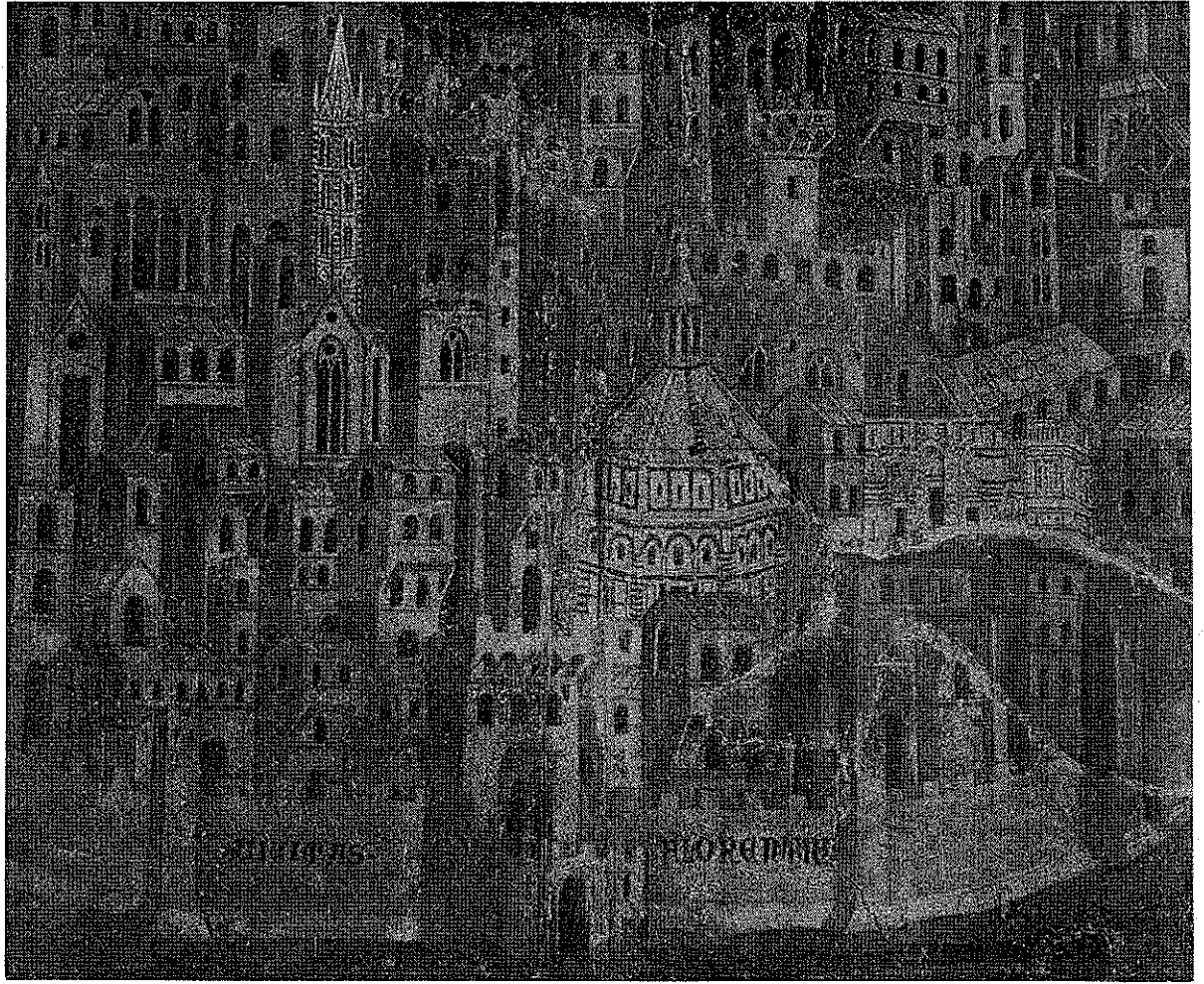


Cesare Barbieri Courier





*Detail of fresco from the Loggia del Bigallo, Florence, 14th c.
One of the earliest known representations of the city of Florence.
Just right of center is the Baptistery where Dante was baptized
and which he affectionately refers to as his "bel San Giovanni."*

Cesare Barbieri Courier

A Special Issue Honoring Dante Alighieri

1265—1965

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The homage of us all

Upon entering the third stage of his journey through Paradise, Dante utters the following invocation to his native zodiacal constellation, the Gemini (the Twins), for aid in the intimidating task of describing the higher celestial regions:

O glorious stars, o light laden with great virtue,
to which I owe all my gifts, whatever they may be!
with you rose and set the sun, father of all mortal
life, when first I breathed the Tuscan air . . .

Thus it is that we learn of the approximate date of the birth of the Florentine poet – sometime between May 21 and June 21 – seven hundred years ago.

Much has been written and spoken this year – and will continue to be – in celebration of this illustrious birthday. Outpourings of praise and admiration have come from every quarter of the globe: books, symposia, lectures, articles, exhibitions, readings, music, dance, illustrations, new editions, translations, postage stamps – every conceivable homage has been paid to honor *l'altissimo poeta*.

And now we too – under the sign of Gemini – add our special issue of *Cesare Barbieri Courier* without elaborate eulogy or extended comment. That Dante still lives in our hearts and minds and that his poem still nourishes us esthetically, intellectually and morally and grows more luminous with age is eloquent enough praise.

Perhaps one of the most apt and arresting comments on the Dante celebrations was made by a student scarcely familiar with Dante who, at the beginning of the commemorative programs at Trinity College this spring, ingenuously observed, "Seven hundred years is a long time! I wonder if there is anyone living among us today who will be honored for what he has written seven hundred years from now!" Out of the mouths of babes . . .

But it is out of the mouths of fellow artists that intimate appreciations and judgments come. Any number of them would do: T. S. Eliot, William Blake, or perhaps someone closer chronologically and temperamentally, a Tuscan and poet too – Michelangelo – a kindred genius who shared, in his own mode of expression, Dante's sense of symmetry and structure. The sonnet that follows (in the translation of John Addington Symonds) by the man whose fourth centenary we celebrated last year expresses most fittingly for this occasion the awe and homage of us all. The neglect of which Michelangelo complains fortunately has been rectified.

From heaven his spirit came, and robed in clay,
The realms of justice and of mercy trod:
Then rose a living man to gaze on God,
That he might make the truth as clear as day.
For that pure star, that brightened with his ray
The undeserving nest where I was born,
The whole wide world would be a prize to scorn;
None but his Maker can due guerdon pay.
I speak of Dante, whose high work remains
Unknown, unhonoured by that thankless brood,
Who only to just men deny their wage.
Were I but he! Born for like lingering pains,
Against his exile coupled with his good
I'd gladly change the world's best heritage!

Glimpses of the Master's Hand:

Dante's Ulysses

by Irma Brandeis

Great poems are never solved. Seven hundred years may pass over them; we may heap their pages with ceremonial talks and volumes until not a phrase remains without its creeper of commentary – but in every new generation the new reader pushes the tangled elucidations aside, reaches for the poem, and sees its own shape, fresh, unspoiled, altogether new.

So it happens with Dante. Nor does it matter how often one comes to re-read him and to arrive at one's own arresting conclusions. Dante does not stand still; he grows; his poem is an open book, not a sealed chamber. The words, the meanings, take on fresh aspects each time one comes to them; it is always as though one had never truly read his *Comedy* before. It is in recognition of this that I have taken up again one of Dante's most familiar chapters – that of Ulysses. . . .

Let me remind you, before I turn to my concrete topic, that the Middle Ages took the idea of authorship with more seriousness, with more veneration than does our own frivolous time. Indeed they cherished the metaphor that saw the universe as a book written by the hand of God. And Dante, when he sat down to his work, recognized the poetic task of drawing order from chaos as analogous to the deed of God in creating cosmos from nothingness. Pride and humility may both flow from such a notion, and you may find both in Dante's undertaking. He intended, and made, a universal microcosm in which every single soul of us has its moral and spiritual locus – and in which we can find ourselves if we dare to look.

Nothing arbitrary about this; nothing left to mere assertion, or to the fly-by-nightness of mere fact. Dante's model is an idea of the universe, not its visible body; and the bodies he shows us are all transparencies through which we read those meanings and relationships he intended us to ponder. What his mind's eye saw he rendered in such unparalleled eloquence of music, action, images and language that we can only miss their profound sense if we refuse them the very great attention they ultimately require. For, yet, however quickly they touch us with their beauty, that is their eventual demand upon us: a great and concentrated attention. Upon receiving it they respond with such outpourings of treasure as stagger the most hopeful and leave the critic short of words.

This gives me my excuse and cue to come at last to my more precise subject. I shall try to show by an illustration from the *Inferno* something of the subtlety and integrity with which Dante's hand moves to give us, upon the seemingly simple narrative surface of the poem, causes for vision and revision until we come to see that the whole vast poem interlocks in every least part and that all the parts are dense with interrelated meanings. Such a poem must be read backwards as well as forwards, from the *Paradiso* to the *Inferno* as well as *vice versa*.

I have said elsewhere that the dramatic scenes of the *Inferno* are themselves images of sin in action, which, if we read them properly, will yield Dante's analyses of the nature of

each sin as it infects the individual human soul. By dramatic means Dante makes us see so deeply into each error that no name for it is necessary, while the conventional names are proved inadequate. Now in this respect there is scarcely a more puzzling and troubling canto than that of the Evil Counselors which introduces Ulysses. Indeed, I have skirted it as cautiously as possible on every occasion until now. For I have found myself asking, along with many other readers: does not the whole scene presented in canto XXVI more exalt Ulysses in our imagination than convince us of his sinfulness? What flaw do we see in his soul? How is his suffering inevitable?

