universal resurrection, that moment when:

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet [...] the dead shall rise again incorruptible. And we shall be changed. (*i Corinthians* 15.52)<sup>43</sup>

The response to Solomon's speech, though, draws back to the level of simple, intimate human relationships, and the social value of each individual's connection with his or her fellow-beings. The elevated linguistic register dips towards the everyday as Dante-poet reveals the almost childlike, spontaneous reaction of every paradisaic soul to this message, displaying a perfect harmony of collective response with individual feeling:

Tanto mi parver sùbiti e accorti  
e l'uno e l'altro coro a dicer 'Ammè!',  
che ben mostrar disio d'i corpi morti:  
forse non pur per lor, ma per le mamme,  
per li padri e per li altri che fuor cari  
anzi che fosser sempiterno fiamme. (*Par.*, xiv. 61–66)

[So swift and eager were both choruses to say 'Amen!' that they well showed their desire for their dead bodies, perhaps not for themselves alone, but for their mamas, for their fathers, and for the others who were dear before they became sempiternal flames.]

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42 See Michelangelo Picone, 'Canto XIV', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Paradiso*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2002), pp. 203–18 (pp. 212–15).

43 Ariani (pp. 9–23) discusses Dante's treatment here of the doctrine of bodily resurrection; see also Gragnolati's attentive reading (especially pp. 298–302, 304, 309). Muresu (pp. 155–64) warns against over-sentimentalizing lines 64–66.

That love for ‘le mamme, li padri e gli altri cari’ which the souls express is the foundational bond of human relationships. Vertically and retrospectively, *Paradiso* xiv thus corrects the vision of *Inferno* xiv, with its ancient Theban warfare fuelled by fraternal hatred, and of *Purgatorio* xiv’s struggling Italian cities and families. The joyful response to Solomon’s speech also gives a measure of the sacrifice offered by the holy warriors of Mars, in the second part of *Paradiso* xiv.

Each of the Fourteens thus offers a different emphasis in its scrutiny of terrestrial history and of the pain and difficulty inherent in life in the body. Solomon’s speech looks towards the perfected afterlife of ‘la carne gloriosa e santa’ [our glorious and holy flesh] (l. 43) beyond the Last Judgement; though *Inferno* xiv and *Purgatorio* xiv offer harsher reminders of the fragility and indignity of sinful bodies, in the images of the infernal souls’ tortured dancing and the sewn-blind eyes of Purgatory, or the mutation of Tuscans and Romagnoli into beasts and plants. Individually, these *canti* offer examples of bodies wounded and broken in the violence of historical tensions between peoples: the crusaders, the Theban warlords, the Italian faction heads who clash at particular moments in the perpetual human struggles for power and authority, whether secular or sacred. The vividly imagined geographies of the three *canti* highlight these currents of opposition by providing recurrent east-west compass points for the clashes between cities, regions, and continents. Via the vertical connection, Dante’s Fourteens locate such single, even trivial, instances of crisis within a larger perspective. Framing the individual historical and geographical reference points, the paired images of the *gran veglio* and Christ crucified as Old and New Adam, and the grand axes linking Eden and Jerusalem, Lethe and Phlegethon (but also Arno, Po, and Reno), open vistas between the three Fourteens onto the entire span of creation history.



# 15. Dante's Fatherlands

*Simone Marchesi*

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Dante does not analyse the emotion so much as he exhibits its relation to other emotions. You cannot, that is, understand the *Inferno* without the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*.<sup>1</sup>

Performing a canto-by-canto vertical reading of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* xv requires a double commitment. On the one hand, it is an exercise that invites us to re-imagine the tradition of reading the *Commedia* in independent installments, in an attempt to elucidate each of the hundredths that make up the whole of the poem as a relatively (if not absolutely) self-standing unit. On the other hand, by reading as sets texts that are vertically arranged in numerical patterns across each third of the poem, we are invited to refocus our attention on the way each unit in Dante's text builds upon its antecedents to construct meaning, on how the poem signifies through the interaction of progressively larger contexts. This double hermeneutical call to interpret the canto units — as well as the contexts each completed section of the poem builds for the next — requires a fine tuning of the theoretical framework for the reading exercise, and a reconsideration of our task as readers which is perhaps best placed before we work our way through the three cantos and their interconnections.

The first clause in the reading contract we may want to adopt before performing a reading of the poem in triads, looking for connections among cantos bearing the same number, is that such reading is *not* necessarily predicated upon a potentially radical notion of authorial design. To be

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1 T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), p. 99.

sure, our enterprise is based on a set of pointed observations that have been in circulation for a while now, and which may be used as a theoretical foundation, or more modestly an operating principle, for the work at hand. The idea that there are strong elements connecting the three proem-cantos of the poem or the three political cantos — those numbered vi, for instance — is not new. Yet, the idea of extending the same detailed mapping of correspondences across the whole body of the *Commedia* should not be taken to imply that we understand the author's compositional control over his poem as not only absolute (which it is), but also preliminary (which it probably was not). As we look for interconnections between distant cantos, in other words, we are also invited to consider the possibility that the layout of the poem was, for Dante, not clear from the start; in particular, that such a plan did not include the double reading perspective that we will be practicing when we read vertically. It would be a dangerous assumption to credit Dante with a blueprint for the poem, in which the forward thrust of the narrative is also balanced by a stringent system of proleptic signposts, marking out reciprocally relating areas of the text.

The theoretical and prejudicial question just formulated is not simply abstract and preemptive. Objections to the interpretive validity of a vertical reading of the kind that implies the assumption of a strong authorial design are not without merit. There are actually moments in Dante's text that militate against conceptualizing the vertical reading along strong proleptic lines. Admittedly, we know fairly little — almost nothing — about the compositional history of the poem and its early dissemination.<sup>2</sup> Yet we do have indications that different plans may have been adopted in the course of its making, and we can also see that some expectations created at a certain point in the text were never fulfilled.<sup>3</sup> Both phenomena in the text seem to

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2 See Alberto Casadei, *Dante oltre la 'Commedia'* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015), pp. 45–76. On the issue of dating and preliminary editions, see also Enrico Fenzi, 'Ancora a proposito dell'argomento barberiniano', *Tenzzone* 6 (2005), 97–116. In a more general vein, Giorgio Padoan, *Il lungo cammino del 'poema sacro', Studi danteschi* (Florence: Olschki, 1993), *passim*; and, in a most particular one, Lino Pertile, 'Le Egloghe, Polifemo e il Paradiso', *Studi Danteschi* 71 (2006), 285–30. For a counter-argument to Padoan, see Enrico Malato, *Per una nuova edizione commentata delle Opere di Dante* (Rome: Salerno, 2004), p. 100. See also John Ahern, 'What did the First Copies of the *Comedy* Look Like?', in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 1–15.

3 See, for instance, the compositional corollaries attached to the so-called *diceria di Boccaccio*, as laid out in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, ed., ad *Inf.*, viii.1 esp. litt. (*Tutte le opere di G. Boccaccio*, ed. by Giorgio Padoan, vol. 6 (Milan: Mondadori, 1965)). A revival has taken place in the first half of the last century, see

question the internal coherence of the work to the point of discounting the possibility of an holistic hermeneutic for the poem.

For instance, a case of apparent change in plans may be found in *Inferno* xv, which displays an anticipation with no fulfilment. When Brunetto Latini gives Dante one more warning about the imminent demise of the White Guelph party in Florence, now formulated as a personal prophecy of struggle, defeat, and exile, the protagonist provides us with what will eventually become an abandoned narrative prolepsis:

‘Ciò che narrate di mio corso scrivo,  
e serbolo a chiosar con altro testo  
a donna che saprà, s’a lei arrivo’. (*Inf.*, xv. 88–90)

[What you narrate about my path I am writing down and keeping to be glossed, with other texts, by a lady who will know, if I reach her.]

As it has long been noted, such a projected episode does not make it into the poem as planned and forecasted in *Inferno*. In *Paradiso* xv, Dante does not learn about his future from Beatrice, but from Cacciaguida. And it is his ancestor, not his guide, who explains in canto xvii the real ‘meaning’ of Dante’s exile, along with the ethical and poetic mission associated with it.<sup>4</sup> The return of the technical term ‘gloss’ explicitly marks the unfulfilled and displaced connection:

Poi giunse: ‘Figlio, queste son le chiose  
di quel che ti fu detto; ecco le ‘nsidie  
che dietro a pochi giri son nascose’. (*Par.*, xvii. 94–96)

[Then he added: ‘Son, these are the glosses on what was said to you: behold the snares that are hidden beyond a few turnings of the heavens’.]

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Giovanni Ferretti, *I due tempi della composizione della ‘Divina Commedia’* (Bari: Laterza, 1935). *Contra*, see Teodolinda Barolini, ‘Aristotle’s Mezzo, Courtly Misura, and Dante’s Canzone *Le dolci rime*: Humanism, Ethics, and Social Anxiety’, in *Dante and the Greeks*, ed. by Jan M. Ziolkowski (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 163–79, who points to *Inferno* VII as markedly and dramatically Aristotelian, and hence already in line with the eventual moral structure of Hell.

4 On this instance of internal authorial glossing in the poem, see Simone Marchesi, ‘Dante’s Self-commentary in *Paradiso*’, in the proceedings of the conference *The Medieval Self-Commentary: A Transnational Perspective*, ed. by Aglae Pizzone and Ian Johnson (forthcoming).



The narrative ellipsis is particularly interesting in a cross-canto reading, since in *Purgatorio* xv — in the context of a different argument, one about free will and the appropriate use of material goods — Virgil creates a second (and parallel) proleptic reference to Beatrice's authority in doctrinal matters and foreshadows an intervention on her part:

'E se la mia ragion non ti disfama,  
 vdrai Beatrice, ed ella pienamente  
 ti torrà questa e ciascun' altra brama'. (*Purg.*, xv. 76–78)

[And if my explanation does not satisfy your hunger, you will see Beatrice, and she will fully remove this and every other yearning.]

Some possible reasons for this change of plans have been proposed, but they all fall into the realm of speculation.<sup>5</sup> It could instead be more interesting to point out that, whatever the reason for the shift, the change in plans most likely took place *after* the writing of *Purgatorio* xv. The issue of timing in compositional decisions is not a moot point, and we will have to come back to questions of dating in due course. For now it may suffice to note that such proleptic inconsistencies are indeed present in the poem.<sup>6</sup> Apparently, the narrative was not immune from twists and turns: the moments in which the text folds upon itself or allows ellipses and eclipses seem to indicate that Dante could and would eventually contradict himself. Possibly the effect of a redirection of the narrative that took place *in corso d'opera*, while the composition of the poem was ongoing and its publication in progress, these

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5 Attempts to reconcile Dante with himself have been made. Benvenuto da Imola, for example, proposes that the contradiction is apparent but not actual, because the encounter between Dante and Cacciaguیدا is stage-managed so that Dante hears the response to the prophecies of both Farinata (*Inferno* x) and Brunetto Latini (*Inferno* xv) 'a praedicto [Cacciaguیدا] mediante Beatrice'. Beatrice is, in other words, the 'cause of, and the intermediary for, Cacciaguیدا's response'. For this line of interpretation, which also emphasizes the precedent in Virgil's authorial strategy in the *Aeneid*, see, for example, George Corbett, *Dante and Epicurus: A Dualistic Vision of Secular and Spiritual Fulfilment* (Oxford: Legenda, 2013), pp. 118–19.

6 There are, of course, other examples of apparent changes in Dante's compositional plan for the poem. See, for instance, the curious disappearance of a mysterious Arrigo from the prosopography horizon of the poem: mentioned in *Inferno* vi. 79–81 as one among worthy citizens of an earlier Florence whom the protagonist will meet, he is actually nowhere to be found. A more complex, but perhaps complementary case of shifts in the poem's personnel is the reduplication of Manto, at once seen and discussed in the *bolgia* of the diviners in *Inferno* xx and then mentioned again as among the limbo dwellers by Virgil in a conversation with Statius in *Purgatorio* xxii. They are both cases that produce a narrative discontinuity.

textual corrugations suggest that, when we attempt a vertical reading, we should not base it on the assumption of total and preliminary authorial control.

Adopted as caveats, the considerations developed thus far may help us respond to Dante's stratified text with a renewed critical awareness and help us to bring into focus an essential feature of our engagement with the poem: namely, that the writing and reading of the *Commedia* are both processes unfolding in time. As such, the compositional and interpretive phenomena involved in the disposition of elements on the vertical axis exist in the linear proceeding of the poem's writing and reading, and complicate it at each stage in new ways. A practical interpretive decision ensues from this awareness: all phenomena detected by a vertical gaze should be studied as elements in a process unfolding in time and progressively producing sense, rather than as a set of data charged with meaning, forever residing in the semiotic reservoir of the text. Dante's Fifteens offer, I believe, the opportunity to practice such phenomenological hermeneutics with significant dividends, at least for one particular aspect of all the three co-numeraries: the connection they all build between two related elements, father figures and imaginary fatherlands. In order to gauge the dynamic interplay of these elements in the cantos, we have to move, finally, into their text.

## Contents

*Inferno* xv is part of a diptych: together with the next canto, it is dedicated to the third ring in the circle of violence. The circle is reserved for the punishment of violence against God, exerted indirectly. As Virgil explains in canto xi, this is the violence one does to things that emanate from the creator — which is to say, violence against nature and art. As we know, the next ring punishes the usurers, who have sinned against God's grandchild — human art — in the way they have put money to work and dispensed with work themselves. The environment here is the same as in the preceding canto, where we find the blasphemers, violent against God Himself: a barren, scorched plain, perpetually under a rain of fire, and it does not change for the next ring either. Groups of sinners run incessantly under flakes of fire that burn their aerial bodies and disfigure them almost beyond recognition. The central character in the canto is Brunetto Latini, a Florentine intellectual of the generation before Dante's. Traditionally

presented as Dante's teacher — and Dante acknowledges that he was taught by Brunetto 'come l'uom s'eterna' [how man makes himself eternal] — he is also cast as a father figure for the protagonist, who still cherishes his former 'cara imagine paterna' [his beloved paternal image] (ll. 85 and 83).<sup>7</sup>

The episode in which Brunetto stars begins with the protagonist's surprise: 'Siete voi qui Ser Brunetto?' [Are you here, ser Brunetto] (l. 30), an utterance in which he uses the honorific 'voi', reserved to a few characters throughout the poem: only two more in *Inferno* (Farinata and Cavalcante) and one in *Paradiso* (Cacciaguida). The protagonist has a long conversation with Brunetto on topics ranging from Florentine civic politics to his own future, an exchange which includes a series of biblically-styled prophetic utterances on Brunetto's part. In this most Florentine and vernacular episode, Virgil is somewhat marginalised. His only speaking part consists in a single approving remark 'Bene ascolta chi la nota' [He listens well who takes note] (l. 99), underlying the righteousness of Dante's stance before the misfortunes awaiting him. The canto concludes with a list of other sinners, all intellectuals and members of the 'cherici' [clergy] (l. 107), and with Brunetto's plea to be remembered for a literary work, his 'Tesoro' — which is to say the vernacular visionary poem we now call the *Tesoretto*, to distinguish it from his other, and more massive work, the encyclopedic treatise in Old French, entitled *Le Tresor*.<sup>8</sup>

The type of sin committed by Brunetto and his ilk has also been the object of some controversy.<sup>9</sup> While Virgil had made clear in *Inferno* xi that violence

7 On Dante's cultural debt to Brunetto, see Francesco Mazzoni, 'Brunetto in Dante', in *Il Tesoretto. Il Favolello*, by Brunetto Latini, ed. by Francesco Mazzoni (Alpignano: Tallone, 1967), pp. ix–xl. See also Peter Armour, 'Dante's Brunetto: The Paternal Paterine?', *Italian Studies* 38 (1983), 1–38, and Madison U. Sowell, 'Brunetto's Tesoro in Dante's *Inferno*', *Lectura Dantis* 7 (1990), 60–71.

8 It remains controversial as to which of his texts Brunetto is supposed to refer with the tag 'il mio Tesoro', whether the Italian fictional poem or the Old French encyclopedia. See, for instance, the bibliographical survey in Robert Hollander's commentary to *Inferno* xv. 119 in *La 'Commedia' di Dante Alighieri*, ed. and tran. by Simone Marchesi (Florence: Olschki, 2011), to which one may add now Giovannella Desideri, 'Quelli che vince, non colui che perde. Brunetto nell'immaginario Dantesco', in *A scuola con Ser Brunetto: Indagini sulla ricezione di Brunetto Latini dal Medioevo al Rinascimento*, ed. by Irene Maffia Scariati (Florence: SISMEL, 2008), pp. 381–400.

9 The debate dates back to the 1950s, when Andre Pézard published a long essay insisting that Brunetto's sin has a linguistic rather than a sexual nature. An alternative hypothesis sees as problematic Brunetto's political rather than linguistic proclivities. See André Pézard, *Dante sous la pluie de feu* (Paris: Vrin, 1950). An alternative proposal may be found in Richard Kay, 'The Sin(s) of Brunetto Latini', *Dante Studies* 112 (1994), 19–31; and Eugene Vance, 'The Differing Seed: Dante's Brunetto Latini', in *Marvelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), pp. 230–55.

against nature is associated with Sodom, there have been alternative hypotheses to identifying Brunetto's fault directly with homosexuality. One proposal has to do with Brunetto's choice of writing his magnum opus, the *Tresor*, in French. By doing so, it has been argued, Brunetto went against nature: he betrayed his 'natural' native idiom for another that was foreign to him. The matter is difficult to adjudicate, but one element that our vertical gaze brings to the fore is that language, in particular vernacular language, does indeed play an important part both in *Inferno* xv and in *Paradiso* xv.

*Purgatorio* xv apparently plays a different role in the poem. Unlike its predecessor, which revolved around a singular encounter and a pause in the narrative progress (or at least a slowing down of its pace), this is a canto of transition.<sup>10</sup> Protagonist and guide are moving from the ledge of envy, to the ledge of wrath, the last of the vices engendered by love directed to a wrong object. The canto is composed of four distinct movements. The first comprises the encounter with the angel of mercy. The angel performs for Dante the ritual transition out of the ledge of envy, cleansing one of the seven P's from the protagonist's forehead. The second movement is an *andante riflessivo*, encompassing a question from the protagonist about what exactly was meant by Marco Lombardo, the last soul with whom he talked in the previous canto, when he said that we should not direct our desires 'là 'v'è mestier di consorzio il divieto' [in such things that cannot be held in common] (*Purg.*, xiv. 87). This is followed by Virgil's lengthy and passionate explanation of the difference between material and spiritual goods, the latter being subject to multiplication rather than division when shared. The third movement is the arrival on the ledge of wrath, and the exposure of the protagonist to the new set of examples — of mercy or meekness, the virtue opposing the vice being purged on the new ledge. The examples offered through a new means of delivery — ecstatic visions — start, as is customary, with Mary, mother of Jesus. The episode encapsulated in the vision centres on the sweetness with which Mary scolds her son, whom she and Joseph had lost in the throng of pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover. The next two examples are from Greek history (Pisistratus, tyrant of Athens of the sixth century BC) and early Christian

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10 Critical attention has focused on the nature of the vision given to the protagonist. See, for instance, Arielle Saiber, 'Virtual Reality', in *Lectura Dantis: Purgatorio*, ed. by Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn and Charles Ross (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 151–66; and Christian Moevs, 'God's Feet and Hands (*Paradiso* 4.40–48): Non-duality and Non-false Errors', *Modern Language Notes* 114 (1999), 1–13.

history (the stoning of Saint Stephen, proto martyr, in Jerusalem). The final section of the canto consists again of a lively exchange, a conversation in which Virgil explains to Dante what he knows all too well; namely, that what the protagonist has been given are exemplary visions inciting to mercy. He tries to convince Dante that he knows a lot (perhaps too much) about what is going on in his pupil's mind.<sup>11</sup>

*Paradiso* xv is based, as is *Inferno* xv, on a single, prominent character. The protagonist in this case is Dante's ancestor, the soldier-martyr Cacciaguida (1091–1148). The canto opens with the protagonist already situated in the Heaven of Mars, where militant souls show themselves to Dante as lights forming a cross on which, mysteriously, shines Christ (we have learned all this in the previous canto). One of these martial and militant souls descends towards Dante, and the text reminds the reader of a classical parallel; namely, how Anchises came forward to welcome his son Aeneas in the Elysian Fields. In the same breath, however, the text also adds a qualifying statement 'se fede merta nostra maggior musa' [if we can trust our greatest source of inspiration] (*Par.*, xv. 26), addressing Virgil's reliability in otherworldly matters. Perhaps in line with the classical paradigm just evoked, the soul, adding sound to the jubilation of light and movement, pronounces a full tercet in Latin:

*'O sanguis meus, o superinfusa  
gratia Dei sicut tibi cui  
bis umquam celi ianua reclusa?'* (*Par.*, xv. 28–30)

[O my blood! O poured out from above grace of God! To whom as to you has the gate of Heaven ever been twice opened?]

Latin, however, is apparently not sufficient to discharge the affective tension. The soul is so overjoyed that the meaning of his second outburst goes beyond human understanding — and we are left to wonder if this is a question of content or of idiom. The text begs the question, that is, whether we are meant to understand that Cacciaguida still spoke in Latin,

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11 We are in the presence of one of the moments in which Virgil is perhaps overanxious to assert his authority as a competent guide to the Christian afterlife, an authority that he often phrases in terms of his ability to 'read' the mind of the protagonist. On this issue, see the debate between Mark Musa, 'Virgil Reads the Pilgrim's Mind', *Dante Studies* 95 (1977), 149–52, and Robert Hollander, 'Virgil and Dante as Mind-Readers (*Inferno* xxi and xxiii)', *Medioevo romanzo* 9 (1984), 85–100.

but about incomprehensible things, or whether he said something in the language souls use in Heaven (whatever that is), but the content of which was outside human grasp. Whatever the answer to the linguistic question about the part of Cacciaguida's speech that the text does not include, we are told that the character eventually moves to a level of diction or to a language geographically akin to that of his interlocutor. Once the heat of the affection has decreased, Cacciaguida moves to praise God in the vernacular: 'Benedetto sie tu, trino e uno / che nel mio seme se' tanto cortese' [Blessed are you, triune God, who have shown such grace to my progeny] (*Par.*, xv. 47–48). It is in that language, finally, that he turns to address Dante, welcoming him and calling him 'figlio' [my son]. The protagonist answers by asking his name and, in a circumlocution, describes the welcoming he has just received as a fatherly welcoming: 'paterna festa' [paternal rejoicing] (*Par.*, xv. 84).

In the ensuing dialogue, Dante comes to know the identity of the soul as that of his ancestor, the root of the tree of which he is a branch. In the framework of an autobiography, Cacciaguida also gives Dante a summary of their family history, a portrait of the city of Florence in his past, and a brief account of his life and death as a crusader. The most extended section of his biographical presentation, which is taken up again in an even more extended form in the next canto, contains the description of the city. Cacciaguida here sketches the portrait of a city imagined in an idealized, peaceful, modest, socially healthy setting. From his account a past emerges, in which people mattered more than things, where certainty about one's role in society was a given, where origins were reflected in the present. This was a city in which economic and social stability meant that generations could grow and age together in harmony, that no wife would be deserted, left alone in her bed because of her husband's business trips to France: 'nulla / era per Francia nel letto diserta' (*Par.*, xv. 119–20).<sup>12</sup>

Some recurrent themes and images emerge from this survey of the three cantos. First, there are issues of language, with *Inferno* and *Paradiso* concerning themselves with the relative value of the various vernaculars of Latin, and of trans-linguistic utterances. Recurring cases of plant

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12 On the theme, see Charles T. Davis, 'Il buon tempo antico', in *Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, ed. by Nicolai Rubinstein (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 45–69; and Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *The Transfiguration of History at the Center of Dante's Paradise* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986). On Cacciaguida's multifarious speech and his vernaculars, see André Pézard, 'Les trois langues de Cacciaguida', *Revue des Études Italiennes* 13 (1967), 217–38.

imagery also constellate the texts: thus, in the speeches of both Brunetto and Cacciaguida, the reader's attention is focused on the relation between seed, root and branches. There are pointed indications that the role and authority of Virgil, the first guide (in *Purgatorio*), and of his text, the *Aeneid* (in *Paradiso*) are to be subjected to certain limitations. Most prominently, however, the three cantos contain questions surrounding civic life and concerns with models of paternity. A vertical reading of the poem allows us to bring these recurrences into sharper focus. It also helps us to see that what recurs are elements in a cluster of ideas, connected to one another and not only each to its own repetition. The ramifications uniting these recursive connections will concern us for the rest of our reading.

## Paternity

The first recursive connection between co-numerary cantos is macroscopic: both *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xv talk about fathers. The connection is also literal. Brunetto is presented as a 'cara imagine paterna' [...] [dear, kind paternal image] (*Inf.*, xv. 83) and Cacciaguida's welcoming is defined as a 'paterna festa' [...] [paternal rejoicing] (*Par.*, xv. 84). These are not the only fathers Dante adopts in the *Comedy*: other salient figures addressed with this title are Virgil, Guido Guinizzelli, Saint Peter, Adam and Saint Bernard. A lexical curiosity, however, may be relevant: the adjective 'paterna' in the feminine appears only twice in the poem, in the coordinated passages from *Inferno* and *Paradiso*:

'Ché 'n la mente m'è fitta, e or m'accora,  
la cara e buona imagine paterna  
di voi quando nel mondo ad ora ad ora  
m'insegnavate come l'om s'eterna'. (*Inf.*, xv. 82–85)

[For in my memory is fixed, and now it weighs on my heart, the dear, kind paternal image of you when, in the world, from time to time you used to teach me how man makes himself eternal.]

'Ond'io, che son mortal, mi sento in questa  
disagguaglianza, e però non ringrazio  
se non col core a la paterna festa'. (*Par.*, xv. 82–84)

[And therefore I, who am mortal, am caught in that inequality and can only thank you in my heart for your paternal rejoicing.]

The next (and only other) occurrence in the poem is in the masculine, in the phrase 'amor paterno' in *Paradiso*, xvii. 34, which again refers to Cacciaguida. The connection on this point is one that is not difficult to interpret. Readers are asked to construct an oppositional pair from the two episodes and their protagonists. In one corner we find Brunetto Latini, the paternal man of letters, burned by the rain of fire in Hell, earthly in the support he would have offered to Dante's mission, limited in the scope of his teachings. (After all, earthly fame is for him a viable surrogate of eternity, as his last words to Dante attest.) Opposite Latini stands Cacciaguida, the fatherly martyr, fully immersed in the glory of God, yearning for, and yet peacefully awaiting in Heaven, the encounter with Dante. He stands poised to give the protagonist a new perspective on work and fame, time and eternity, martyrdom and peace.<sup>13</sup>

The system of oppositions built in and across *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xv is so neat that *Purgatorio* xv may risk being bypassed. The connections that *Purgatorio* has with both extremes, however, should not be overshadowed. Readers should not need to 'leap over' from *Inferno* to *Paradiso*; neither should *Paradiso* xv be forced to 'fold back' right onto *Inferno* xv, skipping the in-between canto. Fathers (and also, for that matter, treasures) are, in fact, not absent from *Purgatorio* xv. In that canto, there is first of all Virgil, who is twice addressed as 'dolce padre' [sweet father] (*Purg.*, xv. 25 and 124), first when Dante asks him about the angel they are approaching and then again when Dante tries to explain to him the nature of his ecstatic experience. More importantly, however, wedged between the two addresses to Virgil, we find a third instance of the word 'padre' [father], which should actually count for two. It is a passage that, through the unambiguous evocation of a clear biblical antecedent, draws attention to a dichotomy in paternity. It is a passage in which we are called to recognize two fathers, the distinction between which is actually the model for the systematic opposition that the

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13 Other lexical connections unite Cacciaguida and Brunetto beyond the essential but not impervious borders of the canto. The poem redeploys a second keyword for Cacciaguida, once again lifting it from the protagonist's encounter with Brunetto: the term *Tesoro*. In *Inferno* xv 'il mio Tesoro' indicates Brunetto's literary work, in which he sees his only hope for a posthumous life. The same phrase, 'il mio Tesoro' appears in *Paradiso* xvii for Cacciaguida, who is described as 'la luce in che rideva il mio Tesoro' [the light in which my treasury shone forth]. The transvaluation from earthly to divine the term has undergone is, of course, radical. See the discussion of the recurrence in John Freccero, 'The Eternal Image of the Father', in *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante's 'Commedia'*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 62–76.



poem invites readers to perceive between *Infernal* and *Paradisal* types of paternity. We find the term in the first example of meekness, when the text reproduces Mary's words to Jesus, whom she and Joseph find in the temple, after having searched for him frantically for three days:

'Ecco, dolenti, lo tuo padre e io  
ti cercavamo'. E come qui si tacque,  
ciò che pareva prima, dispario. (*Purg.*, xv. 91–93)

[Behold, your father and I, grieving, have been searching for you'. And as she fell silent here, what first appeared disappeared.]

The relevant passage in the Vulgate and in the English Standard Version reads as follows:

Et dixit mater eius ad illum fili quid fecisti nobis sic ecce pater tuus et ego dolentes quaerebamus te. et ait ad illos quid est quod me quaerebatis nesciebatis quia in his quae Patris mei sunt oportet me esse. et ipsi non intellexerunt verbum quod locutus est ad illos. (Luke 2.48–50)

[And his mother said to him, 'Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety'. And he said to them, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he said to them.]

In Dante's text, Mary frames Jesus's paternity in terms of earthly cares 'Ecco, dolenti, lo tuo padre e io, ti cercavamo', a strict translation of the Latin of the Vulgate (as Dante consistently provides for Mary's words). In the original context, Jesus replies by alluding to a different plane on which his actions may be understood. Jesus's words remain outside Dante's text. But he did not need to include them, since they would have been embedded in the memory of his first readers. Their meaning is mysterious: the Gospel of Luke states explicitly that Mary and Joseph were unable to understand what was meant by them. But it soon becomes clear that Jesus's words point to a different father, whose work Jesus is soon going to assume. But not just yet; thus far, the promise remains unfulfilled, the language obscure, a foreboding that has not become a foretelling. What remains significant is that Dante could count on his readers' awareness of the contrast between the earthly and heavenly paternity of Jesus. Although confined to one detail in its plot, we may see, then, that *Purgatorio* xv is actually not indifferent to paternity.

## Patriotism

A discourse on fathers naturally leads to talk of fatherlands: *Padri e patrie*, fathers and fatherlands have more than just an etymological connection in Dante. The second macroscopic intersection between *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xv is that both cantos tell a tale of two cities. Actually, once we read them vertically, we can see that the cantos numbered fifteen tell a tale of several pairs of cities. The first level of urban analysis may be found in the tale of degeneration that is told in the poem by way of a hermeneutic suggestion. The vertical perspective invites readers to move backward from the Florence of the good old days that we find in *Paradiso* xv and xvi to the corrupt Florence of the present depicted in *Inferno* xv and xvi. Florence, Brunetto explains to the protagonist, is currently under the rule of the same vices diagnosed in *Inferno* vi by Ciaccio: pride, envy and avarice, the vices of civic dissension and societal dissection. A side-by-side reading of the two passages reveals their connection:

‘Vecchia fama nel mondo li chiama orbi;  
gent’ è avara, invidiosa e superba:  
dai lor costumi fa che tu ti forbi’. (*Inf.*, xv. 67–69)

[Ancient fame in the world calls them blind: they are a people avaricious, envious, and proud: see that you keep yourself clean of their customs.]

‘Giusti son due, e non vi sono intesi;  
superbia, invidia e avarizia sono  
le tre faville c’hanno i cuori accesi’. (*Inf.*, vi. 73–75)

[Two are just, and no one heeds them; pride, envy, and greed are the three sparks that have set hearts ablaze.]

The three mortal sins identified by Ciaccio and Brunetto are perhaps best seen in a precise constellation, not simply as added one on top of the other. In formulating a diagnosis for Florence’s political sickness, Dante is apparently adopting the common medieval perspective of the *sermones ad status*, the sermons preached to specific audiences which associated a particular sin to a precise stratum in society. In the parallel speeches of Cantos vi and xv, pride may be taken as the sin typifying the Black Guelphs

(who preach, and frequently put into practice, an aristocratic and warlike ethos). On the other hand, greed may be taken as the sin typifying the White Guelphs (who are merchants at heart and in practice, more inclined to peace negotiations than to military action). Envy, then, would be the sin opposing each party to the other. The White Guelphs envy the Black Guelphs' status, which they see as based on pride — as it actually is. The Black Guelphs envy the White Guelph's affluence, which they see as based on greed — as it actually is. Ciaccio and Brunetto's diagnoses focus on the political situation leading up to and including the year 1302, the disastrous year when Charles de Valois entered the city of Florence as a peacekeeper on a papal mandate (from Pope Boniface VIII). Charles gave free rein to the Black Guelphs in their bloody campaign of proscriptions against their adversaries, one of whom was Dante himself.

The contrast between the city of the present and that of the past is essentially ethical. In the way Cacciaguida describes the Florence he was born into and that he knew growing up, we find exactly the virtues opposing the vices for which we have heard the city being indicted by Brunetto. In the triad of adjectives that he uses to describe his quasi-heavenly Florence, we can see a point-by-point response to the social vices Brunetto and Ciaccio had individuated:

'Fiorenza dentro da la cerchia antica,  
ond' ella toglie ancora e terza e nona,  
si stava in pace, sobria e pudica'. (*Par.*, xv. 97–99)

[Florence within the ancient circle from which she still takes both tierce and nones dwelt in peace, sober and modest.]

In the span of a few generations, envy will destroy peace, avarice will overcome restraint or sobriety, and pride will shatter modesty. Dante's interest in the past is neither nostalgic nor archeological. The city of the past is evoked only in order to address the present. The Florence of Cacciaguida exists and is ideally visited, in order not only to elicit a reaction from the reader, but also to trigger an authentic ideological reaction in the text, precipitating a counter-model to the city of the present.

The scheme of associations is easy to detect in the external or outer co-numeraries: in *Inferno* xv, we have the bad version of a father discussing the bad side of the common fatherland in Hell; then, in *Paradiso* xv, we

have the good version of a father, reminiscing about the good version of the common fatherland in Paradise. Both cantos, incidentally, also have a coda, with that of *Inferno* xvi devoted to the noble, harmonious homosexuals that inquire about the current state of the city and lament its demise (ll. 64–78), and the coda of *Paradiso* xvi similarly devoted to an even more detailed account of the harmony that characterized the life of the nobility in the city of Cacciaguida's times (ll. 40–147).

At first sight, *Purgatorio* xv does not seem to have much to contribute to the clear-cut dichotomy that *Inferno* and *Paradiso* establish. There is, however, one tercet that, although only incidentally, may be brought to bear on the ethical framing of civic dissension that Dante constructs in the episodes of Brunetto and Cacciaguida. There is at least one lexical element that allows the connection to be proposed, the reappearance of the term 'invidia'. It may be found in Virgil's explanation of the words that Guido del Duca had uttered on the previous ledge to decry the predominance of human sinful desires in the world:

'Perché s'appuntano i vostri disiri  
dove per compagnia parte si scema,  
invidia move il mantaco a' sospiri'. (*Purg.*, xv. 49–51)

[Because your desires point to where sharing lessens each one's portion,  
envy moves the bellows to sighing.]

Virgil's intervention is perhaps simply recasting (more than recapitulating) the categorization of *Inferno* in the new moral system of *Purgatorio*, where the three essential sins of civic life are to be found in different groups: pride and envy in the lower terraces, among the vices of misdirected love, while avarice is still to come at this point in the text, categorized as it is in terms of excessive love for an earthly good. Although the context is generally political (and *Purgatorio* xiv had indeed contained a more pointed review of civic vices), the connection thus established is arguably tenuous. We should resign ourselves, perhaps, to having reached a hermeneutical dead end — and there is nothing wrong with that.

The old and new Florence of which Brunetto and Cacciaguida offer a description are not the only cities about which Dante tells a dyadic story. In the speeches of Brunetto and Cacciaguida, there is a constant reference to Rome as the positive model to which the lost city of Florence should,

but tragically fails to, conform itself. Both Brunetto and Cacciaguida insist on the necessary, biological connection of Florence to Rome — and both evoke the fall of Fiesole as the city's myth of origin. The mixing of the Roman-Florentine stock with the Fiesolani is a moment of downfall which is revisited and repeated by modern Florentines, who have allowed their city to grow too much, inviting in the populace from neighbouring towns and the countryside. The Florence of the past and that of the present are both measured by the ideal of Rome. And Brunetto and Cacciaguida make the point rather forcefully. Brunetto twice accuses Florence of having been contaminated *ab origine* by the mixing of races with the people from Fiesole, the city which was guilty of having supported Catiline in his attempt to overthrow the Roman Republic (as Cicero tells the story). The theme is sounded twice in a short span of lines:

'Ma quello ingrato popolo maligno  
che discese di Fiesole *ab antico*,  
e tiene ancor del monte e del macigno,  
ti si farà, per tuo ben far, nimico;  
ed è ragion, ché tra li lazzi sorbi  
si disconvien fruttare al dolce fico'. (*Inf.*, xv. 61–63)

[But that ungrateful, malicious people who came down from Fiesole of old, and still smack of the mountain and the granite, will become your enemies because of your just actions; and that is reasonable, for among the sour crab apples it is not fitting that the sweet fig bear its fruit.]

'Faccian le bestie fiesolane strame  
di lor medesme, e non tocchin la pianta,  
s'alcuna surge ancora in lor letame,  
in cui riviva la sementa santa  
di que' Roman che vi rimaser quando  
fu fatto il nido di malizia tanta'. (*Inf.*, xv. 73–78)

[Let the Fiesolan beasts make straw of each other, but let them not touch the plant, if any still sprout in their manure, in which may live again the holy seed of the Romans who remained there when that nest of so much malice was built.]

*L'Ottimo commento* provides a synthetic explanation of the legend behind the Roman foundation myth of Florence:

Qui è da notare che facta la battaglia con Cathelina in campo piceno, li Romani assediaron Fiesole. Et però che l'assedio fue lungo, certi nobili romani s'acasarono giù al piano in più parti. Et poi arrenduti per fame li fiesolani li fecioro tornare al piano et di loro et di quelli che de l'hoste di Romani vi volloro rimanere edificaro la cittade di Firenze, assignando a quelli nobili romani campi et terre de rubelli fiesolani. Pare che ser Burnetto voglia se et Dante mettere nel numero di quelli romani. (*Ottimo commento*, ad *Inf.*, xv. 73–78)

[Note that after the battle against Catiline at Campo Piceno, the Romans put Fiesole under siege. Since the siege was a long one, some Romans set up their habitations in the valley; once the Fiesolani surrendered, they were forced down the hill. The city of Florence was populated with them and the Roman veterans who decided to stay. The noble Romans received fields and lands confiscated from the Fiesolani rebels. It seems that Ser Brunetto would like us to count him and Dante among those Romans.]

Cacciaguیدا lends his authoritative support to this foundation myth through a summarized version. In describing the Florence of his time, he recounts how women, while spinning wool, 'favoleggiavan con la sua famiglia / de' Troiani, di Fiesole e di Roma' [would tell their families the legends of the Trojans, of Fiesole, and of Rome] (*Par.*, xv. 124–26). It may be that, in attributing to the women of ancient Florence fabulous, and fable-like versions, the text prompts us to question the credibility of the city's mythical origins. However, the potential of Rome to provide a city with an ideal, and not impractical, model for the formation of her citizens is reasserted in the following lines. In Cacciaguیدا's good old days, 'people would have marvelled at vicious characters like Lapo Saltarello or Cianghella' (a barrator and an adulteress, respectively) 'as they would now marvel at seeing Cincinnatus or Cornelia' (models, respectively, of civic rectitude and modesty from the Roman Republican past (*Par.*, xv. 127–29). The Florence-Rome axis is, in sum, the main historical trajectory Dante adopts for his poem. The Rome that was and the Florence that might have been are what keeps the civic idealism of the poem going. The passages in which the positive juxtaposition of the two cities is offered speak clearly, in stark moralistic terms.

At the core of both Dante's idealization and his denouncement of his fatherland, however, lies an often undetected difficulty. The ideal Florence-Rome connection established in *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xv by the two paternal figures is so central to the historical and political ideology of the poem

that it has naturalized itself, but that association did not come as naturally or as unproblematically to medieval minds as it came to Dante. Rome is not unqualifiedly, that is, a good model for a city.<sup>14</sup> There is a third set of cities that is mobilized in the Fifteens, a new and perhaps even more radically opposed dyad, and it is perhaps only in virtue of the intervening co-numerary *Purgatorio* xv that we are able to recognize it.

If the Florence of the present is opposed to the Florence of the past in *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xv, and both cities ideally project a polarized connection to Rome in the poem, in the wider Christian culture Rome is, in turn, opposed to Jerusalem. And Rome is not the positive pole in the system. In constructing the opposing models of an earthly and heavenly city in his *De civitate Dei*, Augustine forever pitted the two cities against one another: the old pagan Rome, all-too-earthly and destined to disappear in the new age of the son, against the New Jerusalem prophesied by Ezekiel and existing as the militant church in the here and now of the new Christian dispensation. These two cities Augustine called the City of Man and the City of God. This is not the place to rehearse again the debate about the role that Dante's political classicism may have played in the formation of his conflictual Augustinianism. For the present reading, it will suffice to remind ourselves of the presence of another model city in Dante's culture and of the conflicted relation it was construed to have with the idealized image of ancient Rome central to the poem's political propaganda. The Florence-Rome/Rome-Jerusalem system of opposition may serve here to focalise the presence of the last city in the background of *Purgatorio* xv.

Let us return to the episode of the young Jesus in the Temple in the text of the Vulgate, examining now the larger context of the verbal exchange, one half of which Dante reports as an example of meekness:

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14 For an overview of the Roman lineage argument, see Christopher Kleinhenz, *Dante intertestuale e interdisciplinare* (Florence: Società Dantesca Italiana, 2015), pp. 67–79, and his 'The City of Rome in Dante's *Divine Comedy*', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 28 (2012), 51–68. On Augustinian dissent registered in the Guelph political discourse, see most recently Elisa Brilli, 'I romani virtuosi del *Convivio*. Lettori e modalità di lettura del *De civitate Dei* di Agostino nei primi anni del Trecento', in *Il "Convivio" di Dante*, ed. by Johannes Bartuschat and Andrea A. Robiglio (Ravenna: Longo, 2015), pp. 135–56. On the wider dialogue with Augustine on matters of history as well as its literary representation, see Selene Sarteschi, *Per la 'Commedia' e non per essa soltanto* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2002), esp. the chapter 'Sant'Agostino in Dante e nell'età di Dante', pp. 1075–98; Luigi Franco Pizzolato, 'Presenza e assenza di Agostino in Dante', *Testo* 61–62 (2011), 17–34; and Simone Marchesi, *Dante and Augustine: Linguistics, Poetics, Hermeneutics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

Et ibant parentes eius per omnes annos **in Hierusalem** in die sollempni paschae et cum factus esset annorum duodecim ascendentibus illis **in Hierosolymam** secundum consuetudinem diei festi consummatisque diebus cum redirent remansit puer Iesus **in Hierusalem** et non cognoverunt parentes eius existimantes autem illum esse in comitatu venerunt iter diei et requirebant eum inter cognatos et notos et non inveniētes regressi sunt **in Hierusalem** requirentes eum et factum est post triduum invenerunt illum **in templo** sedentem in medio doctorum audientem illos et interrogantem stupebant autem omnes qui eum audiebant super prudentia et responsis eius et videntes admirati sunt et dixit mater eius ad illum fili quid fecisti nobis sic ecce pater tuus et ego dolentes quaerebamus te et ait ad illos quid est quod me quaerebatis nesciebatis quia in his quae Patris mei sunt oportet me esse et ipsi non intellexerunt verbum quod locutus est ad illos. (Luke 2.41–51)

[Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress'. And he said to them, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.]

The city of Jerusalem emerges from this passage as the central trope of the story, suggesting both the holiness of the city in itself and the centrality it assumes in God's plan. In the economical narrative of the Gospel of Luke, the connection of city and temple acts as catalyst for the story. Living under the Law, Joseph and Mary participate in the ritual convergence of the Jews in Jerusalem for Passover, a pilgrimage that has the worship at the temple as its core. At the end of the festival, Joseph and Mary leave the city, but Jesus stays behind; when they realize he is not in the caravan, they go back to the city and look for him there; on the third day, they finally find him in the temple. That building is, as the young Jesus obscurely says, the house of his Father — the place on earth where God's presence is most concrete. At once marking continuity and a break with it, Jesus starts revealing himself right in the centre of the religious capital of Judaism.



With the example of Jesus in the temple, the *Purgatorio* episode allows the model of this holy city to emerge in Dante's text. The problem is that this model is not the one that the texts of *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xv so brazenly adopt and propose in co-numerary cantos. Even if Florence is not Rome, as Brunetto and Cacciaguida explicitly remark, and Rome is the positive polarity in the imaginary system, Rome still exists in another polarised system as the foil for Jerusalem. Should Florence not strive, in that case, to be a new Jerusalem? Or should we, as readers, find a way (any way) to write this third model city off the poem? Are we supposed to search for a way to bypass Jerusalem and the context of *Purgatorio* xv, in order to keep Dante's classicising Roman-ness alive? The answer is no. I don't think we can, and nor should we.

The Florence-Rome/Rome-Jerusalem nexus of connections is complicated by an alternative, and not necessarily secondary, set of associations, that of Florence to Babylon and Rome to Jerusalem, as spelled out in Dante's *Epistles*.<sup>15</sup> In this double dyadic system, Florence is cast as infernal Babylon, while Rome is linked to a heavenly Jerusalem. The Rome-as-Jerusalem pole thus constructed may be responsible for endowing Rome with positive connotations, which extend from the pre-Christian centre in the history of salvation to its new centre. The Christian-to-Jewish supersessionist typology that ensues is, in turn, a familiar one: Peter and Paul bridge the old and the new dispensations, as they move between Jerusalem (where they were united in textual work on the testaments) and Rome (where they were united in martyrdom: the Christian city is built, of course, on their relics). In this system, the exchange of connotations is mutual: the Eternal City intervenes as a better city than Jerusalem, surpassing at least for one element (its Christian identity) at least one aspect (its Jewishness) in the ambivalent portrait of its counterpart. This Rome, in other words, is fully Christian, and thus opposed to the obstinately Jewish Jerusalem; it is featured as the rightful centre of the new spiritual dispensation, as opposed to the old centre of the provisional, and carnal Holy City. Nonetheless, the Rome evoked by Dante in his poem seems to be more attached to the classical Rome than to the Apostolic one. This is a reaction, perhaps, to the recently activated papal rhetoric of centralized pilgrimage promoted by

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15 The trope has been explored most recently by Claire E. Honess in "'Ritornèro poeta": Florence, Exile, and Hope', in *Se mai continga...: Exile, Politics and Theology in Dante*, ed. by Claire E. Honess and Matthew Treherne (Ravenna: Longo, 2013), pp. 85–103.

Boniface VIII, ideally replacing Jerusalem with Rome with the proclamation of the first jubilee.<sup>16</sup>

There is one final element in our reading of the Fifteens that recommends a vertical, contextual meditation on the city at the centre of the first example of meekness offered in *Purgatorio* xv. While archeological evidence about the temple in Jerusalem was out of the reach of Dante and his contemporaries, there is a textual tradition that associates a specific number to the temple and, in particular, to the ascent to the temple in ritual pilgrimage. This number is pertinent to the triad of cantos we have been reading. In medieval numerology, fifteen is a number seldom commented upon, but when it is, the first and foremost connection that is established is with Jerusalem and the temple at its centre. In a short treatise attributed to Isidore of Seville on Numbers in the Bible, we read the following two interpretations of our number:

Recte ergo hic numerus societatem significant Testamentorum. Hinc est quod apostolus Paulus **quindecim diebus in Jerosolymis** cum Petro se commorasse testatur, ut cum eo utrumque Testamentum conferret [...]

Hic autem **quindenarius numerus mystice dominico ascribitur templo**. Quindecim gradus erant in circuitu templi, in quibus sacerdotes et Levitae secundum ordinem meritorum astabant, ad quorum etiam exemplum **quindecim graduum cantica decantavit propheta**, per quos a terrenis paulatim crescendo usque ad templum Jerusalem supernae conscenditur. (Isidore of Seville, *De numeris* xv. 78)

[Rightly, thus, this number signifies the unity of the Testaments. This is the reason why Paul the Apostle spent fifteen days in Jerusalem with Peter, as it is said, so that he could collate with him both Testaments.

But this number fifteen is also ascribed mystically to the Temple of the Lord. Fifteen were the steps around the temple, on which stood the priests and the Levites, according to the order of their merits. Modeled on those steps the Prophet also sung fifteen songs of the steps, the steps through which, gradually rising, one may complete the ascent to the Temple of the celestial Jerusalem.]

In the twofold interpretation Isidore proposes for the number fifteen, we find the same elements which make the episode taking place in the temple of Jerusalem central for a canto bearing that number. The mystical number

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16 On the highly contested quality of this political and cultural move, see most recently Federico Canaccini, *Al cuore del primo giubileo. Bonifacio VII e l'Antiquorum habet* (Rome: Lateran University Press, 2016); for a stricter focus on Dante, see also the collection of essays in *Dante e il Giubileo*, ed. by Enzo Esposito (Florence: Olschki, 2000).

for the temple is fifteen — fifteen are the steps leading up to it; fifteen are the so-called gradual psalms (*Ps.* 119–33), which were traditionally sung during the ascent to the temple; and the temple of the earthly Jerusalem may be read tropologically as the sign of the celestial Jerusalem, to which we ascend via a moral progression. By virtue of the numerological link established in the poem, Jerusalem appears a counter model not only to Florence, but also to the Rome evoked in *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xv.

This connection, like all numerological connections, should not be overburdened with interpretation no matter how tempting. The number fifteen is not the solution to the question of the many contrastive pairs of cities Dante presents as his fatherlands. Yet, the emerging of Jerusalem as a third positive model-city should at least give us pause for thought. The allusion to the city Augustine had chosen as the positive counterpart of Rome accords with the numerological setup of the poem, but it does not seem to sit well with the cantos that are vertically coordinated to it, both radically Roman-centred cantos. It is a situation that calls for interpretation, but the interpretations that may be advanced seem both equally valid and difficult to reconcile with one another. On the one hand, one could read the evocation of Jerusalem in the filigree of the canto as a manifestation of Dante's 'guilty' cultural subconscious, which forces him to keep the Holy City of Jerusalem in the political picture (however slightly and obliquely), even when he is adhering to a fully imperial and philo-Roman platform in his ideological and ideal urban planning. Alternatively, we can read the allusion as a moment of radical *in-itinere* revision of the poem: Dante may be revisiting in *Purgatorio* a philo-Roman position he held during the composition of *Inferno*, which had eventually become difficult (if not untenable), while working through the co-numerary canto a few years later.

