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## REVIEW

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## Preface

### I.

In connection to the commemoration of the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Dante Alighieri also in Hungary – as in many countries in the world – there were many artistic and scientific events. Among these we can mention the series of conferences which took place at the Hungarian Academy in Rome, and at the seats of Szeged and of Budapest of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (*Science and poetry in Dante's works* [*Tudomány és költészet Dante műveiben*], Rome: 11.2-3, 2021; Szeged–Budapest: 11.16-19, 2021). The Hungarian Dante Society published its monumental Commentary to the *Inferno* (see the review on this, written by József Nagy and Massimo Seriacopi), and also the present special issue of the *Hungarian Philosophical Review* – what we offer now to the public – belongs to the actual series of publications on Dante Alighieri.

### II.

It is not necessary to stress here the complexity of Dante's work in general, and in particular of the *Comedy*, in which poetry and doctrinaire material form an organic unity. The present issue highlights obviously this latter aspect of Dante's work, especially the philosophical, the theological and the scientific message of the poet.

### III.

The present issue does not pretend to be monographic, and does not touch upon (which would be impossible) all the countless themes with which classical and contemporary Dante-researches deal. Nevertheless we could not evade the question of Aristotle's influence on Dante's œuvre (see the paper of Massimo Verdicchio), as well as the question of the relationship between Averroes, Thomas Aquinas and Dante, particularly with regard to the problem of the unity



of the soul (see the paper of Gábor Borbély), or how did Thomas Aquinas and Dante conceived Hell and the nature of the anguishes in Hell (see the paper of Gyula Klima).

Nonetheless the subjects of the papers published in the present issue extend to a wide field, like for example to the relationship between poetry and theology (see the paper of József Pál), to political and moral philosophy (see the papers of Márton Kaposi and Márk Berényi), to philosophy of language (see the paper of János Kelemen), or to psychosynthesis, which approach is applied by the author (Zsuzsanna Tóth-Izsó) for the analysis of Dante's conception of time.

We also have to mention the analyses of certain cantos of the *Inferno*, which represent the classical tradition of the *Lectura Dantis* (see the studies of József Nagy, of Béla Hoffmann and of Norbert Mátyus), as well as the analysis dedicated to the *Vita Nuova* and to the *Purgatory* (see the work of Kornélia Horváth).

Finally, it is not less important to mention that in the realm of the questions related to Dantean allegorism and symbolism two authors highlighted some subjects which are rarely studied, but, exactly for this reason, are particularly interesting and important: the symbolism of animals, and the theological symbolism of the illnesses (see the papers of Éva Víg and of Eszter Draskóczy).

*János Kelemen*



MASSIMO VERDICCHIO

## Aristotle in the *Convivio* and in the *Commedia*

Time is number of motion with respect to before and after.  
(Aristotle's *Physics* IV; *Cv.* IV. II.5).

The figure of Aristotle looms large over Dante's works from the *canzoni* to the *Vita Nuova*, from the *Convivio* and *Monarchia* to the *Commedia*. Sometimes the reference is clear when Dante quotes him directly, sometimes he only alludes to his works, at other times the reference is not even there.<sup>1</sup> While Aristotle, or "lo filosofo", as Dante refers to him after Aquinas, is a dominant presence in Dante's early works, references to him are minimal in the *Commedia*.<sup>2</sup> Commentators have explained the discrepancy in terms of the notion of happiness which, according to Aristotle in the *Convivio*, can only be achieved in this life, whereas in the *Commedia* true happiness is only possible in the afterlife, and through the contemplation of God. Although this is certainly the case, it does not explain the continued interest in Aristotle in *Monarchia* but also in the *Commedia*. My aim in the paper is to characterize how Aristotle resurfaces in Dante's works Before and After the *Convivio*.

Barolini points out that references to Aristotle in Italian lyric poetry are as early as the 1280s with Dante da Maiano in the sonnet "saverè e cortesia," where the poet joins courtly values to knowledge which is identified with Aristotelian scholasticism, "as we see from the verse "vertute naturale od accidente" ("in-born or accidental virtue") (B 171).<sup>3</sup> Barolini refers also to Guittone d'Arezzo as the other major poet who alludes indirectly to Aristotle in the canzone "Vergogna ho, lasso, ed ho me stesso ad ira." In this lyric Guittone praises the pagan philosophers for their "onestas": "Già filosofi, Dio non conoscendo, né poi morte sperando guiderdone, ischifar vizi aver tutta stagione, seguendo sì virtù, ch'onesta vita fu lor gaudio e lor vita." ("The philosophers of old, who did not know God, nor hoped for any reward from death, had such contempt for vice at

<sup>1</sup> See Crouse 1988, 88.

<sup>2</sup> See Aristotle 1941. On the presence of Aristotle within the context of Italian literature see Gentili 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Barolini 2014. Here and elsewhere the English translations are Barolini's. Quoted as B and page number.

all times, and so followed virtue, for a righteous life was their delight and their commitment.”) She suggests that these lines are echoed in Dante’s verses in Limbo: “onesta vita / fu lor gaudio e lor vita.” (B 172). She also mentions Guittone’s canzone “Degno è che che dice omo el defenda” where the poet argues that virtue is found not just in fellow Christians but “in others” (in altroi), and gives the example of the virtuous pagan philosophers, “honored philosophers” (“filosofi orrati”) who did not pursue a life of the senses but of the intellect. Guittone mentions “l saggio Aristotel” on what makes man happy: “secondo che ’l saggio Aristotel dice / e mostra omo felice / vertù ovrando” (“according to what the sage Aristotle says when he shows that man is happy in the operation of virtue”) (B 172). She suggests that Dante echoes this Aristotelian definition of happiness in “Le dolci rime,” “vertute, dico, che fa l’uom felice / in sua operazione” (“meaning by virtue that which makes a man happy in his actions”) (B 172).<sup>4</sup>

The first direct reference to Aristotle in Dante is in the *Vita Nuova* in the sonnet “Oltra la spera che più larga gira,” (“the sphere that turns most widely”). In the prose gloss, Dante cites Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*: “e ciò dice lo Filosofo nel secondo de la Metafisica” (and this is what the Philosopher says in the second book of the *Metaphysics*) (VN XLI.6). The other reference to Aristotle in the *Vita Nuova* is at VN XXV.2 (B 171).<sup>5</sup> But by far the most extensive use of Aristotle is in the *Convivio*.<sup>6</sup> In this treatise the model is Brunetto Latini’s *Li Livres dou Tresor* an encyclopedic work intended for those who cannot devote themselves to the study of philosophy and, principally, of Aristotle who at the time was very popular and whose works were translated into Latin, and even in volgare, from the Greek and the Arabic.<sup>7</sup> It is probably for this reason that Dante refers to him as “lo mio maestro.”<sup>8</sup> Unlike the *Tresor*, the *Convivio* is not an exposition of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* but Dante makes use of the work as it suits his purpose which is to make it “useful” (“utile”), “as much as possible,” (“quanto é possibile”), for a discussion of human happiness and the sweetness it brings: “cioé ragionare dell’umana felicità e della sua dolcezza” (*Cv.* IV. xxii.1). Dante prefers Aristotle’s opinion to that of Zeno and Epicurus, and he begins the *Con-*

<sup>4</sup> Barolini emphasizes the importance of “misura” in Guittone that Dante uses in the canzone “Doglia mi reca.” (See B 172, note 18). She also mentions Guido Cavalcanti’s “Donna me prega” as an Aristotelian poem “although not an ostentatious citation of the “Etica” by name” (B 174).

<sup>5</sup> The translations of the lyrics of the *Vita Nuova* are by Barolini.

<sup>6</sup> Alighieri 1989. Translation modified.

<sup>7</sup> See Rafferty on the reception of Aristotle in the Middle Ages.

<sup>8</sup> See Ours Vitiello 2009, and also Holloway 1993 who believes that Dante used Latini’s translation of the *Ethics* for the *Convivio* but Dante makes clear that his source is the Italian translation by Taddeo Alderotti as he acknowledges: “come fece quelli che trasmutò il latino dell’Etica, ciò fu Taddeo Ippocratisa” (*Cv.* I. x. 10). References to Holloway are H plus page number.



*vivio* establishing his authority with a quote from *Metaphysics* I. 1,980a that all men naturally desire to know: “Sì come dice lo Filosofo nel principio de la Prima Filosofia, tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere.” He explains that, “ciascuna cosa, da providenza di propria natura impinta è inclinabile a la sua perfezione; onde, acciò che la scienza è ultima perfezione de la nostra anima, ne la quale sta la nostra felicitade, tutti naturalmente al suo desiderio semo subietti” (“each thing is impelled in its own nature by a force which moves it towards its own perfection, and since knowledge is the ultimate perfection of our soul, in which our supreme happiness resides, we are all by our very nature subject to desire it”) (*Cv.* I. i. 1).

The *Convivio* is based on the premise that every man is infused at birth with a natural appetite that develops differently in every man but only one way leads to peace and happiness. If it happens that one has not inherited the right tendency at birth, the seed can be induced with proper correction and culture: “per molta correzione e cultura”: “ché là dove questo seme dal principio non cade, si può inducer al suo processo, sì che perviene a questo frutto” (“where this seed does not fall at the beginning, it can be induced in the process, so that it attains this fruit”) (*Cv.* IV. xxii. 12). Man has no excuse: he can acquire it either by correction, “graft” (“insetazione”), or by education, by reading the *Convivio*.

Aristotle is the philosopher who is needed to bring man on right road to virtue and happiness. Dante values his philosophy above that of the other pagan philosophers because his definition of the moral virtues is the best: “E queste diversamente da diversi filosofi sono distinte e numerate; ma però che in quella parte dove aperse la bocca la divina sentenza d’Aristotile da lasciare mi pare ogni altrui sentenza” (“Different philosophers have distinguished and classified these in many ways. However, since it seems to me that in matters where Aristotle gave his divine opinion the opinions of others should be set aside”) (*Cv.* IV. xvii. 3). Dante quotes Aristotle throughout the *Convivio* but mostly in support of his own arguments. Instead of giving the reasons why the earth does not move and is at the center of the universe, he just refers to his authority: “perché assai basta a la gente a cu’ io parlo, per la sua grande autoritade” (“because his great authority is more than enough for the people to whom I am speaking”) (*Cv.* III. v. 7). But he does not hesitate to correct him when Aristotle is wrong: when he claims in *De Caelo et Mundo* that there are eight heavens, whereas Ptolemy said there were nine; but he also excuses him by saying that Aristotle saw his mistake and made amends: “Veramente elli di ciò si scusa nel duodecimo de la Metafisica, dove mostra bene sé avere seguito pur l’altrui sentenza.” (“However, in the twelfth book of the *Metaphysics* he excuses himself where he makes clear that he was following the opinion of others”) (*Cv.* II, iii. 4). Dante disagrees with Aristotle when he says that what seems true to the majority cannot be entirely false: “Quello che pare a li più impossibile è del tutto essere falso.” For Dante, instead, the opinion of the many because it is based on the senses is always false:



“Il parere sensuale è molte volte falsissimo” (*Cv.* IV. viii. 6). But he excuses Aristotle because he was only referring to rational opinion: “e però se io intendo solo a la sensuale apparenza ripruovar non faccio contro la ‘ntenzione del Filosofo, e però né la reverenza che a lui si dee non offendo” (“and since I meant to disprove a judgment formed by the senses, I am not going against the opinion of the Philosopher, and in no way I offend the respect which is due to him”) (*Cv.* IV. viii. 8). In another instance, Dante has a laugh with Aristotle when he relates the popular belief that if Adam was noble everyone is noble, while those who are base will always be base. Aristotle would laugh if he heard it: “E senza dubbio riderebbe Aristotele udendo fare spezie due dell’umana generazione...che perdoni lui Aristotele, asini si possono dire coloro che così pensano” (*Cv.* IV. xv.5).

The *Convivio* was left incomplete after the Fourth Treatise without explanation and commentators have speculated that the main reason was that Aristotle’s notion of happiness as the ultimate perfection of man was no longer acceptable within the Christian universe of the *Commedia* where true happiness is possible only in the contemplation of God.<sup>9</sup> For these commentators it follows that in the *Commedia* Dante abandons Aristotle and philosophy to embrace theology symbolized by Beatrice.

Dante’s “use” of Aristotle is not limited to the *Convivio* but extends to the political treatise of *Monarchia*.<sup>10</sup> The idea for the work was already sketched in the Fourth Treatise where Dante argued for the importance of a Monarchy and a monarch to maintain the peace, but the main reason for a Monarch is to free the community of greed. Dante believed that since the Monarch or the Emperor already possessed everything, they had no need to acquire more wealth. They were free of greed and could devote themselves to free the community of this calamity that thwarted true happiness: “essere Monarchia, cioè uno solo principato, e uno prencipe avere; lo quale, tutto possedendo e più desiderare non possendo, li regi tegna contenti ne li termini de li regni, sì che pace intra loro sia... lo qual preso, l’uomo viva felicemente; che è quello perche esso è nato” (“there should be a Monarchy, that is, one principality and one prince who possessing everything and having nothing to desire, he would keep the kings content within the boundaries of their kingdoms and keep peace among them... so that man could live happily, which is the end for which he is born.”) (*Cv.* IV. iv. 4). With the authority of Aristotle from *Politics*, Dante explains that what the Emperor says is law and he should be obeyed by everyone: “così abbiamo un Imperatore e quello che dice è legge e deve da tutti essere ubbidito e quello che comanda prende vigore e autoritade” (“we have an Emperor and what he says is law and he must be obeyed by all, and what he commands has force and authority.”) (*Cv.* IV. iv.7). The indirect reference is to the Pope who should also obey the Emper-

<sup>9</sup> See Weinrib 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Alighieri 1999; English translation Alighieri 1904.



or and not vice versa, as claimed by the Papal Bull which gave the Pope powers over secular matters and the Emperor. For Dante, the rule of the Emperor, even if he came to power by force, is always willed by God, and the Pope should be subservient to him, since he is only the authority in divine matters. The Emperor is the guarantor of man's happiness on earth while the Pope is the guarantor of man's spiritual happiness.

The aim of the *Monarchia*, as is in the fourth treatise of the *Convivio*, is to identify and stamp out greed. In order to do this a Monarch should rule with the advice of a philosopher. Imperial authority by itself without philosophy is dangerous while the latter without imperial authority is powerless. When political power is united with philosophy they acquire great power and are of great utility to the community: "l'autoritate del filosofo sommo... non repugna a la imperial autoritate, ma quella senza questa è pericolosa, e questa senza quella è quasi debile, non per sé, ma per la disordinanza de la gente; sì che l'una con l'altra congiunta utilissime e pienissime sono d'ogni vigore" (*Cv.* IV. vi. 17). The present political situation lacks completely rational advice: "Oh miseri che al presente reggete! E oh miserissimi che retti siete! Ché nulla filosofica autoritate si congiunge con i vostri reggimenti né per proprio studio né per consiglio." ("You wretches who rule now! and you wretched who are ruled! For no philosophical authority operates in accordance with your governments, whether by virtue of your own study or by the counsel of others") (*ibid.* 19). Dante addresses directly Charles D'Anjou and Frederick II and the other princes and tyrants whose advisors make decisions based on greed and not for the good of the community: "guardate chi a lato vi siede per consiglio, e annunziate quante volte lo die questo fine de l'umana vita per li vostri consiglieri v'è additato!" ("Beware who sits by your side and offers advice and count how many times a day your counselors call your attention to this end of human life") (*ibid.* 20). In *Monarchia*, Dante reiterates these themes by stressing the importance of the Emperor's authority over all secular matters, who, under the guidance of a philosopher, can guarantee people's happiness and eliminate greed. In the *Convivio*, Dante described the dangers of wealth which promises to satisfy man's desires but never does: "Promettono le false traditrici sempre, in certo numero adunate, rendere lo raunatore pieno d'ogni appagamento; e con questa promissione conducono l'umana voluntade in vizio d'avarizia" ("These false traitors always promise that if they are amassed to a certain amount they will make the person fully satisfied, and with this promise they lead men to the vice of avarice") (*Cv.* IV. xii. 4-5).<sup>11</sup> In *Monarchia*, Dante echoes that idea that there is no limit to the pursuit of money,

<sup>11</sup> Dante also quotes from Boethius from *The Consolation of Philosophy* who writes that wealth is dangerous and that "la dea della ricchezza quanto più largisce tanto più l'umanità piangerà" (the goddess of wealth the more she lavishes the more humanity will lament) (*Cv.* IV. xii. 6-7); and from Cicero's *De Paradoxo* who denounces wealth and writes that the "la sete de la cupidità non si sazia mai, né il desiderio di accrescerle o la paura di perderle" (the

that no amount can satisfy those who pursue it. He quotes Aristotle from *Ethics* V that greed is particularly pernicious because it is the vice most opposed to justice: “the thing most contrary to justice is greed, as Aristotle states in the fifth book of the *Ethics*, when greed is entirely eliminated, nothing remains which is opposed to justice” (“iustitie maxime contrariatur cupiditas, ut innuit Aristotiles in quinto ad Nicomacum. Remota cupiditate onmino, nichil iustitie restat adversum;”) (*Mon.* 1.11.11). The cure for greed is a Monarch of superior intellect, capable to rule ethically and “in conformity with the teachings of philosophy” (“secundum phylosophica documenta genus humanum ad temporalem felicitatem dirigeret.”) (*Mon.* 3.15.10).<sup>12</sup>

At the outset of *Monarchia* Dante expresses his wish that the work may bear fruit and benefit the public good even though it may go contrary the desire of the individual who does not care for the common good and whose greed is “a destructive whirlpool which forever swallows everything and never gives back what it has swallowed.” (“perniciosa vorago semper ingurgitans et nunquam ingurgitata refundens”) (*Mon.* 1. 1. 3). Dante is aware that very little has been written on the subject of Monarchy but the reason is that it is not profitable: “propter se non habere immediate ad lucrum, ab omnibus intemptata” (*Mon.* 1.1.5). The reason that moved Dante to write on the subject was to shed light on a topic that was not well-known but also to benefit mankind: “in proposito est hanc de suis enucleare latibulis, tum ut utiliter mundo pervigilem,” He also wanted to be the first, for his own glory: “tum etiam ut palmam tanti bravii primus in meam gloriam adipiscar” (*ibid.*).

Dante believed that in writing a treatise on Monarchy he could make the difference since political issues are under the control of the people, and this being the case, we can change the conditions to better serve the community. In a monarchy man enjoys freedom of action, “existens sub Monarcha est potissime liberum,” so man is “supremely free” and free to act “for his own sake and not for another,” as Aristotle teaches in *Metaphysics* I, “‘sui met et non alterius gratia est’, ut Pylosopho placet in hiis que *De simpliciter ente*” (*Mon.* 1.12.8). Referring to the later books of *Politics* where Aristotle discusses the role of money in relation to governments, Dante states that only under the rule of the monarch man is secure from bad forms of government, “which force mankind into slavery” (“que in servitutem cogunt genus humanum”) (*Mon.* 1.12.9). Just governments guarantee freedom so that “men can exist for themselves. Citizens do not exist for the sake of consuls, nor the people for the sake of the King.” (“scilicet ut homines propter se sint. Non enim cives propter consules nec gens propter regem,

thirst of cupidity is never quenched or satisfied; neither the desire to increase them nor the fear to lose them).

<sup>12</sup> On the issue of wealth and greed, see Hittinger 2016. For an account of the implications of Dante’s concept of imperium in relation to medieval political thought, see Nardi 1967; Mancusi-Ungaro 1987; and Sasso 2002.





sed e converso consulens propter cives et rex propter gentem;”) (*Mon.* 1.12.11). The laws are there for the sake of the common good, not for the disordered ends of the authorities and the monarch is necessary to prevent any escalation of conflict between the interests of parties, motivated by greed: “either this situation will continue ad infinitum... or else we must come to a first and supreme judge, whose judgment resolves all disputes either directly or indirectly, and this man will be the Monarch or the Emperor.” (“Et sic aut erit processus in infinitum, quod esse non potest, aut oportebit devenire ad iudicem primum et summum de cuius iudicio cuncta litigia dirimantur sive mediate sive immediate: et hic erit Monarcha sive Imperator”) (*Mon.* 1.1.10). The people who live under a Monarch live in a state of perfection, “therefore the Monarchy is necessary to the well-being of the world” (“Ergo genus humanum sub Monarchia existens optime se habet; ex quo sequitur quod ad bene esse mundi Monarchiam necesse est”, *Mon.* 1. 12.13). In conclusion, Dante clarifies that the Emperor does not have absolute rule over the Pope, since earthly happiness is in many ways related to eternal happiness, “cum mortalis quodammodo ad immortalem felicitatem ordinetur” (*Mon.* 3.15. 18). Instead, the Emperor ought to turn to the Pope for guidance, “ut luce paterne gratie illustrates virtuosius orbem terre irradiet” (*ibid.*). Emperor and Pope should work together for the good of the community.

The importance of *Monarchia* in determining Dante’s continued reliance on Aristotle’s philosophical advice is clear from the generally accepted dates for this work which was probably written between 1310 and 1313. These are the years when Henry VII of Luxemburg was in Italy, and Dante was writing or had completed the *Paradiso* to which there are many references in *Monarchia*: “as I have already said in the *Paradiso* of the *Commedia*” (sicut in *Paradiso Comedie iam dixit*) (*Mon.* 1.12.5; *Par.* V.19–24).<sup>13</sup> Most likely, Dante wrote the treatise to ingratiate himself to the Emperor and to outline a program for his future work which came to nothing with his sudden death. In any case, for our purposes, it is clear from the many references to Aristotle, especially to *Politics*, that Dante continued to rely on his work, albeit for political advice, especially as it relates to greed and the way it undermines the political and social fabric: “as the Philosopher teaches in the books that he has left us on the topic [of laws and government]” (“ut etiam Philosopho placet in his que de presenti materia nobis ab eo relicta sunt”) (*Mon.* 1.12.11).

Evidence of the continued presence of Aristotle even in the *Commedia* can be seen in the cantos of Brunetto Latini and Ulysses where they are punished for their greed. Latini’s emphasis on wealth and on greed as a political expedient is

<sup>13</sup> The reference to the vacant seat of Arrigo VII is in *Par.* XXX, almost at the end of the poem. See the notes in Sanguinetti’s edition of *Monarchia* for the many references to *Paradiso* but also to *Inferno* and *Purgatory*. For the dating of *De Monarchia* see Sanguinetti, x, in Alighieri 1999.

clear from his choice of title for his major work, *Tresor*. The work wants to be not only a treasure of knowledge for readers to treasure, but also literally a treasure for Charles d'Anjou to whom the work was dedicated and given as a gift: "Questo libro è intitolato Tesoro. Perché, così come il signor che vuole accumulare in poco spazio cose di grandissimo valore, non soltanto per il proprio piacere" ("The title of this book is Tesoro. Just as the man who wants to accumulate in little space things of great value, not only for his own pleasure") (*Tresor*, 1–4). Latini presented the work to Charles d'Anjou encrusted in gold.<sup>14</sup> As Holloway points out, Charles was very greedy and "Brunetto openly, in the book's dedication, at the beginning, presented it as bribery and corruption, with gold and gems, as a treasure chest, for Charles" (H 235).

Although Brunetto dedicated the *Tresor* to Charles d'Anjou, the future king of Naples, his sympathies were not monarchic. In his translation of Aristotle's *Ethics*, as Holloway tells us, "he subverted what was dangerous to use it for the good, in his case not the Empire or the Church but the Florentine commonwealth, the commune, to make it republican" (H 230). He paraphrased and at times even rewrote the text of the *Ethics* when it contradicted his republican ideas. (H 231) He changed Aristotle's statement concerning forms of government from his condemnation of democracy in favor of monarchy, to communal democracy in opposition to rule by monarchs or oligarchies. "He falsified the text for communal ends and gave the altered text to Charles who was a monarch" (H 233). After his translation of Cicero's *Rhetoric*, he wrote a section on *Politica* where he gave an account of the State's self-rule by means of a *podestà*, and he went on to discuss the perversions of kingship as a tyranny. (H 231) Holloway speculates that Latini knew that Charles would not read the work to the end, if at all. (H 233).

Cary Nederman has shown that in the *Tresor* Latini advocated a conception of politics based upon a totally perverse reading of Aristotle that supports the idea that "increasing wealth may serve as a positive blessing to the city" and that "politics and justice in the city are concomitant with the good desire for personal profit."<sup>15</sup> Latini wrote that seeking money and personal advantage is a natural thing to do: "Among them [citizens], there is a common thing that is loved, through which they arrange and conform their business, and that is gold and silver" (*Tresor* 2.5.2, Nederman 2009. 148). Latini's republican views and his emphasis on wealth and greed as a political stratagem are one of the reasons that Dante puts him in Hell.<sup>16</sup> Latini's parting words to Dante, "sieti raccomandato il mio Tesoro/ nel qual io vivo ancora, e più non chieggio" ("I recommend my

<sup>14</sup> Holloway writes: "In order to seduce influential readers [mostly wealthy nobles] these manuscripts [like Latini's *Tresor*] were frequently richly illuminated, a few even to the extent of using lavish gold and silver leaf" (H 234–35).

<sup>15</sup> Nederman 2009. 143.

<sup>16</sup> For a reading of *Inf.* XV., see Verdicchio. Ch. 9.



Treasure to you where I still live, and I ask nothing more”) (*Inf.* 119–120), could not be more ironic.

If wealth and greed, are essential political expedients for Brunetto Latini to the point of falsifying the writing of a great philosopher, the other major example of greed is Ulysses who did not desire to accumulate wealth but knowledge. The famous lines with which he persuades his companions to go to certain death to gain virtue and knowledge are a perversion of Dante’s promise of happiness in the *Convivio*:

Considerate la vostra semenza:  
fatti non foste a viver come bruti,  
ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.  
(*Inf.* XXVI. 118–120)

(Consider your origin:  
you were not made to live as brutes,  
but to pursue virtue and knowledge)

Ulysses’ attempt to go beyond the pillars of Hercules has often been compared to Dante’s journey which has a similar goal.<sup>17</sup> However, Ulysses’ “folle volo, as Dante describes it in *Par.* XXVI. 82–83, “sì ch’io vedea di là da Gade/ il varco/ folle d’Ulisse” (82–83) is not Dante’s. Dante’s “greed” or blind ambition is checked in *Inf.* I by the she-wolf, the “lupa,” when he attempts to go up the Mount of Purgatory. The episode triggers another in *Inf.* II when the pilgrim has second thoughts on undertaking the journey with Virgil: “temo che la venuta non sia folle” (“I fear least my going be folly”) (*Inf.* II. 35). Virgil’s account that he was sent by Beatrice who was sent by the “donna gentile” is meant to establish that the authority which makes Dante’s journey possible is the “donna gentile,” reason or wisdom. Virgil is only her representative in the Inferno and Purgatory, just as Beatrice represents her in the Paradiso. Once the authority of Dante’s journey under the aegis of wisdom is established the poem can begin.<sup>18</sup>

The story of Ulysses is retold in the episode of the “femmina balba” in *Purg.* XIX. The pilgrim dreams of transforming a monstrous creature into a beautiful siren, “com’ amor vuol, così le colorava” (*Purg.* XIX. 13–15). She sings that she is the siren who fills sailors with desire and she is the one who deflected Ulysses from his journey:

<sup>17</sup> See Baranski–Cachey 2009.

<sup>18</sup> For a reading of *Inf.* II., see Verdicchio. Ch. 4.

“Io son”, cantava, “io son dolce serena,  
che ’ marinari in mezzo mar dismago;  
tanto son di piacere a sentir piena!

*Io volsi Ulisse del suo cammin vago  
al canto mio; e qual meco s’ausa,  
rado sen parte; sì tutto l’appago!*  
(*Purg. XIX. 19–24, italics mine*)

(“I am,” she sang, “I am the sweet Siren who leads mariners astray in mid-sea, so full of pleasure I am to hear. *I turned Ulysses from his vague journey to my canto*, and anyone who hears me rarely leaves, so fully I satisfy him.”)

Commentators are baffled by the siren who says that she turned Ulysses to her “canto” because it contradicts the events in Homer’s *Odyssey*. But the point of Dante’s allegory is that Ulysses himself is the siren who lured his companions to certain death for his own ambition and he is the victim of his own rhetoric, and “greed”. This is Dante’s “contrapasso” to punish the fraudulent Ulysses and to send him to the Inferno, to “canto” XXVI.<sup>19</sup>

After the *Convivio* and *Monarchia*, Aristotle’s role in the *Commedia* appears minimal.<sup>20</sup> Dante puts him in Limbo with the other pagans and his *Ethics* is mentioned once by Virgil in *Inf. XI* when he explains the structure of the Inferno.

Non ti rimembra di quelle parole  
con le quali *la tua Etica* pertratta,  
le tre disposizion che ‘l ciel non vuole,  
incontinenza, malizia, e la matta  
bestialitate?

(*Inf. XI. 79–83, italics mine*)

(Do you not remember the words with which your *Ethics* treats the three dispositions which Heaven condemns: incontinence, malice and mad bestiality?)

Commentators agree that by “la tua Etica” Virgil is referring to Aristotle.<sup>21</sup> Barolini adds that the claim is followed by an even more precise material reference

<sup>19</sup> For the “femmina balba” episode, see Verdicchio, Ch. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Barolini suggests that the infernal wind of *Inf. V. 31–33* is another reference to Aristotle’s discussion of compulsion in *Nicomachean Ethics* III, and that the example contributes to the construction of the contrapasso in the canto. (B 164 ff.)

<sup>21</sup> See the *Commento Baroliniano* online: “As with «la tua Etica» in verse 80, Virgilio again prefaces the philosopher’s title with the pronoun «tua»: *your Ethics, your Physics*. By attaching the pronoun «tua» first to Aristotle’s *Ethics* and then to his *Physics*, Dante indicates the profound personal connection — affective and intellective — that binds him to the great philosopher’s thought” (B 36).



to the physical “carte” in which Dante read the *Physics*: “se tu ben la tua Fisica note, / tu troverai, non dopo molte carte” (if you note well in your Physics, you will find, after not many pages” (*Inf.* XI. 101–102). These lines occur in Virgil’s speech on philosophy where he says that Nature takes its course from the divine intellect which man imitates in his art: “sì che vostr’arte a Dio quasi è nepote” (“so that your art is almost the grandchild of God”) (*Inf.* XI. 105), and from which also Genesis has its beginning: “Da queste due, se tu ti rechi a mente/ lo Genesi dal principio, convene/ prender sua vita ed avanzar la gente” (By these two, if you recall/ Genesis, mankind takes its beginning and its history) (*Inf.* XI. 106–108).

For Barolini Dante is promoting a theory of art as imitation. The *Commento Baroliniano*<sup>22</sup> to *Inf.* XI points out that “Dante’s grasp of the concept of mimesis does not come from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, a work that was not yet available in the West, but from Aristotle’s *Physics* 2.2.194a from where the scholastics extracted the idea that was distilled in medieval anthologies as follows: “ars imitatur naturam in quantum potest” — literally, art imitates nature as much as it can.” This very plausible explanation does not account for the last stanza on the usurer which appears to be unrelated to the previous three:

E perché l’usuriere altra via tene,  
per sé natura e per la sua seguace  
dispregia, poi ch’in altro pon la spene.  
(*Inf.* XI. 109–111)

(But because the usurer takes another way, he dislikes nature and her follower, since he places his hopes elsewhere.)

The *Commento Baroliniano* explains the discrepancy by supposing that the pilgrim asks Virgil how usury can be construed as a form of violence against God: “Virgilio therefore tells him to read Aristotle’s *Physics*, sending him to yet another Aristotelian text: “la tua Fisica” (your Physics) (*Inf.* 11.101)”. According to this version, “Virgil apparently has read and knows the *Physics* very well” so he specifies that Dante will find the passage he needs after not too many pages: “non dopo molte carte” (“not many pages from the start” [*Inf.* 11.103]). And the passage referred to is in Book 2 of the *Physics*.”

Yet things are not what they seem. Virgil’s speech is accompanied by a formula already employed by Dante in *Inf.* II at a moment that requires on the part of the reader special understanding:<sup>23</sup> “«Filosofia», mi disse, «a chi la ’ntende, /

<sup>22</sup> See <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/>.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, *Inf.* II, 36, when the pilgrim doubts that he is not worthy to undertake the journey, he asks Virgil for understanding: “Se’ savio; intendi me’ ch’i’ non ragiono” (“You are wise; you understand better than I reason”).

nota” (“Philosophy,” he said to me, for those who understand,” italics mine). In fact, Virgil’s reference to *Physics* is to *Cv.* II, i. 13, to a paragraph where Dante explains how the literal meaning must come before the allegorical. He quotes from Aristotle’s *Physics* I that Nature demands that in our learning we proceed in due order: from what we know to what we do not know. The order is innate in us, so we must proceed from what is understood by the senses to what is not, from the literal to the allegorical. It is necessary to quote the entire passage:

Onde, sì come dice lo Filosofo nel primo de la Fisica, la natura vuole che ordinatamente si proceda ne la nostra conoscenza, cioè procedendo da quello che conoscemo meglio in quello che conoscemo non così bene: dico che la natura vuole, in quanto questa via di conoscere è in noi naturalmente innata. E però se li altri sensi dal litterale sono meno intesi – che sono, sì come manifestamente pare – inrazionabile sarebbe procedure ad essi dimostrare, se prima lo litterale non fosse dimostrato. Io adunque, per queste ragioni, tuttavia sopra ciascuna canzone ragionerò prima la litterale sentenza, e appresso di quella ragionerò la sua allegoria, cioè la nascosa veritate; e talvolta de li altri sensi toccherò incidentemente, come a luogo e a tempo si converrà. (*Cv.* II. i. 13–15)

(Consequently, as the Philosopher says in the first book of the *Physics*, nature wills that we proceed in due order in our learning, that is, by proceeding from what we know better to what we know not so well; I say that nature wills it since this way of learning is naturally innate in us. Therefore, if the senses other than the literal are less understood (which they are, as is quite apparent), it would not be logical to proceed to explain them if the literal had not been explicated first. For these reasons, therefore, I shall on each occasion discuss first the literal meaning concerning each canzone, and afterwards I shall discuss its allegory (that is, the hidden truth), at times touching on the other senses, when convenient, as time and place deem proper.)

Virgil’s speech in *Inf.* XI is almost a replica of this example where Virgil explains the order we find in Nature and how man imitates it in his art. A similar order is followed in the prose narratives of philosophy, which Virgil addresses in his speech, and Genesis. But the usurer follows another way:

e perché l’usuriere altra via tene,  
per sé natura e per la sua seguace  
dispregia, poi ch’in altro pon la spene.  
(*Inf.* XI. 109–111)

(But because the usurer takes another way, he despises Nature and her follower and places his hopes in other.)



The usurer does not follow Nature, that is, the ways of mimetic art (“la sua seguace”), but places his hopes “in altro,” that is, in allegory (from “alleon”, other). When we read the stanza literally, it refers to how the usurer does not follow the natural ways of men who desire happiness but places his hopes in accumulating wealth. But when the lines are read poetically or allegorically, they refer to Dante the pilgrim in *Inf.* I who was hindered by the she-wolf in his desire to go up the Mount of Purgatory and who weeps and is saddened by his loss, just as the usurer does when he loses the wealth he has accumulated:

E qual è quei che volentieri acquista,  
e giugne ‘l tempo che perder lo face,  
che ‘n tutti suoi pensier piange e s’attrista.  
(*Inf.* I. 55–57.)

(And like one who willingly accumulates [wealth] and the time comes that he loses it all, he weeps and he is saddened.)

The episode is an allegory of Dante’s decision not to continue writing the *Convivio*, a prose work that deals with vices and virtues based on Aristotle’s *Ethics*, but to take another way, the way of allegory, which is the way of poets, as Ovid says of Orpheus who with his lyre tamed wild beasts and made trees and rocks move toward him, “lo savio uomo con lo strumento de la sua voce fa[r]ia mansuocere e umiliare li crudeli cuori, e fa[r]ia muovere a la sua voluntade coloro che non hanno vita di scienza e d’arte” (“the wise man with the instrument of his voice makes cruel hearts grow tender and humble and moves to his will those who do not devote their lives to knowledge and art”) (*Gv.* II. i.3.). This is Cacciaguida’s advice to Dante in *Par.* XVII. 121–142: to choose examples of famous people, “di fama note,” whose vices and virtues are not apparent (“ch’aia/ la sua radice incognita e ascosa”), and to be as harsh with them as he needs to be, in order to make his entire vision known: “Ma nondimen, rimossa ogni menzogna,/ tutta tua vision fa manifesta; / e lascia pur grattar dov’è la rogna.” For if at first they find his words offensive they will receive great benefit later: “Ché se la voce tua sarà molesta/ nel primo gusto, vital nodrimento/ lascerà poi, quando sarà/ digesta.” Dante’s new way to defeat greed is by exposing the evils that are related to it, or, allegorically, by chasing the “lupa,” or she-wolf, which is the symbol of greed, with the Veltrò, or Hound, to Hell from where she came:<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> For a reading of this episode see Verdicchio. Ch. 3.



Questi [the Veltro] la caccerà per ogni villa,  
fin che l'avrà rimessa ne lo 'nferno,  
là onde 'nvidia prima dipartilla.  
(*Inf.* 1. 109–111.)

(He shall hunt her through every city till he has sent her back to Hell whence envy first generated it.)

Virgil's speech of *Inf.* XI is a warning to readers not to take this episode, or those of the *Commedia*, literally or mimetically, the way we read a prose work like the *Convivio*, but poetically or allegorically. As the pilgrim is hindered by ambition from pursuing the Mount Purgatory, so we will be hindered in understanding the hidden meaning of Dante's allegories. For these reasons, "la tua Etica" and "la tua Fisica" cannot be said to refer to Aristotle's *Ethics* or *Physics* but to Dante who makes these works his own.

The "la tua Etica" and "la tua Fisica" are markers for how we should understand Aristotle's "poeticized" presence in the *Commedia*. A similar example is *Par.* XXVIII, the Heaven of the Primum Mobile, which according to Thomas Aquinas corresponds to Moral Philosophy, since the Primum Mobile governs all other heavens, like Moral Philosophy the other sciences: "secondo che Tommaso dice nell' Etica II che dà ordine alle altre scienze in tutte le loro parti" (*Cv.* II. xiv. 14). In the *Paradiso* this order changes, Aristotle is no longer the center of the Heavens, just as Moral Philosophy is no longer the Heaven that moves the other Sciences. In Aristotle's place, at the center, there is God from which everything originates and around whom all heavens rotate:

Non altrimenti il trionfo che lude  
sempre dintorno al punto che mi vinse,  
parendo *inchiuso da quel ch'elli 'nchiude*.  
(*Par.* XXX. 9–12, *italics mine*.)

(The triumph that always plays around the point overcame me, seeming enclosed by that which encloses.)

However, as commentators have indicated, Beatrice's explanation of the point as first mover is a paraphrase of the same notion in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.<sup>25</sup> While Aristotle is no longer there his works are.

If Aristotle is displaced as the Primum Mobile, Dante gives him a similar place in Limbo with other philosophers and pagans in a castle surrounded by

<sup>25</sup> See Singleton's commentary to *Par.* XXVIII in Alighieri 1973. 41–42 refers to Aquinas on this passage of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. XII, 7, 1072b.





seven walls and protected by a small river: “sette volte cerchiato d’alte mura, / difeso intorno d’un bel fiumicello” (*Inf.* IV. 107–108). The philosophers share with the other pagans their isolation from God, as Virgil says: “sanza speme vivemo in disio” (“without hope we live in desire”) (*Inf.* IV. 42). In Limbo Aristotle is portrayed with the other philosophers as one big family, but this family portrait is not idyllic. In the *Convivio*, Aristotle’s moral philosophy holds universal sway, is taught everywhere, and his doctrine “may almost be called universal opinion” because it is the only one that can lead mankind to happiness: “Per che vedere si può Aristotile essere additatore e conduttore de le genti a questo segno” (*Cv.* IV. vi. 16). The other pagan philosophers, instead, not only do not adhere to his philosophy, but Aristotle’s fame obscures theirs: not just the Stoics’ and Epicureans’, but also Socrates’s and Plato’s: “E però che la perfezione di questa moralitate per Aristotile terminate fue, lo nome de li Academici si spense” (“Since it was Aristotle who brought this moral doctrine to its final perfection, the name “Academics” was eclipsed”) (*Cv.* IV. vi. 16). While Aristotle had few friends among the philosophers, he himself was indifferent to anyone except his own philosophy: “Aristotile, d’altro amico non curando, contra lo suo migliore amico, fuori di quella, combatteo” (“Aristotle paying attention to no other friend, fought against his best friend Plato, except his own philosophy”) (*Cv.* III. xiv. 8). Between Aristotle and the other pagan philosophers there is hardly any friendly or intellectual rapport, as there is no relation between Moral philosophy and the other Sciences. The definition of Aristotle as “l maestro di color che sanno” is ironic since “those who know,” or believe that they know, do not acknowledge him as their “maestro, or he them. In the *Convivio*, Dante had envisioned a celestial Athens where Stoics and Peripatetics and Epicureans were united with Aristotle as one harmonious will. “Per le quali tre virtudi si sale a filosofare a quelle Atene celestiali, dove gli Stoici e Peripatetici e Epicurii, per la l[u]ce de la veritate eterna, in uno volere concordevolmente concorrono” (*Cv.* III. xiv. 15). In the Athens in Limbo, Aristotle and the other philosophers are together but are not united in a single will. They are a dysfunctional family, and not a very happy one.

Dante did not share Dante da Maiano or Guittone D’Arezzo’s view that pagan philosophers “followed virtue, for a righteous life,” as Barolini suggests (see note 2). On the contrary, their place in Limbo is a punishment because, as Beatrice says in *Par.* XXIX, they chose to follow their own way rather than follow Aristotle’s who alone is “degnissimo di fede e d’obediensa” (“entirely worthy of being trusted and obeyed”) (*Cv.* IV. vi. 5).



Voi non andate giù per un sentiero  
filosofando; tanto vi trasporta  
l'amor de l'apparenza e 'l suo pensiero!  
(*Par.* XXIX. 85–87.)

(You do not go along one path philosophizing; so much is the love of appearances and their thoughts that carry you away!)

These philosophers are motivated by self-love and ambition, believing in appearances which they take for the truth. When the pilgrim lifts his brow and sees Aristotle surrounded by the other philosophers admiring him and honoring him, the gesture is an ironic commentary on ancient philosophy and pagan philosophers:

Poi ch'innalzai un poco più le ciglia,  
vidi 'l maestro di color che sanno  
seder tra filosofica famiglia.  
Tutti lo miran, tutti onor li fanno.  
(*Inf.* IV. 130–133.)

(When I raised my eyes a little higher, I saw the Master of those who know, seated in a philosophic family. They all admire him and honor him.)  
This is Dante's 'contrapasso' of Aristotle and of his fellow pagan philosophers.

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Dante's philosophy is not Aristotle's, it is a practical philosophy of life based on the teachings of Boethius and Cicero whom he credits for introducing him to philosophy, and calls them "movers" ("movitori"): "li quali con la dolcezza di loro sermone inviarono me, ne lo amore, cioè ne lo studio, di questa donna gentilissima Filosofia" ("who through the sweetness of their writings, guided me on the path of love, that is, the study of this most gentle lady Philosophy") (*Cv.* II. xv. 1). They were instrumental (with Pythagora) in making Dante fall in love with the "donna gentile" whom Boethius first introduced as consolation after the death of Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*. "dico e affermo che la donna di cu'io innamorai appresso lo primo amore (Beatrice) fu la Bellissima e onestissima figlia de lo Imperadore de lo universo, a la quale Pittagora pose nome Filosofia" (*Cv.* II. xv. 12). For Dante philosophy is philo-sophia, that is, "amistanza a Sapienza," love of wisdom: "Filosofia non è altro che amistanza a Sapienza, o vero a sapere; onde in alcun modo si può dire catuno filosofo secondo lo naturale amore che in ciascuno genera lo desiderio di sapere" ("philosophy is nothing other than love of wisdom or knowledge; consequently in a certain sense everyone can be called a philosopher, on account of the natural love which is generated in everyone



by their desire to know" (*Cv.* III. xi. 6–7). This is not the love of knowledge of Ulysses, which is fraudulent and serves to further his ambitions, or of the pilgrim who wants to head to Mount of Purgatory directly. It is the love that enables one not only to live virtuously but also to choose reason over passion and self-interest.

In the *Commedia*, the figure of Dante's philosophy is the "donna gentile" who replaces Aristotle as the figure of reason, as she is defined in the *Convivio*: "Per donna gentile s'intende la nobile anima d'ingegno, e libera ne la sua propria potestate, che è la ragione." ("By donna gentile is meant an intellectual soul both noble and free in the exercise of its own power, which is reason." (*Cv.* III. xiv. 9) In *Inf.* II, she is called "movitore." together with Lucy the light of reason, who moves Beatrice and Virgil to help Dante on his journey. Aristotle, however, is not too far behind, as in "la tua Etica" and "la tua Fisica," or in Dante's reflections on greed and power throughout the poem.

In the *Convivio* Dante believed that by simply "mirando la Sapienza ogni vizio tornerà diritto e buono" ("by gazing on Wisdom every vice will be made right and good") (*Cv.* III. xv. 15). In the *Commedia* Dante is no longer so optimistic or willing to explain the meaning of his allegories. In reading the allegories of the *Commedia* we do not have the benefit of the bread of Dante's commentary to help us discover the truth hidden beneath his beautiful fictions. In this paper, to determine the impact of Aristotle's philosophy on Dante's writings, I have tried to distinguish the Aristotle before the *Convivio* and after. Before, Aristotle is the authority by which means Dante teaches man's final goal of happiness and virtue. After, the "donna gentile" takes over the role of Aristotle as Dante's poetic wisdom to represent examples of virtue and vice for the benefit of those readers who can uncover the meaning concealed in his allegories. Before and After mark the time which elapses between the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*, between philosophical prose and poetry, the literal and the allegorical.

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GÁBOR BORBÉLY

## United with the Soul, Separated from the Organs: Dante and Aquinas (Purgatorio Canto XXV, 61–66.)

Ma come d'animal divegna fante,  
non vedi tu ancor: quest' è tal punto,  
che più savio di te fé già errante,  
sì che per sua dottrina fé disgiunto  
da l'anima il possibile intelletto,  
perché da lui non vide organo assunto.  
(*Purgatorio* Canto XXV. 61–66.)

Everyone seems to agree that the wise man referred to by Dante in line 63 of *Purgatorio* Canto XXV is Averroes.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, by virtue of this identification, it is generally taken for granted that the error preventing us, at least in Dante's view, from giving a correct description of the origin and nature of the intellective soul is *the* error of Averroes, i. e. the claim that the possible intellect is one for all men.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Or, at least, the principal target is Averroes. Dante might also have hinted at Guido Cavalcanti in line 63 (Inglese 2016. 306, notes to line 63). See further Falzone 2018 and footnote 3 below.

<sup>2</sup> See e. g. Di Siena 1886. 289; Cornoldi 1887. 486–487; Poletto 1894. 568; Mandonnet 1911. 302; Scartazzini 1920. 556.; Torraca 1921. 544–545; Sapegno 1957. 681; Scott 1963. 216; Casini – Barbi – Momigliano 1973. 572; Boyde 1981. 277–278; Cervigni 1993. 373; Marenbon 2001. 370; Martínez 2008. 284; Chimenz 2013. 632; Porro 2013. 253; Chiavacci Leonardi 2014. Note al Canto XXV. 62–66; Bianchi 2015. 78; Inglese 2016. 306–307; Falzone 2018. 278. In contrast, for an identification of the wise man's error in accordance with Dante's own words, without further reference to the thesis of the unity of the possible intellect, see e. g. Palmieri 1899. 343–344; Busnelli 1922. 227–230 and Falzone 754–758. The thesis of the unity of the possible intellect (hence abbreviated as TUI) has been attributed to Averroes since the 1250s (see Gauthier 1984. 221\*–222\*). It is hard to say, however, when TUI began to emerge as the error par excellence of Averroes. A few 14th century manuscripts refer to Aquinas's *De unitate intellectus* as a treatise targeting only one error, quite likely this specific error; see Thomas Aquinas 1976. 251–255. Or see e. g. the biography of Aquinas by William of Tocco (*Ystoria sancti Thome de Aquino*): “Quarum heresum prima fuit error Averrois, qui dixit unum esse in omnibus hominibus intellectum” (Le Brun-Gouanvic 1996. 136).

Certainly, Dante's exact and specific reference to *the possible intellect* as what is being separated from the human soul appears to be a strong indicator that the wise man who is in error can be identified as Averroes.<sup>3</sup>

As for the error, however, that Dante attributes to him, I think we need to be more cautious, for at least two reasons.

Firstly, because the thesis of the unity of the possible intellect seems to be completely irrelevant both to what precedes lines 61–66 and to what follows them in Canto XXV. Shades, whatever their internal constitution may be, appear in Dante's *Commedia* as singular entities.<sup>4</sup> The issue that preoccupies Dante in *Purgatorio* Canto XXV is clearly not how it is possible that shadows are numerically distinct, but rather how they can have bodily characteristics at all: "How can one grow lean where there is never need for nourishment?"<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, because Dante is specific enough by saying that this wise man's error is separating the possible intellect from the human soul.<sup>6</sup> I think we are safe to assume that Dante would have been able to articulate his different view, had he intended to refer to the error of the unity of the intellect. The key idea would seem far too obvious: this wise man is unable to account for the nature and origin of the individual human intellective soul, because he thinks that there is no such thing as an individual human intellective soul.

Instead, Dante unmistakably declares that the error of the wise man is that the possible intellect is separate from the human soul. Furthermore, he suggests that the source of his error is that the wise man did not find a proper organ for it.

<sup>3</sup> There is an obvious terminological difference between Averroes and Dante given that the former used the expression "material intellect" in his *Long Commentary on the De anima of Aristotle* ("intellectus materialis", see the Latin version by Michael Scot in Averroes 1953, passim; see also the English translation of Michael Scot's Latin rendering: Averroes 2009, passim). Nevertheless, since the phrase "intellectus possibilis" became dominant in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (in accordance with the 12th-century translation of Aristotle's *De anima* 429a21–22 by James of Venice and its revision by Guillelmus de Moerbeke: "Quare neque ipsius esse naturam neque unam, set aut hanc quod possibilis", and with the translation by Michael Scot: "Et sic non habebit naturam nisi istam, scilicet quod est possibilis"; see Thomas Aquinas 1984, 201 and Averroes 1953, 387) and the two expressions were clearly regarded as synonyms by the second half of the century (see e. g. William of Baglione in Brady 1970, 38; Siger de Brabant 1972a, 37 and 40; Thomas Aquinas 1976, 291,10–11), one can readily assume that Dante indicates Averroes as the wise man in line 63. It was also raised that the phrase "più savio di te" could refer to Aristotle (see e. g. Toynbee 1898, 48, with a failed allusion to "intellectus agens" and Torraca 1921, 544, who nevertheless hints at the "extreme consequences" drawn from Aristotle's theory by Averroes), but this hypothesis was convincingly rejected by Busnelli (Busnelli 1922, 228). For the use of the term "intellect" in Dante, see Scott 1963.

<sup>4</sup> On the concept of shade ("ombra") in Dante, see Gilson 1967; Gragnolati 2003, 200–203; Porro 2013; Falzone 2014.

<sup>5</sup> *Purg.* XXV, 20–21. Translated by Allen Mandelbaum.

<sup>6</sup> "Separated" ("disgiunto") in "per sua dottrina fé disgiunto / da l'anima il possibile intelletto" can be understood in two ways: (1) the possible intellect is separated from the human soul in its being and (2) the possible intellect is separated from the human soul in its operation. It seems obvious that Dante meant the former when he referred to the wise man's teaching. The second claim represents Aquinas's approach, see footnote 43 below.



Dante's aim is to replace the wise man's false teaching as it is indicated in lines 64–66 with the true narrative of Statius (67–78). Right before the concluding lines (73–75) Statius declares that the human soul that “vive e sente e sé in sé rigira” is substantially one, in clear contradiction to what the wise man teaches by separating the functional unit of the intellective part of the soul from the organic body along with its vegetative, motive and sensitive functions.<sup>7</sup> Again, there is no reference whatsoever to the thesis of the unity of the intellect. As a matter of fact, Dante's words indicate that he seems unequivocally committed to the principle that a human being is not a being per accidens.<sup>8</sup>

Why is it just Averroes and not another of the many substance dualists who lived before and during Dante's time who threatens the substantial unity of the human being by separating the intellect from the human soul in Canto XXV? Why is it that it is not the unity of the possible intellect, but another aspect of Averroes's doctrine that is being referred to by Dante as his cardinal error, thus confounding later commentators of Canto XXV?

Dante's choice to select Averroes as a representative substance dualist seems a reliable indicator that the primary source of Statius's narrative in lines 61–66 is Thomas Aquinas.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it was Aquinas who masterfully and influentially connected Averroes's position and Plato's substance dualism throughout his œuvre. Certainly, Aquinas emphasized that Averroes did not invent a new theory “concerning the union of the intellectual soul with the body”, but rather “discovered an additional reason for holding that the intellectual soul cannot be united to the body as its form.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, as a consequence, Aquinas inves-

<sup>7</sup> For the development of these functions, see lines 52–57. Dante uses a well-known and widely used phrase from Aristotle's *De anima* II. 2 (414a12): “anima autem hoc quo uiuimus et sentimus et mouemur et intelligimus primum”; see Thomas Aquinas. 1984. 82.

<sup>8</sup> See also *Purg.* IV. 5–6: “e quest'è contra quello error che crede / ch'un anima sovr'altra in noi s'accenda.”

<sup>9</sup> As is well known, Bruno Nardi made serious efforts to show that Dante deviated the most from Aquinas regarding the origin of the intellective soul. See e. g. Nardi 1912. 82, and Nardi 1960. 54, where he notes that regarding “the most delicate matter” of the formation of the intellective soul Dante was at least as far away from Aquinas as from Averroes in *Purgatorio* Canto XXV. (“Dante dissente dall'uno come dall'altro”; “È nella soluzione di questa difficile problema che Dante si scosta di nuovo da san Tommaso non meno che da Averroè”). I have no intention of measuring the imaginary distance of Dante from Aquinas or whoever else. I would just like to point out that the way Aquinas and Dante represent the error of Averroes displays a structural isomorphy which is specific enough to let us conclude that in this crucial respect Dante – directly or through intermediaries – followed Aquinas. For Nardi's efforts to demolish the idea of Dante as a faithful Thomist, see further Moevs 2005. 109 and Lenzi 2010. For the sake of simplicity, in what follows I will call any theory that denies the possibility of an immediate, substantial connection between the intellective soul and the body “substance dualism”.

<sup>10</sup> See *Summa contra Gentiles* (abbreviated as SCG throughout the paper) 2.59: “Fuerunt autem et alii alia adinventione utentes in sustinendo quod substantia intellectualis non possit uniri corpori ut forma. Dicunt enim quod intellectus, etiam quem Aristoteles possibilem vocat, est quaedam substantia separata non coniuncta nobis ut forma.” (See Thomas Aquinas.

tigated substance dualism and TUI as two distinct, albeit closely related issues when discussing Averroes's theory of soul in his influential anti-Averroist work, the *De unitate intellectus*.<sup>11</sup> The significance of the issue of substance dualism for Aquinas is clearly indicated by the fact that about two third of *De unitate intellectus* – in contrast to what its most commonly used title suggests – concerns Averroes's claim that “the possible intellect” (...) “is a substance separate in its being from the body and not united to it in some way as its form” and only the last two chapters are devoted to the refutation of the thesis that the possible intellect is one for all men.<sup>12</sup> Aquinas was deeply convinced that not only the thesis of the

1918. 406 and 414; English translation: Thomas Aquinas 1956, 168 and 177). Although Aquinas does not name Averroes in this passage and uses both plural and singular references in the text (e. g. “alii”, “eiusdem”) the arguments that follow clearly show that Aquinas's primary target was Averroes in SCG 2. 59. See also the closing reference: “Now, for these reasons Averroes was moved, and, as he himself says, some of the ancients, to hold that the possible intellect, by which the soul understands, has a separate existence from the body, and is not the form of the body.” (Thomas Aquinas 1956, 178). Note that plural references in medieval Latin often indicate individuals.

<sup>11</sup> As is clear from the first lines of the work: “Inoleuit siquidem iam dudum circa intellectum error apud multos, ex dictis Auerrois sumens originem, qui asserere nititur intellectum quem Aristoteles possibilem uocat, ipse autem inconuenienti nomine materialem, esse quandam substantiam secundum esse a corpore separatam, nec aliquo modo uniri ei ut forma; et ulterius quod iste intellectus possibilis sit unus omnium hominum.” (Thomas Aquinas 1976. 291,7–15). Note, especially, the connective phrase Aquinas uses: “et ulterius”. For the titles, incipits and explicits of the work in the manuscript tradition see, Thomas Aquinas 1976. 251–255. Both “errores” and “error” are used with reference to Averroes's claim(s) discussed and refuted by Aquinas.

<sup>12</sup> Chapters I–III: 1426 lines, Chapters IV–V: 705 lines in the Leonina-edition (see Thomas Aquinas 1976. 291–314). It is important to emphasize that at least three more assumptions must be met to obtain TUI from the premise that “the possible intellect” (...) “is a substance separate in its being from the body and not united to it in some way as its form”. (1) Individuals are instances of (not necessarily subsistent) universals; (2) the principle of individuation is matter; (3) there is no such thing as spiritual matter. Although Aquinas accepts all three assumptions, he still denies that the possible intellect is separate from the body in its being and, consequently, that it is separate in its being from the rest of the soul. In Aquinas's view, Aristotle's reference to the separation of the possible intellect in his *De anima* III, 4 (429b5) means that the intellect does not have a corporeal organ whereas the sense power has. In other words, the intellect is separated only in its immaterial operation (thinking), but not in its being, as it is a power or part of the human soul which is the substantial form of the body. See Aristotle's *De anima* III, 4 429b4–5: “sensituum quidem enim non sine corpore est, hic autem separatus est” (Thomas Aquinas 1984. 201) and Aquinas's commentary to this passage (Thomas Aquinas 1984. 206–207). See further Aquinas's remark in his *De unitate intellectus* (no. 25–26) pointing out that an incorrect interpretation of the word “separate” was being used by Averroes and his followers in support of their “error” that “the intellect is neither the soul nor a part of the soul, but some separate substance” (see Keeler 1936. 17–18, no. 25–26; Thomas Aquinas 1976. 296,450–468; Zedler 1968. 33). For those who can read Hungarian see my translation of the *De unitate intellectus* with commentaries: Thomas Aquinas 1993. 45–46. For an Italian translation see Nardi 1938. 115.





unity of the intellect, but any denial of the substantial unity of the human being has immediate and absurd consequences.<sup>13</sup>

With his unique, balanced and relatively easy to follow approach, which delineates the relationship between substance dualism and TUI in relation to the main tenets of Averroes's philosophy of soul (i. e. basically his Aristotle-interpretation),<sup>14</sup> Aquinas clearly stands out among his contemporaries when he writes the *De unitate intellectus*.<sup>15</sup>

To get an impression of how original Aquinas was in this respect, let us compare his position with two representative approaches from before 1270 with a focus on the relationship between substance dualism and the main tenets of Averroes's theory of soul, especially his notorious "error", the TUI.