It seems to me that even as we enter upon the scene in *Inferno* XXVI the poem compels us to feel for and not against Ulysses, inviting us by visual effects of mystery and beauty. Let us take it up where we find Virgil and the pilgrim-protagonist of the poem standing on one of the overarching stone spans of Malebolge, gazing down into the eighth of those deep prison-pockets. What they first see Dante puts before us in a comparison:

As many as the fireflies the peasant sees
 when he rests on the hillside (at the hour when
 he who lights the world least hides his faces from us,
 and when the fly gives place to the gnat),
 gazing down along the valley where
 perhaps he harvests and tills the ground:
 so numerous were the flames
 with which the eighth chasm was all gleaming,
 as I saw as soon as I came to where the bottom was
 visible.

(25-33)

This, while by sheer contrast it emphasizes the unnaturalness and timelessness of the place, attracts us by a certain majesty to be felt in the silence and brilliance of these flames as they move along the dark chasm. Nothing within the flames is visible. The Pilgrim leans out eagerly, trying to see, but he is too far above. When Virgil has told him that the flames encase the sinning souls, and that in the double flame now approaching them Diomed and Ulysses are closed up together, the Pilgrim is smitten with such a desire to hear those spirits speak that he "prays and re-prays" Virgil not to make him wait even a moment more. Virgil agrees. On the pretext that these souls, being Greek, might have some difficulty with Italian, he silences the Pilgrim and himself addresses Ulysses and Diomed. With utmost courtesy and humility (startling, in fact, from the author of the *Aeneid*, whose opinion of these heroes was not high), he asks that one of the two tells where and how he vanished from human sight and knowledge.

At once the larger of the two horned tips

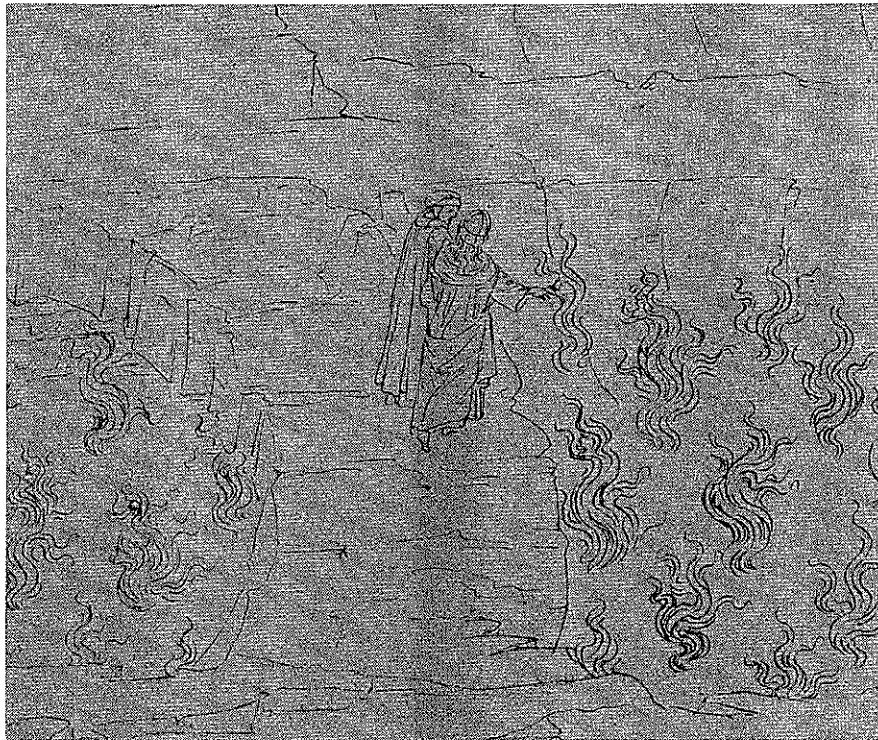
of the flame begins to vibrate into speech, and the strange voice answers Virgil's question. It is impossible not to respond with awe to this whole beginning: the distant approach of the closed and silent flames in the dark valley, the Pilgrim's eagerness, the deference of Virgil, and finally the answering of Ulysses without prelude, without offering his name or race, without self-exoneration, without need to know who it is that has addressed him. Strongly interwoven here is the sense of time—the great ancientness of these Greek spirits in whom some two thousand years have quenched all relationship to the world above-ground, all sense of the other person, whoever he may be.

Here are the greatly famous words of Ulysses:

When I departed from Circe, who more than a year
 kept me with her near Gaeta, before Aeneas had
 given it that name,
 neither the dearness of my son, nor reverence for my
 old father, nor the due love that should have made
 Penelope happy,
 could conquer in me my ardour to win experience of
 the world and of human vice and worth;
 instead I set forth on the high, open sea with one ship
 only and with that shrunken company that still re-
 mained to me.
 Both shores I saw as far as Spain, even to Morocco,
 to the island of the Sardinians and the other isles
 bathed by that sea.
 I and my companions were old and slow when we
 came to that narrow pass where Hercules set land-
 marks
 so that men should not venture further; on the right
 hand I left Seville; on the other I had already left
 Ceuta.
 "O brothers," I said, "who through a hundred thousand
 perils have reached the west, do not refuse to this
 brief vigil
 of the senses that remains to you, experience of the
 unpeopled world behind the sun.
 Consider your origin: you were not made to live like
 brutes, but to pursue virtue and knowledge."
 So keen for the voyage did I make my companions
 with this brief speech that I could hardly then have
 held them back;
 and, turning our stern toward morning, we made wings
 of our oars for the mad flight, pressing ever leftward.
 Night saw already all the stars of the other pole, and
 ours so low that it did not rise from the ocean floor.
 Five times rekindled and as often quenched was the
 light beneath the moon after we entered on the
 arduous passage,
 when there appeared to us a mountain dark with
 distance; and it seemed to me so high that never had
 I seen another like it.
 We felt great joy, which soon was turned to tears: for
 from the new land there rose a storm that struck the
 forepart of our ship.
 Three times it whirled her round with all the waters;
 at the fourth it raised the prow and sent the stern
 beneath as pleased another,
 until the sea closed over us.

(91-142)

It is not hard to see what wins every reader to this speech. No protest, no apology, no self-exoneration nor vanity. Great masculine pride



Botticelli

and a clean linear memory. He assumes that his questioner knows who he is and so picks up his long life-story abruptly at the point of his departure from Circe's island. In his very first sentence he puts before us his overmastering desire—to sail beyond the furthest bournes yet set for man's sea travel—and lays it over against those loves and duties to his family that might else have turned him homeward. (We are bound to think of Homer's Odysseus with his opposite intention.) He is, in Dante's version, moved by ardor to gain experience of the world. . . . Age has not tired him. His courage and strength appear intact. His exhortation to his few companions proves irresistible: to "follow virtue and knowledge" at any risk.

There is a timelessness about the appeal of these attitudes. And to us—to the contemporary mind with its preference for our Greek heritage of bold individualism, rather than Roman order and hierarchy, there is a special attraction in Ulysses' wish to seek the new, the unknown "behind the sun," and in his being quite ready to risk his neck. It reaches and touches us the more, couched in his soaring words coming up from a prisoning pocket of Hell. "Consider your origins. You were not meant to live like brutes." Hearing such words as these we are apt to put away whatever stirrings of doubt we may feel about his evil-counseling in Troy (as we have met it in the

Iliad or in the *Aeneid*; and as Dante's *Virgil* recalls it to us), and any misgivings we may have about the claims of Penelope and Telemachus upon a husband and father who has already been absent a notable number of years. And we are not disposed to hear anything else in his words that would make us question his high motivation.

And yet of course we wonder—given the fact that this place *is*, after all, Hell—we wonder why Dante should choose to offer us and the eager Pilgrim so much alluring greatness in a character cast for the abyss, and whether he really intended to oppose it by the guileful deeds at Troy and the abandonment of wife and son.

And so we fumble a little here at first reading. And Dante allows us to. Indeed, he encourages it. He refuses us (as always, in Hell) any explanation other than what is implicit in the scene. This is not only his right as a proper poet but derives rightly from the logic of this poem at this place. For we, as well as the Pilgrim hero, are in Hell; and like the Pilgrim are left at the mercy of our own vulnerability to every alluring drift away from the *diritta via*.

But there is correction for all fumbling within the poem itself. Indeed, that there is, and how there is, provides the theme of this analysis. As the Pilgrim learns to think, to weigh one value with another in the *Purga-*

torio, so may we, the readers. Two of the ways in which the reader is invited to do so seem well worth examining. He is present at the actual lessons that clarify in explicit philosophical language the Pilgrim's beginnings of insight. And he is given in many parallels of language, image, or action strong hints of the whole scale of Dante's emphases and meanings. These parallels should catch our attention, should make us pause and compare, and should correct us if we have been mistaking Dante's multiple perspective on the life of the human psyche to a one-dimensional black and white police-chief operation.

So let us examine Ulysses from other vantage-points within the poem, catching up, if need be, one or two corroborations from outside it.