The first hypothesis, which treats Jerusalem as repressed material, explains the almost perfect alignment of *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xv on the Roman model. The second one, which treats all elements in the vertical reading as fully intentional, requires that alignment to be the product of a second change of mind, with the revision of the Rome-Jerusalem system being rethought, in its turn, to follow up on the triumphantly imperial Roman sections of *Paradiso*, where Rome is the bearer of God's sign and all its conquests are God-willed, part of a providential plan leading to the Incarnation and Passion of the Christ, as *Paradiso* vi amply demonstrates. At that juncture in Dante's drafting of the poem (and his *Monarchia*), Roman history is treated as sacred history, and the city of Rome is Dante's sacred city. Even this reading, however, is not immune to a counter reading. When we interpret *Paradiso* xv, we cannot dispense with the fact that the soul who

speaks to Dante about lineage and paternity, about Florence and Rome, and about one's mission in life, ended his life parable in the Holy Land. The Florentine Cacciaguida, knighted by a Holy Roman Emperor, actually died during the Second Crusade, when Jerusalem was the capital of a Christian kingdom. The instability of the system of signs constructed in the poem is such that either option is potentially misleading. Whatever option we choose, it leaves much to be desired, and we seem to be forced within a field of tensions and hermeneutic instability.

## Conclusion

The hermeneutic instability is perhaps not only local and not solely hermeneutic, but also philological. We may revisit at this point the framing questions articulated at the start of this reading. One of our goals was to reflect on how we should conceive of, and in turn interpret, vertically connected elements in the poem. From our close consideration of the case of the Fifteens, the connections linking the first two elements in this triad of cantos emerge as essentially retrospective, reaching back from the second to the first half of what philologists think must have been the first two-*cantica* authorial edition of the poem. Apparently, it is *Purgatorio* that makes *Inferno* its counterpart, canto by canto: in practical terms, and our specific case, it is the first example of meekness containing Jesus's contrastive evocation of heavenly and earthly fathers that validates the paternal theme in *Inferno* xv and retrospectively signposts it, creating for it a slot in the correspondingly numbered canto in *Paradiso*. Similarly, the Jerusalem evoked in *Purgatorio* xv comes to nuance and contrast the Florence-Rome model set up in the previous canto xv and eventually revisited (if not revised) in *Paradiso* xv.

What emerges from this theoretical setup is the related suggestion that the verticality of some of these connections passes from virtuality to reality, from potential to act, only with the final instalment of the poem in place. It is only with the third, final element, with the writing and reading of *Paradiso* that the triad becomes interpretable as such. It is perhaps only the instance of Cacciaguida that makes Brunetto his antecedent not only as an inadequate father figure but also as provisional participant in the common condemnation of the decline of Dante's fatherland. This vertical connection does not seem to happen simply because of the 'fortuitous' presence of a father-question and a city-question in *Purgatorio* xv; rather it is intrinsically related to the fact that, in terms of city-models, the middle canto points in a somewhat different, perhaps strategically ambivalent, direction.



# 16. Politics of Desire<sup>1</sup>

Manuele Gragnolati

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One of the challenges posed by the format of the vertical reading has been that none of the Sixteens are self-standing but are, instead, emphatically and explicitly part of diptychs or triptychs: like *Inferno xv*, *Inferno xvi* deals with sodomy and also initiates the episode of Geryon that will continue in the following canto; *Purgatorio xvi* is the first canto within a long and fundamental meditation on human agency, on the relationship between desire and reason, which continues in *Purgatorio xvi* and *xviii* and culminates with the dream of the Siren in *Purgatorio xix*; and *Paradiso xvi* is the central canto of the Cacciaguida episode, in which the pilgrim encounters his ancestor and is told about both the good old days of ancient Florence and the exile awaiting him in the future.<sup>2</sup> In other terms: *Inferno*

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- 1 I would like to thank George Corbett and Heather Webb for inviting me to take part in the Cambridge *Vertical Readings* series. I would also like to thank Christoph Holzhey, David Bowe, Tristan Kay, Elena Lombardi and Francesca Southerden for their comments on former drafts of this paper. I am particularly grateful to Simon Gilson for his precious comments on my reading and for letting me read his essay '*Inferno xvi*' before its publication in the *Lectura Dantis Andreapolitana*, ed. by Claudia Rossignoli and Robert Wilson (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, forthcoming). I have found it very interesting and helpful and I rely on it for several of the points I make on *Inferno xvi*.
  - 2 Indeed, Michelangelo Picone writes that *Inferno xvi* is a 'canto aperto'. See Michelangelo Picone, '*Canto XVI*', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Inferno*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2000), pp. 221–32 (p. 221). Of *Paradiso xvi* Denis Fachard writes that 'ovviamente non sta a sé e quindi non può rivendicare una qualsiasi autonomia'. See Denis Fachard '*Canto XVI*', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Paradiso*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2002), pp. 230–42 (p. 231). For a recent, compelling reading of *Purgatorio xvi–xix*, see Elena Lombardi, *The Wings of the Dove: Love and Desire in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2012).

xvi is the final canto of a diptych, while *Purgatorio* xvi and *Paradiso* xvi are the first and middle cantos of their respective triptychs.

Moreover, the sixteenth cantos are not only overtly part of a larger group of cantos, but — like all cantos of Dante's *Comedy* — are closely related to the rest of the poem and to Dante's other works. The issue of sodomy in cantos xv–xvi of the *Inferno* has been discussed together with canto xxvi of *Purgatorio*,<sup>3</sup> while the meditation on desire begun in *Purgatorio* xvi is a theme that runs throughout the entire *Comedy* and all of Dante's other works.<sup>4</sup> The relationship between papacy and empire at the centre of *Purgatorio* xvi is not only a *leitmotif* of the whole *Comedy*, but also the very topic of Dante's *Monarchia*, the Latin treatise on political theory that Dante wrote while he was already working on the *Comedy*. And, finally, the theme of the city and Florence dealt with in *Paradiso* xvi begins to be addressed explicitly in the encounter with Ciaccio in *Inferno* vi and is never abandoned for the rest of poem.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, the challenge of my vertical reading, which I am sure I share with the other contributors to the series, lies precisely in the fact that these cantos deploy many themes and motifs that reach out not only to the rest

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3 Some of the stimulating essays that have addressed and tried to explain the different treatment of sodomy and sexuality in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* include: Bruce Holsinger, 'Sodomy and Resurrection: The Homoerotic Subject of the *Divine Comedy*', in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. by Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 241–74; Gary Cestaro, 'Pederastic Insemination, or Dante in the Grammar Classroom', in *The Poetics of Masculinity in Early Modern Italy and Spain*, ed. by Gerry Milligan and Jane Tylus (Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2010), pp. 41–73 and 'Is Ulysses Queer? The Subject of Greek Love in *Inferno* 15 and 26', in *Dante's Plurilingualism: Authority, Vulgarization, Subjectivity*, ed. by Sara Fortuna, Manuele Gagnolati and Jürgen Trabant (Oxford: Legenda, 2010), pp. 179–92; Bill Burgwinkle, 'The Form of Our Desire: Arnaut Daniel and the Homoerotic Subject in Dante's *Commedia*', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10 (2004), 565–97; and Heather Webb, 'Power Differentials, Unreliable Models, and Homoerotic Desire in the *Comedy*', *Italian Studies* 68 (2013), 17–35.

4 See Lino Pertile, *La punta del disio. Semantica del desiderio nella 'Commedia'* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2005) and, most recently, Elena Lombardi, *The Wings of the Dove*, and Manuele Gagnolati, *Amor che move. Linguaggio del corpo e forma del desiderio in Dante, Pasolini e Morante* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 2013). See also the essays in the volume *Desire in Dante and the Middle Ages*, ed. by Manuele Gagnolati, Tristan Kay, Elena Lombardi and Francesca Southerden (Oxford: Legenda, 2012).

5 See at least the studies by Joan Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the 'Divine Comedy'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Catherine Keen, *Dante and the City* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003); and Claire Honess, *From Florence to the Heavenly City: The Poetry of Citizenship in Dante* (Oxford: Legenda, 2006).

of the poem,<sup>6</sup> but also to Dante's other works and to medieval culture in general, not to mention various topics related to our contemporary concerns. And yet it has been striking to realize that the Sixteens also share something significant, that is, a sense of nostalgia for a past irremediably lost that contrasts with the degeneracy of the present. My vertical reading will focus on this contrast, although it will also frame it within the larger context of each of the sixteenth cantos, in the attempt both to discuss the way in which it is specifically articulated in *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, and to delineate a common discourse that, as we shall see, raises questions about the human agency and autonomy usually celebrated in Dante's *Comedy* as well as about Dante's attitude towards politics and history. In a way, I will offer a traditional reading that proceeds through the cantos but, rather than moving from *Inferno* to *Purgatorio* to *Paradiso*, I will also invert the verticality of the format and begin with *Inferno* xvi, jump to *Paradiso* xvi and finish with *Purgatorio* xvi, which seems the most 'theoretical' of the three cantos and indeed attempts to resolve some of the issues we find in the other two, while also illuminating some of their tensions.

### *Inferno* xvi

As I mentioned before, canto xvi of *Inferno* concludes a diptych dedicated to the sinners of sodomy. Sodomy is punished in the circle of violence, the seventh circle of Dante's Hell, which is divided into violence against others, violence against the self, and violence against God. Sodomy is classified as a form of violence against God, which takes three forms: violence against God directly (blasphemy), against God's offspring, nature (sodomy), and against God's 'grandchild', art (usury). As with the blasphemers and the usurers, the punishment of the sodomites also consists of being exposed to a rain of fire in a burning desert, but while the blasphemers lay supine on the fiery sand and the usurers are sitting, the sodomites run in a continuous circle.

The canto opens with three shades leaving their group and approaching Dante-pilgrim and Virgil in a way that immediately sets the dominant tone of the canto:

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6 On the implications that this has for the whole concept of vertical reading, see Simon Gilson's own vertical reading of cantos vii. Simon Gilson, 'The Wheeling Sevens', in *Vertical Readings in Dante's 'Comedy'*, ed. by George Corbett and Heather Webb (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), pp. 143–60.



Venian ver' noi, e ciascuna gridava:  
 'Sòstati tu ch'a l'abito ne sembri  
 esser alcun di nostra terra prava'. (*Inf.*, xvi. 7–9)

[Together they came toward us, each one calling: 'Stop, you, who by your garb appear to be a man from our degenerate city'.]<sup>7</sup>

Just as in *Inferno* x, among the heretics, the Florentine Ghibelline leader Farinata degli Uberti had understood that Dante-pilgrim was Florentine thanks to his accent, so too, now, these shades recognize from Dante's clothing that he and they all come from the same city, which they immediately call 'nostra terra prava' [our degenerate land]. The parallel between the encounter with Farinata in *Inferno* x and these lines at the start of canto xvi anticipates the nature of the sinners that Dante will meet in the second part of the diptych: while in canto xv the sodomites encountered by Dante were mainly 'cherici / e litterati di gran fama' [famous clerics and men of letters] (l. 107), including Dante's own 'mentor' Brunetto Latini, canto xvi is populated with civic and military leaders who were active in Florence around the mid thirteenth century, albeit in this case the shades are Guelfs and not, like Farinata, Ghibellines.

Virgil shows great respect towards these shades and even urges the pilgrim to be courteous towards them:

'Or aspetta',  
 disse, 'a costor si vuol esser cortese.  
 E se non fosse il foco che saetta  
 la natura del loco, i' dicerei  
 che meglio stesse a te che a lor la fretta'. (*Inf.*, xvi. 11–15)

[Now wait: to these one must show courtesy. And were it not for the fire that the nature of this place draws down, I would say that haste suits you far more than it does them.]

When the running shades come nearer to the pilgrim, one of them addresses him in a very elaborate tone and with a great display of rhetorical skill:

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<sup>7</sup> I quote the text of the *Commedia* from Dante Alighieri, *'La Commedia' secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols, 2nd rev. edn (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994), while translations are taken from Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander, 3 vols (New York: Doubleday, 2000–2007).

Qual sogliono i campion far nudi e unti,  
 avvisando lor presa e lor vantaggio,  
 prima che sien tra lor battuti e punti,  
 così rotando, ciascuno il visaggio  
 drizzava a me, sì che 'n contraro il collo  
 faceva ai piè continüo viaggio.

E 'Se miseria d'esto loco sollo  
 rende in dispetto noi e nostri prieghi',  
 cominciò l'uno, 'e 'l tinto aspetto e brollo,  
 la fama nostra il tuo animo pieghi  
 a dirne chi tu se', che i vivi piedi  
 così sicuro per lo 'nferno fregghi'. (*Inf.*, xvi. 22–33)

[As combatants, oiled and naked, are wont to do, watching for their hold and their advantage, before the exchange of thrusts and blows, wheeling, each fixed his eyes on me, so that their feet moved forward while their necks were straining back. One began: 'If the squalor of this shifting sand and our blackened, hairless faces put us and our petitions in contempt, let our fame prevail on you to tell us who you are, who fearless move on living feet through Hell'.]

Some critics have noticed that the comparison with the naked bodies of wrestlers carries an erotic overtone, something that is already present in the previous canto's encounter with Brunetto Latini, and it is certain that the sodomite speakers in the two cantos also share a strong investment in fame.

The shade addressing the pilgrim reveals that the group is formed of three Florentine Guelf leaders, all of whom had died by 1272 and who were renowned for their patriotic deeds in Dante's youth: Guido Guerra, Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, and the speaker Iacopo Rusticucci. In this moment the readers realize that two of these souls belong to the group of past Florentine leaders about whose place in the afterlife the pilgrim inquired when he had encountered the Florentine Ciacco among the gluttons in *Inferno*, vi. 79–84. While on that occasion Ciacco had already explained that these souls were all in Hell, Virgil shows the same admiration towards the Florentine sodomites that the pilgrim had shown for them in *Inferno* vi, and that, in turn, corresponds to the esteem that they enjoyed in the time of Dante's youth.

Indeed, the pilgrim's reaction on meeting these shades is still one of great appreciation:

S'ì fossi stato dal foco coperto,  
gittato mi sarei tra lor di sotto,  
e credo che 'l dottor l'avria sofferto,  
ma perch'io mi sarei bruciato e cotto,  
vinse paura la buona voglia  
che di loro abbracciar mi facea ghiotto. (*Inf.*, xvi. 46–51)

[Had I been sheltered from the fire I would have thrown myself among them, and I believe my teacher would have let me. But because I would have burned and baked, fright overcame the good intentions that made me hunger to embrace them.]

It has been argued that the pilgrim's attraction is also erotic<sup>8</sup> — and I would agree that overtones of same-sex attraction are present in both this and the previous canto — but what mainly concerns me here is that the political theme takes over and the pilgrim confirms that he also does indeed come from Florence:

'Di vostra terra sono, e sempre mai  
l'ovra di voi e li onorati nomi  
con affezion ritrassi e ascoltai.  
Lascio lo fele e vo per dolci pomi  
promessi a me per lo verace duca;  
ma 'nfino al centro pria convien ch'ì' tomi'. (*Inf.*, xvi. 58–60)

[I am of your city. How many times I've heard your deeds, your honoured names resound! And I, too, with affection spoke your names. I leave bitterness behind for the sweet fruits promised by my truthful leader. But first I must go down into the very core.]

The shades do not show any sign of interest in the pilgrim's journey of salvation from Hell to Heaven but, instead, continue to rely on fame and to care only for reports of Florence — and this interest merely in the affairs of this world is something that they share not only with Brunetto, but also with Farinata. In particular they want to know if 'cortesia e valor' [courtesy and valour] are still present in their city, because the soul of a certain Guglielmo Borsiere recently arrived in Hell had brought them worrisome news:

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8 See for instance Holsinger, 'Sodomy and Resurrection', pp. 247–52.

‘Se lungamente l’anima conduca  
 le membra tue’, rispuose quelli ancora,  
 ‘e se la fama tua dopo te luca,  
     cortesia e valor dì se dimora  
 ne la nostra città sì come suole,  
 o se del tutto se n’è gita fora;  
     ché Guglielmo Borsiere, il qual si duole  
 con noi per poco e va là coi compagni,  
 assai ne cruccia con le sue parole’. (*Inf.*, xvi. 64–72)

[‘That your spirit long may guide your limbs’, he now added, ‘and your renown shine after you, tell us if valour and courtesy still live there in our city, as once they used to do, or have they utterly forsaken her? Guglielmo Borsiere, grieving with us here so short a time, goes yonder with our company and makes us worry with his words’.]

As Gilson explains, *cortesia* and *valore* are terms expressing ‘not just societal values and elegant behaviour, but a complex knot of ethical values linked to moral dignity, chivalric courtliness, nobility, and above all measure and order’.<sup>9</sup> With a violent tone similar to that of a prophet from the Old Testament, the pilgrim angrily confirms that courtesy and valour have indeed disappeared from Florence, replaced by the ‘orgoglio and dismisura’ [excess and arrogance] that have been created by a new social class and its economic interests:

‘La gente nuova e i sùbiti guadagni  
 orgoglio e dismisura han generata,  
 Fiorenza, in te, sì che tu già ten piagni’.  
     Così gridai con la faccia levata;  
 e i tre, che ciò inteser per risposta,  
 guardar l’un l’altro com’ al ver si guata. (*Inf.*, xvi. 73–78)

[‘The new crowd with their sudden profits have begot in you, Florence, such excess and arrogance that you already weep’. This, my face uplifted, I cried out. And the three, taking it for answer, looked at one another as men do when they face the truth.]

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9 Simon Gilson, ‘*Inferno* Canto XVI’, *Lectura Dantis Andreapolitana*, University of St Andrews, 11 March 2011, <http://lecturadantisandreapolitana.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/video/inferno-canto-xvi>

Dante's words and attitude highlight the contrast between the virtue of the past and the vice of the present and, as Lino Pertile has explained, relate it to a historical phenomenon of an economic, social and cultural nature: the phrase 'gente nuova e i subiti guadagni' indicates 'people who moved to Florence from the countryside and, through commerce and finance, made fast fortune, opening up the closeness and static character of a previous feudal system towards the beginning of capitalism'.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Dante's words recall not only Brunetto's and Ciaccio's critique of Florence's greed, envy and pride (compare, respectively, 'superbia, invidia e avarizia' in *Inf.*, xv. 68 and 'gent'è avara, invidiosa e superba' in *Inf.*, vi. 73), but also a passage from the *Convivio* on the devastating effects upon the civic community brought about by the accumulation of wealth. This creates, Dante argues, a vicious circle whereby 'cupiditate' [greed] can never end but only continually increase, to the extent that Canon Law and Civil Law aim precisely at mending and controlling it:

E che altro cotidianamente pericola e uccide le cittadi, le contrade, le singolari persone, tanto quanto lo nuovo raunamento d'averè appo alcuno? Lo quale raunamento nuovi desiderii discuopre, allo fine delli quali senza ingiuria d'alcuno venire non si può. E che altro intende di medicare l'una e l'altra Ragione, Canonica dico e Civile, tanto quanto a riparare alla cupiditate che, raunando ricchezze, cresce? (*Con.*, IV. xii. 9)

[And what imperils and destroys cities, territories, and individuals day by day more than the accumulation of wealth by some new person? Such an accumulation uncovers new desires which cannot be satiated without causing injury to someone. What else were the two categories of Law, namely Canon Law and Civil Law, intended to curb if not the surge of greed brought about by the amassing of wealth?]<sup>11</sup>

I will return to the connection between greed and the law, but for the moment I want to mention that after the sodomites depart, urging the pilgrim to speak about them on earth (and thereby confirming again their preoccupation with fame), the final part of this canto is concerned with the preparation for the arrival of Geryon. It is a very important, metapoetic episode where, for instance, the term *comedia* is used for the first time in reference to the poem itself. Rather than lingering on it, I will simply

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> I quote the *Convivio* from Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. by Franca Brambilla Ageno (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995), while the translation is taken from *Dante's 'Il Convivio'*, trans. by Richard H. Lansing (New York: Garland, 1990).

conclude by highlighting the ambivalence with which *Inferno* xvi portrays the Florentine sodomites and the Florence of their time. Despite the fact that these souls are indeed in Hell and, like Brunetto, only seem concerned with the sphere of earthly values,<sup>12</sup> and despite the parallel with Farinata exposing 'the fatal blindness of the Florentine aristocracy in its attachment to party and family at the expense of broader loyalties to city and "patria"',<sup>13</sup> *Inferno* xvi nonetheless emphasizes a contrast between Florence's negative present of 'orgoglio e dismisura' [arrogance and excess] and the positive past of 'valore e cortesia' [valour and courtesy] invoked by the Florentine sodomites. Moving now to *Paradiso* xvi will give us a different perspective and reveal that the fairly recent past presented as ambivalent in *Inferno* xvi was, in fact, quite negative and that the contrast set up in the *Commedia* between a bad present and a good past is more accurately a contrast between a very bad present, a less bad recent past and a good distant past.

### *Paradiso* xvi

As I mentioned before, *Paradiso* xvi is the mid part of a triptych staging Dante's encounter with his ancestor Cacciaguida, which is one of the most significant and justly famous episodes of the whole poem. It opens with Dante-pilgrim's vanity and pride for his ancestor's decision to follow the Emperor Conrad III in the Second Crusade and subsequent death as a martyr while fighting for the Church. The pilgrim's pride is signalled by his switch to the 'voi' form while asking for more information about the Florence of the good old days, which Cacciaguida had celebrated in the previous canto. This celebration is captured in microcosm by the famous tercet with which the lengthy passage of praise began: 'Fiorenza dentro de la cerchia antica, / ond'ella toglie ancora e terza e nona, / si stava in pace, sobria e pudica' [Florence, within the circle of her ancient walls from which she still hears tierce and nones, dwelled then in peace, temperate and chaste] (xv. 97–99). The image of a modest and peaceful city contained within the small circle of its ancient walls is exactly the opposite

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12 On the ambivalence of the judgment on Florence in *Inferno* xvi, see Picone, 'Canto XVI', pp. 225–26, who stresses that as Brunetto was only thinking of literary fame, so do the Florentine sodomites only focus on fame and human and social values, disregarding the religious ones. According to Keen (p. 48), instead, there is less ambivalence than condemnation.

13 John Najemy, 'Dante and Florence', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 236–56 (p. 242).

of the depictions of contemporary Florence that one finds throughout the poem, especially those given by Ciaccio in *Inferno* vi and by Brunetto in *Inferno* xv. As critics have acknowledged, Cacciaguida's description of Florence is meant to emphasize a contrast between past and present, but crucially it is a different past from the one mentioned in *Inferno* xvi and nostalgically recalled there by the Florentine sodomites. In other words, the *Commedia* stages three different Florences: the peaceful and entirely positive Florence of the remote past described by Cacciaguida (late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries); the Florence of the recent past referred to by the Florentine sodomites (around the mid thirteenth century), a period presented ambivalently in *Inferno* xvi but which was, in reality, factional and already degenerate; and the wholly negative Florence of the 'present' (the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries).

After his ancestor's praise of this remote Florence in canto xv of *Paradiso*, in canto xvi the pilgrim wants to know more details about his ancestor and the Edenic Florence of the past that he had celebrated. His particular interest is in the size of its populace and the identity of its most important families, 'quanto era allora, e chi eran le genti / tra esso degne di più alti scanni' (ll. 26–27). In this way, as Catherine Keen notes, '[t]he emphasis [...] shifts from the private detail of the domestic scene to the consideration of families as aggregates of their individual members, highlighting the collective nature of citizenship and civic activity'.<sup>14</sup>

In a language that is not 'questa moderna favella' [this our modern tongue] (and it has been long debated whether this is Latin, with which Cacciaguida had begun to speak in canto xv, or — as seems more likely — the old dialect of Florence),<sup>15</sup> Cacciaguida first gives some more details about his family and then moves on to speak about 'his' Florence, which is what interests us here. The first piece of information that Cacciaguida gives is that in his time the number of 'those fit to bear arms' was one fifth of those who live there now, stressing thereby the small size and containment of ancient Florence. But the main difference between the positive Florence of his past and the negative one of the present, Cacciaguida adds, is that the former was 'pure down to the last artisan', while the latter is mixed with people coming from the countryside:

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<sup>14</sup> Keen, p. 213.

<sup>15</sup> See Elena Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire: Language and Love in Augustine, the Modistae, Dante* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2007), pp. 142–44.

'Ma la cittadinanza, ch'è or mista  
 di Campi, di Certaldo e di Fegghine,  
 pura vediasi ne l'ultimo artista.  
 Oh quanto fora meglio esser vicine  
 quelle genti ch'io dico, e al Galluzzo  
 e a Trespiano aver vostro confine,  
 che averle dentro a sostener lo puzzo  
 del villan d'Aguglion, di quel da Signa  
 che già per barattar ha l'occhio aguzzo!' (*Par.*, xvi. 49–57)

[But the city's bloodline, now mixed with that of Campi, of Certaldo, and Figline, was then found pure in the humblest artisan. Ah, how much better would it be had those cities which I name remained but neighbours, had you kept your borders at Galluzzo and Trespiano, than to have them in your midst and bear the stench of the lout from Aguglion and of him from Signa who already has so sharp an eye for graft!]

The contrast between the purity of Florence's citizenry in the ancient past ('pura') and its contamination in the present ('mista') recalls *Inferno* xvi's contrast between 'la gente nuova e i subiti guadagni' of contemporary Florence and the 'valore e cortesia' of the previous generation. The contrast is highlighted here by the emphasis on the 'puzzo' [stench] that this contamination produces and that is here represented by two political figures associated with corruption and barratry and connected in one way or another with Dante's exile: Baldo d'Aguglione and Fazio dei Morubaldini da Signa.

Cacciaguida then hints at the fact that the destructive movement of people from the countryside into the city (and the subsequent societal contamination and corruption) is but another consequence of the Church's damaging opposition to the Emperor's control over Italy (*Par.*, xvi. 58–66). This opposition has meant that several lords, no longer protected by the Emperor, have been forced to give their castles and territories to the communes and have moved to Florence. Ultimately, Cacciaguida insists, it is the resultant 'intermingling of persons' that has caused the city's growth and subsequent decay:

'Sempre la confusion de le persone  
 principio fu del mal de la cittade'. (*Par.*, xvi. 71–72)

[Intermingling of peoples has ever been the source of all the city's ills.]



As Justin Steinberg has recently underlined, critics have debated and disagreed about Dante's political statements in the Cacciaguida cantos, especially about Dante's attitude towards the guild-based government of the *popolo* (and its mercantile values, social mobility and new wealth).<sup>16</sup> A focal point in this debate has been the question of the extent to which the *Commedia* rejects the guild-based system and offers, instead, an idealized version of feudal aristocracy or, on the other hand, how far, and despite his imperial convictions, Dante continues to be attached to the *popolo's* critique of the nobility's excessive consumption and factionalism.<sup>17</sup> I tend to side towards the latter hypothesis. In any case, Dante's insistence on the positive purity of old Florence as opposed to the negative intermingling of the new Florence is, from a contemporary perspective, both puzzling and distressing. It is worth mentioning, therefore, that Keen has argued that Cacciaguida's critique of immigration is to be understood as an attack against a materialistic attitude towards civic life that is exploitative rather than contributory and brings corruption to the old, simple order.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile Steinberg has argued that Cacciaguida's attack on sylvan citizens is only incidentally concerned with their mercantile, upstart nature; rather than a particular class, Cacciaguida rejects a political/juridical phenomenon in which citizenship is treated purely as a private contract, as a title that can be bought and sold in a way that harms the principle of shared obligations and responsibilities.<sup>19</sup>

Change may not always be good, but it is inevitable. The second part of the canto introduces the new theme of the necessity of mutability, firstly of human affairs in general and, then, of Florentine families in particular:

'Le vostre cose tutte hanno lor morte,  
sì come voi; ma celasi in alcuna  
che dura molto, e le vite son corte.  
E come 'l volger del ciel de la luna  
cuopre e discuopre i liti senza posa  
così fa di Fiorenza la Fortuna:

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16 Justin Steinberg, *Dante and the Limits of the Law* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 123–23.

17 The former thesis is maintained by Umberto Carpi, 'La nobiltà di Dante (a proposito di *Paradiso* xvi', *Rivista di letteratura italiana* 8:2 (1990), 229–60, while the latter by Najemy, 'Dante and Florence'.

18 Keen, pp. 213–20.

19 Steinberg, pp. 124–26.

per che non dee parer mirabil cosa  
 ciò ch'io dirò de li alti Fiorentini  
 onde è la fama nel tempo nascosa'. (*Par.*, xvi. 79–87)

[All your concerns are mortal, even as are you, but in some things that are more lasting this lies hidden, because all lives are brief. And, as the turning of the lunar sphere covers and endlessly uncovers the edges of the shore, thus does fortune deal with Florence. Then it should not seem strange or marvellous to you to hear me talk of noble Florentines, whose fame is buried in the depth of time.]

It is interesting that, unlike the Florentine sodomites and other Florentines mentioned in Hell, those good ones mentioned by Cacciaguida were not famous in Dante's time. In particular, Cacciaguida gives a lot of details about several notable Florentine families from his time, mentioning first those which had been important but were already losing their importance, then those which were at the height of their power, and finally those which were not powerful yet but were about to begin to gain significance and power. It is a long section, running from ll. 87–147, which exemplifies the natural alternation of human vicissitudes and concludes by mentioning the episode that was traditionally considered to be the origin of the factionalism between Guelfs and Ghibellines, that is, the murder of Buondelmonte dei Buondelmenti in 1215.

Finally, Cacciaguida ends his long speech by making it clear that Florence's good times belong to the remote past of his youth and that the period of civic strife between Guelfs and Ghibellines, which was associated with a moment of 'valore e cortesia' by the sodomites in *Inferno* xvi, was in fact already understood as a negative moment in Florence's history:

'Con queste genti, e con altre con esse,  
 vid'io Fiorenza in sì fatto riposo,  
 che non avea cagione onde piangesse.  
 Con queste genti vid'io glorioso  
 e giusto il popol suo, tanto che 'l giglio  
 non era ad asta mai posto a ritroso,  
 né per division fatto vermiglio'. (*Par.*, xvi. 148–54)

[With these noble families, and with others still, I saw Florence in such tranquillity that there was nothing that might cause her grief. With these noble families I saw her people so glorious and just, that the lily had not yet been reversed upon the lance nor by dissension changed to red.]

If it is now clear that a contrast also exists between the distant, peaceful Florence of Cacciaguیدا and the violent and factional one of the Florentine sodomites, one can also begin to ponder what kind of violence was associated with their sin of sodomy. I will return to this but, for now, and by way of concluding my reading of canto xvi of *Paradiso*, I would like to highlight that it seems to create an ambivalence or tension between a sense of inevitable change compared to the natural cycle of life and death (like that of the Florentine families of the past) and a sense of vertical degeneracy and decline into violence connected, rather, with human responsibility (as in the case of the decline from the Florence of Cacciaguیدا's good old days to the period of infighting between Guelfs and Ghibellines and, finally, to the wickedness of Dante's own time).<sup>20</sup> *Purgatorio* xvi, to which I will move now, will help us to deal precisely with this crucial question.

### *Purgatorio* xvi

*Purgatorio* xvi is the first of a triptych of cantos at the very centre of the poem, which together elaborate its central discourse on desire and free will. The canto is set in the third terrace of Purgatory where, as is typical in Purgatory, pain works as therapy and, in this case, wrath is cured. The purging shades (as well as the pilgrim and Virgil) are forced to experience a very thick smoke that blinds and impedes them from seeing anything. The first part of the canto insists on the productivity of this experience of pain and I will simply mention the fact that the shades are told that 'd'iracundia van solvendo il nodo' [they are undoing the knot of their wrath] (*Purg.*, xvi. 24), and that the experience through Purgatory is presented as the soul's journey back to God as its maker: 'O creatura che ti mondi / per tornar bella a colui che ti fece' [O creature who purify yourself to return in beauty to the One who made you] (ll. 31–32).<sup>21</sup>

When a purging soul reveals his identity to the pilgrim, he does so by mentioning that same 'valore' which, together with 'cortesia', was discussed

<sup>20</sup> For a reading with a different emphasis, see Keen, p. 223.

<sup>21</sup> See the concept of 'productive pain' that I put forward in my book *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 89–137; see also my article 'Gluttony and the Anthropology of Pain in Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*', in *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person*, ed. by Rachel Fulton and Bruce Holsinger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 238–50.

in *Inferno* xvi as something belonging to the past. This soul simultaneously confirms that, indeed, it is a virtue no longer practiced by humankind:

‘Lombardo fui, e fu’ chiamato Marco;  
del mondo seppi, e quel valore amai  
al quale ha or ciascun disteso l’arco’. (*Purg.*, xvi. 46–48)

[I was a Lombard, known as Marco. I knew the world and loved that valour at which today all aim a slackened bow.]

Little is known of Marco Lombardo, who seems to have been a refined courtier operating in several northern Italian courts. Marco’s statement on the disappearance of ‘valour’ reminds the pilgrim of what the soul of Guido del Duca had told him on the terrace of envy two cantos before. While speaking about the corruption spreading through the valley of the river Arno and Romagna, where the glorious past and the values of its noble families contrast with the degenerate situation of the present, del Duca had stated that ‘vertù così per nimica si fuga / da tutti come biscia, o per sventura / del luogo, o per mal uso che li fruga’ [all flee from virtue as if it were a snake, an enemy to all, whether some curse is on the place or evil habits goad them on’] (*Purg.*, xiv. 37–39). After listening to Marco, the pilgrim reformulates del Duca’s doubt and asks about the reasons for the disappearance of virtue from earth:

‘Lo mondo è ben così tutto deserto  
d’ogne virtute, come tu mi sone,  
e di malizia gravido e coverto;  
ma priego che m’addite la cagione,  
sì ch’ì la veggia e ch’ì la mostri altrui;  
ché nel cielo uno, e un qua giù la pone’. (*Purg.*, xvi. 58–63)

[The world is barren now of every virtue, as you state, and heavy with and overgrown by evil. Please point out to me the cause that I may know it and make it known to others, for both the heavens and the earth receive the blame.]

Thus, like the sixteenth cantos of *Inferno* before it and of *Paradiso* xvi after it, the sixteenth canto of *Purgatorio* also establishes a contrast between the positive past and the negative present, although here the current degeneracy pertains not only to Florence, but to the whole world. But what

this canto adds to the meditations of its infernal and heavenly correlatives is the explicit question about the reason ('la cagione') for the current corruption. In particular, the pilgrim asks whether it has to be attributed to a deterministic influence of the stars on men ('nel cielo') or to men's agency and will ('qua giù'). This is no small question and its full significance is unfolded in Marco's reply — so that the reader cannot miss what is at stake.

First, Marco explains that it is absurd to think, as humans do, that the reason for everything has to be attributed to the influence of the stars because this would mean that humans have no free choice and therefore there would be no justice in being punished for doing evil or rewarded for doing good:

'Frate,  
 lo mondo è cieco, e tu vien ben da lui.  
 Voi che vivete ogne cagion recate  
 pur suso al cielo, pur come se tutto  
 movesse seco di necessitate.  
 Se così fosse, in voi fora distrutto  
 libero arbitrio, e non fora giustizia  
 per ben letizia, e per male aver lutto'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 65–72)

[Brother, the world is blind and indeed you come from it. You who are still alive assign each cause only to the heavens, as though they drew all things along upon their necessary paths. If that were so, free choice would be denied you, and there would be no justice when one feels joy for doing good or misery for evil.]

As a passage from the *Monarchia*, indebted to Boethius, indicates, 'liberum arbitrium' [free will] is to be defined as 'liberum de voluntate iudicium' [free judgment in matters of volition]:

Et ideo dico quod iudicium medium est apprehensionis et appetitus: nam primo res apprehenditur, deinde apprehensa bona vel mala iudicatur, et ultimo iudicans prosequitur sive fugit.  
 Si ergo iudicium moveat omnino appetitum et nullu modo preveniatur ab eo, liberum est; si vero ab appetitu quocunque modo preveniente iudicium moveatur, liberum esse non potest, quia non a se, sed ab alio captivum trahitur. (*Mon.*, I. xii. 2–4)

[And therefore I say that judgment is the link between perception and appetite: for first a thing is perceived, then it is judged to be good or evil, and finally the person who judges pursues it or shuns it. Now if judgment controls desire completely and is in no way pre-empted by it, it is free; but

if judgment is in any way at all pre-empted and thus controlled by desire, it cannot be free, because it does not act under its own power, but is dragged along in the power of something else.]<sup>22</sup>

Along similar lines, Marco Lombardo continues, it is true that the stars can have a certain influence on human inclinations and desires, but men are always endowed with the light of reason and with a free will that, if they are well nurtured, can overcome all inclinations emanating from the stars:

‘Lo cielo i vostri movimenti inizia;  
non dico tutti, ma, posto ch’i’ l dica,  
lume v’è dato a bene e a malizia,  
e libero voler; che, se fatica  
ne le prime battaglie col ciel dura,  
poi vince tutto, se ben si notrica’. (*Purg.*, xvi. 73–78)

[Yes, the heavens give motion to your inclinations. I don’t say all of them, but, even if I did, you still possess a light to winnow good from evil, and you have free will. Should it bear the strain in its first struggles with the heavens, then, if rightly nurtured, it will conquer all.]

Here I would like to highlight the ‘if’ clause, ‘se ben si notrica’ [if it is rightly nurtured], which suggests the Aristotelian notions of *habitus*/custom and implies, then, that a certain training is necessary for men to be able to master their inclinations coming from the stars. But, for the moment, Marco attributes all influence to a person’s autonomy and consequent potential to control desires and align them with the soul’s innate love for God and what is good:<sup>23</sup>

‘A maggior forza e a miglior natura  
liberi soggiacete; e quella cria  
la mente in voi, che l ciel non ha in sua cura.

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22 Quotations from the *Monarchia* are taken from Dante, *Monarchia*, ed. by Paolo Chiesa and Andrea Tabarroni with the collaboration of Diego Ellero (Rome: Salerno, 2013), while I quote the translation from Dante, *Monarchia*, trans. by Prue Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

23 In Bruno Bernabei’s words, therefore, ‘la libertà si realizza nel perfetto costante equilibrio fra ragione e volontà nella piena chiarezza e osservanza del bene morale’. See Bruno Bernabei, ‘Libertà’, in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani, 1971), vol. 3, cols. 641–43 (p. 642). See also G. Stabile, ‘Volontà’, in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani, 1976), V, cols. 134–40, and the recent discussion of *arbitrium* in Steinberg, pp. 53–88.

Però, se 'l mondo presente disvia,  
 in voi è la cagione, in voi si chieggia;  
 e io te ne sarò or vera spia'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 79–84)

[To a greater power and a better nature you, free, are subject, and these create the mind in you the heavens have not in their charge. Therefore, if the world around you goes astray, in you is the cause and in you let it be sought. In this I will now be your informant.]

Men can freely subject themselves to God, who is a greater force and a better nature than the stars, and the reason for this freedom is that the rational soul ('mente') is completely unaffected by any celestial influence — and this is precisely why men, not the heavens, are always responsible for their actions. And humans are autonomous from the impact of the stars because the rational part of their soul is not generated, as in the case of the vegetative and sensitive faculties (which are thereby connected to matter and its laws), but created individually and directly by God. In the *Commedia* the origin of the human soul is theorised by the figure of Statius in his embryological account in *Purgatorio* xxv and also explained by Virgil in *Purgatorio* xviii with regard to the 'innata libertade' [innate freedom] of the soul (l. 68) that allows it to exercise control over any sort of external influence. It is also elegantly restated by Beatrice in *Paradiso* vii:

'L'anima d'ogne bruto e de le piante  
 di complesion potenziata tira  
 lo raggio e 'l moto de le luci sante;  
 ma vostra vita senza mezzo spira  
 la somma beninanza, e la inamora  
 di sé che poi sempre la disira'. (*Par.*, vii. 139–44)

[The soul of every beast and every plant is drawn from a complex of potentials by the shining and the motion of the holy lights. But supreme goodness breathes life in you, unmediated, and He so enamours your soul of Himself that it desires Him forever after.]

As I have shown elsewhere, these embryological tenets are very significant for understanding Dante's anthropology.<sup>24</sup> What I want to highlight here is

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<sup>24</sup> See my *Experience the Afterlife*, pp. 53–87 and 'From Plurality to (Near) Unicity of Forms: Embryology in *Purgatorio* 25', in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. by Wayne Storey and Teodolinda Barolini (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 192–210.

that despite the emphasis placed by the poem on the rational soul's ultimate autonomy from the stars' influence, Marco's subsequent explanation of the reasons for the world's current corruption takes another track and begins to emphasise the fact that the soul is liable to go astray and therefore requires guidance:

'Esce di mano a lui che la vagheggia  
prima che sia, a guisa di fanciulla  
che piangendo e ridendo pargoleggia,  
l'anima semplicetta che sa nulla,  
salvo che, mossa da lieto fattore,  
volontier torna a ciò che la trastulla.  
Di picciol bene in pria sente sapore;  
quivi s'inganna, e dietro ad esso corre,  
se guida o fren non torce suo amore'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 85–93)

[From the hand of Him who looks on it with love before it lives, comes forth, like a little girl who weeps one moment and as quickly laughs, the simple infant soul that has no knowledge but, moved by a joyous maker, gladly turns to what delights it. At first it tastes the savour of a trifling good. It is beguiled by that and follows in pursuit if guide or rein do not deflect its love.]

Each soul is created individually by God and behaves like a child who knows nothing, but, as it originates from a joyous Maker, it is attracted to what pleases it. The soul therefore turns to whatever delights it without pondering whether it is the right or wrong choice and, unless it has a guide or a curb that controls its desire, it loses the right path and goes astray. A similar concept had already been expressed in *Convivio* IV. xii, which seems inspired by Augustine's passage on the distinction between *uti* and *frui* in *De doctrina christiana* I, 3–4 and first explains that the soul's supreme desire is to go back to God, from whom it originates:

lo sommo desiderio di ciascuna cosa, e prima dalla natura dato, è lo ritornare allo suo principio. E però che Dio è principio delle nostre anime e fattore di quelle simili a sé (sì come è scritto: 'Facciamo l'uomo ad imagine e simiglianza nostra'), essa anima massimamente desidera di tornare a quello. (*Conv.*, IV. xii. 14)

[the supreme desire of each thing, and the one that is first given to it by nature, is to return to its first cause. Now since God is the cause of our souls and has created them like himself (as it is written, 'Let us make man in our own image and likeness'), the soul desires above all else to return to him.]



And yet, as the passage goes on to say, the soul's knowledge is imperfect and it can therefore let itself become attracted to other goods and thereby not choose the path (back) to God but the wrong one:

E sì come peregrino che va per una via per la quale mai non fue, che ogni casa che da lungi vede crede che sia l'albergo, e non trovando ciò essere, dirizza la credenza all'altra, e così di casa in casa, tanto che all'albergo viene; così l'anima nostra, incontanente che nel nuovo e mai non fatto cammino di questa vita entra, dirizza li occhi al termine del suo sommo bene, e però, qualunque cosa vede che paia in sé avere alcuno bene, crede che sia esso. (*Conv.*, IV. Xii. 15)

[And just as the pilgrim who walks along a road on which he has never travelled before believes that every house which he sees from afar is an inn, and finding it not so fixes his expectations on the next one, and so moves from house to house until he comes to the inn, so our soul, as soon as it enters upon this new and never travelled road of life, fixes its eyes on the goal of its supreme good, and therefore believes that everything it sees which seems to possess some good in it is that supreme good.]

In this way, going astray and desiring at first small goods and then ever greater possessions, the soul neither attains its goal (God) nor reaches the satisfaction of its supreme desire, but often ends up being consumed by a desire that cannot be fulfilled and endlessly increases (*Conv.*, IV. Xii. 16–19).<sup>25</sup>

Marco Lombardo's speech on the soul's fallibility in *Purgatorio* xvi takes an overtly political turn and indicates that, precisely because of the soul's tendency to go astray from the right path, it was necessary to set laws, with the Emperor acting as a guide:

'Onde convenne legge per fren porre;  
convenne rege aver che discernesse  
de la vera cittade almen la torre'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 94–96)

[Therefore, there was need that laws be set to act as curbs, need for a ruler to discern at least the tower above the one true city.]

As Charles Singleton explains, the image transposes *Convivio's* 'notion of the soul guided by reason in its "pilgrimage" in this life [...] to that of mankind collectively engaged in a pilgrimage. The goal, or "city",

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<sup>25</sup> For an analysis of the Augustine's passage from the *De doctrina christiana* with respect to his understanding of language, see Lombardi, *The Syntax of Poetry*, pp. 34–37.

for mankind collectively (and following Dante's ideas as set forth in *De monarchia*) is universal justice, which under the perfect rule of the monarch should prevail, and is synonymous with temporal felicity, the goal to which the emperor is ordained to lead'.

According to Marco Lombardo, Italy's problem is that, while it is true that laws have been set and do exist, they are not enforced for the reason that the throne of the empire is empty and the Pope, rather than offering spiritual guidance to humankind, wants to have temporal and earthly power and ends up as a negative influence:

'Le leggi son, ma chi pon mano ad esse?  
 Nullo, però che 'l pastor che procede,  
 rugumar può, ma non ha l'unghie fesse;  
     per che la gente, che sua guida vede  
 pur a quel ben fedire ond'ella è ghiotta,  
 di quel si pasce, e più oltre non chiede'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 97–102)

[Yes, there are laws, but who takes them in hand? No one, because the shepherd who precedes may chew his cud, but does not have cleft hooves. The people, then, who see their leader lunge only at the good for which they themselves are greedy, graze on that and ask for nothing more.]

The same image of the Emperor as the guide who is meant to curb humankind but is actually absent, is also present in *Purg.*, vi. 88–90 and *Conv.*, IV. ix. 10 (and see also *Mon.*, III. xvi. 9). As Elena Lombardi has argued, it is a very interesting image that, by suggesting reason is like a horseman that must govern passion like a horse, does not convey the necessity of extinguishing desire. Instead it hints at the taming of desire and suggests the usefulness of passion: if well directed and correctly spurred, desire must become a useful and faithful carrier for the self.<sup>26</sup>

While I agree with Lombardi that this is indeed what the poem maintains in the next two cantos and pushes to its extremes in the *Paradiso*, the emphasis in *Purgatorio* xvi is placed, rather, on the necessity of laws

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<sup>26</sup> See Elena Lombardi, "'Che libido fe' licito in sua legge': Lust and Law, Reason and Passion in Dante", in *Dantesque Dialogues: Engaging with the Legacy of Amilcare Iannucci*, ed. by Margaret Kilgour and Elena Lombardi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 125–54 (esp. pp. 131–32). On the positive and necessary potential of desire as expansion of the self and extension into (paradoxical) pleasure, see also Lombardi's *The Wings of the Dove* and my *Amor che move*.

and the consequences when they are not enforced. Thus Marco Lombardo can conclude his speech with the claim that the reason the world is going astray is to not due to humankind's corrupt nature (the remedy for which is indeed meant to be provided by the laws), but to the bad guidance offered by the papacy:

'Ben puoi veder che la mala condotta  
è la cagion che 'l mondo ha fatto reo,  
e non natura che 'n voi sia corrotta'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 103–05)

[As you can plainly see, failed guidance is the cause the world is steeped in vice, and not your inner nature that has grown corrupt.]

As Irène Rosier Catach has recently argued, these lines, together with lines 91–97 quoted above, recall a passage in the *Monarchia* in which humankind's need for the guidance of the papacy and the empire is justified on the basis of the concept that human nature is corrupted after the Fall: 'si homo stetisset in statu innocentie in quo a Deo factus est, talibus directivis non indiguisset: sunt ergo huiusmodi regimina remedia contra infirmitatem peccati' [if man had remained in the state of innocence in which he was created by God, he would have had no need of such guidance; such powers are thus remedies for the infirmity of sin] (III. Iv. 14).<sup>27</sup> As has been noted, this rather bleak, quintessentially Augustinian concept contradicts the Aristotelian/Thomistic idea, expounded elsewhere by Dante, that man is naturally social and creates institutions naturally. I agree with Rosier Catach's thesis that, albeit implicitly, some traces of the Augustinian concept seem to resonate in *Purgatorio* xvi's connection between the soul's tendency to go astray and the necessity of laws.<sup>28</sup>

27 Irène Rosier Catach, 'Man as a Speaking and Political Animal: A Political Reading of Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*', in *Dante's Plurilingualism: Authority, Knowledge, Subjectivity*, ed. by Sara Fortuna, Manuele Gagnolati and Jürgen Trabant (Oxford: Legenda, 2010), pp 34–51.

28 The Augustinian framework of Marco Lombardo's reasoning is also noticed by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi's commentary to *Purg.*, xvi. 93. Keen also notices a parallel between Dante's doctrine and the Augustinian dictum on law as *remedium peccati*, but she argues for a less negative view than in Augustine (p. 68). On the difference between Augustine and Aristotle's and Thomas Aquinas's idea (usually also followed by Dante) that man is by nature a political animal, see also Honess, *From Florence to the Heavenly City*, pp. 37–41, who also argues that Dante's position in the *Commedia* 'represents a rethinking, though not necessarily a rejection, of many of the most common medieval ideas on the role of the Christian within political society, put forward, above all, by Augustine' (p. 39). See also the interesting survey of how Dante criticism has engaged

The rest of Marco's speech is dedicated to stressing the contrast between past and present in a way that recalls cantos xvi of *Inferno* and *Paradiso* but also emphasizes that the cause for the current degeneracy is the papal interference in the temporal sphere. Indeed, if there is one main point to Dante's political thought, present both in the *Commedia* and the *Monarchia* and emphatically maintained by Marco Lombardo, it is that emperor and pope should act in two completely separate spheres without any mutual interference; the former devoted to the pursuit of the happiness of humankind on earth and the latter to the pursuit of humankind's happiness in the afterlife.

The first contrast made by Marco between the past and the present is the famous image of the two suns that remained separate in ancient Rome, while now one (the Pope) has obscured the other (the Emperor):

'Soleva Roma, che 'l buon mondo feo,  
 due soli aver, che l'una e l'altra strada  
 facean vedere, e del mondo e di Deo.  
 L'un l'altro ha spento; ed è giunta la spada  
 col pastorale, e l'un con l'altro insieme  
 per viva forza mal convien che vada;  
 però che, giunti, l'un l'altro non teme:  
 se non mi credi, pon mente a la spiga,  
 ch'ogn'erba si conosce per lo seme'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 106–14)

[Rome, which formed the world for good, once held two suns that lit the one road and the other, the world's and that to God. The one has snuffed the other out, the sword is fastened to the crook, and these two, forced to be together, must perforce go ill, since, joined, the one fears not the other. If you don't believe me, think of a grain of wheat, for by its seed each plant is known.]