(1) Some of Aquinas's contemporaries regarded the claim that the intellectual soul is a subsistent being ("hoc aliquid") as what provides us with protection from any attempt to prove the thesis of the unity of the intellect. On their account, the intellectual soul is individuated by spiritual matter and is being related to the body as its mover and ultimate perfection.<sup>16</sup> At least one Franciscan theologian, William of Baglione even argues that Aquinas's theory – the intellectual soul is the only substantial form of the body – might lead to the TUI

<sup>13</sup> See e. g. his remark concerning some basic matters of human life and death: "If, therefore, the intellect does not belong to this man in such a way that it is truly one with him, but is united to him only through phantasms or as a mover, the will will not be in this man, but in the separate intellect. And so this man will not be the master of his act, nor will any act of his be praiseworthy or blameworthy. This is to destroy the principles of moral philosophy. Since this is absurd and is contrary to human life (for it would not be necessary to take counsel or make laws), it follows that the intellect is united to us in such a way that it and we constitute what is truly one being. This surely can be only in the way in which it has been explained, that is, that the intellect is a power of the soul which is united to us as form. It remains, therefore, that this must be held without any doubt, not on account of the revelation of faith, as they say, but because to deny this is to strive against what is clearly apparent." (*De unitate intellectus* 3. no. 82; Thomas Aquinas 1976. 306,347–363; Zedler 1968. 57). "Furthermore, if a soul were in its body as a sailor is in a ship, it would follow that the union of soul and body is accidental. Consequently death, which signifies the separation of soul and body, would not be a substantial corruption, and this is obviously false." *Quaestiones disputatae De anima*, q. 1. (Thomas Aquinas 1996. 9,281–286; Robb 1984. 47).

<sup>14</sup> Aquinas is reluctant to consider Averroes's theory of soul as a possible interpretation of Aristotle's *De anima*, because he is convinced that Averroes's theory contradicts Aristotle's doctrine. See e. g. SCG 2. 61: "Sed quia huic positioni Averroes praestare robur auctoritatis nititur propter hoc quod dicit Aristotelem ita sensisse, ostendemus manifeste quod praedicta opinio est contra sententiam Aristotelis." "Averroes, however, attempts to strengthen his position by appealing to authority, saying, therefore, that Aristotle was of the same opinion. We shall, then, show clearly that Averroes's doctrine is contrary to that of Aristotle." (Thomas Aquinas 1918. 428; Thomas Aquinas 1956. 191). See also SCG 2.70.

<sup>15</sup> The *De unitate intellectus* had been written most probably in 1270, before 10 December when Stephanus Tempier's condemnation was issued (see Keeler 1936. XX–XXI; Thomas Aquinas 1976. 248–249; Torrell 1996, 348).

<sup>16</sup> This kind of approach was widespread in the 1260s. In B. Carlos Bazán's apt words, this "eclectic anthropological dualism" was "hold by almost all Latin thinkers." See Bazán 2005. 603.

as we know it from Averroes's work.<sup>17</sup> William thinks that the propositions "the rational soul is not a *hoc aliquid*" and "the rational soul is not the first perfection of the human body" strictly imply each other, therefore it is not possible to hold one of these propositions true and the other false without committing further errors.<sup>18</sup> In William's view, if someone denies that the rational soul is a *hoc aliquid*, and at the same time admits that it is the perfection of the human body (as he thinks Aquinas does),<sup>19</sup> then from his position it follows either that the soul perishes with the corruption of the body, or that it will not be an individual being if it survives. In William's view, this latter claim is based on the premise that the rational soul is a substantial form individuated by corporeal matter, therefore all those who maintain that the principle of individuation is matter are inclined towards the TUI, "the most pernicious error" of Averroes.<sup>20</sup> William also mentions

<sup>17</sup> On William of Baglione, see Brady 1970 with an edition of some of his questions from 1266–1267. See further Bianchi 1984; Dales 1995. 120–126; Bazán 2005. 602–603. As for spiritual matter, John Peckham remarks that the immateriality of the possible intellect is the fundamentum of the TUI. See Johannes Peckham 1918. 49.

<sup>18</sup> "Contrarium autem ponentes, quod scilicet anima rationalis non est hoc aliquid, et quod non est prima perfectio humani corporis, et sic non est prima perfectio hominis, favent illi perniciosissimo errori Commentatoris de unitate intellectus. Ista enim duo principalia sunt fundamentum illius erroris, sicut manifestissimum est inspicienti et legenti verba Averrois in illo passu. Propter quod isti errores consequuntur se, quamvis aliqui velint unum defendere sine alio." Brady 1970. 33. See also Bianchi 1984. 507; Dales 1995. 124.

<sup>19</sup> In this regard, William seems to misrepresent Aquinas's thought. As far as the teaching of faith is concerned, Aquinas certainly was in tight agreement with most of his Western contemporaries, philosophers and theologians alike. See e. g. In Sent II.19.1.1 co.: "Quarta positio est quam fides nostra tenet, quod anima intellectiva sit substantia non dependens ex corpore, et quod sint plures intellectivae substantiae secundum corporum multitudinem, et quod, destructis corporibus, remanent separatae, non in alia corpora transeunt; sed in resurrectione idem corpus numero quod deposuerat unaquaeque assumat." "The fourth position is that which our faith holds that the intellective soul is a substance that does not depend on the body, that there is more than one intellective substance corresponding to the multitude of bodies, and that they remain separate when bodies are destroyed, not passing into other bodies. Rather, in the resurrection each soul assumes the same body numerically that it had laid aside." (English translation is from <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Sent.II.D19.Q1.A1.C.4>.) Furthermore, Aquinas – by means of the principle that "everything acts in accordance with its being" (unumquodque agit secundum quod est ens) – concludes from the immaterial, organ-less operation of the intellect that the it does not depend in its being on the body. However, since the only way available for the intellective soul to acquire immaterial knowledge is to abstract intelligible species from the representations of singular, material objects, the intellect cannot be complete in its species („completum in specie") i. e. it cannot act in full accordance with its own immaterial nature, since it does not actually possess all those things that are required for such type of activity. Therefore, in Aquinas's view, "although a soul could subsist per se, it does not possess a complete nature, but its body is joined to it to complete its nature." See Quaestiones disputatae de anima q.1. (Thomas Aquinas 1996. 3–12). For the English translation, see Robb 1984. 42–51.

<sup>20</sup> A similar objection was raised by the Franciscan William of Mare against Aquinas in the so-called Correctorium-controversy around 1280. In an attempt to refute William's claim, one of Aquinas's defenders (probably Richard Knapwell) indignantly remarks that "illum autem errorem Averrois de unitate intellectus possibilis destruit Thomas effective in tractatu de intellectu contra eundem; unde non fuit curiale errorem sibi imponere in hac parte." See Glo-

Averroes's famous remark on Aristotle's general definition of the soul<sup>21</sup> but it is not at all clear on what ground calls the homonymy of the term "soul" a "non-sense" ("deliramentum").<sup>22</sup> As a matter of fact, when William says that the rational soul is in the genus of incorporeal substances "as an individual substance and a hoc aliquid" but it is in a different genus "as a perfection which is a part of the human being", he creates a textbook example of a homonymous term.<sup>23</sup>

Be that as it may, although Averroes appears here as the prominent representative of the TUI,<sup>24</sup> in William's and probably some other like-minded authors' view substance dualism protects us from the harmful consequences of the principles of Aquinas's theory of soul, with the TUI among them.<sup>25</sup>

(2) Albert the Great, of whom Aquinas was a disciple between 1245 and 1252 and a secretary for years,<sup>26</sup> was one of the first theologians who attributed the error that there existed only one intellective soul to Averroes.<sup>27</sup> Albert, however, often limited the scope of Averroes's claim to the soul that survives the death of the individuals and did not attribute this error to the Commentator exclusively. For example, in his *De unitate intellectus* (probably around 1263),<sup>28</sup> out of the thirty philosophical arguments that Albert gathers or invents himself against the immortality of the individual intellective soul, only four can be identified as Averroes's own.<sup>29</sup> As a general rule, Averroes does not appear as the only or most salient defender of the thesis of the unity of the intellect, not even outside of the context of survival of the individual human soul.<sup>30</sup>

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rieux 1927. 47. On this point, see also Bianchi 1984. 517–518. In addition, another early defender of Aquinas, Thomas of Sutton argues that the thesis of the plurality of forms "directly entails" the error of Averroes that "the intellect is a separate substance". See Klima 2001. 438.

<sup>21</sup> See Averroes's commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* II, 1 (412b4–5): Aristotle "induxit hunc sermonem in forma dubitationis, cum dixit: *Si igitur dicendum est*, excusando se a dubitatione accidente in partibus istius diffinitionis. Perfectio enim in anima rationali et in aliis virtutibus anime fere dicitur pura equivocatione (...)." Averroes 1953. 138. See also Averroes 1953. 397 and 405.

<sup>22</sup> "(...) vere et proprie communicat ei diffinitio illa animae quam assignat Philosophus in secundo *De anima*, non aequivoce secundum deliramentum Commentatoris." Brady 1970. 33.

<sup>23</sup> "Ad illud quod obicitur de distinctione praedicamenti, dici potest quod anima rationalis ut est substantia individua et hoc aliquid est in genere substantiae incorporeae. Ut autem est perfectio talis quae est pars hominis, est in alio genere in quo est suum totum." Brady 1970. 26.

<sup>24</sup> See also the question on the unity of the intellect ("utrum in omnibus hominibus sit intellectus unus numero"): "Fuit autem circa hoc error illius Commentatoris, qui posuit unum intellectum numero in omnibus hominibus." Brady 1970. 38.

<sup>25</sup> See, again, John Peckham's remark cited in footnote 17.

<sup>26</sup> See Torrell 1996. 18–35.

<sup>27</sup> See R.-A. Gauthier's introduction to the critical edition of Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*: Gauthier 1984. \*221.

<sup>28</sup> Albertus Magnus 1975. IX–X.

<sup>29</sup> At the same time, Averroes's *De anima*-commentary seems to be one of Albert's most important doxographical sources.

<sup>30</sup> See e. g. Albert's *De anima* commentary on Averroes: "Iste autem propter superius inductas rationes, sicut fere omnes alii concedunt unicum possibilem esse intellectum in om-

Furthermore, Albert never connects Averroes's position with Plato's substance dualism in his *De unitate intellectus*. On the contrary, criticizing Plato's theory of the three souls Albert refers to the critique of Plato by Averroes<sup>31</sup> whom he considers a leading Peripatetic philosopher.<sup>32</sup> Although it is clear from Albert's treatise that – in Averroes's view – the possible intellect is a separate and eternal entity,<sup>33</sup> it is a particularly striking feature of the text that Albert – in a *reductio ad absurdum* style argument – claims that no one regards the intellect as separate from the soul.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in his *De anima* commentary written a few years earlier,<sup>35</sup> Albert emphasizes that whereas Plato “separated the intellective soul from the sensitive, motive and vegetative soul” in respect of place and subject, the Peripatetics “did not bother to talk about separation in this way for they were convinced that the soul was substantially one and diversified only according to the powers in it.”<sup>36</sup>

In sum, although Averroes appears as a defender (and, in some cases, as the most salient defender) of the thesis of the TUI, nowhere is he consistently portrayed as a philosopher who reinforced the flawed substance dualism by separating the intellect from those parts of the soul that perform bodily functions.

Connecting substance dualism and TUI in a sweeping critique of Averroes's philosophy by emphasizing the deep structural connection between them: this is, as I have already mentioned, a theoretical contribution by Aquinas.<sup>37</sup>

nibus hominibus (...).” Albertus Magnus, *De anima* Lib. 3, Tract. 2, Cap. 7. See Albertus Magnus. 1968. 186.

<sup>31</sup> Albertus Magnus 1975. 16.

<sup>32</sup> See e. g. “In hac autem sententia nobiscum conveniunt et Averroes et Avicenna et plures alii Peripateticorum.” *De anima* Lib. 3, Tract. 2, Cap. 12. See Albertus Magnus 1968. 194.

<sup>33</sup> See Albertus Magnus 1975. 12.

<sup>34</sup> “Vigesima quinta ratio est fundata super hoc quod secundum dictum istorum sequitur, quod anima rationalis non sit anima, sed substantia separata. Sive enim accipiamus diffinitionem animae, quae est sicut conclusio, sive illam quae est sicut demonstratio positione differens, semper hoc sequitur, quod separatum secundum substantiam et esse nec est entelechia corporis organici potentia vitam habentis, nec est causa et principium huius vitae, quia separatum non tangit, et si non tangit, non agit neque operatur nec est causa operationis; igitur non est anima; quod autem est, id omnes confitentur.” (Albertus Magnus 1975. 19). For this point, see also Salman 1935. 44. On the other hand, Albert says that “et haec ratio supponit, quod intellectus non sit pars animae, quod fere supponunt omnes Arabes, qui huius erroris primi sunt inventores.” (Albertus Magnus 1975. 8,16–18). This seems to imply that Averroes is not alone when he thinks that the intellect is not a part of the soul (although, in Albert's view, he may even represent an exception to the rule due to the adverb “fere”), but – above all – adequately shows the low level of consistency that is characteristic of Albert's work.

<sup>35</sup> Albertus Magnus 1968. V.

<sup>36</sup> *De anima* Lib. 3, Tract. 2, Cap. 3. See Albertus Magnus 1968. 180.

<sup>37</sup> The – possibly Pseudo – Aegidius Romanus in his *Errores philosophorum* regards substance dualism as a consequence of TUI. See Giles of Rome 1944. 22. (Ch. IV, 10–12). The *Errores philosophorum* was certainly written later than Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles* that was finished before September 1265 (Gauthier 1993. 10–18; 22; 122; 173 and 179; Torrell 1996. 101–104). The text was dated by Josef Koch between 1268 and 1273/74 and by Silvia Donati and Concetta Luna later than 1270/71, which strengthens the likelihood that it is



Right after linking Averroes to Plato's substance dualism at the beginning of SCG 2. 59, Aquinas remarks that Averroes attempts to confirm his position by having recourse to what Aristotle famously says about the intellect's characteristics in *De anima* III. 4: "separate, not mixed with the body, simple, impassible". In Averroes's view these are "things that could not be said of the intellect if it were the body's form."<sup>38</sup>

Aquinas then presents a proof that draws upon a "demonstration by which Aristotle shows that, since the possible intellect receives all the species of sensible things through being in potentiality to them, it must be devoid of them all." What Aquinas refers here is a crucial premise of Aristotle's demonstration that the intellect cannot have a bodily organ. In a brief and scholasticism-friendly form the argument runs like this. The intellect must be potential, i. e. devoid of all things to be able to understand them. Should the intellect be mixed with the body as it is the case with the power of perception and the sense-organs, it would possess some quality that would prevent it from exercising its proper operation, understanding all things. But the intellect understands all things. Therefore, it is not mixed with the body and does not have an organ of its own: it is separate.<sup>39</sup>

Averroes's first argument for substance dualism in SCG 2. 59, as Aquinas presents it, reconstitutes Aristotle's proof, but with a noticeable ontological spin. For Averroes (again, as Aquinas presents his reasoning) does not only argue that the possible intellect cannot have an organ to be able to understand everything, but also argues that it cannot be the form of the body, and therefore it must be separated in its being from the body.<sup>40</sup> Put differently, he argues that not only would it prevent the intellect from understanding all things if it were mixed with the body in its operation, but also if it were "a form of some body", since every material form "must share something of the nature of which it is the form". Consequently, the possible intellect must be ontologically separated from the body, as it cannot be "the act or form of a body."<sup>41</sup> Since, however, Aristotle's general

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even later than Aquinas's *De unitate intellectus*. For the authorship and the date of the *Errorēs philosophorum*, see the *Introduction* by Josef Koch in Giles of Rome 1944. esp. xxix–xl, and lv–lix. For some doubts about the authorship and the date, see Donati 1990. 28–30 and Luna 1990. 165–166.

<sup>38</sup> SCG 2.59. Thomas Aquinas 1918. 414; Thomas Aquinas 1956. 177.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *De anima* III, 4 (429a12–429b5).

<sup>40</sup> See Averroes 1953. 385–386. and the footnote 20 above. For similar arguments in contemporary arts masters' works, see e. g. Siger of Brabant, *De anima intellectiva* Ch. III, (Siger de Brabant 1972a. 78); *Super Librum de causis*, q. 26: "In operatione formae et perfectionis materiae materia communicat, et sic in eius operatione habet organum. Intellectus autem in operatione sua non habet organum, ut dicitur tertio *De anima*. Ergo nec erit forma et perfectio materiae corporalis." (Siger de Brabant 1972b. 103), the "Anonymous of Giele" (Ignoti Auctoris *Quaestiones in Aristotelis libros I et II De anima*; see Giele 1971. 68–69).

<sup>41</sup> SCG 2. 59. See Thomas Aquinas. 1918. 414; Thomas Aquinas 1956. 177–178. See also SCG 2. 69. For further parallel texts in Aquinas: *Quaestiones disputatae de anima* q. 1. and q. 2; In Sent II.1.2.4; In Sent II.17.2.1; *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* 3.9 and 3.11; *Summa theolo-*

definition of the soul is “the first actuality of the organic body”, (i. e. “the act or form of a body”), it follows that the possible intellect is not the soul nor a part of the soul, except homonymously.<sup>42</sup>

How could this argument be refuted by someone who, like Aquinas, regards *De anima* III.4 as a correct analysis of the nature of possible intellect, but at the same time rejects all forms of substance dualism? Furthermore, since the argument for the separation of the possible intellect relies on a specific reading of Aristotle’s *De anima*, is it possible to provide a rival interpretation of the possible intellect’s nature and operation based on Aristotle general definition of the soul?

Aquinas also thinks that “not to be mixed with body” in Aristotle means that intellect does not have an organ, in opposition to the senses that do. An appropriate indicator of the organless nature of the intellect is that it is impassible, i. e. whereas the senses are “injured by an excessively intense sensible”, the intellect is not affected by its object in a similar way. In Aquinas’s view, Aristotle’s reference to the intellect’s impassibility shows that its organlessness has nothing to do with its status as a subsistent being. Quite the contrary, organlessness means only that the possible intellect is not connected in its operation to the organs of the body as the senses do. Similarly, Aristotle’s claim that the intellect is “separate” does not entail that it is separated in its being from the body, but only that it is separated from the other powers of the soul in so far as it does not need an organ to operate whereas the other powers do.<sup>43</sup>

*giae* 1a.75.2; 1a.76.1; *De spiritualibus creaturis* q. 2; *Sentencia libri De anima: De anima* II, lectio 4; *De anima* III, lectio 7; *De unitate intellectus* 3.

<sup>42</sup> On the general definition of the soul, see Aristotle’s *De anima* II. 1, 412b 4–5: “Hence, if it is necessary to say something which is common to every soul, it would be that the soul is the first actuality of an organic natural body.” (Aristotle 2016. 23). James of Venice: “Si autem aliquod commune in omni anima oportet dicere, erit utique actus primus corporis phisici organici” (see Thomas Aquinas 1984. 67); Michael Scot: “Si igitur aliquod universale dicendum est in omni anima, dicemus quod est prima perfectio corporis naturalis organici.” (See Averroes 1953. 138). See further Aquinas’s *De unitate intellectus* Ch. 3. no. 63: “Averroes held that the principle (...) that is called the possible intellect, is not the soul nor a part of the soul, except equivocally, but rather that it is a separate substance.” (Zedler 1968. 49). See further Averroes on the speculative intellect: “sermo de eo est ita quod sit extra istam naturam; existimatur enim quod non est anima neque pars anime” (Averroes 1953. 178; see also Averroes 1953. 160). See, again, Albertus Magnus who attributes this claim to the Arabs, and not specifically to Averroes: “intellectus non sit pars animae, quod fere supponunt omnes Arabes, qui huius erroris primi sunt inventores” (Albertus Magnus 1975. 8,16–18).

<sup>43</sup> “Now it is especially this last word that they take over to support their error, intending by this to hold that the intellect is neither the soul nor a part of the soul, but some separate substance” (Zedler 1968. 32–33. no. 24–25). See further Aquinas’s commentary on *De anima* III, 1: Thomas Aquinas 1984. esp. 205–207. In Aquinas’s view, the separation of the possible intellect means that it “is the act of no body, because its operation is not accomplished through a corporeal organ” (Keeler 1936. 19. no. 28; Thomas Aquinas 1976. 297.497–499; Zedler 1968. 34). Aquinas, on the other hand, contends that “the intellect is separate, inasmuch as it is not the act of an organ; but it is not separate inasmuch as it is a part or power of the soul which is the act of the body” (Keeler 1936. 27, no. 42; Thomas Aquinas 1976. 299.701–704; Zedler 1968. 39).





It is time to wrap all this up!

In Aquinas's view, Averroes erred when he held – based on a failed interpretation of Aristotle's argument that the intellect cannot have a bodily organ – that the possible intellect could not be a form of the body. This error led Averroes to the flawed conclusion that the possible intellect was separated in its being from the body and so from the other parts of the soul that inform the body. He thought that the possible intellect was neither the soul nor a part of the soul.

Not only it is a correct summary of Averroes's substance dualism from the point of view of Aquinas, but also an abundant paraphrase of *Purgatorio* Canto XXV, 61–66. Consequently, the way Aquinas and Dante represent the error of Averroes displays a structural isomorphy, which is specific enough to let us conclude that in this crucial respect Dante – directly or through intermediaries – followed Aquinas.

Does this mean that all hopes should be abandoned by those who wish Dante to be seen separated from Aquinas in this matter? I do not think so. The crystalline beauty and cosmological depth of Canto XXV will just do.

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JÓZSEF PÁL

## “The Most Secret Chamber of the Heart”

(Secretissima camera de lo cuore)

Poetry and Theology in the State-changing<sup>1</sup> Cantos  
of the *Commedia*

### I. COMPANY OF POETS AND PHILOSOPHERS

According to Dante’s poetics, the depiction of a *thing* (both as a sensory reality and as *signum*) becomes a *word* through several experiential and creative stages, which are usually clearly divisible from each other. Schematically, this process consists of four parts: the otherworldly vision revealed to him, containing a divine message in all its parts; experiencing it in a (mostly) direct and interactive way (seeing, hearing, conversation, etc.); retaining it in memory; writing it down along with the lessons. In the second part, Dante is also a participant, in the third a retainer and in the fourth a recorder and interpreter. In the process of becoming a *word*, the *thing* is constantly fading, until in the recorded text, hardly anything will be left of it.<sup>2</sup>

The reader finds it surprising that Dante, having just entered the first circle of hell, the abode of the unbaptized virtuous, refuses to acknowledge those whom he sees in Limbo. Thus, the bewildered Virgil starts to answer the question that has not even been asked. Later, Dante made up for his omission in two different contexts. The first question is whether any of those arriving here have been able to get out again. He got a partial answer: on the night of Good Friday, Christ arrived here and took the Old Testament ancestors up with him; but before that, no one could leave this place. However, neither Virgil nor Dante makes a clear reference to whether the situation will remain the same in the future. The second question: who are the members of a separate group of four? Virgil returns to them, soon followed by Dante as a *homo novus*. Their newly formed group of six will proceed together to meet the group of philosophers.

<sup>1</sup> From a worldly state to the otherworldly, from an earthly state to a heavenly one: *Inf.* IV., *Pur.* XXXIII., *Par.* II.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the poet’s greatest efforts, the otherworldly reality he experienced has steadily weakened through the phases, and in the end only a small fraction of the power of the original vision remains in the finished work. The most typical poetic definitions are *Par.* I. 5–9; *Par.* XXXIII. 55–57. At the end of Canto 4 of *Inferno*, the statement *al fatto il dir vien meno* (the word comes short of fact) expresses Dante’s doubts.



Così andammo infino a la lumera,  
parlando cose che 'l tacere è bello,  
sì com'era 'l parlar colà dov'era.<sup>3</sup>

The poet clearly drew the reader's attention to the difference between the two authorial positions by using two different forms of the verb of existence: in the present (*è*, the time of remembering and recording), the commendable behaviour is silence, as opposed to the past (*era*, an event that already happened), when talking is required. The environment is different but the knowledge, told or untold, is the same. At other times, the poet undergoes some spiritual change between the two points in time or he reflects on the previous events. Let us see some examples of his relived fear, pain, sympathy, learning and even guilt, mainly from the beginning of the work: "nel pensier rinova la paura", "Allor mi dolsi, e ora mi ridoglio", "mi sento ch'i' godo (ch' i'vidi)", "di mia colpa compunto",<sup>4</sup> etc.

The speech hidden in silence is similar to the figure clad in light (Elijah's chariot *Inf.* XXVI. 35, Rahab, *Par.* IX. 116). Silence and sight are connected in a unique synaesthesia. The impersonation *Sole tace* refers to darkness, or the lack of the Creator and Redeemer *Logos*, the light of Christ. In order to get out of here, one must move in the right direction. During the *infernal* encounters, the *souls*, moving on a forced track, usually stop in front of Dante (and Virgil) for a moment, then they all continue on their path like Francesca or Ulysses. There are some occasions, however, when both the damned and the traveller bound for salvation proceed in the same direction together, for example, Brunetto Latini, who later runs to catch up with his companions. During their conversation, the Sodomite (?) master walks next to Dante on a lower ledge, while Mary's elect leans down to him. In the company of Homer, Horace, Ovid, Lucanus and Virgil, there is no such tangible difference. Quite the contrary, it is they who, observing the general rules of courtesy, (after a short consultation) make a generous gesture towards their late successor. From this point of view, it is rather the representatives of Greek and Roman literature who could go "higher up". Dante was accepted among the five masters with the phrase *fare onore* (to do honour).<sup>5</sup> From then on, there is no differentiation of *they* and *I*; the common subject of the verb (*andammo*, we went) suggests some degree of syncretism between pagan

<sup>3</sup> *Inferno* IV. 103–105. Thus we went on as far as to the light, / Things saying 'tis becoming to keep silent, / As was the saying of them where I was. *The Divine Comedy* translated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the other Dante-works: Dante Online.it (versione inglese).

<sup>4</sup> "in the very thought renews the fear"; "Then sorrowed I, and sorrow now again"; "I feel that I rejoice"; "compunctious for my fault".

<sup>5</sup> A few lines below, the pagan philosophers raise Aristotle above themselves with the same expression.



and Christian poetry. *We* is often and emphatically repeated in the following *terzinas*. For a while, they share the same destination.

The procession of poets is bound towards the fire mentioned in line 68, which casts a semi-circle (*emisperio*, hemisphere) onto the general darkness. In the *lumera*, he wrote earlier (*Rime*, LXIX),<sup>6</sup> a divine messenger, *spirito infiammato* might be hiding. The possibility to progress towards it in the right direction is also given to the pagan poets possessing *lumen intelletuale* (the light of the intellect). However, reaching the antitype is not yet fulfilment or *visio Dei*. Their paths only part at the end of the canto, when darkness falls again.

Besides this *terzina*, Dante also quoted *Ecclesiastes* 3.7 (*tempus tacendi et tempus loquendi*) at other places in different versions: *ov'è più bello/ tacer che dire* (*Pur.* XXV. 43); *più è tacer che ragionare onesto* (*Par.* XVI. 45); *meglio è tacere che poco dire* (according to Saint Paul, *Banquet* 4.5.16); *tacendomi certe parole le quali pareano da tacere* (*New Life* 24.6); *di fuor tacea, e dentro dicea* (*Pur.* XVIII. 5). Why does he not share with posterity what was said? The reason for his silence could neither be the supposed topics of conversation nor the quality of the account. Why did he nor pass on to posterity (as he usually does) what he then learnt from them? What is more, unlike Vergil (*tacciolo, acciò che tu per te ne cerchi*, *Pur.* XVII. 139), Dante did not even encourage anyone to find out for themselves.<sup>7</sup>

Following his acceptance into the company, Dante had an advantage over the others not only because of his knowledge of humanity's historical experience, which was a good thousand years longer (Homer and the Latins were separated by several centuries), not even because he was still alive and could go back to earth, but primarily because of the quality of his consciousness, his knowledge of the truth. He was the only one who, as a devout Christian, did not believe in *falsi e bugiardi* (false and lying) gods but the Real One. He experiences a thousand signs of the Creator's work and he knows he can only attain eternal bliss through Him. The difference is unbridgeable: his knowledge of divine reality provides him with an insurmountable advantage. In vain were his poet predecessors the unsurpassed masters of the *ars bene dicendi* (the art of speaking properly) or the *eloquium romanum* (Roman eloquence), it is not sufficient here. The word, however beautiful it is, cannot be separated from the thing ("from the fact the word be not diverse", *Inf.* XXXII. 12) or, as St. Augustine said the

<sup>6</sup> De gli occhi suoi gittava una lumera,  
la qual pareva un spirito infiammato;  
e i' ebbi tanto ardir, ch'in la sua cera  
guarda', [e vidi] un angiol figurato.

(From her glances sprang such a light / it seemed a spirit flaming everywhere; / and I grew bold, gazing in her eyes / seeing the figure of an angel there.)

<sup>7</sup> Translations of the quotes in order: "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak"; "where 'tis better Silent to be than say"; "Silence is more considerate than speech"; "it is better to be silent than to say little"; "not mentioning certain things which I thought should not be revealed"; "Without was mute, and said within"; "I say not, that thou seek it for thyself".

same, “in verbis verum amare, non verba”.<sup>8</sup> In his advantageous position as a late disciple, he should have taught his masters the most important thing and led them on the path of progress: Christian salvation. During the peripatetic conversation, Dante, with adequate knowledge of heavenly and earthly reality, turned into a master from a disciple whether he wanted to or not. The Christian *theologian* must have made convincing arguments against the outdated thoughts of the ancients, in a way that was instructive to them, which he might even have explained to them there. Despite their lack beyond their will, Dante rightly respected their moral stance and felt he belonged among them. *Beauty* is different *there* and *here*. This word in fact means “proper behaviour” and what it teaches. Modesty is a moral and not an aesthetic term. He had a duty to his conversation partners to tell the truth, and afterwards, a duty to himself not to boast about it. Dante’s reticence is elegant, clever and polite.

The key term of the 12–13<sup>th</sup> century theological and philosophical renewal (scholasticism) was not given to the philosophers but to the *bella scola* of the poets led by Homer. Antique poetry is closer to Christian theology than the philosophy of old. The by-gone poets followed in the “footsteps of the Holy Spirit”;<sup>9</sup> just as the prophets mediated the secrets of divine creation in a veiled manner, poetic inspiration was capable of the same. Like the Scriptures, the poets, though not directly aware of the mystery of the incarnation of the Divine Word, prepared the realization of “supreme salvation” with their own inventions, like Virgil himself or Statius, the other companion in Purgatory. In the Middle Ages, the prophecy of Eclogue 4 was interpreted to refer to Christ. Proceeding towards the light, *andammo* is followed by four verbs of motion, also in the first person plural: *venimmo*, *passammo*, *giugnemmo*, *traemmoci* (we came, we proceeded, we reached, we turned). Through their proper poetic inspiration, they created works that can also bring Christian readers closer to the truth.

The first part is the poets’, followed by a miscellaneous group, whose members is treated quite differently by Dante. He refers to them with the verb *vidi* (I saw), used nine times within a few *terzinas*, which is also a past perfect, but first person singular verb form. This word expresses the obvious distance between the seer and the seen. Dante emphasised at the beginning of the canto that he was awakened by thunder, but his eyes were well-rested, so he could see clearly. The different verb form is one of the most obvious signs of his different attitudes to the two groups. The traveller, newly elected in the company of poets, *watches* the mythological and historical figures and the family of philosophers, but does not enter their circle. What is even stranger, he does not even talk to them. Due to the complete lack of interaction, Dante describes the *spiriti magni*

<sup>8</sup> St. Augustin *On Christian Doctrine* “not to love words, but the truth in words”, IV. 11. [https://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/doctrine.xii\\_3.html](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/doctrine.xii_3.html)

<sup>9</sup> Boccaccio *The Life of Dante*, Chapter “The defence of poetry”.



(great spirits) only externally. He does not give them the opportunity (although it would be expected) to share words of wisdom about the world or themselves, their own political or intellectual activities. In turn, they are not interested (like many other are) in how a flesh-and-blood man came among them. The heroes and philosophers made themselves memorable in the fourth phase in retrospect not with their *words* or thoughts but with their *sight* (*del vedere in me stesso m'essalto, Whom to have seen I feel myself exalted*).

Dante observed the heroes together with the philosophers, as he only raised his brow slightly from the latter in order to see Aristotle and company (*innalzai un poco più le ciglia*, v. 130). Some of those on his relatively long list, as far as we know today, were real historical figures, while others are considered mythological ones. The castle, surrounded by seven walls and a river, which the poets can cross with dry feet, is the eternal (?) home of the ancient thinkers. The well-protected reservation not only protects the sanctuary of knowledge from the profane intrusions of folly, but also encloses its inhabitants, who are disarmed (not any one of them but Homer has a sword in his hand) and rendered harmless.

Some elements of the description of the stationary, rarely speaking and sighing philosophers and the group of six poets moving towards the light forecast the features of the two earthly *canticas*, which are different from each other. Being enclosed and static (*parlavan, seder, stanno*, they spoke, they are sitting, standing), a generally distant description (apart from a few exceptions) are characteristic of *Inferno*, whereas self-presentation as an active participant, team spirit, emphasis on the importance of communication and jointly progressing towards a good goal are characteristic of *Purgatorio*.

## II. UBI SAPIENS?

Dante's presentation of the philosophers in this ways may seem unfair to present-day readers: their confinement, their silence for the future does not seem to be in accordance with historical facts. Even later, he did not regret missing the exchange of views that a personal encounter would have made possible. After all, for scholasticism, *the* philosopher was Aristotle and *the* commentator, as also stated here, was Averroes. In the light of the divine Logos, any world view, spiritual or religious activity that did not take into account Christian principles has either been destroyed or reinterpreted. With his authority, St. Augustine called on Christian theologians to take away from the heathens, as unlawful owners, the objects "of gold and silver" "to devote to their proper use in preaching the gospel".<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine *On Christian Doctrine*. It is the same as what the Jews did at the time of their exodus from Egypt. Augustine referred mostly to the Platonists. <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/doctrine.xli.html>





From the aspect of faith, the poet's intuition and the philosopher's rational reasoning were subject to different judgments. The latter *as a whole* was devalued in a system of ideas that placed reason and experience at the service of faith, which could not be completely exhausted rationally, thus providing it with only a limited space of validity. Moreover, its ultimate goal is not to gain as much wisdom (considered as self-serving) and new knowledge as possible, but to acquire the methods leading to salvation. As St. Paul puts it: "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God." (1Cor 1.20-21.) With the question "*Where is the wise?*", he weakened the whole of Greek philosophy, and replaced it with the way of life teachings of the Gospels. When St. Peter, speaking in the form of light (!), asked Dante questions about the essence of faith, he answered with Paul: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb11,1).

He who has a religion possesses wisdom; he who does not remains in the darkness of ignorance. In the metaphorical language of the poet: the eyes of *Sapienza*, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit and a cardinal virtue at the same time, are the demonstrations (*dimostrazioni*), with which the truth is perfectly visible. The truth experienced through the received intellectual ability returns to the mind as a conviction (*persuasioni*). The latter conveys more uncertainly, more veiled in the inner light, its sign being a smile on the face (*riso, sorriso*). In the sight and serenity of this, man can feel the pleasure of the greatest happiness, which is the supreme good of Paradise.<sup>11</sup>

The creators of the Christian world-view were not forced to make a compromise on any significant issue. Their view is radically different from that of Greek (and Roman) philosophers and is based upon epoch-making statements, such as "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1,1); "I am that I am" (Ex. 3,14); "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye [...] are not consumed" (Mal. 3,6); "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1,14); "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1,20). At the same time, they developed the textual explanatory principles, crucial in the case of a book religion, with which they could extract any element of pagan thought from its context and blend it into their own without contradictions. The revelation completed philosophy and what had been right in it was the preliminary conjecture of Christianity (*typos, umbra futurorum*, antitype, shadow of the future), and it is only relevant in the context

<sup>11</sup> "It should be explained here that the eyes of wisdom are her demonstrations, by which the truth is seen with absolute certainty, and her smile is her persuasions, in which the light interior to wisdom shows itself under a kind of veil. In these two places experience is given of that most sublime of pleasures, happiness, which is the greatest good enjoyed in Paradise." (*Banquet* 3.15.2) <http://www.danteonline.it/english/opere.asp?idope=2&idliv1=1&idliv2=1&idlang=OR>





of the latter, especially in the field of scientific knowledge and the assertion of pure morals as examples.

For the "good Christian", who had passed a theology examination before Peter with honours (*Par.* XXIV. 149–150), it did not pose any problem to attribute the movement of the universe now to the glory of God (*gloria*) and then to Cupid,<sup>12</sup> the son of Venus of ancient mythology. Nor did giving mythological figures from Minos to Mars, Jupiter to Saturn important roles to play at all levels and environments of earthly, heavenly, and otherworldly events. However, they were not regarded as gods but as parts, types, examples, or means of the enforcement of absolute justice.

For Dante, poetry is *living* theology, and he compared his own task to that of the apostles and founders of monastic orders marking the start of a new era, such as Peter, Benedict and Francis (*e io con orazione e con digiuno, Paradiso* XXII. 89). By revealing the operation of the divine Order as a personal experience, his aim was, as he briefly summarized in his last letter to Can Grande della Scala: "*removere viventes in hac vita de statu miserie et perducere ad statum felicitatis*".<sup>13</sup> Eternal bliss is the consequence of the quality of life on earth, the decisions made by man during his life ("Man – as, according to his merits or demerits in the exercise of his free will, he is subject to reward or punishment by Justice," "Et si totius operis allegorice sumpti subiectum est homo prout merendo et demerendo per arbitrii libertatem est iustitie premiandi et puniendi obnoxious," *Epistle* XIII. 34). The observation of history offers many lessons. The behaviour and thinking of previous generations and the systematic and absolute judgment of these are all examples for learning and, above all, of how man can take care of his own salvation. For all this, however, he needs the free gift of divine grace, the wanting of salvation and faith as conviction. All these together are *evangelica dottrina*, which becomes sealed in the mind.

De la profonda condizion divina  
ch'io tocco mo, la mente mi sigilla,  
più volte l'evangelica dottrina.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> "Love does not exist in itself as a substance, but is an accident in a substance." *New Life* 25.1.

<sup>13</sup> *Epistle* XIII. 15–16, to remove those living in this life from the state of misery and to lead them to the state of bliss.

<sup>14</sup> *Par.* XXIV. 142–144. "With the profound condition and divine [the secret of the Trinity – J.P.] / Which now I touch upon, doth stamp my mind / Ofttimes the doctrine evangelical." In this respect, Dante often uses the metaphor of God (*Causa*) as a stamp and the mind as the wax (*effetto*) taking its shape and solidifying. From this point of view, the synonym of *sigillo* is some grammatical form of *impronta*, *impressa* (imprint, impression).

Unlike his antique and contemporary counterpart, the medieval artist did not create art for art's sake, neither to win approval<sup>15</sup> or flatter the recipient of his work, nor to show himself off. The "taxonomic place" of his activity is similar to that of a natural scientist. For the minds of both, if gifted and fair, an intermediate realm becomes available in which divine and human activity can meet. (Dante also had experience in the latter, since on January 20, 1320, he gave a lecture on geophysics in Latin in Verona about water and earth, *Questio de aqua et terra*). From above, the Creator offers the real object of knowledge, to which the scientist can rise, not by researching raw reality but the essential nature (*quidditas*)<sup>16</sup> of things. In the other type of activity, the artist has access to a picture painted on his "mind's canvas" or *dictation* by Cupid from within. In Paradise on Earth, Beatrice almost literally repeats Cupid's inspiring words, taking on the role of revelator.<sup>17</sup> The creative man receives from the *Mountain* (Ex. 25.40, *exemplar*) the object of knowledge or artistic representation, the "pattern" that is revealed to him in the vision. With his will and talent, the scientist and the artist can discover the essence of things and, based on his ideas, he knows what the work to be made should be like (see Figure).

### III. INNER PICTURE, INSPIRED WORD

Augustine dealt with the circumstances of the creation of the work of art on numerous occasions. His point, however, always remained the same: during his work, the artist, who has *ingenium*, or suitable talent, goes from an inner ideal (today, conversely, this could be called "objective") to the outside (finished work), which now also bears some traits of his personality. In the ninth book of *On the Trinity*, he states that we are able to internally experience ineffably beautiful images or verbs with our intellect. "Figuring in the mind after one fashion the

<sup>15</sup> „ostendere in istorum Litteris sacris, quos nobis erudiendis et ab hoc saeculo pravo in beatum saeculum transferendis, providentia divina providit.” (“... found in the sacred writings which God in His goodness has provided to mould our characters, and to guide us from this world of wickedness to the blessed world above” *On Christian Doctrine* IV.6.10). Later, he adds the following: “For teaching, of course, true eloquence consists, not in making people like what they disliked, nor in making them do what they shrank from, but in making clear what was obscure”. “... it is one of the distinctive features of good intellects” (IV.11.26).

<sup>16</sup> Dante uses this very word to repeat the definition by St Paul:

fede è sustanza di cose sperate  
e argomento de le non parventi;  
e questa pare a me sua quidditate.

*Par.* XXIV. 64–66. “Faith is the substance of the things we hope for, / And evidence of those that are not seen / And this appears to me its quiddity.”

<sup>17</sup> And I to him: “One am I, who, whenever / Love doth inspire me, note, and in that measure / Which he within me dictates, singing go.” (*Pur.* XXIV. 52–54); Beatrice to Dante: “Note thou; and even as by me are uttered, / These words, so teach them unto those who live / That life which is a running unto death.” (*Pur.* XXXIII. 52–54).



images of bodies, or seeing bodies through the body; but after another, grasping by simple intelligence what is above the eye of the mind, *viz.*, the reasons and the unspeakably beautiful skill of such forms." Artistic intuition, like faith, is beyond reason. "We behold, then, by the sight of the mind, in that eternal truth from which all things temporal are made, the form according to which we are, and according to which we do anything by true and right reason, either in ourselves, or in things corporeal; and we have the true knowledge of things, thence conceived, as it were as a word within us, and by speaking we beget it from within; nor by being born does it depart from us. And when we speak to others, we apply to the word, remaining within us, the ministry of the voice or of some bodily sign, that by some kind of sensible remembrance some similar thing may be wrought also in the mind of him that hears – similar, I say, to that which does not depart from the mind of him that speaks. We do nothing, therefore, through the members of the body in our words and actions, by which the behavior of men is either approved or blamed, which we do not anticipate by a word uttered within ourselves. For no one willingly does anything, which he has not first said in his heart."<sup>18</sup> It is not any different with *pictures*, either: "Thou [made] the sense of his body, by which, as by an interpreter, he may from mind unto matter convey that which he does, and report to his mind what may have been done, that it within may consult the truth, presiding over itself, whether it be well done." "And these your words formed at the time, the outer ear conveyed to the intelligent mind, whose inner ear lay attentive to Your eternal word." (*Confessions* XI. 5–6). The internal word or picture received from God is the perfect pattern of the work to be created. It is hidden in the depth of the human mind<sup>19</sup> and is the primary source of inspiration for the wise artist. St. Thomas of Aquinas follows the Patristic tradition: the artist works by using the internal word or idea conceived in his mind and inspired by the love of wanting some object.<sup>20</sup>

After Beatrice's death Dante, as he wrote in *Banquet* 2.12, started his journey of spiritual improvement by reading *Consolatio*. He highlighted exactly those parts of Boethius's work several times when Philosophy talks to the prisoner about the divine example within us "tu cuncta superno ducis *ab exemplo* (my italics – J.P.), pulchrum, pulcherrimus ipse mundum mente gerens," (*De consolatione* III. 9. Thy inmost being, the form of perfect good, / From envy free; and

<sup>18</sup> *On the Trinity* IX.6.11–7.12. Augustine <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130109.htm>

<sup>19</sup> *New Life* 1.4. Secretissima camera de lo cuore (the most secret chamber of the heart), where the spirit of life lives. In Augustine, *abditum mentis* (recesses of the mind, *De Trinitate* XIV.7.9), and *intimum verbum* (inner word, *De Trinitate* 15. 21.40), *interioris hominis mei* (my inner man, *Confessions*, X.6.8).

<sup>20</sup> *Artifex autem per verbum in intellectu conceptum, et per amorem suae voluntatis ad aliquid relatum, operatur.* "Now the craftsman works through the word conceived in his mind, and through the love of his will regarding some object." *Summa Theologiae*, 30366. Ia pars qu.45.a.6 (respondeo).

<https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1045.htm#article6>



Thou didst mould the whole / To that supernal pattern. Beauteous).<sup>21</sup> According to the canzone introducing the fourth treatise of *Banquet*, an important condition for artistic activity is that the image should reside within the artist. Just as wealth alone cannot make anyone noble, so mere intention does not put the form to be depicted into our soul. The original and true image is a divine element in the artist's soul, without which a work of art could not be created.

chi pingge figura,  
se non può esser lei, non la può porre;<sup>22</sup>

#### IV. LATIN SPECULATION AND ITALIAN POETRY

Human ability, "sharpened" by the knowledge of our divinity, can be developed into theoretical-rational, speculative (scholastic) heights, or led to correct conclusions drawn from specific historical examples of the world led by Providence. In his pursuit of the latter, the artist is greatly aided by his professional knowledge, his knowledge of the connection of the arts (*artes*) with celestial spheres as well as his recognition of the significance (symbols) of any manifestation of nature as an *effectus*.

The Florentine poet was nine years old (he met Beatrice in the same year) when Thomas of Aquinas died. He could not have thought of a plan to write another, corrected *Summa Theologiae*. He was primarily considered by his contemporaries to be the *master of all rhymes* (besides a talented but failing politician). His intention was to create a just Empire, which did not exist in reality, that could be the preparer of the heavenly one, and which he had failed to create elsewhere through his political activity. In the *Imperium* unfolding on the "canvas of his spirit", he depicts the self-destruction (*Inferno*), the path towards perfection (*Purgatorio*) and finally eternal bliss (*Paradiso*) of man possessing and acting with free will. The characters living on stage move, suffer, rejoice, love and hate, all in the place provided to them by the final and perfect order.

The *Latin* scholastic addressed only a narrow circle of scholars, whereas the *Italian* poet addressed everyone in principle, even though he often emphasized the importance of education. His choice of language determined his readership and, with it, partly the content he could present. The idiom that had considerable effect on authorial intent was not only a question of *how*, but also of *what*.

<sup>21</sup> *Banquet* 3.2.17. The other reference: "Tu mihi et qui te sapientium mentibus inseruit deus, You, and God, who has set you in the minds of philosophers" (Boethius's words to Philosophy, *Consolatio* 1.4.)

<sup>22</sup> From the artist's point of view, *figura* is the same as *forma* (idea) "from above". "A painter who cannot first possess an image in the very texture of his own being is incapable of giving form to this in paint" (*Banquet* 4. Canzone 52–53).



(A few hundred years earlier, the demand of the simple audience determined the secular theme, language, and mode of presentation of the old French heroic epic, thus creating the first significant form of European literature.) The use of two languages in the same work (*Banquet*), the Latin commentary to the Italian canzone did not appear to be a fortunate endeavour. However, in the work inspired by his *second love*, "it would not have been appropriate to sing openly in common language" about Philosophy, as "there was no form of vernacular poetry of sufficient merit to portray directly the lady" (*non era degna rima di volgare alcuna palesemente poetare*). Moreover, those of his audience who were not receptive enough would have misunderstood his "fictitious words" (*Banquet* 2.12, *fittizie parole*) and thus, by confusing reality with fiction, would not have given him any credit. Yet Dante chose Italian, making his own task even more difficult, as not only the language but also his readership "had to be refined".

Italian speakers can be made accustomed to Latinisms, thus expanding the framework and possibilities of the vernacular language and increasing its dignity. Critics of Dante soon noticed<sup>23</sup> that the three great parts use Latin for different purposes, in different ways and to different degrees. In the first, historical part, which describes events and depicts the reality of sinful people, there are hardly any Latinisms (but all the more so jumbled and obscene expressions). Later, the choir of angels, which controls the process of purification in a Providence-like manner, mostly prays and sings (along with souls) in Latin, in accordance with Biblical texts and church traditions. Beatrice's arrival at the top of the Mountain is prepared by a rhyme structure that Latinized all three components of the medieval mental space: Hebrew, Christian and pagan *senis*, *venis*, *plenis* (*Pur.* XXX. 17, 19, 21). *Senis* (old man) is an allegorical figure of the *Song of Solomon*, one of the 24 Old Testament books; *venis/t* (you come, he comes) are the words to greet the Messiah in the Gospels and *plenis* (full) is a reference to Virgil's *Aeneid*.<sup>24</sup> And in a *terzina* containing a strange prediction, Beatrice herself spoke in a mixed language (*Pur.* XXXIII. 10–12, *Modicum, et non videbitis me; / et iterum, ..., / modicum, et vos videbitis me*, A little while and ye shall not see me; and again, (...) a little while and ye shall see me). She quoted Christ's words from

<sup>23</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua* (1525).

This is what Dante says in his imaginary conversation with Machiavelli: „Nelle prime due Cantiche ve ne sono pochi, ma nell'ultima assai, massime dedotti da'latini, perché le dottrine varie di che io ragiono, mi costringono apigliare vocaboli atti a poterle esprimere; e non si potendo senon con termini latini, io gli usavo, ma li deducevo in modo, con le desinenze, ch'io gli facevo diventare simili alla lingua del resto dell'opera.” (In the first two canticas, there are few foreign or Latin phrases, but in the last one, there are a great many, mostly taken from Latin, because the different disciplines that I talk about made me borrow the words appropriate to them; I could only do this with Latin terms, which I used, but in a way that I made them similar to the rest of the work by their endings.)

<http://www.ousia.it/content/Sezioni/Testi/MachiavelliDiscorsoLingua.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> “Manibus, oh, date lilia plenis!” *Aeneid* VI. 883 (Scatter in handfuls lilies).

the Gospel according to John (Jn 16,16), in which she addressed *sorelle mie dilette* (my sisters predilect). Finally, Dante could least dispense with the use of Latinisms and theological terms in presenting the philosophical issues discussed in the heavenly realm of victorious faith. However, he “Italianized” them as much as possible.

Dante probably knew that he would certainly surpass his esteemed master in one important thing. It was his knowledge of the depths and heights of human life based on direct experience. Thomas, apart from his travels, spent his entire life in a monastery or in the chair of the University of Paris and Naples studying, teaching, disputing, preaching and writing. The tasks of the Dominican *magister in sacra pagina* were *legere, disputare, praedicare* (to read, discuss and preach), that is, to learn and teach about God and his work as deeply as possible. Dante’s task was to experience God’s power at work and to make it possible for generations to come to experience it, too. Life instead of speculation; the miserable or glorious stories of thousands of people instead of an abstract concept of man and their summary in a final judgment about them. The Order belongs to God, life belongs to man. In the sentences quoted after the *breviter*, discussing the poetics of *Paradiso*, Dante stated in general terms: the true branch of philosophy is practical morality, or ethics, which helps man orient himself. “... the whole work is not focused on theory but on action”.<sup>25</sup> The content of philosophy is love: “love is intrinsic to philosophising” (*Banquet* 3.13) or, referring to the sixth book of Aristotle’s Ethics, “It is impossible for a person to be wise if he is not good” (*Banquet* 4.27).

Some conclusions can be drawn from the above. On the basis of his studies of *divinae litterae* (writings about God), Dante was convinced that the vision experienced by him was a divine inspiration and what was revealed in it was objective reality itself. By this grace lavished on his person the poet, blessed with a unique talent, was charged with the duty to share what he had experienced with the whole of mankind in an illustrative form, only in view of the truth, for the education of all. None of the poet predecessors had been given such a huge task, especially with regard to the representation of celestial reality. At the beginning of the second canto of *Paradiso*, he states: “L’acqua ch’io prendo già mai non si corse,” “The sea I sail has never yet been passed” (*Par.* II. 7). He often likens his otherworldly journey to a voyage. The stars see to keeping his singing ship in the right direction. After much deliberation, he came to the conclusion that he could get more help for the success of his enterprise from ancient poets than from pagan philosophers. At the dawn of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, for Dante, who chose poetry over speculation, there was neither a sufficiently developed language (*volgare illustre*, an excellent common language that clarifies the essence

<sup>25</sup> Genus vero philosophic sub quo hic in toto et parte proceditur, est morale negotium, sive ethica; quia non ad speculandum, sed ad opus inventum est totum et pars. *Epistle* XIII.40.16.



of the *thing*) nor a poetics that was useable for the depiction of a Christian theme. Therefore, both of these also had to be created along with *Commedia*. The framework is an otherworldly journey, during which he could encounter a complete historical "portrait hall" as a contemporary and at the same time experience how the truth of the Christian God prevailed over (and within) the people all ages.

## V. HISTORY WRITTEN BACKWARDS

The process is the reverse of the natural, *bildungsroman*-like line of development. The author does not go from the birth of an individual, the description of his environment, through the awakening of his consciousness and the decisions and actions made as an adult all the way to his death, on the basis of which the person's life is judged, but the other way around. The end result is known and the causes and events leading up to it can be explained backwards, step by step. Like when a chemist has to tell the empirical, molecular and structural formula of a compound placed in front of him in a test tube. Just like the natural scientist is aided by certain regularities and experiments repeatedly producing the same results, so the theologian-poet must also possess the knowledge of the past and the laws of the moral world. Dante is sometimes rather taciturn in the treatment of the possible historical or experiential background knowledge. In extreme cases, he did not even write the name of the otherworldly soul, only referred to their most important deed, for example: *che fece per viltade il gran rifiuto*, (Who made through cowardice the great refusal, *Inf.* III. 60), 11 syllables, one hendecasyllable out of the 14233. With his step that was mistaken from the point of view of eternity, Pope Celestine V wrote his own name and person out of history despite his significant position. Of all the dead of love, all we learn about Cleopatra is that she was lecherous; of Paris and Tristan, only their names are mentioned. The rest is left to the reader's sophistication. The reason for the summary treatment of these figures here is their insignificance, their proportionately small contribution to the economics of the whole work. (The mere mention of such names is sometimes more helpful in presenting the otherworldly environment rather than the person, to whose earthly story no new information is added beyond what we already know.) The vast commentary literature seeking answers to the why-s and how-s began with the works of Dante himself (*New Life*, *Banquet*, *Epistle XIII*, etc.), followed by his two sons, Jacopo and Piero, then Jacopo della Lana, and later the *chiosa* (explanation) called *Ottimo*, the best, by Boccaccio and, with the continuous growth of historical knowledge, will presumably never be completed.

In the work, history is not presented as a process but as an end result. Due to the simultaneous presence of things that happened during different periods of the past, each small detail has a special significance, its own "story". One of



the main characteristics of an individual is their environment and their place and role in it. Everything that is discussed at a given moment, a surrounding object, refers to the person (or group of people) to be presented. This is how the reader can experience many a human quality, wrapped in fate. Furthermore, the reader who wishes to “decipher” each reference is helped by the didactically structured order of the otherworld and the use of symbols (numbers, colours, gestures, animals, plants, etc.) with known meanings. But perhaps even more important than the above is Dante’s unparalleled insight with which he observed and generalized the human condition. He had an almost superhuman abstraction ability, which lets us recognize our own innermost feelings, thoughts and personal involvement even in seemingly distant and alien things. The poetics of the *abditum mentis* or the most secret chamber of the heart provides an image of man in which the essential qualities always remain the same beyond the separating distances of space and time.

The emphases of the retrospective direction are different from those of forward motion. Let us see some of these peculiarities. The self-knowledge of souls becomes complete in relation to deed and judgment (in the reverse order for the reader). Otherworldly souls are constantly experiencing the eternal good that they have already attained or are to attain through suffering, and also the bad, in the light of the ultimately triumphant truth. They only remember what is important. The psychological excuses that prepare a bad decision, in fact, psychologisation in general, are relegated to the background. But actually, that is not the point, for those having attained damnation will remain in it forever, but an example to be set for the future. The created world as the *effect* of God and the populated otherworld as that of man are in harmony with each other. The perfect creator of the former created a perfect work, but the latter will also achieve its goal and the world is not falling to pieces. Ultimately, the good and bad things harmonize with each other: “the universe, even with its sinister part, is perfect,”<sup>26</sup> as we read at the beginning of Augustine’s lonely dialogue with God. Evil can play a role in man’s ascension as Virgil and Dante use Lucifer’s hairy body on the path to good, to emerge from hell.

Man is a rational being composed of soul and body – this is what we unanimously read in the texts of the Fathers as well as in the catechisms. The immortal and mortal parts that exist in man, but move in different spheres of attraction, are potentially present in all moments of earthly life at the same time, but not in equal measures and proportions. In the case of the dominance of evil, according to Christian teaching, the possibility of correction by absolution following sincere repentance remains until the last moment. His punishment, his reward (in

<sup>26</sup> “Deus per quem universitas etiam cum sinistra parte perfecta est.” Augustinus, *Soliloquium* 1.1.2.





the *Commedia*, we are here, without a real body yet) and his resurrection (this will happen in the future) apply equally to both, not just to the soul. Although, among the vicissitudes of life, everyone has to abide a number of trials, usually obscure, and is judged by the course of their entire life, one single decision made in a sharp situation stands out around which the cause of damnation is centred. Francesca tells her story: "ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vines" ("But one point only was it that o'ercame us," *Inf.* V. 132). (The target audience presumably knew what that *point* was.) Such a presentation of sins or virtues not only highlights some cases with the intent of education but also illustrates the validity of Christian anthropology and ethics.

#### VI. "DONNE MAGNE"

In the decade between the writing of *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia*, Dante's life and thinking underwent a significant change. After Beatrice's death, he came under the influence of another sympathetic woman (*passionata di tanta misericordia si dimostrava sopra la mia vedovata vita*, she showed herself to be moved by such deep compassion for my widowed life, *Banquet* 2.2) and found comfort in her. Dante was led to the *donna gentile* by two defining reading experiences: the already quoted *Consolatio* by Boethius and the moral philosophical work on friendship by Cicero (Tulio), mentioned among the *spiriti magni*. Both writings (in the case of the prisoner of Ravenna, the author as well) were closely related to the poet's pathetic life situation. He then perfected his knowledge and expressive skill by his studies in church schools and his experience gained in philosophical debates. (*Banquet* 2.12) In his loving desire for the two women, Beatrice and Philosophy (*bellissima e onestissima figlia dello Imperadore dell'universo*, the most beautiful and most honourable daughter of the Emperor of the universe, *Banquet* 2.15), the latter became increasingly important, which may be interpreted as his growing interest in mundane scientific knowledge. The immanent explanation of ongoing events increasingly pushed the memory of the former into the background. The relationship between the two of them could initially be characterized by a separation between poetry and philosophy. At the end of his first work dedicated to Beatrice, Dante stated that he was not satisfied with the result, which was unworthy of the subject. But there will be a time when, passing through the celestial spheres with his new knowledge received from Cupid, he will reach as far as the outermost one. The other lady, still in the background in *New Life*, slowly took possession of Dante's thinking, who focused his intellectual powers more and more on studying the system of nature (*Voi che, intendendo...* You who move the third heaven by understanding) and its impact on human activities (the liberal arts). Thus, the significance of the function of the created world as a divine *sign* faded, and things were not manifested

*sub specie aeternitatis* (according to eternity) but in their immanent nature. The philosopher was winning over the poet.

The novelty and benefit of the *intermediate age* for him are more solid scientific knowledge and argumentation that meet the criteria of philosophical regularity. Thanks to the influence of the *donna gentile*, not only was he able to gain a more accurate understanding of the truth in action but, as shown by his in-depth and passionate linguistic and poetic studies, he was able to use more adequate metaphors and poetic tools to serve his purpose. *Banquet* appreciatively explains at length the role and significance of Philosophy in the evolution of his external and internal worlds, and even suggests that her help will enable him to speak of Beatrice like no one before him.