The lesson that throws the first necessary light is the one delivered to the Pilgrim-hero at the center of the entire *Comedy* (the midpoint of Purgatory) — a lesson which affects our whole grasp of the moral life of the poem and reshapes our questioning of Ulysses as it does our understanding of the whole *Inferno*. Let me try to summarize. The human will, we learn, is by our very nature fixed upon the Good. One sees what this means when one notes that every man calls "good" what he believes would constitute his fullest happiness. So that if there is an ultimate good, greater than any other, we must suppose that any man in his right mind would choose to attain it. His movement towards such a goal is not an act or gesture of possession, but one of understanding and supportive love. His road is what Dante has called the *diritta via*. But as man moves out into his life, another impulse leads him *possessively* towards any attractive "good" that offers him its immediate appeal. If he responds possessively (either to what is merely pleasing or what may in the end be painful), he strays from the major good. Yet he need not stray. However great the temptation or delusion, he is equipped to distinguish good from evil, and he has that freedom of the will which empowers him to say "yes" or to say "no" — to act or to refrain. Dante distinguishes these two impulses or wills by name. He reserves the name "will" for that which directs us to the major good; the other he calls "desire." Desire is egocentric, possessive. The will is not so.

Now Dante is firm about all this, and so must we be as we read his *Comedy*. If we happen to prefer other notions of psychology, we must nonetheless grasp the reality for Dante's world of the conditions I have just attempted to summarize; since if we do not, we cannot read what Dante wrote. The key to

his *Inferno* (as well as to much of the rest of the poem) lies in our grasp of the twofold powers of will and desire, moving more often than not in contrary directions, often in deadly conflict. The key to Purgatory lies in the ever-present capacity to affirm the will against contrary desire. Every man suffers the struggle of the opposing forces. Some few manage to school desire until it takes the shape and direction of the greater will. The Pilgrim-Dante has done so at the end of his visionary journey where we read:

... already my desire and will revolved, as does a wheel in its equality of movement, turned by the love that moves the sun and the other stars.

Looking backward from the *Purgatorio* you will see that Dante has shown us in each of the great dramatic Hell-scenes both the opposing ingredients of the moral conflict where will is pitted against desire. Had he been a lesser poet, he might have given us mere portraits of the evil-willed, a simple squalor of sinful souls and their suffering. Instead, he has given us by dramatic means the true tragic insight into the conflict of good and evil, truth and error, within every soul he brings before us. Seeing into what is good we weep with Aristotle's "pity"; seeing into what opposes the good we shudder with Aristotle's "terror."

And if this is true with others, we may expect it to be so with Ulysses. The opposing pulls of will and desire must be present in Dante's portrait of him, too.

We have already seen the knowledge-seeking will that draws Ulysses to explore the world in spite of loss and danger. Dante intends us to see and love it. Without it Ulysses' fall would be of little moment. But, having shown Ulysses to be in Hell, he must also intend us to see clearly what it is in him that destroys the good.

Well, what is that? Just what have we seen on the contrary, the lapsing side of egocentric desire?

That he abandoned wife, son, and father? Well, yes. But this abandonment reveals itself without moral force in the poem, partly because it is not a positive act of any sort, and largely because it is a mere *instance*, and will remain very "mere" in our minds unless we come to see and feel it as evidence of a disposition contrary to the good. Dante never lets his damnations rest on instances, however grave. His Hell is not a pail for wicked deeds, but an abyss of dispositions that cramp and kill the soul. His instances are merest illustrations. Francesca's adultery is a mere illustration: her sin was self-indulgent love. Piero's suicide is an illustration of a certain form of

life-rejecting pride. And so on.

If this is so, Ulysses' evil-counseling at Troy (his contriving of the Wooden Horse, and the theft of the Palladium) will not serve our purpose either. Indeed, when we hear of them from Virgil's lips they too strike us without emotional force, as a dry technical statement of wrongdoing. Ulysses' courage, his thirst for experience, on the other hand, flood over us with the emotional force of their delivery in his words. It may seem to us for a moment that Ulysses' desire and his will are at one, that he is the true hero of the poem, the victim of a blind heaven.

Thus there is a problem here. For the moment *Purgatorio* has deepened it.

There are certain things in the *Paradiso* which cast light on this. In the first canto of the *Paradiso* Beatrice explains to the bewildered Pilgrim, who doesn't know where he is, that he has risen into the first heaven by a movement quite natural and necessary in the soul once it has freed itself of its impediments — in other words, of its counterwills or desires; and we grasp that it is the Pilgrim's will, now perfectly free, which pilots the soul upward in its new weightless condition. Beatrice says:

All things whatsoever observe a mutual order; and this is the form that makes the universe resemble God.

Her stress is on that order, that mutual order, as she goes ahead to show the Pilgrim the multiplicity of different creatures, each with a different instinct directing it to its special goal — its "port," as she calls it, on "the great sea of being." She adds that any creature, may in its freedom, swerve away from its goal following the appeal of "false pleasure."

These notions of hers are elaborated throughout the canticle. Carlo Martello, for example, speaking to the Pilgrim in the Venus sphere, elaborates them in a direction important for our question. He repeats that human destinies are diverse. He says that this diversity depends on the differing potentialities of the individual creatures; and he adds that for every such potentiality there exists a corresponding possibility of actualization. (There is thus scope in the world for the fruition of every capacity.) From this capable diversity of humanity arises the earthly city, with its community of citizens: diverse men acting in mutual accord. As readers we observe here that the path to God is not the same for all souls, nor should be; and that *each soul's proper path is to be pursued in the world and in the fulfillment of a role among men in the world*. From here on until close to the end of the poem the *Paradiso* more and more stresses the ordered and related variety of human po-

tentialities as they may be made actual by men living together in the earthly community.

This sharpens our eyes for reading Ulysses by its strong suggestion that his sea voyage was a swerving off course with respect to his truth-seeking and to his role in the human community. Further, it urges us to compare the Pilgrim, to whom all these teachings are addressed, with the seafaring Greek. That there is a parallel we can see at once, for the image of a journey is central to the entire poem, and the cause of the Pilgrim's other-world venture is his loss of the *diritta via*, with which it all began. That Dante was aware of the parallel and meant it to be instructive seems apparent as soon as we look more closely. For the Pilgrim in the Dark Wood, in the "middle of the journey of our life," saw before him a delectable sunlit mountain, longed to climb it, was barred from it by the three Beasts who pressed him backward and downward, towards Hell. What is more, he would surely have fallen victim to the Beasts had not an act of divine grace sent Virgil to his rescue. Now Ulysses in his *folle volo* also sees before him a distant mountain that causes him great joy until, as he nears it, the huge wave rises that engulfs his ship. It is tempting to think both mountains are one — both Purgatory; and, indeed, most scholars have supposed that was what Dante intended. If that is so, we read in both instances the same message: that the happy mountain cannot be taken by storm, but must be achieved in penitence and hope and understanding. Grace, which is unavailing for the great pagan, preserves the Pilgrim for such rightings of his wrongs.

Now, as the Pilgrim completes his visionary journey, approaching and gazing into the supreme light, one must observe that the object of all his upward motion is not that he may kneel down in a permanent occupation of heaven (or of his vision), but that he may return to the painful world and, poet that he is, write the book in which we are reading all these wonders. His journey to God, then, has as its purpose the fulfillment of a role in the world. He must move beyond his paralyzing bitterness over the corruption of Florence and the greedy strife between emperor and pope — viewing these from the perspective of the heavens, embracing the overarching ideas of the City and the Church; he must go back to the muddled earthly copies of these eternal ideas to pursue their correction as best one poet may. In the Dark Wood passion had obscured these ideas as well as his own goal. Thus the poet's progress out of the Wood has been a journey of the mind-clarifying purpose, diminishing egocentric pride and hunger, and

leading back into the world. To use a more contemporary vocabulary, heaven has taught this hero not disengagement but superior engagement beyond the claims of the individual ego to its private delights. It has taught him, then, a Roman lesson, and he is indeed rightly Virgil's cherished pupil.

Now how is it with Ulysses? Pursuing our comparison we may see certain things that have before remained hidden. Ulysses, like the Pilgrim, has been on a long journey far from home. That is to say, he has fought in the war at Troy (reputed to have lasted ten years), and has been delayed in his return to Ithaca. Of the delaying adventures described in the *Odyssey* Dante acknowledges only the year-long stay with Circe—from which we may presume, but cannot count upon, his having intended still others. In any case Dante's Ulysses has had more "experience of the world" than most men, but—and here he is unlike Homer's hero—is stricken with desire to explore still further remotenesses in preference to turning homeward to Ithaca. He rejects engagement in the life of his tribe. Yet, though he avoids any mention of his public role at home, he was undoubtedly in Dante's knowledge, as in Homer's and Virgil's, chief lord of Ithaca; and one may presume that a considerable task awaited him there. He himself recalls that his wife and son and father needed him and acknowledges that these considerations did not weigh with him. Full though he was of years ("I and my companions were old and slow," he says), he had not yet seen enough of the world but burned for more and more. It is to the "unpeopled world behind the sun" that he invites his mariners.

To what end? What possible answer can one give except this: to none beyond his own immediate satisfaction, the satisfaction of his "ardor" to gain experience of the world. He considers himself to be at the end of his life. He has no notion of making use of what he hopes to learn. All his words to the mariners suggest that he foresees no return. But ought not this aging man have finished with serving his own ends? Dare he still plead to our faces that his education is still incomplete? While a kingdom (or at least a principality) is waiting for his leadership?