Marco's second contrast between the past and the present focuses instead on northern Italy and on the same virtues of 'valore e cortesia' mentioned in *Inferno* xvi as the symbol of a world that has disappeared:

In sul paese ch'Adice e Po riga,  
 solea valore e cortesia trovarsi,  
 prima che Federigo avesse briga;

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with Dante's relationship with Augustine by Elisa Brilli, *Firenze e il profeta. Dante fra teologia e politica* (Rome: Carocci, 2012), pp. 239–70.

or può sicuramente indi passarsi  
 per qualunque lasciasse, per vergogna  
 di ragionar coi buoni o d'appressarsi.  
 Ben v'è tre vecchi ancora in cui rampogna  
 l'antica età la nova, e par lor tardo  
 che Dio a miglior vita li ripogna. (*Purg.*, xvi. 115–23)

[In the land watered both by the Àdige and Po valor and courtesy could once be found before Frederick encountered opposition. Now it may with impunity be crossed by anyone who for shame would shun all discourse with the virtuous or even coming near them. Three old men are left on earth, longing for the better life when God will take them, in whom the ancient times rebuke the new.]

This passage is interesting for at least two reasons: on the one hand, the reference to the three 'old men' (l. 121), who offer a rebuke to modern times, recalls the three Florentine sodomites of *Inferno* xvi and creates a contrast between three truly honest men and the Florentine leaders, whose portrayed ambivalence now reveals its limits and who appear, especially after also reading *Paradiso* xvi's celebration of the remote past, as very much part of that factional world of civic strife and personal interests that characterizes the political scene of Florence in the second part of thirteenth century. (The Florentine sodomites seem in this sense to represent the Guelf correlative of Farinata in *Inferno* x.) And, as Simon Gilson has argued, the words 'valore' and 'cortesia', which were used by the sodomites as a symbol of what has been lost in the present, return here, but 'are now set within a broader context of individual and institutional responsibilities'.<sup>29</sup>

While in a certain way one might consider that, according to the standpoint of the *Commedia*, the political situation in Italy and Europe was ill-governed in virtue of the conflicts between papacy and empire and that, as a result, these Florentine leaders were themselves misguided, it is also clear that they are responsible for their actions and for being, in their turn, misguiding leaders. Arguably, what the Florentine politicians share with Brunetto and, possibly, with the other sodomite teachers and grammarians presented in the previous canto, is an obsession with fame, which was presented by Brunetto as the means for gaining eternal life ('voi m'insegnaste come l'uom s'eterna', *Inf.*, xv. 85). Therefore, it is perhaps

<sup>29</sup> Gilson, '*Inferno* Canto XVI'. See also Emilio Pasquini, 'Cortesia', in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana G. Treccani, 1970), II, cols. 225–27.

possible to consider these pedagogues and civic leaders, categorised as sodomites, as — more precisely — having misguided their pupils and the citizenry by violating their natural desire to return to God. The fact that the sodomites are respected by the pilgrim (and by the Florence of his youth) would not so much show that their Florence was better but, rather, would demonstrate their corrupting power — their success in convincing people, including the pilgrim, that it is by focusing on fame that one achieves immortality.

On the other hand, the line ‘prima che Federigo avesse briga’ (l. 117) refers once more to the war between the Emperor and the Pope and is meant to stress, once again, that the Pope’s greed has been and still is responsible for the decadence of Italy:

‘Dì oggimai che la Chiesa di Roma,  
per confondere in sé due reggimenti,  
cade nel fango e sé brutta e la soma’. (*Purg.*, xvi. 127–29)

[Spread the word, then, that the Church of Rome, confounding in herself two governments, stumbles in the mud, befouling herself and her burden.]

The bad leadership of the Pope (and, to some extent, the Emperor) is deemed responsible for the current degeneracy of human affairs; and yet one should not conclude that the Pope has replaced the stars in bearing responsibility for men’s behaviour. As Marco Lombardo has also made it clear, each individual is, and remains, entirely responsible for his or her own actions (independently, that is, from the conditions that the Emperor or the Pope have created for them); and this is precisely why the Florentine sodomites are punished in Hell. In other words, there seems to be a tension in the *Divine Comedy* between stressing the full responsibility of individuals for what they do on earth (and receive in the afterlife), and highlighting the importance of the political context and the weight it bears on them.<sup>30</sup>

This is, surely, a symptom of the notion that the poem, albeit eschatological, is indeed written, as Erich Auerbach said, by a *Dichter der irdischen Welt*, a poet of the terrestrial world, of the world on earth.<sup>31</sup> But it

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<sup>30</sup> See Keen, pp. 234–39.

<sup>31</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Dante Dichter der irdischen Welt* (Berlin-Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1929); English translation as *Dante, Poet of the Secular World*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

is also a sign that when Dante deals with politics, he is more interested in showing the effects of government on men rather than their full freedom or 'autonomy'. In these cases, Dante's vision of humankind seems bleaker and we can perceive the wound of his exile. If, as scholars have shown, the last cantos of the poem stage the pilgrim's progressive detachment from Florence, finally replaced by the entrance into the community of the heavenly Jerusalem,<sup>32</sup> I wonder whether the nostalgia for the past, so prominent in the cantos sixteen, reminds us, in fact, of the extent to which the poet continued to be affected by the thought and memory of his old city to the end of his life.

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<sup>32</sup> See especially Honess, *From Florence to the Heavenly City*, but also Ferrante, *The Political Vision*.

# 17. Seductive Lies, Unpalatable Truths, Alter Egos<sup>1</sup>

*Tristan Kay*

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Forming what might be regarded as the central column of the three *cantiche* of Dante's *Commedia*, the Seventeens are cantos of considerable, even pivotal, narrative and philosophical importance, yet they do not form an obvious triad. From the dramatic descent on the monster Geryon in the *Inferno*, to Virgil's disquisition on love in the *Purgatorio*, to Cacciaguida's prophecies in the Heaven of Mars, we are, in each case, on very different thematic and stylistic terrain. In preparing this reading, I have nonetheless been struck by a number of threads, symmetries and oppositions that can be traced across this sequence. At the very least, these connections can help us to bring three distinctive cantos into a productive and revealing conversation, and in certain cases are so pronounced as to make us entertain the possibility of a conscious 'vertical' strategy on the part of the poet himself. In particular, these three 'halfway' cantos share a strongly metapoetic focus, featuring metatextual imagery and important statements of purpose, and, in this light, I shall ultimately consider how the Seventeens together contribute to Dante's definition of his poem as a 'comedy'. I shall begin, however, by briefly reviewing the content and some of the most important ideas that emerge from the Seventeens, before highlighting the structural prominence

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1 I would like to thank George Corbett and Heather Webb for inviting to me to participate in the *Vertical Readings* series and for their generosity and hospitality during my visit to Cambridge. As well as to George and Heather, and the anonymous peer reviewers, I wish to offer my thanks to David Bowe, George Ferzoco, and Simon Gilson for their helpful and thoughtful comments on my chapter.



accorded to the three cantos and reflecting upon some of the imagery, themes and intertexts that might be seen to connect them.

*Inferno* xvii represents a key moment of transition in the first *cantica*. It begins in the third and final section of the circle of violence, the seventh circle of Hell, and ultimately recounts the dramatic descent of Dante-pilgrim and Virgil into Malebolge, the circle of fraud. Dante and Virgil descend on the back of the beast Geryon, who had been described in classical literature, including by Virgil, as a monster with three bodies.<sup>2</sup> The opening description of Dante's Geryon as 'quella sozza imagine di froda' [that filthy image of fraud] (*Inf.*, xvii. 7) presents him as the embodiment of the sin punished in the eighth circle. His benign 'faccia d'uom giusto' [face of a just man] (l. 10) distracts us from his hairy forepaws and his serpentine body and tail, as do the vivid colours and extravagant patterns that adorn his flanks. For Robert Hollander, this tripartite form renders him 'the counterfeit of Christ, three-in-one rather than one in three'.<sup>3</sup> As has been widely noted by commentators, Geryon's monstrous body maps out the way in which fraud unfolds: the righteous countenance and seductive colours, whether visual or rhetorical, lure in and distract the victim until the fraudulent deed (represented by his tail's 'venenosa forca' [poisonous fork], l. 26) is done. Geryon, indeed, has fascinated critics not only as an embodiment of fraud but also as what Teodolinda Barolini describes as the '*locus classicus* for textual self-awareness in the *Commedia*',<sup>4</sup> a daring and supremely self-reflexive creation highly attuned not only to the linguistic dimension of fraud, but also to aspects of the poem's own unique textuality.

Following the introduction of Geryon comes Dante-pilgrim's encounter with the usurers. Their charging of interest upon loans, an activity strongly associated with Dante's native Florence, defied the natural law whereby reward should follow corresponding toil. The usurers in Hell are accordingly static, 'unmoved movers hunched over their desks in pursuit

2 See *Aen.*, vi. 289. Durling and Martinez detail various sources for Dante's description of Geryon, from the Book of the Apocalypse to Brunetto Latini and Franciscan discussions of the Antichrist. See Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed., trans. and notes by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), I, p. 268.

3 Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 322 (later cited as Hollander). Hollander also notes that the expression 'Ecco la fiera' [Behold the beast] (*Inf.*, xvii. 1) recalls the Biblical 'Ecce homo' (John 19.5).

4 Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 58.

of gain'.<sup>5</sup> This is a group depicted by the poet with contempt, taking on the sort of subhuman characteristics that become increasingly common in Malebolge.<sup>6</sup> While the pilgrim goes to speak to the usurers alone, Virgil prepares Geryon for their descent to the circle below. The descent itself takes up the third and final phase of the canto. Dante describes the hair-raising flight and the fear it aroused within him with reference to the ill-fated flights of two errant Ovidian figures, Phaeton (*Met.*, i. 747-ii. 332) and Icarus (*Met.*, viii. 183–259). Through these similes, he reflects upon his protagonist's submission to authority and highlights the opposition between a tragic, pagan world view, lacking an underlying principle of salvation, and the redemptive Christian vision of his own *Comedy*.

Like its infernal counterpart, *Purgatorio* xvii is a transitional canto that straddles two zones of the realm in question. Here we move from the terrace of the wrathful, the last terrace devoted to sins of misdirected love, to the terrace of sloth, a sin of love lacking vigour. We can again divide the narrative into three distinct phases. Firstly, the pilgrim experiences a series of ecstatic visions in which he perceives three exemplars of destructive anger.<sup>7</sup> In the middle of the canto, Dante receives the blessing from the angel of meekness, before he and Virgil stop wearily in a liminal space between the terraces. This pause in the narrative provides the opportunity for Virgil, who is accorded here an extraordinary degree of theological insight, to offer one of the most important philosophical discourses of the poem, taking up the last fifty-four lines of the canto, on the nature of love and its role in informing the moral order of Purgatory. Virgil presents 'amor' [love] as present in every being, encompassing both creature and creator, but draws a distinction in humans between 'natural' love, always directed towards the highest good, and 'elective' love, which is subject to free will and thus able to err in its chosen object or its degree, thereby leading us to sin. We learn that the seven deadly sins, punished on the seven terraces of Mount Purgatory, fall into three broader categories: misdirected love (pride, envy,

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5 Hollander, *Inferno*, p. 324.

6 See, for example, the comparison of the sinners to flea-ridden dogs in lines 49–51 and the usurer Renigaldo's bestial gesture: 'Qui distorse la bocca e di fuor trasse / la lingua, come bue che 'l naso lecchi' [Here he twisted his mouth and stuck out his tongue, like an ox licking its snout] (ll. 74–75).

7 Hollander notes the way in which the experience of these visions serves as a 'trial run' for the visionary poetics of the *Paradiso* and especially for the beatific vision of its final canto, anticipated in the use of 'alta fantasia' (l. 25), which reappears in the poem's concluding lines (*Par.*, xxxiii. 142). See Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2003), p. 380.

wrath), insufficient love (sloth), and the excessive love of secondary goods (avarice, gluttony, lust). This doctrine of love is further developed in canto xviii, especially in relation to free will, and its importance is underlined by its situation at the very core of the *Commedia*.

*Paradiso* xvii, the third canto of a triptych dedicated to Dante's encounter with his great-great-grandfather, the crusader Cacciaguida, constitutes one of the poem's truly climactic episodes, forming the apex of the poem's 'historical' dimension.<sup>8</sup> While the previous two cantos in the Heaven of Mars had focused primarily upon Cacciaguida's personal history and the former glories and current vicissitudes of the city of Florence, canto xvii contains two vital messages delivered by Dante's ancestor. First, Cacciaguida gives the definitive prophecy of Dante's painful exile from Florence. He explains with clear words and precise language — 'con chiare parole e preciso latin' (l. 34) — what had formerly been articulated through 'ambage' [ambiguities] (l. 31).<sup>9</sup> He tells of the pain, poverty, and humiliation that await Dante, the patrons who will protect him, and the former political allies who will betray him. Yet this experience of exile will prove bittersweet, for Cacciaguida spells out explicitly that Dante's journey has had a dual purpose. Not only has it been a salvific one from Dante's individual perspective, but it has served as the basis for a divinely sanctioned poem to be written for the edification of the 'mondo che mal vive' [world that lives ill] (*Purg.*, xxxii. 103). We learn, indeed, that the 'anime che son di fama note' [souls who are known to fame] (l. 138), whom the pilgrim has encountered on his journey, have been selected to provide the most potent examples to his future readers. Thinking 'vertically', we might contrast the 'fama' described here with the marked *infamy* of the

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8 See Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, ed. by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (Milan: Mondadori, 1997), pp. 469–70. Chiavacci Leonardi notes that while Virgil's *Aeneid* (evoked here through Dante's comparison of Cacciaguida to Aeneas's father Anchises) can only conceive of such a historical apex, the true climax of Dante's poem comes in the vision of God in the *Paradiso*'s final canto.

9 Durling and Martinez note that the *hapax* 'ambage' evokes the oracles of the pagan gods. See Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed., trans. and notes by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996–2011), vol. I (later cited as Durling and Martinez). As Hollander comments, 'Set off against pagan dark and wayward speech is Christian clarity of word and purpose'. See Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. by Robert and Jean Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2007), p. 468. Cacciaguida's prophecy is widely seen as 'fulfilling' that provided by his infernal correlative Brunetto Latini (*Inf.*, xv), similarly fashioned as a paternal figure: see, for example, Jeffrey T. Schnapp, 'Dante's Ovidian Self-Correction in *Paradiso* 17', in *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante's 'Commedia'*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 214–23 (p. 216).

dehumanized usurers, of whom Dante stated: 'non ne conobbi alcun' [I recognized none] (*Inf.*, xvii. 54). The pilgrim is told that, in reporting his experience, he must foreswear all falsehood, must not fear the consequences of his poem's provocative content. Indeed, exile becomes the requisite platform for Dante in writing this uncompromising poem. Now detached from civic and party-political allegiances, he may speak with a unique candour. Like the descent on Geryon, this encounter with Cacciaguida in canto xvii also features conspicuous allusions to Ovidian figures, as Dante again compares himself to Phaeton as well as to the unjustly exiled Hippolytus. Each figure ostensibly appears as a kind of *figura dantis*, but, as in the *Inferno*, Dante is asking us to consider situational contrasts between his Christian protagonist and his pagan alter egos.

It is immediately apparent that, in addition to their thematic heterogeneity, the Seventeens are characterized by very different kinds of poetry: from visceral narrative drama in the *Inferno*, to philosophical disquisition in the *Purgatorio*, to intensely personal and prophetic dialogue in the *Paradiso*. All three cantos are nonetheless pivotal with respect to the development of the narrative as a whole, each representing a different kind of watershed. *Inferno* xvii marks the passage into Malebolge, a circle distanced in moral, spatial and poetic terms from the previous seven circles;<sup>10</sup> *Purgatorio* xvii sees Virgil elaborate upon a principle that is the foundation of Dante's Christian ethics and key to the structure of his second realm,<sup>11</sup> and *Paradiso* xvii features the conversation between the pilgrim and his forebear that finally renders his exile from Florence and the very purpose of his journey explicit.<sup>12</sup>

It is no coincidence that the Seventeens feature these episodes, concepts, and revelations of decisive importance, for they are structurally privileged cantos. *Purgatorio* xvii and *Paradiso* xvii are the central cantos of their respective *cantiche*, preceded and followed in each case by sixteen cantos. Indeed, it is at the centre of his central *cantica* that Dante situates Virgil's exposition of what Robert Durling and Ronald Martinez describe as 'the

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10 Barolini describes *Inferno* xvi–xvii as 'a land of transition, and proximity to the boundary between old and new is stressed'. See Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, p. 72.

11 Charles Singleton describes this as 'the central pivot of the whole poem'. See Charles Singleton, 'The Poet's Number at the Center', *Modern Language Notes* 80 (1965), 1–10 (p. 6).

12 John Logan describes this revelation as being 'as important to the pilgrim as was the great exposition of love at the centre of the *Purgatorio*'. See John L. Logan, 'The Poet's Central Numbers', *Modern Language Notes* 86 (1971), 95–98 (p. 97).

central principle of all things, as well as the central problem of human life'.<sup>13</sup> The discourse is thereby placed on a pedestal, and the exact centre of the *Commedia* (*Purg.*, xvii. 125) falls at the precise midpoint of Virgil's speech.<sup>14</sup> The centrality of *Inferno* xvii is, of course, less pronounced, since the *Inferno* features thirty-four rather than thirty-three cantos. Accordingly, the midpoint of the *cantica* falls between cantos xvii and xviii — the point of transition from the circle of violence to Malebolge and an undoubted watershed in the first *cantica*.<sup>15</sup> Rather than as representing a 'central' episode, we might thus consider Dante and Virgil's flight upon Geryon as the climactic episode in a demarcated first half of the *Inferno*.<sup>16</sup>

This impression that Dante himself was highly attuned to the centrality associated with the Seventeens is reinforced in the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* by some intriguing structural and numerological patterns. In his essay 'The Poet's Number at the Center', Charles Singleton notes the symmetrical disposition of the number of lines belonging to the seven cantos that surround *Purgatorio* xvii:

xiv: 151  
 xv: 145  
 xvi: 145  
**xvii: 139**  
 xviii: 145  
 xix: 145  
 xx: 151

Singleton claims his identification of a cluster of seven cantos is supported by the sevens we are given by adding together the digits 151 at either end of the sequence. Furthermore, at the centre of cantos xvi and xviii, either side of our canto, we find corresponding references to the vital concept of 'libero arbitrio' [free will]: xvi. 71 and xviii. 74.<sup>17</sup> Each of these is preceded and followed in the canto by twenty-five *terzine*, with the numbers two

13 Durling and Martinez, II, p. 287. See also Singleton: 'Thus Love, as the central concern and argument, is seen to inform both God's world and the poet's world, there at the centre of both—and this we shall hardly view as an accident' (p. 1).

14 See Durling and Martinez, II, p. 611, citing Manfred Hardt, 'I numeri nella poetica di Dante', *Studi danteschi* 61 (1989), 1–27.

15 On Malebolge as a narrative and stylistic watershed, see Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, pp. 74–76.

16 Hollander describes the successful flight, often seen as microcosmic of the poem as a whole, as a 'provisional comic ending' at the midpoint of the first *cantica* (*Inferno*, p. 326).

17 Singleton, p. 2.

and five again combining to give a seven. The number seven is, argues Singleton, the ‘number of Creation’,<sup>18</sup> while Durling and Martinez note its numerous resonances in medieval culture, encompassing the seven planets, the vices and virtues, the sacraments, the ecclesiastical orders, and the liberal arts.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, it corresponds in the purgatorial context to the seven terraces that make up the second realm. Singleton regarded this highly contrived numerological sequence as a kind of ‘signature’ at the very core of the poem, marking its completeness and perfection, and serving as an affirmation of divine order that corresponds to the reordering of errant desire that is the essence of the second *cantica*.

*Paradiso* xvii, too, is framed by a numerological pattern that highlights its structural, as well as narrative, centrality. John Logan traces a similar symmetrical pattern in the number of lines in the cantos ‘framing’ *Paradiso* xvii.<sup>20</sup> He focuses not on the totals themselves, as had Singleton in the case of the *Purgatorio*, but rather on the sum of their constituent digits (for example, 139 lines = 1 + 3 + 9 = 13):<sup>21</sup>

x	148 = 13	--
xi	139 = 13	*****
xii	145 = 10	*****
xiii	142 = 7	****
xiv	139 = 13	***
xv	148 = 13	**
xvi	154 = 10	*
<b>xvii</b>	<b>142 = 7</b>	<b>Centre</b>
xviii	136 = 10	*
xix	148 = 13	**
xx	148 = 13	***
xxi	142 = 7	****
xxii	154 = 10	*****
xxiii	139 = 13	*****
xxiv	154 = 10	--

18 Singleton, p. 8.

19 Durling and Martinez, II, p. 610.

20 See Logan. On the centres of all three *cantiche*, see Riccardo Ambrosini, ‘Canto XVII’, in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Paradiso*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2002), pp. 243–64.

21 As well as in the essays in question, both Singleton’s and Logan’s sequences are usefully set out by Hollander on the Princeton Dante Project site ([www.princeton.edu/dante](http://www.princeton.edu/dante): note to *Purgatorio* xvii, 133–39). I have followed Hollander’s helpful formatting of the two sequences here.

Indeed, while one must be circumspect with respect to numerological patterns in the *Commedia*, Logan identifies an analogous pattern in the *Purgatorio*, thereby reinforcing Singleton's argument and all but confirming an authorial intention (symmetries of this particular kind are found nowhere else in the poem).<sup>22</sup> The Seventeens, probably more than any vertical sequence, thus underline the extraordinary attention to structure and numerology characteristic of the *Commedia*, whose architectural intricacy and harmony is intended as a manifestation of the perfection of God's creation. They confirm, moreover, Dante's own sense of their 'centrality', their place as a structural pillar at the heart of his poem, thematically divergent but containing concepts and episodes that are decisive both in the reader's experience of the narrative and the pilgrim's experience of the journey.

In addition to their structural and architectural prominence, the Seventeens are also connected by a number of thematic and lexical threads that invite interesting comparative readings and illuminate facets of the relationship between the three *cantiche*.<sup>23</sup> Firstly, motion, and in particular images of vertical ascent and descent, play an important role in all three cantos. In the inter-*cantica* section of their edition of the *Purgatorio*, Durling and Martinez note the ascent followed by the descent of Geryon in *Inferno* xvii and the ecstatic visions in *Purgatorio* xvii that fall like raindrops into Dante's fantasy — 'piovve dentro a l'alta fantasia...' [there rained into my lofty fantasy...] (l. 25) — before breaking up like rising bubbles ('a guisa d'una bulla / cui manca l'acqua sotto qual si feo, / surse in mia visione...' [like a bubble losing the water beneath which it formed, there arose in my vision...], ll. 32–34).<sup>24</sup> We might add to this the toilsome ascent of Virgil and Dante up Mount Purgatory itself and, in *Paradiso* xvii, the image of Dante forlornly ascending and descending the staircase of his patrons in exile:

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<sup>22</sup> Logan, p. 98.

<sup>23</sup> Like other contributors, I must stress that we cannot know whether the correspondences I set out in the next few paragraphs were intended as 'vertical' connections by the poet or whether they are merely some of many correspondences based on core semantic fields that could be traced across numerous combinations of cantos. As noted by the series editors, the thorny question of intentionality is not of decisive importance: a vertical reading can always lead to illuminating comparative readings that draw out aspects of the cantos that might otherwise be neglected. On the benefits and pitfalls of the critical approach, see the editors' introduction and the opening pages of Simon Gilson's essay 'The Wheeling Sevens', both in *Vertical Readings in Dante's 'Comedy'*, ed. by George Corbett and Heather Webb (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), pp. 1–12 and 143–60.

<sup>24</sup> Durling and Martinez, II, p. 291.

'come è duro calle, / lo scendere e 'l salir per l'altrui scale' [what a hard path it is to descend and mount by another's stairs] (ll. 59–60). We in fact find references to stairs in all three cantos. Geryon is described by Virgil as a staircase ('si scende per sì fatte scale' [we descend by stairs like these], l. 82), in light of his role of lowering the pilgrim and his guide into Malebolge. We encounter the angel of meekness in *Purgatorio* xvii atop a staircase ('io con lui volgemmo i nostri passi ad una scala' [with him I turned my feet toward a stairway], l. 65); 'Noi eravam dove più non saliva / la scala sù' [We were where the stairway rose no further], ll. 76–77). Finally, in *Paradiso* xvii, we find the staircase to be wearily mounted and descended by the exiled Dante. These staircases thus pertain, in sequence, to infernal descent, purgatorial ascent, and lastly to the forlorn and repetitive rhythms of Dante's life in exile. This last instance might be contrasted, outside of the vertical framework, with the inexorable ascent towards the divine associated with the 'scala santa' [holy stairway] (*Par.*, xxi. 64) we later find in the Heaven of Saturn.

Secondly, nautical imagery connects the three cantos. Geryon, prior to Dante and Virgil's descent, is likened to a docked boat ('Come talvolta stanno a riva i burchi, / che parte sono in acqua e parte in terra' [As skiffs lie on the shore at times, partly in water and partly on land], ll. 19–20), then later to a boat leaving its port ('come la navicella esce di loco / in dietro in dietro, sì quindi si tolse...' [As a little boat moves from its place backward, backward, so he moved thence], ll. 100–01), and finally to an eel during the descent itself ('là 'v' era 'l petto, la coda rivolse, / e quella tesa, come anguilla, mosse' [he turned his tail where his breast had been, and, extending it, he moved it like an eel's], ll. 103–04).<sup>25</sup> The first two of these images resonate in *Purgatorio* xvii, where Dante and Virgil come to a halt like a boat coming to shore: 'pur come nave ch'a la spiaggia arriva' [like a ship that is beached] (l. 78). As with the staircases, we see a change of direction from one *cantica* to the next ('la navicella esce di loco'; 'come nave ch'a la spiaggia arriva'), reflecting the *Purgatorio's* wider concern with homecoming and the pilgrim's overcoming of infernal exile. There is a prominent nautical simile in *Paradiso* xvii, too, used to explain how God's knowledge of future events does not determine them ('necessità però quindi non prende / se non come dal viso in che si specchia / nave che per torrente giù discende' [it does not,

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<sup>25</sup> Durling and Martinez note this abundance of nautical imagery in the canto (I, p. 268 ff.).



however, take necessity from there, any more than from the eye in which is mirrored a ship that floats downstream], ll. 40–42).

Dante also draws on weaving in each of the Seventeens, both in its mythological and technical aspects. For Dante, as for other medieval and classical authors, weaving is often related to questions of language and textuality and, indeed, features in several important metapoetic passages in the *Commedia*.<sup>26</sup> In the metatextual description of Geryon in *Inferno* xvii, the monster's extravagantly coloured body is compared to vivid Turkish and Tartar textiles and to those created by the mythological weaver Arachne, guilty of hubris in her weaving contest with the goddess Minerva and punished by being turned into a spider for her brilliant but irreverent tapestries of the pagan gods: 'Con più color, sommesse e sovraposte / non fer mai drappi Tartari né Turchi, / né fuor tai tele per Aragne imposte' [with more colours, in weave and embroidery, did never Tartars nor Turks make cloths, nor did Arachne string the loom for such tapestries] (ll. 16–18). Dante draws here upon a technical semantics of weaving ('sommese', 'sovraposte', 'imposte'), before doing so again in *Paradiso* xvii. There, as Cacciaguida finishes his first speech, Dante describes him as having completed the 'textile' that the pilgrim had begun: 'Poi che, tacendo, si mostrò spedita / l'anima santa di metter la trama / in quella tela ch'io le porsi ordita' [When, falling silent, that holy soul showed it had finished pulling the weft through the warp I had held out to him] (ll. 100–02). Cacciaguida, in finishing his answer to the pilgrim's question (the 'warp': the fixed threads) with his response (the 'weft': the crosswise threads), has completed the 'weave'. The metaphor implicitly figures the text of the *Commedia* as a tapestry of voices coming together to form a unified and coherent whole, with Dante the poet as the master weaver who skilfully unifies the disparate parts.

This designation, indeed, seems particularly apposite in the case of the Seventeens, where — in Dante's meticulous framing of the cantos discussed above — we witness such highly self-conscious structural 'weaving'. The myth of Procne and Philomela, evoked as one of the exemplars of wrath in

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26 Elena Lombardi describes the association as being 'as old as literature itself' (*The Wings of the Doves: Love and Desire in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2012), p. 241). Sue Hartley is currently writing a doctoral thesis at the University of Bristol on the rich relationship between poetics and textuality in medieval and renaissance literature, focusing especially on Dante and Ariosto. I am indebted to Hartley's work here for its insights into the weaving references in both *Inferno* xvii and *Paradiso* xvii.

*Purgatorio* xvii, is also concerned with this ancient art. Procne killed her son in an act of wrath after her sister Philomela had told her, through images woven onto a tapestry, that Procne's husband Tereus had raped her and cut out her tongue. Ill-fated mythological weavers therefore feature in *Inferno* xvii and *Purgatorio* xvii, followed, in *Paradiso* xvii, by a metaphor that figures Dante the poet as a weaver and the *Commedia* as a woven textile. The weaver of the *Commedia*, acting in accordance with divine will and instigating positive moral change, stands in opposition to the ancient weavers evoked in the earlier cantos, whose tapestries defied divine authority or else brought about chaos, conflict and self-annihilation.<sup>27</sup>

We can note that alimentary metaphors, while common in the poem, feature at especially important moments in *Purgatorio* xvii and *Paradiso* xvii, in both cases with reference to vital processes of knowledge and understanding. In *Purgatorio* xvii, Virgil tells Dante to pay close attention to his discourse on love to benefit from the pause in their ascent: 'volgi la mente a me, e prenderai / alcun buon frutto di nostra dimora' [turn your mind to me, and you will take some good fruit from our delay] (ll. 88–90). In *Paradiso* xvii, Dante describes the bitter taste that his words may have if he candidly retells what he has seen ('ho io appreso quel che s'io ridico / a molti fia sapor di forte agrume' [I have learned much that, if I relate it, to many will bring a most bitter taste], ll. 116–17), before Cacciaguida uses a further digestive metaphor in describing the transformative effects of Dante's poem upon its future audience: 'Ché se la voce tua sarà molesta / nel primo gusto, vital nodrimento / lascerà poi, quando sarà digesta' [For if your voice will be painful at the first taste, it will leave vital nourishment later, when it is digested] (ll. 130–32).

Another thematic point of contact between the Seventeens is the question of Dante's growing autonomy, as both pilgrim and poet. In *Inferno* xvii, Virgil, occupied in preparing Geryon for their descent to Malebolge, trusts Dante for the first time to encounter a group of sinners, the usurers, alone: 'Acciò che tutta piena / esperienza d'esto giron porti, / [...] va, e vedi la lor mena' [That you may carry away full experience of this subcircle, go, and see their behaviour] (ll. 37–39). Thus, Dante proceeds to encounter the usurers independently: 'Così ancor su per la strema testa / di quel settimo cerchio *tutto solo* / andai...' [So once more along the outer edge of that seventh circle I walked *all alone*] (ll. 43–45, emphasis mine). This

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27 On Arachne's relationship to Ulysses, and to the transgressive quality of Dante's poem, see Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, pp. 122–42.

points to the pilgrim's mastery over sins of violence: having earlier felt compassion towards Pier della Vigna and Brunetto Latini, he is confident and contemptuous when confronted by the usurers.<sup>28</sup> *Paradiso* xvii, too, stages a kind of conferral of autonomy onto Dante, but in this case it is onto Dante the poet. Cacciaguida famously commands Dante to embrace the isolation that will be his in exile. Rather than aligning himself with his feckless White Guelph compatriots in exile — 'la compagnia malvagia e scempia' [the wicked, dimwitted company] (l. 62); 'tutta ingrata, tutta matta ed empia / si farà contr' a te' [who will be utterly ungrateful, mad, and cruel against you] (l. 64) — it will behove him to form a party of himself alone: 'sì ch'a te fia bello / averti fatta parte per te stesso' [so that it will be well to have become a party unto yourself] (ll. 68–69). This radical autonomy is the necessary condition for the author of the *Commedia*, allowing him to speak in a truthful manner, condemning Guelph and Ghibelline factions alike as he reaffirms the common purpose of humanity and the unifying role of imperial authority. The journey undertaken by the pilgrim, in order to become the poet, is necessarily one of emancipation, from party-political as well as sinful bonds, of gaining political and moral autonomy, and both these matters are strongly in evidence in these particular cantos.

Finally, as noted by Durling and Martinez, *Inferno* xvii and *Purgatorio* xvii share a number of references to errant deviation, in verbs such as 'abbandonare' [abandon] (*Inf.*, xvii. 107; *Purg.*, xvii. 136) and 'torcersi' [twist] (*Inf.*, xvii. 28; *Purg.*, xvii. 100), as well as references to a 'freno' [bridle] (*Inf.*, xvii. 107) not prudently deployed.<sup>29</sup> In the infernal context, these words apply to the wayward flights of Phaeton and Icarus, which veer off course as they take a 'mala via' [bad course] (l. 117). In the *Purgatorio*, they relate foremost to wayward loves in Virgil's exposition of the structure of Purgatory: a love that 'al mal si torce' [turns aside to evil] (l. 100) or 'l'amor ch'ad esso troppo s'abbandona' [a love that abandons itself excessively to secondary goods] (l. 136) — what Durling and Martinez describe as 'the moral equivalent of Phaeton's mad career'.<sup>30</sup> In both cases, there is an emphasis placed on the dangers of imprudence and excess, of a lack of moral fortitude or a failure to submit to divine authority. Such deviation contrasts with the inexorable

28 On this sense of progression from improper sympathy to firm rebuttal, in five phases of the *Inferno*, see Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's 'Commedia'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 301–07.

29 Durling and Martinez, II, p. 291.

30 *Ibid.*

progress of Dante's journey through the afterlife. This journey, sanctioned by God, arrives unerringly at its destination. Its narrative arc is represented emblematically in the flight of Geryon and its movement from fear and uncertainty to resolution. This movement is evident, moreover, in *Paradiso* xvii, which begins with Dante, again like his mythological antecedent Phaeton, fearing for his future, due to the 'parole gravi' [grave words] he has heard below, but ends with his fears placated and with a reinforced sense of certainty and of poetic and spiritual vocation.

Both the successful flight of Geryon and the powerful certainties offered by Cacciaguida thus encapsulate the poem's wider tendency towards Christian resolution. Indeed, the fact that both episodes unfold in the shadow of tragic Ovidian myths — the 'mad flights' of Phaeton and Icarus and the unjust worldly exile of Hippolytus, untempered by spiritual redemption — underlines the key distinction between Christian 'comedy' and pagan 'tragedy' that appears especially important in the Seventeens, particularly so in the infernal and paradisiacal cantos. My reading so far has offered a sense of the cantos' diversity of style and content (and consequent resistance to any sort of 'global' vertical reading, as per the 'political' Sixes) as well as their surprising range of affinities. In the remaining pages, however, I shall seek to give a more integrated reading of what I regard as a strongly metapoetic group of cantos. In light of the poem's status as a 'comedy', I shall focus on two interrelated questions: firstly, the relationship between Geryon (as 'sozza imagine di frode') and Cacciaguida's instructions to Dante as poet of the *Commedia*; and secondly, the cluster of mythological figures with whom Dante establishes both analogies and contrasts in these cantos.

The label of 'comedy' is especially pertinent in considering the Seventeens because the description of Geryon in *Inferno* xvii is prefaced by a passage, at the end of the previous canto, in which Dante refers to his poem as a comedy for the very first time. Indeed, *Inferno* xvii must be seen to unfold in light of the notion, taken for granted by us but not by the text's first readers, that this poem is to be considered a 'comedia' (*Inf.*, xvi. 128). It comes as Dante the narrator seemingly insists upon the literal truth of perhaps the most implausible moment of the entire *Inferno*:

Sempre a quel ver c'ha faccia di menzogna  
de l'uom chiuder le labbra fin ch'el puote,  
però che sanza colpa fa vergogna;

ma qui tacer nol posso; e per le note  
 di questa comedia, lettor, ti giuro,  
 s'elle non sien di lunga grazia vòte,  
 ch'ì' vidi per quell'aere grosso e scuro  
 venir notando una figura in suso,  
 maravigliosa ad ogne cor sicuro [...] (*Inf.*, xvi. 124–32)

[Always to that truth which has the face of falsehood one should close one's lips as long as one can, for without any guilt it brings shame; but here I cannot conceal it, and by the notes of this comedy, reader, I swear to you, so may they not fail to find long favour, that I saw, through that thick dark air, a figure come swimming upward, fearful to the most confident heart.]

Dante swears upon the very poem itself — ‘per le note / di questa comedia’ — that this sight of the monstrous Geryon swimming through the air towards him was one truly experienced.<sup>31</sup> The key words here are ‘quel ver c’ha faccia di menzogna’, words often regarded as encapsulating Dante’s presentation of the *Commedia* as a whole.<sup>32</sup> It is no coincidence that this description of the poem is juxtaposed with the description of Geryon at the beginning of canto xvii. Where Dante’s poem is classified as a truth with the face of a lie, Geryon is evidently presented as a lie with the face of truth: the foul embodiment of fraud with the benign face of a just man. While this juxtaposition places the *Commedia* in opposition to the kind of fraudulent discourse embodied by Geryon, it should be reiterated before proceeding that critics such as Barański, Barolini and Ferrucci have offered important insights into the ways in which this creature should also be seen to represent the poem itself and aspects of its unique textuality, especially in terms of its violation of stylistic norms.<sup>33</sup> While Geryon is indeed to be

31 For Barolini, Geryon is ‘an outrageously paradoxical authenticating device: one that, by being so overtly inauthentic — so literally a figure of inauthenticity, a figure for “fraud” — confronts and attempts to defuse the belatedness or inauthenticity to which the need for an authenticating device necessarily testifies’ (*Undivine Comedy*, p. 59). For a stimulating recent reading of these lines as representing ‘a bilateral pact’ that is ‘perilously close to [...] a fraudulent deal’, see Justin Steinberg, *Dante and the Limits of the Law* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 154–59.

32 As Barolini summarizes: ‘although a *comedia* may at times, as when representing Geryon, have the “face of a lie” — give the appearance of lying — it is intractably always truth’. Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante’s Poets: Textuality and Truth in the ‘Comedy’* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 59. On this aspect of Geryon, see also Zygmunt G. Barański, ‘The “Marvellous” and the “Comic”’: Toward a Reading of *Inferno* xvi’, *Lectura Dantis* 7 (1990), 72–95.

33 See Barański, ‘The “Marvellous” and the “Comic”’; Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, pp. 58–73; and Franco Ferrucci, ‘Comedia’, *Yearbook of Italian Studies* 1 (1971), 29–52.

understood, as Barolini states, as 'both the poem and its antithesis',<sup>34</sup> it is the 'antithetical' side of this polysemous and indeed paradoxical monster that strikes me as most important in the context of this vertical reading — as the specious, fraudulent and embellished counterpoint to the *Commedia's* humble and truthful realism.

The poem's status as a 'comedy' has prompted extensive critical debate, in relation to classical and medieval poetics, that I am not able to rehearse in detail here.<sup>35</sup> The suitability of the label has largely focused upon narrative and stylistic questions that are encapsulated in the Epistle to Cangrande, even if the letter is widely regarded as much more schematic in its discussion of style than the poem itself.<sup>36</sup> In terms of narrative, the Epistle states:

Et est comedia genus quoddam poetice narrationis ab omnibus aliis differens. Differt ergo a tragedia in materia per hoc, quod tragedia in principio est admirabilis et quieta, in fine seu exitu est fetida et horribilis; et dicitur propter hoc a 'tragos' quod est hircus et 'oda' quasi 'cantus hircinus', idest fetidus ad modum hirci; ut patet per Senecam in suis tragediis. Comedia vero inchoat asperitatem alicuius rei, sed eius materia prospere terminatur, ut patet per Terentium in suis comediis. (xiii, 29)

[Now comedy is a certain kind of poetical narration which differs from all others. It differs, then, from tragedy in its subject-matter, in that tragedy at the beginning is admirable and placid, but at the end or issue is foul and horrible. And tragedy is so called from *tragos*, a goat, and *oda*; as it were a 'goat-song', that is to say foul like a goat, as appears from the tragedies of Seneca. Whereas comedy begins with sundry adverse conditions, but ends happily, as appears from the comedies of Terence.]

34 Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, p. 66. In her reading of Geryon as representing the poem, Barolini accounts for the line 'ver c'ha faccia di menzogna' by interpreting it as Dante's acknowledgement of the mendacity inherent in all narratives: 'The answer is that even a *comedia*, in order to come into existence as text, must to some extent accommodate that human and thus ultimately fraudulent construct, language' (*Undivine Comedy*, p. 61).

35 See, for example, Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Comedia: Notes on Dante, the Epistle to Cangrande, and Medieval Comedy', *Lectura Dantis* 8 (1991), 26–55; Barański, ed., *Libri poetarum in quattuor species dividuntur: Essays on Dante and Genre*, special issue of *The Italianist* 15 (1995); Barolini, *Dante's Poets*, pp. 269–86; Ferrucci; Lino Pertile, 'Canto-cantica-comedia e l'Epistola a Cangrande', *Lectura Dantis* 9 (1991), 105–23; and Claudia Villa, *La 'Lectura Terentii'* (Padua: Antenore, 1984).

36 See Barański, 'Comedia', who denies the Epistle is Dante's on account of its highly conventional treatment of style. In favour of Dantean authorship of the Epistle, see Luca Azzetta, 'Le chiose alla *Commedia* di Andrea Lancia, l'Epistola a Cangrande e altre questioni dantesche', *L'Alighieri* 21 (2003), 5–76; Robert Hollander, *Dante's Epistle to Cangrande* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993); and Pertile, 'Canto-cantica-comedia'.

Naturally, in the case of the *Commedia*, this 'comic' arc concerns the journey from the dark wood of sin and confusion to salvation and the vision of God at the culmination of the *Paradiso*. With respect to language, the Epistle states: 'Similiter differunt in modo loquendi: elate et sublime tragedia; comedia vero remisse et humiliter' [Tragedy and comedy differ likewise in their style of language; for that of tragedy is high-flown and sublime, while that of comedy is unstudied and lowly] (xiii, 30). As has been widely explored by Dante scholars, the lowly and humble style of the *Commedia* can be considered both in terms of the fact that it is composed in the vernacular rather than Latin and also in terms of its non-adherence to rhetorical norms. Its stylistic approach is defined by its breadth and flexibility, its capacity to draw on a full spectrum of language in order to communicate as faithfully as possible the nature of a journey that encompasses the extremes of the created universe.<sup>37</sup>

A vertical reading of the Seventeens sheds light on both these dimensions of the poem's status as a 'comedy'. Let us begin with the question of language and style. As noted above, in presenting Geryon as a living symbol of fraud, Dante is highly attentive to questions of language:

lo dosso e 'l petto e ambedue le coste  
dipinti avea di nodi e di rotelle.  
Con più color, sommesse e sovrapposte  
non fer mai drappi Tartari né Turchi,  
né fuor tai tele per Aragne imposte. (*Inf.*, xvii. 14–18)

[it has back and breast and both sides painted with knots and little wheels: with more colours, in weave and embroidery, never Tartars nor Turks made cloths, nor did Arachne string the loom for such tapestries.]

As noted by Barolini in particular, the references to 'nodi', 'colori' and weaving all carry clear associations in Dante's work with language and textuality,<sup>38</sup> while Arachne, the particular weaver evoked, is 'the mythological figure who more than any other is an emblem for textuality, for weaving the webs of discourse'.<sup>39</sup> As such, the language of fraud (or, depending on one's emphasis, the textuality of the poem) is strongly foregrounded. If

37 See, for example, Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Significar *per verba*: Notes on Dante and Plurilingualism', *The Italianist* 6 (1986), 5–18.

38 See Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, pp. 63–64.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Geryon is to be considered in part a meditation on fraudulent language, then what precisely is it that constitutes fraudulent language? In light of Dante's reference to abundant (rhetorical) knots and colours, it would seem to be an ornate and highly rhetorical language. Such an interpretation would indeed be fitting, anticipating the enticing but deceptive language associated with the seducers and the flatterers – the fraudulent sinners we encounter in the very next canto. Dante describes there the manipulative 'parole ornate' [polished words] (l. 91) of Ovid's Jason, while the flatterers wallow in excrement that reflects their worthless sycophancy. In light of the rhetorical skill accorded to Francesca and Ulysses, it is clear that Dante is conscious of the potentially specious quality of highly ornate language. In *Vita nova* xxv, he condemns those poets (chiefly Guittone d'Arezzo) who cannot justify their use of 'colori rettorici' [rhetorical colours]. In *Purgatorio* xxiv (ll. 49–62), he contrasts those vernacular poets, constrained by an expressive 'nodo' [knot], whose contrived lyric expression contrasts with the inspired and spontaneous genesis of Dante's own verse.

This description of Geryon as an embodiment of fraudulent discourse takes on a further resonance, though, if read in conjunction with *Paradiso* xvii, and specifically Cacciaguیدا's exhortations to Dante. I would suggest that Geryon can be glimpsed in the background of *Paradiso* xvii, the negative image of the kind of poetry that Cacciaguیدا demands. Dante of course tells Cacciaguیدا of a dilemma he faces. On the one hand, he fears his words, if entirely truthful, may leave a bitter taste among his readers and his future patrons; on the other, if he remains a 'timid friend' to truth, he risks compromising his poetic legacy and the transformative potential of his *Commedia*. In response, Cacciaguیدا urges Dante to remain steadfastly committed to a faithful articulation of his experience:

indi rispuose: 'Coscienza fusca  
o de la propria o de l'altrui vergogna  
pur sentirà la tua parola brusca.  
Ma nondimen, rimossa ogne menzogna,  
tutta tua vision fa manifesta;  
e lascia pur grattar dov'è la rogna.  
Ché se la voce tua sarà molesta  
nel primo gusto, vital nodrimento  
lascerà poi, quando sarà digesta'. (*Par.*, xvii. 124–32)

[then he replied: 'A conscience dark with its own or another's shame will indeed feel your word to be harsh. But nonetheless, putting aside every



falsehood, make manifest all your vision, and let them still scratch where the itch is. For if your voice will be painful at the first taste, it will leave vital nourishment later, when it is digested'.]

As expressed so memorably here, Dante's poem must be purged of every falsehood in its account of Dante's vision. As in *Inferno* xvi–xvii, the *Commedia* is powerfully aligned with 'il vero' [truth] (l. 118) and distanced from falsehood: 'menzogna'. Such commitment to truth will naturally render the *Commedia* an abrasive text, whose truths are often unpalatable. Yet the uncomfortable pang of recognition felt by a reader with a 'coscienza fusca' will testify to the poem's capacity to instigate change, to provide 'vital nodrimento'.

The uncompromising commitment to truth demanded by Cacciaguida is no doubt related to Dante's designation of his poem as a humble 'comedia'. Cacciaguida's 'chiare parole' are a model of plain-speaking frankness, not least the expression 'lascia pur grattar dov'è la rognà'. This harsh, corporeal idiom serves as a prototype for Dante's own radically inclusive use of style and register in a poem that must remain beholden only to truth, and not to stylistic and rhetorical norms.<sup>40</sup> At the other end of the linguistic spectrum, and the infernal end of the vertical sequence, we find the seductive and embellished falsehoods, the 'parole ornate', associated with Geryon and the fraudulent sinners who inhabit Malebolge. 'Parole ornate' is, moreover, an expression strongly associated in the *Commedia* with Virgilian eloquence, and the lofty, tragic, and rather stiff style ('alta tragedia', *Inf.*, xx. 113) with which the Mantuan poet is synonymous in medieval culture, a style in opposition to which the vernacular Christian 'comedia' continually situates itself.<sup>41</sup> As is well known, this opposition between 'comedy' and 'tragedy' in Dante's poem continually maps onto an opposition between truth and

40 Claire Honess writes that 'one of the functions of Dante's encounter with Cacciaguida is to make explicit the justification for the poetics of the *Commedia*'. Claire Honess, 'Expressing the Inexpressible: The Theme of Communication in the Heaven of Mars', *Lectura Dantis* 14 (1994), 42–60 (p. 55).

41 For example, it is well known that *Inferno* ii places Beatrice's clear speech ('soave e piana') (56), which 'resembles the sublimely humble style valorized by the *Comedy*', in opposition to Virgil's more embellished, and later tainted, brand of eloquence ('parola ornata' [polished words], 67). See Hollander, *Inferno*, p. 40. On Dante's handling of the *Aeneid* as *tragedia*, see Hollander's *Il Virgilio dantesco: tragedia nella 'Commedia'* (Florence: Olschki, 1983). On Dante's ambivalence towards eloquence, with reference to 'parola ornata' see Steven Botterill, 'Dante's Poetics of the Sacred Word', in *Philosophy and Literature* 20.1 (April 1996), 154–62.

falsehood.<sup>42</sup> Dante's own alignment with truth concerns not only the fact that his poem has a Christian, and not a pagan, subject-matter, but also that in using language more freely than tragedy, it is less fettered by rhetorical restrictions and thus less mendacious in its approximation of reality.<sup>43</sup> By reading vertically we see *Inferno* xvii and *Paradiso* xvii plot two forms of discourse against each other: the ornate, seductive, and yet mendacious speech of fraud is the antithesis of the more unpalatable and humble yet innately veracious language of the *Commedia*.

As well as this stylistic dimension, the narrative opposition between comedy and tragedy, reflecting an opposition between Christian and pagan world views, is also strongly foregrounded in the Seventeens. I discussed earlier how both *Inferno* xvii and *Paradiso* xvii feature a common movement from fear and uncertainty to resolution, in the successful flight of Geryon and the reassuring words of Cacciaguida, but this 'comic' dimension of the poem is brought into sharper focus by the unusual concentration of Ovidian figures who feature in the Seventeens. Perhaps the most striking of these figures are Phaeton and Icarus. As we saw above, Phaeton appears at key moments in both *Inferno* xvii and *Paradiso* xvii, and is thus perhaps the most prominent link between the cantos. In a persuasive essay, Kevin Brownlee has analysed in detail what he regards as the programmatic use of Phaeton over the course of the Seventeens.<sup>44</sup> In Ovid's familiar account, Phaeton is directed by his mother Clymene to his father Apollo, for reassurance that he was indeed the son of the solar deity. To this end, Apollo agrees to Phaeton's request that he be allowed to ride the sun chariot for a day, but the flight ends in catastrophe. Phaeton, terrified by the constellation of Scorpio,

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42 'As Dante's treatment of Vergil's [*Aeneid*] repeatedly demonstrates, the classical *tragedia* participates in fiction, also known as falsehood — *menzogna* — while the *comedia*, based on the conviction that the real is more valuable than the beautiful, deals exclusively in truth'. Barolini, *Dante's Poets*, pp. 279–80.