Dante never used the word *simbololi*,<sup>27</sup> but used the word *allegory* on several occasions, which in general meant saying something “differently” from the literal. For him, the difference was not in the relationship of the *meaning* and the *meant*, but in the articulation (allegorical, tropological / referring to the salvation of the individual / and anagogical / transcendent meaning/) of the *meant*, which he regarded as the main point. The medieval, asymmetrical and hierarchical relationship between the specific and the abstract was later balanced and then reversed. This world conquered the ‘otherworld’. The experiences of modern typology theory, however, shed light on the phenomena of the Middle Ages that remained unreflected in its own system, such as the new relationship between the two concepts, allegory and symbol, which marked the rebirth of the latter after antiquity. (Naturally, modern Dante-criticism could not do without the use of the term “anachronistic”).<sup>28</sup>

The *donna gentile* is an incarnation of a concept, an allegory in the Goetheian sense. Apart from a few simple qualities repeated several times, she has no real personality. She is like a woman born out of Boethius’s imagination of varying size, often changing her height between heaven and earth, comforting with her clever insights and arguments, or like Giotto’s monochrome depictions of the Virtues in the Scrovegni Chapel, opposite of whom stand the allegorical figures of sins (the painter friend also used the *contrappasso* scheme!). The cult of the allegory expressing the general necessarily appeared and survived in Christian art, at times with even greater force than usual (medieval moralities, Baroque fine art). When they met at the *Banquet* after the *New Life*, Dante emphasized, on one hand, that he had presumably met Philosophy, the mistress of books, ancient authors, and the sciences<sup>29</sup> by the will of God and, on the other hand

<sup>27</sup> Actually, this word was reserved for the Apostolic Creed: *Symbolum apostolorum*.

<sup>28</sup> Especially: Sinleton 1978, chapters *Allegoria*, *Simbolismo*; Auerbach 1985; Eco 1990; Kelemen 1999, chapter *Az allegória poétikája*.

<sup>29</sup> „...la filosofia, che era donna di questi autori, di queste scienze e di questi libri, fosse somma cosa”, philosophy, who was the lady of these authors (Cicero, Boethius), these disciplines and these books, was something of supreme importance (*Banquet* 2. 12).



that the noble lady<sup>30</sup> was a poetic allegory. Within half a sentence, he used the word *immaginare* (imagine), once to define her (*immaginava lei fatta come una donna gentile*, I imagined it as having the form of a noble lady), and the second time to describe her relationship with Dante (*non la poteva immaginare in atto alcuno se non misericordioso*, and I could not imagine her with a bearing other than full of pity). She has no natural age, no individual physique, she is neither born nor dies, even her father, as we have seen, is not a real man. The allegory, the daughter of reason, “...the works of art...shove the spirit back upon itself” (Goethe 1797/1984), places the general before the particular.

The dislike for it led Goethe to create a new set of values by placing the *particular* before the *general*. Proceeding in this direction, we arrive at the symbol. “That is true Symbolism, where the more particular represents the more general, not as a dream or shade, but as a vivid, instantaneous revelation of the Inscrutable” (Goethe 1892). Contrary to his allegory of Philosophy – applying Goethe’s opposition to the two ladies – Beatrice is portrayed as a real woman from the first moment, along with many everyday events related to her (her living near Dante’s family, her exact age, their meeting in Florence in the street (at a festival) or in the church, her beauty, her companions, the day of her death, etc.). As opposed to her rival, she is portrayed as a real living person, body and soul,<sup>31</sup> who has revealed both of her “selves” in both states of existence: on earth and in the afterlife (taking off the veil<sup>32</sup>) alike. From Philosophy, the defining feature of the *symbol*, the “objective correlative,” the specific uniqueness, that is, life itself is missing, whereas her predecessor-antagonist<sup>33</sup>-successor, Dante’s Beatrice has almost all the positive features of real existence to the maximum extent. She is spiritual and organic at the same time, continuing Goethe’s separation, what is more, not only carries it but by systematically explaining the *signs*, she also reveals their meaning to Dante and through him to everyone. “The objects represented in this way appear to exist for themselves alone and

<sup>30</sup> As for the relationship of the noble lady and Philosophy, Dante does not give a clear definition. The latter, as quoted earlier, is sometimes an alternative name for the former (*Banquet* 2.12), sometimes only similar to her (*Banquet* 4.30.5), and at other times yet, Beatrice’s “deputy” (*New Life* 38). Philosophy also has several contradictory meanings (besides Thomas’s *ancilla theologiae* and the above-mentioned) or has such qualities: she makes one happy, is similar to Beatrice, a helper of theology; or elsewhere, a false teaching followed by Dante, etc.

<sup>31</sup> Most commentators more or less contemporary with or slightly later than Dante (e.g., Piero Alighieri) and biographers (e.g., Giovanni Boccaccio) claimed that Beatrice was a real person. Some kind of historical person is supposed to have existed even by those scholars who regard her as the product of Dante’s mind. His poetic genius brought Beatrice to life, just as a great painter makes his depicted figure life-like.

<sup>32</sup> In *New Life* (23.8), the women covered the humble face of the dead girl with a white veil. The poet considered his strongest sinful tendency to be its opposite: *superbia* (pride).

<sup>33</sup> “one drew help continually from what lay before, that is, from sight of that lady, while the other drew its help from what lay behind, that is, from my memory”; *Banquet* 2.2.

are nevertheless significant at the deepest level because of the ideal that always draws a certain generality along with it.” (Goethe 1797/1984).

Beatrice was prompted by the Mother of Mercy (*Mater misericordiae*).<sup>34</sup> The previous (unsuccessful) inspirer becomes a leader, who is present all along. Descending to the porch of hell, she made Virgil the means of providence, who brought up his protégé with a steady rise<sup>35</sup> from the *selva oscura* (forest dark) to the gate of the *divina foresta*, (heavenly forest), the original state of human perfection lost with the Fall. The phenomena of earthly paradise were explained by another *donna*, Matilda, ornamented six times by the epithet *bella* (the attribute is consistently placed before the qualified word, while the other way around with *donna gentile*).

Through the six cantos of the earthly Paradise, Dante was accompanied by a lady who had direct experience of the world between heaven and earth that God had intended for the originally sinless man. Unlike other purified souls, the *beautiful lady* will not enter Paradise; her role is as temporary as the place she is the guardian of, but she, too, is warmed by the rays of love (*Pur.* XXVIII. 42). The poet, who is just arriving, complains that what he experienced here was incompatible with his previous knowledge (*Pur.* XVII. 85–87). In this environment (and later ones, too), the sciences and philosophy, considered queens below, get into a contradiction with their own earlier claims. The “fog” (before the celestial Paradise) is dispelled by Matilda by pointing out the geophysical, climatic, biological, and anthropological conditions of the original place of the creation of man. One part of Dante’s new knowledge belongs to faith (God created man good), the other applies to the sciences. Nature is intertwined with morality: the environment of man before the Fall operated according to different laws (the movement of atmospheres, the properties and reproduction of plants, etc.) from the spoiled one afterwards. With earthly intellect, however, only the latter can be known. In the absence of direct experience, scientists and philosophers could only draw correct or incorrect conclusions from earthly phenomena different from the real ones. It is not their observations or conclusions that can be held responsible if the system learned on this basis, and thus their knowledge, lost their validity on a higher level.

In preparation for Paradise, Matilda immersed Dante (along with Statius) in the waters of Lethe and Eunoe. As a favour, his temporary companion added an

<sup>34</sup> Similarly to the *Donna gentile*, Mary is also the daughter of the Son (*Par.* XXXIII. 1–3) and her first attribute is compassion. In *Paradiso*, the word only appears in relation to her, once (*Par.* XXXIII. 19).

<sup>35</sup> The lowest point of the route suggested by Dante’s image of the cosmos is the starting point. From a moral and intellectual aspect, the journey through hell made by the traveller bound for his destination while getting to know the power of God and learning from it is in fact an ascent, even though the path leads geographically downwards until he reaches the centre of gravity.



*ad personam* comment to what had been said with which, without direct reference, she also explained the fundamental difference between the two groups of *spiriti magni*. The ancient poets, when they wrote on Parnassus about the happy golden age (eternal spring, rich fruit, nectar), were already dreaming of Paradise on earth. Virgil and Statius agreed with a smile. On the "canvas of their imagination," the truth was revealed to them, which they unknowingly displayed and made public with the help of their *ingenium*. On the other hand, the philosophers would have had to conceive with full consciousness and describe the reality of God, the incarnation of the Word, which did not yet exist in their day.

Dante walks beside Brunetto Latini with his head bowed down respectfully. On the banks of the Lethe, he adjusts his steps to Matilda's small ones (*Pur.* XXIX. 9), slowing down (even though he would rather hurry). Beatrice, on the other hand, calls him to walk faster, asks him to catch up with her, *vien più tosto* (Come more quickly, *Pur.* XXXIII. 19). Their movement expresses their attitude towards their partner's words. The master calls him *figliuol* (my son), but both ladies call him *frate* (brother), which is the sign of Beatrice's reconciliation after the scolding words and using the word *beard* instead of *face*. After that, not only their steps but also their thoughts proceed side by side, although not at the same height for a while. Beatrice *descends* not only to the porch of hell, but to the top of the Mountain of Purgatory. "We observe, for instance, that when the Sun sends down its rays onto this earth it forms things into a likeness of itself as regards light to the extent that they are able to receive the power of light in virtue of their disposition."<sup>36</sup>

According to Virgil's definition, Beatrice will be "lume fia tra 'l vero e lo 'ntelletto" ("Who light 'twixt truth and intellect shall be", *Pur.* VI. 45). After saving him from damnation, Beatrice's *second* task is to prepare her follower for the seeing of God. In the last two cantos of *Purgatorio* and the first two of *Paradiso*, the long process of doctrinal retraining begins, during which the true image of 'good' slowly unfolds before him. In the borderline situation, the fundamental difference between the two ways of thinking becomes visible. The knowledge that Dante's *school* has provided so far is inapplicable in the new environment. His slow and cumbersome intellect, although wanting to follow Beatrice's words, falls as far behind her as the earth from the Empyrean<sup>37</sup>. His new leader urges him to forget his old, erroneous views, as she experiences that, upon hearing her

<sup>36</sup> "Ove è da sapere che discendere la vertude d'una cosa in altra non è altro che ridurre quella in sua similitudine,... Onde vedemo lo sole che, discendendo lo raggio suo qua giù, reduce le cose a sua similitudine di lume." (*Banquet* 3.14.3)

<sup>37</sup> "Perché conoschi", disse, "quella scuola  
c' hai seguitata, e veggi sua dottrina  
come può seguitar la mia parola  
e veggi vostra via da la divina  
distar cotanto, quanto si discorda  
da terra il ciel che più alto festina"



lofty words such as the Fall, redemption, the corrupt Church, the DXV-prophecy,<sup>38</sup> Dante's *ingenium* slumbers (*Pur.* XXXIII. 64 and *om che sogna*, 33), his mind is converted into stone (*impetrato*, 74), stained (with sin) (*tinto*), and she must use naked (*nude*) words so that the rude (*rude*, 102) gaze of her protégé would see the point of her teaching.

Firstly, *parole nude* means a parable-like mode of speaking, which helps reveal the connections between separate events to her follower in a comprehensible way. The methodological example of facts explaining facts (*allegoria in factis*) may be the solution of the DXV-prophecy by Beatrice.

ma tosto fier li fatti le Naiade,  
che solveranno questo enigma forte<sup>39</sup>

It is not the words but the events-to-happen that will make Dante understand the content of the scene he witnesses and the prediction added by Beatrice, that the Five Hundred and Fifteen would kill the Whore and the Giant.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, Beatrice points out to her partner the flaws of earthly thinking, to the impossibilities and shortcomings arising from the historical-anthropological situation. The thinking of mortals comes to a false conclusion if there is little or no sensory experience to support it. But his intellect still remains shallow (its wings are short) even if the *ragione* follows the senses, that is, it has enough tangible experience.

“...S’elli erra  
l’opinïon”, mi disse, “d’i mortali  
dove chiave di senso non diserra,  
certo non ti dovrien punger li strali  
d’ammirazione omai, poi dietro ai sensi  
vedi che la ragione ha corte l’ali.”<sup>41</sup>

*Pur.* XXXIII. 85–90. “That thou mayst recognize,” she said, “the school / Which thou hast followed, and mayst see how far / Its doctrine follows after my discourse, / And mayst behold your path from the divine / Distant as far as separated is / From earth the heaven that highest hastens on.”

<sup>38</sup> DXV, cinquecento diece e cinque (515): the number designates the divine messenger restoring the broken world order.

<sup>39</sup> *Pur.* XXXIII. 49–50. “But soon the facts shall be the Naiades / Who shall this difficult enigma solve”. Instead of the Naiads, however, it must have been Laios, son of Oedipus who solved the riddle posed by the sphinx. *Enigma forte*, showing the influence of St Paul’s *in aenigmatē*, is a phrase frequently quoted by literary scholars researching the mystical and occult layers of the *Commedia* (e.g., Minguzzi 1988).

<sup>40</sup> DXV may be Dante himself or Henry VII of Luxembourg; the whore is the Pope, the giant is the King of France. The hoped-for event, Henry VII’s victory, did not happen.

<sup>41</sup> *Par.* II. 52–57. “If the opinion / Of mortals be erroneous,” she said, / “Where’er the key of sense doth not unlock, / Certes, the shafts of wonder should not pierce thee / Now, forasmuch as, following the senses, / Thou seest that the reason has short wings.”



The verbal tools being insufficient for Dante to comprehend, Beatrice resorts to artistic means. She urges him to forgo exact reasoning and put what he sees into words by carrying the images within himself to pass its meaning on to posterity, like pilgrims carry in the palm branch on their sticks.

The heavenly *vero* can by no means be revealed by a mere experimental, empirical and rational knowledge of the laws of earthly nature either at the time of creation or subsequently, when it is already corrupted. In the realm close to God (*deiforme*, *Par.* II. 20), by looking into the Sun (*Par.* I. 52–63), the laws of the senses and with the cessation of gravity (Dante ascends to heaven, *Par.* I. 73–75), the laws of geophysics become null and void. After the ridiculous mythological and erroneous scientific explanations for the darker spots on the moon, Beatrice reveals the truth to Dante: the phenomenon is not caused by silvering or different densities, by optical or astrophysical rules but something completely different. It is not the scientific laws that prevail but the moral ones leading to salvation. The phenomenon on the surface of the Moon, which is visible from earth, can be traced back to varying degrees of goodness in the forming principle, i.e., the darker parts received less power from the moving intellect than the bright ones (*Par.* II. 147–148, *formal principio che produce, conforme a sua bontà, lo turbo e 'l chiaro*, This is the formal principle that produces, / According to its goodness, dark and bright). The reasons are spiritual and moral, not natural. Those who are unable to rise in their thinking from matter to spirit, from simple movement to morality, should not want to study deeper truths.

At the beginning of the second canto of *Paradiso*, Dante divided the readers of his work into two (three, along with himself) groups in his favourite ship-metaphor. His ship sails first. Rational thinking based on sensory experience was sufficient to understand the world after the Fall and the description of it. Uneducated readers sitting in small and slow boats could enjoy the colourful account of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* and learn from the multitude of examples given in them. They could sail all the way so far, but Dante advised them against further, deep-sea voyages. They are denied admission to the secret order of God's operation and must return to shore. However, he calls on the sages, who feed on the bread of angels, to follow in the wake of his singing ship to more easily attain the purpose of their existence.

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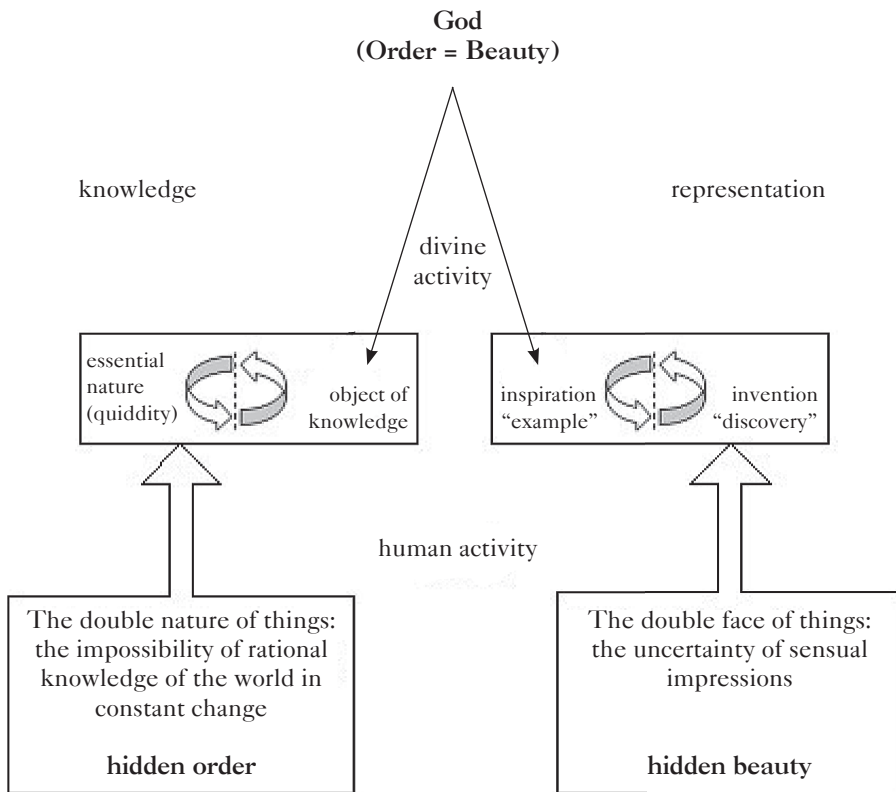
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GYULA KLIMA

## When Hell Freezes Over: Science and Theology in Dante's *Inferno*

It is supposed to be common knowledge that Hell is fiery, well, as Hell. After all, this is why we say referring to a time that never comes as “when Hell freezes over”. And this is why we say of people who have no chance succeeding in something, or indeed, in surviving a dangerous situation, that they have “a snowball’s chance in Hell”. Not so, however, in Dante’s icy Hell, where a snowball would happily continue its otherwise perilous existence. So, what happened to Dante; didn’t he get the memo? Or is it perhaps only our modern Anglo-Saxon imagination that associates hell with “fire and brimstone”? Well, hell no, if I may emphasize the point this way. It is certainly not only Anglo-Saxon imagination, as it can be found in almost any old churches depicting Hell all over Europe. And it is certainly not some modern imagination, witnessed by all sorts of medieval depictions from church frescoes to illuminated codices such as this one:

So, to pose the task of this lecture in one question, we should ask: how come Dante’s *Inferno* is icy, despite the common imagination of a fiery hell? Or to articulate the task a little better: what are Dante’s possible reasons for depicting hell the way he does; are they rooted in his philosophy, science, theology, or mere poetic imagination?

Let us try to address these issues systematically, in the reverse order, starting with what may appear to be the most obvious, the *poetic* explanation. According to this, the punishment of Dis with ice is a sort of “poetic justice”: the greatest punishment fits the greatest crime. Satan, for his arrogant, vain attempt to take the place of God, deserved to be cast the farthest away from that place. Well, obviously, given that God and Satan are both spiritual beings that do not occupy physical space in the way physical bodies do, the talk about places and distances here must be metaphorical. But then the place of Dis is indeed exactly right. For if God’s “place” is where all spiritual light and warmth emanates from, then the place allotted to Dis must be the darkest and coldest, spiritually. But what is this spiritual light and warmth and the opposite dark and cold?

Since metaphors always involve an implicit comparison of what is less known to what is better known, or what is unfamiliar to what is familiar, we should



start with what we are familiar with, namely, what is common experience. And common experiences are best articulated in our language's idiomatic expressions, encoding common wisdom. So, what does this common wisdom teach us about the relationship between coldness and warmth and our spiritual, emotional lives? We all know what it's like to "get cold feet" or "give someone the cold shoulder", as opposed to people "warming up to each other" or "feeling warm

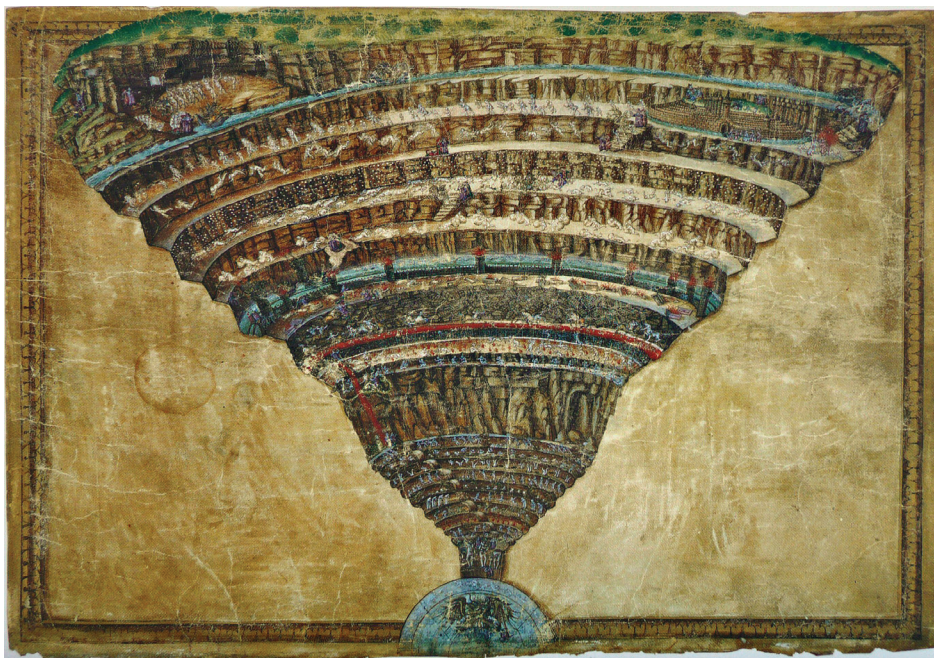


and fuzzy inside”. Accordingly, warmth is always strongly associated with positive and, coldness with negative feelings, or to use another, spatial, metaphor: with emotional, and thus, by extension, intellectual closeness, *versus* remoteness, keeping a distance.

Indeed, this poetic idea would also be in keeping with the *theological* consideration of Satan, and generally the wicked, who are suffering the tortures of Hell by being cast the farthest away from God with no hope of returning to Him.

But, however attractive this type of metaphorical/poetic explanation for Dante’s icy Hell may sound, there are several reasons why it may not be fully satisfactory.

In the first place, Dante’s and Virgil’s journey is cast very much like a physical travel, described with geographic precision, indeed, so much so that it allows for a life-like depiction of the entire structure of Hell inside the earth in Botticelli’s famous Map of Dante’s Inferno.



To be sure, one might object here that for a metaphor to be poetically effective it had better be life-like, and so the description of a metaphorical journey, in order to be poetically effective, must be geographically correct, while it is still metaphorical. Therefore, the geographical correctness of the depiction does not have to conclude to the physical character of the journey depicted.

While we may concede this objection and allow the journey’s metaphorical character, leading to places farther and farther “cast away from God”, using a



spatial metaphor, this explanation still may not fully account for the icy character of “the farthest place”, the ninth circle.

After all, theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas, dealing with the issue of torments in Hell, regularly considered the question of how the souls of the damned, along with the purely spiritual demons and Lucifer himself can suffer from *corporeal fire*.

So, it would seem that such theologians, following in the footsteps of Augustine in his *De Civitate Dei*, would find Dis, his demons, and the separate souls of the dead condemned to Hell to be tormented by *fire*, indeed, corporeal, *physical fire*, and not by ice, where the only problem is how a purely spiritual, incorporeal entity can be afflicted in any way by a corporeal substance, namely, fire.

Now if we look at the solution of the problem provided by Aquinas, we can see that in a way it is in interesting agreement with the poetic/metaphorical explanation we have just considered, despite the contrast between fire and ice: since physical fire cannot have a physical, corporeal impact on an incorporeal entity, its impact must be of a different nature, consisting in “tying down” these spirits, frustrating their natural yearning to get (using again a spatial metaphor) “closer” to God. To be sure, fire in and of itself does not have this power to detain a spirit, which is a substance of a superior nature, but it does so by virtue of working as God’s instrument of inflicting just punishment, exacerbated by the fact that the instrument in question is of an inferior nature than the one being punished. As Aquinas writes:

To investigate, therefore, how corporeal fire can be harmful to a soul or a demon, we should consider the fact that harm is not brought upon someone by receiving that which perfects it, but rather as it is impeded by its contrary. So, the soul’s affliction by fire is not only by receiving its impact, as the intellect receives the impact of intelligible objects, and the sense that of the sensibles, but in the way in which something is afflicted by something else that is its contrary or impediment. And this takes place in two ways. For something is impeded by its contrary through being altered and corrupted, as when fire burns wood. Other things are impeded by something standing in their way or being contrary to their natural inclination, just as a rock’s natural inclination is to fall downward, but it is impeded by something standing in its way and forcing it violently to stop or move. But neither of these ways is like a punishment for something that lacks cognition. For where there is no pain or sorrow, the idea of inflicting punishment simply does not apply. But in a cognitive subject both ways of affliction import infliction of punishment, but differently. For the affliction of alteration by a contrary object imports the infliction of punishment by sensible pain as when an excessively sensible object destroys the integrity of a sense. This is why excessively sensible objects, especially tangible ones, inflict physical pain, while moderately sensible ones bring about pleasure, because they are agreeable to the senses. But the other kind of affliction does not import the infliction of punishment by sensible



pain, but by sorrow, which arises in man or an animal from the fact that something intrinsic is apprehended by some [cognitive] power as being against the will or some other desire. And thus, those things that are contrary to the will or some other desires do have an impact, and sometimes even more than sensible pain does, for one would rather suffer a beating and being afflicted by sensory pain than suffer vilification or some such things that are against one's will. In the first way, therefore, the soul cannot suffer from corporeal fire; for it is not possible for the soul to be altered or destroyed by it. Thus, the soul is not afflicted by fire so that it would suffer sensible pain from it. However, the soul can suffer from corporeal fire in the second way of suffering, insofar as it is impeded by this sort of fire from its inclination or will. And this is obvious from the following. The soul, just as any other incorporeal substance, is not tied to a place by its own nature but transcends the entire order of corporeal things. Therefore, that it is tied down to something by some necessity is against its nature and contrary to its natural desire. And I say this excepting the case when it is joined to the [human] body, of which it is its natural form, and in which it obtains some perfection. However, when a spiritual substance is tied down to a body, this does not happen by the power of the body that would be able to detain a spirit, but it happens by the power of a superior substance tying the spiritual substance to such a body, just as when by means of magical arts, with divine permission, by the power of superior demons some spirits are tied to certain bodies, such as rings or pictures, etc. And this is how souls and demons are tied down, in punishment, to corporeal fire by divine power. This is why Augustine says in book 21 of *De Civitate Dei*: 'why should we not say that, although in miraculous ways, even the incorporeal spirits being afflicted by corporeal fire, if the spirits of humans, although themselves incorporeal can even now be locked up in bodily members, and then will be tied to the members of their bodies by unbreakable shackles? Thus, although they are incorporeal, these spirits will adhere to corporeal fire to be tormented, receiving punishment from the fire, without giving it life.' And so, it is true that this fire, insofar as it detains the soul tied to it by divine power, is acting on the soul as the instrument of divine justice. And insofar as the soul apprehend the fire as something hurting it, it is afflicted by inner sorrow, which is the most intense when it considers that it is subjected to something inferior to it, whereas it was naturally to be united with God in joy. The greatest affliction of the damned, therefore, derives from the fact that they will be separated from God, and a secondary one results from the fact that they will be subjected to corporeal things in the lowest and most dejected place. (Q. d. de anima, a. 21 co.)

So, what do we learn from this lengthy quote? In the first place, and most importantly, the souls of the damned in Hell do suffer from corporeal fire. The fire and the suffering are not imaginary: the fire is physical, and the suffering is real, although not physical. Accordingly, the description of the suffering in terms of physical affliction is metaphorical or analogical, as is usually the case when we are describing mental phenomena: we are "grasping" an idea, abstract, that is,



“pull away”, a concept, that is, what we mentally “grasp”, from its individuation conditions, we can “see” someone’s “point” in an argument, etc., etc. But why does the instrument of divine punishment have to be *corporeal fire*? Aquinas provides the reason with reference to, in the *sed contra* argument, immediately preceding the passage just quoted:

it is the same fire by which the bodies and souls and demons will be punished, as is clear from Matthew XXV, 41: ‘depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels’. However, the bodies of the damned will have to be punished by corporeal fire. Therefore, by the same reason, the separated souls are also punished by corporeal fire. (Q. d. de anima, a. 21 s. c.)

But does it *have to be* fire? It is still not clear where Dante’s icy punishment allotted to Dis and those around him is coming from.

Well, we certainly have here the Biblical reference quoting the words of the Lord himself, speaking about fire. However, we can also learn from Aquinas that it really does not matter whether it is fire or ice: what matters is not the element’s physical impact by its active power, whether it be heat or cold, which it cannot have on immaterial entities anyway; rather, what matters is that it functions as a physical instrument of spiritual punishment, which, however, is metaphorically depicted in terms of physical pain, and which in turn is just the impact of an excessive sensible that is harmful to a sense, whether it be the excessive heat of fire or the excessive cold of ice. So, if Dante has his poetic or other reasons for depicting the torments of the damned in terms of the metaphorical description of sensible suffering, he may use ice in these depictions just as he could use fire.

But, perhaps, Dante the great syncretic poet of the age of intellectual as well as stone-built cathedrals, had also some other, namely, *scientific* reasons for depicting an icy Hell. After all, in Aristotelian physics, the sublunary world consists of four elements, earth, water, air, and fire, churned up by the impact of celestial light, producing the cycles of generation and corruption of mixed bodies within this sphere. But the elements themselves, when left alone, tend toward their natural places in the order of their heaviness: the earth in the center, around it water, enveloped by water and then fire. In fact, according to Aquinas, when at the end of the world (as we know it) the celestial motions will stop, the elements will be separated in their natural spheres, and all generation and corruption will stop. However, even while there is generation and corruption on account of celestial movement, some partial separation is possible, and that’s why the greater part of earth, the heaviest element that is naturally cold is at the center of the universe, and of course it is the coldest toward its very center. Add to its coldness the coldness of water partly trapped inside it at the center, and you get the ice entrapping Dis.



To be sure, besides this scientific reason there may have simply been other popular views influencing Dante, some of which provided him with the imagery of an icy Hell. In fact, one of his sources, the Vision of Tundale, provides us with a vision of Hell torturing its inhabitants *both* with fire and ice:

Then they came to a mountain of extraordinary size, a place of great horror and immense solitude. The mountain provided a very narrow path for those wishing to cross. For on one side of the path there was a putrid fire, sulfurous and dark, while on the other side there was icy snow and a horrible hail-ridden wind. On one side and the other, the mountain was ready to punish souls; it was full of torturers, so that no route appeared to be safe to those who wished to cross it. These torturers wielded fiery iron tongs and had very sharp tridents at the ready, with which they pierced any souls trying to cross and dragged them to torment. While those wretched souls suffered punishments enveloped in the flames, they were pierced by the tridents and thrown into the snow. Then they were thrown back once again from the pounding hail into the fiery flames. (Bruce 2018. 88.)

So, in line with the foregoing theological considerations by Aquinas, what matters again is the vivid sensory description of physical pain, metaphorically standing in for the spiritual torment consisting of being cast away from God, and detained by something inferior, indeed, disgustingly foul, and painful. So, whichever form of torment the poet would pick, the spiritual message would be the same: you are in a place of horrors when you are in a place farthest from God.

But of course, even this reference to a place and distance is metaphorical, standing in for the spiritual condition most vividly depicted by Dante in the abject resignation of Dis himself. For even if Hell is a physical location, somewhere in, over, or under (meaning the other side) the earth, what matters is that spiritual condition itself. This why Aquinas, answering to a question about the location of Hell, says: “As to the question of where Hell is, whether around the center of the earth or around its surface, I take it that this has nothing to do with the doctrine of faith, and it is superfluous to get excited about these matters whether affirming or denying such claims.” (De 43 articulis, a. 31 arg.)

And this is because the point is not a scientific truth or falsity, but the spiritual message, which the poet is free to express in the most vivid and forceful sensory imagery he can conjure up, especially for those who understand him well.





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ÉVA VÍGH

## The Three Beasts

### Animal Symbolism and its Sources in the *Comedy*\*

The fauna has been present in popular imagination as well as in culture, theology, literature, and the arts and cultural history in general for several thousand years, which indicates the privileged role that the animal kingdom has had in man's relationship with the surrounding world. God-created animals are ubiquitous, populating both the educated and the popular imagination: in fact, for millennia, the extremely complex nature of the relationship between humans and animals has been evident in written memories, the works of philosophers, poets, painters, and sculptors, with particular regard to the importance of moral teaching. Ever since the eras of ancient Greco-Roman culture, there has been no literary genre on the level of myth and reality without a symbolical depiction with animals transforming them into messages of universal value by observing their characteristics and unique nature. For the man of the Middle Ages, it may have sufficed to read the book of Job to get an explanation as to how divine wisdom is manifested in animals:

ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being. (Job 12,7–10, NRSV.)

The content and form analysis of the *Comedy*, the hermeneutical diversity of texts and contexts, the rich symbolism of religious-historical-poetic images and its symbol system in general also offered and still offer endless possibilities of interpretation as to Dante's conception of nature. His cosmology, astronomical and

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astrological, physical, mathematical knowledge, as well as his poetic representation of natural phenomena are organically matched by the symbolic depiction of animal behaviour, that is, the depiction of real or fantastic beings for poetic–moralizing or descriptive purposes, sometimes taking advantage of their expressive power, other times of their paraenetic or imperative character. When analysing the relationship between animal symbolism and the *Comedy*’s message, one cannot ignore the many ideological, poetic, and spiritual aspects that have obviously left their mark on Dante’s cosmology. The poet viewed all the creatures of the universe as elements in a cosmic order, and this order of nature means the principle or form that makes the entire universe similar to the Creator:

[...] Le cose tutte quante  
hanno ordine tra loro, e questo è forma  
che l’universo a Dio fa simigliante.  
[...]  
Ne l’ordine ch’io dico sono accline  
tutte nature, per diverse sorti,  
più al principio loro e men vicine;  
(*Par.* I. 103–105; 109–111.)<sup>1</sup>

On this basis, the diversity of created animals also fits perfectly into the Dantean order, and accordingly, the *Comedy* shows different approaches and different poetic–moralizing–descriptive intentions to the presentation of imagined and real animals.<sup>2</sup> The research conducted on the role and interpretation of animals reflecting any poetic intent – “bestiality” – in the *Comedy* is remarkably diverse, and a separate detailed study would be needed to collect and evaluate these in terms of methodology and content.<sup>3</sup> In the Middle Ages, the external or internal characteristics of animals, the stories about them, especially the bestiaries – just like herbariums or lapidaries –, were all enveloped in symbolic meaning, and all aimed at conveying moral instruction. Whatever encyclopaedic culture

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from the *Comedy* are taken from Giorgio Petrocchi’s edition (Dante 1966–1967).

<sup>2</sup> As of today, we do not have a complete summary on the fauna in the *Comedy*, although the increasing number of studies on individual animals in recent decades has indicated the popularity – and the complex nature – of the task. The various repertoires charting the *Comedy*’s animals feature more than a hundred real or imaginary creatures. The first and only repertoire on Dante’s fauna is Holbrook 1902, now available in reprint and electronic form; whereas Celli – Venturelli 1995. 109–117 set remarkably wide limits to the classification of (real and imaginary) animals summarized in tables; and the most recent, useful, hypertextual list of sources (Mouchet 2008) contains 111 animal-related Dantean passages and a number of additional references from the field of zoology, supplemented by a basic bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> On the extremely diverse research directions and reception history, see the exhaustive summary by Crimi 2013. 14–33; Ledda 2008. 139–140. On the zoomorphic imagery of morality, see Vigh 2011.



they reflected, they formed part of a remarkably precise cosmography: nature, as a mirror of divine revelation, corresponded to a higher reality. Within this framework, animals acted as markers for the discovery of moral-allegorical realities. As a typical educational genre of the era, the bestiary translated nature into morality and poetry, focusing not so much on the precise description of animals but rather – as a moral example with a focus on instruction – on enriching the rhetorical praxis of those who had to address the community. The heyday of illustrated bestiaries following the example of the *Physiologus* – produced in the period from the second to the fourth centuries AD in Alexandria, in Greek, preserved in several versions and languages, reflecting a variety of pictorial fantasies – was around the twelfth–thirteenth centuries,<sup>4</sup> and their moral–pictorial messages have been passed down to posterity through representations in fine art too. In Dante’s time, they were considered useful manuals throughout Europe, including real and imaginative animals and hybrid beings indiscriminately; in fact, *Liber monstrorum*,<sup>5</sup> widespread from the ninth century, demonstrates that the strange creatures falling into the category of monsters also enriched the scope of moral interpretation.

Encyclopaedias, summarily containing information taken over from ancient sources, were also important for intellectuals of the era. The authors of the fundamental works of medieval animal interpretations were Isidorus of Seville, also esteemed by Dante (see “l’ardente spiro / d’Isidoro” [*Par.* X. 130–131]), the author of the *Etimologiae* along with the medieval encyclopaedias; as well as theologian and naturalist St. Albert the Great (*Par.* X. 98), the author of *De animalibus*. Although the relationship between the animal imagery conveyed by the encyclopaedias and allegory is a controversial issue, there is no doubt that medieval encyclopaedias based on antique sources conveyed essential knowledge (cf. Van Den Abeele 1999). The *De proprietatibus rerum* (and its section devoted to animals) by the Franciscan Bartholomaeus Anglicus – or even its translation into the Mantuan dialect by Vivaldo Belcalzer – may also have been an important source for Dante.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the poet was well versed in the scientific reading of ancient authors, although he was familiar with Pliny’s natural history only indirectly. Nonetheless, when he mentions scholars who greatly contributed to humanity, in *Inferno*, *canto* IV, “Euclide geomètra e Tolomeo, /

<sup>4</sup> McCulloch 1960; Baxter 1998; Van Den Abeele 2005; Clark 2006; and Pastoreau 2011 are fundamental for the temporal and spatial classification, history, and reception of bestiaries. Due to its summary nature, see also: Payne 1990.

<sup>5</sup> The latest critical edition of the *Liber monstrorum* is Porsia 2012 (the previous version: Bologna 1977). The monsters of the *Inferno* have also inspired researchers; only a few out of the ever-growing literature: Luciani 1975; Livanos 2009; Seriacopi 2014. The *actae* of the conference on the monster-imagery of Dante and the Middle Ages are also worth consulting: CISAM 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Regarding the Italian reception of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, see the still indispensable Cian 1902.



Ippocrate, Avicenna e Galieno, / Averois, che ‘l gran comento feo” (142–144), he betrays direct scientific knowledge.

He must have come into closer contact with the works on animals by Aristotle, the master of all scholars (“‘l maestro di color che sanno” [*Inf.* IV. 131]), as the science adviser and astrologer of Emperor Frederick II, Michael Scotus (“Michele Scotto fu, che veramente / de le magiche frode seppe ‘l gioco” [*Inf.* XX. 116–117]) translated these works into Latin still prior to 1220, in Toledo. These works on biology resonated greatly in contemporary intellectual circles.<sup>7</sup> Even a short outline of the relationship between Dante and the sciences would go beyond the scope of this paper, so the above list is far from complete, limited to only the most important works and authors, with the aim to hint at the nature of the resources known in Dante’s era and his cultural circles, or born in his ideological, linguistic, and cultural context. In fact, these exerted a profound effect on the poet, who was interested in ancient and contemporary culture, and assimilated these organically into his work.

In Italian culture at the turn of the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries, in the immediate vicinity of Dante, a series of literary and philosophical works were born with an emphasis on animal symbolism. These are definitely indicative as to the contemporary concepts on and approaches to animal symbolism. Brunetto Latini, the poet’s beloved and esteemed master (cf. *Inf.* XV. 43–44, 97), in Book I of his *Trésor* (esp. in Part V), discusses the nature of animals in seventy chapters from fish to bear following the concepts and methods known from the encyclopaedias. The third chapter of the *L’Acerba* textbook by Dante’s contemporary, Cecco d’Ascoli – also known for his invective against the fairy-tale-like, contrived, and chattering nature of the *Comedy* – is about morals and their symbols, with the author discussing the natural, zoomorphic equivalents of virtues and vices in the form of a brief bestiary. Travel descriptions describing real experiences (or interwoven with mysticism and visions) could not lack zoological observations either. However, Dante’s poetic sensibility cannot have been left untouched by the ideological-cosmological and cultural background shown in the animal symbolism of troubadour poetry (and of the love bestiary of Richard de Fournival), the zoomorphic emblems of the Sicilian poetic school, traceable also in Chiaro Davanzati’s and Dino Frescobaldi’s poetry, and in the animal symbolism of the *Mare Amorofo*, the Gubbio *Bestiario moralizzato* and the *Detto del gatto lupo*.<sup>8</sup> These works and authors provided a complete repository of zoomorphic rhetorical figures and, in their own ways, styles, and messages, enriched the medieval imagery of animal symbolism, and convey it to today’s readers as well.

<sup>7</sup> For thirteenth-century translations to Aristotle’s books on animals and their reception, see Van Oppenraay 1999; Beullens 1999; whereas for a discussion on the natural philosophy of Michael Scotus and Dante, see Ciccuto 2003.

<sup>8</sup> For a comparison of the *Comedy* and the *Gatto lupo*, see Suitner 2013. 37–61.





Thus, when one takes a brief account of the rich zoononymous and zoomorphic elements of the *Comedy* or seeks for a connection between the symbolism and poetic depiction of certain animals, one must also take into account the ideological-spiritual background by which Dante was obviously inspired. The poetic depiction of the Dantean fauna was not so much due to the observation of nature as to his faith and literary knowledge: the Bible; classical literary sources; the medieval encyclopaedic tradition; the moral admonitions in the bestiaries; travelogues; as well as the moral instructions of Aesop's (and Phaedrus') tales and apologies all enriched the functional, rhetorical, and poetic world of the *Comedy*. Dante, however, did not slavishly take over the zoomorphic rhetorical figures of ancient and medieval culture, some of which had already stiffened into *topoi*. A good example of this is the griffin, "la biforme fera" (*Purg.* XXXII. 96), whose body inherited the shape of the two most glorious animals on earth and in heaven to symbolize the human and divine natures of Christ, thereby illustrating Dante's conceptual operation, his ability to perform poetic transformation.<sup>9</sup>

As early as in *canto* I of the *Inferno*, the appearance of the three beasts in the poet's path, conveying (also) zoomorphic symbolism, indicate the important role attributed by Dante – and medieval worldview – to animal symbolism. I will be attempting to chart the possibilities of zoomorphic interpretation through interpretations related to the three best-known animals in the *Comedy*, and the reason for this lies precisely in their notoriety, as the mottled feline, the lion, and the she-wolf symbolize *something for everyone*, owing to centuries of commentaries on Dante. It is worthwhile, therefore, to approach the problem of zoomorphic symbolism determining the beginning of the *Comedy* through those methods of interpreting animal symbolism that were canonical in Dante's time, and to emphasize Dante's poetic genius when we witness his unique usage of literary antecedents to systematize the beasts obstructing his path.<sup>10</sup> The panther/lynx (*lonza*), the she-wolf, and the lion appear in different, sometimes contradictory, images in the bestiaries. It cannot be my task now to address all the symbolic explanations on the three animals known to researchers in the field of the varied Dantean exegesis; I will only focus on those features that are relevant to zoomorphic (and sometimes zoomorphic-physiognomic) interpretation.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For Dante's depiction of the hybrid, the griffin, as well as its aftermath and the animal's symbolism in general, see Vigh 2014. 341–358.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to point out that the researchers almost unanimously indicate the Book of Jeremiah as the literary antecedent for the three beasts. There, in fact, they appear at the same time and symbolize the obstacles that make sinful souls stumble: "Therefore a lion from the forest shall kill them, a wolf from the desert shall destroy them. A leopard is watching against their cities; everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces – because their transgressions are many, their apostasies are great." (Jer. 5,6.)

<sup>11</sup> On the three beasts of *canto* I, from a physiognomic-zoomorphic approach, see Vigh 2013. 150–168. See also these animals from a moral perspective: Ledda 2019. 46–62.



Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy* (mid-fifteenth century).  
 London, British Library (ms. Yates Thompson 36, f.2.)

<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IID=56664>

The mottled beast described by Dante, the “lonza leggiera e presta molto, / che di pel macolato era coverta” (*Inf.* I. 32–33), pops up unexpectedly, and although most translations identify Dante’s *lonza* as a *panther*, numerous assumptions have been proposed as to the exact identity of the animal,<sup>12</sup> as is well known; as its denotation<sup>13</sup> and its connotation both raise a number of questions. Due to its meaning, Dante’s *lonza*, this large feline may also be seen as a pun, an etymological – and, above all, zoological – enigma to be deciphered on the basis of then-current texts. Aware of the variety of interpretations that can all be legitimate – indicating a panther, a leopard, a lynx, or any feline with spotted fur – we will now focus on the zoomorphic symbolism of panther and lynx, appearing in most translations and interpretations. Undoubtedly, Dante could rely on a range of classical and medieval encyclopaedic or literary, ecclesiastical or secular sources when creating the shape of the mottled monster. To consider the most common identification, it is worth starting with the ancient source tradition, namely, Aristotle. The philosopher described the panther as a seductively beautiful beast that attracts her prey with her fragrant breath (Aristotle: *Hist. anim.* 612a 13). Pliny, in addition to describing the panther’s spotted fur, joins the Greek philosopher by registering the *topos* of the fragrance used to seduce prey. In addition, he distinguishes the female (*panthera*) and the male (*pardus*), describing in detail the colour and shape of their spots and, based on what he

<sup>12</sup> For a summary of some common explanations on symbols, see entries *lonza* and *fiera* (the latter for all three animals) in Bosco 1970–1978.

<sup>13</sup> *Lonza*, as is known, is etymologically related to Latin *lynx*, stemming from its female form (*lyncea*); and appears with a wide variety of names (e.g., *leonza*, *leonça*) in thirteenth-century literature.



had heard from others, states that the *panthera* is distinguished by her bright white fur from the *pardus* (Plinius: *Nat. hist.* VIII. 23. 63).

In the Christian approach, the interpretation of the panther is ambivalent. The cruel beast occurs several times in the Old Testament: for example, the multicoloured, mottled fur of the panther is mentioned by the prophet Jeremiah (13,23); and in the book of Hosea (13,7), we read about a panther (and a lion) “lurking beside the way.” The *Physiologus*, on the other hand, refers to the *topos* of the fragrant breath in Christian reading as belonging to the female panther (*panthera*): the scent of the words of Christ who was risen on the third day proclaims peace between believers far and near (cf. also Eph. 2,17). Furthermore, the beauty and colourful fur of the calm, gentle panther is likened here to the dress of Joseph: “omnimodo varius est sicut tunica Ioseph, et speciosus. [...] Panther quitum animal est et mitissimum nimis” (*Phys.* XXXIX. 162–164). The question is further complicated by the fact that the lavishly beautiful animal with spotted fur is given a different name in medieval encyclopaedias: Isidorus of Seville (and several bestiaries following his lead) – pursuant to Pliny, probably – distinguishes, even with their names, between male (*pardus*) and female (*panthera*) with obvious references to the Bible and the *Physiologus*. In the case of the male, he writes of a swift, mottled, bloodthirsty animal that, by its lush nature, mates even with the lion; therefore, in the *Comedy*, the sin of fornication attributed to the *lonza* suits Isidorus’ male animal. The leopard (*leopardus*) is born out of this “matrimony;” apparently, as an etymology to the composition of the words *leon* and *pardus* (Isidorus: XII. 2, 10–11). The female, on the other hand, is indebted to the Christian explanation: Isidorus derives the etymology of her name from the Greek *pan*: the panther is liked by *all* animals except the dragon: “Panther dictus, sive quod omnium animalium sit amicus, excepto dracone, sive quia et sui generis societate gaudet et ad eandem similitudinem quicquid accipit reddit. Πᾶν enim Graece omne dicitur” (Isidorus: XII. 2, 8–9).

Many of the bestiaries also form their image of the panther on this basis: in addition to their beautiful, spotted fur, their breath is attractive to all animals except the dragon, like the words of Christ to believers, with only the devil who flees from Him. The bestiaries unanimously echo the position of the *Physiologus*, and by categorizing *pardus*, *panthera*, and *leopardus* into separate groups, most of them also classify the above briefly outlined moral interpretation accordingly. It is worth recalling that Dante uses the metaphor of the (albeit unnamed) panther in Book I of his *De vulgari eloquentia* (Chapter XVI), referencing the panther’s beauty and attractive scent, where he is guided by the desire to choose the most beautiful of the various dialects, and he wishes to catch the beast whose scent is felt everywhere but is nowhere to be seen.

As for the panther’s “character traits,” we find a number of useful indications in ancient and medieval physiognomic treatises about which Dante was knowledgeable in addition to Michael Scotus (i.e., “Michele Scotto” [cf. *Inf.*





XX. 116]) who wrote the first systematic work on physiognomy in the Middle Ages and commented on Aristotle's works on animals. One of the most important methods of physiognomy, which promotes the thesis of correspondence between the external features of one's body and one's character, is the method of zoomorphic comparison, so almost every treatise pays great attention to animals. The zoomorphic analogy reveals the moral attitude, which is also relevant from the viewpoint of animal symbolism. Aristotle writes of the panther's attitude, "such is its bodily aspect, and in soul it is mean and thievish, and in a word, the beast of low cunning" (Aristotle: *Physiogn.* 1913. 810a8). The fundamental thesis of late antique physiognomy, quoting from the Latin Anonymus, "who is similar to a leopard, is cunning, ruthless, savage, and reckless" ("qui pardo est similis, insidiosus, rigidus, saeuus, audax" [Anon. Lat. §46]), while in Polemon's physiognomy the "panthera impudens adultera malevola se occultans amans necare et vincere eum qui ipsi se opponit, pacata cum pacato, superba fastosa nec mansueta nec domanda" (Polemon 1893. 172). The panther, he posits, is shameless, unfaithful, malevolent, untamed; that is, there was an unmanageable beast blocking Dante's way.

Giovan Battista Della Porta, collecting and synthesizing the descriptions of ancient and medieval sages, also conveyed centuries-old interpretations in characterizing animals. The image of the lascivious feline, for this sixteenth-century author, takes the form of a leopard. For him the literary antecedent was Dante's description: "Dante Alighieri depicts fornication as a leopard, which copulates with animals of different species and, at the time of coitus, cries out to calls the animals of its own kind and other kinds". As per the the characteristics of a leopard, it is full of deceit and shrewdness, and (like cats in general) shy and bold at the same time: "delicate, effeminate, wrathful, treacherous, fraudulent, bold, and timid at the same time; and the shape of its body properly befits its manners". The physiognomic features of the animal are in perfect harmony with its attitude: "it is proud and full of deceit and treachery, and at the same time bold and fearful: its form befits its manners" (Della Porta 2013. 521, 89 and 46). He lists the panther (*pantera*) as a symbol of shyness, while the panther (*pardo*) – the beast of the Bible and bestiaries – is an epitome of humility. These mutually contaminated definitions by Della Porta provide a good illustration as to the zoonymic, descriptive, and moral confusion characterizing the symbolism of the mottled beast, and also indicate how Dante's poetic invention was interpreted in the late sixteenth century. Based on what has been said so far, we can only be sure that the semantics of the panther are at least as rich – and even more complex – than that of the animal named *lonza*, which, for Dante, by unique and rather intricate symbolism, may have meant any graceful, large feline with spotted fur.

Apart from the assumptions that the choice of *lonza* here may have been motivated by rhetorical reasons; namely, that the names of all three *beasts* had to be-



gin with the same consonant (*lonza*, *leone*, *lupa*), lynx could be the best candidate on an etymological basis. Aristotle and Pliny both wrote about this feline, and the authors of medieval bestiaries were particularly fascinated by the *topos* of the gemstone formed from its urine, the linkur.<sup>14</sup> Ailianos likens this predator – with a slightly flatter nose, tassels on its ears, and the ability to overpower its prey by jumping on it – to the leopard (Aelianus: *De Nat. Anim.* XIV. 6). Ovid associates the lynx with the spotted panther (Ovid: *Met.* III. 668–669). Under the guidance of zoomorphic physiognomy, reading Polemon again, we learn that the lynx, like most animals, has virtues and vices alike, such as being sincere, courageous, sublime, proud, agile, but also shy and noisy, (“lynx quae eadem caracal adpellatur impudent audax elati animi alacris timida superba garrula sincera” [Polemon 1893. 172]). In the Middle Ages, the etymologization by Isidorus (Isidorus: XII. 2, 20) associated the lynx with the wolf, so the bestiaries posit that its spotted fur resembles a panther, its shape is reminiscent of a wolf; moreover, it is envious by nature.<sup>15</sup>

What is remarkable for an exegesis on Dante, is that no ancient or medieval text depicts the lynx as a fornicator, but the sin of envy is repeatedly emphasized by the use of the Latin verb *invidere* (look with envious eyes, be jealous). In Ovid, King Lyncus, who nurtured murderous intent out of envy, is turned into a lynx by Ceres (cf. Ovid: *Met.* V. 659–661). According to Pliny (*Nat. hist.* VIII. 57, 137), the lynx, out of envy or jealousy, scrapes its urine (whose solidified form is the aforementioned gemstone); and the same is reiterated by Solinus and Isidorus, in addition to most bestiaries. Considering medieval animal symbolism and the term *lonza*, the spotted beast in *canto* I of the *Inferno* could also be identified with a lynx in the light of the above, and thus symbolizes the sin of envy rather than fornication. Incidentally, this seemed to be an acceptable solution as early as in the sixteenth century, by Castelvetro, who also indicated, in his commentary on Dante, that the order of the three beasts suggests that the sin of envy is the less heinous out of the sins they symbolize, compared to the lion’s pride and the wolf’s greed: “yet envy is less despicable when compared to the lion’s pride and the wolf’s avarice” (Castelvetro 1886. 13–14).

Another circumstance that is perhaps more than interesting is that Dante was keen on reading Aesop’s tales.<sup>16</sup> In one of the animal tales, known as “The Blind Man and The Whelp” – available, apparently, in several versions and with different characters –, the cub of a beast is handed over to a blind man who is said to be able to recognize any animal by touching it, and he says, “I do not quite

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Aristotle: *Hist. anim.* 499b, 500b, 539b, etc.; Pliny: *Nat. hist.* VIII. 70, 84, 137.

<sup>15</sup> Among the many consistent descriptions, cf. the modern edition of Ms. Bodley 764: Bodley 1992. 38. Brunetto Latini writes similarly about *leonza* in his *Trésor* (Brunetto Latini, I. V. 176).

<sup>16</sup> For the relationship between Dante and Aesop’s animal tales, cf. Marcozzi 2013. 131–149.



know whether it is the cub of a fox, or the whelp of a wolf, but this I know full well. It would not be safe to admit him to the sheepfold.” And the moral explanation is also substantiated by physiognomy: “evil tendencies are shown by one’s physique.” With regard to the *lonza*, I believe Dante may have had similar thoughts when he came up with the name and image of the mottled beast in his poetic fantasy: he offered his readers – as the blind man was offered in the tale – an animal that was spotted, that is, not immaculate in character, and scary by its sheer appearance. Thus, the reader, if unsure, can “palpate” with the help of animal symbolism, which animal is this; and we can be certain that the poet implies, if not a panther, but definitely a scary, large, spotted – that is, sinful – feline.

As for the symbolism of Dante’s lion, looking for prey, angrily signalling hunger with its head raised (“con la test’alta e con rabbiosa fame” [*Inf.* I. 47]), it is certainly one of the oldest and most detailed symbols since antiquity: a symbol of strength, courage, generosity, pride; that is, the virtues of rulers, yet it often symbolizes violence, ruthless plunder, and arrogance. Although “la test’alta” can also be a symbol of legitimate pride, courage, and self-confidence, Dante’s description reveals the image of a haughty, prey-hungry, angry beast reminding St. Peter’s first epistle: “Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour” (1Peter 5,8). However, the Bible also portrays Jesus as the lion of the tribe of Judah, who triumphed over sin (Rev. 5,5). The lion’s symbolism, therefore, has always been ambivalent: dangerous, cruel, the embodiment of evil, yet brave, strong, and compassionate. It would be impossible to cite all the biblical zoomorphic or zoonymic occurrences of the lion here, yet in any case, their sheer number<sup>17</sup> indicates the positive and negative message values of the king of the animals in Christian symbolism. Ancient sources are also plentiful, as the male or female lion, even its hybrid forms with other animals into fantasy-created beings, is a recurring character from mythology to beast fables, from epics to works on nature: present everywhere, not only in words, but also carved in stone, and painted. Therefore, when Dante’s lion is in front of us, its diverse interpretation almost hinders us, like the lion arrested Dante, from moving forward, especially because the reader is glad to linger with the abundance of symbolic meanings the lion provides.

In the *Physiologus*, all “traits” of the image of the lion are placed into a Christological dimension and interpretation (to be precise, there are three of these). Isidorus also calls the lion “king” (Isidorus: XII. 2, 6); and by the twelfth century, dethroning the bear,<sup>18</sup> it had become the king of the beasts in the bestiaries too,

<sup>17</sup> In the Bible – obviously, depending on the translation – lions are mentioned in about 120–140 different verses.

<sup>18</sup> In the Middle Ages, the bear gave over its throne (not voluntarily) to the lion. For this exciting process of cultural and ideological history, cf. Pastoureau 2007.

which mostly follow the descriptions of the *Physiologus*. According to this work, the lion wipes his own mark with its tail, just as Christ hid his own divinity by being born of Mary; moreover, the animal sleeping with open eyes symbolizes Christ lying in the tomb yet still guarding us; the fact that the male lion awakens its stillborn cubs on the third day with its breath evoked the image of the resurrection for believers; the animal spares the life of its defeated adversaries just as the Lord saves sinful souls who repent of their sins, and so on. Medieval people could encounter live lions thanks to the showmen, but they could see the image of the now unconditional king of untamed animals even more often in the ornaments of Romanesque and Gothic churches. Therefore, when Dante was approached by this animal with a well-known positive character and symbolism in Christology, he was obviously highlighting the figure of the most formidable beast, which, according to the *Liber monstrorum*, is portrayed poets, orators, and naturalists as a king of animals due to its strength and fearsome nature: “leonem, quem regem esse bestiarum ob metum eius et nimiam fortitudinem poetae et oratores cum physicis fingunt, in frontem beluarum horribilium ponimus” (Porsia 2012. 257). *Inferno*’s lion is indeed so frightening that the air trembles, “sì che pareva che l’aere ne tremesse” (*Inf.* I. 48), as medieval encyclopaedias also attest that its roar terrifies all other animals (cf. Bart. Angl. 1601. 1083; Cecco 1927. 39).

Dante banished the Christian interpretation of the *Physiologus* and the bestiaries from the figure of the lion and presented an image of an animal with a choleric nature. In terms of its symbolism, though, the poet did not add to it, nor did he take from it; instead, he took over and conveyed the ambivalent symbolism that had existed for centuries (and that would remain for centuries to come) for the characterization of the king of animals. Like Boncompagno, who presented, in his *Rhetorica novissima*, the lion that had become God and the lion that had taken up the image of the devil,<sup>19</sup> Dante merely adapted the image of the haughty animal to poetic fiction, to symbolize not only the sin of pride, but the sin of anger too. The lion and the traits that can be associated with it appear in several other *canti* of the *Comedy*. In the episode about Guido da Montefeltro’s sin, the lion is an archetype of strength and courage, as opposed to the fox that symbolizes cunning (*Inf.* XXVII. 74–75). Elsewhere, it is a symbol of militancy and strength (*Par.* XII. 54); or appears as a constellation (*Par.* XXI. 14), or as a parable when Dante meets Sordello, who at first views the two poets with dignity, almost contemptuously, “a guisa di leon quando si posa” (*Purg.* VI. 66). In any case, the polyvalence of the lion images provided by Dante in all three realms of the afterlife also indicates the hermeneutic complexity of animal symbolism.