In the Pilgrim's whole other-world experience (but chiefly in Paradise) there is strong implication that "in the middle of the journey of our life" it should at last become possible to husk off all the life-consuming desires of youth, while the mind (freed at last of its impediments) should be able to achieve fullness of understanding and control; should be able to attain order in whatever role its particular

genius or destiny has indicated; should be able to reach humility.*

Says T. S. Eliot, thinking of Dante in his poem "East Coker":

In the middle, not only in the middle of the way
But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,
On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold,
And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,
Risking enchantments. Do not let me hear
Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly,
Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession,
Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God.
The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.

Dante in the middle of his life saw that men, whether Greek, Roman or other, are apt to be haunted past maturity and into old age by unquenched thirst for experience and for the whole poor, clamorous life of our senses and desires; that we are never willing to give up anything, but long to dance and sing and feast forever, and wear fine faces and exchange embraces. And "gain experience of the world. . . ."

But, Dante would say, it is not merely the impotence of the flesh that makes these things a poor objective for persons who have passed the middle of their lives. They are extraneous to man's essence, which is his soul. If his life has been a moderately fortunate human life, he will have been using it and refining it until its essential strengths make up for the body's weakness, until its clarity is free of encumbrance and until it gives and takes serenity.

Then must we not say of this Ulysses of Dante's that he refuses to yield up his desires and resume his human work? That he betrays his will to the shape of his pleasure? He wanted godly knowledge and freedom for himself. This is his pride. There is something of our own (excess) pride in our admiration for him and something of the old Adam. Yet of course it is not for this primarily that Ulysses burns in Hell. He burns as an evil-counselor, guilefully converting his few surviving followers (men just released after at least eleven years of absence, ready to turn back to their homes) to his own vain longing for the world behind the sun. "Deny not to this brief vigil of your senses that remains, experience of the

*See, too, *Convivio, Fourth Treatise, chapter XXVII*. "Wherefore, just as that is given to adolescence. . . . whereby we may come to perfection and maturity, so too is given to manhood that perfection and that maturity themselves, so that the sweetness of its fruit may be profitable to itself and to others; for, as Aristotle says, 'man is a civic animal,' wherefore he is required not only to be useful to himself but also to others. And so we read of Cato that he did not think of himself as born for himself, but for his country and all the world. . . ." tr. by Philip Wicksteed; Temple Classics ed.

unpeopled world . . ." he says (Lines 114-117). But these are not men tottering near the grave. To be sure, the whole of life may be considered a brief vigil of the senses; but if that were Ulysses' meaning, his appeal, being broader, would be even more questionable. No, he is making a specious rhetorical appeal to these men to consider themselves free, because they are no longer young, of all ties whatsoever. He adds: "Consider your origin: you were not made to live like brutes, but to pursue knowledge and virtue." Because this appeal sounds altogether lofty to our ears, and harmonious with the great ideals of the West, we do not pause to observe the implications in these words that brutish life is what would have awaited them at home; and - further and worse - that a voyage to the unpeopled land behind the sun would constitute pursuit of knowledge and virtue. But Ulysses could not have thought Ithaca, the country of his own lordship, brutish; and he surely knew that virtue was not to be found by sailing the unpeopled sea. Virtue is a power of action, not an intoxicant for the soul. Ulysses says those things to sway his men. He is the wily Ulysses of Homer, the wilier still of Virgil, become the wiliest of all in Dante.

His eloquence succeeds. His men, hearing him, grow so enthusiastic that (he says) he could not have turned them back had he wished to. They (and a great many readers with them) now long to set off away from the common world and proving ground of men, to exercise their sensibilities and receptivities until the little vigil of their senses ends. So, as you recall, they turn their ship and sail past the Pillars of Hercules. Within sight of the Mountain that rejoices their hearts a wave closes over the ship and the journey is ended. Ulysses' last words in Hell ascribe this accident to the will of God. Thus he is proof for all eternity against incriminating himself.

The interpretation I have offered takes its starting point in the *Purgatorio's* central doctrine and in the early cantos of the *Paradiso*, and rests in part on a likeness between the journeys of the Pilgrim and Ulysses. Let me add a brief postscript from Hell to show one more of Dante's illuminating correspondences. It is Dorothy Sayers, in her brilliant essay on Dante's symbolic imagery, who points out that at the beginning and in the depths of Hell two of Dante's great images - those of Francesca and Ugolino - stress the perversion of right

mutual love between men by picturing in each case a pair of sinners whose lives have been intertwined, as locked together in an eternity of pain. In each case one of the pair speaks out very fully to the Pilgrim while the other remains terribly, fearsomely silent. Miss Sayers alludes in passing to the similar intermediate example of Ulysses and Diomed. You will see at once how interesting this must be for us, and how the other pairs of images reinforce the one we are discussing. Paolo and Francesca are united forever by their love-indulgence that infringed on the social bond and the vow of marriage. Ugolino and Ruggieri are fixed together in the ice of their rival treacheries aiming at political power. Ulysses and Diomed burn together in the complicity of guile. Together they duped the Trojans into opening their beloved city to the ravaging Greeks. But Ulysses alone duped his homebound sailors into eager partnership in his voyage behind the sun. Ulysses' torment is the fire of his ardor to outwit every opposition, Trojan or divine or Ithacan; it is the shape of his deceit, covering his true purpose altogether as it covers the egoistic motivation. It is the flame of an ardor that deforms the soul.

There is further perhaps an element of dark parody in Ulysses' flame. Others have already pointed out the resemblance between it and the flame in which the Holy Ghost descended to the Apostles, according to the second chapter of Acts: "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." And at once those Galilean men, who were going out to preach God, were able to speak with all the tongues of the surrounding lands. Ulysses too has a cloven flame; it shuts him in and binds him eternally rather than consecrating him so that he may preach well to his fellows. He has already proved his worth in preaching. The apostles are by their visitation gifted with tongues. Ulysses can neither speak nor hear other languages than his own; he has not the gift of tongues, but certainly he has the gift of one tongue and that surely is the language of guile, the language of covert persuasion, here in the *Comedy* as in his passage through the *Aeneid* and his birth in the *Iliad*. And it is for himself he burns, together with Diomed, while knowledge and virtue fare as they may, without him.

The Fox Outfoxed (Inferno XXVII)

by Louis R. Rossi

Guido da Montefeltro, who tells the sad story of his damnation in canto XXVII of the *Inferno*, burns with Ulysses among the false counselors in one of the Malebolge, the series of evil pits in which the fraudulent suffer the eternal penalty. Among all the sinners who swarm in this region of the lower hell, only the two false counselors, Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro, are presented in the fulness of their human, and tragic, character.

The panderers, the grafters and the thieves, the hypocrites and the other fraudulent sinners of the Malebolge are too despicable to be the objects of Dante's, and of our, sympathy. Indeed, at one point, in canto XX, Dante the poet clearly indicates that they deserve no pity. Dante the pilgrim may have been unable to hold back his own tears as he looked upon the weeping diviners marching with their heads turned around on their bodies:

When I saw, so close, our own human form
so twisted, that the tears from their eyes
bathed their buttocks at the cleft.

But the voice of his reason, personified in Virgil, immediately rebukes him. Virgil tells him: "Are you as mad as those other fools? Here pity lives when it is quite dead." ("Pity" is, of course, in Italian, *pietà*, "piety" as well as "pity," and Virgil uses the word in both senses.) In the following two cantos, where the pilgrim finds himself in the vulgar company of the grafters and their grotesque, demonic guardians, Dante's scorn is implicit in the sudden descent into farce, devoid of the dignity,

even, of the poet's indignation. Dante and Virgil escape from the pit of the grafters only to fall among the hypocrites. The leaden cloaks of the two Jovial Friars press out the tears that sparkle above the surface of their golden capes, and Dante's first reaction is perhaps compassionate. He exclaims, "Oh brothers, your suffering . . ." and the form of the phrase recalls others used in earlier cantos to express his commiseration. But he breaks off when his eye catches the figure of Caiphas, the High Priest who had demanded Christ's death for the good of the people, and now lies crucified upon the ground. Obviously, Dante's meaning here is that when the full evil of hypocrisy is revealed all compassion must be stilled. Leaving the hypocrites, Dante and Virgil descend among the thieves. Here Vanni Fucci raises his fists toward Heaven in an obscenely blasphemous gesture. But two snakes wind themselves around his neck and arms and bind him fast. At that moment, Dante tells us, the snakes became his friends. There is, perhaps, in the monumental figure of Vanni, in the force of his bestial pride and frustration, in his perverse defiance, a certain esthetic sublimity. But there is no identification with the sinner, only the artist's sensibility is engaged, and not the sympathy of the human being.

Dante and Virgil leave Vanni and the thieves and climb to the bridge that crosses the next ditch. When Dante tells us how he looked down into the *bolgia* of the evil counselors his words are fraught with the sense of his involvement. Here the scene reveals aspects of sin that rise above the farcical or grotesque forms of the lower Hell; here he will find figures in whom the image of sin, because

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it also threatens him, can evoke a tragic fear and pity.

It grieved me then and now again it grieves me
when I turn my mind to what I saw,
and I restrain my talent more than is my wont,
that it may not run where virtue does not guide it;
so that, if kindly star or greater power
has given me this good, it may not be lost through
my misuse.

And as Dante rises as high as possible on the bridge to see the flaming tongues below, he saves himself from falling only by grabbing hold of a rock. The sin punished in this ditch is one of the most dangerous to Dante. Like him, the evil counselors were possessed of extraordinary intellectual powers and qualities of leadership, and Dante is made aware that their possession is always threatened by the temptation to abuse them.