43 'As a genre that is devoted to truth, rather than to the *parola ornata*, it may exploit any register — high or low — but depends on none, since it must always be free to adopt the stylistic register that most accurately reflects the truth of the situation at hand'. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

44 See Kevin Brownlee, 'Phaeton's Fall and Dante's Ascent', *Dante Studies* 102 (1984), 135–44. I am indebted here to Brownlee's account of Dante's inversion of the pagan model. On Phaeton, see also Marguerite Mills Chiarenza, 'Time and Eternity in the Myths of *Paradiso* xvii', in *Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio: Studies in the Italian Trecento in Honor of Charles S. Singleton*, ed. by Anthony Pellegrini and Aldo Bernardo (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1983), pp. 135–55; Michelangelo Picone, 'Dante, Ovid, and the Poetry of Exile', in *Dante in Oxford: The Paget Toynbee Lectures*, ed. by Tristan Kay, Martin McLaughlin and Michelangelo Zaccarello (Oxford: Legenda 2011), pp. 26–38; and Schnapp, 'Dante's Ovidian Self-Correction'.

drops the chariot's reins and risks scorching the earth before being felled by a thunderbolt from Jupiter. Phaeton's story is thus an emblematic tale of human presumption and pride, especially in the face of divine power and authority, and accordingly serves as a valuable counterpoint for the author of the *Commedia*.

Dante compares his own fear while riding Geryon to that of Phaeton upon losing control of the sun chariot:

Maggior paura non credo che fosse  
quando Fetonte abbandonò li freni,  
per che 'l ciel, come pare ancor, si cosse... (*Inf.*, xvi. 106–08)

[I believe there was no greater fear when Phaeton abandoned the reins, so that the sky was scorched, as still appears...]

While the emotion of fear is common to the two figures, the wider contexts of the episodes could not be more different, and, as in many of his classical similes, Dante is prompting us to reflect upon a situational contrast. While Phaeton, to his cost, is heedless of the dangers of his flight, Dante submits to the authority of a guide who all but embodies rational discretion. Brownlee notes that while Scorpio brings about the unguided Phaeton's downfall, Virgil protects Dante-pilgrim from Geryon's scorpion tail.<sup>45</sup>

At the very beginning of *Paradiso* xvii, Dante, in seeking reassurances from Cacciaguida (following the menacing but opaque prophecies he has heard in the previous two realms), compares himself to the apprehensive Phaeton before Clymene:

Qual venne a Climenè, per accertarsi  
di ciò ch'avèa incontro a sé udito,  
quei ch'ancor fa li padri ai figli scarsi;  
tal era io, e tal era sentito  
e da Beatrice e da la santa lampa  
che pria per me avea mutato sito. (*Par.*, xvii. 1–6)

[As to Clymene, in order to verify what he heard against himself, he came who still makes fathers cautious toward their sons: such was I, and so was I perceived both by Beatrice and by the holy lamp that earlier had changed place because of me.]

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<sup>45</sup> Brownlee, 'Phaeton's Fall', pp. 136–37.

We are again invited to consider an inversion of the classical model. While Phaeton goes to his mother asking for reassurances concerning his uncertain past, Dante goes to a paternal figure, Cacciaguida, and seeks clarification concerning a glorious future.<sup>46</sup> In both the infernal and paradisiacal allusions, Dante emerges, writes Schnapp, as a 'triumphant Christian charioteer, a Phaeton made good, a Phaeton who may rightfully lay claim to the heavens'.<sup>47</sup>

Reinforcing the sense of Phaeton as a key thread in the Seventeens, and one intended as such by the poet, Brownlee also identifies an allusion to Ovid's Phaeton in *Purgatorio* xvii, though this time the classical figure is not named and the allusion identified is arguably less compelling. Specifically, the critic sees a parallel between Dante's appearance before the angel of meekness and Phaeton's appearance before Apollo, and draws similarities between the figures' shared inability to withstand the luminosity of the divine figure before them: 'Ma come al sol che nostra vista grava / e per soverchio sua figura vela, / così la mia virtù quivi mancava' [But if as at the sun, which weighs down our gaze and veils its shape with excess, so my power failed before him] (ll. 52–54).<sup>48</sup>

Taking the three episodes across the Seventeens collectively, we witness a 'poetically functioning reversal of the narrative order of the Ovidian Phaeton story', as well as of its tragic narrative principle:<sup>49</sup> we move, in this 'comic' rewriting, from Phaeton's flight, to his appearance before Apollo, to his appearance before Clymene, while in the classical text the events unfold in the contrary direction. A similar idea of inversion is at stake in the figure of Icarus, whose famous and fateful flight is similarly concerned with questions of presumption, temperance, guidance, and authority. Unlike Icarus, who disobeys his father's advice to follow a central course between the sea and the sun, Dante remains guided by the paternal Virgil and has divine will and authority on his side:

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46 *Ibid.*, p. 137. Hollander summarizes the inversion at stake here in Paradise: 'In Ovid's "tragic" narrative, Phaeton is, we remember, allowed to destroy himself through overenthusiastic evaluation of his own capacities as rookie sun-driver; in Dante's comically resolved tale of his journey through the heavens, we see the protagonist as a wiser (and better-aided) version of Phaeton' (*Paradiso*, p. 465).

47 Schnapp, 'Dante's Ovidian Self-Correction', p. 219.

48 See Brownlee, 'Phaeton's Fall', pp. 137–38.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 137.

né quando Icaro misero misero le reni  
sentì spennar per la scaldada cera,  
gridando il padre a lui 'Mala via tieni!'. (*Inf.*, xvii. 109–11)

[nor when the wretched Icarus felt his loins unfeathering because of the heated wax, as his father shouted to him, 'You're on a bad course!'.]

Again, a tragic tale of presumption is granted a comic resolution in light of this Christian voyager's submission to his God.<sup>50</sup> While Icarus is only named in this one instance, and lacks Phaeton's powerful association with the Seventeens, Brownlee sees him as having a similar programmatic function over the course of the *Commedia*, evoked by reference to his father Daedalus and the poem's pervasive imagery of wings and feathers.<sup>51</sup>

Through this continual emphasis on inversion Dante seeks to confer a new Christian significance onto his pagan source texts; to metamorphose pagan tragedy into Christian comedy.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, it only seems fitting that in *Purgatorio* xvii, the very core of the *Commedia*, is defined the principle — 'amor' — that enables human life to achieve comic resolution. For numerous pagan figures referenced in the poem, love, lacking a redemptive object, could end only in the 'foul and horrible', in tragedy. We need only think of Dido, 'che s'ancise amorosa' [who killed herself for love] (*Inf.*, v. 61), or of Virgil's famous words in Limbo, 'sanza speme vivemo in disio' [without hope we live in desire] (*Inf.*, iv. 42), to understand the tragic tenor of love for Dante's pagans. By contrast, love for Dante becomes the comic

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50 As Hollander summarizes, 'the protagonist [...] must have thought that he, too, might die for his temerity; the poet, however, making the analogies now, sees the comic resolution of a voyage that might have turned tragic except for the fact that this voyager had God on his side' (*Inferno*, p. 326). Barolini sees Arachne, Icarus, and Phaeton as 'surrogate figures' of Ulysses: the poem's emblematic figure of overreaching (*Undivine Comedy*, p. 64). The oppositions I have discussed here are not, of course, to be understood as evidence of the innate superiority of Dante's poetic art. Rather they should be seen as emblematic of his continual endeavour to appropriate for himself an unimpeachable authority and to situate himself and his poetry in relation to other traditions of writing, in order to show how the *Commedia* overcomes their perceived moral, spiritual and expressive failings.

51 See Kevin Brownlee, 'Dante's Transfigured Ovidian Models: Icarus and Daedalus in the *Commedia*', in *Rethinking the New Medievalism*, ed. by Howard Bloch, Alison Calhoun, Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, Joachim Küpper and Jeanette Patterson (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 162–80.

52 On this tendency in Dante's work, see the various essays *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante's 'Commedia'*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

instrument of redemption and the means of terminating worldly exile.<sup>53</sup> The Seventeens, structurally privileged within the poem and with a shared metatextual focus, can thus be seen as playing a decisive role in contributing to Dante's definition of his work as a 'comedy'. Looking back down the cantos, from the perspective of *Paradiso xvii*, we can regard Geryon as the poem's negative image, everything that Dante insists his text is not; we find the tale of Phaeton entirely inverted, both in terms of its narrative order and its thematic principle; and we see 'Icaro misero' and 'folle Arachne' as the antitypes of the pilgrim and the poet-weaver respectively. Through the prism of these ancient anti-models, we bear witness to some of the defining features of a radically new kind of epic, one inspired by a redemptive 'amor' alien to his classical antecedents: an epic which Dante labels his 'comedia'.

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53 On Dante's handling of this contrast, with a focus on the figure of Dido, see my essay 'Dido, Aeneas, and the Evolution of Dante's Poetics', *Dante Studies* 129 (2011), 135–60.



# 18. Women, War and Wisdom<sup>1</sup>

Anne C. Leone

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Many aspects of the eighteenth cantos of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* resist meaningful comparison. The cantos differ significantly in terms of their dominant imagery, motifs, structure, topography and astronomy, and characters. Nonetheless, despite these major differences, there are some suggestive parallels between the cantos that relate to their portrayal of women. Across the Eighteens, Dante alludes to female figures in classical, biblical and historical sources, which are often — but not always — negative and narrowly prescribed. Positive and negative images of women in the cantos share a number of characteristics and behaviours, and women are often defined in terms of their political or social functions — specifically in terms of how they aid or impede men engaged in military or heroic exploits, or in terms of their reproductive roles.

The topography of each canto could hardly be more different. At the beginning of *Inferno* xviii, Geryon sets the pilgrim and Virgil down in the first *bolgia* of the Malebolge. The narrative voice describes the structure of the eighth circle, comparing the rocky, iron-coloured terrain of the place to the defensive architecture surrounding a castle (ll. 1–18). *Purgatorio* xviii, by contrast, barely mentions the setting, although we may infer from the previous canto that it takes place on the fourth terrace where *acedia* is

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1 I would like to thank George Corbett and Heather Webb for organizing the *Vertical Readings* project, and for inviting me to participate in this challenging, collaborative and rewarding initiative. I owe a debt of gratitude to Heather and George, as well as to the anonymous peer reviewers, for their thoughtful and helpful comments on my essay. I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to Zygmunt Barański, whose feedback was invaluable.



purged. The appearance of the moon — shaped like a bucket and dimming the other stars — comprises the only topographical and astronomical image in the canto (ll. 76–78).

If we consider as ‘astronomical’ the image of the souls of the blessed appearing as lights in the heavens, then *Paradiso* xviii — predictably — contains more astronomical images than the other two cantos. While still in the Heaven of Mars, Dante witnesses Cacciaguida’s ascent to the cross of light, as well as the simultaneous flashing and naming of other members of the Church Militant on the cross (ll. 34–48). Turning to Beatrice (l. 52), Dante realizes that he has risen up to the Heaven of Jupiter (l. 69), where the souls of the blessed, singing, flying and dancing across the sky, spell out the first sentence of the Book of Wisdom: ‘Diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram’ [Love justice, you that are the judges of the earth] (ll. 73–93),<sup>2</sup> the ‘M’ of the last word taking on the shape of an eagle (l. 107) before sprouting into the figure of a lily (l. 113).

The characters that the travellers meet and the activities in which they engage also differ significantly across the cantos. In the first *bolgia* of *Inferno* xviii, the pilgrim and Virgil witness the punishment of the pimps and the seducers, who walk naked in two lines moving in opposite directions, like people crossing the Ponte S. Angelo in Rome during the Jubilee (ll. 28–33), while demons whip them (ll. 35–36). In the second *bolgia*, they find the flatterers, who, immersed in human excrement and suffocating on the mouldy vapour rising from the *bolgia* below, strike and scratch themselves (ll. 103–08; 131). The figures appearing in *Inferno* xviii come from sources both contemporary (Venedico Caccianemico, who pimped his sister Ghisolabella to the Marchese Obizzo II da Este, and Alessio Interminei of Lucca, who beats his own head, hair wet with shit, denying his sin, ll. 121–26), and classical (Jason, who impregnated and abandoned both Hypsipyle and Medea, ll. 85–96, and Thais, a prostitute guilty of flattering her ‘drudo’ [lover], ll. 130–36).

In *Purgatorio* xviii, by contrast, Virgil and Dante speak with only one soul, although they see and hear others running along the terrace purging the vice of *acedia*: Gerard, who was the Abbot of San Zeno in Verona under emperor Frederick I Barbarossa and who died in 1187, and about whom nothing more is known. The other individuals mentioned in the canto, drawn from biblical and classical sources, are not characters as such, but are presented by the penitent souls as *exempla* of their vice and its opposing

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2 Translations of passages from the *Book of Wisdom* are based on the Douay-Rheims edition of the Bible.

virtue. The positive *exempla* are the Virgin Mary who ran to congratulate Elizabeth when she heard about her pregnancy from the Angel Gabriel (Luke 1.39–42), and Julius Caesar who rushed to battle in Spain (*Purg.*, xviii. 100–02; and compare Book iii of Lucan's *Pharsalia*). The negative *exempla* are the Israelites who did not make it to the Promised Land (*Purg.*, xviii. 133–35; and compare Numbers 14.20–33), and the Trojan women who stayed in Sicily when Aeneas continued on to Italy to found Rome (*Purg.*, xviii. 136–38; and compare *Aen.*, v. 680–776).

In *Paradiso* xviii, Dante encounters the 'nine worthies' who comprise a mixture of Christian and Jewish warriors from historical, fictional and biblical sources: Cacciaguida, whom he has been with since entering the Heaven of Mars, Joshua, Charlemagne, Roland, Maccabeus, William, Renouard, Duke Godfrey and Robert Guiscard (ll. 34–48). Except for Cacciaguida, who directs the pilgrim's attention to the cross before becoming part of it again, the souls making up the cross do not speak to the pilgrim. Instead, he experiences his encounter with them through a kind of synaesthesia of word and light: the naming of each soul and its flashing along the cross of light are one and the same event (l. 39). The other central character of the canto is Beatrice, who guides the *viator's* experience throughout: with the 'amoroso suono' [loving sound] of her voice (l. 7), the love in her eyes (l. 9) which is inexpressible through language, the brightness of her smile (l. 19) and her sage directions (ll. 20–21).

At least on the surface, the central issues of each canto are dissimilar. *Inferno* xviii focuses primarily on fraud; *Purgatorio* xviii is concerned with the nature of love and the purgation of *acedia*; while *Paradiso* xviii focuses on the Church Militant and the issue of divine justice. While it might prove fruitful to explore the interconnections between fraud, love, *acedia* and justice in the *Commedia*, such a task would go well beyond the scope of a single chapter, given that each concept occupies a central place in Dante studies and medieval scholarship more generally.

At a deeper level too, the imagery and central motifs of each canto differ significantly. A recurring metaphor in *Inferno* xviii concerns food,<sup>3</sup> and the structure of the Malebolge as a whole has been associated with

3 Some of the food references in *Inferno* xviii include: 'Già di veder costui non son digiuno' [I am certainly not fasting for sight of him] (l. 42); 'Ma che ti mena a sì pungenti salse?' [But what leads you to such pungent sauces?] (l. 51); 'Perché se' tu sì gordo/ di riguardar più me che li altri brutti?' [Why are you so hungry to look more at me than the other filthy ones?] (ll. 118–19); 'Ed elli allor, battendosi la zucca' [And he again, beating his noggin] (l. 124); and 'E quinci sian le nostre viste sazie' [And therewith let our eyes be sated] (l. 136).

Satan's intestines.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the flatterers are immersed in human excrement — the waste that results from food not absorbed by the body as nutrients. In *Purgatorio* xviii, by contrast, images of fertility from the natural world permeate Virgil's (mainly scholastic) explanation of love: he mentions bees (l. 58), roots, leaves, plants (l. 54), and he refers to pastoral themes (l. 126). In addition, the penitent souls' evocation of Mary alludes to the moment when she was told by the Angel Gabriel that both she and Elizabeth were pregnant, and two further references to birth and pregnancy are found in the canto (ll. 42 and 142). In *Paradiso* xviii, the synaesthesia found throughout much of the canticle achieves a notable climax: the reader is inundated with descriptions of scintillating, flying, spinning, singing and dancing lights of souls who shape themselves into letters in the sky. While there is one reference to food in *Paradiso* xviii (the souls' movement is compared to the delight with which birds fly, 'quasi congratulando a lor pastura' [seeming to rejoice together at their feeding], l. 74), associating this with the food references in *Inferno* xviii does not seem to be meaningful. Indeed, references to food throughout the poem as a whole are numerous, so their recurrence in two cantos of the same number is not necessarily significant.

### Prostitutes and Pregnant Women in *Inferno* xviii and *Purgatorio* xviii–xix

Despite the various ways in which the cantos do not interconnect, their juxtaposition nevertheless brings to light an important issue concerning the treatment of women in the poem. Indeed, two of the most offensive — perhaps even misogynistic — representations of women in the *Comedy* occur in *Inferno* xviii and, as far as the Eighteens are concerned, in the suggestively proximate nineteenth canto of *Purgatorio*.<sup>5</sup> In *Inferno*

4 See Robert M. Durling, 'Deceit and Digestion in the Belly of Hell', *Allegory and Representation: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1979–80*, ed. by Stephen J. Greenblatt (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 61–93. These suggestions are also developed in the Durling and Martinez commentary on *Inferno*, particularly in the note to l. 47 (p. 194), and in the 'Additional Note 2: The Body Analogy (Part 1)', pp. 552–55. See Dante, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed., trans. and notes by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996–2011).

5 The idea of including *Purgatorio* xix in my reading of the Eighteens was suggested by Heather Webb during the discussion following my lecture for the *Vertical Readings* series. Although the methodological implications of including proximate cantos in vertical

xviii, Virgil directs the pilgrim's attention toward the prostitute Thais, who flattered her 'drudo' [lover] by pretending to be gratified by his sexual favours (ll. 127–36). In Virgil's words, she is: 'quella sozza e scapigliata fante/ che là si graffia con l'unghie merdose,/ e or s'accoscia e ora è in piedi stante' [that filthy baggage with disordered hair who is scratching herself with her shitty nails, now squatting, now standing on her feet] (*Inf.*, xviii. 130–32). The situation of the other flatterers is briefly mentioned: they are also immersed in excrement (ll. 113–14); and the other (male) flatterer who is named is mocked: the pilgrim says that he recognizes Alessio Interminei of Lucca from having seen him when his hair was dry – in other words, before it was covered in shit (ll. 122–22).

Thais's condition, however, is described in much greater detail than Alessio's, and the nature of her crime is associated with her gender, and with sex.<sup>6</sup> Not only did she flatter someone, but she did so in a sexual situation, while she was selling her body. She used the organ in her body that defines her as female in order to make money. Furthermore, her posture emphasizes her sexual role as well as her gender: by squatting, she makes visible her genitals in a gesture that might recall the image of the squatting (often female) carvings found above the entrances of many churches in medieval Europe. By squatting, such carved women reveal their sexual organs in a way that, instead of titillating the male viewer, is meant to disgust

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readings deserve further investigation, this approach is not unprecedented. Certain episodes in the *Comedy* exceed the boundaries of one canto, and are interpreted in a way that reflects this. For instance, the central cantos of *Purgatorio* are often considered together for a number of structural and thematic reasons. Structurally, they occupy a central place in *Purgatorio* as well as the *Comedy* as a whole, and according to Singleton, they include a numerical signature based on the number seven. These are often read together for thematic reasons as well: Virgil's disquisition on the nature of love spans two cantos (*Purgatorio* xvii–xviii), and the issue of how love relates to free will may be said to span three cantos (*Purgatorio* xvi–xviii). In addition, it would seem that several other contributions to the volume have benefited from this method of grouping cantos together. For instance, Tristan Kay graciously allowed me to read his vertical reading of the Seventeens, before the volume came out, which makes use of connections with cantos xvi and xviii of *Inferno*. Indeed, readers may find interesting parallels between my reading of the Eighteens (with its foray into *Purgatorio* xix), and Kay's reading of the Seventeens (with its foray into *Inferno* xvi and xviii), particularly in terms of issues relating to representation and misrepresentation, seductive uses of language, and references to Arachne.

- 6 For Dante's treatment of female sinners in Hell and their sexual transgressions, see Rachel Jacoff, 'The Tears of Beatrice: *Inferno* II', *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society* 100 (1982), 1–12. See also Victoria Kirkham, 'A Canon of Women in Dante's *Commedia*', *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989), 16–41, which argues that 'female sensuality runs deep in the funnel of Hell, underlying different faults officially charged to four other members of the sex [Thais, Myrrha, Potiphar's wife, and Manto]' (pp. 25–26).

him, thereby encouraging him to avoid sexual transgression — hence the carvings' prominent positions on churches.<sup>7</sup> Thus, we might read Thais's squatting posture as a moralizing image as opposed to a pornographic one. This reading complements Zygmunt Barański's argument that Dante's depiction of Thais draws on an established biblical tradition in which prostitutes are smeared in faeces, the purpose of which is to disgust the reader and thereby deliver a moral lesson.<sup>8</sup>

In *Inferno* xviii, Dante uses misogynistic tropes to make his point about the nature of flattery and also of fraud more generally. *Purgatorio* xix opens with another disturbing female image. Having fallen asleep at the end of *Purgatorio* xviii, Dante, in the following canto, begins to dream of a siren — the 'femmina balba' — who at first appears deformed, pale and stammering, but is then transformed by Dante's gaze into a beautiful woman. She sings enticingly of seducing Ulysses, mesmerizing the pilgrim until a 'donna santa e presta' [a lady holy and quick] (l. 26) appears and scolds Virgil, who rips open the siren's garment to expose her 'ventre' [belly, or womb] from which a foul stench pours forth (ll. 32–33), awakening the pilgrim. The dream shares several elements with *Inferno* xviii. At the most obvious level, the siren in *Purgatorio* xix is a seductress, while one of the sins punished in *Inferno* xviii is seduction. The sexual organs of both the siren and Thais are revealed; and while Thais is naked throughout the canto, the siren becomes partially naked when her clothes are torn open. A foul stench emanates from both female characters.<sup>9</sup> Thais misrepresents the truth with false words of praise, while the siren is herself an image of misrepresentation. Finally, while the siren stammers, recalling the way a child might struggle to speak — 'balba' is derived from *balbettare* (*Purg.*, xix. 7), — Thais is described as 'fante' (*Inf.*, xviii. 130) — a word associated not only with servility, but also with children and their capacity for speech.<sup>10</sup>

7 See *Images of Lust: Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches*, ed. by James Jerman and Anthony Weir (London: Batsford, 1987).

8 Barański argues that 'the connection between the promiscuous woman and excrement is in fact a biblical commonplace famously established in the story of Jezebel'. Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Language of Sin and Salvation: A *Lectura* of *Inferno* 18', *Bernardo Lecture Series* 19 (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014), pp. 1–38 (p. 11).

9 For examples of bad smells saving men from sensual traps, see Giuseppe Toffanin, 'La foetida aethiopissa e la femmina balba', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 77 (1921), 147–49.

10 For instance, the word is used to describe how a foetus becomes human when it gains the capacity for speech: 'Ma come d'animal divegna fante' [But how from an animal it

On the one hand, perhaps we should not be surprised by the sexual squeamishness revealed in these two episodes given that Dante's depictions of Thais and of the *femmina balba* draw on established traditions which characterize women as sexually dangerous and repulsive: the faeces-smearing harlot is a biblical trope; and scholars have posited a wealth of potential sources for Dante's *femmina balba* in *Purgatorio* xix, many of which emphasize physical transformation, female monstrosity and seduction or sexual jealousy.<sup>11</sup> For instance, Teresa Caligiure examines numerous sources for Dante's *femmina balba*, including, but not limited to, the harlot or seductress in Proverbs, classical depictions of sirens (the early commentators identified her with Circe specifically), and the tale from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which Minerva incites Envy to infect Aglauros so that she will obstruct Mercury's seduction of her sister Herse. Caligiure's argument focuses especially on the striking parallels between the physical appearances of Envy and that of the *femmina balba*.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, *Inferno* xviii and *Purgatorio* xviii–xix also include references to women that are not necessarily negative — or at least are not negative in the same way that the representations of Thais and the *femmina balba* can be seen to be. In *Inferno* xviii, the seducer whom Virgil and the pilgrim recognize among the throng of sinners is male: Jason (l. 86), who seduced and abandoned Medea and Hypsipyle (ll. 92–96). While Dante's source texts stress the treachery and dangerousness of the two women (in the classical sources, the jilted Medea kills not only Jason's new lover, Creusa, and Creusa's father with poisoned robes, but also her own children to avenge Jason's betrayal; and Hypsipyle betrays all her female companions on Lemnos in order to save her own father), Dante downplays their culpability. He mentions Medea only in the context of Jason's abandonment of her, and he depicts Hypsipyle as an innocent victim of Jason's seduction. Dante describes her with unthreatening diminutives: she

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becomes capable of speech] (*Purg.*, xxv. 61). In *Paradiso*, it is again associated with speech and infancy: 'Omai sarà più corta mia favella, / pur a quel ch'io ricordo, che d'un fante / che bagni ancor la lingua a la mammella') [Henceforth my speech will be briefer, even about what I remember, than that of a child that still bathes his tongue at the breast] (*Par.*, xxxiii. 106–08). See also the entry on 'fante' in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca* for its associations with servility and prostitution, as well as with infancy and speech, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/fante\\_\(Enciclopedia-Dantesca\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/fante_(Enciclopedia-Dantesca))

11 For a useful synthesis of the numerous sources for the siren in *Paradiso* xix that have been proposed by commentators, see Teresa Caligiure, 'La "femmina balba" e la "dolce sirena"', *Rivista di studi danteschi* 4 (2004), 333–66.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 337–38.

is 'la giovinetta' [the young girl] (l. 92) who is left 'gravida' [pregnant] and 'soletta' [alone] (l. 94) by her callous lover. By making her seem innocent and pitiable, Dante makes Jason appear more cruel. Interestingly, it is with recourse to Hypsipyle's reproductive role that Dante seeks to garner the reader's pity.

A similar point might be made about Dante's Medea. However surprising it may seem that Dante portrays Medea as anything other than an evil seductress, she is still defined in terms of her (violated) nuptial relationship to Jason and, albeit implicitly, in terms of her role as the mother of his children. Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that female figures in *Inferno* xviii and in *Purgatorio* xix are associated primarily with their sexual organs and reproductive functions. Furthermore, the women in these cantos are often represented in ways that alternate between desire and revulsion. As we saw above, the *femmina balba* appears to Dante alternately as beautiful and ugly, smelly and alluring. While she made a career out of appearing desirable in life, Thais appears as revolting in Hell. Both Medea and Hypsipyle are victims of Jason's inconstancy — presumably itself a state of alternation between desire and revulsion for the women he has seduced. Furthermore, while Dante does not explicitly mention this part of her story, Hypsipyle had witnessed male fickleness before Jason's arrival: Venus punished all the women of Lemnos for neglecting her shrines by afflicting them with a bad smell, causing their husbands to leave them and take up with slaves. Thus, references to women (both positive and negative) in *Inferno* xviii and *Purgatorio* xix reveal an emphasis on female reproductive functions, sexual organs and unpleasant smells.

The issue of pregnancy is emphasized in *Purgatorio* xviii as well. The penitent souls run through the terrace shouting out positive *exempla* of zeal (the opposite of *acedia*):

'Maria corse con fretta a la montagna!  
e: 'Cesare, per soggiogare llerda,  
punse Marsilia e poi corse in Ispagna!' (*Purg.*, xviii. 100–02)

['Mary ran with haste to the mountain!' and: 'Caesar, to subdue Lerida,  
struck Marseilles and then hastened to Spain!']

The first *exemplum* refers to the passage in the Gospel of Luke where Mary goes with haste to the hill country to salute her cousin: 'Exurgens autem Maria in diebus illis, abiit in montana cum festinatione, in civitatem Juda:

Et intravit in domum Zachariae, et salutavit Elisabeth' [And Mary rising up in those days, went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda. And she entered into the house of Zachary, and saluted Elizabeth] (Luke 1. 39–40). When Mary greets Elizabeth, John the Baptist leaps in her womb (1. 41), and Elizabeth says to Mary that she is blessed amongst women: 'Et exclamavit voce magna, et dixit: Benedicta tu inter mulieres, et benedictus fructus ventris tui' [And she cried out with a loud voice, and said: Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb] (1. 42). Interestingly, the description of the pilgrim's subsequent dream repeats Luke's language but to different ends: a stench emanates from the 'ventre' (*Purg.*, xix. 31–32) of the 'femmina balba' (*Purg.*, xix. 7). The siren is a perverted image of Mary,<sup>13</sup> Dante accomplishing the juxtaposition of the two female figures by referring to their wombs.

The second *exemplum* of zeal (*Purg.*, xviii. 100–02) refers to a passage in Book iii of Lucan's *Pharsalia* where Julius Caesar rushes to Spain to do battle with the forces of Pompey. It is worth noting that, of the two positive *exempla*, the first alludes to women and pregnancy, while the second to male heroism in warfare. A similar pattern, in terms of gender, is repeated in the penitents' appeal to two negative examples of *acedia*: the Israelites who did not make it to the Promised Land, and the Trojan women who stayed behind in Sicily when Aeneas sailed to Italy:

Di retro a tutti dicean: 'Prima fue  
morta la gente a cui il mar s'aperse,  
che vedesse Iordan le rede sue.  
E quella che l'affanno non sofferse  
fino a la fine col figlio d' Anchise  
sé stessa a vita senza gloria offerse'. (*Purg.*, xviii. 133–38)

[Behind all the others they were saying: 'First all the people died for whom the sea drew back, before Jordan saw their heirs!' And: 'Those women who did not endure hardship to the end with the son of Anchises, chose life without glory!']

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13 I follow the lead of Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Dante's Three Reflective Dreams', *Quaderni d'italianistica* 10 (1989), 213–36, who interprets the dream of the siren as displaying 'backward-looking features' (p. 213). In Barański's words: 'the siren, a symbol of the perversion of love, ideologically and formally distorts Virgil's words [about the nature of Love from the previous cantos]' (p. 217). He goes on to demonstrate that several other elements of the dream of the siren are also distorted reworkings of passages from *Purgatorio* xvi–xvii (pp. 214–18).



The positive and negative instances of the vice are symmetrical not only in terms of their references to Roman and biblical themes, as many scholars have noted, but also in terms of their gender divisions. Furthermore, in the second negative *exemplum*, in which the penitents refer to the Trojan women remaining in Sicily, we find an instance of female figures trying to impede the progress of male heroes. Not only did the women set fire to Aeneas's ships in the hope that it would prevent the men from continuing their journey to Italy, but they did so at the instigation of Iris,<sup>14</sup> who disguised herself as Boroës, an old woman of their group, in order to gain their trust. Thus, many female figures — the Trojan women and the goddess Iris — conspired to impede Aeneas's divinely-ordained mission. Similarly, the appearance of the siren in *Purgatorio* xix changes in a way that confuses the pilgrim and threatens to impede his journey. By comparing the siren to Iris, Dante once again invites the reader to compare his 'hero' to Aeneas.

Of course, the 'donna santa e presta' in *Purgatorio* xix is also a woman, so we cannot claim that Dante sees all woman as seductresses trying to mislead men. Nor can we claim even that all seductresses are bad according to Dante: Judith, who saved the people of Bethulia from the siege of Holofernes by seducing him and chopping off his head, sits beneath the Virgin Mary in Heaven — right beneath Rachel, Beatrice, Sarah and Rebecca.<sup>15</sup> But, we can affirm that, at least in these cantos, Dante seems to categorize women according to a limited number of characteristics and functions. Indeed, we find in *Purgatorio* xviii–xix and in *Inferno* xviii several very negative portrayals of female figures — some of whom are repulsive, smelly temptresses, 'antiche streghe', or prostitutes. Positively portrayed women in these cantos are often pregnant or, in the case of Hypsipyle, formerly smelly. The shared characteristics of the female characters in these cantos do not of course render them identical. But Dante does repeatedly associate the female figures in *Inferno* xviii and *Purgatorio* xviii–xix with their reproductive functions and, specifically, their sexual organs.<sup>16</sup>

14 Barański, in 'Dante's Three Reflective Dreams', notes Iris's intertextual significance in the passage (p. 217).

15 'Ne l'ordine che fanno i terzi sedi,/ siede Rachel di sotto da costei/ con Bëatrice, sì come tu vedi./ Sarra e Rebecca, Iudit...' [Below her, in the third tier of seats, sits Rachel with Beatrice, as you see. Sarah and Rebecca, Judith...] (*Par.*, xxxii. 7–10).

16 Joan M. Ferrante, 'Women in the Shadows of the *Divine Comedy*', in *Reading Medieval Culture*, ed. by Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 409–27, makes a different but related point: that while most of the women in *Inferno* are portrayed in misogynistic ways, those in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* are portrayed in more positive ways that focus on their value in family structures.

## Lady Justice, Wisdom and the Seductress

The Eighteens stand out in their negative portrayal of women when compared to similar images elsewhere in Dante's oeuvre.<sup>17</sup> For instance, in 'Tre donne intorno al cor mi son venute' (*Rime civ*), Dante depicts Drittura, or Lady Justice, the reader of the dishevelled, partially or fully naked figures of Thais and the *femmina balba*:

discinta e scalza, sol di sé par donna.  
Come Amor prima per la rotta gonna  
la vide in parte che 'l tacere è bello,  
e pietoso e fello  
di lei e del dolor fece dimanda. (*Rime civ*. 26–30)

[ungirt and barefoot, only in person does she reveal herself a lady. When Love first saw, through the torn dress, that part of her which it is decent not to name, in pity and anger he asked about her and her grief.]

Just as the sexual organs of Thais and the siren are revealed, so too does Drittura's ripped skirt reveal the part of her about which it is better 'to be silent'. It is clear that Dante means to refer to Drittura's sexual organs here given that, in *Purgatorio* xxv, he uses almost exactly the same phrase to describe the place into which the reproductive fluid 'descends' during the process of human conception.<sup>18</sup> However, Drittura is portrayed in a positive light, while Thais and the siren are decidedly negative figures. Thus, when Dante describes the exposure of a woman's body, he does not always do so in order to cast her in a negative light.<sup>19</sup> The fact that Lady Justice's reproductive organs are exposed does not make her a whore or a seductress; in this case, it simply makes her into a figure who elicits compassion.

17 For important studies on women in Dante, see Marianne Shapiro, *Woman Earthly and Divine in the 'Comedy' of Dante* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1975); Robert Hollander, 'The Women of *Purgatorio*: Dreams, Voyages, Prophecies', in his *Allegory in Dante's 'Commedia'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 136–91; Kirkham, 'A Canon of Women'; and Olivia Holmes, *Dante's Two Beloveds: Ethics and Erotics in the 'Divine Comedy'* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

18 'Ancor digesto, [sangue perfetto] scende ov' è più bello/ tacer che dire; e quindi poscia gema/ sovr' altrui sangue in natural vasello' [Digested further, it descends to the place of which it is better to be silent than to speak, and then from there it flows onto another's blood in a natural vessel] (*Purg.*, xxv. 43–45).

19 See for instance Dante's dream in the *Vita nova* (Book iii) in which he sees Beatrice, semi-nude, eating his heart.

In fact, Olivia Holmes argues that both Drittura in 'Tre donne' and the 'femmina balba' are based on the Lady Wisdom archetype — a figure that emerged from the Wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible and was developed and transformed in different ways by Boethius, Bernardus Silvestris and Alan of Lille, amongst others.<sup>20</sup> Alan's goddess Natura and Boethius's Lady Philosophy both have dirty and tattered dresses, which indicate that they have been scorned by society, as does Dante's Lady Justice. In Holmes's opinion, Dante's treatment of the siren and of Drittura exemplify the dichotomy established in biblical Wisdom literature between the good woman, or Sapientia, and the temptress or harlot who leads men astray. Proverbs warns against the temptations of the dangerous woman: 'muliere aliena' [strange or foreign woman] (Proverbs 2.16); 'muliere mala' [evil woman] (6.24); 'muliere extranea' [foreign woman] (7.4); and 'meretrix' [prostitute or adulteress] (5.3).<sup>21</sup> This woman is typically associated with the sweetness of her misleading words: 'Favus enim distillans labia meretricis, et nitidius oleo guttur ejus' [For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and smoother than oil is her speech] (5.3).<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Dante's dream of the enchanting siren in *Purgatorio* xix might very well have been inspired, at least in part, by material from Proverbs, wherein the 'strange woman' is associated not only with her enchanting tongue, but also with dreaming, falling asleep and ships: after drinking wine, 'oculi tui videbunt extraneas, et cor tuum loquetur perversa./ Et eris sicut dormiens in medio mari, et quasi sopitus gubernator, amisso clavo' [your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will utter perverse things. And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, or like one who lies down on the top of a mast] (Proverbs 23.3–34).

In addition, the dangerous woman in Proverbs might also have informed Dante's portrayal of Thais. While Thais squats in a ditch of excrement, the harlot in Proverbs is described as a 'deep ditch' herself: 'Fovea enim profunda est meretrix, et puteus angustus aliena' [For a harlot is a deep pit, and an adulterous woman is a narrow well] (Proverbs 23.27); and the mouth of a sinful woman is a 'fovea profunda' [deep ditch] (22.14). While Thais is punished in Hell for having flattered her lover, the harlot in Proverbs

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20 See Holmes, *Dante's Two Beloveds*, pp. 8, 12, 24–25, 56.

21 These are my own translations.

22 This and subsequent translations of passages of the Bible are from the New American Standard Bible.

leads astray a young man specifically with the 'flattery of her lips': 'Irretivit eum multis sermonibus, et blanditiis labiorum protraxit illum' [With her many persuasions she entices him; With her flattering lips she seduces him] (7.21).

In Proverbs, as well as in the Book of Wisdom, the temptress or adulteress is the enemy of Wisdom, personified in female form. The latter speaks wise words: 'Os suum aperuit sapientiae, et lex clementiae in lingua ejus' [She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue] (Proverbs 31.26). She leads the just man away from enemies and seducers ('Custodivit illum ab inimicis, et a seductoribus tutavit illum, et certamen forte dedit illi ut vinceret, et sciret quoniam omnium potentior est sapientia' [She kept him safe from his enemies, and she defended him from seducers, and gave him a strong conflict, that he might overcome, and know that wisdom is mightier than all] (Wisdom 10.12). And the king wishes to have her as his spouse (Wisdom 8.2). Thus, she is explicitly characterized as the opposite of the harlot, seductress or mistress.

I agree with Holmes that these archetypal portrayals of Lady Wisdom and her enemy, an adulterous seductress, may inform Dante's treatment of women in his works. In fact, I believe that they may inform even more portrayals of women in Dante's works than Holmes discusses.<sup>23</sup> However, parallels between Dante's women and the archetypal bad woman of biblical Wisdom literature seem much more explicit at the textual level than parallels between Dante's women and the good woman or Lady Wisdom. This is especially evident in *Paradiso* xviii as I argue in the following subsection.

## Female Figures in *Paradiso* xviii

*Paradiso* xviii conspicuously draws attention to the Wisdom books of the Bible given that the souls spell out the first sentence of the Book of Wisdom: 'Diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram' (*Par.*, xviii. 73–93; Wisdom 1.1). Yet, nowhere in *Paradiso* xviii does an explicit personification of Lady Wisdom appear; nor have I found explicit references in the canto to the female

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23 Holmes's argument deals not only with the characterizations of Dittura in 'Tre donne' and the 'femmina balba' in *Purgatorio* xix, but also with Beatrice in the *Comedy* and Lady Philosophy in the *Convivio*, among others. However, the association between the harlot in *Proverbs* and Dante's Thais is my own.

figure in the Book of Wisdom. Thus, despite *Paradiso* xviii's treatment of wisdom and the related issue of justice,<sup>24</sup> Dante elides reference to the central figure in the tradition of biblical Wisdom literature, who is female. Dante also elides mention of another female figure traditionally associated with justice, who comes instead from the classical tradition: the Goddess Astraea, or Lady Justice.<sup>25</sup>

A third, albeit partial elision of a powerful female figure in the canto concerns the pagan goddess of wisdom and war: Minerva. Dante describes his ascent from the Heaven of Mars to the Heaven of Jupiter — from the red light of the former to the white of the latter — with reference to a blush fading on a fair woman's cheek:

E qual è 'l trasmutare in picciol varco  
di tempo in bianca donna, quando 'l volto  
suo si discarchi di vergogna il carco,  
tal fu ne li occhi miei, quando fui vòlto,  
per lo candor de la temprata stella  
sesta, che dentro a sé m'avea ricolto. (*Par.*, xviii. 64–69)

[And like the changing in a short interval of time of a lady's white face, when it unburdens itself of the burden of shame: such was what I saw, when I turned about, in the whiteness of the temperate sixth star, which had received me within itself.]

Commentators (starting with Scartazzini and Poletto) have traced this image to a passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (vi. 45–49) in which Minerva, disguised as an old woman, challenges Arachne, famous for her 'spinning of fleecy wool', to a contest in weaving. When the goddess reveals herself, Arachne's blush is short-lived, fading too quickly, and thereby reveals her lack of humility in the face of the divine. Minerva punishes the girl by transforming her into a spider.

The allusion to Arachne's cheeks obliquely draws attention to the figure of Minerva, the pagan goddess of war and wisdom. In a canto that straddles the heavens of Mars and Jupiter and treats explicitly the issues of

24 Holmes argues that the issues of justice and wisdom are closely related in *Paradiso* xviii (*Dante's Two Beloveds*, p. 56).

25 Astraea/Lady Justice appears elsewhere in Dante's works. On Matelda's associations with Astraea in the Terrestrial Paradise, see Charles S. Singleton, *Journey to Beatrice* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1958), pp. 184–203. As we have seen above, Lady Justice appears as Drittura in the 'Tre Donne' canzone.

just, religiously motivated war and of divine justice itself, one might expect Minerva to play a somewhat more prominent role. Indeed, for this reason alone, one might wonder if the 'M' of the phrase written in the sky might serve to allude to the pagan goddess, perhaps in addition to — or instead of — the monarchy, as scholars have previously suggested.<sup>26</sup> However, reference to the goddess is oblique to say the least, as it is relegated to a simile that marginalises her by describing Arachne's cheeks. Thus, Dante misses a third opportunity in *Paradiso* xviii to feature one of the female figures traditionally associated with the canto's main issues of wisdom and war.

Indeed, Dante misses a fourth opportunity to mention a positive female figure in the canto, despite the fact that this same woman plays a prominent role in *Paradiso* ix. In the first half of *Paradiso* xviii, when Dante and Beatrice are still in the Heaven of Mars, Cacciaguida calls out the names of martial heroes on the cross of light, among whom is Joshua, a spy sent by Moses to Canaan, who subsequently led the Israelites in capturing the Promised Land. Joshua's mission was significantly aided by Rahab, the prostitute who harboured two of his spies in her house within the walls of Jericho (*Joshua* 2). For this just and courageous act she is granted a place in Heaven, as the poet explicitly declares in *Paradiso*, ix. 112–26. Yet, no mention of Rahab occurs in *Paradiso* xviii. There is little doubt, therefore, that Dante's list of heavenly warriors in the canto is decidedly male-centric.

In sum, Dante elides reference to three positive female figures — Sapientia, Lady Justice and Rahab — who are associated (in Dante's own treatment elsewhere in his works and in the biblical and classical traditions) with three of the central issues of *Paradiso* xviii: wisdom, justice and the heavenly militia, respectively. In addition, Dante only obliquely alludes to another powerful, if not necessarily positive, female figure: Minerva, the goddess of wisdom and war. One possible reason for these elisions could be that Dante subsumes biblical and classical figures of justice and wisdom into the figure of Beatrice. Yet, Dante's portrayal of Beatrice in *Paradiso* xviii betrays no conspicuous hints of wanting to allude to Lady Justice or Lady Wisdom. To put it simply, *Paradiso* xviii frames its central issues in ways that seem calculated to downplay the role of women.

However, female figures do appear in *Paradiso* xviii. Yet, they are portrayed negatively, and according to a relatively strict pattern. First,

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<sup>26</sup> While Francesco da Buti claimed the 'M' stood for 'mondo', modern critics have tended to see it as standing for 'monarchia'.

Dante mentions them implicitly, drawing almost exclusively from classical sources wherein they play instrumental roles in hindering the progress of male heroes — a pattern that we also noted in Dante's treatment of female figures in *Inferno* xviii and *Purgatorio* xviii. Second, the female figures in *Paradiso* xviii are often associated with negative emotions (shame, rage and jealousy). For instance, as Cacciaguida names the martial heroes, the souls' movement in the sky is compared to a spinning top:

E al nome de l'alto Macabeo  
vidi moversi un altro roteando,  
e letizia era ferza del paleo. (*Par.*, xviii. 40–42)

[And at the name of the great Maccabee I saw another move spinning,  
and joy was the whip for the top.]

According to Tozer, the image comes from the passage in the *Aeneid* where the rage of Queen Amata (who was incited by the Fury Alecto to instigate war among the Latins in resistance to Aeneas's marriage to Lavinia), is described with recourse to the image of the whipping motion of a child's toy:

Ceu quondam torto volitans sub verbere turbo,  
quem pueri magno in gyro vacua atria circum  
intenti ludo exercent; ille actus habena  
curvatis fertur spatiiis; stupet inscia supra  
inpubesque manus, mirata volubile buxum;  
dant animos plagae: non cursu segnior illo  
per medias urbes agitur populosque feroces. (*Aen.*, vii. 378–84)

[As at times a top, spinning under the twisted lash, which boys intent on the game drive in a great circle through an empty court — urged by the whip it speeds on round after round; the ignorant childish throng hang over it in wonder, marvelling at the whirling boxwood; the blows give it life: so, no slacker in her course, is she driven through the midst of cities and proud peoples.<sup>27</sup>]

While the female figures in *Purgatorio* xviii–xix impede Aeneas's journey to Italy (figuratively in the case of the siren impeding Dante-*personaggio*

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<sup>27</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

as a figure for Aeneas, and literally in the case of the Trojan women), Amata impedes Aeneas's establishment of the Roman Empire in a different way. Amata incites Turnus, who was originally betrothed to Lavinia, to turn against her own husband, King Latinus, thereby fomenting war and delaying the foundation of Rome. While the other reference to civil war in *Paradiso* xviii mentioned above (namely, the avian skywriting) indicates the progress of a male heroic figure (Caesar's crossing to Brundisium in Lucan's *Pharsalia* v), this reference to civil war brings to the fore three female figures who incite what Dante considers to be an unjust war: one resulting from a mother's rage, instigated by the Fury Alecto, at the command of the jealous goddess Juno. Furthermore, while in the *Aeneid* the image of the spinning top refers to Amata's fury, Dante uses the image in *Paradiso* xviii to figure the joyful spinning of the soul of Judas Maccabeus. In this way, the poet sets up a powerful set of juxtapositions: between classical literature and the Bible, between fury and joy, between pagan female figures who instigated the war that hindered Aeneas's divinely-ordained founding of Rome and male figures from the Old Testament who acted as leaders in holy wars.

When Dante alludes to Amata, Alecto, Arachne and Minerva in *Paradiso* xviii, he does not play up or play down the negative roles they play in their source texts, he simply assumes them. Yet, it is worth noting that most of the female figures evoked in the canto play negative roles in the classical tradition, and share several characteristics. They obstruct men in just or heroic exploits, and they incite unjust struggles for selfish or jealous reasons (for instance, when Minerva instigates a weaving contest with Arachne to prove her superiority). Their emotions — jealousy, shame, anger — instigate wars. They are changeable or *mobile*, that fundamental feminine characteristic according to medieval lore: Arachne is transformed into a spider; Amata is possessed by Alecto.

In addition, the classical women alluded to in *Paradiso* xviii also share traits with the women represented and evoked in the other eighteenth cantos. Goddesses pose as old women (Minerva disguises herself to fool Arachne; Iris gains the trust of the Trojan women disguised as Boroës). Beautiful maidens become monsters (Arachne becomes a spider; the *femmina balba* appears as a beautiful siren before also being exposed as monstrous and sexually repulsive). Cheeks pale and grow rosy again (Arachne's cheek, fading to pale, might recall the siren's pale face in *Purgatorio* xix, which is soon warmed into beauty by Dante's hopeful gaze). Consistently, classical female figures — divine and human — that are alluded to in the Eighteens



undergo physical transformations that belie their motivations, their worth, and their attempts at treachery.

## Conclusion

The comparison of female figures in *Inferno* xviii, *Purgatorio* xviii–xix and *Paradiso* xviii has revealed some interesting parallels, particularly at the level of intertextual allusion. However, this kind of reading must not exclude the need for other ‘vertical’ readings with cantos of different numbers. For instance, a striking number of parallels at the textual level may be found when comparing the description of Thais and the flatterers in *Inferno* xviii with the description of the Furies in *Inferno* ix. The Furies appear in a tower above an ancient, stinking swamp:

‘Questa palude che ’l gran puzzo spira  
cigne dintorno la città dolente,  
u’ non potemo intrare omai sanz’ ira’.

E altro disse, ma non l’ho a mente;  
però che l’occhio m’avea tutto tratto  
ver’ l’alta torre a la cima rovente,  
dove in un punto furon dritte ratto  
tre furie infernal di sangue tinte,  
che membra feminine avieno e atto,  
e con idre verdissime eran cinte;  
serpentelli e ceraste avien per crine,  
onde le fiere tempie erano avvinte.

E quei, che ben conobbe le meschine  
de la regina de l’eterno pianto,  
‘Guarda’, mi disse, ‘le feroci Erine.

Quest’ è Megera dal sinistro canto;  
quella che piange dal destro è Aletto;  
Tesifón è nel mezzo’; e tacque a tanto.