Whereas the symbolism of the lion bears negative and positive traits alike, the third beast, the wolf has almost always carried sinister and ominous messages

<sup>19</sup> On the impact of Boncompagno da Signa and the medieval tradition in general on Dante, cf. Dronke 1990; Marcozzi 2009.



in the beliefs and myths of every people for thousands of years. Aside from the fact that in ancient mythology, it was the sacred animal of Apollo and Mars,<sup>20</sup> and that the she-wolf carries a positive connotation in the foundation myth of Rome; this beast has always been a symbol of savagery, greed, with the addition of licentiousness, lust, and heresy for its female: in Della Porta's physiognomy it is more depraved than any other animal ("devourer, treacherous, wrathful; it is worst of all" [Della Porta 2013. 53]). Aristotle describes the anatomy, mating, and eating habits of the wolf in detail.<sup>21</sup> In Aesop (or even in the Latin Phaedrus who translates Aesop into poetry), the wolf is mostly a villain, in about two dozen tales: a symbol of vileness, injustice, and greed. Pliny's natural history is also remarkably detailed in relation to the description of the animal and the beliefs associated with it (cf. Pliny: *Nat. Hist.* VIII. 34, 80). The wolf is predominantly negative in several books of the Bible too. The prophets, for instance, call the wicked officials of Israel, the judges who abuse their power, wolves who "tear the prey, shed blood, destroy lives to get dishonest gain" (Ez 22,27). Wolves, again, are a symbol of hypocrisy when Jesus warns his disciples: false prophets "come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Mt 7,15).

In the *Physiologus*, the wolf is a cunning and evil animal that paralyzes man before it attacks. According to St. Basil the Great, this is how hypocritical people behave. In medieval encyclopaedias (cf. Isidorus XII. 2, 23–24) and bestiaries following Pliny and the *Physiologus*, the wolf is a cruel, greedy, and horrific beast that, before devouring its preys, mauls and tortures them, just like the devil does with people before shoving into the abyss of hell; in a word, the wolf is the devil himself: "thus the wolf is to be intended as the devil" (*Best. Val.* 1984. 283). Medieval bestiaries, in reliance on ancient depictions, state that the wolf is also a constant threat to man. In the form of a she-wolf, "che di tutte brame / sembiava carca ne la sua magrezza" (*Inf.* I. 49–50) Dante draws, in concise poetic imagery, the centuries-old image of the she-wolf laden with the sins of greed and lust, also conveyed by bestiaries.<sup>22</sup> In addition to greed and lust, it is often identified with deceit and hypocrisy, on the assumption that the wolf mimics the sound of the doe in order to lure the kids out of the pen. In addition to its cruelty, cunning is also associated with it: for one, it moves against the wind so that its smell is not felt by the other animals (Bart. Angl. 1601. 1090). Polemon characterizes it by several seemingly opposite traits when he adds a series of negative traits to the wolf's courage and helpfulness to its peers: it is unreliable, malicious, depre-

<sup>20</sup> Regardless of being Apollo's sacred animal, it is also a veiled symbol of ambition, greed, and unreliability. Cf. Homer: *Iliad* IV. 1–158.

<sup>21</sup> On the appearance of the wolf in ancient Greek literature, cf. the bibliographic summary of Maria Fernanda Ferrini in Aristotle: *Fisiognomica* 2007. 262–265.

<sup>22</sup> "Lussuria" and "golositate" are the wolf's two main sins, yet the bestiaries give a very detailed description of the "nature" of the beast, illustrating its "depravity" with examples: cf. *Best. tosc.* 2018. 1878–1880.

datory, bloodthirsty, unjust, and cunning (“lupus audax perfidus iniquus raptor avidus iniuriosus dolosus auxilium praebens ad iniuriam inferendam, amicum adiuvens” [Polemon 1893. 172]).

Remarkably, of the three beasts blocking Dante’s path, the wolf is granted the longest description. The predator’s unbridled desire to possess has already plunged so many people into misery and mourning that the poet’s fear at the sight of the beast is justified. It pushes forward, unstoppably, and casts the poet back into the dark forest of sins (“mi ripigneva là dove ‘l sol tace” [*Inf.* I. 60]). Scrolling some *terzinas* down, Dante returns to the greed and unbridled nature of the wolf, when he puts into Virgil’s mouth that the wolf’s hunger is not sated after eating (“dopo ‘l pasto ha più fame che pria” [*Inf.* I. 99]); that is to say, its greed and indomitable possessiveness functions as a zoomorphic symbol representing one of the seven deadly sins, *avaritia*. Needless to say, modern ethology in many cases refutes antique and medieval zoomorphic metaphors and symbols related to animal behaviour and “rehabilitates” the wolf and many other animals associated with negative “moralities” in bestiaries. In Dante’s time, however, the wolf was equated with the figure of evil, morally reprehensible, depraved man.<sup>23</sup> The symbolism of the she-wolf used in *canto* I is used similarly in other parts of the *Comedy*: a symbol of greed and avarice, without any positive connotations. And considering that for Dante, this sin is easily associated with several others (“Molti son li animali a cui s’ammoglia” [*Inf.* I. 100]), it is clear that he considered the wolf – greed, the exact opposite of *charitas* – to be, of all three animals, the most detrimental to the soul. Later in the *Comedy*, the symbol of the animals standing in Dante’s way in *canto* I, and the sins they signify, are revisited: the poet declares with the words of Brunetto Latini that the Florentines are an envious, haughty, and miserable people (“gent’ è avara, invidiosa e superba” [*Inf.* XV. 68]); namely, the three beasts simultaneously symbolize the poet’s home city.

The beast with unbridled appetite also appears in *canto* XX of *Purgatory*, where souls are waiting to be cleansed from the sin of avarice: “Maladetta sie tu, antica lupa, / che più che tutte l’altre bestie hai preda / per la tua fame senza fine cupa!” (*Purg.* XX. 10–12). Nor could the wolf be left out of the scene of *Inferno*’s Pluto, who guarded the entrance to the circle of avarice and greedy, and whom Virgil silenced as a cursed wolf (“Taci, maladetto lupo!” [*Inf.* VII. 8]). Moreover, Dante evokes the greedy, predatory nature of wolves in two *canti* of his *Paradise* too: in *canto* XXV, where the poet expresses his hope to return to Florence, owing to the reputation of his “l poema sacro” (1) – that is, the *Comedy* –, evokes that the inhabitants of the city, acting like wolves, expelled him, the poet living as a lamb: “che fuor mi serra / del bello ovile ov’ io dormi’ agnello, / nimico ai

<sup>23</sup> On the relationship between man and wolf, and on the relationship between reality and mentality, cf. Ortalli 1997.



lupi che li danno guerra” (4–6). The poet considered himself a good and just citizen, an adversary of the wolves declaring war on what is right.<sup>24</sup> In *canto* XX-VII., though, St. Peter himself utters harsh words against the wolves concealed in the shepherd’s clothing, that is, the deceitful popes: “In vesta di pastor lupi rapaci” (55). Finally, let me only remind of how often bestiaries talk about the feigning, deceitful wolf (Bart. Angl. 1601. 1090), whose favourite prey is lamb, approaches the pen against the wind, sometimes in sheepskin, in the manner of false prophets (*Best. Val.* 1984. 283).

The scope of interpretation of the various animals in the *Comedy* is, of course, not limited to a zoomorphic depiction of sins. Virtues can also take zoomorphic forms, so the polysemic richness of animals and the nuance of their meanings offer further complex analytical possibilities for those pursuing this line of research. I consciously chose, for my analysis, the three animals of the *Comedy* that are – certainly in terms of their moral and political symbolism – the best-known since annotated editions have granted every reader an interpretative framework about these. On the one hand, I wished to show what knowledge Dante might have had at his disposal, and from what variety of – biblical, literary, artistic, and encyclopaedic – sources he could draw from. On the other hand, we can see how many different sources of cultural history can help the reader to decipher the symbolism related to animals. Elements of poetic symbolism, natural realism, erudite and folk imagination are mixed in Dante’s brilliant imagery, either in a symbolic or in a realistic sense, or in the form of rhetorical figures depicting animals in poetic cues by way of the observation of their behaviour. At the same time, let us not forget that Dante is first and foremost a poet, and a careful examination of extraliterary elements – in the light of his texts and contexts – is also essential to come to an understanding of his worldview and his work. His zoonymic and zoomorphic figures always enrich the symbolism of the poem following meticulous consideration, so we must always keep in mind the functionality of the zoomorphic representation when interpreting the *Comedy*’s rich and varied bestiary.

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<sup>24</sup> For a detailed analysis of this (self) reflection, see Vigh 2018.



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ESZTER DRASKÓCZY

## Diseases in the Counterfeiters' *Bolgia* of Dante's *Inferno*

### Dante's Literary Sources, Contemporary Medical Knowledge and Theological Symbolism

The punishments for the souls of the tenth *bolgia* – uniquely in the entire *Inferno* – are diseases: counterfeiters of metal are punished with leprosy along with scabby rashes, impersonators are punished with rabies, counterfeiters of coins develop dropsy – a disease which compels Master Adam to hold his lips apart “as does the hectic” –, whereas false accusers are punished with acute fever. Two Ovidian diseases are mentioned here: the plague of Aegina and the madness of Athamas and Hecuba, which function as prefigurations of the diseases in the *Inferno*. The unjust and collective mythical punishment of the plague, which did not exist at the time of Dante, is overcome by an individual divine punishment: leprosy, which was the *par excellence* disease from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries.

In this paper, I am elaborating on the following problems: 1) what were Dante's literary and historical sources for the depiction of these diseases; 2) which encyclopaedic works, including contemporary medical knowledge, were available to the author; and 3) the theological symbolism of the diseases. Concerning diseases, medieval theology presents multi-faceted and ambiguous considerations, which Dante surely kept in mind when writing the *Canti* of the falsifiers, even if his concept, which the author explicitly reuses, is the idea of disease as divine punishment. Finally, 4) the ways in which vernacular literature before Dante (Bonvesin de la Riva, Jacopone da Todi) depicted diseases and the main differences between their depictions and the ones found in the *Divine Comedy*.

#### I. THE PLAGUE OF AEGINA

The first 36 verses of Canto 29 are still concerned with the schismatics encountered in the ninth *bolgia*. Verse 37 begins the description of counterfeiters whose episode continues and gets completed in Canto 30. Thus, Canto 29 and 30 work as a ‘twins,’ a solution which is not unparalleled in the *Comedy*. The conjunction of these two Canti is not merely a thematic feature; in fact, they could neither be



treated separately from a stylistic point of view (the language is full of *hapax legomena* drawn from medical science), or from that of their mythological allusions.

The specific description of the punishment of these souls is preceded by the emulation of an Ovidian disease, namely, the pestilence of Aegina, which is presented here as the most devastating mythological epidemic, which could only be eclipsed by the utter misery of the infernal landscape:

I do not believe it was a greater sadness to see  
in Aegina the whole people sick, when the air  
was so full of malice  
that the animals, down to the little worm, all fell –  
and then the ancient people, according to what the  
poets firmly believe,  
were restored from the seeds of ants – then it was to  
see, along that dark valley, the spirits languishing in  
different heaps.

(*Inf.* XXIX. 58–66, transl. by Robert M. Durling.)

The first reference to classical antiquity in the *bolgia* recalls the wrath of Juno (which will be a recurring element and of great importance in the *Canti*, inasmuch as it constitutes an antithesis with divine justice determining the structure of afterlife). Juno, by reason of Jupiter falling in love with the nymph Aegina, struck the whole island with pestilence. The only survivor, King Aeacus, having prayed to Jupiter, was granted the ability to repopulate the island, transforming the ants, which he saw passing at his feet, into humans. Dante's three triplets here faithfully follow the Ovidian narrative (*Met.* VII. 523–660), albeit reducing it to its essentials. On a lexical level, Dante's choice of "*cascaron*" (v. 62), which evokes the Ovidian recurrence of "*cadunt*" (vv. 541, 586) and "*ceciderunt*" (v. 595), betrays Ovidian influence. "*Tristizia*" (v. 58) is probably a translation to "*miseræ res*" (v. 614), and the preceding word, "*languir*" (v. 64), undoubtedly stands for Latin "*languor*" (v. 547). Not only did the Ovidian story of the plague of Aegina become a source of these three triplets, but it also inspired many details of different diseases represented in *Canti* 29–30 (Ledda 2012).

Scholars who believe that the classical memory of the plague of Aegina is no more than a literary reference, an element of erudition (Chiavacci Leonardi 2001. 502; Sapegno 1964. 574–575), are unable to explain why Dante recounts the story of people created out of ants, which in fact, at first glance, seems to be an episode without function. But this mythical story must have been particularly important for Dante, who recounts it in the *Convivio* too (IV. 27. 17), explaining how the king "wisely turned to God," and as a consequence, "his people were restored to him." Thus, the author himself stresses the characteristics of the king's pious attitude, who obtains the rebirth of his people by resorting to God.

The king, heard by God, and the reborn people, that is, the *new* one, constitute a contrast with the *old* people of Aegina, who, resorting to Jupiter, drop dead with incense in their hands right before the altar of the ancient deity (*Met.* VII. 587–595).

The souls depicted by Dante as being punished in the counterfeiters' *bolgia* 'inherited' the despair of the *old* people of Aegina and have to face their inability to heal and get reborn. Note that the verbs that Dante associates with Ovid in these passages – *rinascere*, *convertire*, *ristorarsi* – are all verbs that allude to the Christian mystery of the true metamorphosis, namely, the rebirth of Christ (Barolini 1993. 180). At the same time, we see the parallelism and the contrast between the diseases in Dante's inferno and the Ovidian plague: the reason, in both cases, is divine punishment, but "Juno's unjust wrath" (so defined by Ovid) lies in opposition to Dante's infallibly fair system. The comments by Jacopo della Lana and Ottimo (*ad loc.*) explain that this punishment affects the people of Aegina for the lust of Jupiter as well as for the lust of the people themselves. This explanation stems from medieval commentaries to the *Metamorphoses*: Arnulf of Orléans (p. 219), Giovanni del Virgilio (p. 79), Giovanni di Garlandia (vv. 313–314) and Bonsignori (p. 365) describe the analogies between ants and the people reborn from them; on the one hand, in their physical characteristics and habits (namely, they are small and thin, yet strong, dark-skinned, and industrious), and on the other, in their moral ones (being lustful).<sup>1</sup>

The different types of pathologies recall different associations, which undoubtedly influenced Dante's choices in the Canti of the counterfeiters. The plague, like other major epidemics, affects people indiscriminately, so that all ages, genders, and different social classes are 'equal' in the disease. It is precisely because of this characteristic (that is, indiscrimination) that Juno may be an example to unjust wrath in the text as someone who, out of jealousy towards a single person, exterminated an entire people and all the animals of the island.

The missing description of the disease in the case of Dante's re-enactment of the Ovidian pestilence and the imitative character of this episode are due to the fact that the author was not familiar with the plague (which thirty years after his death would kill at least a third of the population of the continent, but between the seventh and thirteenth centuries it had not yet reappeared in Europe), if not from literary sources. In the literature of antiquity, this epidemic appears as divine punishment: in the Old Testament, we find the plague in this context at least four times (Ezek. 5,17; Lev. 26,25; Deut. 28,21; Jer. 14,12); in the *Iliad* it is the wrath of Apollo that causes the outbreak; and at the beginning of *Oedipus the King*, the plague ravages Thebes for the sinful presence of Oedipus. In contrast, Thucydides' historical perspective excludes any intervention of the divine, with

<sup>1</sup> On ants in the *Comedy*, see: Ledda 2008. 123–143; Rossini 2002. 81–88; Gualandini 2010–2011.



an accurate description of the plague of Athens (II. 47–53), distinguishing between the causes, the symptoms, and the psychological consequences of the disease. Owing to him, Latin literature uses the plague as *topos*: Lucretius (*De rerum natura* VI. 1070–1286) towards the end of his unfinished work, in 196 verses recounts the plague of Athens, focusing on the scientific causes. Virgil, in the final *excursus* of Book III of the *Georgics*, describes the effects of a cattle plague widespread in his time in Noricum. The latter are fundamental intertexts for the narration of Ovid's plague, which incorporates both the structure and numerous details from Lucretius, yet at the same time it places the description in a mythical frame made up of Juno's wrath and the metamorphosis that took place by Jupiter's will and power. This mythical frame, which reiterates the concept of the epidemic as divine punishment, is maintained, and refurbished by Dante in his verses.

## II. THE PUNISHMENT FOR FALSIFIERS OF METAL

The mythical, unjust and collective punishment of the plague – non-existent at the time of Dante – is followed by an individual divine punishment, which was to be leprosy, the par excellence disease<sup>2</sup> from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. Getting back to Canto XXIX: the evocation of the Ovidian myth is immediately followed by the specific presentation of the landscape of the tenth *bolgia*. The souls here, in Dante's definition, used to be "*alchimisti*," but are to be understood as falsifiers of metal, since alchemy at the time was considered – even by Thomas Aquinas – to be genuine science. In Dante's description, the souls lament more loudly than all the sick of Valdichiana, Maremma and Sardinia in the malaria season; they are gathered in a moat that emits a stench "as from putrescent limbs is wont to issue." A further element of their infirmity is weakness, while later we learn of their constant itching with no remedy. By scratching, their nails "dragged the scab" (*Inf.* XXIX. 82); that is, their skin peels off, while in verse 124 Capocchio is called "the other *leper*".

All commentators are therefore uncertain as to the identification of the disease: a large part of nineteenth-century commentators<sup>3</sup> believed that the disease afflicting these souls is scabies, and the word *leper* is only a generic label for 'ill person.' A valid argument against this interpretation is that Dante, in the *Comedy*, uses the word *scabbia* only in one further instance, where it must be understood as a metaphor: "Ah, do not pay attention to the dry scales (*scabbia*) / that

<sup>2</sup> To such an extent that starting from the first decades of the twelfth century, *infirmus* sometimes assumes the specific meaning of leper, just as the word *malaude* in Occitan. See: Bériac 1986. 178.

<sup>3</sup> For example. Gabriele Rossetti and Luigi Bennassuti (*ad loc.*) and – probably in their wake – Mihály Babits, author of the best-known Hungarian translation of the *Comedy*.

discolor my skin [...] nor to my lack of flesh”<sup>4</sup> – begs Forese Donati of Dante. The scabies and itching as a metaphor of greed was a widespread moralizing *topos* in ancient literature; see, for example. Horace’s *Epistles* (I, 12: “Miramur, si Democriti pecus edit agellos, / Cultaque, dum peregre est animus sine corpore velox: / Quum tu inter *scabiem* tantam, et *contagia lucri* / Nil parvum sapias, et adhuc sublimia cures?”) and some of Dante’s comments concerning the episode also point to this direction: Guiniforto delli Bargigi (1440, to the verses 76–84), Gregorio da Siena (1867, to the verse 82).

Other commentators, on the other hand, have assumed that *scabies* is to be read as “the scales of the leper” (Francesco da Buti, *ad loc.*). Moreover, a third line of interpretation posits that souls suffer from both illnesses (Jacopo della Lana *ad loc.*), and this is the way in which earthly diseases are overcome in the afterlife.

The most convincing solution is offered by the fact that the encyclopaedias of the time treat scabies and leprosy together (Bosco 1984. 605–606). Isidore of Seville, in his *Etymologies* (IV. vii. 10) states that

utraque passio [*scabies et lepra*] asperitas cutis cum pruritu et squamatione, sed scabies tenuis asperitas et squamatio est. Hinc denique nomen accepit [...] nam scabies quasi squamies. Lepra vero asperitas cutis squamosa lepidae herbae similis, unde et nomen sumpsit: cuius color nunc in nigridem vertitur, nunc in alborem, nunc in ruborem.

And Bartholomaeus Anglicus, in his encyclopaedia *De proprietatibus rerum* (VII. 64) maintains that leprosy can be accompanied by scabies. In the case of leprosy:

tuberositates crescunt in corpore multa ulcera minuta et dura et rotunda, [...] unguis ingrossantur [...] et *quasi scabiosi* efficiuntur... corrumpitur eorum anhelitus et eius factore saepius sani corrumpuntur... pruritur, *quandoque, cum scabie, quandoque sine scabie patiuntur*, maculis variis, nunc russis, nunc lividis, nunc nigris, nunc subalbidis in corpore respergantur.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. Why is it exactly this disease that affects falsifiers of metal?

There is a realistic connection between health problems and the profession of alchemists, already found in Avicenna (1608. II. 2. 47), who stated that silver vapours cause paralysis – a statement that is quoted in Dante commentaries from the 1600s. Moreover, in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* the servant of the alchemist complains of bright smudges on his skin and his constant smell of sulphur owing to his activity (p. 401).

<sup>4</sup> *Purg.* XXIII. 49–51, transl. by Robert M. Durling.

<sup>5</sup> Italics mine.



A symbolic explanation is given by the analogy between the definition of leprosy and the theory of alchemy at that time. According to medieval concepts (based on Aristotle),<sup>6</sup> metals must „die” and rot before they can be reborn and become more noble. Hence, the putrefaction of the material was to be the first step of the alchemical processes. And the first characteristic of the counterfeiters' *bolgia* is precisely a stench analogous to that deriving from “putrescent limbs.” According to Bartholomaeus Anglicus' definition, leprosy is nothing more than the “corruption of the limbs” stemming from “putrefied humours”. The punishment of the alchemists in Dante is analogous to the first step of their activity, yet paradoxically they remain forever in this state. A final, parodic, element is the fact that, according to the *Libellus de Alchimia*, attributable to Albertus Magnus (p. 19), leprosy can only be cured with natural gold. So even if Dante's alchemists had been successful in their endeavours, their product could not have healed their eternal punishment (Mayer 1969. 196).

Surprisingly, the commentaries and essays do not mention the biblical antecedents in connection with this episode of Dante's. The Old Testament narrates an archaic view of leprosy as an individual divine punishment: it is set as an example in the case of Miriam, Moses' sister, who is punished by God with leprosy for criticizing Moses for having married an Ethiopian. Owing to the intercession of Moses, the punishment lasts only for seven days: for this time Miriam must leave the camp. (Expulsion from society also explains why the disease was treated as one the most serious disasters.)

In the Second Book of Kings (5,1-27), the prophet Elisha heals the leprosy of Naaman, the commander-in-chief of the Aramean army, and accepts no compensation for the miracle. However, the servant of the prophet, Gehazi, hurries after the healed commander with the lie that his lord has changed his mind and demanding a talent of silver from him. Naaman offers two talents to the servant. But when Gehazi returns, the prophet reproaches him for his sin: “«Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever». Then Gehazij went from Elisha's presence and his skin was leprous – it had become as white as snow.”<sup>7</sup> Like Gehazi, metal counterfeiters were moved by greed, and their punishment follows the biblical *exemplum*. It is no coincidence that Job's disease, an infection of the skin with intense itching, which is not identified in the biblical text, in the Middle Ages was represented as leprosy, with Job portrayed as a leper (see the images entitled *Job's portrayals* compared with *Christ healing the*

<sup>6</sup> See Thomas Aquinas's comment on Aristotle's *Meteorology*, *Lectio IX ad finem*; see: Read 1947. 9; Mayer 1969. 195.

<sup>7</sup> In this paper, the biblical quotes in English are taken from the New International Version.

lepers and also with the Dantean *Portrayals of lepers in the forgers' bolgia*). Medieval preaching addressing lepers also made use of the biblical *exemplum* of Job.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to the Old Testament examples, leprosy never appears as punishment in the New Testament, but becomes a disease cured by divine miracle. The synoptics narrate how Christ can heal a leper immediately and, in Luke's account, Christ once heals no less than ten lepers at the same time.

The only other mention in the *Comedy* in connection with leprosy is found in Canto XXVII of the *Inferno*, quite close to the Canti of the counterfeiters: "... Constantine asked Sylvester in Soracte to / cure his leprosy..."<sup>9</sup>. According to legend, Emperor Constantine displayed symptoms of leprosy, from which he was healed at the moment of his baptism. Hence, the miracles of the New Testament and healing are present in the *Comedy's* punishment as antithetical patterns. In fact, we notice the true gravity of the immutable fate of these souls if we bear in mind these accounts of immediate healing. Similarly, an antithetical function is given to the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Lc. 16,22), where the beggar, probably a leper, suffers and dies in front of the door of a rich man, who refuses to give him as much as a piece of bread. Lazarus, for his sufferings endured with patience and his trust in God, after his death is granted eternal life in Abraham's bosom. The rich man, however, when he too dies, suffers in hell instead and, seeing Lazarus in heaven, cries out: "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire." The rich man's sorrowful cry is reflected in the lament of the Master Adam in Canto 30: "alive, I had / much of whatever I wished, and now, alas, I crave a / drop of water" (vv. 61–63).<sup>10</sup>

### III. DISEASES IN THE VERNACULAR LITERATURE BEFORE DANTE: THE EXAMPLES OF BONVESIN DE LA RIVA AND JACOPONE DA TODI

The seriousness of the illnesses represented in cantos XXIX–XXX is supported by the fact that most of the diseases described by Dante are already listed in Jacopone da Todi's *Signor, per cortesia* where he requests the most repugnant and painful diseases for himself in order to suffer and thus to atone for the sins of humanity. In Jacopone's first exclamation ("O Signor, per cortesia, / manname la malsania") many commentators interpret *malsania* as leprosy (considered at the time the disease par excellence). Two afflictions of the following strophe

<sup>8</sup> Jacques de Vitry: *Sermo ad leprosos et alios infirmos, thema sumptum ex epistula Iacobi, capitulo V*: „*Sufferentiam Iob audistis et finem Domini uidistis*,” Bériou-Touati 1991. 101. Even more evident is Humbert De Romans's sermon (around 1270) who treats the story of Job as an exemplum to follow (*Materia Sermonis* II. 1, 93) *Ad leprosos*. (Bériou-Touati 1991. 160–162).

<sup>9</sup> *Inf.* XXVII. 94–95, transl. by Robert M. Durling.

<sup>10</sup> Transl. by Robert M. Durling.





("A mme la freve *quartana*, /... / co la granne *ydropesia*") will return in the lower Inferno (*quartana*: XVII. 85–88; *idropesi*: XXX. 52; *idropico*: XXX. 112). The *tiseo* (v. 13) is recalled in Dante's *etico* (XXX. 56) and the same word, *parlasia*, is found in v. 18 as well as in *Inf.* XX. 16. Two further parallels appear between Dante's *canti* on the forgers and Jacopone da Todi's poetry: *rasmo* (v. 29) is a precedent of Dante's rage afflicting Mirra and Gianni Schicchi (XXX. 46: two rabid persons); moreover, Jacopone's madness (v. 54) will be the disease of the Ovidian mythical figures Atamanthus and Hecuba, whose fate is narrated in the initial twenty-one lines of Canto XXX of the *Inferno*.

However, whereas in Jacopone's case the illnesses requested to be inflicted on the poet himself are a restless and tormented form of a desired asceticism towards God (conveying a *negative theology* that makes divinity a source of conflicting feelings: suffering and joy, certainty and a sense of bewilderment),<sup>11</sup> in the Infernos of Bonvesin de la Riva and Dante, accumulated illnesses are punishments in the afterlife.

Bonvesin de la Riva's *Book of Three Writings* was composed in 1274, a few decades before Dante's Comedy, and like the Comedy, it is divided into three parts: *Black Writing* (*De scriptura nigra*) describing Hell; *Red Writing* (*De scriptura rubra*) describing the Passion of Christ; and *Golden Writing* (*De scriptura aurea*) describing Paradise.

The twelve infernal punishments of *Black Writing* correspond symmetrically to the twelve glories found in *Golden Writing*. Thus, for example, the stench of hell<sup>12</sup> is contrasted with the sweet odours of heaven;<sup>13</sup> the terrible sight of the damned and the devils<sup>14</sup> is contrasted with the admiration of the angels, the faces of Mary, Christ and the Father;<sup>15</sup> the noise of hell<sup>16</sup> is contrasted with the songs of heaven.<sup>17</sup> The gluttonous and those who did not care for the hungry are afflicted with the torments of Tantalus (hunger and thirst amidst gushing water and fragrant fruit),<sup>18</sup> and their contrast is the banquet in heaven, served by God himself.<sup>19</sup> The tenth punishment is the accumulation of various diseases:<sup>20</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ferroni 1995. 127.

<sup>12</sup> Second punishment, SN 329–372.

<sup>13</sup> Second glory, SA 185–224.

<sup>14</sup> Fifth punishment, SN 433–492.

<sup>15</sup> Fifth glory, SA 325–409.

<sup>16</sup> Sixth punishment, SN 493–536.

<sup>17</sup> Sixth glory, SA 410–464.

<sup>18</sup> Eighth punishment, SN 653–704.

<sup>19</sup> Eighth glory, SA 497–560.

<sup>20</sup> Tenth punishment, SN 745–788. The tenth glory will be the antithesis of this: the beauty and health of the blessed ones.



The unfortunate is plagued by all sorts of diseases;  
his whole body is full of festering; he is sickly and frantic,  
feverish and lame, with scabies from head to foot,  
chilled and bruised, bloated and pellagra-ridden.<sup>21</sup>

Squinting and lame, hunchbacked and wormy;  
his ugly and hideous head aching all over,  
both his eyes are rotten, with scrofulous on his neck,<sup>22</sup>  
his teeth are throbbing, and he yells as if he had rabies.

His arms hang down in front, his face is sunken,  
His tongue is swollen, and the flesh is gone from his face.  
He's got cancer, he is half-blind, his shoulders are hunched,  
His ears are foul-smelling.

His limbs are all swollen and gangrenous,  
rotten and stinking inside,  
his chest a constant sore, festering boil.  
His suffering never eases.  
(SN 749–764.)

Bonvesin's damned soul, following the scheme found in *Black Writing*, reveals the logic of counter-punishment:

While I lived in the world, I took good care of my body,  
I kept it as fat and healthy as a pig's,  
safe and sound! Oh, how mad and blind I was:  
for I have cared so little for the health of my soul!  
(SN 781–784.)<sup>23</sup>

Although in cantos XXIX–XXX of Dante's *Inferno* the accumulated illnesses are – as in Bonvesin's afterlife – divine punishments, the logic of the *contrappasso* in the two cases is different. According to the general interpretation of the

<sup>21</sup> *Pellagra*: a disease caused by inadequate nutrition, which provokes the inflammation of the skin, diarrhoea, and dizziness. In Europe, it was particularly common in Italy and Spain until the twentieth century.

<sup>22</sup> *Scrophulous*: a disease of children living in poor social conditions, characterised by persistent swelling of the neck glands and the infection of the upper respiratory tract.

<sup>23</sup> Perfin k'eo stig al mondo, curava pur del corpo;  
Teniva druo e grasso, bastass k'el foss un porco,  
E san e confortoso: com fu eo mat e orco;  
Dra sanitae de l'anima eo curava molt poco.



meaning of *contrapasso* in Dante, illness alters and corrupts the forgers' appearance, just as they altered the nature of what they falsified.

Moreover, there is a poetic difference between the two texts: while Bonvesin's work is characterised by an unrealistic accumulation of punishments, Dante – although the reality he describes is superior to the earthly plane – always aims to be believable and realistic. There is also a marked difference in their poetic intent: Bonvesin's writing is permeated by a didactic intention, the principle of "imagine and learn;" Dante, in contrast, produces a recitable text that requires stylistic-hermeneutic analysis. These two aspects exercise different effects on the reader: Bonvesin's poem is over-stretched, unrealistic and therefore fails to arouse fear; whereas Dante is realistic, yet the impact of what he writes is also dampened by his recurring warnings (for example, in his rivalries with other poets) that his work is a poem, instead of being the narration of reality, a testimony.

#### IV. A THEOLOGY OF DISEASE

Medieval theologians left us with varied and ambiguous remarks on disease, which were definitely accounted for by Dante when writing the Canti of the counterfeiters, even if the main concept, which the author expressly reiterates, is the idea of disease as divine punishment. This concept, which is rooted in various archaic cultures, appears in the Old Testament examples and was widespread during the Middle Ages. An example to leprosy as individual punishment in the Middle Ages, which faithfully follows the structure of the above mentioned Old Testament accounts, is found in a story narrated by S. Pier Damiano (which took place in Bologna, around 1014) in Ulysse Aldovrandi's *Ornithologiae tomus alter*:<sup>24</sup>

Two men who were staying in the Bologna area, either because of friendship or, if I think about it, because of the bond resulting from the fact that they had a father in common, were reclining at a banquet, when a cock was brought onto their table. One of them, of course, took a small knife and, as is the custom, cut the dish into pieces and poured some ground pepper and gravy over it. When he had done this, the other immediately said: Brother, you have undoubtedly quartered a cock in such a way that even if St. Peter himself would be unable put it back together again. The other immediately replied: Certainly, not only Saint Peter, but even if Christ himself commanded it, it would not rise again. At these words, the rooster suddenly sprang up alive and covered with feathers, flapped his wings and crowed, and sprayed all the

<sup>24</sup> *Liber Decimusquartus qui est de Pulveratricibus Domesticis*, Italian translation by Fernando Civardi, 247; Italian translation by Elio Corti. <http://www.summagallicana.it/Aldrogallus/italiano/247%20it.htm>.

gravy over the diners. Immediately, an appropriate punishment followed the sacrilege of blasphemous treachery: *for while pepper was being scattered on them, they were stricken with leprosy, and of course not only they themselves had to endure this calamity until death, but they even passed it on to their posterity for all generations as if it were some heirloom.*

Infirmity, as per this concept, becomes the external sign of sin: it is for this reason that Gregory the Great<sup>25</sup> prohibits the admission of priests with physical defects. Various sources testify to the belief that certain diseases (e.g., deformity, or even leprosy) are consequences of parental sin, or conjugal transgressions of the Church's prohibitions. For Jerome, lepers embody the vices and corruption of the flesh: "in hac lepra, quam quasi albam et florentem designat, diversa crimina varie deprehendit: qua cum mundialis vitae voluptas, quasi candida et florens existimatur, tum grave vitiorum contagium grassatur in corpore. Nam aut avaritiae, aut libidinis maculae perpatescunt."<sup>26</sup> The ill person, therefore, is a sinner who is symbolically revealed, being forced to show, with his disfigured body, the crookedness of his soul (Iannella 1999. 195).

On the other hand, several theologians are aware that the misery of the human condition harks back to original sin: "Dio... quando fece l'omo, per la sua grazia lo fece impassibile et immortale. [...] Ma per lo peccato del primo homo... unde venne che l'omo potesse avere febbre, ferite et altre pene"<sup>27</sup> – contends Giordano da Pisa.<sup>28</sup> This means that *infirmitas*, after original sin, became the *status* of mankind.<sup>29</sup>

The loss of physical health can also lead to the salvation of the soul since infirmity functions as a warning, an image of death,<sup>30</sup> thus bringing the sufferer closer to God. The concept of the usefulness of disease is also expressed by Alain de Lille,<sup>31</sup> for whom a man "*in infermitate carnis invenit sanitatem mentis*;" and by Domenico Cavalca.<sup>32</sup> Considering the disease as a possibility to getting

<sup>25</sup> *Regulae pastoralis liber*, cap. X, PL 77, 24<sup>o</sup>–26D. Cf. also Umberto da Romans (*Expositio super Regulam D. Augustini*, Comi, 1602. 85–86), Ugo di Cluny (*Statuta*, cap. IV, PL 209, 883 D). See: Agrimi–Crisciani 1978. 56.

<sup>26</sup> *Sancti Hieronymi Opera Suppositia*, Epistolae XX–XXIV, „De diversibus generibus leprosarum” PL, 30, cols. 246.)

<sup>27</sup> Giordano da Pisa, *Prediche inedite*, 1997, 225, 6 ss. See Iannella 1995. 181. This concept is already present in Augustine (*Contra Maximinum Haereticorum Arianorum Episcopum libri II*, II, XII) e Tommaso d'Aquino (*Summa theologiae*, I, q. 50, a. 5).

<sup>28</sup> A Dominican from the convent of Santa Maria Novella (c. 1260–1311).

<sup>29</sup> Umberto da Romans, *Expositio*. 99. See Agrimi–Crisciani 1978.74.

<sup>30</sup> On the *infirmitas* as a prefiguration of death, see Giordano da Pisa, 20 marzo 1306: *Quaresimale Fiorentino* 1305–1306, a cura di C. Delcorno, Firenze, Sansoni, 1974. 303: "lo 'nfermo che guerisce non provò la morte, ma assaggiolla." Cf.: "Unde tutte le pene del mondo sono assaggio di morte, però anno in sé della pena della morte ..." *Sul Terzo Capitolo della Genesi*, a cura di C. Marchioni, Firenze, Olschki. 1992. p. 231. See: Iannella 1995. 182.

<sup>31</sup> *Summa de arte predicatoria*, PL. 210, 142 See: Agrimi–Crisciani 1978. 75.

<sup>32</sup> *Medicina del cuore ovvero Trattato della pazienza* (a cura di G. Bottari, Milano, Silvestri, 1838), II, XII. See: Iannella, *Giordano da Pisa*, 193.



closer to God and as an important tool for the *salus animae*, the sick should be grateful and take advantage of their illness and consider their troubles as divine gifts, as claimed by Giordano da Pisa.<sup>33</sup> Aware of his spiritual destiny, the sick person must be *tacitus*, just as Christ was in every stage of his passion (Agrimi-Crisciani 1978. 9).

Alongside the concept of *Christus medicus*, Scripture also portrays that of *Christus patiens*: this is how typological exegesis interprets Isa. 53.4 with reference to Christ: “*Vere languores nostros ipse tulit, et dolores nostros ipse portavit; et nos putavimus eum quasi leprosum, et percussum a Deo, et humiliatum;*” as well as Mt. 25,36 (“*nudus et operuistis me infirmus et visitastis me in carcere eram et venistis ad me*”). One particular example to the iconography of *Christus patiens* is found in the Isenheim altar piece (1506–1515), created by Matthias Grünewald for the Antonian Order, where Christ is represented with the signs of pestilence, alongside the usual physical torment of the Crucifixion and the Deposition.<sup>34</sup> For the Antonians, the Franciscans and the saints, the attitude of *Christus Medicus*, the care for the sick – including, in the case of an extreme vocation, the lepers – becomes a way of the *imitatio Christi*. Domenico Cavalca, in his *Volgarizzamento delle vite de’ SS. Padri* (pp. 280–283), writes about *Sant’Eulogio Alessandrino*, who welcomed a leper in a terrible state into his home and assisted him. Angela da Foligno, with one of her female companions, went to cure the wounds of the lepers and, once they washed the wounds in a basin, drank the water. (A similar story has come down to us about Saint Catherine of Siena.) Saint Francis shared his food with a leper, whose body was entirely plague-stricken, and whose blood was dripping into the bowl every time he took from it.

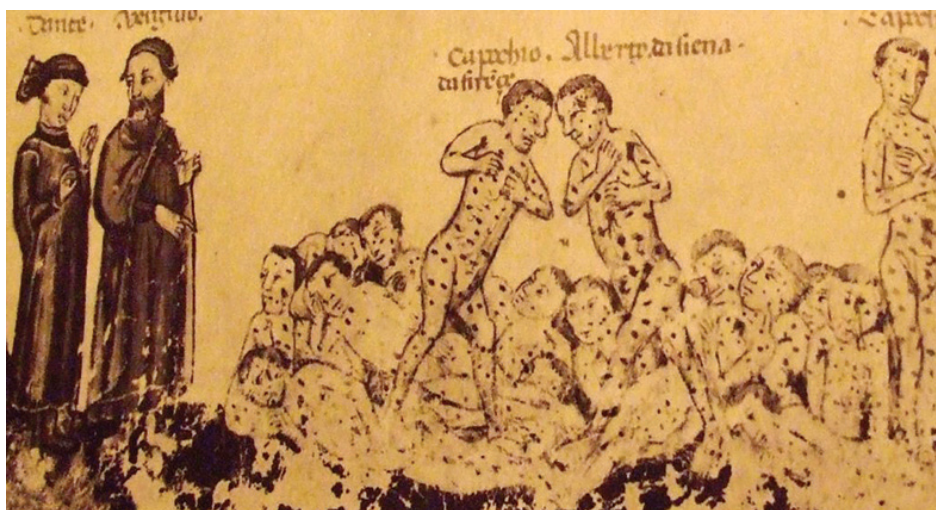
Dante, from among the various concepts of disease in the Middle Ages, chooses the most archaic one; namely, individual punishment, and uses it as the logical backbone for the Canto of the counterfeiters. The ideological background of this choice is given by the circumstance that these sinners cannot even hope for the healing of their bodies, let alone for the salvation of their souls: for them, the Old Testament punishment can never be mitigated with the balm of theology, which grants a positive interpretation to believers.

<sup>33</sup> *Prediche del B. Giordano da Rivalto recitate in Firenze dal MCCCII al MCCCIV*, a cura di D. Moreni, Firenze, Magheri, 183, I, 266–267. See: Iannella 1999. 193.

<sup>34</sup> On the representation of Christ on the Grünewald altar piece, see Újvári 2005. 93–109.



## IMAGES



1–2. The representations of the lepers in the pit of the counterfeiters (after Brieger–Meiss–Singleton) (1) London, B. M. Yates Thompson 36, 53r. (Primo della Quercia, 1442–1450); (2) Holkham Hall MS. 514, Dante, *Divine Comedy*, in Italian. North Italy, Genoa (?); 14<sup>th</sup> cent., third quarter, p. 45; the two lepers: Capocchio and Griffolino d'Arezzo (the illustrator, mistakenly, wrote the name of Alberto da Siena above the figure of Griffolino).









3–6. Job's portrayals: (3) 1140–1150, Romanesque relief. Museum of Navarre, Pamplona; (4) *Histoire de l'Ancien et Nouveau Testament*, 1724. Mary Evans Picture Library, London; (5) Rome, Vat. gr. 749, 9<sup>th</sup> century; (6) Job on the dunghill is afflicted with leprosy...; Jean Fouquet; miniature in the breviary of Étienne Chevalier; 1452–60; Musée Condé, Chantilly, France.





7–8. Christ heals the lepers: (7) Christ with the leper, Bamberg Gospel, 9<sup>th</sup> century; (8) Christ heals ten lepers. Codex Aureus Epternacensis, 1035–1040.



9–11. Christ with signs of the plague: Matthias Grünewald, Altar of Isenheim, 1506–1515, details.

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MÁRTON KAPOSZ

## Visions of the Secular State and of the Earthly Paradise in Dante's Perspective

As a thinker and as a poet, Dante was very much a man of the medieval era, and if certain aspects of his œuvre do go beyond the confines of that era, this is merely because as a genius he thoroughly understood the period of human history that he witnessed. He was able to interpret his own age from the wider perspective of world history. His Christian faith and his classical education allowed him to elaborate an expansive theoretical horizon against which to project a vision of his own era, a vision especially informed by the principle of *universality* and the *linear concept of time*: an era that displaces something (e.g., paganism and barbarity) while carrying on its legacy at an improved and superior level, even allowing space for the possibility of gradually perfecting contemporary society. Dante's thinking was fundamentally grounded in Saint Augustine's views on history as reflected in his *De civitate Dei*, where – to use the terms of the classics – the emphasis is no longer on *aion*, a cyclical understanding of time, but on *chronos* as a selective process of transformation and, increasingly, the implied idea of *improvement*, which finds its solid foundation in soteriology, and its perspective in the doctrine of redemption. He believes that history, in part, is a process of fulfilment that gradually encompasses more and more of the universality of the attainable goodness, a process in which human beings certainly play a role as contributors, something the ancient Greeks referred to using the time concept of *Kairos* (Kinneavy 1986. 80–104; Vasoli 1995. 69–78; Pizzolato 2011. 17–34).

Compared to the Renaissance, Dante was less keen to return to classical antiquity, and even when he did want to revisit some of its elements, the approach he adopted was very different. By his time, mediaeval thought had already embraced many of the achievements of classical antiquity (such as the Latin language, the astronomical view of the world and an appreciation of reason), and Dante certainly went beyond exploiting only these and he was also willing to acquire new knowledge about earlier cultures (drawing lessons from their history and learning from various interpretations of their most prominent thinkers); yet his main desire was to perfect the traditions of pagan antiquity and use them





as his raw material for the further development and modernisation of Christian culture. He emphasised the difference between the two great eras of world history, especially in terms of the conflicting worldviews that their respective cultures were based upon, but he believed that the *continuity* between the two, and therefore the integration of many of the achievements of the past, were entirely natural. Instead of focusing on the sequence of events, he mostly followed Virgil and examined the trends; and, first and foremost, certain historical personalities whose actions and example he found instrumental in promoting progress. (Fülep 1995. 274; Chiesa–Tabarroni 2013. XXXV–XXXIX.)

### I.

Living at the height of the Middle Ages, Dante saw two fundamental ideals of classical antiquity to carry forward: *rationality* and *humanity*, these being in the forefront of mediaeval philosophy, mainly scholasticism. Even in a Christian context, these two ideals are linked: for having been originally made in God's image and likeness, the human being was assumed to possess *reason*, while being mainly motivated in his actions by *love*. Infused by Christian ideals, the feudal system created a social structure in which every individual was granted a permanent place within a social hierarchy as well as the minimum respect that corresponded to that specific status; and, in principle, they were treated as human beings even if they belonged to the lowest level of such a hierarchy. The rapid progress of science and technology demonstrated the positive contributions of the human mind ever more clearly. While calamities and social conflicts certainly did not disappear, the increasing prominence of secular thinking and social achievements all pointed in the direction of *rethinking* what individuals could do *for themselves* in this life, and whether they could change how they saw the *relationship* between life on earth and life eternal.

Though profoundly religious but not in the least bigoted, Dante believed that it was possible to bring about some change as such an effort would be warranted by *divine providence* and by a certain flexibility of *human nature*. In addition to these widely known doctrines of the Christian religion, he found additional support in some of the ideals of classical antiquity: the human being's desire to approach divine perfection; knowledge as a source of happiness; the advantages of the intellectual virtues; human beings as social animals; the superiority of a state managed by reason; cooperation between citizens of virtue, etc. Dante addresses these first in the *Convivio* in part and later, more extensively, in *De Monarchia*; in *The Divine Comedy*, he tries to convince the reader that no one stands a chance of attaining any form of happiness without purging themselves of sin. In fact, those who are punished severely (such as Judas and Brutus) or rewarded generously (such as Justinian, Charlemagne and Saint Francis) are persons who have either



committed something outstandingly evil or did something outstandingly good for society as a whole; and outstanding figures of that ilk are also to be found among the pagans (such as Trajan and Ripheus). Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII – the potential founder of the ideal monarchy, the real-life individual Dante believed capable of taking the first steps towards creating his programme – was placed in Paradise by the poet (*Par.* XXX. 131–138). Dante makes a distinction between the private individual and the social being (the citizen and the official), but does not really separate one from the other. Rather than contrasting one with the other, by using diverse examples, he tries to instantiate the inextricable entanglement of and the mutually reinforcing interplay between their values, opportunities, and tasks. General theoretical conclusions and personal experiences, good and bad, strengthened Dante's conviction that in order to achieve individual happiness – both in this world and in the afterlife – individuals need to be supported, and that it is the best *communities* and *institutions* that have the power to bestow such support. It is communities that help to bring out the most in people, and it is institutions that keep them on the right track and do not let them stray off it (Gentili 2012. 98–114).

## II.

Inspired by a core element of his thinking, the universality principle, Dante takes *the whole universe and the history of the human race* as his basis for an ideal society whose best institutions facilitate optimal human behaviour; which, in turn, may lead to the greatest possible happiness. This is why, in describing the universe, he emphasises the *possibilities* it holds and the fact that everything that exists has a purpose; and this is why, in reviewing the history of the human race since the creation of the world, he focuses on certain aspects of the two great *educational precedents*: the Earthly Paradise and the Roman Empire. His ideas about re-grounding society on the optimal foundations and about reforming society in a beneficial way are expounded in a theory that he elaborates, in concrete terms, on the basis of both theories of state and society from classical examples and works penned by the theologians and philosophers of the Middle Ages. The historical foundation of his concept is clearly reflected in the fact that as far as his secular sources are concerned, the lead role is taken by one of the most prominent classics of *antiquity*, Aristotle, partly by way of some of his *medieval* commentators. He draws on Aristotle's *On the Soul* as supplemented with Averroes's interpretation of the Aristotelian text, and on his *Nicomachean Ethics* as interpreted by his other commentator Saint Thomas Aquinas. Boethius de Dacia is a salient example of the transition between the two worlds. As far as the theologians are concerned, Dante relies on medieval greats (Saint Augustine, Petrus Lombardus, Saint Bonaventure, and others). Naturally, Dante's selected



sources only include those that clearly support his own grandiose vision. He, for example, makes no mention whatsoever of Saint Augustine's criticism of the vices of Rome, avoids speaking of the Commentator's doctrine of double truth, and when discussing Saint Thomas' ideas about the state, he ignores the fact that a monarchy is a form of government limited to individual countries only, not to mention the fact that not every state is monarchic in nature.

Dante developed his concept in line with religious and secular principles and, first and foremost, endeavoured to prove the feasibility of his proposal by arguing that the *possibilities* it encompasses are, in essence, innate to God, nature, and the human being alike. Their *causal hierarchy* and the *teleological system* they form favour large-scale human ambitions that propose a certain sequence of conscious acts in order to fulfil, to the *greatest possible extent*, the ultimate end to which the human being is *ordained*. When viewed from this perspective, the purpose and the meaning of celestial happiness were well-known and accepted notions; but what Dante – a thinker more secular than his contemporaries – considered important to add was the period of earthly existence as a *preparatory* stage *leading to* happiness in the afterlife, saying that “this earthly happiness is in some sense ordered towards immortal happiness” (Dante 2013. 94). With this in mind, he took great care to show what possibilities are available in life on earth. This virtually implicit yet emphatic higher appreciation of life in this world inevitably led him to rethink the intricate and mutually pervasive interrelation between the two stages of life, and not from the perspective of the individual but rather from that of the entirety of *humankind*. Dante definitely did not question that, because of the different nature of body and soul, there was a certain contradiction between life on earth and life eternal, and he never doubted the indisputable primacy of the latter; but he did have something new to say about their obvious entanglement. (Chiesa–Tabarroni 2013. 229–230; Carletti 2006. 38–92.) He focused on the systems of external and internal conditions of human activity, the complex structure and conscious nature of the actions of human beings, and the possibilities and perspectives of their endeavours.

Dante's thinking is confined to the general theoretical framework (theology) that God created and continues to take care of the world; everything in the world has a purpose and nothing in the world is superfluous – yet nothing is so rigidly predetermined that it would bar the human being – a *reasonable* being with *free will* – from bringing about *certain changes* in the world. The world, whatever its actual makeup, does not present insurmountable *obstacles* to humans as they act in the interest of the *highest good*, and divine providence does not render *superfluous* the desire of human beings to improve themselves.

Wishing to improve their lives on earth and thereby lay the foundations for – or rather prepare – their happiness in the *afterlife*, human beings are indeed capable of meaningful action in this context. After all, God gave humanity *reason* and granted humans *free will*. One implication of this is that a key part of the hu-

man soul is *anima intellectiva* (the reasoning part of the soul) in which the human being's *intellectus possibilis* (cognitive ability) operates. This allows humans to acquire knowledge by identifying the essential while also exploring the general context. Furthermore, relying on their *intellectus activus* (active intelligence) and empirical *experience*, they can make concrete their recently acquired general knowledge (*intellectus adeptus*). With such knowledge, they can *deliberate*, set *reasonable objectives*; and using their *free will*, they can carry out a *practical* activity as a result of which new human relations and institution are created. Averroes's commentary on the philosophy of the soul – with which Dante was intimately familiar – offers an accurate summary of everything Aristotle had established about a human being's cognitive ability (*intellectus possibilis*) and mention of a human being as a creator of *new knowledge* (*nous poeticus*). This topic was discussed in detail by Alexander of Aphrodisias along with everything that the Arab Master himself discovered through his study into the nature of operationalisable knowledge (*intellectus adeptus*) that emerged from connecting the *intellectus possibilis* and the *intellectus activus* (or *intellectus materialis*) (Kaposi 2017. 131–156). The Commentator also offers a short summary of his conclusions about the practical applicability of the knowledge so acquired: “For so long as the form is in us in potency, it will be conjoined with us in potency and for so long as it is conjoined with us in potency, it is impossible for us to understand something in virtue of that. But when the form is made to exist in act in us (this will be in its conjoining in act), then we will understand all the things we understand in virtue of [this intellect] and we will bring about the activity proper to ourselves in virtue of it.” (Averroes 1953. 501; Averroes 2009. 400.) This gives Dante a solid starting point from which he can argue that it is possible to consciously design and create a near-ideal society:

Now the intellectual potentiality of which I am speaking is not only concerned with universal ideas or classes, but also (by extension as it were) with particulars; and so it is often said that the theoretical intellect [*intellectus speculativus*] by extension becomes practical [*intellectus practicus*], its goal then being *doing* [*agere*] and *making* [*facere*]. I am referring to actions, which are regulated by political judgment [*politica prudentia*], and to products, which are shaped by practical skill [*ars*]; all of these are subordinate to thinking [*speculationi*] as the best activity for which the Primal Goodness brought mankind into existence. (Dante 1996b. 7–8.)

At this point, relying on other works of Aristotle (*Politics*, *Eudemian Ethics*), Dante makes a clear distinction between two modes of action: *prudentia* (*phronesis*), which is an indirect and predominantly internal regulator of human activities, and *ars* (*techné*), which brings about the realisation of entities like formalised procedures and institutions and it acts as a predominantly external regulator of human activities. The latter also encompasses institutions such as the *state*.



It takes practical knowledge (based on solid theoretical foundations) to maintain, but also to shape, a society, and to improve social coexistence. This holds true even when these efforts are applied to the largest set of humans – *the entire human race*. To improve society by knowledge, the general preconditions of such a venture must be explored, and the shared objective – whose achievement is to facilitate that process – identified. Furthermore, people must be led to realise that such an objective can indeed only be achieved if they act together. For this to happen, the fundamental precondition is that *universal peace* reign worldwide – and that, obviously, is something we can only achieve through *conscious* actions and *joint* cooperation. As Dante concludes, “[t]here is therefore some activity specific to humanity as a whole, for which the whole human race [*universitas hominum*] in all its vast number of individual human beings is designed [*ordinatur*]” (Dante 1996b. 6). Such action is possible because it *ab ovo* *has an end*, and because some of the *instruments* it requires are also at our disposal: the human *abilities* needed to obtain the necessary theoretical and practical *knowledge* and to build the appropriate *institutions*. As Dante says,

Now it has been sufficiently explained that the activity proper to mankind considered as a whole is constantly to actualise [actuate] the full intellectual potential of humanity, primarily through thought and secondarily through action (as a function and extension of thought). And since what holds true for the part is true for the whole, and an individual human being “grows perfect in judgment [prudentia] and wisdom [sapientia] when he sits at rest”, it is apparent that mankind most freely and readily attends to this activity – an activity which is almost divine, as we read in the psalm: “Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels” – in the calm or tranquillity of peace. (Dante 1996b. 8.)

Dante is aware of this, but also wants others to see clearly that they can only master the *wisdom* (*sapientia, sophia*), the *sagacity* (*prudentia, phronesis*) needed for concretisation, and the *practical knowledge* (*ars, techné*) required for realisation – which form the theoretical basis of the knowledge needed to transform people’s views and for a radical reform of the institutions of society – if they cooperate *in the process of acquiring* that knowledge.

In order to make a convincing case for what he sees as the advantages of a society organised in *unity* and therefore prospering in blissful *peace*, Dante deploys the accordant conclusions of two distinct types of argumentation: *deduction* and *analogy* as derived from philosophical ontology and anthropology on the one hand, and *induction* on the other, bolstered by the philosophy of history, always relying, of course, on the relevant religious tenets for further support. At the same time, Dante consistently emphasises the secular nature of the monarchy that can maintain such a society; and he relies on *scientific* facts in his argumentation and uses *logical* procedures.

As far as *deduction* is concerned, Dante – pointing to Aristotle and Pythagoras – affirms that “*being, unity and goodness* are related in a sequence, according to the fifth sense of the term ‘priority’. Being naturally comes before unity, and unity before goodness: perfect being is perfect unity, and perfect unity is perfect goodness; and the further removed something is from perfect being, the further it is from being one and consequently from being good. [...] This is how it comes about that unity seems to be the root of what it is to be good, and plurality the root of what it is to be evil.” (Dante 1996b. 26.) The current fragmentation of society is the root of most evil as it is, in a way, an institutionalised obstacle to peace and understanding. In fact, it is understanding – the unity of wills pulling in the same direction – by which reasonable people are able to aspire; they are able to harmonise their free wills and conjoin their conscious actions. The close cooperation thus arising might be highly economical as it would require just one goal for society to fulfil what would otherwise involve having several goals to fulfil. In addition to the categorical principle of universal validity, Dante had previously also applied an eloquent *analogy* to show how harmonised activities can lead to significant results, namely the integration of the curial nature of the Italian language (Corti 1993. 108–109). As Dante writes, “For although it is true that there is no such tribunal in Italy – in the sense of a single institution, like that of the king of Germany – yet its constituent elements are not lacking. And just as the elements of the German tribunal are united under a single monarch, so those of the Italian have been brought together by the gracious light of reason [*gratioso lumine rationis unita sunt*].” (Dante 1996a. 43.) Note the anthropological perspective, namely the key role attributed to *reason* as a unifying force.

To demonstrate the truth of the above by way of contrast, Dante also deploys a more complex, fundamentally *inductive* line of argumentation, which starts out with an analysis of the disadvantages of the *division* of humankind – specifically, the most *determining cause* of conflicts, the unfettered desire to possess, or *insatiable greed* (*cupiditas*), characterised by its drive to obtain more and more as long as there remains *something to be got*. Appropriating that which belongs to someone else is a great sin: in private life, it is seen as *robbery*, while in the public sphere it is seen as *unjustified conquest*. Those who commit such sins deserve a special mention by God: “For I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering” (Isaia, 61, 8). For cupidity (*cupidigia*) is the greatest enemy of justice, and cupidity – as Aristotle also notes – is integral to the mental constitution of the human being; it is based on “a sordid love of gain” (Aristoteles 1978. 83). and while proper education can go a long way to curb it and laws can limit its excesses, it is very difficult to eradicate. Dante’s other master, Boethius is even more of a pessimist: “For each of these has naturally its own proper working; there is no confusion with the effects of contrary things – nay, even of itself it rejects what is incompatible. And yet wealth cannot extinguish insatiable greed, nor has power ever made him master of himself whom vicious lusts kept bound in indissoluble



fetters; [...]” (Boethius 1897. 76.) It is therefore an essential task to eliminate *cupiditas* in both private and public life. It is a process that can only be initiated by politics – as a universal practice exerting a top-down influence – doing away with the rule of sovereigns (kings, princes, etc.) holding sway over partial areas (countries, provinces, cities, etc.) and subjecting the whole of humankind to a *single secular supreme power*, the *emperor*, by creating a *single empire* (monarchy). For, as Dante says, the single most important action is to eliminate the *opportunities* for any individual to act on their desire to possess – their insatiate greed. Because of his primacy, the monarch (the emperor), Dante believes, is in a favourable position to begin with: “But there is nothing the monarch could covet, for his jurisdiction is bounded only by the ocean; whereas this is not the case with other rulers, whose sovereignty extends only as far as the neighbouring kingdom [...]” (Dante 1996b. 18). Consequently, the empire is best placed to enforce justice and to guarantee peace. And as far as creating a state of peace is concerned, institutionalisation finds further support in *love*: “[...] just as greed, however slight, dulls the habit of justice in some way, so charity [*caritas*] or rightly ordered love [*recta dilectio*] makes it sharper and brighter” (Dante 1996b. 18). Extending the fight for the elimination of insatiate greed, in a top-to-bottom approach, to the citizens it is obviously essential to have universal peace, but beyond its impact on public life, it has just as much bearing on the private life of the individual: “for greed easily leads men’s minds astray” (Dante 1996b. 18); for cupidity, just as the *capital vice* of avarice, endangers the salvation of the soul as the race for material goods of little importance tends to make us forget about our aspirations for attaining the truly important spiritual values. Consequently, eradicating *cupiditas* is a fundamental task both politically and morally (Szabó 2008. 77–79). Dante dedicates several passages to the consequences of cupidity, the destroyer of all, in his *Divine Comedy*; he is embittered by seeing how it can turn a person into a demon already at a tender age, which leads to the destruction of the individual’s private life, while also pushing him as a citizen to commit acts that risk corrupting public life. He does make a distinction between *avarice* (*avarizia*), which is primarily a *private sin*, and *insatiate greed* (*cupidigia*), which belongs more to the public sphere; however, even in making this distinction, he is more interested in how the private sphere’s lust for wealth leads to territorial conquests in political life. He brings up Pope Hadrian V’s lust for wealth (*avarizia*) in Canto XIX and Hugh Capet and Charles I of the House of Anjou in Canto XX of the *Purgatorio* as examples of how personal gain eventually transmogrified into poorly exercised episcopal and secular supreme power. In Canto XXVII of the *Paradiso*, he writes not only about the dangers of allowing greed in private life to enmesh itself with greed in public life but he also expresses the hope that this unfortunate state of affairs would eventually be eradicated and that the ship of humankind will eventually sail in the *right direction*:





*O greediness, you who – within your depths –  
cause mortals to sink so, that none is left  
able to lift his eyes above your waves!*

*The will has a good blossoming in men;  
but then the never-ending downpours turn  
the sound plums into rotten, empty skins.*

[...]