In canto XXVI, from which the passage just quoted is taken, the identification is obviously with Ulysses. When Dante says that he must curb his intellect so that "it may not run where virtue does not guide it," he is thinking above all of Ulysses "mad flight" — his "folle volo" — which he is about to trace in all its sublime but misguided daring. But the example of Guido da Montefeltro is not entirely beyond all possibility of identification. Guido had once represented for Dante a sagacity that he admired, both in his conduct of war and in his judicious retirement to the Christian peace of his last years. Although canto XXVII of the *Inferno* shows that Dante revised his opinion of Guido, in his *Convivio* he had praised him in a passage often cited by the commentators; they use it as a gloss to the line of canto XXVII where Guido tells how he had decided in his later years to "lower his sails." Dante had written in the *Convivio*:

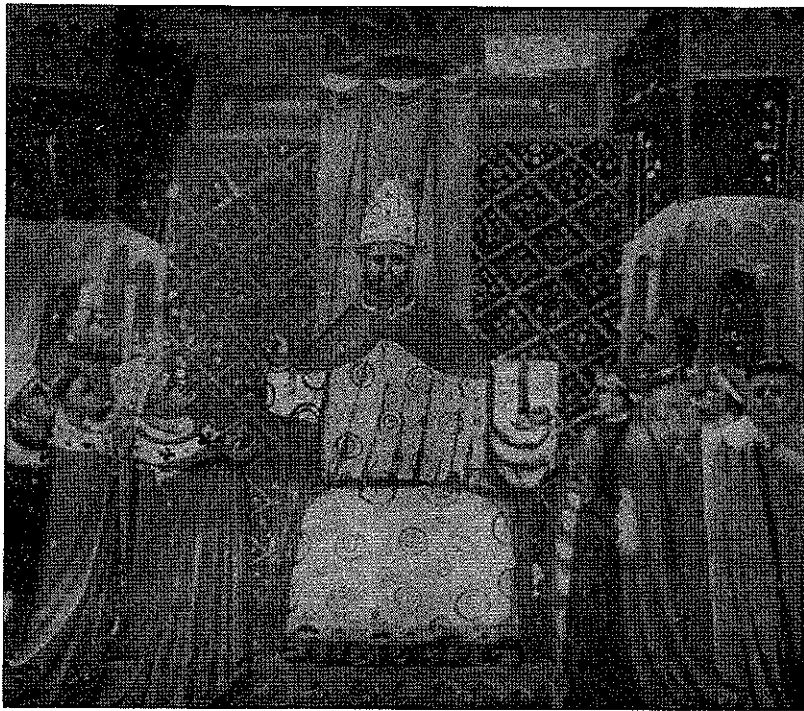
... as the good sailor, when he nears port, lowers his sails, and gently, with slight speed, enters it, so should we "lower the sails" of our earthly operations, and turn to God with all our desire and all our heart, so that we may come into that port with all gentleness and all peace. (*Convivio* IV, xxvii)

And as an example of this Christian prudence, Dante mentions Lancelot and Guido of Montefeltro, whom he calls "our most noble Italian."

Guido's reputation must have indeed been illustrious, even among his natural enemies, the Guelfs of Florence. In fact, it is recorded that after the peace between Florence and Pisa, Guido passed through Florence and was received with full honors. He was the man who had displayed such energy and skill in his campaigns against the Florentines and had defeated them at Pontadera only a few months before. This aura of prestige had begun to surround his name from the beginning of his

career as a war leader of the anti-papal Ghibellines of Romagna. By 1275 he had become captain-general of their forces and in the same year defeated the Guelfs in two major battles. The following years brought continued victories, the most striking being the defeat at Forlì, in 1282, of the strong French force sent by Pope Martin. In his *Commentary* to the *Divine Comedy*, written less than a hundred years after the event, Benvenuto da Imola, himself a native of Romagna, gave a detailed account of this victory in which Count Guido established his fame as a consummate strategist. The mixed force of Italian Guelfs and French men-at-arms entered Romagna to clear it of Ghibellines but encountered the resistance of the inhabitants of Forlì, led by Guido da Montefeltro. They were besieged inside the city, but the siege wore on and finally the French commander began treating with some of the defenders who seemed inclined to open the gates to him for a price. What he did not know was that Guido himself had instigated the offer in order to entrap the French in the narrow streets of the city. On a May morning, in the dark before dawn, the French moved their forces up to one of the gates, which was opened to them. But the entire army did not venture inside. A large probing force entered with the commander to take over the city. The rest of the army was ordered to remain outside and to be ready to intervene if the advance body ran into obstacles, but if all went well they were to assemble in a field at a spot marked by a large oak tree. The city had been emptied of all forces by Count Guido, so the French met with no resistance. They were soon busy looting and making themselves comfortable in their new quarters. Meanwhile, Guido led his men in a surprise attack on the troops assembled at the oak tree and quickly overcame their resistance. Then, leaving part of his force at the same place in a formation simulating that of the French, he reentered the city. The sudden entrance of the enemy caused consternation among the French, who had thought the city was theirs, and now found themselves unprepared to face their attackers. Those who could escape fled out of the town to their rear-guard position at the oak tree, but instead of meeting their comrades they were cut down by Guido's men. A large number of French and their Italian allies fell in this battle, but most remarkable was the slaughter of the hard core of the French force, eight hundred mounted men-at-arms — "octingentos equites," Benvenuto tells us, "de quibus facta est miseranda strages."

But Guido and his Ghibellines did not win the war. The following year the Pope had fresh



*Decretales of Pope Boniface VIII, Book VI, fl.,
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library,
Yale University Library*

forces in the field and the citizens of Forlì finally came to terms with him, forcing Guido to leave the town. "And so this shows," says Benvenuto, "that although the Count's ingenuity overcame the strength of men powerful in war, it nevertheless succumbed to the strength of the Church." Guido too came to terms and was reconciled to the Church, accepting the banishment to Piedmont imposed by Pope Honorius IV. After three years, however, he violated the terms of his reconciliation by leaving Piedmont and taking over the leadership of the Ghibelline forces of Pisa. For this he was excommunicated, but it did not prevent him from enjoying his series of successes against the Florentines, among whom he was known as the Fox. When Pisa and Florence ended their war in 1292 he moved on to gain control of Urbino, and held it against powerful neighbors. But Guido was now about seventy years old, and ready to make his peace again with the Church. He received absolution from the hermit pope Celestine V and became a Franciscan friar. As such he died, near the close of the century, probably in Assisi.

This is the biography Dante must have known when he wrote his *Convivio*, but in the *Inferno* he added an extremely significant detail in the life of Guido. The readers of the *Commedia* will doubtless recall the details of the canto, and I only need sketch them here.

Guido enters upon the scene enveloped in a tongue of flame, as Ulysses, similarly garbed for eternity, silently moves off the stage after speaking his epic piece. Guido seems very eager to talk to Virgil, whom he has heard dismissing Ulysses, and he asks him for news of Romagna. But Virgil refers him to Dante as the expert in Italian affairs, and Dante, with a familiarity born of long acquaintance, names the cities and the tyrants of Romagna now grudgingly keeping the peace imposed by the Church. Dante asks that Guido, in turn, tell his story. This he does, touching first on his vulpine ways as a military leader, and relating how he became a friar to make amends. But Boniface VIII sent for Guido and asked to be advised how he might wrest the fortress city of Palestrina from the Colonna family. He promised the immunity of absolution beforehand, should the advice be sinful, and for Pope Boniface, Guido once more became the Fox. Boniface, he counselled, should make generous promises but never keep them. When Guido died, Saint Francis in his innocence came to gather in his brother's soul, but a black cherubim of Hell loudly claimed it for his own, and Guido was condemned to the eternal fire.

For a long time it was believed that the interview with Boniface which decided Guido's fate was Dante's invention, but at the beginning of this century further research uncovered

the record of such an interview in the chronicles of Pipino and of Riccobaldo of Ferrara, where it may be that Dante found it. However, the chronicles of the time have sometimes been found to have been derived from the *Divine Comedy*, rather than serving as a source for it. But whether it be Dante's invention or not, and even whether it be historically true, the fateful encounter with Boniface is certainly consonant with Guido's character and with his earlier career. During his years of struggle the Pope had been his antagonist. And Benvenuto da Imola, we have seen, observed that all of Guido's astuteness was finally of no avail in his efforts to hold Romagna against the Papacy. It does not seem incongruent, therefore—at least poetically—that Guido's ultimate undoing should be the work of the formidable Boniface VIII. And poetically, also, there is appropriate irony in the fact that Guido was undone when he became the Pope's accomplice. But the factors of Guido's defeat lay within himself, in the conflicting motives apparent in his former life. In the alternation of antagonism and compliance that characterized the long dialogue between Guido and the Church, with Guido now defiant, now yielding, now Fox and then Franciscan, Dante discerned the essential pattern of his character and the image of his fate.