Con l’unghie si fendea ciascuna il petto;  
battiansi a palme e gridavan sì alto,  
ch’i’ mi strinsi al poeta per sospetto. (*Inf.*, ix. 31–51)

[‘This swamp that breathes forth the great stench, girds the grieving city all about, where now we cannot enter without wrath’. And he said more, but I do not remember it; for my eyes had made me all intent on the great tower with its glowing summit, where suddenly, in an instant, stood up three Furies of Hell, stained with blood, who had the limbs and gestures of women and were girt with bright green water snakes;

little asps and horned serpents they had for hair, which wound about their fierce temples. And he, who well knew the maid-servants of the queen of eternal weeping, 'Look', he told me, 'at the ferocious Erinyes. This is Megaera on the left; she who weeps on the right there is Allecto; Tisiphone is in the middle', and he fell silent. With her nails each was tearing at her breast; they beat themselves with their palms and shrieked so loudly that for fear I drew closer to the poet.]

In both *Inferno* xviii and ix, special emphasis is placed on hair and its capacity to repulse: the Furies' hair is made of living snakes (*Inf.*, ix. 40–42), and the flatterers' hair provides evidence of their filthy state (Thais is 'scapigliata' and Alessio's hair is wet with shit, *Inf.*, xviii. 130 and 121). While the Furies are covered in blood (*Inf.*, ix. 38), which was considered a form of bodily waste in the Middle Ages, Thais is covered in faeces. The Furies scratch their chests with their nails (*Inf.*, ix. 49), and beat themselves with their palms (*Inf.*, ix. 50), while Thais scratches herself with shitty nails (*Inf.*, xviii. 131), and the flatterers beat themselves with their palms ('e sé medesima con le palme picchia', *Inf.*, xviii. 105); and Alessio strikes his own head, (*Inf.*, xviii. 124). While the Furies are described as 'meschine' [maid-servants] (*Inf.*, ix. 43), Thais is described as 'fante' (*Inf.*, xviii. 130) — a word associated with servility, as noted above. The Furies perch above a foul-smelling swamp that gives off a bitter vapor: 'schiuma antica/ per indi ove quel fummo è più acerbo' [that ancient foam, there where the smoke is darkest] (*Inf.*, ix. 74–75). The *bolgia* of the flatterers stinks not only because of the excrement in which they are immersed, but also because of a stench that wafts up to them: 'Le ripe eran grommate d'una muffa,/ per l'alito di giù che vi s'appasta,/ che con li occhi e col naso facea zuffa' [the banks were encrusted with a mold from the breath from below that condenses there, which assailed both eyes and nose] (*Inf.*, xviii. 106–08).

Another parallel between *Inferno* xviii and *Inferno* ix concerns the image of whips. In *Inferno* xviii, the pimps and seducers are whipped by demons in punishment for their sins, while the Furies in *Inferno* ix are girded by snakes (l. 40), perhaps alluding to the conventional whips with which Furies were often depicted, and which symbolized their traditional role of instigating war and possessing people. Indeed, as we saw in our analysis of *Paradiso* xviii, Dante alludes to a passage in the *Aeneid* in which the Fury Alecto sends Amata into a frenzy (by poisoning her with a viper's sting) in order to instigate civil strife among the Latins (*Aen.*, vii. 341–406). In Dante's allusion to the Virgilian passage, he uses the image of whips to

describe the spinning motion of the toy: 'vidi moversi un altro roteando, / e letizia era ferza del paleo (*Par.*, xviii. 41–42). Since the word 'ferza' is used only four times in the poem (twice in *Inferno* xviii with reference to the punishment of the pimps and seducers, once in *Purgatorio* xiii in reference to the scourging of envy,<sup>28</sup> and once in the image from *Paradiso* xviii of the spinning tops), its appearance in two of our three eighteenth cantos may be significant. In this way, the reference to Alecto in *Paradiso* xviii may recall, via associations with *Inferno* ix, the episode of Thais in *Inferno* xviii. However, a key component of this type of 'vertical' reading requires a sort of triangular reading, including the analysis of another canto of a different number. In addition, the use of the word 'ferza' in these passages calls further attention to the pattern seen above with which Dante depicts women throughout the Eighteens: they are monstrous; they are either possessed by fury, or they incite others to fury; they are sexually repulsive; and they often incite war or hinder male heroic exploits with sexual temptations or personal desires.

While the number of characteristics shared by female figures in the eighteenth cantos is striking, Dante's inspiration for many of these allusions comes from biblical and classical sources which are themselves saturated with misogynistic and narrowly prescribed images of women. Unfortunately, it is nothing new to find examples in western culture of men portraying women either as saints or seductresses. This does not absolve Dante, however, from charges of misogyny. The poet misses numerous opportunities to represent women positively in *Paradiso* xviii; and in *Inferno* xviii and *Purgatorio* xviii–xix, the difference between negative and positive portrayals of women seems to correlate strongly with the ways in which they use their reproductive organs. By choosing to allude to negative images of women more frequently than positive ones, Dante reveals that he may not have managed to escape the prejudices of his time.

Whether Dante sets up parallels in his treatment of women across the eighteenth cantos consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally — something that cannot be known with certainty — it is clear that these parallels exist, and that they reveal a negative bias against female figures. To ascertain whether this negative bias is localized solely in the eighteenth cantos, and to what extent the negative bias may be blamed

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28 'E l buon maestro: "Questo cinghio sferza/ la colpa de la invidia, e però sono/ tratte d'amor le corde de la ferza"' [And my good master: 'This circle whips the guilt of envy, and therefore the cords of the whip are braided of love'] (*Purg.*, xiii. 37–39).

on the way in which the source texts from which Dante borrows portray women, are questions for a more systematic study, which would have to address Dante's treatment of women across the *Commedia* and throughout his works.



# 19. Inside Out<sup>1</sup>

*Ambrogio Camozzi Pistoja*

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In Dante's time, the conventions controlling the composition and interpretation of texts were fairly stable. As a discipline, this system of rules, sometimes known as *grammatica* or *rhetorica*, constituted the fundamental subject of medieval school *curricula*. This does not mean, of course, that there was no cross-fertilisation between literary genres, but rather that the literary canons, derived from classical authors, had reached a very high level of codification at this point in western culture. This is at the origin of the late-medieval fascination for meta-literary discourses, a phenomenon that is widespread in Dante's cultural background and characterises all of his works. Compared to his contemporaries, however, the poet's dedication to the theorisation of literature and language takes a radical turn. As Dante himself puts it, he was 'in love' with language: 'quite perfect love for my native language that burns within me' (*Conv.*, I. xii. 1–4).

Rhetoric, as the knowledge of how language works, of how texts convey or hide certain messages, how they are structured and classified, was extremely close to Dante's heart. Of *this* art — not politics, law or theology — he knew all the variations and possibilities, of *this* discipline his

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1 For support towards this research, my gratitude is warmly extended to Keith Sykes and Pembroke College, University of Cambridge. I should like to thank George Corbett and Heather Webb for having invited me to take part in this project. The present chapter is based on and reflects the style of a spoken presentation prepared for a public of non-Dantisti. For a revised and better documented examination of *Inferno* xix, see my 'Profeta e satiro. A proposito di *Inferno* 19', *Dante Studies* 134 (2015), 27–45. For the translations of the *Commedia*, I have used Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. and comm. by Robin Kirkpatrick (London: Penguin, 2006–2007). Horace's texts are quoted from *Opera*, ed. by Stephanus Borzsák (Leipzig: Teubner, 1984).

expertise was unparalleled in his generation. He wrote extensively on the topic, leaving two books on the subject: the *De vulgari eloquentia*, a treatise on the vernacular language; and the *Vita nova*, an elaborate collection of love poems that has been fruitfully read as a manual for writing good poetry, an *Art of Poetry* in the same vein as Horace's *Ars poetica*. In addition, scholars suggest that he also intended to devote one of the books of his unfinished *Convivio* to language. This section was never written, but meta-literary references surface almost everywhere in the surviving four books. Gianfranco Contini aptly defined this obsession as a 'serietà terribile', a 'cosa dell'ordine sacrale'.<sup>2</sup> This sentiment permeates Dante's lyric production and, of course, the *Commedia*. As the adventurous journey through the black chasm of Hell, the cornices of Purgatory and the pure lights of Heaven advances, so the journeying progresses through the forms of language. The ethical ascent goes hand in hand with a process of revision and redefinition of poetry which eventually gives life to the plurilingualism of the poem, a pan-linguistic landscape where a newly redefined 'comic' language exists next to a newly redefined 'erotic' language, 'tragic', 'elegiac', 'scholastic', 'scientific', 'trivial', 'colloquial', 'technical' languages, as well as many others.<sup>3</sup>

The teaching of *grammatica*, furthermore, is key to unlocking a dimension of the Nineteens that has long been overlooked. Hidden in the fabric of these cantos lies a series of references to medieval literary theory and, in particular, to the theory of satire, one of the major literary genres. These hidden clues, if brought together, form a line of thought which questions the canonical limitations of satire, the potentialities of satiric language and the risks involved in using this particular way of writing and thinking. Thus, my vertical reading of the Nineteens begins with a reconstruction of the medieval theory of satire and a description of those stylistic features that would have made satirical language recognisable to medieval readers. This brief summary is followed by a reinterpretation of *Inferno* xix's and *Purgatorio* xix's key moments; in the final section, I analyse *Paradiso* xix and

2 Gianfranco Contini: 'Introduzione alle *Rime* di Dante' [1938] in *Varianti e altra linguistica. Una raccolta di Saggi (1938-1968)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), pp. 319-34 (p. 321).

3 This line of research has been pursued in particular by Gianfranco Contini: 'Introduzione alle *Rime* di Dante' [1938], and 'Dante come personaggio-poeta della *Commedia*' [1957], in *Varianti e altra linguistica. Una raccolta di Saggi (1938-1968)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), pp. 319-62; and Zygmunt G. Barański, "'Tres enim sunt materie dicendi...": Some Observations on Medieval Literature, "Genre" and Dante', in *Libri poetarum in quattuor species dividuntur*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański, supplement to *The Italianist* 15 (1995), 9-60; see also Barański's '*Sole nuovo, luce nuova*'. *Saggi sul rinnovamento culturale in Dante* (Turin: Scriptorium, 1996).

address also *Paradiso* xxvii in order to show how some of the questions raised by Dante in *Inferno* xix and *Purgatorio* xix re-emerge in the course of the last canticle.

## Medieval Theory of Satire

According to late antique and medieval grammarians, satire is a literary genre modelled upon the writings of Juvenal, Persius and Horace.<sup>4</sup> In order to summarise its formal features, grammarians often refer to the false etymology from 'satyr', the god of the forest.<sup>5</sup> This etymological explanation enjoyed great popularity in medieval schools; it offers a poignant visual epitome of the main stylistic qualities of satirical writing. Satire, grammarians explain, is 'saltans' [leaping] like a satyr, for it does not have a specific topic or target. In other words, the satirist must not spare anyone, whether rich or poor, priest or professor, king or peasant. The image of the caprine satyr gives visual representation to the typical 'filthiness' of satire's vocabulary, the obscenity of its lexicon and the vulgarity of its prosody. Another attribute that satire shares with satyrs is its 'nuditas' [nakedness]; there are no pretences or cover ups, satirists do not beat around the bush but rather go straight to the point. They use a 'rustica' [rustic], simple syntax, a mode of speaking that derives from the language of rural rampages.<sup>6</sup> Finally, satire is 'derisoria' [offensive]. Like the giggly,

4 On medieval theory of satire see Ben Parsons, "'A Riotous Spray of Words": Rethinking the Medieval Theory of Satire', *Exemplaria* 21 (2009), 105–28; and Ambrogio Camozzi Pistoja, 'Il quarto del *Convivio*. O della satira', *Le Tre Corone* 1 (2014), 27–53 (pp. 28–38).

5 One of the principal sources of the satire-satyr connection is Diomedes's *Ars Grammatica* III: 'Satura dicitur carmen apud Romanos nunc quidem maledicum et ad carpenda hominum vitia archaeae comediae caractere compositum, quale scripserunt Lucilius et Horatius et Persius [...]. Satura autem dicta sive a Satyris, quod similiter in hoc carmine ridiculae res pudendaeque dicuntur, quae velut a Satyris proferuntur et fiunt [...]' [Satire is the name of a verse composition amongst the Romans. At present certainly it is defamatory and composed to carp at human vices in the manner of the Old Comedy; this type of *satura* was written by Lucilius, Horace, and Persius [...]. *Satura* takes its name either from saturs, because in this verse form comical and shameless things are said which are produced and made as if by satyrs]. For other examples see the collection of texts published by Suzanne Reynolds, 'Dante and the Medieval Theory of Satire: A Collection of Texts', in *Libri poetarum in quattuor species dividuntur*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański, supplement to *The Italianist* 15 (1995), 145–57.

6 See Horace, *Ars Poetica*, pp. 203–50. And Guillaume de Conches notes: 'Potest et satira dici a satiris, id est ab agrestibus dicta est [...] agrestes cuiuscumque patrie conveniebant in honore Cereris et Bachi [...]. Deinde sibi indulgendo, commedendo, et bibendo magnam partem diei consumebant. Ad ultimum, rustici unius ville contra rusticos alterius ville consurgebant et in vicem fundebant convicia non bene consona pro discretione rusticana. Et huius modi convicia predicta sunt satire, id est agrestes callidiores autem in



unpredictable half-men, satirists ridicule their enemies, wounding them with their 'sharp tongue', biting with their mordant remarks.

These colourful features can be reorganised into five scholastic categories: *intentio*, *modus scribendi*, *stylus*, *causa materialis* and *materia tractandi*. The *intentio* of satirical writings is to wound, lacerate, hurt. The *modus scribendi* — the way in which these words are written — is bare, straightforward, unadorned.<sup>7</sup> The *stylus* of the syntax is simple, quotidian and ordinary; the vocabulary is vulgar, filthy, obscene. What satirical works also have in common is the so-called *causa materialis*, the motive behind the decision of writing a piece in the satirical style. That which provokes the writer to burst into a satirical attack is very often identified by the fact that the world where the satirist lives appears to be turned upside down. A profound injustice allows the evil to trample on the good, whereas the just are exiled, mistreated, isolated. Another recurrent theme of the satirical tradition is the 'materia tractandi' [subject matter]. The favourite target of satirists throughout the ages is the accumulation of riches, more often than not leading to the bartering of spiritual values for material possessions.

Of these five predicaments, the rhetorical category of *intentio* deserves special attention because medievalists, including Dante scholars, have largely failed to account for its normative implications. *Intentio* is not the author's intention — which is generally referred to as *causa finalis* (e.g. to entertain, to moralise, to dishonour, etc). In contrast to the variable nature of the author's intention, the *intentio* is a quality intrinsic to a given language and cannot be altered: it is like conductivity for materials. The *intentio* of satire, as mentioned, is to hurt and offend. This point is striking mainly because no other literary genre possesses this particular trait. Satire has a dark heart: it is a language entangled with violence and as such, unlike other

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artem redigerunt et metricae ceperunt reprehendere' [It is possible that 'satire' is derived from 'satiri', that is from 'peasants' [...] peasants, they used to assemble for the honour of Ceres and Bacchus [...] In these occasions they would give free reign to their appetites, celebrating and drinking, feasting for the greater part of the day. At the end of such gatherings, the rustics of one village would stand against those of another settlement, and by turns they poured out abuse, chiming together in ungainly fashion, as harsh and rough as befits the peasantry. And these types of outbursts anticipated satire, because the craftiest farmers, those with most skill and artistry, later fashioned verse intended to reprehend']. Guillaume de Conches, *Glosae in Iuvenalem*, ed. by Bradford Wilson (Paris: Vrin, 1980), p. 91.

7 See medieval annotations on Horace, *Ars Poetica*, pp. 234–35: 'Non ego inornata et dominantia nomina solum / verbaque, Pisones, Satyrorum scriptor amabo' [As a writer of [a new] satire, oh Pisos, I shall never be fond of unornamented words and verbs of established use].

languages, it requires containment. From late antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages, scholiasts and commentators have worked towards a definition of the genre that includes forms of control and inhibition. The *marginalia* of medieval manuscripts containing poems of Persius, Juvenal and Horace, are fraught with anonymous glosses indicating ways to justify and embank the flood of rage, to make it morally acceptable.<sup>8</sup> I would divide these popular solutions into three groups.

One way of justifying the use of satire follows the Aristotelian principle of moderation. ‘Vituperatio et laudatio’ or ‘reprehensione vitii et commendatione virtutis’: any harsh rebuke must be followed and tempered by a praise of the good aspects.<sup>9</sup> Another way is to prevent the use of satirical language against specific historical individuals. Satire can be practiced as long as its target is left unnamed or consists in a generic category of persons. It is the well-known motto: hate the sin not the sinner. The third and most popular way of justifying satirical violence is to introduce a moral finality. Hitting and hurting is permitted as a way of correcting [‘ut corrigat’]. Satirists shout and insult their targets in order to push them away from their bad habits and wrong behaviours.

That satirical language can potentially be used for ethical purposes does not mean that satire is *per se* an ethical genre. In satirical writings, the moral finality is accessory, a rhetorical device aimed at defusing what the civic body sees as a form of mutual violence. Satire is the expression of a feral and wild spirit:

Certe novimus Lucilium in urbe Roma satyrographum ita invectum in vitia, ut videretur *non mores* carpsisse, sed homines necasse et vulnerasse.<sup>10</sup>

[We read of the satirist Lucilius who in the city of Rome was so carried away against vices that he would wound and kill people rather than carping at their habits.]

8 This material is still largely unpublished; for bibliographical references on Giovenale, see Stefano Grazzini, ‘Leggere Giovenale nell’alto Medioevo’, in *Trasmissione del testo dal Medioevo all’età moderna. Leggere, copiare, pubblicare*, ed. by Andrea Piccardi (Florence: Polistampa, 2012), pp. 11–45; for Horace, see Chiara Nardello’s, *Il commento di Francesco da Buti all’Ars poetica di Orazio* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Padua, 2008), pp. 33–50; for Persius, see *Persius-Scholien. Die lateinische Persius-Kommentierung der Traditionen A, D und E*, ed. by Udo W. Scholz and Claudia Wiener (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2009).

9 Guido da Pisa, *Expositiones et glose. Declaratio super Comediam Dantis*, ed. by Michele Rinaldi (Rome: Salerno, 2013), p. 245.

10 *Persius-Scholien*, p. 49 (commentary on *Satira* i., 114–15). See also late antique and medieval commentaries on Horace, *Ars Poetica*, p. 284.

This takes us back to the satyr-satire connection. This false etymology disseminates the idea that satire derives from or is connected to the original language of 'monstra' [monsters], creatures whose nature is hybrid, unclear. The satirist is animated by an animal rage, that can kick off, twitch in any moment; he is an unbridled, brutal and riotous being. In the depth of his language brews a primordial violence.<sup>11</sup>



Gianbattista Tiepolo, 'Satyr family (Pan and his family)', etching from *Scherzi di Fantasia* series (c.1743–57). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, ©MET under OASC licence, <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/361896>

Satyrs come from the forest, relegated outside the community, they are creatures to avoid. The central section of Horace's *Ars Poetica* (ll. 202–50), an epistle presented as an informal letter to members of the Piso family and one of the key textbooks in medieval schools, is concerned with the origins of satire and satyrs' irreverent nature.<sup>12</sup> The great Latin poet claims that his

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<sup>11</sup> To convey this sense of disquiet, I accompany this study with a reproduction of Tiepolo's etching of a satyr.

<sup>12</sup> This section of the Epistle to the Pisos ought to be read through school commentaries on Horace. For the *Anonymus Turicensis*, see István Hajdú, 'Ein Zürcher Kommentar aus

*fictum carmen*, his new poetry, is able to tame those woodland spirits ('*Silvis deducti caveant me iudice Fauni*', l. 244), to domesticate their habits, mixing ('*contemperare*' is the verb used in a popular commentary) some elements of their obscene repertoire with the sobriety of the tragic style. Arguably, Dante's *Commedia* — as a whole — narrates a very similar process. The poet who emerges from the wild, harsh forest ('*aspra, selvaggia, forte*', *Inf.*, i. 5) used to speak a bitter, malicious language ('*Tant' è amara che poco è più morte*' [So bitter, that thought, that death is hardly worse], *Inf.*, i. 7), the language of the *tenzone* with Forese Donati:

[...] 'Se tu [Forese] riduci a mente  
 qual fosti meco, e qual io [Dante] teco fui,  
 ancor fia grave il memorar presente.  
 Di quella vita mi volse costui [Virgilio]  
 che mi va innanzi [...]'. (*Purg.*, xxiii. 115–19)

[If you (Forese) bring back to mind what you were once to me and I (Dante) to you, the memory of that will still be sore. I, from that life, was turned away by him (Virgil) who walks ahead of me...]

From that life, from that language that was unnecessarily obscene and offensive, Dante is turned away by Virgil, the author of the *alta tragedia* (*Inf.*, xx. 113).<sup>13</sup> The process which transforms the language of the *selva oscura* into a sacred poem to the service of the Church and the Empire thus resembles the story narrated in Horace's letter to the Pisos; it begins when the man of the 'selva oscura' curbs to the grave words of tragedy. In this sense, Dante's satire (only one of the many languages of the *comedia*), just like Horace's satire, is a combination of the rustic and the tragic. The first two cantos of this vertical reading, *Inferno* xix and *Purgatorio* xix, aptly combine the two registers.

But there is more to it. Unlike in Horace, Dante's satire is not simply legitimised by a stylistic compromise between the filthy and the sublime;

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dem 12. Jahrhundert zur *Ars poetica* des Horaz', *Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen âge grec et latin* 63 (1993), 231–93 (in particular pp. 261–63); for the *Materia*, see Karsten Friis-Jensen, 'The *Ars Poetica* in Twelfth-Century France: The Horace of Matthew of Vendôme, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, and John of Garland', *Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen âge grec et latin* 60 (1990), 336–88 (in particular pp. 360–63); for *Pseudoacro*, see Otto Keller, *Pseudacronis scholia in Horatium vetustiora* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1902–1904), *ad loc.*

<sup>13</sup> See Robert Hollander, 'Tragedy in Dante's *Comedy*', *The Sewanee Review* 91:2 (1983), 240–60.

the violence of Dante's satire takes a spin so radical that a stylistic solution cannot contain it. To find its full legitimisation, indeed, Dante's satirical attack requires — as I shall show — a prophetic investiture directly from God, and this is what *Paradiso* xix can help us to understand. But let us proceed in order.

### *Inferno* xix

From the very opening lines of *Inferno* xix, Dante struggles to contain his anger and bursts into a loud cry:

'O Simon mago, o miseri seguaci  
[...]  
or convien che per voi suoni la tromba'. (*Inf.*, xix. 1, 5)

[You! Magic Simon, and your sorry school! ...The trumpet now (and rightly!) sounds for you.]

Dante's 'tromba' is both the trumpet of the angels of the final judgement and also the squealing *tuba* of Horace's satyrs. The vocabulary and the syntax of the canto are characterised by the typical attributes of satirical writings. Alongside the tragic nuances of the dialogue with Pope Nicholas, Dante uses a low register. The vocabulary is often vulgar and comical, as the poet lingers on the description of the lower limbs of the body of the sinners: 'piedi' (*Inf.*, xix. 23, 64, 79, 81), 'gambe' (l. 23), 'grosso' (l. 24), 'piante' (l. 25), 'giunte' (l. 26), 'buccia' (l. 29), 'calcagni' (l. 30), 'punte' (l. 30), 'anca' (l. 43), 'zanca' (l. 45) 'piote' (l. 120) [feet, legs, joints, skin, heel, toe tips, hip, shank, feet]. Of these terms, the word 'zanca' [shank], deriving from the dialect, probably of gypsy origin, works as a stylistic marker, tuning the whole piece on a sordid keynote.<sup>14</sup> The syntax is rustic, quotidian, colloquial: 'dopo lui verrà di più laida opra' [after him, an even uglier thing will come] (*Inf.*, xix. 82);<sup>15</sup> 'Deh, or mi di' [Ah, now tell me] (l. 90); 'Però ti sta, ché tu se' ben punito' [Therefore you stay down there, for you deserve your punishment] (l. 97). Dante insists on the filthiness of the language: the foot soles of the

<sup>14</sup> See Francesco D'Ovidio's chapter 'Il canto dei simoniaci' in his *Nuovi Studi Danteschi* (Milan: Hoepli, 1907), pp. 335–443 (pp. 370–71).

<sup>15</sup> For the translation of 'opra' as 'thing' see Ruggiero Stefanini, 'La "laida opra" di *Inferno* XIX 82', *Lingua nostra* 66 (1995), 12–14.

simonists are 'unte' [greasy] (l. 28), the rock of the pouch is 'sconcio' [filthy] [l. 131], and the future pope is 'laida opra' [obscene stuff] (l. 82).

The poet highlights that the canto's words are 'vere' [true] (l. 123), alluding to the standard *modus scribendi* of satirical writings. In *Inferno* xix, Dante does not employ circumlocutions but accuses the shepherds point blank of treating the Church as a whore:

'Di voi pastor s'accorse il Vangelista,  
quando colei che siede sopra l'acque  
puttaneggiar coi regi a lui fu vista'. (*Inf.*, xix. 106–08)

[Saint John took heed of shepherds such as you. He saw revealed that She-above-the-Waves, whoring it up with Rulers of the earth.]

The whole episode is constructed on the satirical trope of inversion, of the *mundus immundus*, making full use of the upside down world metaphor that proliferates in medieval (and modern!) satirical writings. The word 'sottosopra' occurs in this canto (l. 80) and only one other time in the whole *Commedia*, in *Inferno* xxxiv, where it serves to describe the position of Satan.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the kingdom of Hell is arguably God's satirical 'poem', written to trample the evil and raise up the good. In *Inferno* xix, the focus of this antithetical representation is on the bodily posture of the sinners whom Dante portrays buried upside-down in holes the size of baptism basins:

'O qual che se' che 'l di sù tien di sotto,  
anima trista come pal commessa... (*Inf.*, xix. 46–47)

[Whatever you might be there, upside down, staked, you unhappy spirit, like a pole...]

In this way, the canto redresses the injustice procured by the simonists with their avarice, a sin that afflicts the world 'calcando i buoni e sollevando i pravi' [trampling the good and raising up the wicked] (l. 105). The valley of the simonists resonates with distorted representations of natural roles. In a grotesque carnival of the holy sacraments, the canto parodies the liturgy of baptism, marriage, priestly ordination and confession.<sup>17</sup> Kenelm Foster

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<sup>16</sup> Also the term 'zanca' occurs only in *Inferno* xix and *Inferno* xxxiv (l. 79), and there again to rhyme with 'anche' (*Inf.*, xxxiv. 77).

<sup>17</sup> On the inversion of sacraments see Erminia Ardissino, 'Parodie liturgiche nell'*Inferno*',

writes that the canto is '[a] kind of Anti-Church',<sup>18</sup> where readers encounter the groom 'avolterate' [betraying] (l. 4) and making a whore of his wife (ll. 106–11), the (un)charismatic unction of the foot soles rather than the foreheads (ll. 25, 28), the mismatching of baptismal names (ll. 52–53). The subversion of roles is methodical: as he listens to Pope Nicholas III, Dante presents himself as a friar who confesses the assassin ('Io stava come 'l frate / che confessa lo perfido assessin', ll. 49–50); but the assassin is in reality a pope, a friar, who, in the right world, should confess the assassin, the poet. Why does Dante depict himself implicitly as an assassin? My hypothesis is that Dante is here thinking of himself as a satyr, someone able to kill with his language. In fact, this is exactly what this canto does. The poet here attacks individuals that are still alive. One of these individuals, Boniface VIII (who died in 1303), is still alive when the fictional journey of the *Commedia* takes place. The other one, Pope Clement V (who served as pope 1305–14), was alive when this canto was already circulating in Florence.<sup>19</sup>

Dante's satirical attack is of a unique kind. I am not aware of another classical or medieval satirical work that so explicitly assaults and defames contemporary figures. Satirical poems such as the *Visio Alberici*, the *Apocalipsis Goliae* or *Le songe d'Enfer* narrate journeys through Hell where the writer claims to have seen countless groups of friars, princes, kings and even popes.<sup>20</sup> Unlike these other satirists, Dante puts aside any conventional scruple, and rather than attacking generic social categories,

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*Annali di Italianistica* 25 (2007), 217–32; John Scott, *Dante Magnanimo. Studi sulla Commedia* (Florence: Olschki, 1977), pp. 75–115; Ronald Herzman and William Stephany, "'O miseri seguaci': Sacramental Inversion in *Inferno* XIX', *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society* 96 (1978), 39–65; Mirko Tavoni, 'Effrazione battesimale tra i simoniaci (Inf. XIX 13–21)', *Rivista di Letteratura Italiana* 10:3 (1992), 457–512; Filippo Zanini "'Simulacra gentium argentum et aurum". Parodia sacra e polemica anticlericale nell'*Inferno*', *L'Alighieri* 39 (2012), 131–45.

18 Kenelm Foster, 'The Canto of the Damned Popes', *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society* 88 (1969), 47–68 (p. 55).

19 Francesco da Barberino, *I Documenti d'Amore*, ed. by Marco Albertazzi, 2 vols (Lavis: La Finestra, 2008), I, pp. 371–72.

20 For an edition of the texts mentioned, see *Die Apokalypse des Goliath; Visio Alberici. Die Jenseitswanderung des neunjährigen Alberich in der vom Visionar um 1127 in Monte Cassino revidierten Fassung*, ed. by Paul Gerhard Schmidt (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997); *The Songe d'Enfer of Raoul de Houdenc: An Edition Based on All the Extant Manuscripts*, ed. by Madelyn Timmel Mihm (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984); and Darren Hopkins, 'Le Salut d'Enfer: A Short Satire Modelled on Raoul de Houdenc's *Songe d'Enfer*', *Mediaeval Studies* 71 (2009), 23–45.

he gives us the Christian and family names of those friars, princes, kings and popes. In so doing, the poet seems to destroy what his readers know about satire as a literary genre. The rules that rhetoricians had established are broken in front of our eyes by someone who, nonetheless, demonstrates that he knows them perfectly well. Dante presents himself as a satirist in a canto where he is crossing the traditional boundaries of the style, those limitations that were put in place to protect society from the violence hidden in this language.

It is even possible to catch a glimpse of the iconography of the satyr in the filigree of this infernal canto. In the opening lines, as we have seen, Dante mentions the trumpet, the typical instrument of the half-goat, half-man creature. He then refers to horns in the middle of the canto, in line 60, where he writes that he feels almost 'scornato' (literally 'without horns'), frustrated for not understanding what was said to him: 'Tal mi fec'io, quai son color che stanno, / per non intender ciò ch'è lor risposto, / quasi scornati' [Well, I just stood there (you will know just how) / simply not getting what I'd heard come out, / feeling a fool] (ll. 58–60). In the finale of the canto, a third visual clue is released, when a hybrid creature appears re-emerging from the valley of the simonists. Dante is being carried up by Virgil in his arms and, as a result of this bizarre way of transportation, a 'monstrous' figure looms up from the third pouch of the eighth circle. The appearance in this canto of a double natured figure with legs comparable to goat's legs is no coincidence but, rather, a deliberate reference to the popular association between satire and satyrs:

Quivi soavemente spuose il carco,  
soave per lo scoglio sconcio ed erto  
che sarebbe a le capre duro varco. (*Inf.*, xix. 130–32)

[And there he gently put his burden down, gently on rocks so craggy  
and so steep they might have seemed to goats too hard to cross.]

The welding of the two bodies is located at the level of the 'anca' [hips] (l. 43), where classical and medieval iconography locates the passage of nature in the frame of the half-man half-goat god.

This particular reading of *Inferno* xix raises a whole set of issues regarding the justification of the *Commedia* and Dante's self-representation. To some of these problems, at this point of his journey, Dante has no answers:



Io non so s'ì mi fui qui troppo folle,  
 ch'ì pur rispuosi lui a questo metro:  
 'Deh, or mi dì:...' (*Inf.*, xix. 88–90)

[I may have been plain mad. I do not know. But now, in measured verse,  
 I sang these words: 'Tell me...']

'I do not know'. The poet does not know if the language ('metro', poetry) used against the simonist popes is too harsh and foolhardy.

### *Purgatorio* xix

Evident bonds tie *Inferno* xix to *Purgatorio* xix. Ronald Martinez and Robert Durling have listed these affinities in their edition of the *Commedia*:<sup>21</sup> like *Inferno* xix, *Purgatorio* xix is devoted to avarice and simonist popes; in each canto, Dante speaks to one soul only, and this happens to be a pope; the souls are punished upside down: 'che 'l di su tien di sotto' [who hold your up side down] (*Inf.*, xix. 46); 'volti avete i dossi / al su' [you have your backs turned up] (*Purg.*, xix. 94–95); 'i nostri diretri / rivolga il cielo a se' [Heaven turns our backsides toward itself] (*Purg.*, xix. 97–98). Both former popes, Nicholas and Adrian, use the metonymy of 'the great mantle' to refer to their former office (*Inf.*, xix. 69 and *Purg.*, xix. 103–04); both identify themselves as popes with the words 'know that...' (*Inf.*, xix. 69 and *Purg.*, xix. 99); and there are recurrent keywords ('calcagne' in *Inf.*, xix. 30 and *Purg.*, xix. 61) and parallels of phrasings.

Some of these vertical links highlight the continued influence of the satirical tradition on his poem. The upside down position of the bodies is one of the most compelling visual clues that relate the satirical vein of this canto back to its infernal counterpart. However, the poet does not simply replicate the same issues in a changed setting; on the contrary, he takes advantage of the circular and vertical structure of the journey not only to take forward, but also to rethink and correct ideas previously expressed. This process of retrospective rewriting, continuous correction and amendment is the mechanism that allows him to persuade — or attempt to persuade — his readers of the 'miraculous' coherence of his poem. In

21 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed., trans. and notes by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996–2011), II, pp. 324–25.

reality, what happens is often far from being as linear as he would like us to think. This is clear especially in his use of the notion of ‘reverenza’ [reverence]. In *Inferno* xix, the poet explains that if he were not forbidden by his reverence for the papal office, he would have used still heavier words against the simonist popes:

E se non fosse ch’ancor lo mi vieta  
la reverenza de le somme chiavi  
che tu tenesti ne la vita lieta,  
io userei parole ancor più gravi; (*Inf.*, xix. 100–03)

[And, were I not forbidden, as I am, by reverence for those keys, supreme and holy, that you hung on to in the happy life, I now would bring still weightier words to bear.]

In *Purgatorio* xix, Pope Adrian refers back over Dante’s decision of curbing his vehemence against the former popes, and corrects him. Dante kneels to show his ‘reverire’ [respect] (l. 129) for the office of pope, but Adrian rebukes him:

‘Drizza le gambe, lèvati sù, frate!’,  
rispuose; ‘non errar: conservo sono  
teco e con li altri ad una podestate’. (*Purg.*, xix. 133–35)

[Straighten your knee, my brother. Just get up! Make no mistake. I am, along with you and all, co-servant of one single Power.]

‘Drizza!’, ‘vattene!’ Pope Adrian reproaches Dante harshly. In the afterlife, he explains, secular institutions no longer exist and all souls are equal. No reverence to the souls is thus needed for the office they held in their previous life. Dante could and should have used ‘heavier words’ in *Inferno* xix. The heavier words that Dante did not dare to use in Hell will resound in *Paradiso* xxvii, arguably the most exact ‘vertical’ conclusion to the satirical vein of the *Inferno* xix and *Purgatorio* xix. In this canto of *Paradiso*, simony and the corruption of the papacy are brought back to the scene to be lambasted once more. St Peter glows red with anger as he condemns his successors who use their papal power for selling false privileges and benefices. The disciple accuses the popes of Dante’s day, wolves in shepherds’ clothing (*Par.*, xxvii. 55–56), of turning his burial place into a blood-filled sewer (*Par.*, xxvii. 25–26); the first pope also singles out two French popes — one of

whom Dante had blamed in *Inferno* xix (Clement V) — and reveals that they are preparing to drink the blood of their martyred predecessors (*Par.*, xxvii. 58–60). Here are the heavier words! In *Inferno* xix — as well as in *Purgatorio* xix — the poet is still far from understanding what is really going on, the exact nature of his role, what his job really entails. The signs are there but the poet's (and the reader's) hermeneutic skills are not strong enough to interpret them. To quote a passage of *Paradiso* xix, we can say that God's providential plan 'èli, ma cela lui l'esser profondo' [it is there but its depths conceal it] (*Par.*, xix. 63).<sup>22</sup>

The other vertical parallelism that renews the satirical paradigms of *Inferno* xix is related to the role of Virgil. *Purgatorio* xix opens with the ugly woman (ll. 1–33) who appears to Dante in his dream: her eyes are crossed, her feet are crooked, her hands are crippled, she is pale, and stammers when she talks. This is what she is, but Dante, in his dream, 'dresses' her into a beautiful Siren:

mi venne in sogno una femmina balba,  
ne li occhi guercia, e sovra i piè distorta,  
con le man monche, e di colore scialba.  
Io la mirava; e come 'l sol conforta  
le fredde membra che la notte aggrava,  
così lo sguardo mio le facea scorta  
la lingua, e poscia tutta la drizzava  
in poco d'ora, e lo smarrito volto,  
com'amor vuol, così le colorava. (*Purg.*, xix. 7–15)

[there came, dreaming, to me a stammering crone, cross-eyed and crooked on her crippled feet, her hands mere stumps, and drained and pale in look. I gazed at her. Then, as to frozen limbs when night has weighed them down, the sun gives strength, likewise my staring made her free, long-tongued, to speak, and drew her, in the briefest space, erect in every limb, giving the hue that love desires to her blurred, pallid face.]

The beauty Dante attaches to the woman is fleeting, superficial; it is the 'beauty' that humans attach to worldly goods. As the poet explains in

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22 See Tavoni, 'Effrazione battesimale'; and Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Canto XIX', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Inferno*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michele Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2000), pp. 259–75 (then Zygmunt G. Barański, *Dante e i segni: saggi per una storia intellettuale di Dante Alighieri* (Naples: Liguori, 2000), pp. 147–72 with the title 'I segni della Bibbia. II. La lezione profetica di *Inferno* XIX').

the fourth book of his *Convivio* and throughout the *Commedia*, riches and wealth are the basest goods; yet, when our conscience is asleep, we fall in love with them. Before the Siren finishes her song, another woman shows up and asks Virgil the identity of this Siren. What happens next is quite striking. Virgil jumps in and rips the Siren's clothes off, showing Dante the terrible rotten stench that is steaming from her bare genitalia:

L'altra prendea, e dinanzi l'apria  
 fendendo i drappi, e mostravami 'l ventre;  
 quel mi svegliò col puzzo che n'uscita. (*Purg.*, xix. 31–33)

[He seized the Siren, ripping down her dress, opened the front of her, displayed her guts, and that, with all its stench, now woke me up.]

Virgil does here what a satirist does, ripping superficial values apart, and revealing the true nature of corruption. He re-enacts, almost word by word, the deeds of Lucilius, the earliest Roman satirist:

...cum est Lucilius ausus  
 primus in hunc operis componere carmina morem  
 detrahere et pellem, nitidus qua quisque per ora  
 cederet, introrsum turpis... (Horace, *Sat.* II. i. 62–65)

[...when Lucilius first dared to compose verses after this style, and to strip off the skin with which each strutted with a fair outside, though foul within...]

In *Purgatorio* xix as in *Inferno* xix, when satirical language and tropes are employed, the character of Virgil appears fused, enmeshed in that of Dante. In the pouch of the simonists, the Roman poet carries Dante on his hip, directly contributing to the deployment of the defamatory attack against those sinners. It is again Virgil, now part of Dante's dream, who lacerates the fake beauty of the Siren revealing her true nature and the plague that is affecting her body. Both scenes can be fruitfully read from a metaliterary point of view, by assessing them against the medieval theory of satire. Dante would seem to suggest that Virgil — Virgil's poetry or Virgil's imperial ideas — played a fundamental role in his own transformation into a 'good' satirist. Yet, Virgil will not accompany Dante in the third realm, where the full unveiling of crimes and injustice is performed. In *Paradiso*, the poet

takes his satirical language to another dimension, and Virgil appears to be no longer needed.

### *Paradiso xix*

In the third *cantica*, the vertical pull of the Nineteens loses its momentum. The numerous and compelling connections that tied *Inferno xix* to *Purgatorio xix* are almost absent in the third canto of the series. This is no surprise. Just as the poet strives to offer his readers internal references and structural symmetries that may help them in the difficult task of interpreting the poem, so, at the same time, he refuses to 'imprison' himself in rigid, obvious patterns. Flexibility — or 'liquidity' to use a more poetic term — is an inherent feature of the *Commedia*. This said, *Paradiso xix* contains certain themes and images that, although not exclusively related to the canto, can still offer rich insights into the central questions of Dante's 'new' satire.

Famously, the last nine *terzine* of the canto present an acrostic — a 'visible' word — on the letters L, U, E, the Italian word for 'lue' [pestilence]. The acrostic weaves together, *terzina* after *terzina*, all kingdoms of Europe, from Norway to Sicily, in a common, disgraceful tapestry. If read against the content of the other two Nineteens, and in particular against the episode of the putrid Siren, the acrostic LUE stands out as another, further example of satirical revelation. The canto exposes — just like Virgil does in the dream of the Siren — the corruption affecting the world. Little or no thought is given here to the ethical causes of this perversion. Dante just shows to his readers how things really are. In fact, one of the main focal points of this last canto is sight. *Paradiso xix* opens with a verb, 'parea' [to appear], relating to the sphere of sight, continues with the 'bella image' of the eagle (2), with the repetition of 'parea' (4), and the description of Dante's eyes reflecting the vivid light coming from each soul. In the next *terzina*, the poet explains that he will portray, 'ritrar' [to draw], what he saw — instead of saying it or writing it (6). He adds that 'Io vidi e anche udi' parlar lo rostro' (l. 10, emphasis mine). He 'saw' the words being said. The eagle will answer the poet's question because the divine animal can *see* the poet's mind (28–30). Sight, and human sight in particular, is the theme developed by the eagle in its long discourse on God's Justice.

'Or tu chi se', che vuo' sedere a scranna,  
per giudicar di lungi mille miglia  
con la veduta corta d'una spanna?' (*Par.*, xix. 79–81)

[Well, who are you to sit there on your throne, acting the judge a thousand miles away, eyesight as short as some mere finger span?]

This emphasis on sight might help to explain why the Virgilian component is missing from this new staging of satirical modes. The *Commedia* is a satire *sui generis* because its author is allowed to cross the natural boundaries to which satirists are normally bound. Through the invention of the journey to the afterlife, Dante enables himself to see the invisible, the things dark to view ('tanto occulto', *Par.*, xix. 42). His ability to expose crimes and immorality is thus enhanced. He sees through the Franciscan cloak, through Guido's skin and reads the immoral heart of the apparently 'nobilissimo' duke of Montefeltro (*Inf.*, xxvii).

...molti gridan 'Cristo, Cristo!',  
 che saranno in giudicio assai men prope  
 a lui, che tal che non conosce Cristo;  
 [...]  
 'Che poran dir li Perse a' vostri regi,  
 come vedranno quel volume aperto  
 nel qual si scrivon tutti suoi dispregi?' (*Par.*, xix. 106–08, 112–14)

[...many cry out: 'Christ! Christ! Christ!' Yet many will, come Judgement, be to Him less *prope* than are those who don't know Christ [...] 'What will the Persians say about your kings, when once they see that ledger opened up in which is written all their praiseless doings?']

Many who cry out 'Christ!', many who want to appear pious and good, when all things are revealed, will appear for what they really are: sordid simonists, traitors and thieves. Dante peers at that ledger and tells us what he sees. In fact, the *Commedia* is that ledger ('volume aperto', l. 113) in which all actions and thoughts are recorded, the volume where 'the secrets of their hearts are laid bare' (*i Corinthians* 14.25).

In a similarly positive way, we could read the three *terzine* beginning in line 58:

'Però ne la giustizia sempiterna  
 la vista che riceve il vostro mondo,  
 com' occhio per lo mare, entro s'interna;  
 che, ben che da la proda veggia il fondo,  
 in pelago nol vede; e nondimeno  
 èli, ma cela lui l'esser profondo.

Lume non è, se non vien dal sereno  
 che non si turba mai; anzi è tenèbra  
 od ombra de la carne o suo veleno'. (*Par.*, xix. 58–66)

[It follows that the sight your world receives in sempiternal justice sinks itself three-fold as deep as eyes in open sea. Although you see the bottom near the shore, the ocean floor you can't. And yet it's there. Its depths conceal its being so profound. There is no light except from that clear calm, changeless, untroubled. Others are tenebrae, the shadows or the venom of the flesh.]

Readers tend to interpret these lines as a description of the restrictions imposed by God upon human nature. I would like, instead, to emphasise their positive significance. 'Lume non è...': there is no light unless it comes from that clear calm that is God. This is quite different from suggesting that there is no sight at all. These lines suggest that human beings, thanks to God's help, can see that which is invisible: 'fede è sustanza di cose sperate / e argomento de le non parventi' [Faith is substantial to the things we hope, the evidence of things we do not see] (*Par.*, xxiv. 64–65). In purely technical rhetorical terms, God functions for Dante as a literary device, that allows him to surpass satire's traditional limitations and innovate the genre.

## Conclusions

Although many scholars have interpreted the Nineteens, and especially *Inferno* xix, as steps towards a redefinition of the *Commedia* as a prophetic poem, I have focused, instead, on an appreciation of the Nineteens in terms of satire.<sup>23</sup> However, it should be clear that the satirist of the *Commedia* is very much a prophet, a man whom God bestowed with a special election. The aim of this vertical reading is not, then, to diminish the role of the prophetic tradition, or the figure of the prophet, in the formation of Dante's language but, rather, to raise the tradition of satire to an equal level of importance. Perhaps, indeed, Dante deemed that neither the genre of satire nor the tradition of prophecy was adequate on its own as an antidote against the moral and social corruption of his world. He thus forged a new poetic persona that is at the same time prophet and satirist; the two traditions are

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23 See Rachel Jacoff, 'Dante, Geremia e la problematica profetica', in *Dante e la Bibbia*, ed. by Giovanni Barblan (Florence: Olschki, 1988), pp. 113–23 (especially pp. 119–20); Tavoni, 'Effrazione battesimale'; Barański, 'I segni della Bibbia'.

equally valued and are woven together, arguably for the first time in the history of western literature.<sup>24</sup> The Roman pagan roots and the technical contribution of the literary tradition of satire are fully preserved, if not even vivified through the encounter with the biblical, prophetic tradition. The two bearded figures, the satyr and the prophet, are both cast out of their communities for speaking the truth, and share, thereby, a state of isolation and exile. They are seen as foolish but have an uncanny ability to see what no one else can (or wants) to see. They expose the truth, bringing it forcefully to light. These shared elements highlight a particular, innovative aspect, then, of Dante's poem. Although the *Commedia* has sometimes been described as a 'vision', it is an 'inside out' vision, a prophetic vision of that which is hidden inside the outside mask of satire.<sup>25</sup>

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24 Some connections between satire and prophecy are developed by St Jerome. See David S. Wiesen, *St. Jerome as a Satirist: A Study in Christian Latin Thought and Letters* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964). Walter of Châtillon, in his satirical poems, draws extensively from biblical prophets, especially in the poem 'Propter Sion non tacebo'; see *Moralisch-satirische Gedichte Walters von Châtillon. Aus deutschen, englischen, französischen und italienischen Handschriften*, ed. by Karl Strecker (Heidelberg: Winter, 1929), pp. 17–33. A possible source for the conjuncture satire-prophecy is the book of Jeremiah: 'Antequam exires de vulva, sanctificavi te, et prophetam in gentibus dedi te [...] ut evellas, et destruas, et disperdas, et dissipas, et aedifices, et plantes' ['Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart. [...] I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant'] (Jeremiah 1.5–10). In the Ordinary Gloss on these lines, it is used a line from Origen: 'eradicare vitia per sermones' (St Jerome, *Translatio Homiliarum Origenis in Jeremiam*, PL 25.756). This understanding of the prophetic mission is copied in a popular *accessus* to Juvenal: 'eradicare vicia et plantare virtutes'; see Estrella Pérez Rodríguez, 'La teoría de la sátira en el s. xii (según los comentarios a Juvenal)', in *Teoría y práctica de la composición poética en el mundo antiguo y su pervivencia*, ed. by Emilio Suárez de la Torre (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid), pp. 299–317 (p. 306). The sentence appears also in William of Auxerre's *Summa Aurea*, ed. by Jean Ribailier (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1980–87), vol. 3, p. 114. For the political sphere, see Andrea da Isernia, *Liber Augustalis: 'Ad hoc debent tendere omnes boni Principes, eradicare vitia, et plantare virtutes'*, in *Consitutionum Regni Siciliarum Libri III* (Naples: Cervonus, 1771), vol. 1, p. 85.

25 Compare with Dante Alighieri, *The Vision: Or, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, of Dante Alighieri*, trans. by Henry F. Cary, 3 vols (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1814). I am most grateful to George Corbett for his revisions and very helpful corrections.





# 20. Prediction, Prophecy and Predestination: Eternalising Poetry in the *Commedia*<sup>1</sup>

Claudia Rossignoli

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When we consider cantos in the *Comedy* that have strong ‘vertical’ links across the three *cantiche*, the Twenties are certainly not among the ones that immediately spring to mind. Although often individuated by Dante scholars as remarkable, these three cantos appear to have very little in common from a structural, narrative or thematic point of view. *Inferno* xx depicts the harrowing spectacle of the fourth *bolgia*, where the seers and diviners are fittingly punished for their deceptive claims and their bold aspiration to appropriate what is rightfully and exclusively divine, the ability to know the future. The description of this *bolgia* and of its uncanny atmosphere, of the debased figures that inhabit it and of their monstrous deformity, of their unique, defeated (and eerily silent) desperation, is markedly self-contained. *Inferno* xx is interspersed, nonetheless, with an exceptional metatextual discourse and is characterised by stylistic hybridisation and a particular linguistic idiosyncrasy. Notably, this is one of the cantos with the highest number of *hapax legomena*, including the momentous ‘tragedia’ at l. 113 (to which we will return), and the infamous ‘introcque’ (l. 130), which confronts the reader in the canto’s closing verse in a unique rhyme with the

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1 I am especially grateful to the editors not only for their invitation to take part in the vertical experiment, but especially for their unfaltering support and learned advice during the completion of this chapter.

other *hapax* 'nocque' (l. 128).<sup>2</sup> *Purgatorio* xx, on the other hand, opens with a very violent invective against the 'antica lupa' [ancient she-wolf] (l. 10) that anchors it strongly to the encounter with Adrian V in *Purgatorio* xix, and prepares the way for Hugh Capet's vehement tirade that occupies most of the canto (ll. 40–123). This has just concluded when a dramatic sudden earthquake mysteriously shakes the mountain of Purgatory bringing the canto to its end with a powerful and suspensive *coup de theatre* (ll. 124–51).