*That you not be amazed at what I say,  
consider this: on earth no king holds sway;  
therefore, the family of humans strays.*

*But well before a thousand years have passed  
(and January is unwintered by  
day's hundredth part, which they neglect below),  
this high sphere shall shine so, that Providence,  
long waited for, will turn the sterns to where  
the prows now are, so that the fleet runs straight;  
and then fine fruit shall follow on the flower.*

(Par. XXVII. 121–126, 139–148 – translated by Allen Mandelbaum.)

These hopes of Dante rest on much stronger foundations in *De Monarchia*, in which the elimination of the lust to conquer features as a *plan*. A future emperor will not be able to conquer, and citizens – strengthened in their virtues – will not strive to wrong fellow citizens but to enrich the community of humankind.

The relationship between the *emperor* and the *citizens* of the universal state is manifold; among other things, it is highly reasonable and humane. What creates a connection between them first and foremost is, on the one hand, a *system of political institutions* cleansed of its fundamental contradictions but characterised by the requisite degree of consideration, and, on the other hand, the prevailing of *moral virtues*, a prerequisite not only for peaceful public life but also for happy private life. This is also the basis on which respect or sympathy, but especially *love* operates as an important force of coherence. As Dante does not separate the *human being* from the *citizen* in members of society, he likewise does not separate the *human being* from the *embodiment of supreme power* in the emperor; and this is, in effect, what enables him to present the emperor as a complex and outstandingly effective *efficient cause* (*causa efficiens*) that, by relying on optimised social institutions, he has the ability to shape society – which needs improvement itself – as a *material cause* (*causa materialis*). Through his *unique position* and through *the completeness of his personality*, the monarch is able to fulfil his multifaceted function, which, while it implies a wide range of tasks to tackle, boils down directly to ensuring that people can live in peace. “Therefore since the monarch is the most universal cause among mortals that men should live the good life (for other rulers are a cause only by virtue of him, as we have seen), it



follows that the good of mankind is dear to him above all else. Who doubts that the monarch is most strongly disposed to the working of justice [...]?" (Dante 1996b. 19.) Free people living in peace and surrounded by an atmosphere of love can develop their intellectual and moral virtues, which only helps ensure that they will consistently have the opportunity to attain happiness *in this world*, and which even improves their chances of attaining happiness in the *afterlife*.

An important element to Dante's concept of the state – one he inherited from classical antiquity – is that he believes *politics* go hand in hand with *paideia*, the positive role that a citizen – who combines his free will with the knowledge he has acquired – plays in shaping society, enjoying his individual happiness as the fruit of his wisdom but also always willing to work in harmony with others, in both theory and practice, in order to promote social progress. While Dante – quite naturally – did not value the concept of *paideia* quite as highly as the free Greeks, he did consider it essential that the citizens of the ideal state do not merely engage in whatever enriches their own souls but they should also *take part* in the growth and development of society. It is quite understandable that Dante does not primarily see *happiness in this life*, emerging from optimal social relations, as an end in itself or as a value of itself, but, as it is widely known, as only *a secondary purpose* to a greater end; still, he emphasises that its *value as an instrument* is not to be ignored (Ogor 1993. 91–104; Lecker 1993. 120–131).

That creating *world peace* requires the cooperation of the *entirety* of humankind is fairly obvious; however, Dante also tries to make his readers grasp that while peace is indeed a fundamental *condition*, the cooperation of the *multitude* also plays a decisive role in *the exercise of power*. This is even more obvious in the matter of political affairs and taking things further, in the growth and development of society. While the emperor plays a key role in creating the ideal monarchy, the multitude of citizens also have a role to play if the ideal society is indeed to become reality. The emperor as the supreme efficient cause can rely on the multitude as his single most important *instrument*; yet the general population is itself one of the efficient causes – one of the maintainers and operators – of a society of higher order. And, indeed, it is mainly this dual role with which the general population contributes to ensuring that nature as it exists and the world order (the *sublunary* world, *civitas terrena*, which also includes society) continues to operate as originally ordained, even if subject to certain minor changes. As Dante sees it,

just as a craftsman would never achieve artistic perfection if he aimed only at the final form and paid no heed to the means by which that form was to be achieved, so too nature would fail if it aimed only at the universal form of divine likeness in the universe, yet neglected the means to achieve it; but nature is never less than perfect, since it is the work of divine intelligence: therefore it wills all the means through which it achieves the fulfilling of its intention. Since the goal of the human race is



itself a necessary means for achieving the universal goal of nature, it is necessary that nature should will it. For this reason Aristotle in the second book of the *Physics* rightly shows that nature always acts with an end in view. And since nature cannot achieve this end by means of one person alone, since there are many functions [*operationes*] necessarily involved in it, and these functions require a vast number of people to carry them out, it is necessary for nature to produce a vast number of people fitted to different functions: as well as celestial influences, the qualities and characteristics of regions here below. In human institutions the power conferred on an individual elected to office will reflect that person's abilities; in the natural world power and aptitude are correlated in the same way, for it is unthinkable that nature should be less careful in its provisions than human beings on earth who make a large contribution to this. (Dante 1996b, 46–47.)

While in this passage Dante emphasises the historical role the Romans were destined to play, he also makes reference to Aristotle's *Politics* and makes it palpably clear that transforming society is a *practical* activity that fits into the overall order of reality. In other words, life on earth – in the sphere applicable to human beings – creates a sort of well-being for them that does not amount to committing a sin; instead, it is seen as humankind's contribution to the fulfilment of the order of the universe. It is how “the qualities and characteristics of regions here below” [*locorum inferiorem virtutes*] are engaged on the whole. This is how, by creating the optimal medium for humankind's *physical* existence, the community helps each and every *individual* to fulfil their preordained purpose.

His summary is very clear:

And since every nature is ordered towards its own ultimate goal, it follows that man's goal is twofold: so that, just as he alone among all created beings shares in incorruptibility and corruptibility, so he alone among all created beings is ordered to two ultimate goals, one of them being his goal as a corruptible being, the other his goal as an incorruptible being. Ineffable providence has thus set before us two goals to aim at: i.e., happiness in this life, which consists in the exercise of our own powers and it is figured in the earthly paradise; and happiness in the eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of the vision of God (to which our own powers cannot raise us except with the help of God's light) and which is signified by the heavenly paradise. Now these two kinds of happiness must be reached by different means, as representing different ends. For we attain the first through the teachings of philosophy, provided that we follow them putting into practice the moral and intellectual virtues; whereas we attain the second through spiritual teachings which transcend human reason, provided that we follow them and put into practice the theological virtues, i.e. faith, hope and charity. These ends and the means to attain them have been shown to us on the one hand by human reason, which has been entirely revealed to us by the philosophers, and on the other by the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets and sacred writers, through Jesus Christ the son of God,



coeternal with him, and through his disciples, has revealed to us the transcendent truth we cannot do without. Yet human greed would cast these ends and means aside if men, like horses, prompted to wander by their animal nature, were not held in check “with bit and bridle” on their journey. It is for this reason that man had need of two guides corresponding to his twofold goal: that is to say the supreme Pontiff, to lead mankind to eternal life in conformity with revealed truth, and the emperor, to guide mankind to temporal happiness in conformity with the teachings of philosophy. And since none can reach this harbour (or few, and these few with great difficulty) unless the waves of seductive greed are calmed and the human race rests free in the tranquillity of peace, this is the goal which the protector of the world, who is called the Roman Prince, must strive with all his might to bring about: i.e., that life on this threshing-floor of mortals may be lived freely and in peace. (Dante 1996b. 92–93.)

In *De Monarchia*, Dante considers it necessary to emphasise that while temporal happiness on earth is of a lower grade than eternal celestial happiness and may be attained in a different way, it is not *without value*. It is the *emperor* who leads people to this state on the basis of the guidance afforded by *philosophy*, but it is vital for success that the *citizens* themselves develop and exercise their *intellectual and moral virtues* at a high level. He does not enumerate the virtues in *De Monarchia*, but he did so in Treatise IV of the *Convivio*. In Chapter 17 Book IV of the *Convivio*, Dante discusses eleven of the twelve virtues that feature in Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (courage, temperance, liberality, righteous indignation, magnificence, proper pride, good temper, ready wit, truthfulness, friendliness, and fairness) while in Chapter 19 he discusses shame (*vergogna*) (Aristoteles 1978. 32–34). Neither in *Convivio* nor in *De Monarchia* does he emphasise that attaining earthly happiness closely correlates with divine grace, and he makes no mention of certain virtues that are of key importance from a religious perspective, such as patience and humility (MacIntyre 1981. 312). Rather, his argumentation leads the reader to conclude that a combination of the *requisite knowledge* with the *requisite virtuousness* is themselves an almost sufficient basis for attaining secular happiness (Kempshall 2007. 127–172). He lays much greater stress on the exploration of possibilities and on the development of the instruments required to arrive at the solutions, and on the related tasks and responsibilities of all individuals of outstanding talent. Because “all men whom the Higher Nature has endowed with a love of truth” and “to whom it is given to know the best that is in us, it is not proper to follow the tracks of the herd, but rather we ought to confront their errors” (Dante 1996b. 3; Dante Epist., XIII. 2). Indeed, it is most natural that “they are not directed by law, but rather the law by them” (Dante Epist., XIII. 2). No other possibility exists and it takes the force of a monarchy’s reasonably drafted laws to permanently eliminate “cupidity” (*cupidigia*), so all those who undertake the lion’s share of creating such laws and controlling society do indeed deserve a prominent position.

## III.

Having laid out and proven his theoretical foundations, and having shown that the creation of an ideal monarchy is an attainable goal, Dante proceeds to describe *two exemplary precedents*. In his effort to bolster his argumentation in *De Monarchia*, he turns his attention to a detailed discussion of the imperial era of Rome. However, in addition to discussing the *secular example actually existing* in history as a model, he also considers the legend of the Golden Age (the rule of Astraea), although he does so in a later passage and also from the perspective of a quite different mindset (Nardi 1967. 276–310). What he presents, in a peculiar way, in the last six cantos of the *Purgatorio* is, however, a version of the Golden Age that is sanctioned by *Christianity*. This mainly illustrates the *questionable nature* of the church's competence in secular affairs, much in the same vein as his discussion of the imperial model of Rome is intended to exemplify the *optimal nature* of the secular monarchy. Dante believes that the role of the church and of the pope is *ab ovo of religious nature*; consequently, he views certain popes' aspirations to supreme secular power as an unwarranted expansion of their competence, *a special form of cupiditas* as it were, even though – as several instances in the *Divine Comedy* illustrate – certain popes (Boniface VIII, Clement V, Nicholas III) failed to fulfil their ecclesiastical roles and committed certain sins (simony, violence, etc.) in the context of secular activities while exercising competences they had no right to exercise (Madarász 2015. 15–32). In this respect, the legitimacy of the foundations on which the Roman Empire had been built represents the exact opposite (Brokmeier 2003. 249–261).

Dante carefully deduces and demonstrates his doctrine that the emperor's power is not mediated by the pope but it comes directly from God: "Thus it is evident then that the authority of the temporal monarch flows down into him without any intermediary from the Fountainhead of universal authority; this Fountainhead, though one in the citadel of its own simplicity of nature, flows into many streams from the abundance of His goodness" (Dante 1996b. 93). One of these channels is that of the pope, and it ranks with its secular counterpart: that of the emperor. The way Dante recalls the image of the Earthly Paradise – and especially the ruinous fate of the triumphal chariot and the figure of the barren tree – not only illustrates the collapse of the church's efficiency and authority in secular matters and suggests that it is ordained for creating non-secular organisations. More importantly, the big picture as a *whole* (the triumphal processions) represents the versatility and the *original power* of the church, and these factors guarantee the efficiency of religious life. Dante never challenged the authority of the church, nor the notion that it was ordained to be the caretaker of people's *spiritual lives*, nor its suitability for leading them to eternal celestial happiness. As for the ideal monarchy, the fundamentally idyllic atmosphere of the Earthly Paradise draws the reader's attention to the realisation that *peaceful*



social relations represent the *original state* of humankind. The *Golden Age* (the rule of Saturn) was not to be found on Mount Parnassus, it was *not* merely a figment of the poet's imagination (even though Virgil had also written about it) but in fact it was historical reality – a lost bit of historical reality, but still historical reality – represented in the Bible, an undoubtedly credible source, as the miraculous dwelling place of the ancestral couple:

*Here*, mankind's root was innocent; and *here*  
were every fruit and never-ending spring;  
these streams—the nectar of which poets sing.  
(*Purgatorio*, XXVIII. 142–144 – translated by Allen Mandelbaum.)

Escorted by Matelda, Dante not only emphasises the beauty of this miraculous place but also its *fertility* and how it affords humankind all that is required for a life without care or worry – this, in fact, reminds the reader of the classical tradition, namely, the cult of Proserpina; and, in a way, adds a different hue to the biblical tradition (Mercuri 1994. 175–180). When God created a home of such beauty and richness for the original couple, He offered all humankind a very favourable opportunity: humanity could have lived in such *complete* temporal happiness *here on earth* that nothing could have surpassed it, save eternal celestial happiness:

The Highest Good, whose sole joy is Himself,  
made man to be – and to enact – good; He  
gave man this place as pledge of endless peace.  
(*Purg.* XXVIII. 91–93 – translated by Allen Mandelbaum.)

The Earthly Paradise is a realm of opportunities for *human completeness*: it offers humanity safety and joy, the *tranquillity* of *personal* fulfilment, and *peace for the community*. While this *peace* was disrupted by the fall, the crucifixion of Christ the Saviour *gave humanity back* the possibility of that peace, and in fact gave humanity a taste of that peace: for at the time when Christ was born, under the rule of Emperor Augustus, *peace* held sway *across the entire globe*, which Saint Paul expressed poignantly when he “called that most happy condition »the fullness of the time«” (Dante 1996b. 28). Hence the history of the Roman Empire does not only prefigure and model the ideal monarchy; it also demonstrates that a prerequisite without which a global empire cannot last is that the *entire world must attain a state of peace* – and that such a state of peace can be recreated because it is *not alien* to the desires of the world's citizens, nor is it alien to human nature, but in fact it is the *original* precondition of society's *normal* existence, something originally granted to humanity by God. The fact that peace could be *resurrected* during the time of Augustus was certainly the will of God, as it was surely out



of God's "inclination" that Augustus could gain power "justly" over the Roman people, that he could become the ruler of the world, and that he could build a global empire that – thanks to its overall balance and many other values – was worthy of becoming the birthplace of both Christ and Christianity.

The *original* peace of the Earthly Paradise and the *transitional* peace of the Roman Empire prefigure or *model* – in a way, as an *allegoria in factis* – the monarchy that Dante recommends, although done in a highly abstract manner: the former in the *sensus anagogicus*, and the latter in what is a borderline between the *sensus litteralis* and the *sensus allegoricus*. They may be seen as models – as regards their meaning rather than their temporal sequence. Namely, that the *earthly Roman Empire* anticipates the future empire, primarily its social and *institutional structure*, while the *Earthly Paradise* mainly anticipates its *human relations* and *spiritual atmosphere*. Taken together, the two can lead one to the celestial Paradise; they can play the role of a "liber scale", provided that human beings do indeed strive to fulfil their ordained purpose. In the ideal state of the *Monarchy*, *interpersonal* relations are characterised by an atmosphere of *peace* and *love*, while in the society that Dante presents in *Purgatorio* from a perspective other than its institutions and whose *subjective* aspects are shown in a harsher light by the earthly Paradise, the human being is to receive much more good: there, everything is *great* and *joyful*. While Dante's vision of society in *De Monarchia* presents more of the preconditions of happiness, his vision of the Earthly Paradise shows more of the individual's actually attained happiness. In other words, the latter gives the reader more insight into celestial happiness and it is therefore much more attractive:

While I moved on, completely rapt, among  
so many first fruits of eternal pleasure,  
and longing for still greater joys, the air  
before us altered underneath the green  
branches, becoming like an ardent fire,  
and now the sweet sound was distinctly song.

(*Purg.* XXIX. 31–36 – translated by Allen Mandelbaum.)

This vision of the *peace* and *beauty* of the Earthly Paradise, appealing to our faith and intellect, *partly* confirms the human conviction that celestial happiness is attainable; and, by appealing to humankind's sagacity and morals, partly *motivates* human beings to realise that the temporal and the eternal are interconnected and that human beings should start changing their lives *as soon as possible*. However, it is impossible to create conditions better than the current state of affairs and closer to the conditions of the Earthly Paradise by merely harnessing the mortal forces of human *knowledge* and *determination*; beyond God's grace and other interventions, humankind must also *cleanse itself* of its sins. This is why





mortals have to drink from the waters of Lethe and Eunoe. Forgetting the bad (Lethe) and remembering the good (Eunoe) was not meant to improve the situation of the ancestral couple; it was actually meant to help their *descendants* in the future. Dante cannot emphasise strongly enough that an ideal society and state cannot be created merely as a result of the *monarch's* actions – however complex and comprehensive they may be. Neither is it limited only to the sphere of *public life* with its proper institutions (just officials); *citizens* must undergo a complete change to stand a chance of attaining happiness in life on earth. As part of the ideal model of cleansing that he presents in *Purgatorio*, Dante points out the significance of the good – the original as symbolising the ideal – in general terms by his description of the last stage of his journey: as the *light* becomes gradually stronger, he drinks from the water of *remembering* – from a river created, in this specific form, by his own imagination – reminding us, with some emphasis, of the *original* state of humankind (Le Goff 1981. 478–479).

Relying on the instruments of poetry, Dante gives a description of the two rivers of opposite effects but supplementary roles; but in doing so, he definitely does not ignore certain elements that originate in classical mythology. In Greek mythology – which often abounds in variations on the same theme – several names derive from the word *mneme*, which means *memory*: the goddess Mnemosyne is well known as the mother of the nine muses; *Mneme*, who is one of the three muses in another tradition; and Mnemosyne, a *spring* in Boeotia originating near the spring Lethe and trickling across the shrine of goddess Mnemosyne. Zeus fathered the muses so they can help lighten the burden of cares and sooth pain – the two roles expressed with the words *lesmosyne* and *lethe*, respectively – but, for the sake of balance, the chief god also made sure people do not forget about what is *good*, an aspect that receives special emphasis in the variant about the muse *Mneme*. In comparison to these versions, however, certain features of the Mycenaean ‘cult of the dead’ bear closer resemblance to Dante’s vision – the most prominent one being that the souls of the dead had to *drink* from the *spring* Mnemosyne so that they do not forget, even as they enter the underworld, about who they are as persons and about their personal identities, as this would help ensure that the living do not forget them either. Incidentally, there was also a river called *Euenos* in Aetolia; it was wading across this river that the centaur Nessus, lethally wounded by the arrow of Heracles for his act, carried off Deianeira (Kerényi 1951. 100–104, 240). When naming his own mythical river of remembering, Dante opted for a name that sounds very similar and means *remembering* (*eu* + *nous* ~ good sense, good remembering), assigning the river the role of preparing the living for a more meaningful life. However, the Eunoe with the river Lethe also have the function of providing balance and guidance in Dante’s vision. This mythical background also helps the reader realise that it is possible to reinstate the originally good state of humankind through certain cooperation between God and



humanity because humankind still encompasses much good that deserves to be recreated in a modernised form.

What distinguishes Dante's vision of society and state from even the most sophisticated medieval concepts is that, despite its quite utopian nature, it adopts a *sufficiently realistic* perspective to not try and subvert the then-possible *hierarchy* within the state between the citizens and the supreme power; and in terms of the latter, between the emperor and the pope. Unlike Marsilius of Padua, Dante does not challenge the primacy of the pope in matters of religion, and unlike Thomas Aquinas, he does not subordinate the emperor to the pope in terms of secular power. Like most other theories of state, Dante too puts forward a new proposal for creating balanced, peaceful social relations and just rule, but his emphasis is on the secular nature and the *rational* instruments of his proposal. The closest his vision ever gets to that of Thomas Aquinas is when he presents the *peace* of the Earthly Paradise as the *original state* of the human being and an *essential* feature of the human condition, even though in his *De regimine principum* written half a century earlier, Thomas refers to the well-governed state saying that "One must relate these things to the peace of the heart, not to the peace of the body" (Aquinas 1997. 195), and when he speaks of the rise of the fifth *global empire* after the four pagan ones, what he has in mind is the unification of the *Christian world* on the basis of Christ being God-man; after all – according to the prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel – "this rule or monarchy brings to naught and destroys all other lordship, because all kingdoms are subjected to the same one [...]. Indeed, the reason it will last through eternity is at hand, because that one is joined to eternal rule, since he is both Lord God and human." (Aquinas 1997. 187–188.) Dante does not challenge the notion that peace is a gift from God, but his proposal addresses the matter of reinstating the peace among people and among provinces, emphasising the *original* nature of peace in order to underscore the *possibility* of its reinstatement. The peace in social relations and the internal peace of individual members of society can only reinforce one another.

The *emperor's rule* that safeguards both *private life* (as lived in the idyllic peace of the *future state* or Earthly Paradise presented by Dante through the description of the social relations characterising the two *ideal-typical societies*) and *public life* (rationally and justly coordinating the freedom and cooperation of the citizens of the global empire encompassing humankind in its entirety) appears as a *state* whose *personal* as well as *institutional* guarantees are not merely the most acceptable *in theory* but, as attested to by *historical* precedents, are indeed possible. Dante offers a complex characterisation of this – granted, much too idealised – state from *both* vantage points, although he attributes more importance to, and he has more new ideas to propose, its *personal* components. It is the *emperor* as the representative of the supreme power that can initiate the transformation of the status quo; however, such a transformation inevitably requires the active participation of the *citizens*, themselves also educated, aware, well intentioned,



and active. Hence, those agents *exerting* (*to poioun*) the effects of improvement and those *suffering* (*to paschon*) the effects are not entirely distinct from one another and are not in rigid confrontation with one another; as a result, it is possible to *integrate* their respective achievements. As far as the *institutions* are concerned, special emphasis is laid on the fact that they are *secular*, that their role is to enforce justice, and that the persons operating within their ranks must use their skills in the interest of the *public*. An individual's additional contribution of knowledge, love, or dignity also acquires significance in public life inasmuch as it helps to attain the public good. Those assuming leadership positions at various levels of the ideal state should be characterised by *libido servandi* rather than by *ius dominandi* (Falkeid 2011. 144–149).

From a *practical* perspective, such an over-idealised vision of reasonable social coexistence and such an abstract concept of the state are certainly mere *utopia*. However, when evaluated from a *theoretical* vantage point, they are *limit concepts* (*limes*) that manifest an ideal that is *approachable* at best (a thought not at all alien to philosophy or even, despite its secularistic air, to religion), but ones that also clearly outline the *possibility* of approaching that ideal, and, in fact, muster examples of their partial *realisations* as actual historical precedents.

#### IV.

In attempting to partly reinterpret – but more importantly, to paint a more intricate picture of – the relationship between life on earth and life in the hereafter, Dante did not merely expound a variant of the theory of double truth with an innate tendency to shift towards further theoretical differentiation. Rather, he attempted to point out, in general terms, the advantages of the complementary nature of the two types of truth and the positive social impact of the expected practical consequences of this complementarity. He never doubted the indisputable social significance of religion, challenged the notion that the church played a role in making human beings better, or questioned the divine origin of secular power. All he emphasised was that the pope did not have the competence to exercise secular power because God ordained him to help souls attain eternal celestial happiness. He proposed that it was the emperor as the sole representative of supreme power who could resolve conflicts between individuals fighting for secular goods, create the original peace that is essential to humankind, and guarantee the freedom of human beings through his just rule, and allow the whole of humanity to cooperate in its efforts to attain happiness on earth as well as in the hereafter – earthly happiness being seen as a state preparing celestial happiness – that is to say, to fulfil the ultimate end humankind is ordained for. He was able to show the fundamental religious and philosophical *principles* were involved. In terms of the *individual*, he outlined the ideal of a reasonable human

being; in terms of peaceful *interpersonal relations*, he reminded his readers of the humane social concepts of the Earthly Paradise; and in terms of an institutional system that operates justly, he described a vision of the monarchy and proposed the secular *state* of the Roman Empire as a real and credible historical precedent.

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JÁNOS KELEMEN

## A Semiotics of Prohibition

### Boundaries and Exclusion in the *Divine Comedy*\*

Dante's Comedy contains, among other things, an elaborately worked out semiotics for prohibition, delimitation, discrimination, exclusion and expulsion, a semiotics which is intimately interrelated.

Prohibition is, in effect, the organizing principle of the moral order within the poem. On the one hand, this follows straightforwardly from the way that law and sin, prohibition and the Fall are conceived to be interconnected within Christian teachings. In addition, it also follows from an essential feature of the world in which Dante lived, and which he recreated in his poem: that people's lives were governed by a multitude of prohibitions. The poet describes the fates he encounters during his otherworldly journey as examples of sin and punishment, of justice issuing rewards or punishment, all consequences of obeying or defying such prohibitions.

According to Dante, commands involving prohibitions serve as foundations for the moral order not merely in the trivial sense that doing what is prohibited is sinful, but also in a more profound sense: that acts can acquire a moral sense only in a world that is entrenched by prohibitions. Bearing witness to this, the most important passage can be found in Canto XXVI of *Paradise*, where Adam speaks about the original sin and his expulsion from paradise:

[...] the tasting of the tree was not by itself the cause of so great an exile, but only the overpassing of the bound. (*Par.* XXVI. 115–117.)<sup>1</sup>

\* An earlier version of this essay was published in Magyar Dante Füzetek / Quaderni Danteschi Ungheresi, 2008.

<sup>1</sup> Or, figliuol mio, non il gustar del legno  
Fu per sé la cagion di tanto esilio,  
Ma solamente il trapassar del segno.  
English translation: Dante 1952 (1984).





Adam's sin is therefore related to the symbolic, rather than the material aspect of his action. The Fall was the result of a prohibition being violated, not merely an action that was bad in itself – the taking of the forbidden fruit.

In major respects, this corresponds to Saint Thomas Aquinas's conception, according to which in the case of the Fall, it is not the act itself that should be regarded as sinful, since, as he explained, it is no sin at all to desire knowledge and to wish to resemble god with respect to his knowledge. Thomas's primary emphasis is on the intemperance apparent in performing the act, which consisted in Adam's wanting to resemble God too much. His sin is that he overstepped a certain boundary, "il trapassar del segno," as Dante also noted. And this is precisely what pride is,<sup>2</sup> which is the chief sin within the system of *The Divine Comedy*.

The thought that sin's origins are to be found in the symbolic sphere, can be even more easily discerned from Paul's words: "but sin, finding occasion, wrought in me through the commandment all manner of coveting; for apart from the law sin *is* dead" (Rom, 7:8). This explanation of the roots of sin contains the legal principle that without law there is no sin, as the apostle elsewhere states explicitly: "but sin is not imputed when there is no law" (Rom, 5:13), "through the commandment sin might become exceeding sinful" (Rom, 7:13).<sup>3</sup>

In this *Paradise*-episode, the question of the origin of language is also known to arise. Using Adam as his mouthpiece, Dante explicates a new and rather original theory – with respect to both the tradition and his views in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* – according to which language is not a gift from god, but Adam's creation. It is no accident that the two themes are interconnected. Just as the first sin was committed by the first man, he was also the one to utter the first words. In other words: the origins of sin and of language are one and the same.

Thus a strong symbolic link exists between sin and language. This is enforced by the fact that when Dante describes Adam's sin, he uses the word "segno," which in his language simultaneously means, among other things, "boundary," "measure," and "sign." Adam therefore crosses the boundary by disregarding the sign and thereby opposing God. He rationalizes the fact that God had placed the tree there as a sign, and had endowed it with a certain significance.

The interconnection between sin and language also crops up in other places that are fundamental to the interpretation of the poem as a whole. One of these is the Odysseus-episode in Canto XXVI of *Hell*. The following brief remarks about the episode should be noted: (1) Odysseus is the poet's alter ego, (2) Odysseus's sin as a *fandi factor* is also a language-related sin, (3) enclosed within a tongue of flames with the underworld, Odysseus's penitence is through or by language, in accordance with the principle of contrapasso (an eye for an eye,

<sup>2</sup> See Thomas Aquinas 1952 (1984), II, CLXIII, 1–2.

<sup>3</sup> Quotations from the American Standard Version of the Holy Bible.



a tooth for a tooth), appearing as a flame in front of Dante (“as if it were the tongue that spoke” – *Inf.* XXVI. 85–90).

This link is so strong that the punishment for those who had committed suicide (*Inf.* XIII) as well as for Nimrod (*Inf.* XXXI) also becomes linguistic in nature. In each of these cases, we are justified in talking about a case of “linguistic contrapasso.”<sup>4</sup> Those who committed suicide have thrown away life, depriving themselves of the essence of their humanity, and as a result, the most distinctive human characteristic, speech becomes a source of eternal suffering for them. They turn into trees and every one of their words streams forth with blood spurting out from their wounds where their twigs and branches used to be before having been broken off. (“Who was thou, who through so many wounds blowest forth with blood a woe-ful speech?” – *Inf.* XIII. 137–138.) Nimrod, who out of excessive pride convinced people to build the tower of Babel, ends up losing his humanity through garbled and nonsensical speech. His punishment excludes him from human communities. (“Let us leave him alone, and not speak in vain; for such is every language to him, as his to others which is known to no one” – *Inf.* XXXI. 79–81.)

Of course, the figure of Odysseus is endowed with special significance through the fact that we can recognize in him the likeness of the poet. It is obviously no coincidence that in comparison to all other characters in *Hell*, his is the story in which the greatest emphasis is placed on a prohibition being violated, on a boundary being crossed, on the motif of disregarding a sign. Let us remind ourselves of the story’s structure: upon leaving Circe’s island, Odysseus and his remaining companions set off yet again, and after passing the Straits of Gibraltar, where the Pillars of Hercules mark the border of the world, they reach the mountain of Purgatory in the middle of the ocean, at the shore of which they are shipwrecked. The relevant lines are as follows:

I and my companions were old and slow when we came to that narrow strait where  
Hercules set up his bounds, to the end that man should not put out beyond.

Io e’ compagni eravam vecchi e tardi  
quando venimmo a quella foce stretta  
dov’ Ercole segnò li suoi riguardi  
Acciò che l’uom più oltre non si metta.  
(*Inf.* XXVI. 106–109.)

Immediately after the reference to the Pillars of Hercules, we read Ulysses’s famous speech, through which this great master of persuasion convinces his crew to undertake the final journey:

<sup>4</sup> I have already considered this question in Kelemen 1994.



Consider your origin; ye were not made to live as brutes, but pursue virtue and knowledge.

Considerate la vostra semenza:  
fatti non foste a viver come bruti,  
ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.  
(*Inf.* XXVI. 119–121.)

The parallel between Adam and Odysseus already becomes striking at the first glance. Just as the first man attempts to acquire knowledge by plucking the forbidden fruit, the Greek hero is driven by his desire for knowledge to sail past the boundary marked by the Pillars of Hercules. We know all too well how wide the range of possibilities for interpreting the Odysseus-episode is, but fortunately, these bear little connection to the present inquiry. We should, however, make one remark. In the light of the parallel between Adam and Odysseus, and taking into account Thomas's interpretation of the original sin, Odysseus' case, like Adam's, can be regarded as one in which the quest for acquiring knowledge does not in and of itself constitute a sin. Odysseus's sin is not what he describes as "the ardor which I had to become experienced of the world, and of the vices of men, and of their virtue" (*Hell*, XXVI. 97–99), but rather the fact that he has crossed the boundary (and he did literally do so) and thereby violated the prohibition. For his case, too, the words describing Adam's act are perfectly fitting: „il trapassare del segno." At the level of semantics, this is supported by the fact that in the line (108) referring to the border that cannot be crossed, we encounter yet again the semantic content of "sign" and "signal" in connection with various lexemes: „dov' Ercole segnò li suoi riguardi" ("Segno" appears here as a verb: and "segnò" on the "riguardi" should be understood as a warning inscription, border marking). This way, the literal meaning of the line is as follows: "where Hercules inscribed his sign (inscription)."<sup>5</sup>

We can be certain about the sense attributed to the Pillars of Hercules. They serve to signal more than just a border, they are signs of warning and prohibition as well: they are there so "that man should not put out beyond" (109). Disregarding the sign is inescapable and the punishment is comparable to that of Adam's. The punishments received by Odysseus and Adam are structural counterparts of one another, just like their sins are. Odysseus is shipwrecked at the foot of Purgatory, on the top of which is earthly paradise. Meanwhile, Adam was expelled from earthly paradise, losing immortality for him and his descend-

<sup>5</sup> Witte's German translation corresponds to this: "Wo Herkules die Zeichen setzte". Dante 1945. 101.

In a work by Brunetto Latini, Dante's mentor, entitled *Tesoretto*, Hercules is said to have "put there as signals" ("vi pose per segnale") "great columns to show people that the earth ends there and terminates." See Singleton's commentary of the *Comedy*: Singleton 1989. 465.



ants (he therefore died in a symbolic sense). Odysseus's journey is accordingly an attempt at returning to the starting point for humans prior to the expulsion from paradise. This is why it was forbidden to sail past the Pillars of Hercules, and this is why Odysseus's fate repeats Adam's: he is effectively expelled from paradise through his ship being wrecked and through being sent to hell.

We have already emphasized that Adam's and Odysseus's sins are symbolic, semiotic in nature, if you like: they consist in the two men neglecting the sign. But in Odysseus's case, the prohibition refers to the crossing of a concrete, spatial boundary – a geographic border in the fully literal sense. In describing this, Dante follows an existing tradition which can provide further help in understanding the Odysseus episode.

Starting with Strabo, several authors from antiquity and medieval times have written about the Pillars of Hercules,<sup>6</sup> recalling a Hercules-temple decorated by Phoenician columns (not mentioning initially the prohibition for sailing through the straits). Certain Arabic sources<sup>7</sup> also include accounts of a copper statue depicting a man with a long beard enrobed in a golden cloak, turning towards the east, and pointing at the strait behind him with a prohibitive motion of his hand, meaning “no further.” The sources also tell about an inscription on the cliff wall, reading “non plus ultra.” This is the same expression as the one Dante used in line 109: *più oltre non*.

As always, from the perspective of our present theme as well, we should distinguish between descriptions of the afterworld on the one hand, and those earthly stories about which Dante is informed during his otherworldly encounters. Accounts of the physical location of hell and the purgatory generally include descriptions of their boundaries and the vicissitudes involved in crossing these boundaries. In these cases, the boundaries are not without symbolic meaning, but they still primarily remind us of “geographic” borders, due to the fact that Dante has elaborately worked out the topography of hell and of the purgatory. By contrast, paradise presents a completely different image. Because it is no physical-spatial place, its various circles are not separated by boundaries from each other or from earthly paradise on top of the mountain of Purgatory. From earthly paradise, Dante flies into the skies in an unconscious state, in a single flash: “lightning, flying from its proper site, never ran as thou who art returning thereunto” (*Par.* I. 93).

Let us examine some types of boundaries in hell and in the purgatory.

<sup>6</sup> Maria Corti gives a detailed account of the various sources from antiquity: Corti 1993. See the sections entitled “Il divieto ovvero la navigazione proibita” (“Prohibition or Prohibited Sailing”) and “Canali di informazione arabo-castigliani” (“Castilian-Arabic Information Channels”), 122–124.

<sup>7</sup> Corti 1993. See the section entitled “Canali di informazione arabo-castigliani” (“Castilian-Arabic Information Channels”), 124–126.



Everyone knows that at the semiotically marked boundary separating hell from the world of the living, one must pass through a gate with the inscription (“Through me is the way into the woful city [...]”, etc. – *Inf.* III. 1–9). This, in contrast with the inscription on the Pillars of Hercules, does not serve to *prohibit*, but to *inform*, announcing (along with numerous other signs with a similar function) who are allowed to enter the given area and what they should expect (no hope). It is also a *border marking* sign, just like contemporary signs with scripts like “boundary of Budapest,” “country border,” and many other similar signs.<sup>8</sup> But the gate is not all. The real boundary, in accordance with the classic tradition, is Acheron, whose ferryman, Charon is also a border guard keeping a watchful eye to make sure that only those who are entitled will get into his boat to cross over to the other side. The encounter with him is followed by a sequence of scenes with repetitions of almost ritualistic monotony: each time, the guard recognizes that Dante is one of the living and prohibits him from entering (“thou who art there, living soul, depart from these that are dead” – *Inf.* III. 89), and Virgil secures permission to carry on through appeal to a higher will:

And my Leader to him: “Charon, vex not thyself; it is thus willed there where is power for that which is willed; and ask no more.”

(*Inf.* III. 94–96.)

The same ceremony recurs at the entry into the purgatory. The realm of the purgatory, with an entirely different set of laws, still has a guard: Cato of Utica, the Roman hero who sacrificed his life for freedom. His figure commands respects and is quite the opposite of the mythical and rude Charon’s figure but is no less strict and vigilant than him. The two travelers have to throw themselves to the ground and Virgil has to give a long speech in order for them to gain admission. The speech is one of several splendid rhetorical feats within the *Divine Comedy*, containing every tried and tested element for influencing the audience, ranging from appeal to a higher command to rational explanations and strategically placed mention of *captatio benevolentiae*. A beautiful example of this is the reference to the hero’s love of freedom:

Now may it please thee to look graciously upon his coming. He goes seeking liberty, which is so dear, as he knows who for it renounces life.

(*Purg.* I. 70–74.)

<sup>8</sup> In this instance, Dante is following a practice already familiar. In his era, it was common custom to place inscriptions alongside coats-of-arms and other badges on houses and especially on buildings with a sacred function.



Meanwhile, appealing to the character of the great Roman nobleman is not enough.<sup>9</sup> In the end, Virgil manages to soften the stern guard only by reminding him of his love for his wife Marcia, and promising to convey to her the guard's greetings:

For her love, then, incline thyself to us; allow us to go on through thy seven realms:  
I will report this grace from thee to her [...].

(*Purg.* I. 81–83.)

The situation in the purgatory resembles the preliminary events in hell in a further respect: the function of border crossing regulations are twofold. Much like during their journey into the underworld – where Dante and Virgil had to pass through the gates of hell and then had to cross the Acheron in Charon's boat – on the way to the purgatory, they have to request admission from Cato, while the souls awaiting penitence are carried across the sea by the angel of god, the heavenly ferryman, and deposited on the island of purgatory. But this gets us no further than the foot of the mountain yet. In order for the travelers to be admitted into the purgatory itself, they have to cross yet another border and first go through the ceremony –already familiar from previous episodes – of negotiating with the guard. This time around, the guard is an angel with a sword, who etches the *P*'s representing the seven sins onto Dante's forehead (each of which will be erased by an angel upon entering the next circle). Here then the admission ceremony is complemented by *branding*, physically marking the entering individuals.

Perhaps the most paradoxical example of prohibition and exclusion within hell is offered by the city of Dis. The travelers have to sail through the sea of mud in Styx, in order to reach the giant fortress surrounded by a rampart and moat:

We at last arrived within the deep ditches which encompass that disconsolate city.  
The walls seemed to me to be of iron.

(*Inf.* VIII. 76–79.)

At the city gates (which recalls the memory of the gates of hell)<sup>10</sup> a siege-like situation develops, but in the opposite sense: here, the demonic inhabitants of the city are the ones who react aggressively towards those requesting entry. The

<sup>9</sup> I would like to note a loosely related point: perhaps this is an example of Dante's irony and self-irony, since the poet suggests that there are far too many words. For at one point Cato has had enough of the speech: "But if a Lady of Heaven move and direct thee, as thou sayest, there is no need of flatteries." (*Purg.* I. 91–92.)

<sup>10</sup> "This their insolence is not new, for of old they used it at a less secret gate, which still is found without a bolt. Above it thou didst see the dead inscription [...]." (*Inf.* VIII. 124–127.)





logic of exclusion works in reverse. The travelers wish to enter a place whose gates the angry guards slam in front of the negotiating Virgil („These our adversaries closed the gates on the breast of my Lord, who remained without” – *Inf.* VIII. 115) – a place that is the city of horrors and a perfect opposite of the noble castle visited in Limbo. This time around the negotiations between the guards and those seeking entry, ends in failure. For despite Virgil encouraging his protégé (“I shall win the contest, whoever circle round within for the defense” – *Inf.* VIII. 123), they cannot get past the walls without the help of an angel sent from above.

As we see from the foregoing, hell and purgatory have characteristic natural boundaries: the river and the sea. We should add that several other rivers described in the *Comedy* serve the same function. A nice little brook surrounds the ancient castle in Limbo, where Homer leads Dante and the accompanying poets. Also, Lethe and Eunoe, the two rivers of paradise flowing from the same origin, also serve as borders in a symbolic sense. The travelers reaching the ancient castle, whose idyllic surroundings strikingly resemble our encounter of earthly paradise, is described as follows:

We came to the foot of a noble castle, seven times circled by high walls, defended round about by a fair streamlet. This we passed as if hard ground; through seven gates I entered with these sages; we came to a meadow of fresh verdure.

Venimmo al piè d'un nobile castello,  
Sette volte cerchiato d'alte mura,  
Difeso intorno d'un bel fiumicello.  
Questo passammo come terra dura;  
Per sette porte intrai con questi savi;  
Giugnemmo in prato di fresca verdura.  
(*Inf.* IV. 106–111.)

We are in an idyllic place, but entry is by no means simple. The nice little brook does not merely surround the castle, but also *protects* it (“difeso intorno d'un bel fiumicello”); and even if it were an exaggeration to say that the castle is like a prison, still, it is surrounded by seven *tall* walls (“cerchiato d'alte mura”), with seven gates. Prominent commentaries have it that the castle symbolizes human wisdom; the seven walls, the seven branches of philosophy; the seven gates, the trivium and the quadrivium; the stream, eloquence and experience. Whatever the allegorical meaning of the description might be, the image in front of us depicts a medieval castle surrounded by a wall and a moat, with the inhabitants – sages – living there shut off from the world. And the allegorical meaning is no different: the seven branches of philosophy (physics, metaphysics, ethics, politics, economics, mathematics and dialectics) encircle and protect the castle



of knowledge. At this point, too, we are presented with a world in which the interconnections among exclusion, isolation and segregation are expressed in terms of divisions of physical space and various symbolic manifestations of social hierarchy alike. Social space is directly recreated in physical space.

The forked river running through earthly paradise is not a boundary in a literal or physical sense. In one place though (when Matilda appears), the text expressly suggests that the small river constitutes exactly the kind of boundary that the Hellespont is for others:

The stream made us three paces apart; but the Hellespont where Xerxes passed it—still a curb on all human pride—endured not more hatred from Leander for swelling between Sestos and Abydos, than that from me because it did not then open.

(*Purg.* XXVIII. 70–75.)

Despite this, the river's border function is not purely symbolic: it separates the poet's old and new selves from one another. The water of forgetting (Lethe) frees him of the sin (makes him forget the sin), whilst the water of remembering (Eunoe) enforces virtue (makes him remember it). The poet becomes a new man by crossing the boundary. *Purgatory* is the cantica of freedom: the story of a traveler who has shrugged off his sins and was *set free*; one who has overstepped the boundary within whose confines he *used to be a prisoner*.

Of the forms and types of discrimination and exclusion which structure the episodes of the *Divine Comedy*, from the theological point of view, the decisive one is, without a doubt, the opposition of Christians and non-Christians. They are separated by the kind of boundary that we have encountered above, and baptism is a gate into another world, just like those gates that Dante had passed through with the help of Virgil. Dante's wording is by no means accidental then when he talks about the gate of faith when introducing the unsinning inhabitants of Limbo:

[...] these did not sin; and though they have merits it suffices not, because they did not have baptism, which is part of the faith that thou believest.

[...] ei non peccaro; e s'elli hanno mercedi,  
non basta, perché non ebber battesimo,  
ch'è porta de la fede che tu credi.

(*Inf.* IV. 34–36.)

Of course, Dante introduces an innovation at this point as well, theologically, morally and poetically speaking. In Canto XIX of *Paradise*, staggering words appear about the doubt that the exclusion of non-Christians raises weighty ques-



tions. Is it just to condemn “a man who is born on the bank of the Indus”, and “no one is there who may tell of Christ”? If “all his wishes and acts are good”, “where is his sin if he does not believe?” (*Par.* XIX. 70–78).

Dante’s other innovation relative to medieval conceptions of hell consists in his placing on the doorsteps of hell children as well as the greatest representatives of antiquity and Arabic culture. This is an important and telling compromise, which nevertheless leaves the logic of segregation unaltered: the sages in question are confined to a place fenced off for them, even if that is not hell itself.

The structure apparent in *Paradise*, whose world lacks hierarchic structure entirely, is of course very different from the one previously described. The saved souls are all equally close to god and are not distributed into assigned spots. That we encounter them in apparently different circles which seem to be lower or higher, is just an allegoric demonstration of the fact that their merits are not equal:

These showed themselves here, not because this sphere is allotted to them, but to afford sign of the celestial grade which is least exalted.

(*Par.* IV. 37–39.)

In contrast with the arrangement within hell, where in accordance with the principle of talion every sin has its own punishment, rewards in paradise are not issued in proportion to merit and everyone partakes in the same happiness. This is the allegoric expression of a kind of utopia that a different era has formulated as follows: “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” This is the utopia that invalidates the logic within hell about prohibition, delimitation and exclusion.

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## Lectura Dantis: Canto XII and Canto XVII of the *Inferno*\*

### I. CANTO XII

#### 1. *The main topics of Canto XII*

After Virgil and Dante have passed through the city of Dis in the 6<sup>th</sup> circle of Hell – i.e., through the place of punishment of the heretics (cf. *Inf.* IX–X) – and after Virgil presented to Dante the architectural structure of Hell (in Canto XI of the *Inferno*), the pilgrim and his guide descend on the landslide between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> circles to the first sub-circle of the 7<sup>th</sup> circle (of the violent), where in the river Phlegethon (more exactly in a bath of blood) the *violents against their neighbors* (*violenti contro il prossimo*) get soaked, i.e., the murderers, the tyrants and the robbers (*predoni*), who – in the case of being “undisciplined” – are hit by the arrows of the centaurs. According to the explanation of Virgil (in which he applies the dialectics of the Pagan-Empedoclean principles of Chaos and Cosmos, and of love and hatred, completed with the assumption of a cosmic catastrophe) the landslide was formed as a consequence of the earthquake at the moment of the death of Christ on the cross and his *descensus ad inferos* (which, as understood by Dante-Protagonist as a Christian, had the purpose of saving the souls of some Jewish prophets, for example David and Hezekiah). The guard of this circle is the Minotaur, the archetypal symbol of violence. Virgil asks the centaur Chiron for a guide to help them get across the Phlegethon (which river is also the symbol of *horror*). The centaur Nessus, after showing the two pilgrims the souls of some tyrants, transfers Dante on his back to the other shore, to the wood of the suicides, which will be presented in Canto XIII of the *Inferno*.

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## 2. *The critical reception of Canto XII; the special role of centaur Nessus*

Giuseppe Giacalone observes the controversial reception of the Canto. Fernando Figurelli, who expressed his views on Alighieri under the influence of the Dante-interpretation of Benedetto Croce (but with less efficiency than Croce), remarked in his judgement on Canto XII the lack of unity and of poeticalness, stressing that Canto XII differs significantly from the other five Cantos of the 7<sup>th</sup> circle of Hell, in particular because those other Cantos (XIII–XVII) are organic, and in their subject each concentrates on one episode or protagonist. Differently from Figurelli's judgement, Guido Mazzoni, Vittorio Rossi, Umberto Bosco, Attilio Momigliano consider Canto XII as relevant from the poetic point of view and coherent in the context of the whole œuvre (cf. Giacalone 2005. 261–262). The mixed reception of this Canto is underlined also by Carlo Caruso's analysis: in connection with this reception the Dante scholar mentions that the old Johann Wolfgang Goethe in his critical review of 1826 on a German translation of the *Comedy*, quoted, suprisingly, exclusively from Canto XII, highlighting the unique realism of the *Comedy*: according to Goethe this realism was more important even than the naturalism of Giotto's painting (cf. Caruso 2000. 165–166).

In comparison to the others, the unusual character of the present Canto – the action of which takes place, according the fictional narrative, on the second day of Dante's itinerary – can be explained by the fact that the infernal vision is clearly revealed from the viewpoint of Dante-protagonist (with the caveat that Dante-narrator is obviously the director of the scene). As a consequence, visual perception has great relevance. According to Giacalone, in the present Canto we watch a movie shot from a point of view, which has as its central scene the meeting with the centaurs. Dante-protagonist's temporary silence, the temporary transfer of the guidance from Virgil to Nessus, the crossing of the Phlegethon and the presentation of the damned are all poetic episodes for the moral deterrence of the reader (cf. Giacalone 2005. 262–263). In the present Canto Nessus, through his explanation of the sins of various ancient tyrants, assumes the dignity of a kind of moral leader. In the figural language of the *Comedy* the alert and intelligent centaurs (as – paradoxically – servants of divine justice) represent the *relentlessness* (correspondent to the *contrappasso*) experienced by the damned. In their utterances the centaurs are noble and pervaded by moral consciousness: this description of them accentuates their alienation from the horrible sins treated in this Canto (for example in the case of Guido di Monfort and of Attila; cf. Giacalone 2005. 263), and all this is manifested in the speech of Nessus, while Dante and Virgil – in a very unusual way – attend this scene as schocked spectators. So Nessus has a special status among the centaurs, because due to his demonic intelligence he took vengeance on Heracles for his own violent death. The centaurs – as *agile beasts* (*fiere isnelle* [76]) – have a double nature, which can be a reference to the ambiguous character of the damned souls expi-



ating in the Phlegethon, i.e., to the fact that these are murderers and ferocious tyrants (keeping in mind that also the Minotaur, as a guard of the 7<sup>th</sup> circle of Hell, has a double nature; cf. Giacalone 2005. 264).

Nessus formulates some moral judgments (which obviously are those of Dante-author), and at the same time he gives the security-escort to the two pilgrims: this means also some kind of moral ascension for him, because by his acquired intelligence and humanity he has to surmount his own inborn aggressive and beastly passions. It can be claimed that Alighieri gives to Nessus the function of the only possible intermediation between the cruelty of the tyrants and murderers, and the humanity of Dante himself (given to him in an exceptional way by divine providence), and in this sense the hybrid nature of the beast-man (of the centaur) made possible the already mentioned intellectual, visual and moral attitude of Dante-protagonist toward all that he (and the reader) has seen in the present Canto (cf. Giacalone 2005. 264). So in Canto XII, in a sense, the centaurs have a more relevant role than the violents against others. We can add that the centaurs in their language preserve their original bestiality even though they intend to distance themselves from the sins presented by them.

### 3. *The Minotaur*

In connection with the Minotaur we have to take seriously in consideration that this figure, according to Medieval interpreters – among them Francesco da Buti – is the symbol of the three kinds of violence derived from malice (*malizia*) and beastliness (*bestialità*): violence against one's neighbor, violence against oneself or one's possessions, and violence against God. On the basis of this the Minotaur is the guard of the whole 7<sup>th</sup> circle of Hell, analogously to Geryon – guard of the 8<sup>th</sup> circle of Hell –, who is the symbol of fraud (*frode*). It's a further problem that in the Hell described by Virgil there is no antecedent of the Minotaur as a guard or as an infernal creature, moreover Dante does not clarify of which kind of violence the Minotaur is the symbol. So it is not clear what Alighieri's sources are in his poetic adaptation of the figure of the Minotaur (though here, too, Ovid's work is certainly a basic reference for Dante). Anyway, it seems to be coherent that in the logic of Dante's Hell, created partly on the basis of the conception of hell in Antiquity, the Minotaur has to be the guard of the 7<sup>th</sup> circle analogously to the case of Minos, who apparently is the minister in Hell (and in the Other World in general) of distributive justice – in reality of injustice –, in other words he is the judge of the dead, meanwhile in the world (according to mythology) he was the just king of Crete (cf. Pastore Stocchi 1971).

We have to mention about the Minotaur that for Alighieri and his contemporaries it was not unambiguous that he is a bull-headed man. In the sources of Dante (Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI. 26–27; Ovid, *Ars amatoria*, II 24, and *Metamorphoses*,





VIII. 156) the anatomy of the Minotaur remained an open question, and in certain periods it was the opposite version (man headed bull) that prevailed, so it is this version which appears – with the exception of one codex-illustration, which shows the image of the Minotaur in harmony with classical iconography – in the illustrated manuscripts of the *Comedy*. The Italian names of the two hybrid figures of *Minotauro* and *Centauro* could also inspire mediaeval poets to present the Minotaur as a man headed bull. Still, on the basis of the writings of Johannes Balbus (†1298), as well as the researches of Achille Tartaro (1936–2008) we know that the “classical” version of the Minotaur (bull headed man) was also continuously present in mediaeval thought, thanks – among others – to the works of Statius, which were fundamental also for Dante (cf. Statius, *Thebaid*, XII. 668–671, moreover *Achilleid*, I. 191–192; see Caruso 2000. 167). When Virgil and Dante meet the Minotaur, they abash him: their appearance makes recall Minotaur his fatal confrontation with Theseus (cf. v. 14–27): at that point the monster bites himself (cf. v. 14), which can be interpreted as a *contrappasso*, for Minotaur’s cannibalism (*antropofagia*) here turns to be self-mutilation (*autoleisionismo*).

The reference to Theseus was important already in Canto IX of the *Inferno* (there, according to what the Furies [Erinyes] told, Dante dared to descend to Hell because previously the Furies themselves and Medusa did not appropriately punish Theseus who had also descended to Hell; cf. *Inf.* IX. 52–54), and in Canto XII this reference is made in a dramatic moment, when the pilgrim and his guide have to negotiate the difficult passage on the slide between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> circle. Also in this episode the humble Christian pilgrim (Dante-protagonist) is compared to the Pagan Theseus, who in reality was a mortal enemy and the murderer of the Minotaur and of the centaurs at the danger-fraught wedding of Pirithous and Hippodamia (cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XII. 210–532), to which Dante himself makes reference in *Inf.* XXIV. 121–123 (cf. Caruso 2000. 167–168). Virgil, countervailing the blemish on his honour as a guide (when the demons prevented Dante and Virgil to enter Dis), seems, in verses 26–27 of the present Canto (“Run to the passage; it is well thou descend while he is in fury”) to have the capacity of a magician: so Virgil as a magician is able to neutralize the Minotaur with his above mentioned mantra-like utterance, and urges Dante because this magic formula has a short effect (cf. Caruso 2000. 168).

*4. The river Phlegethon and the expiation of the violent against their neighbours in it; the general role of the centaurs*

At the moment of the passage of Dante and his guide along the ravine, Virgil encourages the pilgrim to observe the unfolding sight: “But fix thine eyes below, for the river of blood draws near in which are boiling those that by violence



do injury to others” (v. 46–48). The boiling river of blood is the Phlegethon (which was already a burning river in Virgil’s *Aeneid* and in Statius’s *Thebaid* as well). The Phlegethon carries two main meanings in the *Inferno* at the allegorical-symbolic level. The specific meaning refers to the 7<sup>th</sup> circle of Hell washed by the Phlegethon, and to those who are in it or at its banks. Related to this, the Phlegethon, according to Giovanni Pascoli, is the river which corresponds to the corruption born in bestial anger, i.e. this river is the symbol of bestiality as the first form of injustice. According to the second, more general meaning the Phlegethon – in the order of Hell – is an emblematic moment in the life of the damned: Giovanni Boccaccio sees in this river the symbol of the sinning soul; the sinner, conscious of his own damnation, desires immeasurably to get rid of his own suffering. Luigi Pietrobono extends the symbolic meaning of the Phlegethon from *those who are dominated by mad rage (vinti d’ira folle)* to *those who are dominated by love/desire (vinti d’amore)*, i.e., to the lustful, the gluttonous, the avaricious (cf. Mazzamuto 1970).

As mentioned already, it is on the rock between the slope and the river – which unfold to Virgil and Dante – where the centaurs appear, who (differently from their earthly activity) hunt not for animals, but for humans, those who emerge more from the boiling river of blood than permitted to them on the basis of their sin (cf. v. 75). The meaning of the term *isnelle*, referring to the centaurs, is *agile* or *fast*, and this feature of them is strictly connected to their demonic character, expressed also in *Le Roman de Troie* of Benoit De Sante-Maure. This implies the question if Dante could possibly know *Le Roman de Troie* (which is disputed by Bruno Nardi; cf. Caruso 2000. 170–171). The commentaries of Giovanni Boccaccio and of Benvenuto da Imola are noteworthy: they see in the centaurs the figures of the adventurer mercenaries, so in the Phlegethon the tyrants are tormented right by those who – in the unjust world of the tyrants – were simple tools in the hands of the tyrants themselves (cf. Izzi 1970).

Among the damned, treated in the present Canto, the first four are tyrants (see from v. 103): they – i.e., Alexandros (Alexander the Great, or, according to other interpretations, Alexandros, tyrant of Pherae [cf. Borzi–Fallani–Maggi–Zennaro 2005. 102. com.]), Dionysius (Dionysius I, tyrant of Syracuse), Azzolino (Ezzelino) da Romano, and Obizzo II of Este – are soaked by the river up to their eyebrows; they are emblematic figures – in a negative sense – of the aristocracy of blood and violence, as they are represented in the eclectic synthesis of mediaeval culture (cf. Ciotti 1976). The following group is the murderers, soaked by the river up to their neck: Guido di Montfort (the murderer of Henry III, an English prince), about whom Nessus talks a little bit more than usual (cf. v. 115–120), furthermore Attila, Pyrrhus (son of Achilles), Sextus Pompeius, and Rinieri da Corneto.

An anticipation of the explanation with reference to the inhabitants of the 7<sup>th</sup> circle of Hell can be found in Canto XI of the *Inferno* (cf. v. 28–39). According



to Caruso's reconstruction of that description four groups can be identified: (1) *murderers* (*omicide*); (2) *dishonestly malicious* (*ciascun che mal fiere*); (3) *wound-givers* (*feritori*) and *destroyers/ravagers* (*guastatori*); (4.) *robbers* (*predoni*). By applying these four categories to the ten damned who figure in the narration of Nessus, we have the following subdivision of groups:

- (1) Alexandros, Dionysus, Azzolino da Romano, Obizzo of Este: bloody (slayer) tyrants;
- (2) Guido di Montfort: dishonest/slayer and malicious person;
- (3) Attila, Pyrrhus and Sextus: wound-givers and ravagers;
- (4) Rinier da Corneto and Rinier Pazzo: robbers and slayers (on this subdivision see Caruso 2000. 179–180).

It is peculiar that after having communicated all this, Nessus falls silent and – after he has transported and led the two travellers to the other bank – he turns round (which gives a suspended character to the ending of the Canto): “Poi si rivolse e ripassosi 'l guazzo” (“Then he turned back and crossed the ford again” [v. 139]). Leading two human beings (one of whom is alive) through the ford works as a *contrappasso* for Nessus, because in his life he served at the river Euenos: this service cost him his life, after he wanted to kidnap Deianira and as a consequence he was killed by Hercules/Heraclēs (cf. Caruso 2000. 181). According to the study of Teodolinda Barolini, *Transition: How Cantos Begin and End*, the peculiar ending of Canto XII can be characterized – in the typology of the endings of the Cantos of the *Inferno* – as follows: “transition initiated, but delayed”; “withdrawal of a companion” (in this case, of Nessus); “transition is postponed until after the departure” (Barolini 2008. 324).