In his book, *Dante, Poet of the Secular World*, Erich Auerbach claimed for Dante the merit of having restored tragedy to the literature of the Western world. For the epigraph of his book, Auerbach chose a quotation from Heraclitus: "A man's character is his fate." This maxim, Auerbach believed, expressed an insight into the human condition that was embodied in Greek tragedy: the awareness that a man's particular fate is a part of his unity, his total essence revealed in time. Dante's sinners are also shown in the tragic perspective of time; in the other world they have attained an "ultimate self-realization, where their essence is fulfilled and made manifest forever." And Auerbach claimed that Dante's work allowed for a greater realism than Greek tragedy, in that a man's earthly deeds were not set at naught by his death:

. . . Dante in the *Comedy* transcended tragic death by identifying man's ultimate fate with the earthly unity of his personality, and . . . the very plan of the work made it possible, and indeed confronted him with the obligation, to represent earthly reality exactly as he saw it. Thus it became necessary that the characters in Dante's other world, in their situation and attitude, should represent the sum of themselves; that they should disclose, in a single act, the character and the fate that had filled out their lives. (p. 91)

That single act is in Guido's case the giving

of fraudulent counsel to the Pope. Seduced by Boniface, Brother Guido lost his soul when he reassumed the duality of his character. He had repented his former ways as the Fox, but when the Pope assured him of his absolution he could not repress the compulsion to exercise his old mastery. Guido found himself in a situation where he could become his whole self, where he could satisfy the contradictory demands of his nature. It seemed to him that he could again give proof of the cunning that had won him fame, but safely now, as a friar wearing the penitent cowl; he could become the Fox once more, but while acting as an obedient servant of the Pope.

Not the contradiction in his character, but the unity underlying his duality becomes evident in his decisive act. And in fact, Guido had been an astute tactician not only in his military campaigns, but also in his cautious manoeuvring as a repentent Christian bent on winning the eternal victory. Guido's intellectual power—and its utter failure to win the real prize—constitute his tragedy.

Tragedy, it has been said, represents the encounter of human freedom with the limit set by fate; the tragic hero struggles against his destiny, in his actions and his reason, but succumbs to a stronger power. The tragic effect is greatest when that power is not outside him only, but within him, in the limiting nature of his own character. Dante perceived the sum of Guido's character, and both his greatness and his failure, in his sagacity and its limitation. In itself, sagacity is good; it is an intellectual and spiritual power that can be realized as Christian prudence as well as worldly guile. This potential for the good and its waste and perversion is the essential ground of Guido's tragedy.

In his lecture on "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy," A. C. Bradley held that according to Hegel a drama representing a conflict simply of good and evil cannot be a tragedy. Restating Hegel's theories, Bradley saw the tragic effect as depending on a conflict involving spiritual waste:

. . . tragedy portrays a self-division and self-waste of spirit, or a division of spirit involving conflict and waste. It is implied in this that on *both* sides in the conflict there is a spiritual value. The same idea may be expressed . . . by saying that the tragic conflict is one not merely of good with evil, but also, and more essentially, of good with good. Only, in saying this, we must be careful to observe that 'good' here means anything that has spiritual value, not moral goodness alone. . . .

Using *Macbeth* as an example, Bradley extended the notion that tragedy involved a conflict of good with good, with the necessary qualifications. *Macbeth* is one of those

plays that seem at first to represent a conflict of good and evil. But the good is also in Macbeth himself, and not only in the persons opposing him. "It is not a question merely of moral goodness," says Bradley, "but of good. It is not a question of the use made of good, but of its presence." And Bradley goes on to enumerate the virtues of Macbeth, qualities apparent in him even as he pursues his evil course. "Do they not make you," he asks, "for all your horror, admire Macbeth, sympathise with his agony, pity him, and see in him the waste of forces on which you place a spiritual value?" Then Bradley explains more fully what the tragic effect depends on:

It depends on our feeling that the elements in the man's nature are so inextricably blended that the good in him, that which we admire, instead of simply opposing the evil, reinforces it. Macbeth's imagination deters him from murder, but it also makes the vision of a crown irresistibly bright. If he had been less determined, nay, if his conscience had been less maddening in its insistence that he had thrown the precious jewel of his soul irretrievably away, he might have paused after his first deed, might even have repented. Yet his imagination, his determination, and his conscience were things good.

Guido is not Macbeth, and he is not his equal in strength and courage, nor in evil violence. His is a tragedy in a minor key, for as he says himself, his ways were not those of the lion, but of the fox. But we can say that his intrepid sagacity, his prudence and his conscience were things good.

The problem posed by the "noble" characters of Dante's *Inferno* has generated endless discussion among the critics. Dante, the man of feeling, the tragic poet, the humanist is opposed to Dante the dispenser of a stern justice, the theologian and the medieval moralist. The figures of the damned, in all their full human reality, have seemed to stand in contradiction to the ethical meaning imposed by the poem's theological frame. Auerbach felt that Dante's intense involvement in the human reality of his characters either overwhelmed the theological frame, or made it serve as a means of magnifying their concrete and earthly humanity. While at the other extreme, critics such as Irma Brandeis have seen a consistent and absolute moral condemnation by Dante the poet of the sinners who were pitied and admired only by the still uninformed pilgrim of the *Inferno*. But if we adopt Bradley's theory, the poet and the theologian are no longer in conflict. Both the tragic poet and the theologian fix on the essential spiritual value in the condemned hero. Tragic pity need not oppose ethical purpose: for the worst evil is the perversion of the good, the misuse of the divine spark, of the presence

of the spirit that still glows even in the damned, but forever useless.

It is in the vision of the poet that the ethical purpose of the theologian is best served. For sin is not most strikingly and practically represented as an absolute and total incarnation of evil. This extreme can never be one with which the reader can identify. He cannot recognize the evil that threatens him in anything so foreign and external; he can feel the danger to himself if evil can be shown insidiously blended with the good and even reinforced by it. Here we can use Bradley—and Aristotle—to correct Auerbach. Bradley wanted to formulate a theory of tragedy that would apply to modern tragedy and especially to Shakespeare. He tended to move away from theories that saw the tragic hero solely as a victim—however valiant in his struggle—of an implacable, external fate; or the victim of a discord within himself between two universal values opposed to each other, such as love and honor. Bradley did not deny such theories, but he advanced his notion of spiritual waste as being more essentially tragic. He does not mention Dante, but we can see that as a medieval Catholic who insisted on man's freedom, Dante had naturally given expression to the ethical pathos of spiritual waste. For it admirably suited his purpose both as poet and theologian: esthetically, we are made to feel the tragic loss; morally, we discover the misuse and waste of a spiritual value; and ethically, in terms of human responsibility, the perversion of the good must be seen as the free choice of the sinner. Guido da Montefeltro is one of the "noble" characters who evoke this ethical pathos in the *Inferno*. He belongs with them, even if we must add that he is the least in dignity, and really tragic only in a limited sense. What these limits are we may better perceive after looking at the more admirable sinners of the *Inferno*.

In each case Dante concentrates on the good quality that was wasted and perverted in them. Francesca da Rimini is the tender incarnation of *gentilezza*, that spiritual refinement and sensitive responsiveness which Dante had once exalted as the only true nobility. To this ideal of courtly love refined by the young Dante and the adepts of the *dolce stil novo*, Francesca, in her way, was faithful. As she read with Paolo of the kiss bestowed on the noble and worthy Lancelot by the noblest of ladies, Guinevere, and their eyes met above the book, it was from a *cor gentil* and as another gentle heart, that she received his kiss. In Hell, she bitterly accuses love of having betrayed and destroyed her, but even in her indictment she repeats the dictum of courtly

love: "Amor che a cor gentil ratto s'aprende . . ." — "love which quickly seizes the gentle heart. . . ." It had seized and destroyed her, she feels, because she had been worthy. And indeed, she had surrendered to the ecstasy of an adulterous embrace in obedient response to her highest ideal.

The aristocrat Farinata degli Uberti still preserves undiminished in Hell his magnanimous dedication to the Ghibelline cause of the Uberti. He lies undaunted in a flaming tomb among the heretics who had denied the immortality of the soul. So steadfast does he remain in his earthly purpose, and in his disdain of the eternal life, that he seems "to hold Hell itself in scorn." This entire *earthliness* of his passionate being, with all its grandeur, is objectively portrayed in his statuesque, monumental figure — in its corporeal solidity. In his dialogue with Dante, Farinata's total concern, as it was in life, is still his family and party. Unmindful of his eternal doom, his earthly self appears to live on in his passionate hope for the victory of his party and posterity. Not until he learns from Dante of their final defeat and exile does Farinata refer to his infernal punishment, but then it is only to say that the defeat of his family is a greater torment to him than the eternal fire. Dante the tragic poet understands that Farinata's real doom and punishment should be consonant with his earthly character and a fulfillment of it. So, Farinata will not suffer in the eternal loss of his soul in Hell — in which he did not believe — but in the eternal death of the earthly hope and passion that had been his total being. Farinata's undaunted spirit and greathearted dedication to the triumph of his family had been the measure of his greatness, but also of his spiritual limitation. For in Hell this greatness is revealed as a useless passion, a waste of spirit that excluded its true fulfillment in the eternity of the soul.

Pier della Vigna, the minister of the emperor Frederick II, had been tortured and blinded by his royal master when he was accused of treason, and he had committed suicide in prison. He swears to Dante that he was faithful to his emperor; and still faithful in Hell, Pier declares that Frederick was worthy of all honor. This fidelity to Frederick touches us, but we recognize in it a selflessness that reached the limit of self-destruction. And in reality, Pier had basked proudly in his master's reflected glory, but without a real being of his own. His was a dependent being feeding on his lord's magnificence, and the moment Frederick turned his face from him, Pier was already dead.

Dante finds his former teacher Brunetto

Latini among the sodomites. He hardly recognizes him, his face has been so altered by the passion that burned him — and by its punishment, for they are one. Dante remembers instead the paternal face, "la cara imagine paterna," the face of the great teacher who had taught him "how man makes himself immortal." It is one of the highest tributes paid to any sinner in the *Comedy*. But the fatherly affection that made the man a great teacher of youth was the sublimation of a darker passion. His love for boys was not untainted by homosexuality. This great pedagogue was also a pederast.