When we move to *Paradiso* xx, we find ourselves immersed in the exalting and enfolding light of the Heaven of Jupiter, where the just souls present themselves to Dante in the mesmerising and highly symbolic shape of an eagle. Having addressed the pilgrim's doubt about the mystery of divine justice in *Paradiso* xix, the eagle encourages him in the following canto to focus on its eye, where divine justice manifests itself more clearly in the souls of David, the Roman Emperor Trajan, King Hezekiah, the Emperor Constantine, William II of Altavilla, and the Trojan Ripheus (*Par.*, xx. 31–73). The 'immagine divina' [divine image] then administers to the pilgrim a 'soave medicina' [sweet medicine], clarifying in mystical accents the salvation of the two 'gentili' [pagans] and declaring the inscrutability of predestination whilst warning all 'mortali' [mortals] to distrust their fallible judgement (ll. 88–148).<sup>3</sup>

2 See also *DVE*, I.13.2, where 'introcque' is used to exemplify 'municipalia vulgaria Tuscanorum'.

3 This is clearly a very brief summary of three typically rich cantos. It is not possible in this context to examine in detail all the significant elements that individually characterise them. I will only focus on the features and themes that allow us to construct a clearly 'vertical' discourse. For an analysis of each canto individually, and of some of the issues raised, see the following editions of the *Comedy: The Divine Comedy*, trans. and comm. by Charles Singleton (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970–1976), *La Divina Commedia*, ed. by Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio, 3 vols (Florence: Le Monnier, 1988); *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed., trans. and notes by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996–2011); and *Commedia*, ed. by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 3 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1991–97). In the extensive bibliography available for *Inferno* xx, I relied especially on Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, 'Interpretazione della struttura del canto XX dell'*Inferno*', *Ateneo Veneto* (1965), 273–302; Ernesto Parodi, 'Il canto xx dell'*Inferno*', in *Lecture dantesche. Inferno*, ed. by Giovanni Getto (Florence: Sansoni, 1964), pp. 379–91; M. Barchiesi, 'Catarsi classica e medicina dantesca. Dal canto XX dell'*Inferno*', *Lecture Classensi* 4 (1973), 9–124; Robert Hollander, *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 1980), pp. 131–218; Teodolinda Barolini, 'Canto XX: True and False See-ers', in *Lectura Dantis: Inferno*, ed. by Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn and Charles Ross (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 275–86; Georges Güntert, 'Canto XX', *Lectura Dantis Turicensis I*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2000), pp. 277–89; Piero Boitani, 'Inferno Canto XX', *Lectura Dantis Andreatopolitana*, University of St Andrews, 6 May 2011, <http://lecturadantisandreatopolitana.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/video/inferno-canto-xx;>

At first sight, then, the Twenties seem to pursue very different concerns. The experiment of 'vertical' reading may open up and reveal, nevertheless, a significant web of connections between these three cantos that operates on semantic, symbolic and allegorical levels. These connections arguably serve to highlight a persistent, and vertically coherent, discourse about the powers of the human mind and its blatant limitations, about rightful objectives and misplaced ambitions, and about Dante's own attempt to eternalise his poetry through a radical rethinking of classical literature and a provocative appropriation of Scripture. Whilst it might be far-fetched to force the hypothesis of a conscious and planned alignment on Dante's part, it is clear that the elements that will be discussed below form part of a broader and compelling bridging strategy operating 'at structurally-marked moments'<sup>4</sup> across the poem that hinges on key aspects of Dante's conception of being and of scriptural poetics.<sup>5</sup>

The first striking element that recurs in the three cantos is a consistent and emphatic reference to the semantic field of eyes and sight, which is

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Sonia Gentili, 'Canto XX. Deformità morale e rottura dei vincoli sociali: gli indovini', in *Lectura Dantis Romana. I. Inferno. 2. Cantos XVIII–XXIII*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno, 2013), pp. 646–81. For *Purgatorio* xx, see at least Pio Rajna, 'Ugo Ciappetta nella *Divina Commedia*', *Studi Danteschi* 37 (1960), 5–20; R. Scrivano, 'L'orazione politica di Ugo Capeto: morale, politica e retorica in Dante', *L'Alighieri* 12 (1971), 13–34; M. Marti, 'Il pianto di Ugo Capeto e il natalizio "Gloria" nell'unità del XX del *Purgatorio*', in *GSLI* 162 (1985), 321–43; A. Stäuble, 'Canto XX', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Purgatorio*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2001), pp. 307–14; M. Grimaldi, 'Canto XX. La regalità dei nuovi capetingi', in *Lectura Dantis Romana. II. Purgatorio. 2. Canti XVIII–XXXIII*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno, 2014), pp. 583–620; Robert Bartlett, 'Purgatorio Canto XX', *Lectura Dantis Andreapolitana, University of St Andrews, 15 November 2013*, <http://lectura.dantisandreapolitana.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/video/purgatorio-canto-xx>. For *Paradiso* xx, I found especially helpful John A. Scott, 'Dante, Boezio e l'enigma di Rifeo (*Par. XX*)', *Studi Danteschi* 61 (1989), 187–92; Andrea Battistini, "'Rifeo troiano" e la riscrittura dantesca della storia', *Lettere Italiane* 42.1 (1990), 26–50; Michelangelo Picone, 'Canto XX', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Paradiso*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2002), pp. 307–24; L. Serianni, 'Lettura del canto XX del *Paradiso*', *Filologia e Critica* 28.1 (2003), 3–22; Marco Ariani, *Lux inaccessibilis. Metafore e teologia della luce nel 'Paradiso' di Dante* (Rome: Aracne, 2010), pp. 245–67; Claudia Villa, 'I cieli di Marte e di Giove', in *Esperimenti danteschi. Paradiso*, ed. by Tommaso Montorfano (Genoa: Marietti, 2010), pp. 185–99; Erminia Ardissino, "'Ciascuna cosa qual ell'è diventa" (*Pd. XX, 78*). *Metamorfosi e vita beata*', *Lettere Italiane* 63 (2011), 208–23; and Nicola Fosca, 'Il canto XX del *Paradiso*. Giustizia e predestinazione', *Studi Danteschi* 79 (2014), 209–66.

4 See Simon Gilson, 'Medieval Magic Lore and Dante's *Commedia*: Divination and Demonic Agency', *Dante Studies* 119 (2001), 27–66 (p. 54).

5 For a seminal illustration of Dante's 'scripturality', see the classic Peter S. Hawkins, *Dante's Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), esp. pp. 19–95.

continuously characterised by significant allegorical undertones. In *Inferno* xx, a canto dealing with those who wanted to see too far ahead ('veder troppo davante', l. 38) and whose meticulously calculated punishment consists in a violent distortion of their physical capacity to see, such insistence is indeed to be expected. However, in no other *bolgia* as in this one do we see such a striking construction of what the pilgrim is experiencing in terms of a spectacle that he is to absorb through his eyes, a spectacle in fact that will be literally revealed to him, as announced in the concluding verse of the previous canto: 'Indi un altro vallon mi fu scoperto' [from there another valley was revealed to me] (*Inf.*, xix. 133). The sense of visual expectation created by this *explicit* is then heightened by the almost immediate repetition of 'scoperto' at the beginning of *Inferno* xx, and reinforced by the pilgrim's disposition to 'riguardar' [gaze] leading, in turn, to a progressive disclosure of what the pilgrim sees, from the emphatic 'e vidi' [and I saw] of line 7:

Io era già disposto tutto quanto  
a riguardar ne lo scoperto fondo,  
che si bagnava d'angoscioso pianto;  
e vidi gente per lo vallon tondo  
venir, tacendo e lagrimando, al passo  
che fanno le letane in questo mondo. (*Inf.*, xx. 4-9)

[I was already bent over to gaze into the uncovered depth, which was bathed with anguished weeping; and I saw people coming along the curving valley, silent and shedding tears, at the pace taken by litanies in this world.]

The sinners, at least momentarily, appear to emanate a sense of tragic penitential gravity, expressed in their distinctive and absorbed silence, in their strangely composed demeanour, and in their delayed and impeded movement. The almost solemn pace of their proceeding seems to evoke that of earthly religious processions but its actual characteristics will soon reveal the inverted nature of this representation. In fact, as soon as the pilgrim literally looks closer ('Come 'l viso mi scese in lor più basso' [As my gaze went lower on them], l. 10), his gaze becomes a powerful device to establish a sophisticated dynamic of correlation and reversal. Most obviously, the pilgrim's own sight contrasts with the sinners' aberrant blindness, caused by a uniquely matched *contrapasso* both in physical and allegorical terms. The compensating and reversing logic of the diviners'

punishment, whose heads are unnaturally twisted backwards, is clear. In opposition to their mainly solitary and secluded existence, the diviners are now not just blinded and forced to be part of a large group but also obliged by the physical nature of their punishment to proceed at a synchronised, regimented pace; their silence contrasts with their garrulity in life while their penitential demeanour counteracts their previous arrogance.<sup>6</sup> However, their degraded humanity is depicted specifically through the progressive visual scanning of their deformed bodies, hinging insistently on their deprivation of sight, in direct opposition to their mortal existence as well as to Dante *personaggio's* intense stare:

*mirabilmente apparve* esser travolto  
 ciascun tra 'l mento e 'l principio del casso,  
     ché da le reni era tornato 'l volto,  
 e in dietro venir li convenia,  
 perché 'l veder dinanzi era lor tolto. (*Inf.*, xx. 11–15)

[each was marvellously twisted between the chin and the beginning of the chest, for the face was turned towards the kidneys, and they were forced to walk backwards, since seeing forward was taken from them.]

It is clear that sight and all its semantic cognates establish here a specular opposition between Dante-character, actively seeing and able to experience and communicate his truthful 'vision',<sup>7</sup> which has been sanctioned by divine grace, and the sinners he is observing, who are no longer able to see because of their direct challenge to the boundaries established by divine authority.<sup>8</sup>

In a clearly antiphrastic construction later on in the canto, the seers' fraudulent and misguided desire to appropriate a uniquely divine prerogative are also expressed in terms of their own seeing ('veder', l. 38; 'guardare', l. 50), and again their sinful practices and false claims are directly contrasted to their current dehumanised status. This apparently forceful and clear-cut opposition is immediately complicated, nonetheless,

6 This seems unusual as in Dante's Hell the sinners are more normally immortalised in the specific sinful act or attitude that typifies their sin and determined their damnation.

7 This is specifically defined as such in *Par.*, xvii. 128. On this contrast, see also Gentili, 'Canto XX', p. 647.

8 On the particular nature of the diviners' sin, see, for example, Achille Tartaro, 'Canto XX', in *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana. Inferno*, ed. by Pompeo Giannantonio (Naples: Loffredo, 1986), pp. 341–64; and Gilson, pp. 35–37.

by the pilgrim's affliction and tears at the sight of the cruelly unnatural course of the sinners' tears down their bodies, creating a direct and disturbing specularity with the seers' 'angoscioso pianto'.<sup>9</sup> The problematic character of this connection is singled out not just in Virgil's harsh and sudden outburst in response to this emotive crisis, but more significantly in Dante's direct appeal to the reader, an unequivocal signal of a textual issue worthy of careful consideration:<sup>10</sup>

Se Dio ti lasci, lettor, prender frutto  
di tua lezione, or pensa per te stesso  
com'io potea tener lo viso asciutto,  
quando la nostra imagine di presso  
vidi sì torta, che 'l pianto de li occhi  
le natiche bagnava per lo fesso.

Certo io piangea, poggiato a un de' rocchi  
del duro scoglio, [...] (*Inf.*, xx. 19–26)

[So may God permit you, reader, to take profit from your reading, now think for yourself how I could keep dry eyes, when from close by I saw our image so twisted that tears of their eyes were bathing their buttocks down the cleft. Surely I wept, leaning on one of the rocks of the hard ridge.]

Commentators have responded to the challenge, advancing numerous competing interpretations of the pilgrim's sorrow at this point.<sup>11</sup> However, the specific extradiegetic dimension in which this crisis unfolds arguably points at a broader discourse that, like many other elements in the canto, extends beyond the boundaries of this canto or of this *bolgia*, and that,

9 The pilgrim's tears often signal his struggle to understand divine justice, as already in *Inf.*, iii. 24 and as late as *Purgatorio*, xxx. 54. But I am convinced that they could indicate also a significant symptom of self-questioning, as in his epistle XI where he compares himself to Uzzah. See Robert Hollander, 'Dante as Uzzah? (*Purg.* X 57 and *Ep.* XI 9–12)', in *Sotto il segno di Dante. Scritti in onore di Francesco Mazzoni*, ed. by Leonella Coglievina, Domenico De Robertis (Florence: Le Lettere, 1998), pp. 143–51. At the same time, Statius's representation of the tearful Melampus and Amphiarus at their fore vision is of crucial importance in a book that wonders 'unde iste per orbem / primus uenturi miseris animantibus aeger / creuit amor?', and is filled with tears since the return of Maeon, who 'signa dabat magnae longe manifesta ruinae / plactumque et gemitu', in *Thebaid*, III, 549, 551–52, and 43–44 respectively.

10 On the crucial metatextual function of Dante's appeals to the reader, see at least the classic Erich Auerbach, 'Dante's Addresses to the Reader', *Romance Philology* 7 (1954), 268–78; Leo Spitzer, *Romanische Literaturstudien (1936–1956)* (Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1959), pp. 574–95; and Vittorio Russo, 'Appello al lettore', in *ED*, I, pp. 324–26.

11 After the studies of Baldelli, Gorni, Cornish and more recently Gilson, it is no longer possible to dismiss Dante's interest in divination and other magic *artes* as 'laughable'.

indeed, a 'vertical' perspective may help us to demonstrate more clearly. His tears, just like his gaze, are intended to encourage the reader to compare the difference, not immediately apparent but nonetheless fundamental, between the divination punished in this 'vallone' (*Inf.*, xxxi. 7) and what Dante is doing 'in libro isto', as the commentator Benvenuto da Imola lucidly recognised.<sup>12</sup> In fact, there is no real 'solidarietà' [solidarity]<sup>13</sup> with the sinners themselves, as the pilgrim's tears register his dismay at their abuse of human intelligence and, consequently, the debasement of their human form in Hell.

In this sense, the pilgrim's reaction may echo the similarly emotional tears shed by Paul in the apocryphal *Visio Pauli* at the sight of a specific group of sinners, described by the angel in some versions of the text as those 'who sullied the marital bed, and denied their own children, [...] and did divinations and predictions'.<sup>14</sup> And, as in the *Visio Pauli*, Dante's guide is also quick to intervene and disperse any association created by this shared 'pianto' with an uncompromising reproach that brusquely ends this pathos-filled parenthesis.<sup>15</sup> After apostrophising Dante as 'sciocco' for appearing to have compassion for the suffering of those rightly punished by divine justice,<sup>16</sup> Virgil forcefully urges him to look at the inhabitants

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12 With his characteristic perspicuity, Benvenuto connects the pilgrim's sorrow for the seers' punishment to the *Comedy's* ambitious prophetic aspirations. See *Comentum*, II, 67; 69.

13 See Barchiesi, pp. 54–56.

14 In L. Jiroušková, *Die Visio Pauli. Wege und Wandlungen Einer Orientalischen Apokryphe im Lateinischen Mittelalter* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 203: 'que maculaverunt torum viri sui et negaverunt filios suos [...] et augurias et divinaciones fecerunt'. This is generally the text in manuscripts of Redaction I, like the Ms 28 of the Cathedral Library in Barcelona. All versions, however, include the scene of Paul crying and, although the angel's subsequent question is not always the same, the response of Paul's guide remains essentially unchanged: 'Et dixit angelus ad Paulum: Quid ploras?'

15 The interpretation of Virgil's reproach is still a matter of significant scholarly contention. The *Ottimo* appears to summarize well, in my view, the essence of the moral problem highlighted by Virgil's attitude: 'Virgilio il riprende di questo piangere, a dimostrare che gli uomini non deono aver compassione a coloro che per divino giudicio patiscono de' loro peccati pena. Iob dice che nulla è peggiore di quello uomo, che ha pietade di cotali gente: avere compassione è patire pena in parte con lui, che ha peccato; partecipare con li rei, è parte di reitade'. See *L'Ottimo commento della Divina Commedia*, ed. by Alessandro Torri, 3 vols (Bologna: Forni, 1995), I, pp. 363–64.

16 Virgil's rhetorical question 'Ancor se' tu de li altri sciocchi?' at l. 27 is a direct calque of Matt. 15:16: 'Adhuc et vos sine intellectu estis?' [Are you also yet without understanding?], as noted by Tommaseo (see Niccolò Tommaseo, gloss to *Inf.*, xx. 25–27, in Dartmouth Dante Project, <https://dante.dartmouth.edu>). From a 'vertical' perspective, it is also interesting to note the connection of the *hapax* 'sciocchi' to the rare 'stolti' [fools] of *Par.*, xviii. 102, who 'sogliono agurarsi' [often take auguries] from the sparks that fly up from smouldering logs, as this contributes to the description of the movement of 'lights' that will form the eagle protagonist of *Paradiso* xx.



of the *bolgia* with the imperatives 'vedi' [see] (repeated no less than seven times) and 'mira' [gaze].

In addition to such formulaic reiteration, the importance of sight is accentuated by clear visual signposting for each of the characters listed in the canto, both in the initial group of more clearly defined figures (Amphiaraus, Tiresias, Arruns and Manto) and in the second, less characterised group presented after a long digression on the foundation of Mantua, at lines 106–23 (Eurypylyus, Michael Scot, Guido Bonatti, Asdente and the numerous 'wretched women who left their needles, spindles and distaffs, and became soothsayers').<sup>17</sup> As some critics have suggested, Virgil's emphasis on seeing and his repeated use of 'vedere' throughout his speech mimics the sinners' own divinatory language, cruelly mocking both their forced blindness and their current silence. This is particularly clear in the case of the first seer mentioned, Amphiaraus.<sup>18</sup> His very public demise 'a li occhi d'i Teban' [before the eyes of the Thebans] (l. 32) not only reinforces the visual dimension of Virgil's discourse, adding to the pilgrim's gaze upon the sinner that of the scornful Theban crowds;<sup>19</sup> it also rearranges the narrative elements of the classical sources to further diminish the Theban augur and highlight the severity of his error in openly scriptural terms, as in the powerful hyperbaton of l. 32 's'aperse [...] la terra' [the earth opened], a clear echo of Numbers 16.30 but also of 'aperta est terra' [the earth opened] (Psalm 105.17).<sup>20</sup>

The insistence on 'vedere' as well as on the 'occhi' in Dante's description of the diviners has, then, a specific scriptural quality and meaning, just as with the reproach at ll. 27–30. His imperative request at line 31, 'Drizza la testa, drizza e vedi' [Raise your head, raise it and see], literally translates the

17 Especially through the imperative 'vedi', repeated three times in two tercets at ll. 118–23.

18 On Amphiaraus, see at least the entry by G. Padoan in *ED*, I (1996), p. 265.

19 Many critics have highlighted how the popularising and violent language used in this canto to describe the diviners stands in powerful and direct opposition not only to the literary loftiness of Virgil's 'alta tragedia' mentioned at ll. 113–14, but also to the classical tradition from which the sinners here mentioned originate. The degrading punishment reserved for the diviners and the crude and mocking language with which it is exposed certainly operate also at an intertextual level, reflecting negatively on the classical sources that transmit the stories of these characters, degrading them and divesting them of any mythical quality. See, for instance, Tartaro, who indicates the canto's 'anti-literary' objective (p. 342).

20 Scholars have noted the connection of this representation with existing medieval contaminations between Statius's tale and the biblical one in *Numbers*. Interesting, in this sense, is Barchiesi's connection of Dante's representation of Amphiaraus to the *Roman de Thèbe* and its explicit reference to the demise of Dathan and Abiram in *Numbers* 16 (Barchiesi, pp. 92–98).

'leva oculos tuos et vide' of Genesis (13.14 and 31.12) and the 'leva oculos tuos in directum et vide' of Jeremiah 3.2.<sup>21</sup> In these particular cases, as more generally in Scripture, references to the ability to see signify the salvific power of revelation.<sup>22</sup> So Virgil's literal insistence on gaining a full 'vision' of this scene denotes also the necessity for the pilgrim to acquire the spiritual truth of this manifestation of divine justice in order to progress towards the ultimate objective of his journey and, more importantly, to retell what he has seen, as the commentator Benvenuto da Imola lucidly points out.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the entire representation revolves on the contraposition of these two different forms of 'vedere': on the one hand the diviners' fallacious and fraudulent desire to see, rooted in their arrogance and misplaced confidence in the human intellect, mortified through Virgil's aggressive words and tone; on the other, Dante's understanding and acceptance of the absolute truth and intellectual necessity of this (as of any other infernal) punishment as part of his authentic and salvific vision, accepted with a clear awareness of its purpose and humble recognition of its rightful limits (as it will become apparent in the eagle's 'soave medicina' that clears up the pilgrim's 'corta vista', in *Par.*, xx. 130–41).<sup>24</sup> Dante (through Virgil's voice)

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21 Equivalent expressions recur also in the apocrypha, as in Baruch 2.17: 'Aperi oculos tuos et vide'. Neither these or the biblical antecedents of l. 32 are indicated in Carolyn Lund-Mead and Amilcare Iannucci, *Dante and the Vulgate Bible* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2012), p. 104.

22 See, for example, 'Illumina oculos meos, ne umquam obdormiam in morte' [Enlighten my eyes that I never sleep in death] (Psalm 12.4) and 'audi populus stulte qui non habes cor qui habentes oculos non videtis et aures et non auditis' [Hear, O foolish people, and without understanding: who have eyes, and see not: and ears, and hear not] (Jeremiah 5.21). But also notably as in the gospels, as in 'Et aperti sunt oculi eorum, et cognoverunt eum' (Luke 24.31) or 'Vestri autem beati oculi quia vident, et aures vestrae quia audiunt' (Matthew 13.16). See also Mark Brummitt, 'The Sublime Art of Prophetic Seeing: Aesthetics and the Word in the Book of Jeremiah', in *Beauty and the Bible: Toward a Hermeneutics of Biblical Aesthetics*, ed. by Richard J. Baultch and Jean-François Racine (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), pp. 23–30, and Francis Landy, 'I and Eye in Isaiah, or Gazing at the Invisible', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131 (2012), 85–97.

23 See *Comentum*, II, 71: 'driccia la testa, idest, erige oculos mentis, et repetit istud verbum driccia, ut magis tangat eum, quasi dicat: non fleas amplius, fatue, non fleas, sed dimitte ipsos flere, et incede ad cognoscendum aliquos'. This is a typical characteristic of experiences of visions of the other world, as clearly documented in Giuseppe Ledda, 'Modelli biblici nella *Commedia*. Dante e San Paolo', in *La Bibbia di Dante. Esperienza mistica, profezia e teologia biblica in Dante*, ed. by Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna: Centro Dantesco dei Frati Minori Conventuali, 2011), pp. 179–216.

24 The different objective is what essentially distinguishes Dante's operation from that of the diviners as their sin here is the self-centred and narcissistic desire to 'veder troppo davante' (l. 38), the same desire to see too much as instigated by the serpent in Genesis 3.5: 'scit enim Deus quod in quocumque die comederitis ex eo aperientur oculi vestri, et eritis sicut dii, scientes bonum et malum' [for God doth know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil].

goes out of his way here to establish this contraposition and to demonstrate the sacrilegious nature of the soothsayers' pretension to know what only God can know as opposed to the pilgrim's revelatory experience, elicited and sanctioned by a gift of divine grace, as clearly articulated by Aquinas:

Si quis ergo hujusmodi futura prænoscere aut prænuntiare quocumque modo præsumpserit, nisi Deo revelante, manifeste usurpat sibi quod Dei est. Et ex hoc aliqui *divini* dicuntur: unde dicit Isidorus, *Divini dicti quasi Deo pleni: divinitate enim se plenos simulant, et astutia quadam fraudulentia hominibus futura coniectant*. Divinatio ergo non dicitur si quis prænuntiet ea quae ex necessario eveniunt vel ut in pluribus, quae humana ratione prænosci possunt. Neque etiam si quis futura alia contingentia, Deo revelante, cognoscat: tunc enim non ipse *divinat*, idest quod divinum est facit, sed magis quod divinum est suscipit. Tunc autem solum dicitur divinare quando sibi indebito modo usurpat prænuntiationem futurorum eventuum. Hoc autem constat esse peccatum. Unde divinatio semper est peccatum.

[If then anyone claims to foreknow and foretell such like future things by any means whatsoever, except by God's revelation, he is clearly usurping what belongs to God alone. That is why he is called a 'diviner'; Isidore observes that *men are called diviners as though they are full of God; they pretend to be charged with divinity and they forecast the future for men by shrewd fraud*. Divination then, does not mean plotting the course of events which follows necessity or a statistical majority; these things the mind of man can foreknow. Nor does one divine the future if he learns about its contingent happenings through God's revelation; for he does not *divine* in the sense that he performs something divine, rather he receives it. Divination occurs when a man usurps to himself, and wrongly, the foretelling of the future. To claim what belongs to God alone is a sin, and in this sense foretelling the future is a sin.]<sup>25</sup>

This contrast is also articulated in clearly intertextual terms as the representation of the diviners in *Inferno* xx deliberately conflicts with the accounts offered by classical sources (most significantly, but not exclusively, Virgil's own *Aeneid*), heavily manipulating the style, tone, meaning and factual details of its literary antecedents.<sup>26</sup> While reinforcing the *Comedy's*

25 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae, q. 95, a. 1. The Latin text and English translation are taken from St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. by Thomas Gilby, 61 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), XL, p. 38.

26 But on this aspect of the canto see, for example, Marcello Aurigemma, 'Osservazioni sulla trasformazione dantesca di episodi classici nel canto degli indovini', in *Miscellanea di studi danteschi in memoria di Silvio Pasquazi*, 2 vols (Naples: Federico Ardia, 1993), I, pp. 3–9. It is important to note, however, that while Virgil is not the only classical source that gets transformed here, Dante's 'correction' to the *Aeneid* is the only one that is made explicit at ll. 97–99.

claim to superior authenticity and authority, this discrepancy also reveals the shift in the poem's conception and creative ambitions: to achieve a literary form that is eschatological and prophetic as well as poetic, in which the 'Enea' and 'Paolo' of *Inferno*, ii. 32 can be embodied, emulated and surpassed.<sup>27</sup>

In this sense, the prominence of the pilgrim's 'pianto' seems to be specifically designed to accentuate this tension, and to call the reader's attention to an element that recasts the protagonist of the journey, and implicitly also his testimony, in an explicitly prophetic light. The emphatic 'Certo io piangea' [surely I wept] (l. 25) in response to the spectacle of the dereliction of human nature caused by the pride of the seers, seems, indeed, to evoke the tears of the prophet Jeremiah when, with characteristic 'emotional extremity',<sup>28</sup> he is called upon to denounce the false prophets who are deceiving the people of Israel in words that perfectly encapsulate the composite (and more specifically fraudulent) nature of the diviners' sin:

et dixit Dominus ad me Falso prophetæ vaticinantur in nomine meo: non misi eos, et non præcepi eis, neque locutus sum ad eos. Visionem mendacem, et divinationem, et fraudulentiam, et seductionem cordis sui, prophetant vobis. (Jeremiah 14.14)

[And the Lord said to me: The prophets prophesy falsely in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, nor have I spoken to them: they prophesy unto you a lying vision, and divination and deceit, and the seduction of their own heart.]

The emotive outpouring resulting from this severe condemnation — 'deducant oculi mei lacrimam per noctem et diem et non taceant' [Let my

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27 I take 'prophetic' here as meaning more than just 'predicting future events'. More broadly, it may communicate a divine message with a profoundly moral and catechising function, which communicates doctrinal teachings and ethic-pedagogical moral objectives that should influence and convince the believers to change their ways. This is already convincingly highlighted in Hawkins, pp. 54–95. See also Lucia Battaglia Ricci, 'Scrittura sacra e "sacrato poema"', in *Dante e la Bibbia*, ed. by Giovanni Barblan (Florence: Olschki, 1988), pp. 295–321; Giovanni Petrocchi, 'San Paolo e Dante', in *Dante e la Bibbia*, pp. 235–48. This definition, I believe, reflects better than others the scriptural aspiration and the poetic ambition of the *Comedy* as both a literary and a scriptural experiment. For a broader discussion on this crucial issue see, more recently, Robert Wilson, *Prophecies and Prophecy in Dante's 'Commedia'* (Florence: Olschki, 2008), esp. pp. 157–222; Lucia Battaglia Ricci, "'Dice Isaia...". Dante e il profetismo biblico', in *La Bibbia di Dante*, pp. 49–75; and V. Stanley Benfoll, *The Biblical Dante* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), esp. pp. 79–106.

28 Walter Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 33.

eyes shed down tears night and day, and let them not cease] (Jeremiah 14.17) — is prepared by the flow of tears in the previous chapter:

in abscondito plorabit anima mea a facie superbiae plorans plorabit et  
deducet oculus meus lacrimam quia captus est grex Domini (Jeremiah 13.17)

[my soul shall weep in secret for your pride: weeping it shall weep, and my  
eyes shall run down the tears, because the flock of the Lord is carried away  
captive.]

This is pointedly followed, then, by an incitement to the people of Israel to lift up their eyes and see: 'levate oculos vestros et videte' (Jeremiah 13.20), and reinforced by chapter 23, entirely dedicated to the denunciation of those who 'speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord' ('visionem cordis sui loquuntur non de ore Domini', Jeremiah 23.16). The narrative prominence assigned to the pilgrim's tears in the specific theological context of this *bolgia* seems to suggest, therefore, a conscious attempt on Dante's part to evoke the figure of the 'weeping prophet'<sup>29</sup> and to use the power of his emotive rhetoric to uphold his claim about the prophetic nature of his narrative.

On the fifth terrace of Purgatory (*Purg.*, xix–xxi), crying and weeping are also essential elements of the representation of the penitents correcting their *cupiditas* and prodigality. In this extended denunciation of the devastating consequence caused by humanity's inability to resist the 'maladetta [...] antica lupa' [accursed ancient she-wolf], *Purgatorio* xx is central not only in simply structural terms. It presents the strongest condemnation of the vice 'che tutto il mondo occupa' [that fills the whole world] (l. 8), proclaimed emphatically in the canto's opening in Dante's own brief invective, and then reiterated in Hugh Capet's long arraignment. However, since the pilgrim's arrival on the terrace, we know that weeping is one of its defining qualities:

Com'io nel quinto giro fui dischiuso,  
Vidi gente per esso che piangea,  
Giacendo a terra tutta volta in giuso. (*Purg.*, xix. 70–72)

29 This definition has traditionally been attributed to Jeremiah by the rabbis. See Jack R. Lundbom, *Theology in Language, Rhetoric, and Beyond: Essays in Old and New Testament* (Cambridge: Clarke, 2014), pp. 99–131. On this and the importance of Jeremiah in Dante's *Purgatorio*, see Ronald L. Martinez, 'Lament and Lamentations in *Purgatorio* and the Case of Dante's Statius', *Dante Studies* 115 (1997), 45–88; and Rachel Jacoff, 'Dante, Geremia e la problematica profetica', in *Dante e la Bibbia*, pp. 113–23.

[When I was loosed onto the fifth circle, I saw people weeping there,  
lying on the earth, all facing downward.]

The sorrow of these penitent souls is, of course, radically different from that of the diviners. A number of prominent elements here seem designed to evoke, nonetheless, the equally tearful infernal procession we witness in *Inferno* xx. And this is especially the case if we focus on the way in which Dante frames his experience narratively at *Purgatorio*, xix. 70–72: here again the pilgrim is notably observing — ‘io attento a l’ombre’ [I walked intent on the shades] (l. 17) — a scene of weeping that in many ways parallels the narrative situation of the canto of the diviners. This orchestrated correspondence is confirmed by significant textual elements such as the ‘piangea’ (l. 71), a calque of the ‘piangea’ encountered in *Inferno*, xx. 25, and the hapax ‘drizzate’ at l. 78 (‘drizzate noi verso li alti saliri’ [direct us towards the high ascent]) which immediately reminds us of the poignant ‘drizza la testa, drizza e vedi’ of *Inferno*, xx. 31. Sight is, furthermore, the sense initially chosen to verify and relay the experience of the new terrace despite the fact that the prostrate position the souls would naturally hide their faces.

At the opening of *Purgatorio* xx, resuming the journey after the encounter with Pope Adrian V, the author’s voice erupts to curse cupidity, insisting specifically (in his brief invective) on the tears pouring out of these penitent souls:

[...] la gente che fonda a goccia a goccia  
per gli occhi il mal che tutto’l mondo occupa (*Purg.*, xx. 7–8)

[the people, melting out through their eyes, drop by drop, the evil that fills the whole world]

The landscape and atmosphere of the terrace are again characterised mainly in terms of the souls’ weeping: of their ‘pietosamente piangere e lagnarsi’ [piteously weeping and lamenting] (l. 18), and their ‘chiamar nel pianto’ [calling out weeping] (l. 20). Moreover, the pervading sound of the ‘pianto’ of the terrace suitably frames the central discourse, appearing in rhyming position at l. 20 (*pianto/tanto/santo*) when Hugh Capet attracts the pilgrim’s attention with his lamentation, and then at l. 144 (*canto/santo/pianto*) to indicate the conclusion of the episode and the souls’ return to their penitential routine.

*Purgatorio* xx centres on Hugh's vehement denunciation of the insatiable and ever-growing *cupiditas* of his descendants, hyperbolically described with clear biblical undertones as the 'mala pianta / che la terra cristiana tutta aduggia' [the evil plant that overshadows all the Christian lands] (*Purg.*, xx. 43).<sup>30</sup> His whole speech is heavily imbued with scriptural elements from his opening confession of being the root of a corrupting and degenerating lineage (which directly evokes Paul's well-known first letter to Timothy)<sup>31</sup> to his concluding mention of Achan, Sapphira and Heliodorus as examples of cupidity called out by the penitents 'com'el s'annotta' [when night falls] (*Purg.*, xx. 101).<sup>32</sup> In Hugh's outline of the French ruling dynasty's future, these powerful scriptural echoes are studiously arranged around the increasingly clustering rhythm of the anaphora constructed on the first person of *vedere* ('veggio' [I see]), repeated six times in ll. 70–93. This creates a compelling contraposition with Virgil's repeated use of 'vedi' and 'mira' in *Inferno* xx. The openly prophetic tenor of *Purgatorio* xx confirms the allegorical function of references to sight as the salvific power of revelation in the context of both cantos. The shift from the imperative 'vedi' [see] to the assertive 'veggio' [I see] of Hugh's pronouncements arguably signals, however, a progress from the pilgrim's passive and often apprehensive observation in *Inferno* to a more active and emphatic participation in the moral journey of *Purgatorio*.

Alongside the fact that Hugh's speech contains a clearly 'predictive' vision,<sup>33</sup> framed by characteristically Jeremianic tears and expressed in a precise semantics of sight, a number of other elements contribute to connect this purgatorial canto more distinctively with the prophetic rhetoric of the book of Jeremiah.<sup>34</sup> In contrast to the deceiving divinations

30 I could not find any previous discussion of the importance of the Book of Jeremiah in the context of this canto, except for one reference to Jeremiah 4.31 for ll. 19–21 in Lund-Mead and Iannucci, p. 257.

31 'Radix enim omnium malorum est cupiditas' [greed is the root of all evil] (i Timothy 6.10). For this verse, Lund-Mead and Iannucci refer instead to i Maccabees 1.11: 'et exit ex eis radix peccatrix [...]'. See Lund-Mead and Iannucci, p. 258. But in this context it is also interesting to contrast Hugh's expression 'mala pianta' with Jeremiah 23.5 where David is described as 'germen iustum'.

32 Respectively in Joshua 6.17–19, Acts 5.1–11 and ii Maccabees 3.1–40.

33 Wilson, p. 85.

34 These would include also the extensive use of repetitions and of rhetorical questions that also characterises Jeremianic rhetoric. As the *Comedy* intertwines universality and historicity, allegory and biography, poeticism and realism, in a similar way to Jeremiah, it would be worth investigating in more depth Dante's significant use of the Book of Jeremiah in his poem and in his other works.

of faithless impostors, the scriptural reliability and moral righteousness of Hugh's truthfully prophetic discourse (and of Dante's through his voice) are reinforced by his denunciation of his descendants' systematic 'rapina' [plundering] that plagues all the lands they cross 'con forza e con menzogna' [with force and fraud] (ll. 64–65). This condemnation of betrayed justice, repudiated blood ties and indignation at ll. 70–93 closely recalls Jeremiah's critique of corrupt rulers (Jeremiah 22.13–19 and 23.1–2 but also 5.27–28) displaying an equally forceful 'rhetoric of judgment'.<sup>35</sup> And, as repeatedly in Jeremiah, this accusatory speech also culminates in a fervent appeal to the Lord's rightful vengeance at ll. 94–96:

O Segnor mio, quando sarò io lieto  
a veder la vendetta che, nascosa,  
fa dolce l'ira tua nel tuo secreto? (*Purg.*, xx. 94–96)

[O my Lord, when will I be gladdened seeing the vengeance, now hidden, that makes your anger sweet in your secret counsel?]<sup>36</sup>

The alliterative emphasis on witnessing the Lord's 'vendetta' forcefully links these verses also to the 'Laetabitur justus cum viderit vindictam; manus suas lavabit in sanguine peccatoris' [he just shall rejoice when he shall see the revenge: he shall wash his hands in the blood of the sinner] (Psalms 57.11). While signalling the conclusion of Hugh's angry tirade and a change of tone and narrative direction, this emphatic question alludes back to Dante's own anger and fervent plea that conclude his brief invective at ll. 10–15 ('quando verrà per cui questa disceda?' [when will he come who will drive her away]),<sup>37</sup> anchoring both to a renowned *locus* in a Pauline

35 See, for example, Brueggemann, pp. 35–41 and pp. 75–81 (p. 77). For the distinctive features of Jeremiah's rhetoric, see also J. L. Berquist, 'Prophetic Legitimation in Jeremiah', *Vetus Testamentum* 39.2 (1989), 129–39; L. Boadt, 'The Poetry of Prophetic Persuasion', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59 (1997), 1–21.

36 See for instance 'Tu autem Domine Sabaoth qui iudicas iuste et probas renes et cor videam ultionem tuam ex eis [O Lord of Sabaoth, who judgest justly, and triest the reins and hearts, let me see thy revenge on them] (Jeremiah 11.20), or similarly 'et tu Domine exercituum probator iusti qui vides renes et cor videam quae ultionem tuam ex eis' [And thou, O Lord of hosts, prover of the just, who seest the reins and the heart: let me see, I beseech thee, thy vengeance on them] (Jeremiah 20.12); and the more dramatic Jeremiah 10.25. For the importance of the theme of vengeance in Jeremiah, see, in particular, M. Avioz, 'The Call for Revenge in Jeremiah's Complaints (Jer. XI–XX)', *Vetus Testamentum* 55.4 (2005), 429–38.

37 As some commentators have noted, this is strategically wedged at the beginning of the canto between his encounter with a pope and a king, ie. the 'due soli'.



epistle: 'date locum irae scriptum est enim mihi vindictam ego retribuam dicit Dominus' [avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord] (Romans 12.19). The same anguished appeal returns in Dante's sonnet of exile, *Se vedi li occhi miei di pianger vaghi*, in which we encounter a similar plea to the Lord to punish the iniquity of a 'gran tirranno' [great tyrant] whose poison 'ha già sparto e vuol che'l mondo allaghi' [has already poured forth in the wish that it may flood the world]. This is closely reminiscent of the pervasive proliferation of the 'mal che tutto 'l mondo occupa' (*Purg.*, xx. 8).<sup>38</sup> In the sonnet as well as in *Purgatorio* xx, a fitting punishment is demanded for the new Pilate ('nuovo Pilato si crudele', l. 91), avid usurper ('sanza decreto', l. 92) and destroyer of justice.

Justice is, of course, the central theme of *Paradiso* xvii–xx in which the *viator* encounters the just souls in the Heaven of Jupiter, an experience significantly inaugurated by the powerful visual re-enunciation of the imperative and admonishing opening of the Book of Wisdom: 'Diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram' [Love Justice you who judge the earth] (*Par.*, xviii. 91–93). This spectacular display, with its perceptual intensity and its scriptural solemnity, fittingly prepares the experience of *Paradiso* xx, a canto 'of intense and compact mysticism' where this scriptural frame of reference is consciously heightened.<sup>39</sup> The focus on the eagle's eye in itself and specifically on David, the archetypal just king, as its 'pupilla' [pupil], certainly occasions this canto's dense intertextuality with the Psalms, particularly Psalm 16.<sup>40</sup> The characteristic rhythm of the Psalms is also evoked by the patterned cadence of the eagle's description of the souls that form the rest of its eye, whose specific beatification is individually introduced with the regular anaphoric repetition of the same formula

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38 This uniquely political sonnet rehearses many of the motives of *Purgatorio* xx, again interestingly and forcefully linking the 'vista' and the 'pianto', and displaying a significant numbers of scriptural references. It also presents a rare rhyme in 'ugge' in the quatrain, highly reminiscent of the 'uggia' of *aduggia/Bruggia/giuggia* of ll. 44, 46, 48. For a detailed commentary of the sonnet see Dante Alighieri, *Rime*, ed. by Domenico De Robertis (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2005), pp. 246–48, and Dante Alighieri, *Opere. Rime, Vita Nova, De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. by Claudio Giunta, Guglielmo Gorni and Mirko Tavoni (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), pp. 540–51 where, however, *Purgatorio* xx is mentioned only very briefly.

39 See Serianni, p. 3.

40 See Psalms 16.7–8: 'mirifica misericordias tuas qui salvos facis sperantes in te a resistentibus dexteræ tuæ custodi me ut pupillam oculi sub umbra alarum tuarum proteges me'.

'ora conosce' [now he knows].<sup>41</sup> This further underlines the scriptural significance of sight and of references to the eyes as privileged metaphors for revelation, as explicitly used later on in the canto at ll. 118–26. But it is also indicative of the prophetic mode the text is trying to emulate, which notably characterises also the first part of the eagle's speech in canto xix.<sup>42</sup>

The long speech on justice and salvation pronounced by the eagle in *Paradiso* xix already frames references to the inscrutable nature of divine judgement in terms of seeing, in the double anaphora of 'Lí si vedrà' (ll. 115, 118, 121) and 'Vedrassi' (ll. 124, 127, 130).<sup>43</sup> Then, in canto xx, this insistence on sight and eyes continues as 'lo benedetto segno' [the blessed sign] (l. 86) asks the pilgrim to 'riguardar fisamente' [gaze fixedly upon] (l. 33) its eye, indicated with a periphrasis on the visual faculties of 'aguglie mortali' [mortal eagles] (l. 32) centred on the dittology 'vede e pate' [sees and endures] (l. 31).<sup>44</sup> David is surrounded by five other just souls who form the brow of the eagle's eye, each designated with reference to both his earthly and his heavenly circumstances except for the last one, Ripheus.<sup>45</sup> In his case, in the first *terzina*, the eagle completely neglects any reference to Ripheus's fleshly existence, instead boldly and rhetorically asking:

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41 This is repeated six times, once for each of the just souls mentioned, every time opening the first verse of the second *terzina* of the block of two dedicated to each soul.

42 The eagle's invective in canto xix is specifically connected to Jeremiah in a number of ways: in its generalisation of the condemnation of all evil nations (Jeremiah 25:13); in its accusation of those who try to hide their iniquity professing Christ's name (Jeremiah 7:11); and in its call for divine justice (Jeremiah 22).

43 Many commentators have remarked on the close connection of *Paradiso* xix and xx not only because of the continuity in both cantos of the eagle's discourse, but also because of a calculated chiasmic correspondence in the cantos' distribution of doctrinal matter: in *Paradiso* xix an abstract theological discussion is followed by a historical excursus, while in *Paradiso* xx the historical contextualisation of the souls mentioned is followed by the discussion of predestination. The symmetric use of anaphoras in the two cantos is part of the same pattern.

44 There is no need to reiterate here the importance of vision, more generally, in the ascending narrative of *Paradiso* that openly links the pilgrim's ability to see to his capacity to understand the mysteries of revelation and, as such, to become ready for the ultimate vision at the end of his journey.

45 The case of the Emperor Trajan is just as scandalous as that of the Trojan Ripheus. However, in my view, it is extremely significant that the text specifically highlights the exceptionality of the latter while framing the former in the same formula used for the other just rulers. We should not ignore this by assimilating the case of Trajan and Ripheus. The issue of the salvation of 'virtuous pagans' in general is, of course, an immensely complex issue. See, most recently, John Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers: The Problem of Paganism from Augustine to Leibniz* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 188–213.

'Chi crederebbe giù nel mondo errante  
che Rifèo Troiano in questo tondo  
fosse la quinta de le luci sante?' (*Par.*, xx. 67–69)

[Who would believe, down in the erring world, that Ripheus the Trojan  
would be the fifth of the holy lights in this round?]

Critics have fittingly called the presence of the pagan Ripheus here a scandal and an enigma, as the only functional source for his inclusion in the Heaven of Jupiter appears to be Virgil's *Aeneid* (ii. 426–28). His presence is admittedly so idiosyncratic that the pilgrim's (and the reader's) declared inability to understand is reasserted twice: first, in his direct and impetuous questioning 'Che cose son queste?' [What things are these?] (l. 82); and then when the eagle embarks on discussing in detail Ripheus's and Trajan's salvation:

'Io veggio che tu credi queste cose  
perch'io le dico, ma non vedi come;  
sí che, se son credute, sono ascose'. (*Par.*, xx. 88–90)

[I see that you believe these things because I say them, but do not know  
how, so that, though they are believed, they are hidden.]

This elucidation occupies a significant section of the canto (ll. 79–129). Whilst emphasising the allegorical association of sight with the acquisition of salvific revelation, it also introduces a further theological discourse on the relationship between prophetic vision and spiritual receptivity, between human understanding and faith, as we might expect at this stage in the pilgrim's journey.<sup>46</sup> This *terzina*, in fact, introduces a fundamental distinction between the eagle's assertive 'Io veggio' [I see] and the pilgrim's inability to see: 'tu... non vedi' [you do not see], marking the boundaries of human understanding that its speech will clarify. On the one hand, Ripheus's salvation is presented precisely in the biblical and, more specifically, prophetic terms that associate human 'vedere' [seeing] with

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<sup>46</sup> Barberi Squarotti, pp. 252–57. In this sense, it is also interesting to highlight the composite nature of the pilgrim's sensorial experience in the Heaven of Jupiter, where the sounds and silences are synchronised with the visual inputs, albeit with no possibility of being communicated in human terms. This reflects a recurring aspect of prophetic language where *videre* and *audire* are counterparts of the same spiritual and intellectual process of illumination.

faith in revelation: 'Dio li aperse / l'occhio a la nostra redenzion futura' [God opened his eyes to our future redemption] (*Par.*, xx. 122–23). This explicitly scriptural frame of reference is established at ll. 94–96, where Dante incorporates into the eagle's explanation half a verse, part vernacularised, from Matthew's gospel.<sup>47</sup>

'Regnum celorum violenza pate  
da caldo amore e da viva speranza,  
che vince la divina volontate.' (*Par.*, xx. 94–95)

[*Regnum celorum* suffers the violence of burning love and lively hope that overcome God's will.]

On the other hand, this demarcation offers an opportunity to clarify the absolute inaccessibility of the mysteries of divine justice and predestination, which are even beyond the grasp of the souls already saved and rejoicing in the beatific vision of God. The doctrinally dense *lectio*, imbued with technical terms, strident Latinisms and further scriptural elements,<sup>48</sup> concludes with a significant *monitum* to all 'mortali' [mortals] to embrace revelation and to accept with the necessary *humilitas* the inescapable limits of our understanding,<sup>49</sup> clarifying whilst also asserting the limits of the poet's own 'corta vista' [short sight] (l. 140).

On the basis of its assumed divine origin, Dante's text defiantly sanctions, in this way, its own superior authority and scriptural status. But whether or not we choose to accept this claim, it is undeniable that the revealed nature of the *Comedy* is here clamorously trusted to the *exemplum*<sup>50</sup> of a purely literary character whose complete eccentricity in *Paradiso* could not be missed, 'unum infidelem paganum Ripheum'.<sup>51</sup> As such, it is defined emphatically in terms of its relation to its poetic status and to Virgil's text.<sup>52</sup>

47 'regnum caelorum vim patitur et violenti rapiunt illud [the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away] (Matthew 11.12).

48 See, for instance, 'quiditate' (l. 92) and 'passuri' (l.105).

49 This motif is anticipated a number of times in the poem, most significantly in *Par.*, xix. 79–81 when the eagle mocks human aspirations to fathom divine justice with a 'veduta corta d'una spanna' [with sight as short as a handbreadth].

50 See Villa, 'I cieli di Marte e Giove', pp. 197–98.

51 Benvenuto, *Comentum*, V, p. 263.

52 This is, in fact, much more than just a 'touching tribute'. See Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 359. But see also the convincing case put forward by Scott (p. 190) for the determinant influence of Boethius in contributing to the choice of Ripheus in this particular instance.

Dramatically reversing the fate of this 'iustissimus unus' might certainly appear as yet another conspicuous correction of the *Aeneid*.<sup>53</sup> However, in a 'vertical' perspective, it is possible to trace a much more complex and directed 'dialettica dell'intertestualità' [intertextual dialectic]<sup>54</sup> that, at least in part, can contribute to illuminate further the presence of such a significantly Virgilian reference at this stage in the pilgrim's journey.<sup>55</sup>

*Inferno* xx presents, in fact, not only another one of these corrections in its retelling of the myth of the foundation of Mantua but also a rather articulate intertextual and metatextual discourse, particularly in its unusual opening which addresses the reader with a startling admission:

Di nova pena mi conven far versi  
e dar matera al ventesimo canto  
de la prima canzon, ch'è d'i sommersi. (*Inf.*, xx. 1–3)

[Of a strange new punishment I must make verses and take matter for the twentieth song in this first canticle, which is of those submerged.]

The technical language here, as well as throughout the canto and into the subsequent one, has encouraged critics to reflect on its statements mainly in terms of style.<sup>56</sup> But it is actually a powerful signal that Dante is developing in this canto a specific self-reflective discourse. This is clearly the case in relation to the poem's composition. In an absolutely unique instance, *Inferno* xx explicitly mentions the canto's number 'ventesimo' (l. 2), naturally projecting the readers' mind towards the other Twenties. At the same time, the word 'canto' in rhyming position (with its suggestive Virgilian resonance) also sets up a further, and compelling 'vertical' connection: 'canto' rhymes with 'quanto' and 'pianto' in *Inferno*, xx. 2, 4, 6, with 'santo' and 'pianto' in *Purgatorio*, xx. 140, 142, 146, and with 'santo' and the rare 'altrettanto' in *Paradiso*, xx. 38, 40, 42.