## II. CANTO XVII

### 1. *The relevance and some main motifs of the Canto*

The relevance of the present Canto in the first part of the *Comedy* consists (among others) in the fact that – by being at the half point of the *Inferno* i.e., preceded by 16 Cantos and followed by 17 Cantos – from the 7<sup>th</sup> circle (of the *violents*) it leads on to the 8<sup>th</sup> circle (of the *fraudulents*), divided into ten *malebolge*. This is undoubtedly an important passage (*trapasso*), to which some emphasis is given by the ritual descent of Geryon (cf. Gorni 2000. 233, 238). As for the numerological aspect of the *Comedy*, is certainly not coincidental that Cantos XVI to XVIII all have 136 lines: this expresses their close relationship to each other, and all this gives a further emphasis to the transitional character of Canto XVII (from high-Hell to low-Hell; cf. Gorni 2000. 234).

A peculiarity of the Canto is that Dante-protagonist – just like Geryon – does not talk, while Virgil talks relatively a lot, as a leader, as a master, with an imperative and persuasive tone (even to Geryon: cf. v. 97–99). This unilateral communication between two parties (when one of them warns or exclaims, while the other keeps silent) is also a peculiar motif of this Canto, which is presented in different forms: the Florentine usurers scream in the ear of their Paduan “colleague” tauntingly (cf. v. 72–73); Daedalus screams to his son, Icarus (cf. v. 111); the falcon, with its slow descent, stimulates the falconer to scream (cf. v. 129). The silence of Dante-protagonist can be explained also by the fact that Dante-narrator describes thirteen comparisons (metaphorical comparative images) in the Canto.

## 2. *Geryon*

In the *Comedy* Geryon is the symbol of fraud, and his distinguishing mark is his trinity (analogously to the Dantean Cerberus and Lucifer): it has a human face, lion claws and the body of a snake (the latter ends in a scorpion’s tale). In the myth of Hercules Geryon is a giant with three bodies and is the lord of three Iberian islands. His threefold character was deeply analysed by scholars, for example Pietro Alighieri saw in this the three basic modes of fraud: with words (flatterers, mediators, discord-inducers), with things (forgers, simoniacs, and hypocriticals), with actions (defaulters, thieves, and traitors). The *Ottimo commento* saw three brothers in this triple character, one of whom flattered (*lusingava*), the second robbed, the third caused physical harm. In his studies Giovanni Pascoli connected this triple character to envy, Dino Mantovani to depravity, Enrico Proto saw in it Satan who tempted Eve, Silvio Pasquazi thought to recognize the Antichrist in it. In classical mythology Geryon is a rather complex figure, Dante inserts only its bodily trinity and its Hell-dwelling nature into his own eschatological vision (cf. Salsano 1971), though for Dante this figure must have had particular relevance, because he wrote a lot about it (cf. *Inf.* XVI. 94–136 [specifically 121–136], XVII 1–27 and 79–136).

As Giovanni Getto points out, in other Cantos of the *Comedy* the representation of creatures which include human as well as animal features (for example the Furies, the Minotaur, the centaurs, the harpyes, etc.) probably does not cause any particular emotion in the reader, but the poetic description of Geryon necessarily causes revulsion, because in the personality of Geryon there is evidently an emphatically human stamp: its human face is relevant not exclusively in its physical reality, but it bears some kind of morality, and simultaneously is salient in its bestiality as well. So the well recognizable human face of Geryon “which is completed by the body of a reptile is excruciatingly repugnant and unforgettably terrific” (Getto 1987. 453).



Salsano rightly stresses that in the *Comedy* Geryon is not simply an allegory, nor merely a vehicle, but is a mysterious being with a peculiar relationship to Virgil and Dante. Its mysteriousness refers to the enigmatic existence of fraud: fraud is not only an offence against God, but a perversion and the darkening of all that is human. Virgil's allusion to the fact that he will talk to this beast and ask for its help (cf. v. 41–42), moreover he will give some particular instructions to it, means that there is a mysterious and special relationship between Virgil and Geryon (i.e., between reason and fraud). Any kind of fraud can be reduced to a malicious use of reason; furthermore, fraud can be prevented by reason. For Dante-protagonist Geryon is a menace, meanwhile for the Virgil of the *Comedy* it is a servant. In connection to the Virgil–Geryon relationship it is worth recalling Gian Battista Gelli's commentary from the Renaissance, according to which also Geryon represents reason. This reason accidentally (as it was mentioned already) knows depravity, and under this aspect – according to Gelli – reason, from a certain point of view, can be considered as a form of fraud: in an optimal case reason aspires to know mendacity and fraud in order to be able to eliminate it (so not because of wanting mendacity and fraud). This kind of rationality-fraud in the context of the *Comedy* can be surmounted by Virgil, who – as an allegorical figure of reason – knows good and justice, so he is also able to differentiate these from fraud (cf. Salsano 1971).

In lines 94–96 (“But he who succored me another time in another peril clasped me in his arms as soon as I mounted and supported me”) there is an implicit reference to the fact that in *Inferno* XVI Dante-protagonist gave up his rope-belt (which rope-belt can be interpreted also as a moral bond), which was tossed into the abyss (cf. *Inf.* XVI. 106–114). In connection with this John Freccero has some relevant ideas:

Casting off the rope is meant to attract Geryon, “the filthy image of fraud”. This image seems to have no direct biblical precedent, but is reminiscent, if only by contrast, of ancient allegories represented in terms of flight. (Freccero 1995. 173.)

In the context of the *Comedy* and of Dante's biography

Geryon's meaning [...] is not difficult to decipher. Although the monster is fearsome, it is strangely docile, grudgingly responsive to Virgil's commands. This apparent inconsistency illustrates a familiar paradox of confessional literature: adversity and evil turn out retrospectively to have been of spiritual help even when they seemed most threatening. (Freccero 1995. 173.)



Whatever moral-allegorical function Geryon has in the *Comedy*,

Geryon is exquisitely literary [...]. Elements of the monster's composition are drawn from the Apocalypse, or perhaps from the lunar dragon of the astrologers [...]. Scholars have suggested various classical sources for the image as well, notably from Virgil and Solinus. Apart from its thematic function, however, its literally central position in the *Inferno* and the elaborate address to the reader introducing it, suggest that it was also meant to stand for the poet's own prodigious imagination. (Freccero 1995. 174.)

According to Freccero's interpretation the flight on Geryon has its antithesis in the catastrophe of the ship of the mind (*navicella dell'ingegno*) described in *Inferno* XXVI (cf. Freccero 1995. 174). Particularly important are the remarks of Freccero according to which the political-social and autobiographical references to Alighieri's life can also be revealed in the figure of Geryon as an allegory.

Geryon introduces a social dimension into the tradition of neoplatonic allegories, inasmuch as it suggests that the corruption of society can serve as a vehicle for plumbing the depths and then transcending them. [...] The description of the crowds in Rome during the Jubilee year suggests perhaps an association between Dante's flight [on Geryon] and his embassy to Rome to avert the entry of Charles of Valois into Florence. The duplicity of the pope might aptly be represented by a duplicitous Geryon, while the imagery of Antichrist that is used to describe the monster is consistent with traditional descriptions of a corrupt papacy. (Freccero 1995. 178, 179.)

### 3. *The usurers*

Dante has already unfolded the problem of usury in his explanation on the moral structure of Hell by Virgil's moral judgement (cf. *Inf.* XI. 94–111), and he also makes a reference to it in connection with the attraction of the Benedictines to earthly goods (cf. *Par.* XXII. 79–84), who by their behavior – according to Alighieri's formulation – commit a greater sin than the usurers (cf. Capitani 1976). In the present Canto the episode of the meeting with the usurers (cf. v. 34–78) basically serves to express Alighieri's contempt for the usurers. It has a particular relevance from this point of view that Dante-protagonist does not recognize any of them (cf. v. 54), meanwhile by describing the insignia visible on the pouches hanging in their necks he made recognizable – at least for the contemporary reader – the usurer dynasties which are mentioned in the Canto (cf. v. 59–65).

It is worth taking a look – as to Alighieri's conception on usury – to the commentaries of Giovanni Boccaccio and of Jacopo della Lana. According to Boccaccio the usurer is called this because he sells something – i.e. money – which by





its nature does not fructify.<sup>1</sup> And according to Lana's formulation, it's not natural that someone should make money as the usurer does, acting against God: because if he invested his money in something, for example in domestic animals, or in arables, or in vines, or in any other goods, which investment can be classified as realisable according to God's will, it would be natural that his money would fructify – but the usurer is distressed by these last cases.<sup>2</sup>

In his poetry Dante presents unequivocally in a disapprobative way the degradation of the authentic nobility – idealized by the same Alighieri himself – by the families which have become suddenly rich and bought their noble titles (cf. Gorni 2000. 240). The corporal position of the usurers in Hell shows clearly the validity of the *contrappasso*: suitably to their profession, they sit on the ground and watch rigidly the object (the pouch) with a symbolic significance from the point of view for their activity, stiff for eternity in this posture, debased to the level of bestiality (“and on these they seemed to feast their eyes” [“e quindi par che 'l loro occhio si pasca”], v. 57; literally: they were pasturing with their eyes constantly [those insignia and pouches]). The flourish with their arms – to protect themselves from external effects – in principle also can be considered as a *contrappasso*: the usurers, who detested labour by their hands, are now coerced to flourish with them (cf. Jacomuzzi 1976). The comparison of these bizarre and perplexed movements of the usurers to the movements of the dogs provoked by the bites of fleas, flies or warbles can have its source in the *Pois la fuoilla revirola* of Marcabru(no), or in some work of Marbodius Redoniensis (Marbodius of Rennes; cf. Gorni 2000. 236).

As a concluding thought it can be recalled that the intense analysis and the poetic representation by Alighieri of the problem of usury and of avarice/cupidity in several passages of the *Inferno* (particularly, as we have seen, in Cantos XI and XVII) can be traced back in part to Dante's systematic development of what Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote on these subjects (in *Summa Theologiae*, P. II. 2, qu. LXXVIII [on usury], qu. CXVIII [on avarice]).

<sup>1</sup> “[C]hiamasi ‘usuriere’ per ciò che egli vende l’uso della cosa la quale di sua natura non può fare alcun frutto, cioè de’ danari.” Boccaccio quoted in Bufano 1976.

<sup>2</sup> “[C]osa natural non è che uno denaio faza un altro denaio, come vol che faza l’usurario, e però offende Deo; che sello investisse in altra cosa, come in bestiame, naturale cosa è che frutifica e multiplica, in terreni e vigne, naturale è che frutifica; in altre mercadandie ch’enno sottoposte a le stasuni e ai casi che possono avignire per ordine e per volontà de Deo. Ma l’usurario è desolto da tai casi ch’è tal, s’el piove come neva e como sia tempesta e bonaza in mare, el pur vole ch’i’ soi dinari avanzino cotanto per libra.” Lana quoted in Bufano 1976.

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BÉLA HOFFMANN

## Canto XIX of the *Inferno*\*

### I. THE MAIN TOPICS OF CANTO XIX

At the core of this Canto we find the encounter of Pope Nicholas III with Dante-Protagonist (henceforward: the Traveller): this encounter represents, by a specific example, the legitimacy of the “invective” against simony, stressed in the *apostrophe* of Dante-Author (henceforward: the Narrator) at the beginning of the Canto. In the description of this encounter, the issue of simony becomes a historical pageant. In this pageant we see the figure of Jason from the Old Testament, the passage from the New Testament on the conflict between Peter and Simon the Magician (Magus), as well as the portraits of popes Nicolas III, Boniface VIII and Clement V. The references to passages of the Gospels formulate – beside the integration of the protagonists and of the events in a narrative of salvation – the indispensability of the Church of the Spirit (Barańsky 2000. 260), i.e., that the Church has to reject the desire for earthly objects (cf. *Inferno*, XIX. 1–6; 104–105; 112–114), has to fulfill its high mission of leading spiritually – at the level of faith – the believers (cf. *Inf.* XIX. 106–111), and has to be devoted exclusively to God (cf. *Inf.* XIX. 2).

Because in Dante’s view and interpretation Divine Providence entrusted the papacy to lead all souls to salvation, while it entrusted the empire to obtain earthly beatitude for all human beings, the conception of Canto XIX indicates also one of the main inspirations of the writing of the *Comedy*: in this Canto the sin of the popes is presented as a transgression which depraves all human beings as well. Dante’s criticism against the papacy of course is not about the institutions (of the same papacy), it’s not a general, but rather a specific criticism against particular popes. The set of problems raised in this Canto is of excep-

\* The Hungarian version of this work is the following: Béla Hoffmann: “Interpretation” [“Értelmezés”] of Canto XIX of *Inferno*, In Dante Alighieri: *Comedy I. Inferno*. Commentary [Komédia I. Pokol. Kommentár] (ed. by János Kelemen in collaboration with József Nagy). Budapest, ELTE Eötvös Kiadó – ELTE BTK, 2019. 279–284. Translated into English by József Nagy with the support of the research program NKFIH K 124514 of the National Research, Development and Innovation Office of Hungary. I thank Prof. Ádám Nádasy for his kind help.

tional relevance because it interweaves all the scenes of the *Comedy* and always comes to the fore. From this point of view three passages of the *Comedy* are particularly important.

In the first two passages, Peter stresses the moral decadence of the Church and the absence of a good Pastor (cf. *Par.* XXVII. 22–24; 40–42): he emphasizes that the Church now is like it wouldn't exist at all (it's "empty"), and he summarizes simony, already established synthetically by the four opening lines of Canto XIX. In the third passage Beatrice makes reference to the imminent punishment of the Lord, to three popes, and among them to the expiation of Boniface VIII (cf. *Par.* XXX. 145–148). By re-actualizing the thematic strands of the experiences of the Traveller in the third bolgia, it is the fiction of the authenticity of reality that is recreated again and again. Also at the *linguistic level*, in a self-referential sense the text re-connects to itself (cf. *Par.* XXX. 142) by confronting the reader with an antonomasia. The expression *prefetto nel foro divino* (the prefect of the forum of God) refers to Clement V, i.e., to the earthly prefect of the things of God, who – because of his actions – found himself upside down in a "hole" similar to a pit (*foro*). In fact, he became in the primary sense of the word a *prefect* (*praefectum*), put in a rock-hole with his head first, but because he is to arrive last, he will be the first who (as a *prefect*) will push below pope Boniface and the others. Moreover, the rock-hole (*foro*), as a place for punishment, will have an extended meaning, because it can be also interpreted as the forum for justice, or as a court of justice. In this sense when the Head of the Church passes a sentence, he makes it also on himself. And it's not a coincidence that two senses are interconnected in the word *foro*.

In the Italian dictionaries *foro* figures as a homonym. In its sense of "hole" scooped in a rock it can be traced back to the Latin verb *forare* (*forō*, *forās*), whose main meaning can be related to the sense of *to dig*, *to scoop a passage*, i.e., *to open a door*. The other meaning of *foro* derives from the Latin word *forum*, whose Indo-european root produces terms like *forés*, *foris*, i.e., has the sense of *door*, *outside*, *public place*, or *in front of the door*. With a mutual superposition of these two senses, given by the syntactic position of the word *foro* – thanks to the new vernacular-poetic language of the *Comedy* – the Narrator invests this word with a new metaphorical sense. This way the Dantean text generates several specific and allegorical meanings. In an allegorical sense the pope, on the one hand, opens the door which leads to Hell for his personal expiation (for his own sins and judgements made in the world), on the other hand he becomes a prisoner of the same rock which was damaged by himself. And because the rock denotes Peter, on whom Jesus founded his own Church, the actions of the pope correspond to the destruction of the foundations of the Church. In fact, the pope – because Jesus is the source of the rock, of the cornerstone and of salvation, and anybody can get exclusively through him, as a door, to Heaven ("I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved" [John 10,9]) – opened the



door to Hell by his activities. Moreover, if the Church, in a metaphorical sense, is Christ's body, so the wounds on the Church (i.e., on the rock) mean further wounds of Christ. And finally, because the Latin word *forum* means also public place, Dante's account of the sinner popes means also to make public their punishment. There was already a reference to one of the inspirational sources of the *Comedy* as literary fiction: this source is concentrated in the third *apostrophe* (v. 115–117), which could also function as the opening lines to this Canto, because it traces back the corruption of the Church not simply to the weakness of its leaders, but to an historical event as an indirect cause. The essence of this event is that the emperor Constantine – originally a persecutor of Christians –, who was cured from leprosy by pope Sylvester and became a Christian himself, out of gratitude donated Rome to the papacy. Aside from the fact that this Roman imperial decree was forged, the Church made itself not merely a dispenser, but also an owner of these goods. Thus the Church didn't use these possessions for the benefit of the poor (in that case beneficence obviously could not have corrupted the Church) but used them for its own secular purposes (cf. *Purg.* XXII. 138). For that reason, the Church, as a prisoner of gold and silver, became a secular power, an inveterate wolf (cf. *Purg.* XXII. 138). This horrible consequence can be perceived also at the level of this tercet's linguistic construction. It's necessary to stress the emotional saturation expressed by the exclamation at the beginning of the line, by the shortened words (*Constantin-*, *mal-*, *conversion-*, i.e., *Constantine*, *evil*, *conversion*), the *r*-phoneme, a rough sound, repeated four times (*prese, ricco, primo, padre*: 117; Brezzi 1970. 181). Besides the intensive word stresses – in accordance with this huge problem –, the break also has a powerful effect, both inside the two lines (115–116), i.e., between *Constantine* / *to how much evil* (*Constantin* / *di quanto mal*) and *conversion* / *that dowry* (*conversion* / *ma quella dote*), and between the two lines in question, and all this can be intensified by the enjambment and the two kinds of hendecasyllables (a minore / a maggiore). At the same time the four consecutive words, in the third verse of this tercet, with accents on their first syllables (*prese, ricco, primo, padre*) rhythmically give to this verse such a pulsation in which all words are equally emphatic. So the action of the first father of the Church who received the donation of Constantine, suggests to mean the Church which lost the right path, just like the claim in line 3 of Canto I (*ché la dritta via era smarrita*, i.e. *where the straight way was lost*). These assertions in both cases become realistic by the scratchy-rustling, phonosymbolic *r*-sounds, because these invoke the experience of the cracking branches under the feet of the man who lost his way in the dark forest. This conceptual rhyme indicates also the following: as the Church has lost its way, also its ability and capacity of moral and spiritual guidance – to lead the souls to salvation – is lost. From this point of view, though the divine gift of free will doesn't prevent man from assuming the responsibility of decision, the Church's lost way becomes the reason for the dim sight and the deviation of its believers.

## II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BEGINNING OF CANTO XIX. THE APOSTROPHE

The silence between the concluding verse of the previous Canto, with the words of Virgil – “And with that let our sight be satisfied” (*Inf.* XVIII. 136) – and the beginning of the following Canto can’t be described as a disembodied space (Sanguineti 1992. 35). In fact, the figure of the prostitute, who sells and betrays her own soul through her body, assumes an associative and analogical relationship with the Church, which, thanks to the popes, becomes as well a whore of the kings (v. 107–108), i.e., prostitutes itself “living according to the body” and makes of the soul an object of trade. The feelings of the Narrator are characterized by the first sentence of Canto XIX, which is a sentence fragmented by a not completely regular word order (Brezzi 1970. 162). The verb *avolterate* (*you turn something out, you corrupt, you prostitute*; v. 4) refers to the corrupt leadership of the Church in such a way that shows a peculiar self-interpreting analogy with the structure of the sentence itself.

The Canto starts by tracing the indictment pronounced on the followers of Simon and the promise of making this indictment public. Henceforth, after the “confession” of pope Nicolas III, touching also on Boniface VIII and on Clement V (v. 52–57; 69–87), the Traveller, assuming once the position of the prosecutor, and once that of the judge, specifies the essence of the indictment and the justification of the punishment (v. 90–118), the rightness of which was already pinpointed by the fourth tercet, which includes the praise of the wisdom and the justice of God (v. 10). Line 5 (“now must the trumpet sound for you”) refers to *writing*, i.e., to the tool of making public God’s judgement, by which the courier, an envoy of God, fulfils his own mission by turning to the public. In the rhymed relationship between *tromba* (*trumpet* or *trump*, i.e., the *writing*) and *tomba* (*tomb*), with the new rhyme (*piomba*) we have an impregnation of meaning. Referring to the tomb, a definition of the place in question is given by lines 7–9 (“We were now at the next tomb and had climbed to that part of the ridge which hangs right over the middle of the ditch”), meanwhile in connection to the trumpet lines 5–9 refer to the fact that judgement, i.e., writing – in correspondence to the meaning of the verb *piombare* (*to precipitate*) – will relentlessly bear down on the sinners in the ditch.

## III. CHRIST AND/OR THE HOLY SPIRIT

As one of the signs of the mystery of the Holy Trinity is that if we talk about one of its components we necessarily have to be talking also about the other two – because the existence of each of them in themselves can be described as one which is a contemporary existence in the others –, it’s not practical, even





in the case of the corrupted Church, to aim exclusivity in the sense of emphasizing the incarnate word of God, i.e., the rejection of Christ, as Muresu does (Muresu 2009. 81–91), or the Pentecostal event, the Descent of the Spirit. It's true that – as it is verified by lines 5–6 of Canto III of the *Inferno* – the exclamation *O, somma sapienza* (*O Wisdom Supreme*; *Inf.* XIX. 10, cf. *Inf.* III. 6) refers to the Son – to what and to who, as to the Wisdom of God, already Buti alluded (Buti 1858–1862/1385–1395. 496) –, and is also true that the keys were given by Jesus in the hands of Peter. Moreover the “living Stone” (1Peter 2,4) undoubtedly is an antonomasia of Jesus, of the Divine man, who was not recognized (cf. Psalms 118,22). Even the punishment of the popes, in their captivity of the rock, invokes – in all its negativity – the close relationship with the *stone*, i.e., with Christ, what they didn't intend to establish and to sustain during their lifetime. The oiled soles of the sinners – with its reference to the liturgical anointing – invokes the Jewish Messiah (*Christós* in Greek) whose authentic sense is in fact *the anointed*.

We have a lot of arguments also in favor of the particularly important role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of this Canto. Firstly: it's true that the believers are built on Christ into a spiritual house, but what makes live their organic unity is the Holy Spirit. Secondly: the fire-circles running around on the soles of the sinners are caricatured expressions of their having trampled on the gift of the Holy Spirit: while on the first Whitsun – on the Church's birthday – after the stormy wind (as a sign of the coming of the Holy Spirit) the tongues of fire appeared above the heads of the Apostles, in this *bolgia* (*ditch*) the fire is burning the soles of the heads of the Church (cf. Acts 2,1–4). Thirdly: the opposition of the two Simons – of the person who already is in possession of the gift of the Holy Spirit (Simon, i.e. Peter) to Simon magus, still without that gift but already baptized – indicates the primacy of the work of the Spirit compared to the action of the Church based on the sacraments (Nocke 1996–1997. 246). Fourthly: the Holy Spirit is donated by the Father (cf. Luke 11,13). By the fact that the popes mentioned made of the sacraments some objects of trade – while the Apostles prayed for the help of the Spirit to make the right decision in selecting one of their fellows (v. 94–96) –, these same popes became pastors who scorned the Spirit (v. 83), destabilizing the identity of the Church, which – concerning its origin – was a work and a creature of the Spirit (Schütz 1993. 349).

Nevertheless, the synthesis of the two kinds of argumentation is obvious: the refusal to follow Christ is simultaneously a sin against the Holy Spirit, and the sin against the Holy Spirit is also a sin against the Son, and all these naturally mean the denial of the Father. Since the eternal goal of the work of the Holy Spirit is the continuation and completion in salvation-history, in the enigmatic tercet of this Canto (v. 19–21) a close relationship is established between the act of baptism, the deliverance of the Soul (i.e., the main scene), and the functioning of the Church (the main topic of this Canto).



## IV. THE PROBLEMATIC TERCET (V. 19–21)

The majority of scholars – in connection to the biographical event – describes the sense of this tercet in the following way: on one occasion Dante broke a baptismal font of marble to save the child who had fallen in, and Alighieri has to talk about this (in the present Canto) because many people could interpret this event in many different ways, what is more, he could also have been accused of sacrilege. So it is *the action of having saved a person* which is stressed from this approach, and for this the tercet seems to be a retrospective explanation of an event (the breaking of the font, i.e. sacrilege) for self-absolution. In reality, the Narrator makes a counterpoint to this sacrilege right with the semblance of it: the breaking of the amphora of the font assumes the sense of saving a soul, i.e., of a sacrament. So it is the utterance of “I broke” (“rupp’io”; v. 20) which is stressed by Dante, and the conscious pledge of the apparent sacrilege indicates that the drowning soul was left without any help from the Church: “I” here is to be interpreted as “not them” to whom the future of the child was entrusted. So this utterance is not a self-apology. The result of the “sacrilegious action” is that for the drowning soul the way of salvation remains open, otherwise this soul would have ended up in the Limbo, among the non-baptized children.

According to Spitzer this “biographical incident” can be conceived as an integral part of a description, and its goal is merely artistic: to persuade the reader of the reality of the scene which is depicted in the present Canto of *Inferno*, to open the reader’s eye on the relevance of it (Spitzer 1964. 248). According to this approach the event of saving pre-projects by a peculiar inverted symbolism a subsequent part of the Canto which will explain the sin of the simoniacs. And accordingly the sequence in the third verse of this tercet, “e questo sia suggel ch’ ogn’ omo sganni” (v. 21) means: “Be the image that I have revealed to you the image of the exemplary punishment, which will direct everyone’s eye to the final fate of the sinners” (Sanguineti 1992. 41).

This biographical detail of the immanent Author – which functions as an element of the ideal biography of the Traveller in the *Comedy*’s fiction – is presented by the memory of the Narrator, not casually in connection with the point to which he has arrived in his account, i.e. the subject of the simoniac popes and the church corrupted by them. In this respect Gorni sustains (explicitly on the Author’s intention) that Dante the prophet had to offer an objective sign to his age which is indisputable and is also independent of his own will, but it’s not hidden to his intellect, and this is a factual evidence of his privilege (Gorni 1990. 111). At the same time Tavoni “translates” lines 20–21 in the following way: “that I made this gesture, it has to be a seal which guarantees the prophetic authenticity of the demistification made by me concerning the activity of the papacy” (Tavoni 1992. 488). That means that an event which is previous to the writing of the *Comedy* would mean the warrant of the prophetic authenticity of this work. The fact that



the Narrator has mentioned a biographical event indicates that the Traveller, who at this point still doesn't recognize his own spiritual vocation (cf. *Inferno*, II. 31–33), will only, thanks to the experience of his other-worldly pilgrimage, be able to understand fully the – unconsciously – prophetic character of his one-time action. So it is more the accusation against the simoniac popes and the account made by the pilgrim, with already a spiritual vocation, which verifies the full meaning of that concrete action. This way the last verse of the tercet (v. 21) is the Narrator's *emphatic warning* for the believers, according to which complete reliance on the corrupted church and its leader, the pope, as well as the clergy – as Montefeltro's case will prove – can also lead to the losing of the way to salvation (cf. *Inf.* XXVII). So the meaning of the tercet would be the following. "This (i.e., the fact that it was *me* who broke the font to save a soul, and not some ecclesiastical person), because I am bringing to you the message of God about other-worldly justice, has to be the *seal* itself, to make everyone conscious that they cherished some illusions on the church led by the actual pope". In other words: it was me who saved that soul, not the church, and it is good for everyone to remember this and to awaken from their misbelief and from being *deceived*. This is congruent with the goals of the *Comedy*. At the same time, the act of saving is allegorically the sign of the Narrator's prophetic vocation: this act shows also the figure of the *piscator hominum* (*fisherman of humans*; Tavoni 1992. 498).

Because the text is about stones with an infinite number of holes (v. 13–15), in the scoops there are not only corrupt popes but also other ecclesiastical persons and laymen (Muresu 2009. 88). This, in connection to the attempt to describe the actual case, can lead to the assumption that during the act of baptism the child could slip out from the hands of the priest, because he was leading the liturgy in a negligent way, because possibly he could not expect any allowance for his service of the sacraments. The concrete case, as a sign of negligence and indifference, in the whole Canto grows into the image of the behaviour of the church which has lost its way, of its negligence toward its own task connected to the history of salvation. So the verb "to break", in a paradoxical way, means to save Christian life and to eliminate the ecclesiastical practice of trading with the sacraments. Just as in the prophetic texts of the Scripture the image of breaking an amphora (indeed: sacrilege) expresses the indignation toward the spread of earthly desires (Barański 2000. 269). From this point of view, Tavoni's remark can be supported, according to which in this scene there is a prophetic meaning in Dante's gesture (Tavoni 1992. 471), referring also to the fact that in the Bible the breaking of a vase or an amphora is always connected to a common and prevailing sin (cf. Jer 19,10).

Thus the event in question is in connection to baptism, to the deliverance of the Soul, because by the sacrament of baptism the man who until that point was living according to the body will resurrect as a man who will live according to the soul and will be re-born for a new life, since symbolically he will participate of the death and resurrection of Jesus. So here we are dealing with the phenomenon

of *abnegatio*, i.e., the negation of the old self, the renunciation of one's own will, which can be perceived also in the meaning – offered by its context – of the verb *annegare* (to drown). In an allegorical sense this means that the church let go of the hands of its believers and cannot be anymore a true support for the baptised, instead of serving as a sign, a path and a sacrament for the believers (Zerfass 1988. 204). All this is also confirmed by the use of the verb “avolterare” (v. 4), in the first verse of the second tercet, whose (infinitive) meanings are “to change”, “to turn inside out”, “to falsify”, “to corrupt”, moreover “to cheat”, “to commit adultery”, and it refers to the church which by its secular lust for power turns upside down the words of God and cheats on its own fiancé, Christ. It's no coincidence that in the third verse of this tercet the verb “sganni” (“waken”; v. 21) functions as an *antinomy* of the meaning of “avolterare” (“ingannare”; v. 4), i.e., “to cheat”: its meaning can be defined as to recede from illusions and misbeliefs, so it is closely connected to the accusations made by the Narrator. All this will be verified also in connection to the similarity between wordforms and the difference between meanings (*sganni* ↔ *'ngannno*; Tavoni 1992. 488).

The significance of the use of a biographical gesture is given by the fact that, because in the case of baptism we deal with the deliverance of the Soul as a present of God, this tercet allegorically indicates the fault of the intermediary activity of the Church.

#### V. NARRATION AND THE FORM OF PUNISHMENT. THE NARRATIVE ATTITUDE AND THE GESTURE-LANGUAGE

The peculiarities of the dynamics of the spreading out of the topic and of the structure of the narration can be described with those linguistic-poetic methods whose objective is to raise expectations and to cause suspense in the reader. All this gives the impression as if the actual memories were hard to evoke for the Narrator, because all that he has experienced there in the mirror of the actual state of the world is distressing and intolerable. This is confirmed by the two initial *apostrophes* – which are almost subsequent to each other –, then by the *apostrophe* made to Constantine (v. 115–117), because all these stress the undelayable expression of the narrator's attitude. We “get” to the first encounter only after the 51st verse, and even then the identity of the sinner is still not clarified, and until that point neither his name is pronounced. Besides the two first *apostrophes* and the public announcement of the topic, further features are used for the delaying and the blocking of the narration: the desert landscape and the comparison of its characteristics with the fonts of the chapel for baptism; the already mentioned problematic tercet (v. 19–21); the description of the scene of the sinners hiding their faces in the already populated scoops; the unpronounced request of our hero to Virgil and the signalling of the posture, which



– as a simile – is cleared by the image of the priest-confessor of a murderer, etc. (Chiesa 2008. 146–147).

Previously to the dialogue with pope Nicolas, the Narrator gives a grotesque and “eloquent” image of the sinners upside down in the scoops, whose bodies are made to sound by the circular flames on their soles with the clashing noise of the hot, burning and squirting oil which forms bubbles. All this is mediated by the triple rhyme *buccia, cruccia, succia* (v. 29, 31, 33) through sound-symbolism, underlined also by the expression – used by the narrator – “lamented with his shanks” (“piangeva con la zanca”; v. 45). The same way Nicolas’ jerking leg will “confess” (because of his hatred: v. 64), which is fed by the squalid pleasure that his pain will affect others too (Bellomo 2013. 307). The reaction of Nicolas III is characterized by a suggestive gesture language also in the closure of the scene: his answer to the outcry of the Traveller (v. 118–121) is simply dumbness, moreover, we see his comically moving feet, which express his impotence. The attitude of the narrator, shown in the description, is not untinged with irony and sarcasm (Renucci 1963. 178). This can be explained by the fact that it is the “song” of the Narrator (“while I sang this song to him” – “mentr’io li cantava cotai note”; v. 118) that forced the reluctant sinner to “dance”. And it is the self-reflectional character of the narrator’s attitude which can be grasped also in the verse “all my answer to him was in this strain” (“ch’ i’ pur rispuosi lui a questo metro”; v. 89). At the same time, irony and taunt originates also from the ironic situation: it is the Traveller who is questioning the pope about his knowledge on theology and the Bible. This feature, i.e., the change of the roles, in itself represents an “upside down situation”. In reality, the questioning is only apparent because the questions are in fact the claims of the Traveller, are already-answered questions, so in this respect, too, we find ourselves faced with an *upside-down*, but not anymore in connection to the protagonists, but to the linguistic form of the essence of what is to be communicated. The verdict of the narrator culminates in the subsequent textual adjacency of Judas and pope Nicolas, and in the mention of their *deserved* place in Hell (v. 96–97). The link between these two is to have betrayed Christ.

The Narrator, for a length of seven tercets, evokes in such a style and by such a word usage the self-unmasking account of Nicolas III which is absolutely opposite to the papal high office, but gives a precise image of a reprobate and petty man, who gives an account of his own sins with a word-play: “above I pursed my gains, and here myself” (“su l’avere, e qui me misi in borsa”; v. 72). No matter the surprise of pope Nicolas III, he doesn’t fail to manifest his own sarcasm against pope Boniface VIII – who will soon follow him in Hell – by the expression *stare ritto* (which can have the sense: *to stand up erect*; the verse in question is the following: “se’ tu già costì ritto, Bonifazio?”; v. 53). And while the reproaches of Nicolas against Boniface are legitimate, by the person of the speaker these become unintentionally also parts of a self-characterization, because it was actually Nicolas



who “served as a model” for Boniface, so Nicolas’ verdict has also the effect of hypocritical mendacity.

The position of the sinners, the grotesque image of their being positioned upside down clearly indicates their orientation towards earthly existence and their hunger for earthly treasures, their hidden hypocrisy, their loss of spiritual character, meanwhile their stance evokes those reliefs which represent Simon magus as a figure falling to the earth upside down. This explains the similarity between the form of punishment of the simoniacs and the position of the sinners of avarice/cupidity (Pietrobono 1923. 81). What unifies them is the insatiable desire for the appropriation of earthly goods. This is represented allegorically by their “position near to the earth”: meanwhile the simoniacs are partly prisoners of the earth (of the rock), the sinners of avarice/cupidity in Hell are bent to the floor, with their hands and chest – because they didn’t have the strength of the heart to resist to temptation – are rolling enormous weights before themselves, the weight of their treasures accumulated during their lifetime (cf. *Inf.* VII. 26–27). Similarly to the greedy inhabitants of *Purgatory*, who, ranged on their abdomen, pinioned by their hands and feet, lay inert on the earth and can’t look up, as they didn’t do it in their earthly lifetime.

#### VI. FROM THE CHANGE-IN-MEANING OF A WORD TO THE NUANCES OF INTERPRETATION

In the tercet 22–24 the meaning of the expression “*infino al grosso*” (“the rest was inside”; v. 24) – which is interpreted by the scholars sometimes as calf, sometimes as thigh – can be cleared maybe by the *necessity* of the act of pushing down. It can be interpreted also as the buttocks of the sinner (Chiesa 2008. 146). The empirical experience suggests that the effort for pushing down is necessary because the body of the sinner has got stuck in the pit, otherwise it would have fallen by itself to the depth. And it has got stuck at the widest part of the body, at the wide hip or buttocks. It has to be taken into consideration also that “*grosso*” refers concretely to a Florentine silver coin, and in a general sense to money as a tool for payment, which was absolutely necessary for the secular power of the popes and the church. From this perspective, the guilty popes were hitched right for this reason – in the literal, as well as in the abstract sense of the word – on the sieve of divine justice. We can read in a vernacular transcription of the *Vite dei Santi Padri* of a contemporary of Dante, Domenico Cavalca (here in English): “Judas sold him for thirty *grosso*”. On the other hand *grosso* can stand for bulge, blister of the body (*bubbone*), as a sign of some infection and illness, maybe meaning also bubonic plague. In this case, the expression in question assumes the sense of a pandemic moral infection which corrupts the world and the souls. As leprosy will function as the infectious sickness of the soul with no cure in the case of an often quoted figure



of Canto XXVII, who is pope Boniface himself. Though Salvatore Battaglia's dictionary interprets the Dantean image in question as calf, the further meanings of *grosso* make possible the further interpretations mentioned above (Battaglia 1972. 72–73).

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## Oracles and Exegetes in the *Comedy*

The present study intends to analyze Canto XX of the *Inferno* and to reveal – by the analysis of a single Canto – the problems related to divining, prophecy and textual interpretation, moreover the interconnection of all these.

According to the narrative of the *Comedy* we find ourselves in the fourth pit within the 8th circle of Hell, among the fraudulents, and specifically among the oracles and the magicians. In my analysis first I try to present the structural role of the opening tercet in the definition of the subject. Following this I try to give a definition to the concepts of prediciton, of scientific research and of prophecy, taking in consideration the contemporary scientific context – in particular the texts of Thomas Aquinas – and I will indicate that on the basis of the semantic strata of the first tercet, moreover of the conceptual definitions, the relator, i.e. Dante-narrator assumes the figure or personality of the prophet and of the erudite. After this I will analyze how the poetic illustration of divining/prophecy is affected by the paradoxical character of this same activity – presented by Dante –, i.e., in how (in which sense) will be paradoxical the presentation itself of the oracles. Finally I will try to grasp this same paradoxical character in the leading role of Virgil.

### I. THE FIRST TERCET

The opening tercet of the Canto wedges as a sharp break into the main narration. After the closing verse of the preceding Canto – according to which *another valley was disclosed* to Dante-traveller (cf. *Inf.* XIX. 133) – we would expect that here it is the suspended narration which will continue. And in fact it happens so, but only in the second tercet, which also at the lexical level reconnects to the closure of the preceding canto in the sense that the traveller takes a look *into the bottom disclosed there* (v. 5) and discovers the group of the oracles which is moving forward slowly. The lexical reconnection stresses even more that for the extension of three verses we took distance from the main action and something else became relevant.



In fact the first tercet is a self-reflexive outlet of the narrator, in which the narrator egresses from the narrated time and speaks to the reader from the present time/tense of the text lying in front of him. In other words it is not the other-worldly story of the traveller which continues here, but the narrator presents us the history of the formulation of the *Comedy* (cf. *Inferno* I). Apparently the tercet claims only that in the history of the writing of the *Comedy* the author/narrator got to Canto XX of *Inferno*, and now he will have to draft it. But it is questionable why is necessary to do this and rightly here: it is evident that – in the process of reading – we are in the *Inferno* (the title can be read at the beginning of the volume) and it is also clear that we are in Canto XX (the number of this Canto is above these same verses), moreover the tercet – on the basis of its structure – could be the opening tercet of any Canto: only the word indicating the number of the Canto (*twentieth*) should be changed (cf. Carrai 2005. 51).

As we could say, such an insertion enhances the previously established expectation of the reader: let the reader be excited a little bit about what can be found in that deep valley. But in reality three verses are not enough to enhance the excitement, and in this case we could evaluate the speech of the narrator as a rhetoric tool without any relevant meaning (cf. Parodi 1907. 25).

We have to take in consideration that this locution removes not only the reader, but the narrator himself from the usual path of the narration. It is Dante-narrator himself who here reflects on which point is he in the writing of the one-time vision, what did he already achieved and what is still to be made. The self-reflection in only three verses directs our attention to the structure of the form of the entire text borning here and now, moreover to the fact that at the given moment of writing the following text-units (Cantos and main parts) are still not ready. Actually some kind of uncertainty is also perceivable with regard the structure of the work to be written: in fact the narrator uses the expression *canzone* (*song*) to indicate the whole of the *Cantos* of the *Inferno*, meanwhile later will be the term *cantica* (*main part*) which will indicate the main groups of Cantos of the three otherworldly realms (cf. v. 1–3, moreover Pertile 1991. 107–108; Baranski 1995. 3–5).

When the narrator says to have to write Canto XX, moreover he makes for the first time – in this work – a reference to the structure of his work to be written, in reality “makes a prediction”: first he indicates the following task, i.e. to poeticize the new subject, then he delineates the structure of the whole work. And with this he also promises to complete his pledge. At the same time this promise – as always – is a prediction, projection, prognosis of a future event.

This way the tercet – semantically, as well as dramaturgically – is perfectly integrated in the course and the logic of the story: the narrator directs our attention to the incompleteness of his own work and projects its completion rightly at the point where such an activity – the prognosis of the future – will be presented as a sin. In this manner an apparent parallel will be formed between the narrator and the sinners (the oracles) who will appear soon.

But this parallel is only apparent, because to know and to predict the future is not a sin in itself. On the contrary, to know the future it is a noble and useful activity, if we – human beings – take present the possibilities to do so. Because the narrator utilizes (or is allowed to use) rightly those possibilities which enable him to predict the future, his figure and his activity are not parallel, but are contrary to those of the oracles.

## II. THE SCHOLAR, THE PROPHET AND THE ORACLE

According to the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas, the future can be known in two ways: “there are two ways in which future things can be fore-known: [...] in their causes and [...] in themselves” (Aquinas, *ST* II II 95 1), i.e. (1) an event can be predicted when its causes can be seen already in the present, or (2) when we know from the future itself the coming event.

To make an inference from the causes to the still not materialized, but probably or necessarily realizing effect, takes part of the category of scientific knowledge, so it doesn’t have anything to do with divining. Who intends to know this way the future is said to be a scholar or researcher.

At the contrary, from the future itself only God is capable to know the future, because his eternal presence means also that for him every and any moment of the future is given as the present. It is obvious that the human being living in the present is not capable of such knowledge, nonetheless the divine providence can confer – as it did in fact during history (cf. *Inf.* II. 13–30) – to some chosen ones the mercy by which it reveals from the future itself the future to them. Naturally neither in this last case we would be allowed to claim that a chosen one could acquire knowledge about the future by divining. The man who can have an insight into the future by God’s mercy, and is also allowed to communicate his own vision to his fellow-beings, is called prophet.

*Tertium non datur* – there is no third way. So what can do the oracle? And how is possible that the sinners – who were not scholars, neither prophets – could really foresee certain future events?

Divining, according to Virgil’s classification (cf. *Inf.* XI. 52–59) takes part of the category of fraud. On the basis of our moral sensibility even today we judge as fraud the different species of prediction, astrology, magic, because those who make these activities always trick, deceive and wile themselves and their human fellows. However it is important to observe that in the age of Dante divining is condemned not exclusively from this approach. In fact the sin of the oracle is primarily not to deceive his too credulous and irrationally thinking fellow-beings, but it is his intention to usurp fraudulently God’s foresight (Isid. *Etym.* VIII. ix. 14). Fraud here consists in deceiving God, as Thomas Aquinas clarifies it: “if anyone presumes, without a revelation from God, to know or to foretell



in any way future things [...], then he is manifestly usurping to himself what belongs to God" (Aquinas, *ST II II* 95 1).

The oracle intends to possess divine knowledge by human means and capabilities, which is impossible: he wants to deify himself as a human being. This is clearly indicated by the etymology (in Italian) of the words "oracle", "predict" (*indivino, indivinare*), because in contemporary Italian (and already in Latin) these words preserve the meaning of "deification", "becoming God", "to be fused in God". However the participation in God is given only to the beatified/blessed and to some chosen ones – to the prophets –, by God's mercy, according to the plan of the providence.

As God's omniscience is unknowable – because it transcends human capabilities and reason –, the oracle is forced to be reliant in Satan's help. This is a common feature of all sacrilegious cults: "every case of divination makes use of the advice or assistance of demons [of Satan] in order to get precognition of a future event" (Aquinas, *ST II II* 95 3).

So, when someone – who is not a scholar, neither a prophet – would like to know the future, necessarily calls Satan as a help for his own activity, and in principle Satan can even help him, and thus some details of the future can be revealed to him. Therefore divining is a pact with Satan (cf. Baldelli 1977. 481).

### III. THE NARRATOR AS A POETA DOCTUS [SCHOLAR-POET] AND AS A PROPHET

As we turn back to the narrator of Canto XX, we see that his faith in being able to finish his own work in the future, moreover his promise to do that, can be reconfirmed by reason and by divine revelation. On one hand, as a traveller assisted by divine mercy, he has already completed his own trip in the other world, where he was also authorized to draft what he has seen (cf. *Purg.* XXXII. 103–105; *Par.* XVII. 112–141; *Par.* XXVII. 64–66), thus he rightly can have confidence in God's further support; on the other hand he is conscious of his own poetic proficiency (cf. *Inf.* I. 86–87), on the basis of which it is logical that he feels capable to accomplish this great task. We have to add to this that Dante-traveller, during his pilgrimage in the other world – as the future Dante-narrator –, has received not simply an authorization, but an irrefutable mandate to describe what he has seen, also with some indications on its *modus operandi*, but the final form of this work – its structure, its phrases and rhymes – had to be formed by himself, by his previous and continuously evolving poetic experience, thus is comprehensible that here, at the beginning of his work, he is characterized by uncertainty.

So the first three verses of the Canto show us a narrator secure in his own capabilities and in his authority, who exhorts himself to accomplish the obligatory task. The tone of Dante-narrator shoving off the narrated time, but simultane-



ously watching to the whole work in the first stage of its writing, becomes of *prophetic character*, in sharp contrast with the figures of the oracles to be presented here.

Dante-narrator takes shape in the first three verses in such a way that the new subject, and the sinners to be presented by it, are – on the level of assertion – alienated from him, and already by this he anticipates his own judgement on them to be formulated later.

#### IV. PRESENTATION OF THE ORACLES

The peculiarity of the presentation of the oracles is that it shows the intrinsic contradictions of divining, magic and astrology. The oracle desires to acquire knowledge, which in itself is a correct tenor. The desire for knowledge, as it is claimed also by the often quoted incipit of *The Convivio*, it is a natural aptitude of mankind: “since knowledge is the ultimate perfection of our soul, in which resides our ultimate happiness, we are all therefore by nature subject to a desire for it” (“onde [...] la scienza è ultima perfezione de la nostra anima, ne la quale sta la nostra ultima felicitade, tutti naturalmente al suo desiderio semo subietti”; *The Convivio*, I. i. 1). To reach this kind of happiness, reason is also at man’s disposal, no matter the fact that not as pure intellect (which is characteristic in the case of the angels), but in a form which is integrated with and not separable from perception. Is rightly this human reason, what the oracle rejects when he desires to possess divine knowledge: the contradictory character of his life consists in the fact that he discards possible knowledge for the impossible one: he desires to acquire knowledge, but he rejects the given tools of knowledge and intends to use other tools. At the same time his sin is absolutely not tragic: it is not that he would dare also the impossible for a noble aim, it is more that he rejects reason to chase something which already in itself is over the human reason. Therefore the sin of divining is more comic, or even more “grotesque”, in which the aim and the tool are in an indissoluble contradiction with each other. The presentation of the Dantean other world’s oracles is defined rightly by this contradiction, and its description assumes a grotesque character when the comicality of the images (tears flowing down between the buttocks, the thick veneral hair on the back, the back clashing with the abdomen), moreover the deeply tragic nature of the corporal and spiritual distortions have their common effect. The description of the movement of the sinners looking and moving back, moreover of the position of their head is characterized by the figure of paradox – they look forward looking back, and they go forward going back –, by the same paradox which characterized also their life and which corresponds exactly to the sin committed by them: they wanted to understand, but they rejected reason; they desired to have divine knowledge, but they resorted to the devil instead of God.





The presentation of the oracles is not net by the paradoxical character exclusively on the ideal level and by the imagery, but this same paradoxical character penetrates also in the logic, the structure and the phrasing of the Virgilian speech, which describes all these. On one hand we can see the ordering of words with contrary meaning near each other: *he has made a breast of his shoulders* (*ha fatto petto de le spalle* [37]); *he would see too far ahead he looks behind* (*volse veder troppo davanti, / di retro guarda* [38–39]); *from male he turned to female* (*di maschio femmina divenne* [41]); *He that backs up to the other's belly* (*quel ch'al ventre li s'atterga* [46]). On the other hand we can observe the turning upside down of the time-level and of the logical structure of the syntax: We read on Tiresias that hitting a snake-couple he was transformed in a woman, and “then, previously” (*prima, poi*) he had to hit again that snake-couple to become a man again (cf. v. 43–45).<sup>1</sup> And becomes absurd as Virgil indicates Manto in the group of the oracles: when he wants make univocal who is talking about, he doesn't indicate a sign by which he could identify him, because he emphatically recalls the attention of Dante-traveller rightly to that body-part, which can't be seen by the pilgrim (cf. v. 52–54).

#### V. CHANGING THE FUTURE AND THE PAST

As the internal structure and the presentation of the world of the oracles is of paradoxical character, also the straight relationship of Dante-traveller to them is bothered by a contradiction. When he sees the group of the convoluted penitents, this spectacle makes him cry (cf. v. 25–27). Dante-narrator immediately stresses that the reason of the weeping is the reflection on the spectacle of the unnatural physical distortion, and the wit of the fact that the souls who are expiating here have lost one of the major gifts, their similarity to God. I.e. the traveller's weeping is not so much a consequence of his sympathy for these damned, but it is the consequence of an intellectual recognition: Dante-traveller sees clearly the deeply tragic nature of the scenery, which at first sight could seem to be comic. We have to take in account that in the Middle Ages the illustration of physical distortion, paralysis was always of comic character, that the vision of disabled, amputated persons basically caused laughter: that is the reason why these crippled people were shown on fairs and banquets. It has to be stressed as well that by the apostrophe to the reader (cf. v. 19–24) Dante-narrator has the same expectation from the reader: reading these passages will be fruitful, i.e. useful

<sup>1</sup> Note of the translator: the paradoxical use of temporal terms (in this case: “than, previously”) cannot be found in the verses in question in the English translation of the *Comedy* used by me – Sinclair (1948) –, and neither in Longfellow (1867).



in a moral sense for the reader, if he/she reflects on the horror (cf. v. 20) which is revealed for the two travellers of the other world.

But Virgil misunderstands the reason of the weeping of Dante-traveller and thinks that it is caused by pity. For that Virgil turns to him with an admonition and warns him that if he feels pity for these sinners, he becomes similar to them (cf. v. 27). Then he formulates exactly that *here pity lives when it is quite dead* (*qui vive la pietà quand' è ben morta* [27]), i.e. the adequate attitude is if we found our interpretation of the revealed image not on the pity toward the sinners, but on rationality devoid of pity, on the recognition of the justice of divine wisdom and judgement (cf. v. 28). Although Virgil has misunderstood Dante-traveller, this way he served a new characterization of the oracles. In fact when Virgil claims that Dante-traveller by his pity becomes similar to the oracles moaning their own destiny, undirectly identifies the true reason of these sinner's weeping: absurdly, they want to have pressure on divine justice. At least this seems to be the adequate interpretation of the debated verses 29–30: *Who is more guilty than he that makes the divine counsel subject to his will?* (*chi è più scellerato che colui | che al giudicio divin passion comporta?*).

This (interrogative) sentence is surely a statement with a general force, and indicates such a form of behavior which can characterize both the weeping traveller (misunderstood by Virgil), than the sinners. If pity or empathy would be the case, that would not justify Virgil's invective, because in other places of Hell he doesn't admonish Dante-traveller who feels pity or empathy for some sinner. Neither the weeping of the sinners – broken physically and spiritually – caused by self-pity would be a sufficient reason (here and elsewhere) for such a powerful invective. The whole scene suggests that Virgil's sentence reveals, as a definition, the sin of the oracles, who already in their earthly lifetime intended to exert pressure on divine omniscience, and also indicates that this endeavor of them is still active, even in the other world. In fact the weeping – in the other world – of the oracles is also an attempt to change judgement and the past, which is the foundation of judgement, as it was their desire – in their earthly life – to know and to have influence on the future.

## VI. THE ORACLES OF ANTIQUITY AND THE FIDDLERS

In the fourth pit the travellers first meet four ancient oracles. The four oracles can be connected to four Latin poets and to their epic works: about Amphiarus wrote Statius (in the *Thebais*), about Tiresias wrote Ovidius (in the *Metamorphoses*), about Arruns wrote Lucanus (in the *Pharsalia*), and about Manto wrote Virgil (in the *Aeneis*; cf. Parodi 1907. 33–38). And are rightly these four Latin authors who are mentioned by Dante among the poets who “make poetry respecting the rules” (“Et fortassis utilissimum foret ad illam habituandam regulatos vidisse



poetas [...]” in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (II. vi. 7). That means that the presentation of the oracles at the same time is a dialogue with some representatives of ancient literature (cf. Bellomo 2013. 235).

In Latin literature (and in a general sense in ancient culture) oracles belong to the world of sacredness, they are the priests and the messengers of the gods, so their presentation usually shows the signs of a sublime style. When in the *Comedy* these same oracles appear more in a comic (or grotesque) manner, we are witnesses of a radical change in their role and their evaluation. That is comprehensible: the priests of the *false and lying gods* (*Inf.* I. 72) are obviously the servants of Evil, and their activity can be exclusively fraud and the temptation against God. However the main problem is that here Dante condemns one of the important and honoured “professions” of antiquity, the activity of divining, which is an organic part of a set of beliefs and of a culture. When Dante-narrator – in the name of Christianity – formulates some critiques on the mistakes of the ancient beliefs, we would expect that he would criticize the belief itself and not some specific form of it (cf. Güntert 2000. 278). In other words it seems that Dante doesn’t condemn the disease (the ancient beliefs), but the symptom (the activity of divining).

But if we try to analyze the characteristics of the presentation of the ancient oracles, we will note that Dante-author doesn’t say a word on the “professional” activity of the presented four oracles: on what, when and how they vaticinated. In Dante’s text we have knowledge only about the death of Amphiarus; the text doesn’t emphasize either the sin of Tiresias, because it reports on some events of his life which preceded his activity as an oracle; and about Arruns and Manto we get to know exclusively that they lived apart from society. All these characterizations drive our attention to some unexplainable and transrational event in the life or in the activity of these oracles. In fact it is evidently a transrational event if under the feet of someone the soil opens and he falls in Hell (that is the case of Amphiarus), or if someone beating snakes changes his own gender (that is the case of Tiresias), or if someone – avoiding security in a society – lives apart from his fellow humans in an underbrush (that is the case Arruns) or in a smelly swamp (that is the case of Manto). As if the presentation of these oracles would suggest that their sin was not simply the activity of divining as a “profession”, but this was a consequence of their life, lived with no righteousness. As if the practice of their “profession” would be the result of their conduct of life longing to transrationality, i.e. the pact with Evil.

The sin of the oracles therefore is not to have been the priests of the *false and lying gods*, because even before Christianity (without knowing the revelation) one could live an honest life, even by fully accepting and professing the *false* thesis of the *lying* religion (that is the case of the inhabitants of Limbo), but is to have established a covenant with Evil. In fact divining (i.e. the desire to know the future in an illegitimate way) – taking in consideration what we said about



this above – always requires the participation of Evil, independently from the belief of the oracle. So the vocation to be an oracle is really “only” a symptom, but it is not the symptom of ancient polytheism, but it is a sign of the intrigue of Evil which is present from the beginning. Christ said that “for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18,20), but also the contrary of this is true: if somebody alone tries to tempt God, he will be visited by Satan, even if the oracle doesn’t intend to pursue his own activity in the name of Satan. Therefore the ancient oracle is a tempter of God at the same way as the Christian oracle: it is not his belief or faith which makes him a sinner, but it is his life and the events of that which show his wickedness, and the result of this is his vocation to be an oracle.

After the presentation of the four ancient oracles follows the enumeration of further ancient and Christian oracles: Virgil presents Eurypylos, Calchas, Michael Scotus, Guido Bonatti, Asdente and some – not named – witches. They are simple felons: they have consciously chosen the covenant with Evil.

## VII. VIRGIL AND THE APPROPRIATE INTERPRETATION

Canto XX of the *Inferno* is considered almost unanimously by Dante-scholars as one of the most contradictory and controversial texts in the *Comedy* (cf. Hollander 1980. 133; Güntert 2000. 277). One of the reasons of this is the presence of Manto, a protagonist of this Canto, but later we read about *the daughter of Tiresias* – who can’t be anybody else than Manto (cf. *Purg.* XXII. 113) –, that she is an inhabitant of Limbo. Many suggestions arised, but this contradiction still could not be resolved. One of the most simple – and therefore most attractive – explanation is that there could be an error in copying the text: because we don’t know Dante’s autograph texts, and the *Comedy* got to us only by copies (made much more later than the original text), it can’t be excluded that in this textual place of the *Purgatory* one of the first copyists made a mistake and the error was inherited in the later copies. In fact, if in *Purgatory* XXII. 113 instead of Tiresias we would read the name of an other mythological oracle of Thebes – for example that of Nereus –, the contradiction would be resolved (cf. v. 55).

The three remarks of Virgil in the Canto mean a still greater exegetic problem. First, in the Canto Virgil disserts a lot on the history of Mantua’s foundation, but the history traced here is in contradiction with what Virgil himself wrote – 1300 years earlier – in the *Aeneid*. Here we receive a scientific exposition according to which Mantua – on a moorland near the river Mincio – was founded by those men who lived in that area after the death of oracle (vaticinatress) Manto. They have chosen that place because it was secure, and the city was simply named after the first inhabitant of that area, Manto. The explanation is logical and credible. But in the *Aeneid* is claimed that it was Ocnos who founded Mantua, who is



the son of Manto and Tiberinus (the god of the river Tiber). This second one is obviously a legendary and mythical history of origin (cf. v. 55–96).

The second contradiction of the speech of Virgil is that it presents Eurypylus as an oracle, moreover it claims that it was Eurypylus who – with Calchas – established on the basis of a divine prophecy the most adequate moment for the Greek navy to approach Troy. Differently, according to the *Aeneid*, Eurypylus was not even an oracle, but a soldier, and the prophecy on the departure to Troy was intermediated exclusively by Calchas, who in fact was an oracle (cf. v. 106–112). It is particularly interesting that Virgil himself recalls our attention to these two contradictions, when he stresses in Canto XX that he relates the real story of Mantua to confute dim legends (cf. v. 97–99). Moreover he indicates Eurypylus to make clear for Dante-traveller, who knows by memory the *Aeneid*, that the appearing Greek sinner is the same about whom he – Dante – could read in the *Aeneid* (cf. v. 112–114).

The third controversial textual place is the strange denomination of the Moon: Virgil for this uses the expression *Cain with his thorns* (*Caino e le spine*), which can correspond to a contemporary popular belief, according to which the spots of the Moon depict Cain, who after the murder of his brother carries the weight of his own sin on the Moon (cf. v. 126). This legend will be confuted by the text itself on a later place (cf. *Par.* II. 49–51), moreover it is strange that Virgil says such a superstitious imbecility right among the oracles, i.e., among the sinners who don't care about rationality.

To solve the contradictions, according to one of the explanations Virgil, who after his death has already confronted himself with the truth of Christian revelation, in this speech countervails and corrects the deficiencies and the “lies” of his own old works (in connection to the first two contradictions). At the same time he uncovers himself (by the peculiar denomination of the Moon) and shows that he still could not transcend and overcome his own old superstitious beliefs, and – at least here – he can't be considered as a “wise advisor” (cf. Güntert 2000. 282).