Like the gentle sensibility of Francesca, the magnanimity of Farinata, Pier della Vigna's fidelity, like Brunetto's paternal love, Guido da Montefeltro's sagacity is an ambiguous quality which is both good and evil.

However, while Guido belongs in this repertory of noble or admirable characters, he is less tragic than they. This becomes especially evident when we compare him with Farinata, or with the heroic Ulysses. A comparison with Ulysses was evidently intended by Dante, since he placed them together, but as contrasting figures, in the *bolgia* of the evil counselors. Ulysses, when he set out on his broad sweep across the unknown and forbidden seas, was carried along by his consuming passion for experience, unmindful of the consequences. To Dante he must have seemed a hero of the ancient stamp, mistaken and doomed but struggling valiantly in the face of destiny. Against the major mode of his canto, Dante placed, immediately following, the pathetic minor of Guido's canto. Guido is still a formidable figure, and the critic Attilio Momigliano has insisted on the virility and robustness of his language. But there is in him a querulous rancor altogether foreign to the grand Ulysses. The Italian possesses the intellectual power of an astute commander, and even a delicate conscience lacking in Ulysses, and these make us feel his damnation as a tragic spiritual waste. But his very Christian awareness seems to reduce his stature: the pathos of his frustrated longing for salvation, his moral trepidation are Augustinian, and certainly not the stuff of the ancient tragic hero.

Moreover, Dante deliberately lowers the tone of the drama, at the end, with a sudden descent into the grotesque and comic atmosphere of the Malebolge. With the irruption upon the scene of the devil who jeeringly taunts Guido with being a poor logician, we are returned to the swarming pits of the lower Hell. Ever mindful of the need for varying his orchestration, Dante had lifted his reader out of the grotesque changes of the cantos of

the thieves into the heroic reaches of Ulysses' daring flight. Then, in the scene between Guido and Boniface we were witnesses to the intimate tragedy of perverted intellect. But the drama of the wise man "taken in his own craftiness" degenerates in tone; apparent wisdom and prudence are revealed to be tainted by craftiness, which in its failure appears as foolishness. The arrival of the black cherubim dissipates the seriousness of the tragic mode in the lurid coloring of medieval folk theology. The fox is out-foxed, first by Boniface, and finally by the devil himself, and his final defeat reminds us of the comic gulling of the conniving crew of demons in cantos XXI and XXII, the cantos of the grafters.

In his *Esquisse d'une histoire de la tragédie française*, Gustave Lanson noted the almost complete absence in medieval literature of a truly tragic sense. The essentially tragic character of the central dramas of the Christian faith, the fall and redemption of man, the action of a divine Providence that redeems and punishes, was neglected by medieval writers, says Lanson. He ascribes this to two influences: the popular tastes of the audience, with its love of comic dialogue, of burlesque and crudely realistic scenes; and also the absence of all problematic, due to a naive and absolute faith. The line between good and evil is neatly drawn, and the triumph of good and the defeat of evil assured. It follows that absolute evil, in its subjection, is reduced to grotesquely comical forms. In an essay on "The Farcical Elements in the *Inferno*," Leo Spitzer said: "It is well-known that in Christian drama, the Devil, the power of Evil, is regularly represented as a comic character, precisely because he is conquered in principle by the Good."

We have seen that what Lanson said of medieval drama is not true of the *Divine Comedy*, that Dante restored tragedy to Western literature, but certain aspects of this medieval comic vision persist in the *Inferno*. In the canto of Guido da Montefeltro the devil seems more conqueror than conquered, but he is acting as an instrument of divine justice. When he appears the drama takes on a comical turn, and with it there is an absolute identification of evil. The canto of Guido, with its tragic blending of good and evil, which seems to verge on the problematic, ends with the ruthless judgement of comedy. In the same canto, Dante encompasses the two extremes of the *Inferno*: the tragic vision of human spiritual waste, and the comic denunciation of the God-forsaken sinner.

Although the comic and ironic resolution comes at the end, Dante the poet undermines

the tragic dignity of Guido from the start of the canto. When he first enters the scene, Guido is already an ambiguous character. Dante exploits first of all the suggestion of duplicity and contradiction in the nature of the *contrappasso* – the infernal punishment to fit the crime. The evil counsellors are swathed in a tongue of flame which Dante calls the "thieving fire" to indicate that it conceals the sinners' human figure. The meaning of the *contrappasso* is apparently that the counsel they uttered with their tongues was a lie that concealed the truth. Guido, within the flame, speaks to Dante through the enveloping tongue, and the impression is one of contrast between inner and outer speech, and inner and outer being. And as the action of the canto progresses, we become aware that Dante has brought before us a man of intellection, of reasoned discourse and deduction. The structure of the canto is in fact based on a series of enthymemes. (An enthymeme being a rhetorical syllogism whose premises and conclusion are not always presented in formal logical order, or explicitly stated in every part.) These enthymemes – and Pope Boniface and the black cherubim each contribute their own – are in harmony with Guido's character: they express the ambiguity and contradiction first apparent in his physical presence. Those uttered by Guido, or accepted by him, are first dubious, then fallacious in fact, and finally, morally wrong. The exception in the series is, of course, the last, almost formal syllogism spoken by the devil; it is not fallacious or contradictory, it points out the fatal contradiction and is scholastically impeccable. This tragedy of deductive errors is obviously an ironic tragedy – we could almost say a deliberately contrived pseudo-tragedy; and we might add that the poet reflects – as it were – in the ambiguous form of his poem, in his surreptitious presentation of Guido, the duplicity and contradiction of Guido's character. This should become more apparent from a reading of the text:

Now the flame was erect and motionless
 in silence, and now was moving from us
 with the consent of the gentle poet,
 when another, coming on behind it
 made us turn our eyes toward its summit
 and the confused sound that issued from it.
 As the Sicilian bull – whose first bellow
 came with the cries of him (and this was just)
 who had turned it with his file –
 bellowed with the voice of its victim,
 so that although it was of brass
 it seemed itself to be pierced with pain;
 just so, because there was at first
 no outlet through the fire, the sad words
 were changed into its language.
 But after they had found their way
 up through the point, giving it that flutter

the tongue had given in their passage,
 we heard it say: "O you at whom I point my voice
 and who were just now speaking Lombard,
 saying, 'now go your way, I ask no more of you,'
 though I have come somewhat late, perhaps,
 do not mind staying and speaking with me:
 you see I do not mind, although I burn!
 If you just now into this blind world
 have fallen from that sweet Italian
 land whence I bring all my guilt,
 tell me if Romagna's people have peace or war;
 for I was of the mountains there between Urbino
 and the peak where the Tiber springs."
 I was still intent and leaning downward
 when my leader touched me on the side,
 saying, "You talk, this one is Italian."

The simile of the Sicilian bull may seem strained, but it functions quite efficiently in the poem. Dante is alluding to the hollow bronze bull made by the artisan Perillus for Phalaris, a tyrant of Greek Sicily. Perillus, we are told, thought his master could use an instrument which would transform the human cries of his victims into an inhuman roar, as they were being roasted within its resounding chamber. The purpose of this device was to prevent their cries from touching the tender heart of the tyrant. When the bull was presented to him, the tyrant rewarded the artisan with the honor of being the first to be roasted within his own invention. Here we already have the story of Guido: he gave his fraudulent counsel to Boniface and was the first to suffer from it, since he was damned at that moment. The simile conveys, moreover, the idea of the disparity and contradiction between the inner and the outer voice, between the man within and the bronze but bellowing animal "pierced with pain." The outer form is a cover and a dissimulation of the real being within. So Guido's voice is "a confused sound" transformed as it finds its way out through the tongue of fire, issuing at first as the roar of the flame—"changed into its language," Dante says. Guido seems to have much greater difficulty than Ulysses in communicating through the flame. The implication is that there is a contradiction between the man and his words, between passion and pretext, between the inner compulsion and the spoken rationalization. What is not concealed, however, is the human pain of the man within.

Guido's first words, addressed to Virgil, contain the first fallacious deduction. Guido appeals to Virgil as a fellow-countryman because he thinks he heard him speaking to Ulysses in the Lombard dialect. This has seemed a rather odd detail to most readers of the *Inferno*, but perhaps it is not to be taken at face value. Virgil had chosen to address Ulysses and Diomedes, instead of allowing Dante to do so, because they were ancient Greeks. If Dante's curial Italian was not of

sufficient dignity for communicating with Ulysses, it hardly seems likely that Virgil would descend to speaking a dialect, even if Dante did believe that he was able to speak Lombard, having been born in Mantua. Rather it would seem that this is simply a false impression of Guido's, who transforms Virgil's Latin, in his own mind, into a linguistic form more familiar to himself. This is the opinion of Benvenuto Terracini, a recent commentator of this canto. He believes that Dante is developing here his antithesis between Ulysses and Guido. The modern and inferior Italian can only apprehend the elevated language of Virgil in a reduced and regionalized form. We have descended, Dante is implying, from the epic struggles and adventures of the ancient world to the sad, bloody chronicle of contemporary Italian feudal warfare.