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53 For a detailed analysis of this dynamic, see especially Robert Hollander, *Il Virgilio Dantesco. Tragedia nella 'Commedia'* (Florence: Olschki, 1983).

54 Scott, p. 192.

55 As already noted by Benvenuto in his commentary: 'Verumtamen autor elegit potius istum nominatim quam alium, quia Virgilius fecerat singularem commendationem de justitia eius, ut jam patuit ex dictis'. See *Comentum*, V, p. 263.

56 Especially concerning the references to 'canto' and 'canzone' but also more significantly for the definition, discussed below, of Virgil's *Aeneid* as 'tragedia' at l. 113 in relation to the consciously 'comedic' style, characterising the whole canto, which Parodi defined 'quasi poemetto popolare'.

Even more interestingly, from our point of view, Dante underlines the canto's relationship with classical literature. Each of the ancient diviners mentioned in *Inferno* xx is connected to a crucially important literary antecedent for the *Comedy*: Amphiaraus from Statius's *Thebaid*, Tiresias from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Aruns from Lucan's *Pharsalia*, and Manto from Virgil's *Aeneid*. The close proximity of these *auctores*, with the immensely significant exception of Statius, naturally brings to mind the 'bella scola' of *Inferno* iv, implicitly reminding us of their spiritual error and consequent damnation. This is particularly apparent in the long digression on the origins of the city of Mantua occasioned by the mention of Manto, 'an intertextual node of particular bumpiness in the *Comedy*'s never smooth texture'.<sup>57</sup>

'Però t'assenno che, se tu mai odi  
originar la mia terra altrimenti,  
la verità nulla menzogna frodi'. (*Inf.*, xx. 97–99)

[Therefore I advise you, if you ever hear any other origin given for my city, that you let no lie defraud the truth.]

Of course, the lie referred to here is the one put forward in Virgil's *Aeneid*, which is constructed as the 'menzogna' in direct opposition to the 'verità' of the Dante's *Comedy*.<sup>58</sup>

This contraposition would seem to be confirmed by the designation of Virgil's poem as 'tragedia' (l. 113) as opposed to Dante's 'comedia', mentioned for the first time in *Inferno*, xvi. 128, where his vision is significantly described as 'quel ver c'ha faccia di menzogna' [that truth which has the face of falsehood] (l. 124). But there is nothing so simple in Dante's relationship with his 'maestro e [...] autore' [master and [...] author] (*Inf.*, i. 85), the 'dolcissimo patre' [most sweet father] (*Purg.*, xx. 97–99) Virgil, within or outside the text's narrative. In fact, although in the *Inferno* we can perhaps trace a pattern of progressive displacement,

<sup>57</sup> Barolini, 'Canto XX', p. 275.

<sup>58</sup> Or so we are told almost unanimously in all commentaries. In fact Manto's portrait in *Inferno* xx as 'vergine cruda' appears constructed not only to directly resemble Lucan's 'effera' and 'dira' Erichthon in the *Pharsalia* (vi. 508; 564), also called 'cruda' in *Inf.*, ix. 23, but also Statius's own description of Manto as a 'innuba' priestess (*Theb.* iv. 463 and vii. 758), against the Virginian suggestion that she was Ocnos's mother (*Aen.*, x. 198–200). See Padoan's entry on Manto in *ED*, III, pp. 810–11. This aspect is also indicated in Hollander, 'The Tragedy of Divination', pp. 188–95; and Gentili, p. 674.

the developing representation of Virgil and the continued reference to his *Aeneid* in Purgatory and Paradise would seem to suggest a rather different trajectory, one that develops an increasingly complex but self-conscious celebration of the inestimable poetic value of Virgil's work, despite his limitations.<sup>59</sup> If, indeed, Dante asserts the validity and superiority of his vision, and of course implicitly also of his poetry, consciously adopting a prophetic style and an openly scriptural framework, he does not deny the poetic *auctoritas* of Virgil as well as of the other classical poets celebrated in and through the poetry of the *Comedy*. On the contrary, the exemplary value of Virgil's poetry, despite the defeats and limitations of his characterization in Dante's poem, continues to inform his poetic discourse and to offer (with the other classics) a fundamental expressive and cultural model.

The *novitas* and superiority of Dante's own poetry are constantly measured, therefore, against the literary tradition that his poem tries at the same time to celebrate and to challenge, as famously in *Paradiso* xxv:

con altra voce omai, con altro vello  
ritornerò poeta, (*Par.*, xxv. 7–8)

[with other voice by then, with other fleece I shall return as poet]

Explicitly and emphatically claiming the title of 'poeta', in this sense, has a double function, particularly in the context of *Paradiso*: whilst allowing Dante to maintain the necessary humility demanded by prophetic discourse,<sup>60</sup> highlighting the humanity of his language and accepting its inherent limitations,<sup>61</sup> it also enables him to claim an evident superiority over all other poets precisely because of his poetry's exclusive scripturality. The poetic and the scriptural level are therefore inextricably intertwined,

<sup>59</sup> Statius calls the *Aeneid* 'divina fiamma / onde sono allumati più di mille' [divine flame that has kindled more than a thousand], 'mamma' [mother] and 'nutrice' [nurse] in *Purg.*, xxi. 95–98; and, in *Purg.*, xxii, we find also the only occurrence of the noun 'cantor' outside *Paradiso* to refer to a non-blessed soul, where it qualifies Virgil as the 'cantor de bucolici carmi', with an interesting correspondence to David's designation in *Paradiso* xx as 'il cantor de lo Spirito Santo' (l. 38).

<sup>60</sup> For the paradoxical coexistence, particularly in the *Paradiso*, of Dante's declared poetic ambition and desire to affirm both his *novitas* and superiority, and his awareness and strong affirmation of the necessity of humility in human discussions of divinity, see especially Robin Kirkpatrick, *Dante's 'Paradiso' and the Limitations of Modern Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 28–50.

<sup>61</sup> Valerio Lucchesi, 'Giustizia divina e linguaggio umano. Metafore e polisemie del contrappasso dantesco', *Studi Danteschi* 63 (1991), 53–126.

reciprocally validating, and equally functional in the creation of a uniquely sacred poem that offers a renewed belief in the power of poetry to inspire others on the path to salvation. In this sense, what emerges consistently in the Twenties is the way in which the clear scriptural framework is used to underpin and legitimise a poetic discourse with bold cultural and moral ambitions. In fact, although the opportunity to experience the other world is explicitly identified as a free gift of divine grace and entirely dependent on divine authority, the poetic language that express Dante's eschatological vision are resolutely and provocatively professed as his own.





# 21. God's Beloved: From Pitch, Through Script, to Writ<sup>1</sup>

Corinna Salvadori Lonergan

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The protagonists in the Twenty-Ones are all poets, 'Dei dilectos', 'God's beloved, raised to the heavens by their ardent virtue and made the children of God',<sup>2</sup> as Dante writes in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (II. iv. 10) loosely adapting the Sybil's speech to Aeneas (*Aen.*, vi. 124 ff). In the letter to Can Grande the author writes of poets being given an almost divine gift, 'quasi divinum quoddam munus',<sup>3</sup> just like our protagonists — Virgil, Dante, Statius and Peter Damian — who do not stand independently but are *inanellati*, intertwined in the three *canti*. Virgil introduces himself as a poet: 'Poeta fui' (*Inf.*, i. 73); Dante also styles himself a poet amongst poets, rather than a *rimatore*, he is 'sesto tra cotanto senno' (*Inf.*, iv. 102); Statius says that the name 'poeta' is the one that lasts and honours most, 'che più dura e più onora' (*Purg.*, xxi. 85). Peter Damian was not primarily a poet, though he has left some verse, but a writer with a substantial body of works to his credit; this included a life of Romoaldo degli Onesti, who is mentioned in *Paradiso* xxii, and which may have been known to Dante; also, he had the 'reputation as one of the major Latin stylists of the Middle Ages'<sup>4</sup> and, in

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- 1 Unacknowledged translations are my own. I have used emphasis to draw attention to key words in Dante's text.
  - 2 Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. and trans. by Steven Botterill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 59.
  - 3 Letter X in *The Letters of Dante*, trans. by Paget J. Toynbee, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).
  - 4 Peter S. Hawkins, 'Dante's Lesson of Silence: *Paradiso* 21' in *Lectura Dantis* 11 (1992), 42–51 (p. 44).

both Dantean and Virgilian terms, his 'ardent virtue' made him worthy of being raised in contemplation to the stars.

The ascent is from the murkiness of the clinging pitch with devils defeated by human astuteness, but who defeat Virgil and expose his limitation because they have scriptural knowledge, the divinely inspired writing that he does not know. It is this same Scripture that permeates the dialogic exchange with Statius, bonded to Virgil, but now a saved Christian poet so a better guide for Dante. It is to Dante that Peter Damian, writer and reformer like him, will issue the writ: report as you have been inspired. Four writers, united by the written word, but not all raised to the heavens.

### *Inferno xxi*

The fifth *bolgia* of the eighth circle, the episode of the swindlers in public offices, has an unusual and interesting beginning: 'Così di ponte in ponte, altro parlando / che la mia comedia cantar non cura, / venimmo' [and so we came from bridge to bridge, and talked of other matters that my comedy does not bother to record] (*Inf.*, xxi. 1–3), that needs a reflection on the previous canto (xx) where Virgil is in control and the main speaker. He rebukes Dante for questioning God's judgement — an intimation of the sixth heaven — and then points to three damned soothsayers of the ancient world known to us through those gifted transmitters of knowledge, poets: Amphiaraus known from the *Thebaid*, Tiresias from the *Metamorphoses*, Arruns from the *Pharsalia*; most importantly he gives us a sound (and beautiful) version of the foundation of Mantova, acceptable to human geographers, offering reason over magic.

'Però t'assenno che, se tu mai odi  
originar la mia terra altrimenti,  
la verità nulla menzogna frodi'.

E io: 'Maestro, i tuoi ragionamenti  
mi son sì certi e prendon sì mia fede,  
che li altri mi sarien carboni spenti'. (*Inf.*, xx. 97–102)<sup>5</sup>

[Therefore I have made sense to you, and if you ever hear a different version for the origin of my city, let not my truth be cheated by lies'. And I: 'Master, your reasons are so sure and command my trust that others would be like spent coals'.]

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5 Here and hereafter (unless otherwise stated) the emphasis is mine.

The explanation makes sense — *senno* — and Dante accepts it, placing his faith in reasoning as it demonstrates the truth. The greatest poet of antiquity — ‘lo maggiore nostro poeta’ (*Conv.*, IV. xxvi. 8) — has humbly shown that he is aware that his work can occasionally lack credibility; led astray as he himself admitted by ‘dei falsi e bugiardi’ [false and lying gods] (*Inf.*, i. 72) his ‘alta mia tragedia’ (*Inf.*, xx. 113) — a work the Florentine poet knows only too well (‘ben lo sai tu che la sai tutta quanta’, l. 114) — is not the work of a Christian poet. It is in the spirit of shared knowledge that the poets converse, of bonding through writing, noted already in the first circle of Hell where the six great poets had engaged in their own exclusive poetic talk: ‘parlando cose che ’l tacere è bello’ [speaking of matters best passed over] (*Inf.*, iv. 104). It will be noted again, for example, in *Purgatorio* xxii:

Elli givan dinanzi, e io soletto  
di retro, e ascoltava i lor sermoni,  
ch’a poetar mi davano intelletto. (*Purg.*, xxii. 127–29)

[They walked ahead and I, alone behind them, listened to their talk that was inspiring on the poet’s art.]

However, Dante in *Inferno* iv is an equal with a difference, as will be the poet of the *Thebaid* when he appears in *Purgatorio*.

The opening of *Inferno* xxi draws attention to the different nature of two genres — tragedy and comedy — and Dante immediately embraces a completely new type of comedy — black comedy — in this *bolgia* of the grafters, the corrupt public officials derisively termed *barattieri*. It is exemplified both in style — colloquial, aphoristic, coarse, plebeian in the extreme, with harshness of rhyme, quite different from the style of canto xx (where the last word ‘introcque’ introduces the difference)<sup>6</sup> — and in content. It is burlesque; in fact it is based on a double *burla*: trickery of the devils who are cheated by the damned official, Ciampòlo, whose intelligence and astuteness defeat them as now they are ‘in essilio de la superna patria’; they can no longer philosophize and reason for in them love is extinct (*Conv.*, III. xiii. 2). The second *burla* is at the expense of the

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<sup>6</sup> John Barnes makes this point in an acute examination of the language and prosody of *Inferno* xxi. John Barnes, ‘Inferno Canto XXI’, *Lectura Dantis Andreapolitana*, University of St Andrews, 6 May 2011, <http://lecturadantisandreapolitana.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/video/inferno-canto-xxi>

'mar di tutto 'l senno' (*Inf.*, viii. 7), the wise Virgil, cheated by the devils. So, twice he is wrong.

In canto xx Dante was strongly rebuked — *scelerato*, impious, compassionate rather than *pious*, for he had failed in due respect for the judgement of God. As the reader was told to 'prender frutto / di tua lezione' [benefit from your lesson] (*Inf.*, xx. 18–19), Dante, in the episode with the devils, shows that *he* has certainly learnt the lesson. In the black comedy of this *bolgia* the author's purpose is to damn through derision, through the grotesque, because neither devils nor *barattieri* are worth the *saeva indignatio* he had expended on the simonists. Now his aim is to excite vulgar laughter, and in fact the whole episode — and the word is Dante's — is ludicrous: 'O tu che leggi, udirai nuovo ludo' [Reader, you will hear a new entertainment] (*Inf.*, xxii. 118). One *reads*, but one also needs to *hear* the hard-hitting rhymes, the changing rhythms of the hendecasyllable, for in comedy timing is of the essence. As ever Dante proves a master, and he creates what Umberto Bosco defined as a *profana rappresentazione*, a play with little black devils scuttling fiercely around, just as they were popularly imagined.<sup>7</sup>

In the background is the bitterness of Dante's much suffered exile: he was accused of *baractaria*, a standard accusation when political opponents were sent into exile;<sup>8</sup> in the coarseness of the canto there is Dante's superiority, cathartically exorcising the experience. Even Santa Zita and the Sacro Volto are sacrilegiously exploited in the sarcasm. There is not a whiff of dignity about the devils who collect, dump, and flay with their hooks those who want to emerge from the pitch, whereas there is with some other ministers of the justice of God, most notably the Centaurs. A comparable scene might be in a tavern with guzzlers, rather than in a church with saints, as Dante will suggest in a clipped maxim: 'ne la chiesa / coi santi, e in taverna coi ghiottoni' (*Inf.*, xxii. 15). The *ludo* is packed with derision: the activity of the devils, their ensuring that the damned 'dance' in the pitch ('qui balli', l. 53), their not being important enough to be compared to chefs — they are low grade scullery hands:

7 Umberto Bosco, 'Il ludo dantesco dei barattieri', in *Essays in Honour of John Humphreys Whitfield*, ed. by H. C. Davis, D. G. Rees, J. M. Hatwell and G. W. Slowey (London: St George's, 1975), pp. 30–40. On the 'comedy' of *Inferno* xxi, the classical reading by Luigi Pirandello in *Lecture dantesche. Inferno*, ed. by Giovanni Getto (Florence: Sansoni, 1964), pp. 417–36, is still valuable.

8 A clear exposition of the charge against Dante is in Barnes, 'Inferno Canto XXI'.

Non altrimenti i cuoci a' lor vassalli  
 fanno attuffare in mezzo la caldaia  
 la *carne* con li uncin, perché non galli. (*Inf.*, xxi. 55–57)

[Chefs get their scullery hands to do the same, to push the meat with their hooks into the middle of the cauldron so it does not float upwards.]

And as for the *dannati*, here demeaningly *carne*, later in the *canto* they are dismissed as *lessi dolenti* — bully beef in pain — and in the next *canto* they are described as being well done to a turn: 'ch'eran già cotti dentro da la crosta' (*Inf.*, xxii. 150). Dante's scorn is strongly stated in the first simile in *canto* xxi. It anticipates the busyness of the devils, comparable to the hub of activity in the arsenal where the Venetians are busy repairing rotten timber — the *barattieri*, with greed clinging tenaciously, have damaged the ship of the state and it cannot sail, as there cannot be *buon governo* with rotten officials:

Quale ne l'arzanà de' Viniziani  
 bolle l'inverno la *tenace pece*  
 a rimpalmare i legni lor *non sani*,  
 ché navicar non ponno; (*Inf.*, xxi. 7–10)

[As in the Venetians' arsenal in winter time the tenacious pitch boils to repair their damaged ships that are not sail-worthy;].

Dante and Virgil are not spectators but participants in the ludic performance. The appearance of the first devil takes them by surprise:

Ahi quant' elli era ne l'aspetto fero!  
 e quanto mi pareo ne l'atto acerbo,  
 con l'ali aperte e sovra i piè leggero! (*Inf.*, xxi. 31–33)

[Oh, his looks were so savage! and nasty in his action, with splayed wings and feet skimming!]

This is the devil of medieval frescoes; he is carrying a *barattiere* as if it were a bag of coal, head down, clutching the sinew-strings and creating an image similar to that of the corruptors of the Church, the simonists. That same athletic devil scuttles away like a 'mastino sciolto' (44), a bull-dog going

off for another *barattiere*, to Lucca. He has done such good work there that the place is full of barrators, and he implies sarcastically that Bonturo is the worst of them. The devils — to the approaching Virgil — come with the same *furore* and *tempesta* as ‘*escono i cani a dosso al poverello*’ [dogs making for the beggar] (l. 68), an anticipation that our Virgil *farà la figura* of the *poverello* in all of this. Dante — and this is an understatement — disliked animals; birds just about escaped. With the *barattieri*, as with the usurers, all of them kindred souls unashamedly pursuing money, the imagery, the metaphors, the similes are animal-inspired and designed to evoke disgust. The names of the devils may indeed be ‘storpiature’ [distortions] of surnames of Lucchese officials,<sup>9</sup> but just as they stand they are onomatopoeically suggestive of beastly features — Cagnazzo, Draghignazzo, Ciriatto, Graffiacane — bizarre but hardly frightening. The Malebranche are a bunch of no-gooders.

The main players are Virgil, Dante and Malacoda (ll. 58–135). Mindful to hide his charge from the devils, Virgil tells Dante to hide, ‘*t’acquatta*’ [to squat] — not the most dignified pose, and later, when he is called away from hiding, he is described as coming almost stealthily, ‘*quatto quatto*’ — with Virgil adding over-confidently: ‘*non temer tu*’, [don’t be afraid], as I have everything under control from the previous time, *altra volta*. He has made the journey all the way to Giudecca, but it did not help him at the lock-out at the city of Dis and, but for the *messo dal ciel*, the journey might have been discontinued. Furthermore, since he first went to Giudecca, there was a major event (the Harrowing, which he told Dante about when they were in Limbo). The devils make for him with their hooks and Malacoda is called upon to negotiate. Dante’s reader knows at once that someone named Malacoda would have a sting in the tail (Gerione was rather a clue) but not so the confident Virgil who asserts that God is on his side, he is an official guide. Malacoda, good actor and deceiver, feigns to believe and orchestrates the deception of Virgil, announcing that he is not to be attacked — ‘*non sia feruto*’. Nor is the pilgrim to be harmed; though one bridge is broken, there is another bridge, just a little further on. The accurate reference to the Harrowing of Hell, a confirmation that the journey’s date was April 1300, wins Virgil’s confidence. What is presented as damage to one bridge is, however, false as all the bridges are down. Malacoda pursues his act

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9 See ‘*I nomi dei diavoli*’, in *Commedia*, by Dante Alighieri, ed. by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (Bologna: Zanichelli, 2001), p. 377.

and invites ten devils to accompany the poets, assuring them that they will come to no harm: 'gite con lor, che non saranno rei' [go with them and they will not harm you] (l. 117).

In all of this, Dante's performance is opposite to Virgil's. He does not believe that the devils will keep their word: 'ch'io temetti ch'ei tenesser patto' (l. 93), and mentions fear in two consecutive lines (ll. 93–94). The memory from the Caprona seige is so strong that he gets as close as possible to Virgil while keeping an eye on the devils as 'la sembianza lor (ch') era non buona' [their looks were not reassuring] (l. 99), (one of Dante's great understatements). His fear is so obvious that the devils exploit it humorously: 'Vuò che 'l tocchi [...] in sul groppone?' [...] 'Sì, fa che gliel'accocchi!' ['will I hook into his rump? Yeh, go for him'] (ll. 100–02). Dante does not want to be escorted by devils and asks Virgil to dispense with them if he (the official guide) knows the way, Dante is prepared to go it alone; can Virgil not see how they 'digrignan li denti' [gnash their teeth] (l. 131) as they will be so graphically painted later by Andrea di Bonaiuto, Angelico and others? Virgil is trusting: nonsense, he says, it is a *mise-en-scène* for the *dannati*, not for them:

'Omè, maestro, che è quel ch'ì veggio?',  
diss' io, 'deh, *sanza scorta andianci soli*,  
se tu sa' ir; ch'ì per me non la cheggio.  
Se tu se' sì accorto come suoli,  
non vedi tu ch'e' *digrignan li denti*  
e con le ciglia *ne minaccian duoli*?'.  
Ed elli a me: 'Non vo' che tu paventi;  
lasciali digrignar pur a lor senno,  
ch'e' fanno ciò per li *lessi dolenti*'. (*Inf.*, xxi. 127–35)

[‘Oh, master, what do I see?’, said I, ‘do let us go without any escort, if you know the way, as I don’t need one. If you are your usual sharp self, can’t you see how they grind their teeth and how their brows are threatening harm?’ And he replied: ‘I don’t want you to fear, let them grind away as much as they want, they are doing it for the boiling beef in pain’.]

Virgil is wrong: Dante is right. The canto ends with its vulgar trumpet call, another way of mocking the hollow military discipline of these fallen angels, but it is the end of the episode that crystallizes Virgil's defeat and explains it (*Inf.*, xxiii. 139–44).



Virgil will be mocked for trusting Malacoda, and the revelation comes with a last laugh at his expense. When Catalano gives the travellers correct information, the downcast Virgil comments that '**Mal contava la bisogna**' (l. 140) (linking linguistically to **Malacoda**), to which the friar retorts, boasting of his theological studies in Bologna, that he had learnt that the devil is a liar and the father of all lies. Catalano is quoting John 8.44: 'mendax est et pater eius' [for he is a liar, and the father thereof]. Dante will later write: 'Taccia Lucano [...] Taccia [...] Ovidio (*Inf.*, xxv. 94, 97), and here he silences the greater poet, his guide, but one who cannot lead him into Heaven as to him Scripture is unknown. The devil is just like his gods, 'falsi e bugiardì' (*Inf.*, i. 72), the words echoed by Catalano.

### *Purgatorio xxi*<sup>10</sup>

It is indeed Scripture, holy writ, that permeates *Purgatorio xxi*, the third canto set in the fifth *girone*, that of the *avari e prodighi*, the covetous and squanderers, an area reached by Virgil and Dante in canto xix, when Virgil interprets Dante's dawn dream and exposes the misdirection of sensual desire. A quick reading of *Purgatorio xx* suggests themes that were background to *Inferno xxi*: the covetous are fixed face downwards, like the *barattieri* in the pitch and the simonists in the rock, and they look into the bowels of the earth from whence comes the gold and silver of which they made their God. The condemnation of greed comes strong, and its metaphor is predictable, directly linked to *Inferno i* and to the hope of the Veltro: 'Maladetta sie tu, antica lupa, [...] quando verrà per cui questa disceda?' [Be cursed, ancient she-wolf [...] when will the saviour come to cast her away?] (*Purg.*, xx. 10–15). These saved souls cry out examples of scorn for riches and praise of liberality, which Dante hears because it is day. Yet at night he cannot hear, we are told that they recall punished avarice, and that the volume of their cry indicates the intensity of their feeling. Amongst the *exempla* there is one Caius Fabricius, a Roman consul, of whom we read that he lived frugally and died poor; he refused the gifts of the Samnites and of

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10 My thinking on this canto has been enriched by three enlightening studies: Mario Martelli, 'Lettura stilistica del canto XXI del *Purgatorio*', in *Ragione e talento. Studi su Dante e Petrarca*, ed. by Amelia Ciadamidaro (Cosenza: Falco, 2009), pp. 37–62; Edoardo Fumagalli, *Il giusto Enea e il pio Rifeo. Pagine dantesche* (Florence: Olschki, 2012), especially pp. 89–108; Spencer Pearce, 'Purgatorio Canto XXI', *Lectura Dantis Andreatopolitana*, University of St Andrews, 15 November 2013, <http://lecturadantisandreatopolitana.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/video/purgatorio-canto-xxi>

Pyrrhus when he was sent to negotiate with them. Virgil describes him as 'rich in poverty' (*Aen.*, vi. 843) — and for Dante he is an exemplary figure of *pro bono* service to the state, the opposite of Hell's public officials (*Purg.*, xx. 25–30).

Another theme in canto xx relevant for us is the indirect reminder of Dante's exile, the result of treachery; this is in the condemnation of Charles de Valois, who championed the Black Guelphs and achieved victory not through military prowess but through treachery, using 'la lancia / con la qual giostrò Giuda' [the lance of Judas] (ll. 73–74), and the treachery of Judas reappears in canto xxi. Still in xx, the poets feel the mountain quake, 'tremar lo monte' (l. 128), and Dante is frozen with fear — 'mi prese un gelo / qual prender suol colui ch'a morte vada' [as one going to his death] (ll. 128–29) — terrified as he was with the devils. Virgil, as in Hell, asserts confidence in his power of leadership: 'Non dubbiar, mentr' io ti guido' [doubt not, while I lead you] (l. 135). That confidence is fading, as is Virgil himself who will gradually yield his role to Statius, the Christian poet, and invite him to explain to Dante the complex generation of the body: 'e io lui chiamo e prego / che sia or sanator delle tue piage' [and I call on him and pray him to be henceforth the healer of your wounds] (*Purg.*, xxv. 29–30). The quake is followed by the hymn of praise, *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, sung by the angels at the birth of Christ as reported by Luke 2.14.

Scripture opens *Purgatorio* xxi with Christ in his ministry, and it remains the canto's sub-text. The first reference is to John 4.5–15: the *femminetta*, the Samaritan woman whose very anonymity indicates ordinariness. She is the social outsider who will become an insider and she asks for grace: 'dimandò la grazia' (*Purg.*, xxi. 3). Grace is gratuitously given, but one must dispose one's heart to receive it. Dante's 'thirst', his yearning for grace, his natural curiosity to know more, his wanting that knowledge that was stated in *Conv.*, I. i to be our 'ultima perfezione', our 'ultima felicitade', is a metaphorical thirst that is tormenting him, 'mi travagliava' (l. 4), and he implies unequivocally that it cannot be quenched by what is of this world, it needs 'the water that I (Christ) will give him [...] a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting', as one reads in John's account. Thrice in canto xxi does Dante use the metaphor: 'sete natural', we cannot know fully without supernatural grace (ll. 1–4); 'si fece la mia sete men digiuna' [my thirst diminished], Statius's explanation is of a supernatural phenomenon (ll. 37–39); 'tanto del ber quant'è grande la sete', Dante's joy now that he has knowledge is proportionate to his yearning for it (ll. 73–75). The metaphor

of thirst and its quenching appears at the opening of canto xxii with the beatitude that links thirst and justice: 'beati qui *esuriunt et sitiunt* iustitiam quoniam ipsi saturabuntur' [Blessed are they that *hunger* and *thirst* after justice: for they shall have their fill] (Matthew 5.6). Only when justice destroys greed will society live in peace; this is Dante's fundamental theme in the *Commedia* and the *Monarchia*. The text emphasises that there is now only one water: there are meteorological impossibilities in Purgatory as our water no longer has a place there because there is a new water, a salvific *aqua viva* that sustains:

'Per che non pioggia, non grando, non neve,  
non rugiada, non brina più su cade  
che la scaletta di tre gradi breve;' (*Purg.*, xxi. 46–48)

[For this reason neither rain, nor hail, nor snow, nor dew, nor hoarfrost falls above the short stairway with its three steps;]

A shade approaches the poets from behind, just as the black devil had with the *barattiere* on his shoulder, and Dante himself reminds us of Luke, the 'scriba Cristi' (*Mon.*, II. viii., 14), and he uses Luke's very words: *Et ecce*, 'ed ecco, sí come ne scrive Luca' (Luke 24.13–15). So had the risen Christ ('già surto fuor della sepulcral buca', *Purg.*, xxi. 9) appeared to the disciples. Later in that chapter Luke writes that Christ appeared to the eleven apostles wishing them peace with the greeting: 'Pax vobis: ego sum, nolite timere' (Luke 24.36), or in Dante's words: 'O frati miei, Dio vi dea pace' [Brothers, may God give you peace] (*Purg.*, xxi. 13). Note that these references are to the risen Christ, as the birth — when peace first was wished to men of goodwill — could have been that of a prophet, but only His death and resurrection made Christ the Redeemer. These *canti* are punctuated by commonly known passages from the Evangelists; the chant was the birth, the quake was the death, the apparition was the Resurrection, but also, mid canto, the Crucifixion is presented as Judas selling the blood of Christ, a line evocative of both simonists and *barattieri*: 'vendicò le fora / ond'uscì 'l sangue per Giuda *venduto*', [he avenged the wounds from which poured forth that blood that Judas sold] (Matthew 26.14–15). The canto ends in a manner that recalls the embracing of Anchises and Aeneas, but scripturally it is from the Apocalypse as the newly arrived soul, the poet Statius, wants to prostrate himself at Virgil's feet, but is stopped:

Già s'inchinava ad abbracciar li piedi  
 al mio dottor, ma el li disse: 'Frate,  
 non far, ché tu se' ombra e ombra vedi'. (*Purg.*, xxi. 130–32)

[He was already bowing wanting to embrace my teacher's feet, but the latter said to him: 'Brother, don't do that, for you are a shade and it is another shade you see'.]

Et dixit mihi: Scribe: Beati qui ad coenam nuptiarum Agni vocati sunt; et dixit mihi: Haec verba Dei vera sunt. Et cecidi ante pedes ejus, ut adorarem eum. Et dicit mihi: Vide ne feceris: conservus tuus sum, et fratrum tuorum habentium testimonium Jesu. Deum adora. Testimonium enim Jesu est spiritus prophetiae. (Revelation 19.9–10)

[And he said to me: Write: Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith to me: These words of God are true. And I fell down before his feet, to adore him. And he saith to me: See thou do it not. I am thy fellow servant and of thy brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Adore God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.]

Relevant in the source is not just the angelic injunction not to prostrate oneself, inappropriate in the brotherhood of love, but there is also the one to *write*: one must write and thus through writing bear testimony to Christ. Another Scriptural reference that comes readily to mind is 'Noli me tangere', the words spoken by the resurrected Christ to Mary Magdalen; they are here applicable to the non-embrace between the two classical poets — one saved, and one not — but there is more, for, in John 20.17, Christ's command is to go to the brethren and say to them ('et dic eis'): 'I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God'. Repeatedly Dante's attention is on the injunction to write, to tell, and to do so with the purpose of bearing witness. Already in *Conv.*, IV, xxii. 16 Dante had written that the three Marys looking for the saviour at his tomb were to go and tell the disciples and Peter, that is those looking for Christ and specifically 'coloro che sono sviati, sì come Piero che l'avea negato' [those who have gone astray from the right path and have denied Him as Peter did] (Matthew 28.2–3). To write, to speak, to bear witness but also with a redemptive message 'in pro del mondo che mal vive' [for the good of the world that is living in sin] (*Purg.*, xxxii. 103).

There has been an earthquake and the newly arrived soul explains the reason: it indicates that a soul feels ready to ascend to Heaven after the

purgatorial sentence, hence shouts of joy that celebrate this release. It is appropriately evocative of that earthquake that ushered Christ as victor, 'un possente, / con segno di vittoria coronato' [crowned with the sign of victory] (*Inf.*, iv. 53–54), into Limbo to release the souls of the just; this was first mentioned by Virgil, recalled also by Malacoda (*Inf.*, xxi), and now it is Virgil who makes clear that he was excluded from that release (*Purg.*, xxi. 16–18). Virgil's *cenno* in response to the stranger's greeting, one likes to think, is a smile, but he becomes very serious as he distinguishes between the three of them: the stranger who will have peace according to the judgement of one who cannot err; he himself forever relegated to the 'eterno essilio' (l. 18) (one of those left behind, and exile is a very strong word); and his companion Dante who will be saved and amongst the blessed: 'ben vedrai che coi buon convien ch'è regni' [you will see that he will be in the kingdom of the blessed] (l. 24). The stranger introduces himself: he is Statius, the poet, author of the *Thebaid* and the unfinished *Achilleid* ('la seconda soma', l. 93).

What the text suggests is that Virgil's role vis-à-vis Dante and Statius is similar: he is the poetic master to both. Statius in life, 'famoso assai ma non con fede ancora' [famous but without the true faith] (l. 87), was inspired by the 'divina fiamma' [sacred flame] (l. 95) of Virgil's poetry, a flame that set many on fire. But Statius goes further and uses an image, a common topos that appears often in the *Commedia*, that of motherhood, one that always carries strong emotion with connotations of provision of vital nourishment:

'de l'Eneïda dico, la qual mamma  
fummi, e fummi nutrice, poetando:  
sanz' essa non fermai peso di dramma'. (*Purg.*, xxi. 97–99)

[I mean the *Aeneid*, both mother and wet-nurse to me as a poet: without it what I wrote would have had much less substance.]

It is worth noting that Dante uses that same rhyme (*mamma / dramma / fiamma*) in *Purgatorio* xxx, when he turns like the frightened child 'quando ha paura' (l. 45) to Virgil for help and finds him gone. Virgil's role has been fulfilled. This intimate image ushers in a change in the linguistic register, which becomes very direct and colloquial. Statius indulges in hyperbolic, affectionate, but absurd wishful thinking which is a source of humour: 'if only I had been a contemporary of Virgil's!' The ensuing scene is delightful,

an unspoken exchange where only a 'lampeggiar di riso' (l. 114) conveys happiness and surprise, followed by a completely absorbing and tenderly dramatic scene of agnition.

Dante phrases the debt of Statius to Virgil in almost the same words he had used when he first met Virgil in the *selva oscura*:

'Questi che guida in alto li occhi miei,  
è quel Virgilio dal qual tu *togliesti*  
forte a cantar de li uomini e de' dèi'. (*Purg.*, xxi. 124–26)

[This soul who is leading me to see higher things is that very Virgil on whom you drew greatly for your singing of men and of gods.]

And

'Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore,  
tu se' solo colui da cu' io *tolsi*  
lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto onore'. (*Inf.*, i. 85–87)

[You are my master and my author, you are the only one from whom I have taken the fine style for which I am honoured.]

To both Statius and Dante, Virgil has been not only a poetic *maestro*, but more importantly an instrument of salvation. In this canto Virgil tells Statius, before their identity is revealed, that Dante was not capable of doing the journey alone; he needed help because he could not see clearly. Remember Beatrice's appeal to Virgil, that he should convince Dante to undertake the journey with his 'parola ornata', as only poets have this enabling gift (*Inf.*, ii. 67–69):

'l'anima sua, ch'è tua e mia serocchia,  
venendo sù, *non potea venir sola*,  
però ch'al nostro modo non adocchia.  
Ond' io fui tratto fuor de l'ampia gola  
d'inferno per mostrarli, e mosterrolli  
oltre, quanto 'l potrà menar mia scola'. (*Purg.*, xxi. 28–33)

[his soul, a sister to ours, could not make the ascent alone because it does not see as we do. I was summoned from the wide throat of hell to show him the way, and that I shall do insofar as my knowledge enables.]

In *Purgatorio* xxii Statius reveals that he owes it to Virgil that he became a poet and a Christian: 'Per te poeta fui, per te cristiano' (l. 73) — an emphatic assertion of a link between poetry and the true faith. *Aeneid* (iii. 56–57) made him review his behaviour and abandon prodigality, the counterpart of avarice (as shown also in the fourth circle of Hell, *avari e prodighi*, in canto vii). Still led by Virgil's writing — that effective *parola ornata* — this time in the fourth eclogue, he became a Christian. Truly, Virgil could be called a 'famoso saggio' (*Inf.*, i. 89) though one with a major limitation: he could give light for others to see, but fail to see himself. Also, Statius lived in a society where there was knowledge of Christ, hence he could see the salvific import in Virgil's text; he ushers in his autobiography with God, the 'sommo rege' (83), and vengeance for the Crucifixion, whereas Virgil lived in a completely pagan milieu.

But Dante, at the beginning of the journey, had balked at the task, and Virgil the *magnanimo* had to rebuke him with pusillanimity: 'l'anima tua è da viltate offesa' (*Inf.*, ii. 45), and again: 'perché tanta viltà nel cuore allette?' [Why has so much cowardice gripped you?] (*Inf.*, ii. 122). When better informed, Dante overcomes the fear and agrees to undertake the journey that will result in a poem greater than the ones of his fellow poets. Statius, however, did not overcome his *accidia*, his insufficiency of zeal, and he failed to proclaim the Christian message, to bear witness: 'per paura chiuso cristian fu'mi' [out of fear I was a crypto-Christian] (*Purg.*, xxii. 90). Statius and Dante are poets, both indebted to Virgil as poets and as Christians, but only one — Dante — will proclaim, indeed he will *shout*, his God-given message as Cacciaguida bids him: 'Tutta tua vision fa manifesta; [...] Questo tuo grido farà come vento' [make your vision known [...] this loud shout of yours will be like a wind] (*Par.*, xvii. 128, 133). Our three poets are bonded, *inanellati*, but Dante is the most privileged; and now I will explore a further link, with Peter Damian.

### *Paradiso xxi*<sup>11</sup>

*Paradiso* xxi and xxii are in the seventh Heaven, that of Saturn, the heaven in which the contemplatives are revealed to Dante. Three canti were dedicated to the sixth Heaven, that of Jupiter, the only time when all the blessed — the

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11 My thinking on this canto has been shaped by Fumagalli's chapter 'Dante e Pier Damiani', pp. 147–57.

*milizia del ciel* (*Par.*, xviii. 124) — in the shape of an eagle, speak chorally with one voice. Some looking back is required in order to understand better the seventh Heaven, and to carry forward the crucial lesson that Dante has learnt: how *mysterious*, to us humans, is divine judgement. Aquinas in *Paradiso*, xiii. 130–42 had spoken very directly, aphoristically, on this, and the eagle's discourse has a sharpness that is less than paradisaical and less than enlightening. It is motivated specifically by Dante's concern with those who die without baptism and without faith — 'non battezzato e senza fede' (*Par.*, xix. 76) — through no fault of their own, in lands where no one has read or written about Christ (*Par.*, xix. 70–99). The conclusion is a paraphrase of Scripture (Romans 11.33) which Dante had already expressed in Pauline words in *Conv.*, IV. xxi. 6 ('sono incomprendibili li tuoi giudicii e investigabili le tue vie') that God's judgements and ways are beyond our understanding and pursuit, and the eagle reiterates it:

Roteando cantava, e dicea: 'Quali  
son le mie note a te, che non le 'ntendi,  
tal è il giudicio eterno a voi mortali'. (*Par.*, xix. 97–99)

[Wheeling, it sang and said: 'as my music is beyond your understanding,  
such is eternal judgement to your mortal minds'.]

Dante must believe without understanding, but a perplexing implication is suggested.

Beatrice, of course, is present but in fact, from their ascent into the sixth Heaven (xviii. 55), there is no mention of her; she takes no part in the exchange on the salvation of the unbaptised. The hypothetical case of the eagle, however, is made unto the image of a great *innominato*, Virgil, never mentioned but present as *poeta*. Indeed, it is in the *Aeneid* that one reads of Ripheus, the Trojan hero who was slain during the sack of Troy and is singled out as 'iustissimus unus / qui fuit in Teucris et servantissimus aequi' [the one man amongst the Trojans most just and most observant of probity] (*Aen.*, ii. 426–27). God enabled him to be redeemed and he promoted goodness amongst the perverse, the *sviati*. But God's grace did not extend to Virgil who describes his abode in a manner that is acceptable when he first states it, but becomes perplexing later in the poem: 'Io era tra color che son sospesi' (*Inf.*, ii. 52). Can his being amongst the 'suspended' mean that a final judgement awaits? The eagle's injunction was not to judge as even the blessed do not know God's judgement, and Dante was rebuked for



setting himself up as judge; nonetheless, he has judged, and as his writing evolves, he comes to question his own earlier decision. Virgil, at this critical moment, is very much an absent presence in *Paradiso*.

The impossibility of understanding is carried on from the sixth to the seventh Heaven, that of Saturn: though Dante accepts that the eagle has given him 'soave medicina' (xx. 141), doubt is still with him, and appears at the very 'entry' into the seventh Heaven. The pilgrim is perplexed: contrary to previous practice, Beatrice, who is now mentioned, is not smiling as Dante would be unable to sustain her smile; the intense 'fulgore' [effulgence] is too much for his 'mortal podere' (*Par.*, xxi. 11), although he is 'trasumanato' (*Par.*, i. 70). A kaleidoscopic radiant effect of light begins, the very text sparkles (*Par.*, xxi. 16–30); the Heaven mirrors divine light, and the poet must make his eyes mirrors as some new spectacle — *nuovo ludo?* — will begin. He sees a golden ladder that reflects the sun: 'di color d'oro in che raggio traluce / vid'io uno scaleo eretto in suso' (*Par.*, xxi. 28–29). Appropriately it is golden, as Saturn evokes a golden age of justice and no greed: 'ogni malizia morta' [all evil lay dead] (l. 27). The souls on this ladder who descend toward the pilgrim are like a 'cascade' of light and yet he gives us a simile of humble jackdaws that Peter Hawkins suggests may be 'as if to reinforce the emphasis on humble simplicity celebrated throughout these cantos'.<sup>12</sup>

The image of the ladder comes primarily from Jacob's dream in Genesis 28.12–13, where it is not golden; there are angels upon it, not souls, and they are ascending and descending, whereas Dante's only descend. Yet it is very relevant that Jacob is shown the Kingdom of God and given knowledge of the holy: the connotation is one of revelation for a purpose. Jacob's ladder was used as a metaphor for the monastic life: while based on the active life, through contemplation it reaches upward to God. It seems to have been used by medieval preachers often *ad corrigendos mores*,<sup>13</sup> for doctrinal purposes; the angels descending were used to instruct the uneducated, as suggested at the end of the canto. The source for the ladder's *color d'oro* could be Peter Damian himself; in *Dominus vobiscum*, in epistle I. 28 he makes use of the image of the ladder of contemplation: 'Tu via aurea, quae homines *reducis* ad patriam'.<sup>14</sup> Dante says something similar of his journey; when speaking

12 Hawkins, 'Dante's Lesson of Silence', pp. 42–43.

13 Fumagalli, p. 151, drawing on Cesarius of Arles.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 154. Fumagalli tends to the opinion that Dante was acquainted with some of Damian's writings. This passage is quoted also by Hawkins, 'Dante's Lesson of Silence', p. 43.

to Brunetto (*Inf.*, xv. 49–54) he points to Virgil as the one who ‘*reducenti a ca’ per questo calle’* — he is taking me back home, *ad patriam*, and his entire journey is an *itinerarium mentis in Deum*, the journey of the contemplative.

One sparkling soul comes closest to Dante who knows it is love — ‘*alta carità’* (l. 70) — that has motivated the soul’s descent to him. He waits to speak until Beatrice has bid him to do so, and then he asks why it is he, rather than any other soul, who has come nearest to Dante, and also why there is no ‘*dolce sinfonia’* [sweet symphony] (l. 59) in this heaven. This is quickly answered in that Dante’s ‘*udir mortal’* [mortal hearing] (l. 61) would not be able to sustain it, as was the case earlier with his sense of sight. There is great joy in the ordinariness of the saint’s statement as to why he has come down:

Giù per li gradi de la scala santa  
discesi tanto *sol per farti festa*  
col dire e con la luce che mi ammanta; (*Par.*, xxi. 64–66)

[I have come down the steps of this holy stair just to celebrate that you have come, both with my words and with the light that mantles me.]

God has bid the saint to go to Dante but this causes the pilgrim to continue with a variation of the doubt unsolved by the eagle: why amongst all the contemplatives has this soul been *predestined* to celebrate Dante’s arrival — and Dante is the first to use the word: ‘*perché predestinata fosti sola / a questo officio tra le tue consorte’* [why have you been, amongst the souls, the only one predestined for this task] (ll. 77–78). Dante, from the idea of salvation, *who* is saved, is moving to predestination, trying to understand what he has been told he cannot presume to penetrate, God’s counsel; *why* is it Peter Damian? The soul for some twenty lines, with evocative and dazzling language — ‘*allegrezza ond’io fiammeggio [...] la chiarezza de la fiamma pareggio’* [the joy in which I flame [...] I equal the clearness of the flame] (ll. 88–95) — closes with a statement similar to the eagle’s: neither we nor you can answer the question, all is hidden in the abyss of God’s eternal law, in his unfathomable will. Moreover, Dante is directed to report this to those on earth when he returns from his journey:

‘E al mondo mortal, quando tu riedi,  
questo *rapporta* [...]’

Sì mi *prescrisser* le parole sue,  
 ch'io lasciai la quistione e mi ritrassi  
 a dimandarla umilmente chi fue. (*Par.*, xxi. 97–98, 103–05)

[‘And when you return to the mortal world, carry this back [...]’ These words so prescribed a limit that I abandoned my question and drew back to ask humbly who he was.]

The saint’s words are clear, prescriptive, and Dante drops the whole matter: ‘lasciai la quistione e mi ritrassi’ [I dropped the matter and left it at that] (l. 104). The question — why Peter Damian? — remains and implies why Dante? In the contemplative our poet is presenting an alter-ego, as indeed in part were Virgil and Statius. In Damian’s third speech to Dante (ll. 113–35), it is clear that Dante was not alone in being caught in sin for ‘la diritta via era smarrita’ [I could not see the right path] (*Inf.*, i. 3); the saint had been ‘Pietro peccator’ (taking the text at its face value) as indeed was the great Peter, a sinner, as Dante reminds us more than once.<sup>15</sup> Damian’s ascetic life in the service of God is presented precisely in terms of that of Peter (and of Paul), who ‘magri e scalzi’ [thin and bare-foot] (i. 128) — unlike the over-fed and over-dressed modern prelates — had sought no gold, but bore witness to Christ; the passage is evocative of John, Luke, Matthew and indeed Paul. Damian’s was, like theirs, an active life, engaged in reform of monasticism and of society, which enabled him to ascend in contemplation in order to descend to share the vision with others, with a view to bringing them nearer to God — for that was the role of Peter and of Paul. The reasons differ but the life of the exiled Dante is one of hardship, ‘povero e vetusto’ (*Par.*, vi. 139), he has abandoned ‘ogni cosa diletta / più caramente’ (*Par.*, xvii. 55–56) what was dearest to him and, out of this deprivation, the *Commedia*, with its message for mankind, will be written. Peter Damian was an important spiritual writer who wrote angrily, ‘con cruda violenza’,<sup>16</sup> on topics close to Dante, topics that appear in the *Commedia*, in the prose works: the integrity of the Church, the absolute poverty espoused by the first followers of Christ, but now abandoned, belief in imperial power, denunciation of *cupiditas*, the root of all evil, as it corrupts both social and ecclesiastical structures. Like Dante, he was motivated by wanting to hound back to Hell the ‘maledetta

<sup>15</sup> In *Mon.*, III. ix Dante recreates Peter giving him a depth of personality beyond Scripture.

<sup>16</sup> Arsenio Frugoni, ‘Pier Damiano, santo’, in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani, 1996), IV, pp. 490–91.

lupa', the cursed wolf of greed that is destroying a society where 'del no per li denar vi si fa ita' (*Inf.*, xxi. 42), where money can change nay to yea.

Peter Damian wrote — and the written word matters. In canto xxiv Dante, in his magnificently bold assertion of faith to St Peter, will state that alongside physical and metaphysical proofs of God, he has truth — *verità* — as prophets and evangelists recorded it in the Old and the New Testaments (ll. 130–38). He believes in what they wrote, inflamed as they were by the Holy Spirit that hallowed them: 'per voi che scriveste / poi che l'ardente Spirto vi fé almi' (ll. 137–38). He too is inspired by the Spirit, he writes a consecrated poem — a 'sacrato poema' (*Par.*, xxiii. 62), and in xxv he will call it: a 'poema sacro / al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra' [a sacred poem to which both heaven and earth have set their hand] (ll. 1–2).

To conclude, there are four writers, each with a different role, but each connected through Dante and his interaction with them. Each one brings him further on his journey: Virgil, 'nostra maggior musa' [our greatest muse] (*Par.*, xv. 26), in whose pagan beliefs lies his limitation; Statius, lesser poet, gifted with faith but a crypto-Christian; Damian, less accessible to the 'futura gente' (*Par.*, xxxiii. 72) in his Latin but clear in his message to Dante, who will continue his edifying preaching, completely accessible in the vernacular. All are writers, all God's beloved, and the differences lie not in 'altezza d'ingegno' [genius] (*Inf.*, x. 59), but rather in predestination. Peter Damian asserts but cannot clarify that he is predestined, Dante is predestined, all is predestined, all is unfathomable; but there is an obvious purpose, and it lies in their writing as through their writing, in which they were gifted, they have influenced. His writ to Dante is to report back to those on earth: 'E al mondo mortal, quando tu riedi, / questo rapporta'. Dante's journey, an ascent to the world beyond ours, has its purpose in his descent back to our world, so sadly synthesized as 'l'aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci' [The threshing-floor, whereon fierce deeds are done] (*Par.*, xxii. 151),<sup>17</sup> a world in the grip of greed. Damian is not the first to issue the command to Dante, and it appears more than once in the *Commedia*. Dante had already heard it in a form that was most reassuring to the poet to be exiled because, as well as his mission, Beatrice promised citizenship: a citizenship that could not be stripped from him, a citizenship of the eternal Rome, his perennial imperial dream. This promise comes in a context of

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17 Dante, *The Divine Comedy 3: Paradise*, trans. by Dorothy L. Sayers and Barbara Reynolds (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 253. The translation of canti xxii to xxxiii, the introduction and notes are by Barbara Reynolds.

justice restored. Moreover, her command to write is issued in words that echo Scripture, the first chapter of the Apocalypse, when one John also heard a voice that said: 'Scribe in libro' [Write it in the book] (Revelation I.11, see also 19):

'Qui sarai tu poco tempo silvano;  
e sarai meco senza fine cive  
di quella Roma onde Cristo è romano.  
Però, in pro del mondo che mal vive,  
al carro tieni or li occhi, e quel che vedi,  
ritornato di là, *fa che tu scrive*'. (*Purg.*, xxxii. 100–05)

[You will be but a short while back on earth, and you will be for ever with me a citizen of that Rome where Christ himself is Roman. Therefore, for the good of the world that is living in sin, when you return there, ensure that you write.]