And indeed Virgil himself claims that it is necessary to have a factual description of the history of the origins of Mantua, “thou let no false tale pervert the truth” (“la verità nulla menzogna frodi” [99]). I.e. here Virgil qualifies his own previous story – described in the *Aeneid* – as a lie. However we surely can claim that this remark doesn't mean at all that Virgil would qualify his own poetry as a mendacious discourse, because that would contradict with his own role of a leader and to the basic truth described in the *Aeneid* (cf. *Inf.* II). Maybe we can presume that certain places of the *Aeneid* would contain some false thoughts (cf. Barolini 1984. 214; Italia 2008. 35–355).

But maybe we deal here with a deeper problem. In fact Virgil doesn't intend to confute, but to confirm what he previously wrote in the *Aeneid*: that is the reason why he – in connection to Eurypylus – recalls the reader's attention to



the *coherence* between his old and actual texts. For us these texts seem to be contradictory, that is the reason why Virgil gives an explanation to this problem. I.e. he doesn't confute himself, but he explains how should we read the *Aeneid* (cf. Bellomo 2013. 237). At the beginning of Book II of the *Convivio*, where Dante explains the allegorical sense of the ancient author's writings, he states that in the works of these poets "this is the one that is hidden beneath the cloak of these fables, and is a truth hidden beneath a beautiful fiction [lie]" ("questo è quello che si nasconde sotto 'l manto di queste favole, ed è una veritade ascosa sotto bella menzogna"; *Convivio* II. i. 3). And what else could be the foundation of Mantua by the son (i.e. Ocno) of the god of the rivers (Tiberinus) and the female oracle (Manto), than a beautiful fiction or lie? In Canto XX of the *Inferno* Virgil by his detailed account on the history of Mantua teaches Dante-traveller – who, as it was mentioned, knew by memory the *Aeneid* – to not interpret as a literally truth the mythical story of this city. The fable described in the *Aeneid* in reality expressed – even if beneath an allegorical veil – the truth: Mantua was founded by Ocno, i.e., it was not the mentioned female oracle, but the men who came later, who founded the city; Ocno was the son of the God of the river Tiber, i.e. the city has the advantage to have this river (and the moorland) for protection. We just have interpret the fable, and under the fiction (or lie) we can discover the truth.

That is valid also regarding the role of Eurypylus. It is possible that in the *Aeneid* Virgil didn't assert explicitly that Eurypylus would have been an oracle and he would have gone in search of a divining in connection to the time of departure of the navy, instead Virgil asserted that all this was the work of Calchas. Anyway, at the beginning of the *Aeneid* Virgil claims that Calchas had a companion, Eurypylus. This remark evidently means that also Eurypylus took part of that wickedness which was committed by Calchas, and so – even in this case – beneath the cloak of the fable the light of truth is revealed: one who is engaged with wicked people, becomes wicked himself.

So if these two remarks of Virgil present a reading-methodology, these introduce Dante-traveller (and the reader of the *Comedy*) to the method of the adequate interpretation. This way becomes logical the remark regarding the Moon, which can be considered also as a methodological digression, by which Virgil tests if Dante-traveller had apprehended the lesson. Here Virgil doesn't merely present a reading-method, but shows the method of giving an allegorical meaning (to some concept). In fact, to define the Moon by the terms *Cain with his thorns* it is univocally a beautiful fiction (or lie). It could also be the sign of some superstitious belief, but in that case we should attribute some unearthly and magical power to the Moon. But Virgil doesn't do that. He simply says that the Moon (*Cain with his thorns*) is already full and so it gives some light on the road of Dante-traveller. There is no any superstition and magic in the fact that the Moon lights by night and thus can help in the orientation (Bellomo 2013. 235).



Virgil, by analyzing two details of his own main work, first has shown how the allegorical reading works, then he has shown how an allegory has to be created, how the truth has to be hidden beneath the cloak of a fable.

So the Virgil of Canto XX is not the self-critical Christian figure of the once-Pagan poet. Virgil remained and remains for ever a Pagan poet, but even this way is able to teach the art of hermeneutics/exegesis to the Christian reader.

Translated by *József Nagy*

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ZSUZSANNA TÓTH-IZSÓ

## Human and Divine Time in the Comedy as Viewed by Psychosynthesis

“Time passes on, and we perceive it not” (*Purg.* IV. 9)

### I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEMATICS OF TIME: CHRONOS AND KAIROS

Giovanni Papini wrote in *Treaties about Mankind* that “humans, a poet once said, are composed of two elements: time and eternity. Years slip away swiftly for those who live for time; but those who live for eternity will arrive till the consummation of their days, like Mosé.”<sup>1</sup> O’Connell Baur in his *Dante’s Hermeneutics of Salvation* also uses the pair of binary oppositions “*the temporal*” and “*the eternal*”. Similar distinctions are made by several other writers, poets, or philosophers.

On the one side, humans need chronological time to complete tasks, organize their everyday life, and develop themselves from every point of view. On the other side, however, there is another type of time, “the right time”, which is not short or long, which does not have a measure. Its description often appears in sacred or literary pieces. It happens in one instant but contains eternity. Chronos and Kairos, time and eternity, human and divine. Theologically speaking we can say that while in the dimension of Chronos causality (or *karma*) rules, in the world of Kairos finality (or *akarma*) does.

Chronos is the normal, ordinary time, as we usually perceive it in our everyday life: the time measured by metronomes, clocks, watches, and other measuring instruments.

Kairos is a quite different kind. Having reviewed the relevant literature, finally – mainly based on the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* and the *Psychology Dictionary Professional Reference* – the following working definitions have been accepted:

*Kairos* is an experience of a timeless moment of heightened awareness at which a person’s typical knowledge of time fades away and one feels a sense of holistic involvement with another individual or thing or with the universe as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Papini 1977. 448.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. <https://dictionary.apa.org/kairos>.



*Kairos* is also known as the state of *mystic union* (otherwise known as the *cosmic identification* or *oceanic feeling*), which is a feeling of spiritual identification with nature and the whole universe.<sup>3</sup>

The distinction between the Chronos and Kairos time was produced by the ancient Western culture, by the antique Greeks. Concerning the time, the ancient East had also produced something partly similar: by the teaching of the ancient Indian yoga philosophy, the spiritual development has seven distinct stages (chakras) of which the first four relate to the normal time (equivalent to Chronos) experienced every day by ordinary people (see *Figure 2* later). At the very high spiritual level of the fifth chakra and above, however, there is a kind of timelessness (equivalent to Kairos).

The average person stays at a medium or even a bit lower spiritual level, lives according to Chronos, his life is lead by karma and he is located approximately at the level of the fourth chakra, the so-called Anahata. Psychologically and spiritually more advanced and matured individuals although, who have transcended the limits of their ego and have stepped out of the circle of causality, and got rid of (chronological) time, may enter a realm that already belongs to the higher chakras. Eastern tradition marks the cessation of chronological time from the fifth chakra. Papini describes the timelessness of these stages as follows:

Space, for these dreamers, is reduced to a single point and time to eternity. (Papini 1977. 424.)

Eternity is neither short nor long; a moment that has no present because it no longer knows the earthly schedule of time for past and future. Eternity is, like God. (*Ibid.* 448.)

When in the Bible God says “I am who I am” (Ex. 3:14) it is the final statement of self-existence, it indicates immediate presence. In Papini’s vision Eternity’s, just like God’s existence is not upon any spacious or temporal circumstances. Eternity is beyond human time, beyond Chronos. In the original, Greek version of the Bible, the New Testament contains the word Kairos 86 times, while Chronos is mentioned 54 times. This fact does not have to surprise us, since it contains countless descriptions of transpersonal experiences in which the individual exceeds human time and enters divine time. Vacchelli, saying that “We, moderns, have already lost this radical relationality”<sup>4</sup> refers to this duality of time which is manifested also in the fact, that in modern languages (at least in our case, in Italian, Hungarian, and English) there is no linguistic distinction between the two temporal concepts (we have only “tempo”, “idő” and “time”).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. <https://psychologydictionary.org/kairos>.

<sup>4</sup> Vacchelli 2018. 28.



So, people of the modern Western world are almost exclusively inheritors of chronological time, and we have lost an important part of ourselves by ignoring this distinction. We have to search hard to awake our “eternity part” since our “time part” dominates everything around us. It is no accident that – among others – Walt Whitman raises the question in his famous *Song of myself*: “The clock indicates the moment—but what does eternity measures?” (44), then he says:

Here or henceforward it is all the same to me, I accept Time absolutely.  
It alone is without flaw, it alone rounds and completes all,  
That mystic baffling wonder alone completes all.  
I accept Reality and dare not question it,  
Materialism first and last imbuing. (23)

In the Kairos-ruled realm of existence, which also Dante will enter, the binary oppositions disappear: the soul is neither strong nor weak, nor is time short or long anymore, it no longer has a measure. Dante also gets to experience the dissolution of oppositions at the peak of his spiritual journey, as Papini writes in *Dante vivo*:

Dante is outside the fixed categories, above incidental divisions, beyond the unyielding *yea* and *nay* (Papini 1935. 28.)

in *Poesia in prosa*:

I am with me. I am dissolved, far from and outside the system. I do not belong to your circle. (Papini 1932. 222.)

or in *Mostra personale*:

Eternity is not, as many think, an avalanche of days, the succession of centuries, the sum of thousand years, but an infinite and perennial Present. Nothing is more similar to eternity than one moment of ecstasy. (Papini 1941. 128.)



Sándor Weöres calls that one minute there, that Kairos “eternal moment”:

A moment leaning out of time  
arrives here and there,  
guards what time squanders keeps  
the treasure tight in its grasp—  
eternity itself, held  
between the future and the past.  
As a bather’s thigh is brushed  
by skimming fish— so  
there are times when God  
is in you, and you know:  
half-remembered now  
and later, like a dream.  
And with a taste of eternity  
this side of the tomb.  
(Weöres 1975)

In this eternal moment, it is the soul, the spirit that – with its omnipresence and eternal stability – rules time and space without their human divisions: “the spirit is above these human distinctions, for him, everything is the same, he justifies everything” (Assagioli 1988e. 134).

## II. PSYCHOSYNTHESIS IN A NUTSHELL AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE COMEDY

Psychosynthesis was established by Roberto Assagioli, who accepted, extended, and later further developed the analytic psychology of Carl Gustav Jung. About psychosynthesis in general, in English, the interested reader can refer to the following basic publications:<sup>5 6 7</sup>. The main ideas of psychosynthesis can best be summarised shortly by the so-called “egg diagram” below (*Figure 1*).

<sup>5</sup> Assagioli 1971.

<sup>6</sup> Assagioli 2000/2008/2012.

<sup>7</sup> Assagioli 2010.

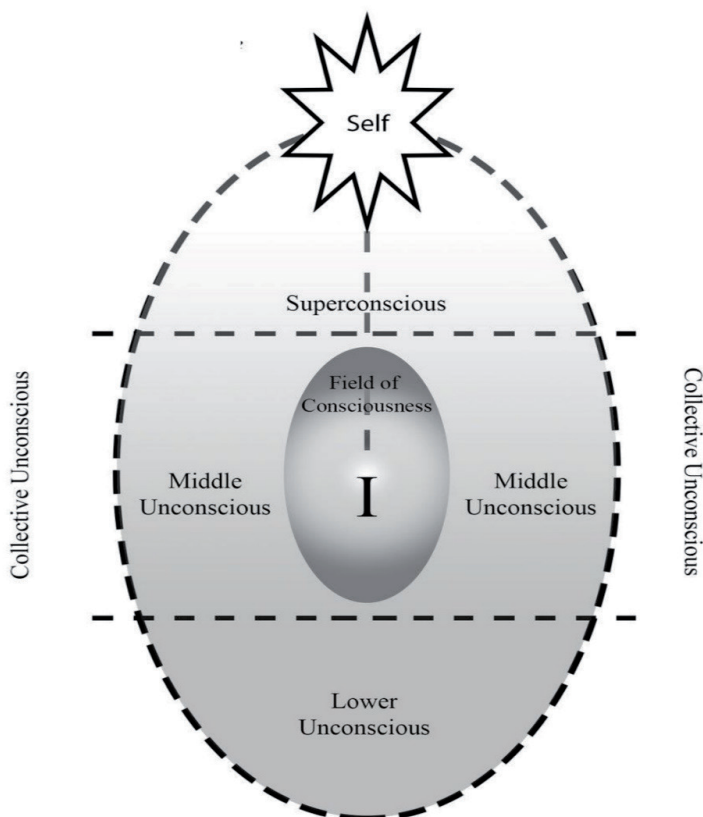


Figure 1.

Assagioli's model of the structure of the human psyche<sup>8</sup>

The "I" is the centre of the *Field of Consciousness*, surrounded by the *personal unconscious*. The *personal unconscious* is subdivided into the *lower unconscious* (elementary psychological activities, drives, primitive urges, phobias, etc.), *middle unconscious* (ordinary mental and imaginative activities), and *higher unconscious* or *superconscious* (higher intuitions and inspirations) regions.

The Self (also known as Transpersonal Self, or Higher Self), represented as a star at the top of the diagram. The Self, mostly as defined by Jung, is dual: it is both personal and transpersonal (universal). Assagioli declared that the Self, the real subject of all transpersonal experiences, is a permanent centre which is not necessarily religious or dogmatic:

<sup>8</sup> Assagioli 2000/2008/2012. 17.



the Self exists in a sphere of reality different from that of the flow of psychic phenomena and from sensory inputs of organic life, and cannot be influenced by these, while its influence can profoundly modify our psychophysical conditions. (Assagioli 1988i. 25.)

All the personal unconscious contents are interfacing with the *Collective Unconscious* via the dotted borderline of the “egg”, also in the sense as Jung used this term.

According to Assagioli “it is a harmful illusion – that can easily sham us – that we are indivisible, immutable, and consistent beings.” (Roberto 1952) On the contrary, within the human psyche, there are so-called *subpersonalities* of different levels and kinds, which are partly autonomous entities existing in continuous interactions and fighting with each other. Subpersonalities are based in the personal unconscious and are agglomerates of different attitudes, drives, habit patterns, characteristics, and act as false selves.

As Assagioli puts it:

*Psychosynthesis*, both personal and transpersonal, is a process of growth based on the harmonious integration of all aspects of the personality around the self, the center of awareness and will. Psychosynthesis sees man as tending naturally toward harmony within himself and with the outer world. (Assagioli 2010. Preface.)

The *personal psychosynthesis* (horizontal dimension) includes the development and harmonizing of all human functions and potentialities at all levels of the lower and middle unconscious.

The *transpersonal psychosynthesis* (vertical dimension), however, includes the development and harmonizing of all human functions and potentialities at the levels of the higher unconscious (superconscious). During this process of the inner ascent, the area of consciousness comes to include the content of the superconscious and is approaching more and more closely to the Self. It consists in raising the conscious “I” to higher levels towards the Self, and with it also the whole area of consciousness. This is what Assagioli called “psychological mountain-climbing”:

Two different, and in a certain sense opposite, ways of exploring the superconscious offer themselves. The more usual is the one that may be described as *descending*. It consists of the inflow, the irruption of higher elements into the field of consciousness. [...] These inflows manifest themselves in the form of intuitions, inspirations, creations of genius, and impulses to humanitarian and heroic action. [...] The other type of relationship and contact which we can establish with the superconscious is the *ascendant*. It consists of raising the conscious “I” to higher levels, and with it the area





of consciousness, to the point where a zone is penetrated whose location above the ordinary level of our consciousness normally prevents our knowledge of its existence. (Assagioli 1988b. 28.)

Jung wrote:

We can hardly escape the feeling that the unconscious process moves spiral-wise around a centre, gradually getting closer, while the characteristics of the centre grow more and more distinct. Or perhaps we could put it the other way around and say that the centre – itself virtually unknowable – acts like a magnet on the disparate materials and processes of the unconscious and gradually captures them as in a crystal lattice. (Jung 1974. 217.)

The “magnet metaphor” – and with a bit more stressful feeling the other, so-called “spider metaphor” also – are quite apposite for many cases of ascending transpersonal psychosynthesis.

Assagioli asserted that the Comedy provides “a wonderful picture of a complete psychosynthesis”<sup>9</sup> to its readers. He goes on as follows:

The first part, the Pilgrimage through Hell – indicates the analytical exploration of the Lower Unconscious. The second part – the Ascent of the Mountain of Purgatory – indicates the process of moral purification and gradual rising of the level of consciousness through the use of active techniques. The third part – the visit to Paradise or Heaven – depicts in an unsurpassed way the various stages of superconscious realizations, up to the final version of the Universal Spirit, of God Himself, in which Love and Will are fused. (Assagioli 1973b. 174.)

The “wonderful picture” of this inner journey will be shown in the following in some details after an excellent article by Lombard and den Biesen.<sup>10</sup> Parts of this article of these authors are often cited in the rest of this section. Further deeper analyses on this topic can be found in two other, equally excellent, articles by the same authors.<sup>11 12</sup>

The Comedy<sup>13</sup> starts with:

<sup>9</sup> Assagioli 1973b. 174. In English Assagioli 2000. 186.

<sup>10</sup> Lombard – den Biesen 2014. 5–11.

<sup>11</sup> Lombard – den Biesen 2015a. 15–20.

<sup>12</sup> Lombard – den Biesen 2015b. 15–21.

<sup>13</sup> This and the following cited pieces are from the translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Available also online: <https://antilogicalism.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/divine-comedy.pdf> (23/03/2021)

Midway upon the journey of our life  
 I found myself within a forest dark,  
 For the straightforward pathway had been lost.  
 (*Inf.* I. 1–3.)

Dante, the pilgrim, states he is “midway upon the journey of our life.”<sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup> The explicit use of the word “our” – and not “my” – here, as Lombard and den Biesen put it,<sup>16</sup> indicates that this is a universal journey that all of us have to take once, or at least should take.

This universal journey, however, is also always personal, as expressed by the singular in the second line of the poem: “I found myself within a forest dark” (*Inf.* I. 2) (again, after Lombard and den Biesen<sup>17</sup>).

Dante then confesses that “the straightforward pathway had been lost” (*Inf.* I. 3), therefore he has to take a longer one. For Assagioli it means that Dante has to “experience a profound self-analysis”.<sup>18</sup> As Lombard and den Biesen<sup>19</sup> asserts, from a psychosynthesis perspective, based on *Figure 1.*, it follows that

- the first line of the poem represents the collective unconscious journey,
- the second line represents the “I”, the Field of Consciousness,
- and the third line represents points to the “I”-Self-connection that had been lost (indicated as a dotted vertical line connecting the “I” with the Self).

<sup>14</sup> The term “*midway of life*” can be interpreted as corresponding to the “*midlife crisis*” concept coined by Jung. During the first half of our life we receive our education, choose our careers, begin a family, build up a new existence, etc., and, in the meantime, we develop a strong ego (Ego-Self Separation). Doing so, we step-by-step lose connection with the rest of our psyche. Therefore, we usually reach our midlife feeling that our things are going wrong. At midlife we may experience alarm messages from the psyche in order to (re)establish the unity of the psyche. (After: <http://jungian.ca/mid-life-jungian-analysis/>, (20/03/2021).

<sup>15</sup> Assagioli’s interpretation of the *selva oscura* explicitly concerns to spiritual awakening:

“The wilderness represents not only, as commentators generally say, the vicious life of the ordinary man, but also and above all, the special state of unease, of acute suffering, of inner darkness, which usually precede the awakening of the soul. To this state corresponds, much more than to the life of ordinary man, what Dante says about the forest; that is, only the memory of it filled him with fear. [...] In fact, the discovery of the hill illuminated by the sun, and the elevation of the gaze clearly indicate the decisive moment of the awakening of the soul. Then fear subsides in the lake of the heart and, after a little rest, he begins to climb the slopes of the hill. This clearly symbolizes the phase following the awakening.” (Assagioli 1988c. 131.)

And Vacchelli: “Realizing is essential. That’s all. But it is also only the beginning of seeing, of awakening.” (Vacchelli 2018. 34.)

<sup>16</sup> Lombard – den Biesen 2014. 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Assagioli 1973b. 174.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*



Vacchelli puts it as follows:

The three canticles are also three states of conscience: the separative and violent, infernal one; that of transformation, purgatorial; and the paradisian one, of integration. They are not waiting for us later, but they are here now. (Vacchelli 2018. 79.)

Since for Dante, “the straightforward pathway” – which is the direct, shortest path to the Self – had been lost, his life’s journey from the “I” has to be re-established towards the Self. Dante discovers that he is far from having a direct connection to the Self. Instead, he is standing in a “selva oscura”, (“forest dark”) helplessly and frightened. In reality, Dante is terrified by his own shadow,<sup>20</sup> his unexplored unconscious. Assagioli believes that the *selva oscura* represents “that acute suffering and inner darkness which usually precedes the awakening of the soul.”<sup>21</sup> And really, there comes a touch of the awakening of the soul: he got to a mountain representing the Self.<sup>22</sup>

But after I had reached a mountain’s foot,  
At that point where the valley terminated,  
Which had with consternation pierced my heart,

Upward I looked, and I beheld its shoulders,  
Vested already with that planet’s rays  
Which leadeth others right by every road.

(*Inf.* I. 13–18.)

The border between the wild woody valley and the high mountain appears as a numinous transitional threshold. When he looks up to the shining top, the decisive moment arrives: his soul is awakened, he – although imperfectly and for moments only – enters Kairos-time. He then desires to receive more of this light and immediately begins to climb towards it. He, however, cannot approach the light straightforward, because his way is blocked by three wild beasts (a leopard, a lion, and a she-wolf) and thus he is forced to give up his quick ascent up the mountain. These three beasts are symbolic manifestations of lower-level sub-personalities over whom Dante has yet to gain conscious awareness and control. After experiencing the light, Dante is forced back to his dark wood, but now he is suffering so acutely that he cries out for help. And the help suddenly comes

<sup>20</sup> Shadow meant (also) in the Jungian sense.

<sup>21</sup> Assagioli 1993. 156.

<sup>22</sup> In 1907 Assagioli, at the age of 19, wrote a story full of metaphors on spiritual research, *Fantasia in Re interiore*. It was published in the *Leonardo* of Papini and its most important symbol is a high mountain lit by the sun. [http://www.psicosintesi.it/sites/default/files/rivista\\_1991\\_04\\_robertoassagiolifantasiainreinteriore.pdf](http://www.psicosintesi.it/sites/default/files/rivista_1991_04_robertoassagiolifantasiainreinteriore.pdf) (22/03/2021).



in the shape of Virgil, the great Roman poet. In psychosynthesis terms, Virgil – himself also a subpersonality of Dante, but of a higher level – acts as the ideal guide, teaching Dante to be in relationship with his authentic “I”. As Lombard and den Biesen formulated, “Virgil empathically mirrors Dante, offering him tools and insights for achieving discernment.”<sup>23</sup> Vacchelli, although not using psychosynthesical terms, stresses the same interpretation of the archetypical figure of the “old sage”: “the outer guide is also an inner guide. Virgil is not only “another person”, but also a part of the profound of Dante himself and of all of us.”<sup>24</sup> These interpretations recall the figure of another famous inner guide, Philemon, who was a subpersonality of Jung,<sup>25</sup> representing superior insight. It is no coincidence that Vacchelli highlights the parallels between the Divine Comedy and the *Red Book* of Jung:

The Comedy is also Dante’s Red Book, just as the Red Book is, in its way, a reinterpretation of Dante’s Comedy. The underworld descent is a necessary step: if I go directly to the median world of Purgatory, I make a fundamental mistake. I am shipwrecked. (Vacchelli 2018. 54.)

As Assagioli himself states, “Virgil leads Dante on his pilgrimage, helping him, encouraging him, explaining to him the various phases of the [psychosynthesis] process.”<sup>26</sup> Virgil outlines the entire journey and makes clear that Dante cannot directly climb up to the Self, because he first must make a pilgrimage through Hell: “Thee it behoves to take another road” (*Inf.* I. 91). Hell represents his lower unconscious and Dante has to understand it and bring it under control. The motto of psychosynthesis, “Know, possess, transform yourself”, refers to all parts of the psyche and could easily be the motto of the Divine Comedy. So, Dante cannot bypass the experience of Hell, first, the contents of his lower unconscious have to be integrated and finally synthesized around the “I”. The three beasts, as lower-level subpersonalities, that first blocked his way, now have already been integrated and synthesized. Therefore, only after having visited Hell, can he climb the mountain of Purgatory and pass through the purification process to redeem and transform his lower unconscious. Only then will he be able to once more continue his climb towards the light.

Later Virgil explains that at a certain point when reasoning is transcended, he will have to step back:

<sup>23</sup> Lombard – den Biesen 2014. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Vacchelli 2014. 187–188.

<sup>25</sup> Jung 2009. 200–202; 207; 216; 218; 223–224; 312.

<sup>26</sup> Assagioli 2000. 187.



If Virgil is the mind, the reason (even in the medieval meaning we were talking about) it is obvious that certain areas of reality are closed to him. This is not Dante's will, but the common experience and science of mystics. Reason lives in a space-time dimension, and cannot access non-time. He can get as close to it as the threshold, but no more. (Vacchelli 2018. 195.)

Virgil "is a true master, and as such he frees and does not bind his disciple. This is why he steps aside when the time comes for him to do so." (*Ibid.* 188.) Alessandro Berti catches with great sensibility this very moment when saying:

The mind must be silent and withdraw in front of the glorious presence of the Infinite. This is the state that Assagioli proposes to us as a "second birth". (Berti 1987. 24.)

János Arany describes the significant moment of the transcending of reason in his *Dante*, a poem that tells the marvellous journey of the "sommo poeta":

Such a depth makes reason's plumbline grow unsteady,  
Float as if with feather weighted, not with lead.  
Consciousness accepts it's caught up in the eddy.  
Wondrous divination fills the human head.  
It can feel the pull of other-worldly quarters;  
Shudders at the dread and pleasures they afford;  
Hears Leviathan go thrashing in the waters...  
Onto which has passed the presence of the Lord.  
(Arany in Prickett 2010. 711)<sup>27</sup>

From that moment a female spirit will accompany Dante for the final climb towards the heavens to join the "blessed" in Paradise.

To whom, then, if thou wishest to ascend,  
A soul shall be for that than I more worthy;  
With her at my departure I will leave thee;  
(*Inf.* I. 121–123.)

It means that Virgil, the symbolic personification of Reason, can only guide Dante towards *personal psychosynthesis*, but for the *transpersonal psychosynthesis* already another guide, a worthier female spirit (Beatrice, herself also a subpersonality of Dante, but of an even higher level), will be necessary. Only after Dante has harmonized and coordinated his conscious, as well as lower and middle un-

<sup>27</sup> Translated by David Hill. Also in Gyapay 2017. 364–365. Original poem: János Arany: *Dante*. In Arany 1978. 184.



conscious material into an authentic personal “I”, can he be guided by Beatrice towards his transpersonal Self, where – as Virgil says – human reason cannot go.

The beautiful Beatrice, the symbolic personification of Wisdom, Dante’s inner divine mother, sister, and lover (in Jungian terms his divine Anima) – already representing the transpersonal qualities from Dante’s superconscious – takes over the guidance from Virgil. As Dante leaves Virgil and joins Beatrice, Dante’s journey continues towards the heavens: Divine Light, Love, and Joy (that is to the Self).

### III. IT IS TIME FOR KAIROS: DANTE IN THE *SELVA OSCURA*

Since its birth the Divine Comedy has been analyzed from several points of view, was torn down to little pieces to be then recomposed again, but to the best of my knowledge, the aspect of time has not yet been considered. This very slice of this magnificent cake of different interpretations is rather modest, but maybe offers a small, but interesting new hint, a humble contribution to the huge worldwide Dante criticism.

The article, other than the antique theory of Chronos and Kairos, is also inspired by two (sometimes similar, sometimes divergent<sup>28</sup>) interpretations of the Comedy: Assagioli’s psychological approach and Gianni Vacchelli’s thoughts on the actuality of Dante, the *selva oscura*, and symbolic hermeneutics. To them, I added Romano Manescalchi’s polarity concept in which the pilgrim Dante via his ascent along the spiritual growth’s axis, arrives from the lower pole, the *she-wolf*, to the higher pole, the *Virgin* (actually the triad of Beatrice, Lucia and Virgin Mary). This process is symbolizing the development from the attachment to the physical body with its instincts at the lower extreme, to its superation in psychological and spiritual self-realization at the higher, respectively.

Taken overall, our proposed tentative model for a psychosynthetic interpretation of Dante’s inner journey, based on his Chronos and Kairos experiences, is summarised in *Figure 2*.

Important to emphasize that, as Assagioli himself asserts, people do not develop linearly.<sup>29</sup> It can be observed time-to-time that certain transpersonal qualities – that, in the terms of Indian yoga philosophy, involve the level of the fifth or even the sixth chakra – occasionally can also appear in a poorly integrated personality. These phenomena, of course, cannot take long, because the destiny determined by the person’s earlier acts and experiences (the so-called “karma”) necessarily pulls him back after a while.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Leoncini 2021 (in print).

<sup>29</sup> For non-linear development, see Sorrensen 2021.



It means, the rarely – and only for short time – even quite ordinary people can experience Kairos. But only highly developed persons can reside longer, or almost permanently at the height of the fifth, or quite exceptionally even the sixth chakra. Assagioli, in *Transpersonal development*, describes the psychological effect of the five stages of spiritual awakening, in which he also refers to the temporality of these high, chronologically timeless moments:

Such a blessed state lasts for varying periods, but it is bound to cease. The lower self was only temporarily overpowered and stunned, but not killed or transformed. The inflow of spiritual light and love is rhythmical, as is everything in the manifested universe; after a while, it diminishes or ceases—the out-flow is followed by the ebb. This is a most painful experience for the neophyte and it is apt, in some cases, to produce strong reactions and cause serious troubles. The lower self reawakens and asserts itself with renewed force. All the rocks and rubbish which had been covered and concealed by the high tide emerge again. The man whose moral conscience has become more refined and exacting, whose thirst for perfection has become more intense, judges with greater severity and condemns with a new vehemence his personality and he is apt to nurture the false belief of having fallen lower than before. It sometimes happens that some lower propensities and impulses which had been lying dormant in the subconscious are vitalised by the inrush of higher energy, or stirred into a fury of opposition by the spiritual consecration of the awakened soul, which is a challenge and a menace to them. (Assagioli 1988g. 103.)

Assagioli's statement on "the lower self [*that*] reawakens and asserts itself with renewed force" can easily be applied to the emergence of the three beasts. Right at the moment when Dante "finds himself", the beasts arrive. Immediately after when he finds himself in a *selva oscura*, he sees the sunlit summit. Seems that everything happens in one huge, divine moment, free of human, chronological time. So said that, how can we interpret the concept of time in the case of Dante's inner experience?

According to Vacchelli, the time of the Comedy is "the time of the soul":

The Comedy is (and not only) a super-tale, a super-myth. Time is – from the very beginning – the time of the soul, even if in Dante everything is intersected, multi-level and polysemic: even where soul-time kairos seems to prevail, under the surface history-time chronos rules, and vice versa. We, moderns, have already lost this radical relationality. But Dante sees it and experiences it in reality and reproduces it in his work, which serves as a *speculum* to see reality, or maybe it is better to say it is a micro-reality, a microcosmos. (Vacchelli 2018. 28.)



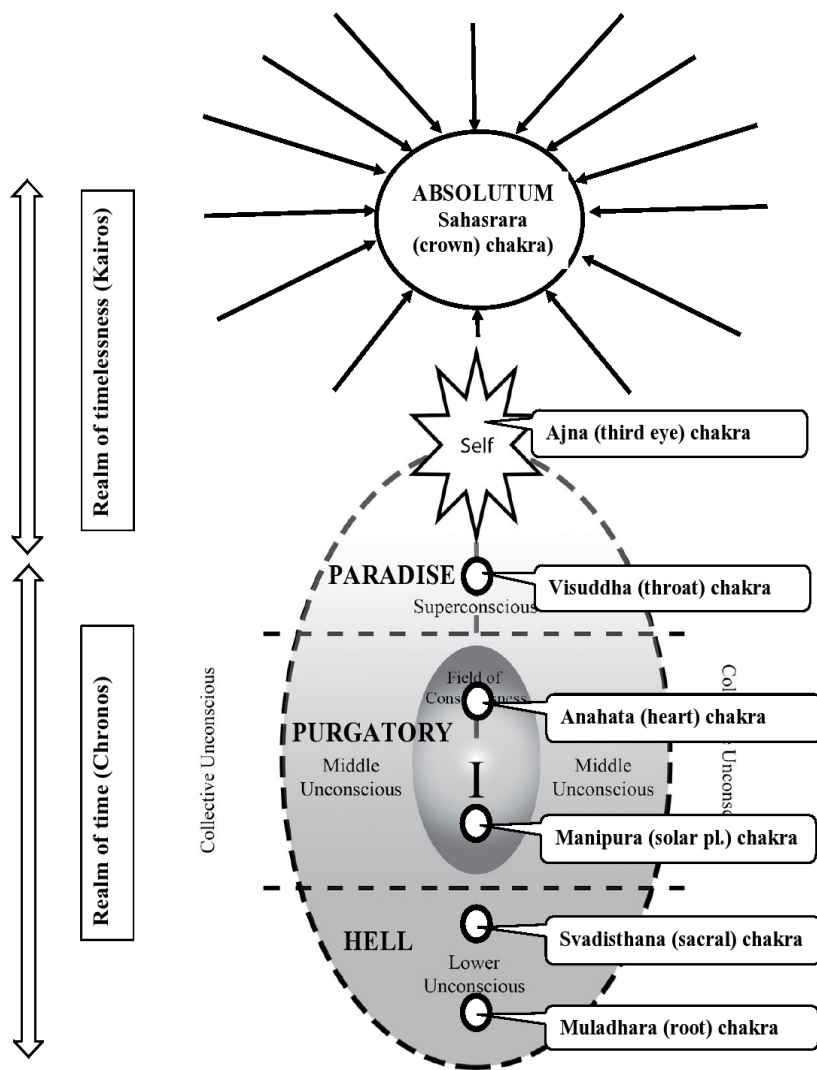


Figure 2.

Assagioli's model of the human psyche completed with the absolute centre, the seven chakras, the realms of time and timelessness, and the three stages of Dante's inner journey in the *Comedy*.

The figure shows that all the individuals, represented by converging arrows, are developing towards the absolute centre (the Absolutum, the seventh chakra). Of the many, only one individual's spiritual growth axis is indicated combining Assagioli's "egg diagram" with the chakra system.



That reflects the macro-reality, the macrocosm. Although Dante, in his gigantic vision, seemingly walks in an outer world, in the summary of the then macrocosm, we agree with most interpretations that he makes his journey inside his psyche, in his microcosm. All the men represented in Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise are tendencies, inclinations, or attitudes that manifest in humans in very different measures. From a certain point of view, they are all subpersonalities of Dante and all of us, as Assagioli highlights it:

man is a microcosm: it contains the various forces of the universe, from the lowly to the sublime, and it would be a mistake to focus only on the bad as we sincerely find and understand our lowly components, we must treat our virtues with the same sincerity. They need to be accounted for, they need to be recognized: we need to know what guidelines, incentives, and tasks are driving us toward further improvement. (Assagioli [without date]. 5.)

From a different point of view, as opposed to Freud's psychology and the medieval Christian attitude concerning sins, mainly focus on hidden sins, on inner tendencies or instincts of which one has to be ashamed of, for this Assagioli calls the attention also to the "good guys", the subpersonalities that help us to achieve self-realization. The goal of personal psychosynthesis, as already mentioned, is the harmonization, the integrating synthesis of all of our subpersonalities. From this integrated state, transpersonal psychosynthesis can be developed. Harmonization is not an easy job as we can see it also in the outstanding case of a Dante... Papini described Dante's microcosm as the synthesis of several, sometimes even contrasting parts:

In him there is everything: the wisdom of the East, the Greek *logos*, the Christian *cari-tas*, the Roman *civilitas*. He venerates Aristotle and follows St. Thomas, but he does not hesitate to levy upon the Arabians and the Jews. He feeds upon the Old and New Testaments, but does not scorn to make use of Moslem tradition. (Papini 1935. 28.)

And as a generalization of the idea, he precisely gives a literary description of personal psychosynthesis:<sup>30</sup>

Real contradictions are found more often in mediocre minds, and that on the case of the great we ought to take account of the vastness of soul and intellect which gathers within itself opinions and tendencies apparently contradictory, but actually concurrent and complementary. In little minds, contrasting ideas live together with difficulty and must of necessity come to blows; and in the outcome remain definitely

<sup>30</sup> Assagioli himself, after having found in *Dante vivo* these sentences, confirmed that they are authentic reflections of personal psychosynthesis.



contradictory. But in vigorous minds, more active and more ample, contrasting ideas work together to produce a richer vision; and, in achieving harmonious results, arrive at a higher synthesis which annuls, while justifies, their oppositions. (Papini 1935. 27.)

We find very similar thoughts in Vacchelli's text as he sees Dante as the unity of different parts:

Do not search for one unique idea in Dante, more for the harmony and integration of the parts. Furthermore, there is no need to assume that this harmony is perfect and it does not show sometimes sutures and some juxtapositions. Certain intuitions may not be developed sufficiently in their consequences. Even though they are sons of the same time, they transcend it in depths and "pierce" it vertically. Every life and every epoch has its kairos. (Vacchelli 2014. 210.)

Dante's moment of Kairos has yet arrived: when he finds himself in the *selva oscura*, his spiritual awakening happens. As he realizes the importance of the moment, it becomes a point of no return. The story begins... The parts of his psyche gather around his conscious "I" and form one unified cosmos. In that very minute, in that minute of intuition, in that moment of Kairos, Dante steps out of chronological time and enters in "the time of soul". According to Manescalchi, the whole work is built upon this crucial intuitional moment, when Dante finds himself in desperation, admits it and calls for help, and help arrives in the figure of Virgil sent by divine love:

Every work of art is based upon one unique principle, a primary intuition that branches out for the whole work, joining to and absorbing in itself all of its parts. (Manescalchi 2007. 97.)

For Manescalchi the unifying principle is exactly this divine love that reaches its manifestation in the mystical body of the Catholic (thus "universal") Church. Surely here we are not talking about the official institution of the Church with all its historical failures and sins, but the church based on Christ's Verb:

As a synthesis, we can say that the organizing principle of the Comedy is love donated for us by God. ("Neither Creator nor a creature ever, / Son," he began, "was destitute of love / Natural or spiritual; and thou knowest it" (*Purg.* XVII. 91–93). When we cultivate and grow it, we rise towards the zenith and create an increasing number of more and more solid bonds of love with God and with other humans till the point of our merge in one unique body, the mystical body of the triumphant Church, in which "Nay, 'tis essential to this blest existence / To keep itself within the will divine, / Whereby our very wishes are made one" (*Par.* III. 79–81). (*Ibid.* 100–101.)



The two summits may represent the already identified two entities: the she-wolf, the love for ourselves that progressively rules out everything that does not belong to the self till the point of total loneliness, the absolute aphasia; and the Virgin, in her, love has reached its zenith and she assimilates all the spirits in the mystical body of the glorious church. The different stages along the axis correspond, in an arbitrarily fine gradation to the stage that the individual souls have reached whether in their process of integration into the mystical body or in the disidentification from the body of its associated life, till the most radical atomism of the habitants of the ice of the frozen Cocytus, including demons that – at that level – do not have any connection between them. (*Ibid.* 104.)

In summation, the two poles of this axis are the absolute unity, the superior synthesis of the many at the highest, and on the opposite side the absolute isolation of the individual at the lowest. The “El Camino” is long and full of difficulties and one can never know whether he will really arrive at “Santiago de Compostella” or not. We are all on the rugged road, with different backpacks, different mates, different physical and psychological makings... and because of this, the steps upwards of the spiritual growth’s axis can be very little ones or even quite huge ones. Mathematically speaking, the axis can be divided into arbitrarily small line segments till the last unit of geometry, the one single point. In our context, a point means stagnation. Most people proceed slowly, even unconsciously, while living life’s experience in their Chronos.

As Leoncini highlights it<sup>31</sup>, Assagioli finds human time, so chronological (sequential or linear) time, very important to achieve psychological and spiritual goals, that is to realize personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis. This slow and often much suffered personal development is a typical characteristic of ascendant psychosynthesis (from human to divine). Assagioli wishes to ensure chronological time for his patients enough to realise their spiritual growth, accompanies them even from a serious neurotic illness to recover psychological health (original meaning of the term “psychosynthesis”). In other words, he helps them through the healing progress from a depressive state or existential crisis of the *selva oscura*, via the purification process of Purgatory, to the psychological-spiritual self-realization. Step by step, meeting after meeting, respecting the individual pace of the patient, understanding and accepting him, and gradually guiding him in Chronos-time. This is the general case, but also exists another one, the case of Saint Paul, Dante, the mystic Master Eckhart, and many other Christian saints, the wise men of the oriental traditions, and numerous unknown pilgrims who reached the summit silently and humbly: they were able to make a huge or even gigantic step upwards, in certain cases, they even overstepped the whole remaining part of the axis and arrived at the other pole, which represents

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Leoncini 2021 (in print).



the union-experience with God. Now, this huge step, this Chronos-independent very minute is Kairos: the time of not-time, when, as Papini said, “time is reduced to eternity”. It is the time of the Penitent Thief on the right side of the cross of Jesus. He is deeply touched by the intuited sinlessness of Christ next to him. He lets his ego go, admits (and thus transcends) his sins. And this is when Christ’s dissolution and upliftment comes:

But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. “Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise. (Luke 23,40-43.)

It is the time of Milarepa, the so much-cited and invoked minute of “illumination”, of divine understanding when the veil falls, and one sees the reality instead of its reflection. This is what can be seen in *Figure 2*: at the level of the fifth chakra, the person can already directly observe reality instead of its manifestations. As Saint Paul says:

For now, we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. (1 Cor. 13,12)

But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3,16-18)

Finally let’s read in Purgatory Dante’s beautiful description of this Kairos moment when the individual is absolved of his sins (or his karma) by “the fire of love”, by divine forgiveness:

For top of judgment doth not vail itself,  
Because the fire of love fulfils at once  
What he must satisfy who here installs him.

And there, where I affirmed that proposition,  
Defect was not amended by a prayer,  
Because the prayer from God was separate.  
(*Purg.* VI. 37–42.)

Other than religious traditions and related sciences, it is literature that gets closest to the description of transpersonal experiences. Psychology, from this point



of view, is just an indirect method and not a direct source. Countless literary pieces sang human feelings, psychological sensations experienced while “transcending” themselves. In Mathematics when dealing with sequences or functions we often use the concept of “limit” which is a given, prescribed number to which the sequence or function tends. Their value can be sufficiently close to, but never exactly equal to the given limit. This is what happens to poetry or in psychology to transpersonal psychology. Generally speaking “poetry is dancing around the unutterable”<sup>32</sup> – as a famous Hungarian actor, Zoltán Latinovits, said once. Kenneth Sorensen turns to Assagioli to describe this phenomenon by the metaphor of the sun:

The Transpersonal Self creates the Superconscious (1974, p. 119) with all its creative processes of light, beauty, and love. The soul is a static centre of pure being and self-awareness whose energies radiate, in the same way as the sun’s do, a comparison Assagioli often makes. We see the sun’s rays but not its stable core. (Sorensen 2016. 26.)

Dante became the one in every thousand years who could glow in the “fire of the unutterable” during his earthly life: “One millennium sets and one millennium rises, / Till a mortal’s dream into that world will stray, / Till the unbelieving person recognizes / That mist-hidden Godhead to which he must pray”<sup>33</sup> – as János Arany wrote in his poem *Dante*. So Dante did what was thought to be impossible: he reached the limit, even if temporarily! He arrived at the other pole, in religious terms and according to Manescalchi, to the mystical union with the holy body of the church of God, he lived the alchemical marriage, the most powerful union of duality, the most perfect conjunction:

And I remember that I was more bold  
On this account to bear, so that I joined  
My aspect with the Glory Infinite.  
O grace abundant, by which I presumed  
To fix my sight upon the Light Eternal,  
So that the seeing I consumed therein!  
(*Par.* XXXIII. 79–84.)

It is the Kairos of Dante’s life, according to Vacchelli. Kairos is the very second of crystallization. As it is known, crystallization takes place from a solution suddenly, when the necessary conditions for supersaturation supervene.

<sup>32</sup> Latinovits 1978. 69.

<sup>33</sup> Translated by David Hill. In Prickett 2010. 711. Also in Gyapay 2017. 364–365. Original poem: János Arany: *Dante*. In Arany 1978. 184.



Similarly, the individuals also have to be prepared for such an extraordinary event, the disciple has to be ready to take in, to internalize the teaching of the master. Only this way can he step out from Chronological time and enter Kairos-time, can he accept descending psychosynthesis or moving forward in his ascendant psychosynthesis. In his “Esercizi Danteschi” (*Dante exercises*) Assagioli warns us:

About the exercise based on the Divine Comedy, it is important to know that it is suggested only to subjects that have sufficient cultural preparation and spiritual aspiration. (Assagioli 1973c. 175.)

For Vacchelli, divine grace is already present when Dante awakes and his eyes open up to see his condition. Similarly, Assagioli sees in that crucial moment a quick synthesis of the whole spiritual pilgrimage of Dante in which fear and blessing are co-present. They include and not exclude each other:

Dante, “in the middle of the journey of his life” finds himself, without knowing how, in a “forest savage, rough, and stern / Which in the very thought renews the fear” (*Inf.* I. 5-6); but it is precisely in that dark forest that he finds a good. In fact, wandering in that forest he reaches to the foot of a hill; then he looks up and sees that it is illuminated by the sun. In this simple allegory, everything concerning the first stages of spiritual development is symbolized in a quick synthesis. (Assagioli 1988e. 130.)

Furthermore, Assagioli says:

The wilderness represents not only – as commentators generally say – the vicious life of ordinary man, but also, and above all, the special state of discomfort, acute suffering, and inner darkness that usually precede the awakening of the soul. [...] In fact, the discovery of the sunlit hill and the elevation of the gaze clearly indicate the decisive moment in the awakening of the soul. Then fear subsides in the lake of the heart and, after a little rest, he begins to climb the slopes of the hill. This evidently symbolizes the phase that follows the awakening of the soul. (*Ibid.* 131.)

While Dante is in this grave danger, Virgil appears to him and Dante immediately invokes him humbly, asking for help. Thus the soul, after having ascertained by painful experience the difficulties of life, after having suffered the first bitter defeats, loses its boldness and its presumption recognizes its own weakness and impotence, acquires, in short, the true humility and therefore puts itself in the condition of being able to be helped. And as soon as it has been done, help comes. This is a great and consoling law of the life of the Spirit [...] The superior help is always ready, it never fails: only in us are the obstacles that keep it away from us. We don’t know, we don’t want to ask it right. (*Ibid.* 132.)





Virgil, the reason and the power of superior spiritual discrimination inherent in man, recognized that the still impure soul cannot face and overcome the beasts and climb directly to the radiant summit; therefore, to Dante's request for help he says: "It is convenient for you to take another trip. (Assagioli 1988e. 136.)

And Dante, at this point, becomes a disciple and starts to follow his master.

In the first two songs of his divine poem, Dante represents the human soul at the beginning of the spiritual path - that is, he represents each of us. And each of us is given - if we willingly want it - to walk the path he has traveled, to follow him along the various stages of his great pilgrimage, to climb with him to the sublime spheres of Light and Love. (*Ibid.* 136-137.)

What happens during Dante's Kairos when he "si ritrovò" (*found himself*) and after the necessary descent to the underworld of his subconscious will ascend to the luminous summit? He lived with his whole existence a magnific transpersonal experience. What happened can be described also without religious terms as one of Assagioli's patients told his personal story:

I remember well that night, almost the exact moment, at the top of the hill where my soul opened, so to speak, into infinity, and the two worlds, inner and outer, fused into a single unit. Depth called depth; to the depth opened by my struggle was the immeasurable depth of the outer universe beyond the celestial bodies, which truly responded. (Assagioli 1988f. 124.)

After his "finding himself", his spiritual awakening, Dante accepts to follow his master and he leaves Chronological time to enter Kairos-time, the "time of the soul", as Vacchelli calls it. Sándor Weöres calls it "inside time" and makes the following distinction between Chronos and Kairos, or, as he calls them, outside and inside time:

You experience a variety of days and seasons: this is the *outside time* that you can measure with the steady movement of the clock.

You experience the alternation of the disembodied contents of your personality: this is the *inner time* for which you have no measure. (Weöres 1975. 675.)

The quotation expresses exactly what happens to Dante: he discovers the "disembodied contents" of his personality, his subpersonalities, and all of his microcosm.

The first step is to discover the dark side of his soul, the inferior unconscious. Entering Hell he enters the world of eternal time. This characteristic of Hell is explicitly expressed by Dante when he describes the gate of Hell:



Justice incited my sublime Creator;  
Created me divine Omnipotence,  
The highest Wisdom and the primal Love.

Before me there were no created things,  
Only eterne, and I eternal last.  
All hope abandon, ye who enter in!"

These words in sombre colour I beheld  
Written upon the summit of a gate;  
Whence I: "Their sense is, Master, hard to me!"

And he to me, as one experienced:  
"Here all suspicion needs must be abandoned,  
All cowardice must needs be here extinct.  
(*Inf.* III. 4–15.)

In Purgatory Dante describes his own psychological state of *trans* or *flow*. Nothing enters from the outside world, nothing disturbs his Kairos, no tick-tack of chronological time, no sounds, no senses, "time passes on, and we perceive it not" (*Purg.* IV. 9):

And hence, whenever aught is heard or seen  
Which keeps the soul intently bent upon it,  
Time passes on, and we perceive it not,

Because one faculty is that which listens,  
And other that which the soul keeps entire;  
This is as if in bonds, and that is free.  
(*Purg.* IV. 7–12.)

and

O thou, Imagination, that dost steal us  
So from without sometimes, that man perceives not,  
Although around may sound a thousand trumpets,

Who moveth thee, if sense impel thee not?  
Moves thee a light, which in the heaven takes form,  
By self, or by a will that downward guides it.



Of her impiety, who changed her form  
Into the bird that most delights in singing,  
In my imagining appeared the trace;

And hereupon my mind was so withdrawn  
Within itself, that from without there came  
Nothing that then might be received by it.  
(*Purg.* XVII. 13–24.)

To exemplify this exit from the physical time-space world and enter the inner one, I cite Giovanni Carmassi, master of piano, who perfectly catches the “Kairosness” of music-experience:

It is always the music that creates a particular suggestion, so you no longer think about the technical elements of the performance, or perhaps the gas bill that expires the next day. When the miracle happens, however, thought stops, and time no longer passes according to the rhythm of the clock. (Carmassi–Ferrucci 2013. 166.)

What Carmassi asserts concerning music, is also true to poetry: There is no music without time, and poetry is a kind of music. Starting from Antiquity, music, and poetry have always been intertwined: poems were mainly sung and frequently also accompanied on lyre, lute, or guitar. Be mentioned here as examples only the medieval troubadours in South Europe, and the Welsh bards<sup>34</sup> in the North. Poems – especially rhyming poetry, like the Comedy, that also have a rhythm in the words – share some salient temporal properties with music. If one is listening to a poem or reading it aloud, the musical instrument is the human voice. If one is reading a poem silently, the instrument is the person’s inner hearing.

Apart from the grandiose spiritual content of the Comedy, which is the topic of this paper, also its highly inspiring form is to be mentioned and appreciated. The poem also works as highly inspiring music, the Terza Rima (or “chained”) rhyme scheme is especially suitable to picture the transition from Chronos to Kairos. The highly inspired content and the brilliant artistic form together make the Comedy a masterpiece.

Time cannot be Chronos and Kairos at the same “time”. The same is true for our double human nature: or we live in the outer world, or we enter in ourselves and leave outside Chronos. When the inner journey starts (for Dante also), the individual enters Kairos.

<sup>34</sup> The Welsh word “cerdd” has a double meaning of both „music” and „verse”.



What is Dante looking for? Actually, at this point, he does not know yet, but he knows that has to finish what he has started, it is an inner need, an inner urge that cannot be oppressed.

#### IV. DIVINE COMEDY: EXAMPLE OF BOTH DESCENDING AND ASCENDANT PSYCHOSYNTHESES

Assagioli has repeatedly expressed his concern that “religion” is discussed in an overly intellectual and abstract form (and perhaps even from a metaphysical point of view). In his opinion, the study of religious experiences, such as the description of their essential part and the provoked psychological mechanisms are completely relegated to the background. The approach lacks a careful study of the states of consciousness experienced during the religious experience, and it is precisely to this end that literature, which testifies countless religious or other types of transpersonal experiences from various ages, places, and in various ways, will be of great help. Although the psychological characteristics of the experiences of Eastern and Western mystics are the same, Assagioli points out that the paths are different: Christians regard the mystical experience as a special gift of God’s grace, while the Orientals also use their own power through various willful and conscious internal practices to elevate their soul to the higher spheres.

We note that for Assagioli, these mystical experiences (“peak experiences”) were important in that they represented a higher-than-average state of consciousness, more precisely the contact with the upper unconscious.

The unexpected conversion of St. Paul is a fine example of far-reaching, descending psychosynthesis, while the enlightenment of Gautama Buddha is the fruit of a long, persistent search, meditation, and retreat, and thus of conscious action, and thus a good example of ascendant psychosynthesis.

Turning back to literature, the inner experience described by Dante in the Comedy is not the result of a pre-planned, conscious upward pursuit. The initiative came from above, hence it can be called *descending psychosynthesis*. What happens to the poet when divine energies flow in his soul? Arany will answer us:

...the poet (wretched rascal’s label!)  
Trembling, drops his worthless laurels to the sod;  
And, as if before a church’s altar table,  
Prayerful, he kneels earthward, for he senses God.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Translated by David Hill. In Prickett 2010. 711. Also in Gyapay 2017. 364–365. Original poem: János Arany: *Dante*. In Arany 1978. 184.



Dante moves on, and instead of “sensing God”, in the end, he will also “see” God, he will admire the Empyrean. His description suits completely the psychological sensations listed by Assagioli when talking about the superconscious experiences (citing himself Dante):

It is then that the normally superconscious region, or sphere, is reached in full consciousness. At this stage, one may experience the various psychospiritual qualities and activities which have play in the superconscious. They are not something abstract, vague, and evanescent, as those who are unfamiliar with them might think. They are rather something living, intense, varied, and dynamic, which are perceived as more real than ordinary experiences, both inner and external. The principal characteristics of this stage are as follows:

1. A perception of light, an illumination, both in a general sense and as light on problems and situations which are thereby rendered comprehensible and whose significance is revealed.
2. A feeling of peace, a peace independent of any external circumstance or inner state.
3. A feeling of joy, of happiness, the state of happiness so well expressed by Dante in the words:

*“O Joy, ineffable gladness,  
O Inner life of love and peace,  
Full of richness untainted by avidity.”*

4. A feeling of harmony and beauty.
5. A feeling of power, of the power of the spirit.
6. A sense of magnitude, of boundlessness, of universality, of the eternal.

All these qualities interpenetrate one another. Dante pictures their inseparability in his admirable tercet:

*“Intellectual light full of love,  
Love of truth overflowing with joy,  
Joy which transcends every sweetness.”*

Naturally, there can be no permanence in such a lofty contemplative experience; but even in departure, it leaves behind effects and changes, often profound, in the ordinary personality. Among other things, it fosters a gradual stabilization of the centre of personal consciousness and little by little raises the area of normal consciousness to higher levels.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore:

Numerous poets have had and attempted to express these enlightenment experiences. The greatest of them is Dante: Dante’s “Paradise” is full of expressions of

<sup>36</sup> Assagioli 1988b. 34; Assagioli 1976.



light. At the beginning of the *Canticle*, he clearly states that he has had the ineffable experience of the highest Light, the one that shines in the highest 'heaven', closest to the Supreme Reality, God.<sup>37</sup>

Since transpersonal experiences are, by their nature, temporary, Dante cannot stay in the divine presence forever. He has to go back to his "normal, everyday" life. The question is, how he continues it.

In the following, I will attempt to show that the *Comedy* is also ascendant, and moreover, it is ascendant in two different ways. First, it is ascendant as Dante leads himself to a higher spiritual level consciously by writing the *Work*. Secondly, the *Work* itself helps many individuals (even today) to accomplish personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis. Nicely, the two are integrated into each other, not in several other cases, when the writing of a literary piece caused catharsis and by it healing to its creator, on the other hand, was harmful to a huge number of readers by dragging them into his problems. For Assagioli, an instructive example for this case is Goethe's *The sorrows of young Werther*.

Let's consider first Dante's ascendant psychosynthesis.

Individuals that reached spiritual peaks of their inner landscape, later on, when they find themselves in the plain, in the lowland again, often feel the desire to relive the experience that cannot ever be forgotten. They are eager to experience it again, and this happens to

Dante. First of all, with all the fresh, miraculous, and eye-opener experiences in his mind, he wishes to tell the world his dramatic and elevating journey, with all its details. He prays to have the power to do so in *Paradise*:

<sup>37</sup> The glory of Him who moveth everything  
Doth penetrate the universe, and shine  
In one part more and in another less.

Within that heaven which most his light receives  
Was I, and things beheld which to repeat  
Nor knows, nor can, who from above descends;

Because in drawing near to its desire  
Our intellect ingulphs itself so far,  
That after it the memory cannot go  
(*Par.* I. 1–9.)

The manifestation of light assumes – in the consciousness of those who perceive it – different aspects. More precisely, different aspects prevail in it, since they are not separate but interpenetrate and merge in various ways according to individual differences. Sometimes, the perception of beauty prevails, for example in Tagore; in others, the cognitive aspect do, as in Plotinus and Eckhart. In Christian and even in Eastern mystics, these aspects are combined with feelings of love and adoration. In others, enlightenment above all arouses a sense of joy, which can lead to ecstatic bliss. But, I repeat, it is a question of the prevalence of one or the other of these aspects: in general, they are all present to some extent. Their fusion was expressed in an admirable way by Dante. (Assagioli 1988c. 60.)



O splendour of God! by means of which I saw  
The lofty triumph of the realm veracious,  
Give me the power to say how it I saw!

There is a light above, which visible  
Makes the Creator unto every creature,  
Who only in beholding Him has peace.  
(*Par.* XXX. 97–102.)

Assagioli highlights this “inner need to share” in the third phase of spiritual growth:

The former personality, with its sharp angles and disagreeable traits, seems to have vanished, and a new loving and lovable individual smiles at us and the whole world, full of eagerness to please and to Serve, and to share his newly acquired spiritual riches, the abundance of which seems almost too much for him to contain. (Assagioli 1988d. 103.)

Unlike St. Paul, Dante, after his depressing, gigantic vision of God, returns to a similar continuation of his life so far. An overwhelming, descending transpersonal experience takes place with it, but the full and lasting transpersonal psychosynthesis is not yet realized: Dante is about to fall back into the horizontal dimension, from where he will grope nicely again in the vertical direction.

The pilgrim, who is in Paradise in his physical body and will turn back to earth, knows that he is not immune to temptations, and so “*Let thy [Maria’s] protection conquer human movements*” [...] Maria wins against the she-wolf, but it is not a definitive victory. Dante has to go back into his human world and will continue the fight against her in his human conditions, so he prays: “*Let thy protection conquer human movements*”. (Manescalchi 2007. 98)

Assagioli makes another clear statement that refers to Dante’s ascendant psychosynthesis process:

In general, the great artists, the great writers and poets have then worked on the material that surfaced or descended in their consciousness, elaborating it consciously. A typical example is that of Dante. He, replying to Bonagiunta, in the Divine Comedy, clearly said that he was inspired:  
And I to him: “One am I, who, whenever  
Love doth inspire me, note, and in that measure  
Which he within me dictates, singing go.”  
(*Pur.* XXIV. 52–54) (Assagioli 1988j. 38–39.)





Ferenc Baranyi's poem, *Prologue* (which is an introductory poem to the poem-group entitled *Dante's confession*), illustrates very well the whole process of the creation of the divine work, including also the phenomena and dangers of "ego-bloating":

Ferenc Baranyi: *Prologue*

Halfway through the path of human life  
I told what I could say then.  
And I still believe what I said then;

although a poet is ordered also by circumstance,  
but only until the will radiated on him  
shall not generate violent self-belief

I had to descend to the depths of hell,  
so that I no longer decimate my inspiration,  
and I shall not be frightened if I see disintegrated

my discipline transformed into freedom.  
I just simply sang the cosmos,  
since it is impossible to tell the whole, the everything.

If I accused while not willing to hurt anyone,  
if I was a hero only if allowed to be,  
and I just related to myself, just as

my truth relates to the absolute truth:  
than all the poems were created in vain,  
even if my work is valued.

At the beginning of the journey of "NEW LIFE"  
I write down again everything that I already wrote,  
to believe my faith for good and all  
and to find my savior in the paper.  
And you, hear my poem anxiously  
and not nodding gently: so it is.

My heart just sings what has already sung,  
only with a more undisciplined voice,  
and, if necessary, it will even sue itself,  
to win everything and lose everything.

(Baranyi 1969)



The fate of St. Paul, as is well-known, did not turn out this way: after the groundbreaking, blinding transpersonal experience, he not only does not continue his previous (Christian persecutor) life but changes radically (“Paul’s turn”). His astonishing encounter with the Self results in him identifying with the Self as far as his human circumstances allow. Hence his famous sentence, “And I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2,20). As I have repeatedly pointed out in the wake of Jung, in Western Christian culture, Christ is the symbol of the Self. Master Eckhart, the great Christian mystic, writes of St. Paul’s experience in a mystical interpretation:

This is what happened to Paul: he could have stayed for a hundred years where he lived the vision of eternal goodness, he would not have returned to his body by that time: he would have completely forgotten about it.

But he returned, hiding back in his physical garment to continue his earthly career, thus giving up the joy of the eternal contemplation of the Absolute. He justifies his action as follows:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. (Phil. 1, 21-24.)

Assagioli outlines five phases of spiritual awakening. To get through these phases is a (chronological) time-consuming task for the average person, and the achievement of the goal is not even guaranteed. Man can do one thing, to follow the counsel of Imre Madách, placed in the mouth of God in *The Tragedy of Man*: “O Man, strive on, strive on, have faith; and trust!” (Madách 1963). Phases can take up to one-two decades, and we earthly mortals, like the patients of Assagioli, are not a Dante, a St. Francis, a St. Augustine, or a Milarepa. We could, of course, trust Vacchelli’s words: “Every life [...] has its kairos” (Vacchelli 2014. 210). Dante viewed himself in an ambivalent way: on the one hand, he states in Comedy that “I not Aeneas am, I am not Paul, / Nor I, nor others, think me worthy of it” (*Inf.* II. 32–33), also Vacchelli draws attention to this. On the other hand, as Brockman states in his psychoanalytical exploration of the Comedy, “Dante pridefully claimed his spiritual imagined trip was far superior to the one by St. Paul” (Brockman 2017. 2).

The second case of ascendant psychosynthesis regarding the Comedy is when readers are helped to reach their own transpersonal psychosynthesis by the “report” of Dante. Dante was able to translate the world of symbols, the supreme experience of the transpersonal, into “human” language. He dances so close around the fire that he almost ignites, and the reader himself feels the radiant heat of the flames.



Even more valuable are personal relations with someone who has himself explored these heights. In this category are the genuine spiritual teachers: the false claims of many to be spiritual teachers necessitate the emphasis on the word genuine.

Thus doubly prepared, we can now tackle the ascent itself. Being an ascent and not a flight, it has several stages and halting places. There exist two very instructive and illuminating descriptions of this gradual ascent; one is that of Dante's ascent of the Mount of Purgatory, the subject of the second part of *The Divine Comedy*. Studied from a psychosynthetic and anagogic point of view, it is even today a source of much relevant instruction, since the obstacles and difficulties to be overcome are largely the same in both cases. The other is the Ascent of Mount Carmel, described by St. John of the Cross. Despite its specifically ascetic and mystical character, it contains real treasures of psychological knowledge and some direction which, expressed in modern language and abstracted from its period frame, could prove very instructive. (Assagioli 1988b.)

"Dante's ascent of the Mount of Purgatory" is a guide of conscious spiritual and moral growth for all of us. The *Divine Comedy* is able to function as a useful and practical tool for its readers to accomplish ascendant psychosynthesis. Assagioli came into truly personal contact with the chapter of Paradise when he was imprisoned for a month in fascism for his Jewish origins and pacifist manifestations in 1940. It is no coincidence that he developed a series of therapeutic exercises based on the work called (and already mentioned) "Dante-exercises".<sup>38</sup> Assagioli's point was to create a practical exercise based on the Comedy aiming at fostering the ascendant psychosynthesis for ordinary people living in the ordinary Chronos world.

One realization of these exercises is described in *Rivista della Psicosintesi*. In the article Laura Maninchedda explains Assagioli's reasons to think of the Comedy as a tool to reach personal development:

He recommends the exercise of the Divine Comedy as a useful stimulus to retrace the stages of one's life and inner itinerary, precisely because of the universal value of Dante's journey, which symbolically represents that of all humanity. (Maninchedda 2012. 17.)

Further on she makes a summary of her reading experience as follows:

The best way to approach Dante seemed to me to listen to the poem and try to grasp the resonances and emotions it arouses within us. In the reading we tried to make him our contemporary, avoiding arbitrarily updating him, indeed ignoring the many aspects of his thought and his outdated conceptions of the world, that is, paying at-

<sup>38</sup> Assagioli 1973c. 174–175.



tention above all to what makes each of us feel close to Ugolino or Francesca, that is to his greatness as a poet. On the other hand, themes such as the passionate aspiration for justice, moral indignation, commitment to the search for truth, living and moving participation in the feelings of humanity represented in its most varied aspects, but always seen concerning their existential task, they do not need explanations, they are very clear and present even in today's readers, who find in the Divine Comedy a very rich range of situations and experiences that recall their own ones. In addition to the infinite possibilities of comparison and resonance with spiritual, moral, passionate, emotional contents, a careful reading can focus on the many main themes of the poem that address the essential questions for every man who wants to live consciously, and which are at the basis of all personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis. (*Ibid.* 18.)

Maninchedda's vision is very close to Vacchelli's: to read Dante (not as a critic or a literate, but as one individual, as "me") it is important not only to try to understand its plural symbolism<sup>39</sup>, but also to "feel" his poetry, to let it enter and form, or even transform me. As the Hungarian writer, Géza Gárdonyi wrote: "An inspired piece of literature works because its vibration creates vibration in the hearts" (Gárdonyi 1974. 75) and "the true produces greater vibration" (*Ibid.* 83). Now, the Divine Comedy can be considered a true experience, a very intimate and personal, but for Dante a true and real experience. Precisely for this, it affects and "resonates", quite independently of the cultural background of the reader. As Vacchelli highlights:

Dante is a sublime poet, but also a popular one (Contini). In Tuscany illiterate peasants know entire songs by heart. I saw and felt it with my own eyes. He is a learned poet, but he has the greatness of absolute geniuses to speak even to the simple, the humble. [...] What does this mean? That Dante wants to speak to everyone. (Vacchelli 2012. 74.)

The Divine Comedy works in different levels of understanding, cultural background, or material knowledge, in different stages of psychological and spiritual growth. It works as a guide to self-realization, even if the process is not a conscious development. Similarly to the Bible, the Tao-Te-King, or other spiritual materials, it offers new and new guidelines as the reader goes ahead in his dialectic self-development promoting the realization of his personal, inter-personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis.

<sup>39</sup> The four levels of interpretations of the symbolism of Dante are: literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical. Cf. Assagioli 1973b. 174.

## V. CONCLUSION

The interpretation of the Comedy from a psychosynthesis view is a rather new approach, several excellent papers have been recently published on that. This paper also accepts this approach as a general frame, but specifically focuses on the problematics of time as perceived by Dante. Till the “midway” of his life journey, Dante – as the vast majority of all the people – lived in the normal, ordinary sequential time, measurable by measuring instruments (like metronomes, clocks, watches, etc.). This kind of ordinary time is called Chronos (the human time). Then, however, at this “midway”, suddenly something unforeseen happened to him: he found himself in the middle of a *selva oscura*, and simultaneously he found also himself out of time. This extraordinary, numinous, and “timeless time”, that cannot be measured, is called Kairos (the divine time). This overwhelming and shocking out-of-time Kairos experience helped him to an unusual ascent of his consciousness, a touch of the awakening, providing him with a true, but painful insight about his destiny: he had to realize that “the straightforward pathway had been lost” and therefore he had to take a longer and more troublesome route. A descending psychosynthesis (initiated from divine to human) happened to him in Kairos –although temporarily – in which Chronos had no role at all. Finally, looking out from the Comedy, we can identify an ascendant psychosynthesis (initiated from human to divine) too. After his decisive transpersonal experiences gained in Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, Dante turns back to live again his ordinary human life. But after his experiences, which he can never forget, this life already cannot be the same as before: he then desires to receive more of the light of Paradise, he is longing for being “blessed”. Dante – already not as a pilgrim – is slowly, advancing step-by-step in Chronos, begins his ascendant psychosynthesis. Writing The Divine Comedy is not only a help for himself, the psychological elaboration of his experience, but also a useful tool for those who are to make the first steps towards self-realization, for those who dare to accept the invitation to step out of Chronos and enter Kairos.

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MÁRK BERÉNYI

## The Ethical Aspects of the Concept of 'amore' in Dante's Œuvre

When looking into the ethical concept of Dante, one cannot avoid analysing the important question of the nobility of the soul. In this essay I study the poetry of the 80s and 90s of the Italian *Duecento*, in other words, the years when the *dolce stil nuovo*, the sweet new style, flourished. *Dolce stil nuovo* rose above the other poetic styles thanks to its novel approach to the concept of love, or *amore*. The approach that the artists of the new form chose was mystical and they attempted to combine the concepts of love and otherworldly happiness. The fundamental notion of these poets was that only a noble mind and pure heart can nurture love, and without this a man is unable to feel love for a woman. At the time, women were seen as an angelic presence on Earth, and were capable of helping their lovers reach for otherworldly happiness. Needless to say that this kind of love could not be a carnal love.

Naturally, at the centre of this study we find Dante's *stilnovismo*. Like many of his contemporaries, Dante also met the *dolce stil nuovo*. This famous meeting between the Master and the *Zeitgeist* bore the fruit known as *The New Life*, but elements of *stilnovismo* can be found in Dante's other works as well, including the *Convivio* and the *Comedy* (let us just think of the canto of Paolo and Francesca). In this paper, I analyse how the sweet new style and its underlying philosophy appear in Dante's œuvre.

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In order to identify the historical and cultural premises for this essay, I should start by outlining the two key roots that combined to allow the Tuscan *stilnovismo* to flourish; namely, the traditions of the Sicilian literary school and Provençal troubadour poetry. I should also mention the fertile seedbed that provided nourishment to the style, that is, the deep religious fervour that was omnipresent in the Middle Ages. By way of introduction, let us take a closer look at these cultural and historical circumstances.

While Central and Northern Italian cities started to become more and more independent centres of power, Southern Italy would witness the birth of a large



kingdom under the rule of the Swabian Hohenstaufen dynasty during the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Romano–Vivanti 2005. 194–196). Under the rule of the Hohenstaufen – and especially under Frederick II – a power system was established that successfully applied the traditions of the German-Norman state structure, thus creating a new governmental structure in Europe. It was a rational, rigorous, modern state with public administration based on strict rules. The reader may rightfully find scant connection between Dante's lyrics of love and the stern rooms of the royal court. However, the court is precisely where it started, as paradoxically, it was the rigours of state that provided the best framework for significant artistic and cultural growth, and in fact it would become the greatest poetry workshop of that place and time. The cold and rigorous royal court offered its officials very little joy and very few opportunities for self-fulfilment, which led them, or forced them, to write poems for their own amusement, the majority of which were love lyrics. Of course, the environment in which they were written had a huge impact on these poems, which often became vehicles for stereotypical characters, as they usually included men subordinating themselves to the women they loved, and swearing allegiance to them, which is analogous to the oath of fealty that served as the basis for the feudal system. In Ugo Dotti's words, it is extremely difficult to find any signs of a spontaneous love or sincere emotion suddenly arising in Sicilian love poetry. Rather, these poems include mannered, reasoned, often enigmatic images (Dotti 1963. 9–10). If we take a look at the provenance of these officials/poets, we can see that they were neither aristocrats, nor church dignitaries. They were mere commoners, who understandably did not define their nobility and qualities based on their origins but based on their actions, and even more importantly on their ability to give and receive love. Consequently, according to this poetic perception, nobility as a social status had to give its place to the nobility of the soul (Dotti 1963. 9–10). Of course, the question of how this literary and cultural wave got from Sicily to Florence has rightly been questioned. And the answer lies in the scientific migration that was taking place in Italy at the time. Medieval universities (especially the University of Bologna and a little later the University of Padua) were rich melting pots of scientific, literary and artistic traditions, and the University of Bologna, for instance – which Dante himself almost certainly attended in the 1280s – demonstrably played an important role in transmitting and spreading Sicilian literary traditions. So it is not surprising that the *Dolce Stil Nuovo* became well known and appreciated relatively easily and rapidly in Florence as well.

Naturally, 13<sup>th</sup> century Tuscan love poetry, which Dante later dubbed the sweet new style, seems to originate from other roots as well. In terms of its development and its central theme, 11<sup>th</sup> century Provençal troubadour poetry can most definitely be seen as one of these roots, as it also places emphasis on the subordinate relationship of the poet to the woman he loves (Viscardi 1993. 11). For the sake of historical accuracy, it is of course worth noting that the two



key roots I have mentioned already had their own literary predecessors. Indeed, interpreting nobility as the predisposition of the individual for spiritual nobility had long literary and philosophical traditions, thanks to Aristotle, Seneca, Juvenal, Boethius and others.

Besides the literary traditions that form the two key roots, the flourishing of the Tuscan stilnovismo was rooted in the fertile seedbed of medieval religious fervour. The idea – that is considered almost a cliché today – that Christianity was ever-present in medieval European society, contributing to the birth of Europe, once again is not compromised (Le Goff 2003. 31–61). This is because love can most definitely be considered the central theme of the sweet new style. In fact, it was an entirely new concept of love based on religious transcendence, which was to replace the affective concept of previous historical eras. In the following sections I analyse this concept of love in detail.

Once the traditions of the Sicilian literary school and Provençal troubadour poetry reached Tuscany, it was not long before Dante came into contact with them, and he could not escape being affected by them and indeed he went on to become one of the most significant representatives of stilnovismo. But Dante was not alone, and it is also worth mentioning Guido Cavalcanti, Lapo Gianni, Gianni Alfani, Cino da Pistoia and Dino Frescobaldi as other adherents to the style. These poets did not form an actual literary school, although their subject matter, their themes and their answers brought them together into one movement. Dante, and other poets considered representatives of the sweet new style wished to abandon the pagan eroticism passed down through the Middle Ages by classical antiquity and wanted to fill their poems with something deeper and more substantial than a simple appraisal of the physical form. This resulted in the birth of the concept of the angel-like woman (*donna angelicata*), who, with her love, guides her beloved to a higher and purer spiritual dimension, thus helping make himself worthy of standing before God in heaven. This angel-like woman is a major transformation from the female character in pagan antiquity, which awakened carnal desires. In the sweet new style this woman was part of the divine structure and contributed to the eternal salvation of the man that loved her. So love played a central role in the worldview of the new style and became the antithesis of the antique concept of love, as unlike the latter (just think about the Lesbia poems of Catullus) it is free from any physical aspects.

Although Dante was not the only representative of this important style, what distinguishes him from other stilnovists, is that he tried to frame his literary endeavours into a system based on a structured concept. Dante's very first work was *The New Life* (*La Vita nuova*). This text, which is thought to have been written between 1292 and 1294, is where Beatrice makes her first appearance, and her character would go on to provide a framework for Dante's entire œuvre. The title, *The New Life*, means nothing other than the new life following the death of the beloved woman, Beatrice, and the book was inspired by the real-life



Beatrice's death in 1290. The physical and inner description of the female character clearly reflects the female characterisations already known from Provençal troubadour poetry. The woman is noble-minded, pure of heart and virtuous, and she is also the "destroyer of all the vices and the queen of the virtues" (*The New Life* X). Following the description of all the joy and spiritual pain that love brings, the reader is shocked to read of Beatrice's death. As a result of the sudden loss of his beloved, Dante faces an unprecedented emotional crisis, which he is trying to drag himself out of by showing weakness towards the call of other women. Among all the female characters in the book, *Donna gentile*, whose real name could be Lisetta, and who is introduced in chapter XXXV, stands out. She attracted Dante's attention because she looked like Beatrice. The poems in this section are characterized by the writer's constant compunction, as he feels unfaithful to Beatrice and to her memory due to his relationship with other women. Dante's bad conscience is most notably expressed in chapter XXXIX, where he shows deep remorse when thinking about Beatrice. The book ends with the image of the lady looking down from heaven as an angel-like apparition.

In general, the literary canon welcomes Beatrice's character with scepticism. The characterisation is stereotypical, flash-like and symbolic. The Dantist viewpoint therefore started to become a dualist one, according to which a real Beatrice could exist alongside an abstract one that was idealised in Dante's mind and works. The history of literature never misses a chance to mention the daughter of Folco Portinari, Beatrice, who married a rich Florentine banker, Simone de' Bardi at a very young age. It is possible that this noble woman was the very same that Dante showed adoration for in his poems, but it almost unthinkable that this was a sexual love, as Dante had a wife, Gemma Donati, who bore him with several children, and Beatrice also had a husband. The sceptical reader might argue that the fact that they were married to others is no reason to exclude the possibility of a physical aspect to their relationship, but let us keep in mind that this was the Middle Ages, when it was much harder for men and women to meet privately than it is today.

The potentially realistic elements of the relationship between Dante and Beatrice are very well demonstrated in Alessandro Barbero's recent Dante monography. Mostly referring to Boccaccio's *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, Barbero first tells us the story of the relationship between the young Dante and Beatrice. He then analyses the relationship from a psychological point of view. According to this analysis, they first met in spring 1274 at a public feast, when Dante was nine years old and little Beatrice had just turned eight. Barbero reminds us here that even though men and women did not celebrate together in the Middle Ages, this did not apply to children, which is why it was feasible for a young master Dante to meet miss Beatrice. Beatrice was wearing a crimson dress (a detail greatly emphasised by our writer), which was the first thing to attract Dante's attention, who fell in love with the girl immediately. Child psychology helps us



out here, as the first, idealised love, free of any sexual attraction can, and often does, develop at this age. Children of this age are usually attracted by physical traits, such as a smile, a lock of hair, a gesture, or even a remarkable crimson dress (Barbero 2020. 19–30). Nine years later, in 1283, when Dante was eighteen and Beatrice seventeen, Dante catches a glimpse of her again. Beatrice is now married but she waves to poet. After meeting the young woman, Dante has an erotic dream that he describes in chapter III of *The New Life*:

In his arms I thought I saw a sleeping person, naked but for a crimson silken cloth that seemed to be draped about her, who, when I looked closely, I realised was the lady of the saving gesture, she who earlier that day had deigned to salute me. (*The New Life* III.)

The lines again confirm that Dante did indeed meet the real Beatrice. There might have been an abstract Beatrice as well, who only existed in Dante's poetic world, although it is impossible to completely separate the two. Here Dante probably reaches back to the traditions of Provençal troubadour poetry written in the Occitan language. The troubadours would choose a real, but unattainable noble lady of the royal court – usually the wife of the lord of the castle – whom they idealised and whom they wrote poems to. This theory is supported by the choice of the name as well. *Beatrice*, in medieval Tuscan as well as in modern Italian, is the substantivised form of the adjective *beato*, -a ('blessed') and means "she who brings blessing". It is worth noting that this name appears often in Provençal poetry, for example in the troubadour song of Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, *Kalenda Maya*, in which the beloved woman is also called *Beatriz*. This all supports the idea of an idealised Beatrice living in Dante's poetic universe, in co-existence with the real physical person. The symbolic character is further demonstrated by the numbers divisible by three that appear in the biography, all referring to the Trinity.

As mentioned before, this love – whether earthly or heavenly – comes to an end with Beatrice's sudden death. Her demise is not described in detail, and the reader gets the impression that it is all just a flash preparing them for the lady's reappearance in the Earthly Paradise in the *Divine Comedy*. Canto XXX of the *Purgatorio*, where Beatrice, showered in flower petals, is resurrected (remember the famous lines: "Manibus, oh, date lilia plenis" – *Purg.* XXX. 21), practically echoes the following lines in *The New Life*: "[...] a wonderful vision appeared to me, in which I saw things which made me resolve to speak no more of this blessed one, until I could more worthily treat her" (*The New Life* XLIII).

It is worth noting the tripartite structure of the text, once again referring to the Trinity, takes the form of the thesis–antithesis–synthesis model. The thesis of the idealised, platonic love for Beatrice is denied by the antithesis of the physical attraction towards Donna gentile. This emotional deviation is even-

tually balanced by remorse, the synthesis of Beatrice's appearance and a later reference made to her return in the *Divine Comedy* (Szabó 2008. 21).

Due to the specific structure of Dante's love lyric, a certain branch of Dan-tists, including Giovanni Pascoli,<sup>1</sup> René Guénon<sup>2</sup> and Luigi Valli<sup>3</sup> have always been particularly interested in the esoteric aspects of Dante's concept of love, especially at the rise of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These writers assume that Dante could have been a member of an initiatic group *Fedeli d'Amore*, which was inspired by the traditions of the Knights Templar and that of the Rosicrucians, and as such was considered one of the predecessors of Freemasonry. According to these interpretations, Dante's love lyric actually uses a secret language to express and spread certain esoteric doctrines. Although these interpretations are definitely justified and, as such, need to be respected, they are not in the scope of this paper.

Dante elaborates the majority of his philosophical theses in books III and IV of the *Convivio*, which was written during his exile, roughly between 1304 and 1307. When examining book III, we immediately discover a quite exact definition of love: "Love, taken in its true sense and subtly considered, is nothing but the spiritual union of the soul and the thing which is loved" (*Convivio* III. 2). According to Dante, in the case of living beings, love is always directed at something. Plants are usually attached to a certain place, animals are able to express emotions towards one another, whereas humans love creatures that are close to their Creator, God. That is why men direct their love at the idealised, angelic woman, who, by her heavenly nature, is a creature close to God. Consequently, by spiritually uniting with the heavenly woman, men find the Lord as well. Eventually this completes the logical circle that forms the basis of the philosophy of love Dante shared with the stilnovists (Cseke 2011. 269), which is seen as either impressive or nearly inhuman depending on the viewpoint. Naturally, this kind of rationalisation of love has its own literary background. The biggest bestseller of its time, *Roman de la Rose*, written in langue d'oïl, also tried to rationalise love, and present the burning, passionate, instinctive feeling as something negative. This idea appears in the anonymous sonnet cycle, *Fiore o detto d'Amore* as well, which some actually attribute to Dante himself.

Concerning the human soul Dante argues that it is the most noble among the souls of all beings, as it is the human soul that was given the largest portion of divine nature, and since its existence also depends on God, its aim is to form a spiritual union with Him. According to the poet, this reveals a lot about humans: "This union is what we call love, whereby we are able to know

<sup>1</sup> Pascoli 1898.

<sup>2</sup> Guénon 1925.

<sup>3</sup> Valli 1928.



the quality of the soul within by seeing outside it those things which it loves" (*Convivio* III. 2). Indeed, this feeling cannot be born in any soul. In order to explain the phenomenon, Dante refers to Aristotle's treatise *On the Soul*, according to which the soul has three potentials; namely, nutritive, sensible and rational. The human soul includes all three potentials and is the most perfect, and through the potential of reasoning the human soul is part of the divine nature as eternal intelligence.

Besides being Dante's most well-known work, the *Comedy* is also his last work. Accordingly, the content and images depicted in the poem reflect a mature Dante. From certain points of view, however, the work reaches back to the basics, thus providing a framework and – unbeknownst to Dante himself – a closing chapter for his entire œuvre. After several decades of not mentioning Beatrice, she unexpectedly reappears in the *Comedy*, and with her come stilnovist themes again, such as the concept of the noble heart or the image of the angel-like woman. Naturally, Beatrice is not depicted in the same way as she was in *The New Life*. Dante suggests that after her death, the lady rose to the kingdom of heaven to help and, if needed, redirect men who once adored her to the right earthly path. It is known that based on the fiction of the *Divine Comedy* it was Beatrice who assured that Dante would not get lost once and for all in the dark wood symbolising sin, and that, as such, following the purge that was the journey through the afterlife, Dante would deservedly reach the Earthly Paradise. Beatrice's appearance is therefore understood as the victory of the angel-like woman concept: she is the one with whom Dante proves – even if within the framework of literary fiction – the verity of the idea that he had established in his stilnovist period decades earlier.

The elements of the new style can be discovered in several parts of the *Comedy* but are most pronounced in the *terza rima*s of Canto V in the *Inferno*. In this canto, Dante does not apply his stilnovist theories to his own love – as he did in *The New Life* – but rather to the love of Paolo and Francesca. The reader might get the impression that Dante intended to experiment with the ideas he developed while writing *The New Life* in one of the cantos of the *Divine Comedy*, and then examine it from this external point of view.

If we take a look at Canto V of the *Inferno*, we can immediately see that the sinful souls are tossed and whirled by the winds, which is a *contrapasso* referring to their sin of loving improperly and immorally, just drifting with the feeling. In other words we can say that these souls experienced their feelings according to the antique concept of love, and therefore subordinated their rational mind to carnal pleasures, which equated to a moral failure. Dante discovers the characters of Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Polenta among the lascivious. The love story of Paolo and Francesca was regarded – especially in the age of romanticism – as a symbol of the glorious victory of love over feudal and dynastic conventions, which might convey a message to the modern man as well.





Some argue that this romantic reading, which was still quite popular even during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reflects an obsolete, honeyed and improper interpretation, and overlooks the real concepts of stilnovismo.

Francesca's famous anaphoric lines read as follows:

Love, that can quickly seize the gentle heart,  
took hold of him because of the fair body  
taken from me – how that was done still wounds me.  
Love, that releases no beloved from loving,  
took hold of me so strongly through his beauty  
that, as you see, it has not left me yet.  
Love led the two of us unto one death.  
(*Inf.* V. 100–106.)

Francesca demonstrates that in terms of stilnovismo she possesses relatively good, but not sufficient knowledge. The quoted *terza rima*s recall certain lines of Guinizzelli's love lyric. However, despite a thorough knowledge of these lines, the interpretation is wrong. Béla Hoffmann argues that the interpretation of Francesca is a superficial one, which tries to apply transcendence-based stilnovist ideas to her emotions towards Paolo, conceived in sin and infidelity. Of course, we could interfere and ask how the love between Paolo and Francesca could be sinful given that it was based on pure emotions, and as such could not be displeasing for stilnovists either. But this reasoning would omit the principle of the new style which states that love may only be born in a pure heart, and this purity precludes any infidelity. And besides falling into the sin of lust, the sinners in Canto V of the *Inferno* were also unfaithful: Francesca sinned against marital fidelity, whilst Paolo – by reciprocating his sister-in-law's feelings – sinned against fraternal fidelity. After hearing Francesca's monologue, the poet bends his head in shame:

These words were borne across from them to us.  
When I had listened to those injured souls,  
I bent my head and held it low until  
the poet asked of me: "What are you thinking?"  
(*Inf.* V. 108–111)

Francesca's deviation from the right path reminds Dante of the path he almost went along. As if suddenly, from the depths of our mind, Dante's words from the dark wood echo in our ears: "I was so full of sleep just at / the point where I abandoned the true path" (*Inf.* I. 11–12). The words of Vergilius when introducing the unearthly traveller to Cato of Utica also come to mind: "This man had yet to see his final evening? / but, through his folly, little time was left / before



he did – he was so close to it” (*Purg.* I. 58–60). Dante and Francesca share a thing in common: abandoning the right path to walk towards failure. But there is also an important difference between them. As opposed to Francesca, Dante repents of his sins, which comes thanks to the angelic woman, Beatrice. This angel of his is no other female creature but the woman he fell in love with back when he was a child, and who intervened at the right moment so that Dante would not get lost in the dark wood, symbolising sin, in Canto I of the *Inferno*. Beatrice, worthy of her name, meaning “she who brings happiness”, indeed guides Dante to salvation and close to God. When the woman appears we read “Benedictus qui venis” (*Purg.* XXX. 19). With this sentence the poet undoubtedly evokes Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem from the Gospel of John: “Benedictus qui venis in nomine Domini” (John 12,13). Thereby Beatrice, like a new saviour, takes Christ’s place (Cseke 2011. 266).

When seeing Dante again, the angel-like creature reprimands him for his deviation:

arrow of things deceptive struck you, then  
you surely should have lifted up your wings  
to follow me, no longer such a thing.  
No green young girl or other novelty –  
such brief delight – should have weighed down your wings  
awaiting further shafts. The fledgling bird  
(*Purg.* XXXI. 55–60).

In conclusion we can say that in the *Divine Comedy* we are witness to the distinction made between two widespread concepts of troubadour poetry, *fin’amor* and *fals’amor* (‘true love’ and ‘false love’). Following the death of Beatrice, Dante indeed chose the wrong path, and having forgotten the woman, turned towards *fals’amor*, which means he started to look for the company of women such as Donna gentile who could never have led him to God. But *fals’amor* can be seen between Paolo and Francesca as well. In the *terza rima*s of the *Divine Comedy* Francesca tries to justify her own sinful love with the stilnovist concept of love. However, this is a mistake as she cannot differentiate between the stilnovist *fin’amor* and the *fals’amor* she experienced.

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KORNÉLIA HORVÁTH

## On Imaginative Activity in Dante's *Vita Nuova*

It was Guglielmo Gorni, who shortly examined the manifestations and functions of vision and imaginative activity in Dante's work in his commentary, added to Dante's work and published in 1996 (Alighieri 1996a. VI–XXXII). Gorni in his analysis examines only the two first visions of the hero-narrator. He declares in a well-established manner that the “mirabil vision” (“mirabile visione”) in the end of the work, which is interpreted by a quite high number of scholars as Dante's allusion to the preparation for writing the *Comedy*, has a different character and aim from the two first visions, appearing in the narration as a description the hero-narrator's dreams. We accept this difference made by Gorni and consider the last paragraph or chapter of the *Vita Nuova* as a metapoetic allusion of Dante-author.

However, there can be found more references to the acts of imagination, vision and fantasy, and it seems worth to make a potential difference between them. Apart from the first two “real” visions of the text, the words *vision*, *imagination* and sometimes the word *fantasy* figure as the work's repeating words. Let's see these word-appearances, and afterwards we will examine the first two visions at the beginning of the text, emphasized by Gorni:<sup>1</sup>

1. *imagination*: XV. (8) “sì tosto com'io *imagino* la sua mirabile bellezza, sì tosto mi giugne uno desiderio de *vederla*...”

2. *imagination* and *fantasy*: XXIII. (14)

Così cominciando ad errare la mia *fantasia*, venni ch'io non sapea ove io mi fosse; e *vedere mi pareva* donne andare scapigliate piangendo per via, maravigliosamente triste; e *pareami vedere* lo sole oscurare, sì che le stelle si mostravano di colore ch'elle mi

<sup>1</sup> As it well-known, Gorni in his study developed a new numbering of the chapters of Dante's work on a philological basis. In mine analysis the first Roman numbers sign the traditional chapters, while the Arabic ones follow the so-called Gorninian paragraphs.



faceano giudicare che piangessero; e *pareami* che li uccelli volando per l'aria cadesero morti, e che fossero grandissimi terremuoti. E maravigliandomi in cotale *fantasia*, e paventando assai, *imaginai* alcuno amico che mi venisse a dire: “Or non sai? La tua mirabile donna è partita di questo secolo”. Allora cominciai a piangere molto pietosamente; e non solamente piangea *ne la imaginazione*, ma piangea con li occhi, bagnandoli di vere lagrime. *Io imaginava di guardare* verso lo cielo [...] e fue sì forte la erronea *fantasia* [...] e sì forte era la mia *imaginazione*. [...] E parlandomi così, sì mi cessò la forte *fantasia*...

(And see the the hero-narrator's reflection in the next, XXIV. chapter (15): “vana *imaginazione*”.)

3. *imagination*: XXIV. (15) “mi giunse *un'imaginazione* d'Amore...”

4. *imagination*: XXXIX. (28) “quasi ne l'ora de la nona, una forte *imaginazione* in me, che mi parve vedere questa gloriosa Beatrice con quelle vestimenta sanguigne co le quali appariva prima a li occhi miei...”

5. *vision*: XLII. (31) “Appresso questo sonetto appare a me una mirabile *visione*, ne la quale io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamente trattare di lei.”

We can see that the word *imagination* is prominent in the *Vita Nuova*, and partly followed by the words *vision* and *fantasy*. But what about with the two first visions in the first part of the work? The first one can be read in the first paragraph (by the original philological statement in the 3rd chapter) when the hero-narrator dreams that Amor is bringing the sleeping Beatrice in his arms to him; afterwards Amor wakes her up and makes her to eat the Dante-hero's heart.

III. (1) E pensando di lei, mi sopraggiunse uno soave sonno, ne lo quale mi apparve una maravigliosa *visione*: che me pareva vedere ne la mia camera una nebula di colore di fuoco, dentro a la quale io discerneva una figura d'uno signore di pauroso aspetto a chi la guardasse [...]

E mantenente cominciai a pensare, e trovai che l'ora ne la quale m'era questa *visione* apparita, era la quarta de la notte stata, sì che appare manifestamente ch'ella fue la prima ora de le nove ultime ore de la notte.

However enigmatic this vision might seem, we know that it is a literary *topos*: Gorni mentions as a possible sort of it for example the Provençal Guilhelm de Cabenstanz's poetry (Alighieri 1996a. XXXII). From another aspect, the act of eating of the other's heart can be interpreted as an event of union of two persons. And the union between Dante-hero and Beatrice constitutes the main topic



and the aim of the whole work called *Vita Nuova*. Consequently, this initial vision takes the role of the motive power of the narration in the work.

The other one uses all the formulations of *imagination* and *vision*:

IX. (4) E però lo dolcissimo signore, lo quale mi signoreggiava per la virtù de la gentilissima donna, ne la mia *imaginazione* apparve come peregrino leggermente vestito e di vili drappi. [...] *A me parve* che Amore mi chiamasse, e dicessemi queste parole [...] E dette queste parole, disparve questa mia *imaginazione*.

XII. (5) Avenne quasi nel mezzo de lo mio dormire che *me parvevedere* ne la mia camera lungo me sedere uno giovane vestito di bianchissime vestimenta, e pensando molto quanto a la vista sua, mi riguardava là ov'io giacea [...]

Ondo io ricordandomi, trovai che questa *visione* m'era apparita ne la nona ora del die.

(In XIII. [6] Appresso di questo soprascritta *visione*...)

And we should stop here for a while, because the construction of the *Vita Nuova* from a certain point of view seems to represent the composition of an archaic or mythical narration. As Olga Frejdenberg, researcher of the origins of Antique Greek literature states, the formation of narration has as his origo the *image*. She emphasizes that visions representing the ancient forms of narration and the stories with visions have a visual character and testimony that the origin of narration is hidden in *showing an event, seen personally by the story-teller* (Фрейденберг 2008b. 353–354). So the way of creation of the ancient story leads from the „show” of a vision to narration, more simply: from image to words. The so called „I-narration” has been created by the image or images of the world, firstly in form of ekphrasis and vision, and afterwards has become narration.

Still remaining at the thought of myth, we can admit with Kerényi and Eliade, that images and symbols represent a special, not conceptual, not rational form of cognition. This revelation seems to repeat in the modern hermeneutic theory, too: Gottfried Boehm argues that cognitive power of *deixis* consists in the act of showing: the shown object shows itself as it is alike. The act of showing constructs a new space for cognition, essential feature of which can be named *intentionality* (Boehm 2014. 19–36).

If the essence of an ancient narration can be revealed in the show of a vision, of an image seen by the story-teller, it can be identified with exploration of Logos, as Frejdenberg writes. Narration, when its cognitive essence changes, loses his nature of Logos and “image”. In that moment narration remains like an image, but, in the meantime, it obtains a conceptual nature: it can be revealed in the appearance of a *two time-representation*, in representation of past and present (Фрейденберг 2008b. 359–360).



The *vision* interrupts narration and interprets its topic. In that way results a conceptual generalization. The show of a vision gradually becomes a comparison, then allegory or symbol, and, in the end, a metaphor (Фрейденберг 2008b. 353). Dante's *Vita Nuova* in this sense may be considered as an example for the origin of allegory, symbol and, last but not least, the origin of metaphor.

The archaic narration emerges from atemporality. Narration by our modern concepts reaches its form when past become separated from present. The forms of atemporality of narration are the *frame* and the visioned *image* (Фрейденберг 2008b. 353). The role of the image seems clear in Dante's work (it is quite enough to think about the two first visions or the images drawn by the hero-narrator); what regards the frame, it can be easily demonstrated, considering Beatrice's two imaginary appearances in the beginning and quite in the end of the text, in both text-places in blood-coloured clothes. And also the Latin words in the beginning and in the end of the text ("*Incipit vita nova*", "*qui est per omnia secula benedictus*") fulfils the function of frame.

The archaic narration is a mythical story-telling which has well-formed characterizing features. One of these is that the story "speaks" about the hero, *who is the narrator itself*. The talk is going on the narrator, personally, and on his acts and passive behaviours, victories and faults. In that process direct speech begins to separate within itself the indirect narration from the absolved or experienced events (Фрейденберг 2008b. 364). Consequently, the image gradually becomes to be a *concept* in the process of narration.

It is worth to consider the role of the "explicit images" articulated in the text. The second one in the XL. chapter (or in the 29th paragraph) does not describe, only mentions the famous image of Christ, conserved in Veronica's scarf. We could say, here the word *image* realizes his archaic meaning: the image means *imitation*, an exact copy of the "original", of the „real thing" (Фрейденберг 2008a. 307). As Mircea Eliade stresses, the word *imago* (*image*) has a linguistic relationship with the word *imitor*, meaning 'imitate, reproduce' (Eliade 1991. 24). But, as it is known, this reproduction obtains a new character in the artistic work: the factual *mimesis* of reality becomes an illusory reflection of a real phenomenon. In the new phase of literature the image does not aspire to follow "truly" the so called reality any more: the interpretative way of thinking becomes much more important. And, as Frejdenberg emphasizes, this is the way of the *generation of a metaphor*: the original meaning and the meaning of its transmission were identical earlier, but this identity was later replaced by the illusion of it, by the illusory appearance of imagination. This transmission could not be effectuated if the concrete and real identity (Frejdenberg's example: the way, the road as a factual road) had not been changed to an apparent and abstract identity (the way, the road as the "way of life" or "way of thinking"). So in the artistic work *mimesis* achieves a new nature: this is the starting point to construct the "image" of the world which is already intentionally illusory and can "embrace" every visual





form of reality (Фрейдсберг 2008a. 308–310). But one can realize a quite similar thought in Ricœur's works (Ricœur 1975a, Ricœur 1975b).

After this theoretical argumentation the text-places articulating the words *imagination* or "*I imagine(d)*" in Dante's work can be read as signs of a double or metaphorical meaning, as signs of the narrator's creative poetic activity. Since Dante here renews the medieval genre *prosiemtrum*, treating and explaining his own lyrical pieces, constructing an original and personal story not only about Beatrice, but first of all about himself. In the *Vita Nuova* one can definitely separate the so called schematic *sujet*, inherited from the Middle Ages, and the original and personal poetic achievement (Веселовский 1940. 493–501). The *artist creans* appeared towards the end of the Middle Ages as a sort of *alter deus*, as it is often declared. Umberto Eco also sees a new approach to the artistic process, citing Purgatory's twentieth chapter 52–54, where the poet declares that he conserves what Amor dictates to him word by word. In this gesture we can reveal a very new consideration of the act of invention:

(Ma di s'ì veggio qui colui che fore  
Trasse le nove rime, cominciando  
"Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore".)  
E io a lui: „I' mi son un, che quando  
Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo  
Ch'e' dita dentro vo significando.  
(*Purg.* XXIV. 49–54 [Dante and Bonagiunta].)

From this aspect John Took's opinion can be evaluated very considerable: he directly interprets the *Vita Nuova* „as Dante's characteristic tendency towards self-organization” by the way of “self-interrogation” and “self-education in and through the words” (Took 1990. 43–44). And that is why we can't agree with the statement of Leo Spitzer who stresses – in one of his studies on the *Vita Nuova* – that fantastic activity of a poet is only a work of memory, a reproducing memory. In his opinion, Dante speaking about visions should be conceived only as an act of repeating, without the liberty of poetry bearing *hic et nunc* (Spitzer 1992. 54).<sup>2</sup>

It is rather interesting that Spitzer uses only the word *fantasy* and not *imagination*, however there should be some difference between the structure of sense in the two lexems. The word *fantasy* appears in Dante's work only in the 23rd chapter (in the 14th paragraph) and seems to have some “negative” character (“errare la mia fantasia”, “erronea fantasia”, and when Dante uses the word *imagination*

<sup>2</sup> “L'attività fantastica del poeta si presenta solo come un ricordare, per così dire, riproduttivo: strano stato di cose per un poeta che a noi pare aver difeso e affermato come nessun altro il diritto all'attività produttiva della fantasia umana [...] Quando Dante racconta una visione, ciò è per lui un ripetere; non domina in lui la libertà della poesia che nasce *hic et nunc*.”

as a synonym of that „mistaking” fantasy, imagination also gets a negative attribute: “vana imaginazione”) (Iser 1993).<sup>3</sup> As if fantasy was a quite arbitrary, a freely rambling activity without any limit, or to say, without a *form*, which could give it its frames. While imagination appears as an active creating potentiality which forms as lyric poems of the opera, as the narration, and, finally, the whole work. We can remember Eliade’s words, emphasizing that imaginative faculty makes certain the balance between the individual and collective psyches; who has an imaginative power, enjoys a rich internal world and an endless and spontaneous stream of images. However, spontaneity does not mean an arbitrary fantastic activity. The word *imagination* derives from *imago*, as Eliade stresses, so our imagination imitates, reproduces, reactivates and repeats the “Images” as models without end. To have an imaginative activity it means to see the world in his totality. That is why the power and “mission” of the images reveal and show everything what resists to conceptual thinking (Eliade 1991. 24).

Turning back to the second vision of our hero-narrator in the XII. chapter (or in the 5. paragraph), here we can see (or read) Amor’s another visit where he carries on talks with Dante. This vision has a significant importance from the aspect of the linguistic processes of the text, since Amor at first starts to speak in Latin language and Dante does not understand the meaning of his sentence, so he asks him in Italian (“»Che è ciò, signore, che mi parli con tanta oscuritade?»”). After that Amor answers to him in Vulgar language, too, and this fact is stressed in the narration: “E quelli mi dicea in parole volgari...” Moreover, Amor here calls upon Dante to write poems “in rhymes”, so that in Vulgar (Italian) language and gives him an advice which can be considered as a little lyrical theory, since he advises him the adequate use of the figure of apostrophe (“queste parole fa che siano quasi un mezzo, sì che tu non parli a lei immediatamente, che non è degno; e non le mandare in parte, senza me, ove potessero essere intese da lei...”). So this vision appears directly as a start of the conscious poetic activity of the hero-narrator (Manni 2013. 31–36).<sup>4</sup>

From the examples of *vision*, *imagination*, *fantasia* and *image*, enumerated in the beginning of this paper, the 40. chapter is still missing.<sup>5</sup> This chapter explicates the topic of *drawing* and *figure* – the latter can be understood as visual,

<sup>3</sup> It is well-known that some theories of literature define “imaginery” as an authentic territory of poetic activity – see for example, Wolfgang Iser.

<sup>4</sup> The appearances of the number 9, aiming to Beatrice, create more connection between the two dreams of the Dante-hero-narrator. As for the importance of vulgar language, see one of the most recent publications: Manni 2013, with special emphasis on the pages 31–32.

<sup>5</sup> XXXIV. (23) “io mi sedea [...] ricordandomi a lei, *disegnava* uno angelo sopra certe tovallette [...] ritornai a la mia opera, cioè del *disegnare figure* d’angeli: e facendo ciò, mi venne uno pensiero di *parole*, quasi per annovale, e scrivere a costoro li quali erano venuti a me; e dissi allora questo sonetto, lo quale comincia: *Era venuta*; lo quale ha due cominciamenti...”

XL. (29) “in quello tempo che molta gente va per *vedere* quella *immagine* benedetta la quale Iesu Cristo lasciò a noi per essempla de la sua bellissima *figura*...”

drawn figure, or as a spoken or written one, too –, and finally the subject of words. It seems to represent the change of narration from the image to the word, a crossing from the drawn, pictorial figures to the figures of speech and language, and consequently, to the creation of lyric poetry. (“ritornaimi a la mia opera, cioè del *disegnare figure* d’angeli: e facendo ciò, mi venne uno pensiero di *parole*, quasi per annovale, e *scrivere* a costoro li quali erano venuti a me; e dissi allora questo sonetto, lo quale comincia: *Era venuta*; lo quale ha due cominciamenti...”). As if it demonstrated the division of the artistic activity into to „parts”: into a visual, pictorial and a verbal one. Consequently, it cannot be only an accident that we can find the only lyric poem (a sonnet) with two beginnings exactly here. This double-beginning sonnet seems to symbolize the reduplication of the imaginary artistic activity. Nearly like Boehm illuminated the strict connection between *image* and *word*, with the help of etymology: he revealed that in the most of Indo-European languages the verbs meaning ‘to say, to tell’ or ‘to show’ have a common root. This root is *dik*, which in the Sanskrit (*dic*) means ‘to show, to let see’, in the ancient Greek *daikumi* has the sense ‘I show’, in the Latin *dico*-, ‘I say’, and in the Gothic language *gateikon* means ‘to show, to sign, to publish, to utter’ (Boehm 2014. 35).

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## Dante Alighieri: *Comedy* I. *Inferno*. Commentary

Edited by János Kelemen, in collaboration with József Nagy.

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The present volume is a significant result of a substantial research-project which has the aim to produce and to publish the first Hungarian Commentary to the *Comedy*.<sup>1</sup>

It is known that Dante's poem has had several literary – complete or partial – translations into Hungarian. Among these, from the point of view of scholarly accuracy, the most important translations are those of Károly Szász (1886–1899), of Mihály Babits (1912–1922) and – recently – those of Sándor Szabadi, of Ferenc Baranyi, of Ádám Nádasdy, and of Gyula Simon. These translations contain notes which give some basic information for an adequate interpretation of Dante's work, but among these authors it was first of all Károly Szász who attempted to develop a commentary to his own Hungarian translation of this œuvre. The par excellence classical Hungarian translation of the

Comedy is undoubtedly that of Mihály Babits, but – besides the fact that this scholar published important studies on the *Comedy* – in the edition of his own Hungarian translation of the *Comedy* Babits used exclusively notes containing only essential information. So the main predecessor is the exegetic work of Károly Szász, but obviously the authors of the present volume – who constitute the research-team of the Hungarian Dante Society (János Kelemen, József Nagy, Norbert Mátyus, Béla Hoffmann, Eszter Draskóczy, Tihamér Tóth, Márk Berényi) – used mainly, as sources (besides the results of the research on Dante in Hungary), some of the most important works of international Dante-studies, which is evident on the basis of the huge bibliography of this volume.

The volume is structured in the following way: for each Canto of the *Inferno* it prints the main Italian text of the Petrocchi-edition (of 1996) in parallel with the Hungarian paraphrase (or rough translation), with the commentary – in footnotes – to the Hungarian text (with the necessary references to the Italian text), and finally with an essay which gives an overall interpretation of the Canto in question.

As it is rightly stressed by the editors and by Norbert Mátyus in the *Preface*, the

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aim of the Hungarian Commentary to the *Comedy* is essentially to make possible for Hungarian readers (researchers, university and high school students, general readers) to grasp the main semantic layers (besides the mechanisms which generate certain meanings) of one of the most important works of world literature, obviously on the basis of the results of classical, modern and contemporary Dante-research, establishing this way a new foundation for the scientific approach to the Dantean œuvre in Hungary. It's clear that without such scientific analysis and reflections any possible future attempts at literary translation can hardly have good results. For this reason, in the analysis and in the commentaries to the Cantos the treatment of problems related to literary translation keeps recurring.

On a more general level, in the present volume the analysis of the Dantean text shows necessarily the traits of an inter-disciplinary approach, with ample references to the historical, philosophical, theological and religious-doctrinal aspects, besides the political, juridical, medical, literary, artistic and musical-historical aspects of the *Comedy* and of the whole work of Dante.

The latest Dante-studies which had the aim to contribute to the edition of the Hungarian Commentary of the *Comedy* – i.e., studies published since 2004, year of

the foundation of the Hungarian Dante Society on the initiative of Professor János Kelemen – received a further impulse by the oncoming seventh Dantean centenary, which will certainly have (and has already) a deep cultural impact internationally.

As it is reiterated by the authors of the *Preface*, it can be hoped that by the present volume (and by the following two – *Purgatory* and *Paradise* –, in preparation with the same editorial principles) Hungarian Dante-scholars will have the opportunity to preserve and simultaneously to renew the scientific and artistic legacy of the great Italian poet, philosopher-theologian and political thinker.

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## Summaries

MASSIMO VERDICCHIO

### **Aristotle in the *Convivio* and in the *Commedia***

Aristotle's influence on Dante's work is undisputed especially in the *Convivio*, but it is much less so in the *Commedia*. The reasons have been explained in terms of the notion of happiness which, according to Aristotle, is man's greatest desire in this life. In the Christian universe of the *Commedia* true happiness is possible only in the afterlife and in the contemplation of God. While this view is certainly correct, in the paper I show that Aristotle's influence continues in the *Monarchia* but also in the *Commedia* where Aristotle is present in Dante's poetic "philosophy" or the wisdom of the "donna gentile."

GÁBOR BORBÉLY

### **United with the Soul, Separated from the organs: Dante and Aquinas** (*Purgatorio*, Canto XXV. 61–66)

As is well known, Bruno Nardi made serious efforts to show that Dante deviated the most from Aquinas regarding the origin of the intellective soul. In this paper, I have no intention of measuring the imaginary distance of Dante from Aquinas or from anyone else. My aim is rather to point out that the way Aquinas and Dante represent the error of Averroes displays a structural isomorphy, which is specific enough to let us conclude that in this crucial respect Dante – directly or through intermediaries – followed Aquinas.

JÓZSEF PÁL

### **"The Most Secret Chamber of the Heart" (*Secretissima camera de lo cuore*)** Poetry and Theology in the State-Changing Cantos of the *Commedia*

In the Limbus (*Inf.*, Canto IV) Dante meets two groups of people from the ancient pagan world, the group of poets and the group of philosophers. While he accompanies the former group and proceeds with them towards the light (Christianity), he does not in any way seek the possibility of conversation with the latter, he sees them only from a distance. Dante explains the reason for this later, in Earthly Paradise: the intuitive poetry (Virgil, Statius) comprehends the Christian truth far better than mere speculation. The rational explanation of the world is uncertain and can only be applied to earthly phenomena. Furthermore, it is to be seen that at the top of the Purgatorium's mountain prepared



for man before the Fall, this rational way of thinking is incapable of fully grasping the original nature. Finally, the Paradise journey to see God is open only to believers who are nourished by the “Angels’ bread”.

GYULA KLIMA

### **When Hell Freezes Over**

Science and Theology in Dante’s *Inferno*

To pose the task of this paper in one question, we should ask: how come Dante’s *Inferno* is icy, despite the common imagination of a fiery Hell? Or to articulate the task a little better: what are Dante’s possible reasons for depicting Hell the way he does; are they rooted in his philosophy, science, theology, or mere poetic imagination?

ÉVA VÍGH

### **The Three Beasts**

Animal Symbolism and its Sources in the *Comedy*

The content-form analysis of the *Comedy*, the hermeneutical diversity of texts and contexts, the rich symbolism of religious-historical-poetic images and symbol system in general offered and still offer endless possibilities of interpretation of Dante’s conception of nature. This paper points to some sources of Dante’s animal symbolism, a topic that has become the subject of increased attention and interest in recent years. For the sake of demonstration, I consciously selected the three animals of the *Comedy* that are – in terms of their moral and political symbolism – certainly the most famous ones in the *Comedy*. The biblical, literary, and encyclopaedic antecedents of the *lonza*/leopard/mottled feline, the lion, and the wolf, as well as all other sources indicated in this paper are useful resources for other specimens in the Dantean fauna as well. In any case, the polysemic richness of the animals and the nuance of their meanings offer further complex analytical possibilities for those pursuing this line of research.

ESZTER DRASKÓCZY

### **Diseases in the Counterfeiters’ *Borgia* of Dante’s *Inferno***

Dante’s Literary Sources, Contemporary Medical Knowledge and Theological Symbolism

The paper analyses Dante’s literary and historical sources for the depiction of the diseases presented in the tenth *bolgia* of Hell, comparing the Dantean representations with contemporary medical knowledge and the ambiguous considerations of medieval theology concerning illnesses.



MÁRTON KAPOSÍ

**Visions of the Secular State and of the Earthly Paradise in Dante's Perspective**

In Dante's entire œuvre there is an ambition to inspire tremendous changes among his contemporaries both as private individuals (by committing the fewest possible sins and by perfecting their personalities to the greatest extent) and as citizens participating in public life (by shaping their society in ways that minimize conflicts and maximize fairness), as he believed this was the way for them to attain true happiness. In two of his works (*De Monarchia* and *Purgatorio* XXVIII–XXXIII) Dante offers a detailed blueprint of the practical ways humans can make their lives here on earth more meaningful and happier while following their own path to celestial happiness in the afterlife. The society of the Christian world would need to be transformed in such a way that all its countries merge into a single great *monarchy* ruled by an *emperor* who, thanks to his supreme position, his wisdom rooted in ample philosophical knowledge, and his love for his people (*recta dilectio*) could prevent conflicts and wars of conquest motivated by *unbridled greed* (*blanda cupiditas*) and create *lasting peace* as he exercises his supreme secular power justly, relying on the conscientious and cooperative citizens of his realm. This scenario is not unfamiliar to human society. In fact, such an ideal monarchy had existed before in human history: at the beginning of the *imperial era* of Rome (which was also the dawn of Christianity). But social peace and happiness existed among people in other periods since the creation of the world: during the *Golden Age* under the rule of Saturn (according to classical pagan mythology) as well as during the time of the first couple living in the *Earthly Paradise* (according to the Bible). These historical examples led Dante to the realisation that, owing to their *original nature*, human beings are peaceful and human societies are *unified* and properly organised, and their essential nature can best manifest itself under the rule of a secular, monarchic state (while the pope should only be concerned with providing spiritual guidance to people). According to Dante, a well-managed monarchy can guarantee the lasting peace and humane social relations required to ensure that humankind can indeed fulfil its *pre-ordained end*: to live a life here on earth in sinless joy, making the most out of all the gifts and opportunities granted to it by God, and pave its own way to celestial happiness in the hereafter.

JÁNOS KELEMEN

**A Semiotics of Prohibition**Boundaries and Exclusion in the *Divine Comedy*

Dante's *Comedy* contains, among other things, a semiotics for interdiction, delimitation, discrimination, exclusion and expulsion. In the paper are examined different kinds of borders separating zones of the other world. The characteristics of the construction of space are expressions of punishment and sin. They can be analyzed as signs and symbols of moral, political and social discrimination, typical of medieval, and not only medieval social order.



JÓZSEF NAGY

**Lectura Dantis: Canto XII and Canto XVII of the *Inferno***

The paper presents a short analysis of Canto XII and of Canto XVII of the *Inferno*, focusing on the study of the sins and of the expiations of some of the protagonists of these Cantos, on the basis of the exegeses of some leading Dante scholars.

BÉLA HOFFMANN

**Canto XIX of the *Inferno***

After having defined the basic subject matter of the Canto and having emphasized intertextuality, obviously linked to the Holy Scripture, the author focuses on the rhythmic-linguistic organization of the text as a relevant factor of the narrative aptitude, demonstrating at the same time that the sphere of meanings in this Canto, also because of the importance of the treated subjects, can be taken as one of the inspiring sources of the same *Comedy*. By an explicit allusion to the specific character of the opening, the author analyzes both the role of the apostrophe in the narrative rhythm and the role of the rhymes, which are able to predetermine – by a gradual extension of the sense – the dissolution of the narrative thread. By interpreting the literal sense of the enigmatic third tercet – which seems to be an extraneous unit in the text corpus of the Canto – the present analysis starts from the (possibly) allegorical sense, and finds a consistent connection of the tercet in question with the main subject matter, using the relationship between verbs – for example the correlation between *avvolterare e sgannare* – to understand later the sense of the episode (quoted by Dante) about the broken amphora as a warning toward the Church and the believers, fallen in a mistake with regard to the interpretation of its right functioning, as well as an act consciously undertaken by the author's *self*. A basic accomplishment of this study is highlighting the „contrapuntal” connection of the Holy Spirit's Baptism to the sin of simony.

NORBERT MÁTYUS

**Oracles and Exegetes in the *Comedy***

I begin my analysis by presenting the structural role of the opening tercet in the definition of the subject. I then provide a definition of the concepts of prediction, of scientific research and of prophecy, taking in consideration the contemporary scientific context – in particular the texts of Thomas Aquinas – and indicate that on the basis of the semantic strata of the first terce and the conceptual definitions, the relator, i.e., Dante-narrator, assumes the figure or personality of the prophet and of the erudite. Subsequently I analyze how the poetic illustration of divining/prophecy is affected by the paradoxical character of this very activity, presented by Dante, i.e., the sense in which the presentation of the oracles itself will be paradoxical. Finally, I try to grasp this same paradoxical character in the leading role of Virgil.





ZSUZSANNA TÓTH-IZSÓ

### Human and Divine Time in the Comedy as Viewed by Psychosynthesis

The paper addresses human and divine time in the Comedy relying extensively on Giovanni Papini's and Roberto Assagioli's views. Giovanni Papini said once that "*humans are composed by two elements: time and eternity*," Chronos and Kairos, metrological time and eternity, human and divine. Theologically speaking we can say that while in the world of Chronos causality (or karma) rules, in the dimension of Kairos finality does. According to Vacchelli's interpretation, the salvation is right there in the first minute spent in the "*selva oscura*" where Dante finds himself. He really does find himself in the spiritual way: he finds his "eternal" part. Assagioli finds human (chronological) time very important to achieve psychological and spiritual goals that is to realise personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis. Assagioli, as a psychotherapist, had always considered *The Divine Comedy* as a guide and elaborated his "*Dante exercises*". The paper aims to show how the Comedy as an outstanding example of descending psychosynthesis transforms to be a guide for readers who intend to realise an ascendent psychosynthesis. Furthermore, this approach may offer new interpretation possibilities.

MÁRK BERÉNYI

### The Ethical Aspects of the Concept of "Amore" in Dante's Œuvre

The present study, after reviewing the main pillars and foundation of "*stilnovismo*", examines, on the one hand, how the new style and its underlying philosophical idea appear in Dante Alighieri's works, and on the other, how Dante's concept of love – going beyond the eroticism of classic literature – became the transcendent phenomenon of deliverance that ultimately takes us to God. The detailed analysis addresses relevant paragraphs primarily from *The New Life*, the *Convivio* and the *Divine Comedy*.

KORNÉLIA HORVÁTH

### On Imaginative Activity in Dante's *Vita Nuova*

The paper examines the concept and the interpretative processes of *imagination* in Dante's *Vita Nuova*, revealing the similarity between *imagination* and *vision*, and also the difference of these concepts from *fantasy*, a term also used by Dante. The paper also addresses the connection between the words *image*, *vision*, and the process of narration in the story, and, consequently, the question of imitation and metaphor (based primarily on the works of Frejdenberg and Eliade).