# 22. Truth, Autobiography and the Poetry of Salvation

*Giuseppe Ledda*

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## Vertical Diptychs

Many of the 'vertical readers' who have come before me have examined the reasons that make the experiment of a complete vertical reading of the *Commedia* compelling, while also remarking on the care with which this critical exercise must be approached. Without adding to the valid reflections that have already been offered on these methodological issues, I will concentrate on the three twenty-second cantos, which are of extraordinary interest. Reading them vertically will allow us to identify particular trajectories of meaning that are developed throughout the three canticles.

The first element common to all three is the close relationship that each twenty-second canto has with the preceding canto, the twenty-first. In fact, the critical tradition assigns to cantos xxi and xxii the classification of closely connected canto pairs. *Inferno* xxi and xxii are both dedicated to the *bolgia* of the barrators, the fifth in the eighth circle. In the first canticle, this is an exceptional fact, because up to this point only one canto, or merely one part of a canto, has been dedicated to one individual region. The extended attention to a single region is counterbalanced by the complexity of the episode dedicated to this *bolgia* and by the movement Dante and Virgil have been forced into by the trickery of the Malebranche demons. The latter, at the instruction of their leader Malacoda, guides them along the embankment between the fifth and sixth *bolgia* looking for a bridge

over the sixth *bolgia* that hasn't collapsed — in reality a bridge that does not exist. But it is thanks to this deception that the travellers can observe the condition of the damned, who emerge from the boiling pitch seeking a moment's relief, and then immediately sink back down so as not to be caught by the demons. Furthermore, they are able to witness the capture of one of the damned, and talk to him, and find out about his other fellow sufferers.<sup>1</sup>

In *Purgatorio* xxi–xxii the movement is from the fifth to the sixth terrace. The ceremony of the encounter with the angel, which includes the recitation of the Beatitude and the erasure of the *P* from Dante's forehead, however, is skipped over, evoked as having already taken place at the beginning of canto xxii. All of the attention is concentrated on the encounter between Virgil and Statius, the narrative object that makes cantos xxi–xxii a unit, defined by critics as 'the Statius cantos'.<sup>2</sup> Statius has finished serving his sentence in the terrace of the avaricious and prodigal. He introduces himself as a poet influenced by Virgil; then as indebted to Virgil also for his moral conversion from the vice of prodigality to virtue, and finally from paganism to the Christian faith. These are cantos of great importance for their reflections on poetry, on the relationship between classical and Christian culture, and between Virgil and Dante.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 Interesting readings of the two cantos are offered by Michelangelo Picone, 'Baratteria e stile comico in Dante (*Inferno* xxi–xxii)', in *Studi americani su Dante*, ed. by Gian Carlo Alessio and Robert Hollander (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1989), pp. 63–86; Claude Perrus, 'Le jeu des diables (*Inferno*, xxi–xxii)', *Chroniques Italiennes* 17 (1989), 11–34; and Lino Pertile, 'Canti XXI–XXII–XXIII. Un esperimento eroicomico', in *Esperimenti danteschi. Inferno 2008*, ed. by Simone Invernizzi (Genoa: Marietti, 2009), pp. 157–72. See also Vittorio Panicara, 'Canto XXII', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Inferno*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2000), pp. 305–19; and Claudio Vela, 'Canto xxi. Il pellegrino fra diavoli e barattieri', and Giuseppe Crimi, 'Canto XXII. Demonî e barattieri nella pece', both in *Lectura Dantis Romana. Cento canti per cento anni. I. Inferno. 2. Canti XVIII–XXXIV*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno, 2013), pp. 682–707 and 708–39.
  - 2 For excellent examples of conjunct readings of these two cantos see Andrea Battistini, 'L'acqua della samaritana e il fuoco del poeta (*Purg.* xxi–xxii)', *Critica letteraria*, 20.74 (1992), 3–25; Marco Ariani, 'Canti xxi–xxii. La dolce sapienza di Stazio', in *Esperimenti danteschi. Purgatorio 2009*, ed. by Benedetta Quadrio (Genoa: Marietti, 2010), pp. 197–224.
  - 3 See Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the 'Comedy'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 258–70; Luca Carlo Rossi, 'Canto XXI', and Michelangelo Picone, 'Canto XXII', both in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Purgatorio*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2001), pp. 315–31 and 333–51; Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 327–29; Andrea Battistini, 'Canto xxi. La vocazione poetica di Stazio', and Arturo De Vivo, 'Canto XXII. "Per te poeta fui, per te cristiano"', both in *Lectura Dantis Romana. Cento canti per cento anni. II. Purgatorio. 2. Canti XVIII–XXXIII*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno, 2015), pp. 621–51, and 652–86.

In *Paradiso*, the unity of the xxi–xxii pair is apparent as well: they are the two cantos dedicated to the seventh sphere, Saturn, and the encounter with a pair of contemplative spirits who represent the sanctity of monasticism: Peter Damian (xxi) and Benedict (xxii).<sup>4</sup> This part completes a fundamental structure of *Paradiso*: the double hagiographic diptych found in the cantos dedicated to the fourth and the seventh spheres, in perfect symmetry. In the sphere of the sun there is in fact the diptych of Francis (xi) and Dominic (xii), both founders of the mendicant orders.

Reading these three pairs of cantos vertically, with particular attention to the Twenty-Twos, I was surprised, indeed, by the number of commonalities. Often these are thematic elements that are spread throughout the entire poem, but in these three cantos the repetitions are evident, numerous and significant. For instance, one first element is provided by the presence of the otherworldly ministers of the various realms, devils and angels. This is only a seemingly obvious fact, because the presence of Malebranche devils is exceptional, insofar as in Dante's Hell there are very few devils. Another pervasive theme in the poem is that of flight and vertical movement, of descent and ascent, a theme which has original and interesting developments in these cantos. Furthermore, all three of the Twenty-Twos are cantos of movement. In the *Inferno* canto, the movement takes place within the *bolgia* of the barrators; in *Purgatorio*, from the fifth to the sixth terrace; in *Paradiso*, after their encounter with Benedict, Dante and Beatrice ascend from Saturn to the Fixed Stars. I cannot approach all these topics here. Instead, in what follows, I shall focus on a series of correspondences and oppositions which I consider inter-related and of particular relevance to truth, autobiography and the poetry of salvation.

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4 For an exemplary conjunct reading of these two cantos see Giuseppe Mazzotta, 'Contemplazione e Poesia', in *Esperimenti danteschi. Paradiso 2010*, ed. by Tommaso Montorfano (Genoa: Marietti, 2010), pp. 201–12. See also Peter S. Hawkins, *Dante's Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 228–43 and 332–33; Georges Güntert, 'Canto XXI', and Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Canto XXII', both in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Paradiso*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2002), pp. 325–37 and 339–62; Elena Landoni, 'San Benedetto e il modello di lettura della *Commedia*: Par. xxii', *L'Alighieri*, 47 (2006), 91–111; Giuseppe Ledda, 'San Pier Damiano nel cielo di Saturno', *L'Alighieri*, 32 (2008), 49–72; Mira Mocan, *L'arca della mente. Riccardo di San Vittore nella 'Commedia' di Dante* (Florence: Olschki, 2012), pp. 191–231; Andrea Battistini, 'Canto XXI. L'incontro con Pier Damiano', and Carlo Vecce, 'Canto XXII. San Benedetto e il "mondo sotto li piedi"', both in *Lectura Dantis Romana. Cento canti per cento anni. III. Paradiso. 2. Canti XVIII–XXXIII*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno, 2015), pp. 616–41 and 642–70.



## Infernal Darkness and the Light of Paradise

The opposition between infernal darkness and the light of Paradise is a common motif.<sup>5</sup> In cantos xxi–xxii of the *Inferno*, the darkness of the shadows is emphasized by the blackness of the pitch: thus the *bolgia* seems from the very beginning ‘mirabilmente oscura’ [wondrously dark] (*Inf.*, xxi. 6). In cantos xxi–xxii of *Paradiso*, the theme of the divine light reflected in the blessed recurs many times.<sup>6</sup>

In *Purgatorio* xxi–xxii there is no trace of the usual purgatorial discussions of the theme of light, related to the position of the sun or the brightness of the angel. Here, there are only metaphorical uses related to the knowledge of truth and faith. Virgil, having registered Statius’s conversion from vice to virtue, asks him to explain his conversion from paganism to the Christian faith, without which virtue is insufficient for attaining eternal salvation. Virgil asks Statius which ‘lume’ [light] took him from the shadows to illuminate him with: ‘qual sole o quai candele / ti stenebraron [...]?’ [what sun or what candles dispelled / your darkness?] (*Purg.*, xxii. 61–63). The answer is that it was Virgil himself who illuminated Statius, whereas he himself remained in the dark:

Ed elli a lui: ‘Tu prima m’inviaſti  
verso Parnaso a ber ne le sue grotte,  
e prima appresso Dio m’alluminasti.  
Faceſti come quei che va di notte,  
che porta il lume dietro, e sé non giova,  
ma dopo sé fa le persone dotte,  
quando diceſti: “Secol ſi rinnova,  
torna giuſtizia e primo tempo umano,  
e progenie ſcende da ciel nova”’. (*Purg.*, xxii. 64–72)

[And he to him: ‘You first sent me to Parnassus to drink from its springs, and you first lit the way for me toward God. You did as one who walks at night, who carries the light behind him and does not help himself, but instructs the persons coming after, when you said: “The age begins anew; justice returns and the first human time, and a new offspring comes down from Heaven”’.]

5 See Simon A. Gilson, *Medieval Optics and Theories of Light in the Works of Dante* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000).

6 See also Marco Ariani, *Lux inaccessibilis. Metafore e teologia della luce nel ‘Paradiso’ di Dante* (Rome: Aracne, 2010), pp. 261–75; and Battistini, ‘Canto XXI. L’incontro con Pier Damiano’, pp. 624–25.

The reference is to Virgil's fourth eclogue, which announces the birth of a *puer*, the renewal of the era, and the return of the golden age and justice. Virgil appears in the guise of the prophet unaware of Christianity, who presages Christ yet attributes a limited and terrestrial meaning to his own words, without understanding their true significance.<sup>7</sup> The image to represent this condition is that of the torch-bearer who in the night has the light in his hand, but rather than holding it forward to light his own way, holds it behind, continuing to walk in the shadows while those who come behind him are able to make use of the light that he carries.<sup>8</sup> Virgil was not able to be illuminated by his own words. For this reason he is relegated to Limbo, defined as a 'luogo [...] non tristo di martiri, / ma di tenebre solo' [a place [...] not saddened by torments but only by darkness] (*Purg.*, vii. 28–29). Yet despite Virgil's personal failure, the redemptive power of his poetry is exalted, which 'stenebra' or dispels the darkness for Statius, enlightening him to the truth and the faith.

### 'La vera credenza': The Theme of Truth

Another crucial theme in these cantos is truth. In *Purgatorio* xxii, in the tercet at the exact centre of the canto, after having praised the role of Virgil's poetry in his conversion, Statius adds, however, that, 'la vera credenza' [the true belief] was spread throughout the world by the apostles:

'Già era il mondo tutto quanto pregno  
de la vera credenza, seminata  
per li messaggi de l'eterno regno;  
e la parola tua sopra toccata  
si consonava a' nuovi predicanti'. (*Purg.*, xxii. 76–80)

[Already the whole world was pregnant with the true belief, sown by the messengers of the eternal kingdom, and your word, touched on above, agreed with the new preachers.]

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7 See Picone, 'Canto XXII', pp. 340–42. On Dante's treatment of Virgil see also Robert Hollander, *Il Virgilio dantesco: tragedia nella 'Commedia'* (Florence: Olschki, 1983). For a discussion of the philological problems connected to Dante's representation of Statius, see Luca Carlo Rossi, 'Prospezioni filologiche per lo Stazio di Dante', in *Dante e la "bella scola" della poesia*, ed. by Amilcare A. Iannucci (Ravenna: Longo, 1993), pp. 205–24.

8 For some hypothetical sources of the image see De Vivo, p. 667.

Thanks to the 'vera credenza' and the preaching of the apostles and disciples the conquest of the 'eterno regno' [eternal kingdom] is possible. Only due to its 'consonance' with this truth is Virgil's word able to take on redemptive value.

Spreading the truth is emphasized even more in Benedict's self-presentation in *Paradiso* xxii.<sup>9</sup> As in many other instances, the biographical section begins with a geographical marker. For Francis and Dominic, it is their places of birth, while for Peter Damian and Benedict it is the monasteries where they spent their lives in contemplation. In Benedict's case, it is the Abbey of Monte Cassino, previously a site of pagan worship:

'Quel monte a cui Cassino è ne la costa  
fu frequentato già in su la cima  
da la gente ingannata e mal disposta;  
e quel son io che sù vi portai prima  
lo nome di colui che 'n terra addusse  
la verità che tanto ci soblima;  
e tanta grazia sopra me relusse,  
ch'io ritrassi le ville circostanti  
da l'empio cólto che 'l mondo sedusse'. (*Par.*, xxii. 37–45)

[The mountain that bears Cassino on its side was once frequented, at the summit, by folk deceived and ill disposed, and I am he who first carried there the name of him who brought to earth the truth that so exalts us; and so much grace shone down upon me that I drew the surrounding towns away from the wicked cult that had seduced the world.]

This description exhibits specific correspondences with the hagiographic story of Benedict's life as related by Gregory the Great in book two of the *Dialogues*, where he recalls an ancient temple to Apollo, a place still visited for pagan worship, and the work of evangelism and conversion carried out by the saint.<sup>10</sup>

The second hagiographic diptych concludes by linking back to the eulogy of St Francis in *Paradiso* xi. In fact, Benedict's work of converting pagans is presented like that of Francis, who to the infidels 'predicò Cristo' [He preached Christ] (*Par.*, xi. 102). Just as Dante's Francis is also an evangelist and a preacher, so too Benedict is not only an ascetic and monk, but also a holy preacher who promotes conversion. In the case of Benedict there is a

<sup>9</sup> See also Landoni, 'San Benedetto e il modello di lettura della *Commedia*', pp. 105–07.

<sup>10</sup> See Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, ii. 8, 10.

strong emphasis on truth: Francis's 'predicò Cristo' becomes now Benedict 'carried' [portai] (*Par.*, xi. 40) the name of Christ, indicated periphrastically as 'colui che 'n terra addusse / la verità che tanto ci soblima' [the name of him who brought to earth the truth that so exalts us] (ll. 41–42).

The emphasis on the truth brought by Christ and spread by the apostles and the 'novi predicanti' [new preachers], then brought by Benedict in his mission of conversion is opposed by the emphasis on fraud and deceit that characterises the cantos in *Inferno*. Thus, in pseudo-scriptural language, the barrator Frate Gomita is defined as the 'vasel d'ogne froda' [vessel of every fraud] (*Inf.*, xxii. 82),<sup>11</sup> while later, in canto xxiii, albeit in reference to the *bolgia* of the barrators, there is mention of the evangelical saying that the devil is 'bugiardo e padre di menzogna' [a liar and the father of lies] (*Inf.*, xxiii. 144).<sup>12</sup> Deceit unites the damned and the demons in the *bolgia* of the barrators, just as both are joined by defeat and damnation, and under the illusion of the simulacra of false salvation.

Barratry is a falsification of the truth in public office through the perverse and deceitful use of language.<sup>13</sup> Its strongest definition appears at the beginning of the episode: 'del no, per li danar, vi si fa ita' [for money there they turn 'no' into 'yes'] (*Inf.*, xxi. 42). Recalling the importance given to the affirmative particle for the classification of languages in *De vulgari eloquentia*,<sup>14</sup> we can understand just how radical is the contortion of

11 'Vasel', 'vaso' is a scriptural epithet for St Paul, defined as 'Vas electionis' (Act 9, 15). Dante repeatedly uses this expression for St Paul: 'lo vas d'elezione' (*Inf.*, ii. 28), 'il gran vasello / de lo spirito santo' (*Par.*, xxi. 127–28). Paul is also a fundamental model for Dante's self representation: see Giuseppe Ledda, 'Modelli biblici nella *Commedia*. Dante e san Paolo', in *La Bibbia di Dante. Esperienza mistica, profezia e teologia biblica in Dante*, ed. by Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna: Centro Dantesco dei Frati Minori Conventuali, 2011), pp. 179–216. So it is not surprising that he uses the same word, 'vaso', also for himself (*Par.*, i. 14). In *Inferno* xxii, the image of the 'vasel' is to be understood within the perspective of the sacred parody, but it is also one of the many aspects of the opposition between Dante and the barrators. Of course the parodic use of this formula is also a *topos* of the comic style, as noted by Saverio Bellomo, 'Sul canto xxii dell'*Inferno*', *Filologia e critica* 22 (1997), 20–36 (p. 26). It is to be noted also that the expression 'vas malitiae' is attributed by Patristic authors to the devil (see Crimi, p. 727).

12 For the reference in the Gospels see John 8: 44.

13 See also Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine 'Comedy': Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 80–85 and 293–95.

14 See *DVE* i. viii. 3–6; i. ix. 2; i. x. 1. See also *Inf.*, xviii. 61; xxxiii. 80. On the political function attributed to language by Dante in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, see Mirko Tavoni, *Introduzione to 'De vulgari eloquentia'*, in *Opere. Rime, Vita Nova, De vulgari eloquentia*, by Dante Alighieri. ed. by Claudio Giunta, Guglielmo Gorni and Mirko Tavoni (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), pp. 1067–116 (pp. 1068–69).

language these sinners commit. The fraudulent use of language twists truth and destroys political community.

We can note a syntactical and structural similarity between the verse that defines barratry and the one with which Saint Benedict concludes his condemnation of corruption in the Church. He cites the three great initiators: Peter, founder of the Church; himself, father of western monasticism; and Francis, founder of the mendicant orders. The holy beginnings, characterized by poverty, prayer, asceticism and humility, are overturned in the corrupt actions of their current successors:

'Pier cominciò sanz'oro e sanz'argento,  
e io con orazione e con digiuno,  
e Francesco umilmente il suo convento;  
e se guardi 'l principio di ciascuno,  
poscia riguardi là dov'è trascorso,  
tu vederai del bianco fatto bruno'. (*Par.*, xxii. 88–93)

[Peter began without gold and without silver, I with prayer and fasting, and Francis his convent in humility, and if you look at each one's beginning and then see where it has run awry, and will see white has turned black.]

The present corruption of the Church is the fraudulent contortion of the original truth: 'del bianco fatto bruno' [white has turned black] and 'del no [...] si fa *ita'* [the 'no' into 'yes'].

## Hunger for Gold: Greed, Virtue and Contemplation

The motive for the fraud that contorts the truth, then, is money. This is the case for the barrators: 'del no, per li danar, vi si fa *ita'* [for money there they turn 'no' into 'yes'] (*Inf.*, xxi. 42), as well as Frate Gomita 'danar si tolse' [he took their money] (*Inf.*, xxii. 85). But the same goes for the corrupt monks. According to Benedict's condemnation, the monks, moved by foolish greed, took the earnings of the monasteries for themselves, forgetting that the riches obtained by the Church must only be used for the poor (*Par.*, xxii. 79–85). Thus the reference to the original poverty of the Church is especially strong: 'Pier cominciò sanz'oro e senza argento' [Peter began without gold and without silver] (*Par.*, xxii. 88). The phrase 'sanz'oro e senza argento'

[without gold and without silver] recalls the opposite behaviour of the simoniacs: 'le cose di Dio, [...] per oro e per argento avolterate' [you who the things of God, [...] adulterate for gold and for silver] (*Inf.*, xix. 2–4); and 'Fatto v'avete dio d'oro e d'argento' [You have made gold and silver your god] (*Inf.*, xix. 112).<sup>15</sup> Thus Benedict returns to the polemic against greed among the religious orders who corrupt the original truths and forsake their mission out of a desire for wealth. But in the fraudulent contortion of the truth, civil barratry is as serious as ecclesiastic simony and equally motivated by the greed for money.

There is no need to recall the centrality of the reflection on the vicious or virtuous relationship with wealth in cantos xxi–xxii of *Purgatorio*. These cantos in fact constitute an appendix to the terrace of the avaricious. Canto xx ends with its examples of avarice punished, and contains multiple occurrences of the term *oro*. Among these examples is that of Polymnestor and Polydorus, which later is also mentioned by Statius, who admits that he was inspired by Virgil's verse to convert from the vice of prodigality to virtue:

'E se non fosse ch'io drizzai mia cura  
 quand' io intesi là dove tu chiami,  
 crucciato quasi a l'umana natura:  
 "Perché non reggi tu, o sacra fame  
 de l'oro, l'appetito de' mortali?"  
 voltando sentirei le giostre grame.  
 Allor m'accorsi che troppo aprir l'ali  
 potean le mani a spendere, e pente'mi  
 così di quel come de li altri mali'. (*Purg.*, xxii. 37–45)

[And had it not been that I straightened out my desires, when I understood the place where you cry out, almost angry at human nature: 'Why do you, O holy hunger for gold, not govern the appetite of mortals?' I would be turning about, feeling the grim jousts. Then I perceived that one's hands can open their wings too much in spending, and I repented of that as of my other vices.]

In Virgil's text, the exclamation 'Quid non mortalia pectora cogis, / auri sacra fames' [Dire lust of gold! how mighty thy control / To bend to crime man's

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<sup>15</sup> See Filippo Zanini, "'Simulacra gentium argentum et aurum". Parodia sacra e polemica anticlericale nell'*Inferno*', *L'Alighieri* 39 (2012), 133–47.

impotence of soul! Trans. Charles Symmons] (*Aen.*, iii. 56–57,) addresses Polymnestor, who out of greed kills his brother-in-law Polydorus to take possession of his wealth.<sup>16</sup> Dante transforms the Virgilian passage: the cursed hunger for gold censured by Virgil becomes a *holy hunger* for gold, a just and balanced hunger, neither excessive (avarice) nor too circumscribed (prodigality).<sup>17</sup>

But the term 'oro' [gold] also refers to the relationship between Christian and classical culture by alluding to the myth of the golden age. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, Statius's conversion from paganism to Christianity takes place through his reading of Virgil's fourth eclogue, which announces the birth of a *puer*, a new age, and a return to justice (see *Purg.*, xxii. 67–72). The significance that Virgil attributed to these verses was bound within the horizon of paganism and only a Christian reading, able to notice its consonance with the evangelical 'good news', could be illuminated by these words. In fact, the verses of Virgil's eclogue that immediately follow — which are not cited by Statius but activated in the reader's memory — say that the divine birth will bring back to earth the 'gens [...] aurea': 'ac toto surget gens aurea mundo' [and a golden race spring up throughout the world] (*Egl.*, iv. 8–9).<sup>18</sup>

The term *oro* is explicitly used in the reference to the golden age which closes *Purgatorio* xxii. Dante, Virgil, and Statius reach the sixth terrace where the gluttons are punished. First, they are presented with examples of virtue that are contrary to gluttony, that is alimentary temperance. One such example is indeed the golden age, though here reread not as an age of abundance, but of poverty, in which virtue made the poorest and most humble of foods taste good:

'Lo secol primo, quant'oro fu bello,  
fé savorose con fame le ghiande,  
e nettare con sete ogne ruscello'. (*Purg.*, xxii. 148–50)

[The first age was as lovely as gold: it made acorns tasty with hunger, and with thirst turned every stream to nectar.]

16 For the broader context of the Virgilian passage, see *Aen.*, iii. 13–68.

17 For this interpretation see for instance Ronald L. Martinez, 'La "sacra fame dell'oro" fra Virgilio e Stazio', *Lecture classensi* 18 (1989), 177–93; and Michelangelo Picone, 'Canto XXII', pp. 335–40. For a discussion of the various interpretations, see Massimiliano Chiamenti, *Dante Alighieri traduttore* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995), pp. 131–37.

18 Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid, Books 1–6*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

Another revision of this myth can be found in the cantos of the sphere of Saturn, who was in fact the mythical king of the golden age.<sup>19</sup> Dante indicates it as the sphere that bears the name ‘del caro suo duce / sotto cui giacque ogne malizia morta’ [of that dear ruler under whom every malice lay dead] (*Par.*, xxi. 25–27): the realm of Saturn is remembered as an epoch of innocence and purity.

Then, Dante sees a ladder that shines as if made of gold: ‘di color d’oro in che raggio traluce / vid’io uno scaleo’ [I saw a ladder, the colour of gold struck by the sun] (ll. 28–30). This golden ladder is the same one that Jacob saw, which the Christian scribes interpret as a symbol of the ascetic and contemplative life.<sup>20</sup> More specifically, Peter Damian also introduces the adjective *aureus* in the *Dominus vobiscum*, defining the hermetic life as the Jacob’s ladder but also as a ‘via aurea’ [golden path].<sup>21</sup> Right after the allusion to the reign of Saturn, referencing the golden ladder corrects the ancient myth: the true golden age is the one that leads the Christian towards his celestial homeland.

## Foods and Alimentary Metaphors

Furthermore, citing the golden age among the examples in the terrace of the gluttons (*Purg.*, xxii. 148–50), Dante introduces the theme of alimentary temperance, which will become central in the sphere of Saturn. Thus Peter Damian praises the monastic and contemplative life, comprised of the renunciation of the world and its pleasures, as well as of fasting and humble food:

‘al servigio di Dio mi fe’ sì fermo,  
che pur con cibi di liquor d’ulivi  
lievemente passava caldi e geli,  
contento ne’ pensier contemplativi’. (*Par.*, xxi. 114–17)

<sup>19</sup> For Dante’s identification of Saturn’s kingdom with the golden age see also *Mon.* i. xi. 1.

<sup>20</sup> On the theme of Jacob’s ladder, see also Georg Rabuse, ‘Saturne et l’échelle de Jacob’, *Archives d’Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge: Volume 45* (Paris: Vrin, 1978), pp. 7–31; Claudia Di Fonzo, ‘“La dolce donna dietro a lor mi pinse / con un sol cenno su per quella scala”’ (*Par.* xxii. 100–101), *Studi danteschi* 63 (1991), 141–75; and, more generally, Salvatore Pricoco, *Monaci, filosofi e santi. Saggi sulla storia della cultura tardolatina* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 1992), pp. 207–37; and Christian Heck, *L’échelle céleste dans l’art du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Peter Damian, *Dominus vobiscum*, xix: ‘Tu scala illa Jacob, quae homines vehis ad coelum, et angelos ad humanum deponis auxilium. Tu via aurea, quae homines reducis ad patriam’ (PL 145, 248).



[there I became so fixed in the service of God that with but the juice of olives I easily survived heats and frosts, content in my contemplative thoughts.]

And he evokes the model of the primitive Church:

'Venne Cefàs e venne il gran vasello  
de lo Spirito Santo, magri e scalzi,  
prendendo il cibo da qualunque ostello'. (*Par.*, xxi. 126–29).

[Simon came, and the great Vessel of the Holy Spirit came, thin and barefoot, taking their food in any hostel.]

The apostles are thin and barefoot, they eat what they find if they are offered something: thus returns the theme of thinness, poverty and fasting. This model is the opposite of the degenerate custom of the 'moderni pastor' (*Par.*, xxi. 130–32), so fat and heavy they are defined as beasts. And Benedict too recalls his holy beginnings in terms of fasting: 'e io [iniziai] con orazione e con digiuno' [I [began] with prayer and fasting] (*Par.*, xxii. 89).

The *Stattus cantos* are opened by the alimentary metaphors, with the evangelical reference to 'La sete natural che mai non sazia, / se non con l'acqua onde la femmetta / samaritana domando la grazia' [The natural thirst that is never sated, except by the water of which the poor Samaritan woman begged the gift] (*Purg.*, xxi. 1–3).<sup>22</sup> Not only are such metaphors repeatedly used in these cantos with reference to poetry,<sup>23</sup> but the theme of food is also fundamental, circularly, to the last part of *Purgatorio* xxii, which proclaims models of alimentary temperance, the last of which, at the end of the canto, is John the Baptist who sustains himself on nothing but honey and locusts in the desert:

'Mele e locuste furon le vivande  
che nodriro il Batista nel diserto;  
per ch'elli è glorioso e tanto grande  
quanto per lo Vangelio v'è aperto'. (*Purg.*, xxii. 151–54)

22 See also the ll. 37–39, and 73–75. For the evangelical reference see *Io.*, 4, 5–15. See also Ariani, 'Canto XXI. La dolce sapienza di Stazio', pp. 197–98 and 208–09.

23 See *Purg.*, xxi. 88, 97–98; and xxii. 64–65, 101–02 and 105. Also the Beatitude is here connected with the metaphor of thirst (see *Purg.*, xxii. 4–6), as well as the discussion about the vice and the virtue, through the Virgilian quotation (*Purg.*, xxii. 40–41).

[Honey and locusts were the food that nourished the Baptist in the wilderness; therefore how glorious and great he is, is set forth for you by the Gospel.]

The Baptist is the first ascetic and at the same time the first preacher, 'vox clamantis in deserto'. In fact, his asceticism is always mentioned in the Gospels next to his preaching in the desert (Matthew 3.1–4; Maccabees 1.2–8). Thus in the conclusion of Statius and Virgil's canto, the exemplar of John the Baptist also alludes to a stronger and more effective model of the word, which corrects the unknowingly redemptive word of Virgil and the indolent poetry of Statius, 'chiuso cristian' [secret Christian]. Whereas the Gospel openly proclaims the truth: 'quanto per lo Vangelo v'è aperto' [set forth for you by the Gospel].

The Baptist, throughout the hagiographic tradition, is the archetype of monastic asceticism, and so the conclusion of *Purgatorio* xxii announces the type of holiness that will be exalted in cantos xxi–xxii of *Paradiso*. And the theme of alimentary temperance connects back to the insistent motif of deprivation and renunciation in the Saturn cantos. In *Inferno* xxi–xxii there is also heavy insistence on alimentary themes. This is one of the few passages where Dante brings together elements of the traditional hell-kitchen:<sup>24</sup> the damned submerged in the boiling pitch are called 'li lessi dolenti' [the sufferers in the stew] and the demons treat them like pieces of meat to be cooked:

Non altrimenti i cuoci a' lor vassalli  
fanno attuffare in mezzo la caldaia  
la carne con li uncin, perché non galli. (*Inf.*, xxi. 55–57)

[Not otherwise do cooks have their servants push down with hooks the meat cooking in a broth, so that it may not float.]

Finally the demons, butchers and cooks of the damned, are themselves transformed into well-cooked food when they fall into the boiling pitch: they too are 'cotti dentro da la crosta' [cooked within their crusts] (*Inf.*, xxii. 150).

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<sup>24</sup> See Piero Camporesi, *Il paese della fame* (Milan: Garzanti, 2000), pp. 39–42.

## Concealment and Revelation

In these cantos, the theme of truth and fraud is accompanied by the theme of concealment and its opposite: revelation, or discovery. In the cantos of *Inferno* and *Paradiso*, this motif unfolds in relation to the condition of the souls. The narrators always remain covered and hidden in the pitch. And Dante too has to hide in order not to be seen by the demons while Virgil introduces himself to negotiate with them (*Inf.*, xxi. 58–60).

In the cantos of the sphere of Saturn, a great deal of space is allotted to a motif that is frequently repeated in *Paradiso*, according to which the blessed appear to Dante not in their human guise, as do the spirits in the other realms of the afterlife, but surrounded and concealed by an intense, impenetrable light.<sup>25</sup> Thus Peter Damian is addressed as 'vita beata che ti stai nascosta / dentro a la tua letizia' [O blessed life hidden within your gladness] (*Par.*, xxi. 55–56; see also 82). And Dante asks Benedict if he can see him 'con imagine scoperta' [[his] countenance openly] (*Par.*, xxii. 60). But the saint urges him to give up and be patient. Only in the Empyrean will he be able to fulfil his desire and see the blessed in their corporeal form (*Par.*, xxii. 61–63).

In *Purgatorio* the language of concealment is less frequent, but it is unusually emphasized in canto xxii, in parallel to the corresponding cantos in the other canticles. However, this is not because of the representation of the souls, but because of the theme of truth, falsehood and appearance (*Purg.*, xxi. 28–30), and especially with regard to the communication of the truth and the faith. Statius admits that even after baptism, 'per paura chiuso cristian fu'mi, / lungamente mostrando paganesmo' [out of fear I was a secret Christian, for a long time feigning paganism] (*Purg.*, xxii. 90–91). Further, he attributes to Virgil the merit of having guided him towards the faith, in the language of covering and its opposite: 'Tu dunque, che levato hai il coperchio / che m'ascondeva quanto bene io dico' [You therefore, who raised for me the cover hiding all the good I speak of] (ll. 94–95), that is 'the true belief'. But it is the last verse of *Purgatorio* xxii that applies the language of opening to the truth revealed by the Gospel: 'quanto per lo Vangelio v'è aperto' [set forth for you by the Gospel]. This stands in counterpoint to the concealment of faith, on Statius's part, and to the opening to others of something that remains closed to himself on Virgil's part.

<sup>25</sup> See *Par.*, v. 124–39; viii. 52–54; xvii. 34–36; xxvi. 97–102 (and also *Purg.*, xvii. 52–57).

## Autobiography

A theme of utmost importance is that of the modes Dante employs to speak about himself. Under the general term 'autobiography' I include not only all references to his real life, but also the representation of the self as the protagonist of the poem, a character who undertakes a journey through the afterlife, during which he is ordered to put into a book all that which has been shown and revealed to him; and finally, the representation of the self as a poet engaged in the verse narration of this transcendent experience.

Let's start at the end: the ascent into the sphere of the fixed stars, where he reaches the constellation Gemini, in the second part of *Paradiso* xxii.<sup>26</sup> The passage from one sphere to the other always happens in an instantaneous movement, faster and swifter than any movement that could be made in terrestrial life (ll. 103–05). The ascent to the starry sphere is underscored by an address to the reader that is different from all the others, due to its personal and autobiographical character. The poet swears in the name of the final return to Paradise, in order to be worthy of which, he states that he often makes confession and repents for his sins:

S'io torni mai, lettore, a quel divoto  
trïunfo per lo quale io piango spesso  
le mie peccata e 'l petto mi percuoto,  
tu non avresti in tanto tratto e messo  
nel foco il dito, in quant'io vidi 'l segno  
che segue il Tauro e fui dentro da esso. (*Par.*, xxii. 106–11)

[So may I return, reader, to that devout triumph on whose account I ever weep for my sins and beat my breast: you would not any sooner have withdrawn your finger from the fire and put it in, than I saw the sign that follows the Bull and was within it.]

The poet represents himself as a sinner engaged in lamenting his sins and humbling himself in the hope of attaining eternal salvation. But it must not be forgotten that in the previous canto Peter Damian presented himself as 'Pietro Peccator' [Peter the Sinner] (*Par.*, xxi. 121–23), as he did in life. Dante, admitting humbly to his own nature as a sinner, links back to Peter

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<sup>26</sup> For the autobiographical implications of this section of *Paradiso* xxii, see also Barański, 'Canto XXII', pp. 347–53.

Damian's model of sacred humility, thus continuing to construct his own identity after these saints.

But the address to the reader is immediately followed by the invocation to the divinity: an invocation that is the most personal of the nine present in the poem, as it is addressed to the zodiac sign of Gemini under which the poet was born and to which he declares to owe all of his genius (*Par.*, xxii. 112–23).<sup>27</sup> It becomes evident, from this conclusion of the trajectory of the Twenty-Twos, how closely the autobiographical themes are connected to the metaliterary – to the representation of Dante as a poet engaged in an extraordinary literary enterprise.

The presence or absence of an autobiographical thematic in the infernal cantos devoted to the *bolgia* of the barrators has been a topic of fierce scholarly debate.<sup>28</sup> In fact, barratry was the primary accusation that led to Dante's conviction and exile from Florence. In *Inferno* xxi–xxii no explicit reference to any such conviction is to be found. But there are other explicit autobiographical statements, inserted in an unessential way as vehicles for similes. There are no allusions to the accusations of barratry; on the contrary, there are implicit claims to being a model citizen and a patriot, one who served the country by fighting to defend it against the enemy Ghibellines.

The first allusion is to the siege of Caprona, which took place in August 1289: 'così vid'io già temer li fanti / ch'uscivan patteggiati di Caprona' [thus once I saw the foot-soldiers fear, coming out of Caprona under safe-conduct] (*Inf.*, xxi. 94–95). The second set of references is located, emphatically, at the beginning of canto xxii where there is another allusion to military events in 1289, to the war between Florence and Arezzo culminating in the battle of Campaldino, during which Dante fought among the cavalrymen: 'corridor vidi per la terra vostra, / o Aretini' [I have seen mounted men coursing your city, o Aretines] (*Inf.*, xxii. 1–12). These allusions make a claim to his own military service to the nation, precisely in the cantos devoted to the sin of barratry.

27 On the invocations, see Robert Hollander, *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 1980), pp. 31–38; Giuseppe Ledda, 'Invocazioni e preghiere per la poesia nel *Paradiso*', in *Pregliera e liturgia nella 'Commedia'*, ed. by Giuseppe Ledda, (Ravenna: Centro Dantesco dei Frati Minori Conventuali, 2013), pp. 125–54. It is also the fulfilment of an important path of astrological autobiography. See *Inf.*, xv. 55–56; *Inf.*, xxvi. 23–24; *Purg.*, xxx. 106–17; and Elisa Maraldi, "'Ragionare di sé" (*Conv.* i. ii. 14) nella *Commedia*: alcune note autobiografiche-astrologiche', *L'Alighieri* 43 (2014), 113–30.

28 See Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 'Canto XXI', in *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana. Inferno*, ed. by Pompeo Giannantonio (Naples: Loffredo, 1986), pp. 365–85 (pp. 370–73).

## Ancients Poets, New Preachers and the Poetry of Salvation

In cantos xxi–xxii of *Purgatorio* there are no autobiographical allusions in the narrative sense, and overt elements of direct self-representation of the poet do not appear either. Consideration of poetry through the figures of Statius and Virgil, however, has a clear value that reflects on the figure of Dante, poet of the *Commedia*. In fact, the acts of identity construction based on certain models are here intertwined with metaliterary reflection on the power and limits of poetry. Even in canto xxi, this theme is at the centre of Statius's self-representation (ll. 82–93), which is structured like Virgil's in *Inferno* i (ll. 67–75).<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Statius acknowledges that if he has become a poet, he owes it to the love with which he studied Virgil's *Aeneid*, which taught him everything (*Purg.*, xxi. 94–99). And thanks to Virgil's poem, Statius turned away from the vice of prodigality (*Purg.*, xxii. 37–45). Yet as I already mentioned, the text from Virgil that Statius cites is here profoundly transformed in meaning. Only thus does it become effective in promoting Statius's moral conversion. Finally, Virgil's poem enlightens Statius to the faith, in the passage I have already cited (*Purg.*, xxii. 64–73). Statius's translation of the beginning of Virgil's fourth eclogue is substantially faithful, but the meaning that Virgil attributed to these verses was limited and reductive. Only a Christian reading, attentive to the consonance Virgil's verses found with the good news spread by the Gospel, can render these verses able to illuminate the path to salvation.

Alongside this reflection on Virgil's poetry, there is, however, another on Statius's poetry. Statius's poem, in fact, does not make his faith manifest:

'Or quando tu cantasti le crude armi  
de la doppia trestizia di Giocasta',  
disse 'l cantor de' bucolici carmi,  
'per quello che Cliò teco li tasta,  
non par che ti facesse ancor fedele  
la fede, senza qual ben far non basta'. (*Purg.*, xxii. 55–60)

[‘Now when you sang of the cruel war that caused the double sadness of Jocasta’, said the singer of the bucolic songs, ‘by what Clio touches on with you there, it seems that faith, without which good works are not enough, had not yet made you faithful’.]

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<sup>29</sup> See Rossi, ‘Canto XXI’, pp. 324–29.

And Statius himself admits to having been a 'chiuso cristian' [secret Christian], to not having displayed his faith openly and to having actually continued to feign his adherence to paganism:

'E pria ch'io conducessi i Greci a' fiumi  
di Tebe poetando, ebb'io battesimo;  
ma per paura chiuso cristian fu' mi,  
lungamente mostrando paganesmo'. (*Purg.*, xxii. 88–91)

[And before I led the Greeks to the rivers of Thebes in my poetry, I was baptized; but out of fear I was a secret Christian, for a long time feigning paganism.]

The long appendix on the poets in Limbo, Virgil's fellow sufferers, who are always engaged in talking about poetry, confirms their eternal fate of failure and absence. Just as Virgil had presented himself to Statius as someone banished 'ne l'eterno essilio' [to eternal exile], so now all the great ancient poets are condemned to Limbo, 'nel primo cerchio del carcere cieco' [in the first circle of the blind prison], also Homer and the other 'Greci che già di lauro ornar la fronte' [Greeks who once adorned their brows with laurel]:<sup>30</sup>

'dimmi dov'è Terrenzio nostro antico,  
Cecilio e Plauto e Varro, se lo sai;  
dimmi se son dannati, e in qual vico'.  
'Costoro e Persio e io e altri assai',  
rispuose il duca mio, 'siam con quel Greco  
che le Muse lattar più ch'altri mai  
nel primo ringhio del carcere cieco;  
spesse fiate ragioniam del monte  
che sempre ha le nutrice nostre seco.  
Euripide v'è nosco e Antifonte,  
Simonide, Agatone e altri piùe  
Greci che già di lauro ornar la fronte'. (*Purg.*, xxii. 97–108)

[tell me where our ancient Terence is, Caecilius and Plautus and Varro, if you know: tell me if they are damned, and to which district'. 'They and

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<sup>30</sup> Dante expresses the desire for poetic laurels in the first canto of *Paradiso* (ll. 13–33) and then in canto xxv (ll. 1–12), in the middle of the sequence of the sphere of fixed stars. See Michelangelo Picone, 'Il tema dell'incoronazione poetica in Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio', *L'Alighieri* 25 (2005), 5–26.

Persius, and I, and many others', replied my leader, 'are with that Greek to whom the Muses gave more milk than ever to any other, in the first circle of the blind prison; often times we speak about the mountain that forever holds our nurses. Euripides is with us and Antiphon, Simonides, Agathon, and many other Greeks who once adorned their brows with laurel'.]

Now Dante is representing himself as intent on listening to Virgil and Statius's discussion of the power, glory, and limits of poetry. He draws on these discussions for lessons that he will seek to apply to his own poetry:

Elli givan dinanzi, e io soletto  
di retro, e ascoltava i lor sermoni,  
ch'a poetar mi davano intelletto. (*Purg.*, xxii. 127–29)

[They were walking ahead, and I all by myself behind them, listening to their talk, which instructed me in writing poetry.]

But the lessons for Dante's new poetry also come from Statius's references to another activity of speech: the preaching by the messengers of the 'vera credenza' [true belief], the 'novi predicanti' [new preachers] who brought the truth of the Gospel into the world (*Purg.*, xxii. 76–81).

Cantos xxi and xxii of *Paradiso* display, in ways that are unexpected and thus particularly relevant, passages with strong metaliterary significance, important reflections on the poem, its structure, its function, its meanings. In *Paradiso* xxi we find a first confirmation of the prophetic mission assigned to Dante by Beatrice in Eden and solemnly reaffirmed by Cacciaguida in the sphere of Mars (*Par.*, xvii. 124–42).<sup>31</sup> Now, in the Heaven of Saturn, Dante the character asks the first blessed soul he encounters why he had been the one predestined by divine providence to carry out this task (ll. 76–78). But his response is that divine providence elects men, and also the blessed souls, to take on certain offices, according to an infallibly just will that no creature can fully know (ll. 82–96). And he adds that this response should be extended to all men:

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31 On the prophetic dimension of the *Comedy* see Nicolò Mineo, *Profetismo e apocalittica in Dante. Strutture e temi profetico-apocalittici in Dante: dalla 'Vita nuova' alla 'Divina Commedia'* (Catania: Università di Catania, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, 1968); and Robert Wilson, *Prophecies and Prophecy in Dante's 'Commedia'* (Florence: Olschki, 2007).



'E al mondo mortal, quando tu riedi,  
 questo rapporta, sì che non presumma  
 a tanto segno più mover li piedi'. (*Par.*, xxi. 97–100)

[And when you return to the mortal world, carry this back, that it may  
 no longer presume to move its feet toward so great a mark.]

Dante's mission is thus also to remind men of the limits of their knowledge and of the need not to presume beyond these limits, but to accept them humbly. This prophetic investiture is unexpected and therefore very significant; it confirms Cacciaguیدا's solemn investiture and precedes a series of investitures entrusted to the apostles most beloved by Jesus: James (*Par.*, xxv. 40–45), John (*Par.*, xxv. 127–29), and Peter (*Par.*, xxvii. 64–66).

And canto xxii presents an equally significant metaliterary and structural intervention. This takes the form of an invocation — the third in *Paradiso* — of great structural import, since it begins a new part of the canticle, the part dedicated to the last three spheres: the Fixed Stars, the Primum Mobile, and the Empyrean. The difficulties that the poet is preparing himself to face in narrating the final part of his journey are emphasized with the invocation to the stars of the Gemini, to which he asks for the necessary virtue for this 'passo forte' [difficult pass] (*Par.*, xxii. 112–23).<sup>32</sup>

The metatextual import of *Inferno* xxi–xxii is announced from the beginning of canto xxi, when the title of the work, *comedia*, is mentioned for the second time:

Così di ponte in ponte, altro parlando  
 che la mia comedia cantar non cura,  
 venimmo [...] (*Inf.*, xxi. 1–3)

[Thus we went from bridge to bridge, speaking of other things my  
 comedy does not record.]

The title had already appeared at the end of canto xvi, 'Ma per le note / di questa comedia, lettor ti giuro' (ll. 127–28) while in the canto of *Inferno* prior to this one, Virgil's *Aeneid* is defined as 'high tragedy' (*Inf.*, xx. 113). The Dantean and Christian *comedia* is opposed to the Virgilian, pagan and

<sup>32</sup> See Giuseppe Ledda, *La guerra della lingua. Ineffabilità, retorica e narrativa nella 'Commedia' di Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 2002), pp. 154–55.

classical *tragedia*.<sup>33</sup> The Christian comedy is not afraid to go down to the lowest levels of the humble style, down to the depths of vulgarity and triviality, as Dante does in the cantos of the barrators. In Christian culture in order to truly rise, one must come down, prostrate oneself, in order to then ascend to the sublime heights of Paradise.

In canto xxii, the animal similes which were present with a parodic function for the demons back in canto xxi, reappear.<sup>34</sup> Here they refer to the damned, who are forced to remain under the boiling pitch so as not to be caught and further tormented by the demons:

Come i dalfini, quando fanno segno  
a' marinar con l'arco de la schiena  
che s'argomentin di campar lor legno,  
talor così, ad alleggiar la pena,  
mostrav' alcun de' peccatori 'l dosso  
e nascondea in men che non balena. (*Inf.*, xxii. 19–24)

[As dolphins do, when they signal to sailors, arching their spines, to take measures to save their ship: so from time to time, to lessen the pain, a sinner would show his back and hide it in less than a flash.]

Just as dolphins leap out of water revealing their curved backs, so the sinners' backs briefly emerge from the pitch and then immediately disappear back down. If the movement is similar, their motivations are completely different. The damned emerge in the attempt to relieve their own suffering, but this relief is fleeting and illusory.

The medieval tradition attributed the movement of dolphins to their desire to inform sailors of a storm's imminent arrival, so that they could allow enough time to reach shelter and keep the ship and themselves safe.<sup>35</sup> Thus it is no surprise that extremely positive symbolic meanings were attributed to these animals. In Bartholomeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum*, a text that is often close to Dante's formulations, we find the gloss

33 See also Hollander, *Studies in Dante*, pp. 131–218.

34 See *Inf.*, xxi. 44–45, 67–71.

35 See for instance Isidorus of Seville, *Etymologiae*, xii. vi. 11; Rabanus Maurus, *De universo*, viii. 5 (*PL* 111, 237–38); Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum naturale*, xvii. 109; Alexander Neckham, *De naturis rerum*, ii. 27; Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, vi. 16–17, and vii. 29; Brunetto Latini, *Tresor*, i. 134. For other references and more evidence in favour of the following interpretation, see Giuseppe Ledda, 'Un bestiario metaletterario nell'*Inferno* dantesco', *Studi danteschi* 78 (2013), 119–53 (pp. 127–33).

'Nota de sanctis', which is an index of not only their positive symbolic value, but also of their redemptive value in a strictly religious sense: the 'santi' [saints] are in fact the holy writers.<sup>36</sup>

The redemptive value of dolphins could thus be brought into dialogue with the metaliterary and metatextual reflections, which resound in these cantos with echoes brought about by the emphatic reference to 'la mia comedia' [my comedy], placed at the beginning of the previous canto (*Inf.*, xxi. 1–3), and of the autobiographical allusions to Dante's military experiences, with the recollection of the barratry conviction Dante had faced in the background. As opposed to these barrators damned in the pitch who are false dolphins, Dante is a true dolphin who — through his *Comedia* — directs Christians to safety and salvation.

The prophetic and potentially redemptive value of the poem is variously affirmed in the individual investitures; and even the first, where Beatrice commands Dante to write what he is shown in the afterlife 'in pro del mondo che mal vive' [for the good of the world that lives ill] (*Purg.*, xxxii. 103), is affirmed with particular force by the investiture of Cacciaguida, who speaks of the 'vital nodrimento' [vital nourishment] (*Par.*, xvii. 131) that the poem, with the alas bitter condemnation of the sins and the representation of the souls punished in the afterlife, would constitute for human sinners. In this framework, the phrase 'fanno segno / a' marinar [...] / che s'argomentin di campar lor legno' [they signal to sailors to take measures to save their ship] assumes particular significance. The readers of the poem, too, are sailors, who can, thanks to these signals, 'campar lor legno' [save their ship]. It is through the image of the dolphins that the reflection on the poetry in the Twenty-Twos intertwines with the model of the holy preaching of the apostles, of their followers, of Benedict. Based on these models, Dante presents himself as a holy preacher and claims the redemptive power of the poetry of his *comedia*.

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36 Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, xiii. 26.

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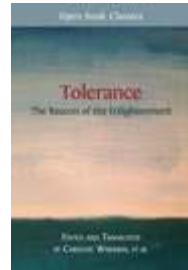


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