The fourteenth-century commentator Benvenuto da Imola finds in line 22 to 24 an expression of Guido's desire to emulate Ulysses and tell his story, as Ulysses has told his; Guido sees himself as another creator of history, another great commander of men who also deserves to have Virgil hear his story. Benvenuto da Imola interprets the line "though I have come somewhat late, perhaps," as meaning "though I am a modern Italian and not an ancient hero like Ulysses." We may find this explanation rather quaint, and even contradictory, since later Guido claims he has no desire to have his story known. But the medieval commentator was closer to the truth than he realized. This line does indicate the inner compulsion that has forced Guido to approach Virgil, and to find a pretext for doing so in Virgil's Lombard speech. The strength of this compulsion becomes apparent in the pathetic appeal of the lines "do not mind staying and speaking with me: you see I do not mind, although I burn." A secret pride yearning to find its outlet burns in the blind recesses of Guido's heart—the pride in his fame as an astute and successful commander. Now we can understand what Dante was suggesting in the image of the Sicilian bull, in which the inner voice is transformed as it comes forth; and in the image of the fitful tongue of fire that flutters as the words within struggle to the summit, and are distorted as they escape. So Guido's inner yearning to return to the scene of his dubious successes finds its distorted expression in the request for news of Romagna. Guido alludes to "this blind world" in which he has fallen; he is a sightless prisoner within the flame, a prisoner of his intellectual blindness, burning with a passion hidden from himself. Dante presents him as the same man who on earth, even in his

friar's habit, could not contain the desire to display once more the skill that had earned him the fame and name of the Fox. He needed only Pope Boniface's sophistry as a pretext for its satisfaction.

Virgil spoke Lombard; he was a countryman; he would therefore give him news of the Romagna – so Guido reasoned. But he is mistaken, and this becomes evident in Virgil's words to Dante: "You talk, this one is Italian." Dante, the modern Italian, will know about this land from which Guido brings "all his guilt." This Guido confesses, but his admission of guilt covers a secret pride: from the Romagna he also brought all his fame. Dante satisfies Guido's request:

And I, whose answer was already formed,
without delay began to speak:
"O soul that now lies hidden there below,
Your Romagna is not, and never was,
without war in the hearts of its tyrants,
but I left none fought openly now.
Ravenna stands as it has stood for many years:
the eagle of Polenta over it still broods,

covering Cervia with its outspread wings.
The city that once withstood the long siege
and made a bloody heap of Frenchmen
finds itself again under the green claws.
And the old Mastiff, and the young one, of
Verrucchio who decided Montagna's evil fate
still sink their teeth where they fed before.
The cities of Lamone and of Santerno
are ruled by the young Lion of the white lair
who changes party with the season.
And the town whose side the Savio bathes,
just as it lies between hill and plain,
so lives between tyranny and freedom.
Now, I beg you, tell us who you are:
do not be more unyielding than one has been
to you, so may your name in the world endure."

Dante speaks to the soul that lies "hidden there below," and tells him there is always war in the hearts of Romagna's tyrants, although none is being fought openly. To one who is acquainted with Dante's ways as a poet this may well seem to be an allusion to Guido's hidden motives. Dante's reply is made by the pilgrim who does not even know who Guido is, but it was artfully fashioned by the poet. The cities on the Lamone of the Santerno are



Faenza and Imola, between which Guido had won a decisive victory over the Guelfs; the Savio bathes the town of Cesena, taken by Guido, along with Cervia, in 1275. Forlì is the city that "withstood the long siege," and the "bloody heap of Frenchmen" is an allusion to Guido's most famous victory. To these memories the old Fox had compulsively returned. The Romagna was the lair of the many beasts whose ferocity the Fox had outmatched with his cunning.

Guido's reply is delayed by the enveloping fire, but finally breaks through:

After the fire had roared a while,
in its fashion, it moved its sharp point
to and fro, and then exhaled these words:
"If I thought that my reply were made
to one who might ever return to the world,
this flame would quiver no more;
but since no one from these depths
has ever returned alive, if what I hear is true,
without fear of infamy I shall answer you."

This preamble to Guido's story is almost a formal syllogism, and again the fallacy is apparent. Guido cannot see Dante, so he does not perceive, as had several other sinners, that Dante is alive and therefore not condemned to remain in Hell. Although the words "if what I hear is true" seem to indicate that Guido can conceive of someone returning to earth, the suspicion is not allowed to linger. The compulsion to tell his story is stronger than his fear of infamy, and forces the decision to speak. The syllogism is a rationalization hiding Guido's real motives from his listener and from himself. In the last line there is a clue, however, to what urges his reply. Guido decides so readily that he need not fear infamy for himself because he is more intent on covering with infamy his accomplice and enemy, Pope Boniface. Blindly, Guido had rushed forward to tell his story, burning with eagerness and fearing he might be too late. He may allege that he is telling his story only because no one could ever return to the world from the depths of Hell. But his secret desire is to have Boniface's infamy known to the world. Guido's tragedy is that of a powerful mind so enveloped in subtleties and subterfuge that it deceives itself. It is the tragedy of intellect defeated by rationalized compulsions.

Guido begins his story:

I was a man of arms, and then a corded friar,
believing, that so girt, I could make amends,
and surely my hope had been made whole
were it not for the high Priest, may evil take him,
who drew me back into my first sins;
and how and why I will have you hear
from me.

While I was the form of bone and flesh
my mother gave me, mine were the deeds
not of the lion but of the fox.

All stratagems and covert ways I knew,
and used them with such art
that their sound went out to the ends
of the earth.

When I saw myself come to that part
of my life where everyone should
lower his sails and gather in the lines,
what had pleased me before then grieved me,
and my sins repented and confessed, I took
holy vows.

And this - oh my evil fate - this would have saved
me.

It is this part of the story that engages our sympathy. The cunning of the astute commander had become the caution of the Christian soul. Guido's consciousness of sin, the prudence which imposed so radical a reform may not have been free of self-interest. But this Christian strategy was the highest expression of Guido's character; all his formidable astuteness was obediently engaged in the maneuver that should have brought him, with long patience and restraint, safely to the eternal port. In this passage, as elsewhere, the virility and dignity of Guido's language is apparent. It lacks the aristocratic elevation of Farinata's speech, the heroic breadth of Ulysses' story, and it even has a colloquial quality; but its measured cadences and robust eloquence are those of a leader of men who dominated his age.

There is, of course, some complacency in his mention of his fame: the sound that "went out to the ends of the earth"; and his whole account will be artfully presented so as to bring out Boniface's villainy and show himself as the victim.

The Prince of the modern Pharisees -
waging war there near the Lateran,
and not with Saracen or with Jew,
for all his enemies were Christians,
and none had gone to conquer Acre
nor been a trader in the Sultan's land -
had no regard for the highest office
nor for Holy Orders in himself,
nor on me the cord that once made its wearers lean.
But as Constantine asked for Sylvester
to come from Soracte to heal his leprosy,
so did this man seek me out as the master
who could cure the fever of his pride:
he asked my counsel, and I was silent
because his words seemed drunken.
And then he added: "Let not your heart be afraid;
I absolve you beforehand, and you teach me
what I must do to cast Palestrina to the ground.
I have the power to lock and to unlock the gates of
Heaven,
as you know; for two are the keys
that my predecessor did not hold dear."
Then his weighty arguments were so compelling
that I was placed where silence seemed the greater
evil,
and I said, "Father, since you cleanse me
of that sin into which I must now fall . . .
long promise with short keeping
will make you triumph on your high throne."

Guido draws back when he senses the danger

to himself in Boniface's "drunken" words. Boniface knows his man, however, and provides the specious argument that will serve as Guido's pretext. Here is another of the syllogisms: Boniface can forgive or condemn; he will forgive Guido in advance; therefore Guido can give his advice without fear of sinning. The Pope's claim that he could forgive Guido beforehand would have been doubted by a Christian far less astute than Guido, but he chooses to find the Pope's arguments weighty and compelling. He is apparently in awe of Boniface's power to lock the gates of Heaven against him, and so he fears that silence would be the more dangerous course. Guido, who had played the game of power in the world, is still more susceptible to the claims of might than of justice. But more compelling than the Pope's deductions are the inner urgings of Guido's own nature. The Fox that he had suppressed still lurked beneath the cowl of the Franciscan. Here was an opportunity to exercise his famous skill once more, to assume again the earthly role that had been his delight, while still winning the heavenly prize. To Guido, who had always played the double game in the world so as to win the most at the least cost, the immunity offered by Boniface made the temptation irresistible. The wisdom of the world, Dante seems to be saying here, is no more intelligent than the blind appetite it serves.

Guido's advice to Boniface also takes the form of a logical, syllogistic argument. His mention of the high throne has been explained as a reflection of the threat of the Colonna family to have Boniface deposed as pope. But it also serves as the premise in Guido's deduction. For Guido's advice is based on the fact that Boniface is the Pope, even for his enemies; he speaks from the moral eminence of the papal throne and his promises will be believed. He need only neglect to keep them, and he will have won. The mention of

the high throne at the end of Guido's counsel also emphasizes its perversity. What had been the holy seat of Peter was now the throne of a temporal prince who would win a treacherous victory over his own people. The triumph of guile in such a place was for Dante the worst perversion of human intellect. Guido must be judged as the abettor of such a crime; a prestigious but a pitiful figure after all, who allowed himself to be deceived by Boniface and by himself. The punishment will fit the crime with absolute poetic justice: long promise and short keeping Guido advised, and such he got from Boniface, who promised a forgiveness he could never grant.

But Guido was more deluded by himself than by Boniface. The craftiness of the worldly-wise is exposed as utter folly by the jeering devil who seizes Guido upon his death:

Then, when I was dead, Francis came
for me; but one of the black cherubim
said to him: "Don't take him; don't you cheat me!
He must come down among my servants
because he gave the fraudulent counsel;
from that moment have I been hanging at his hair.
For no one can be absolved who repents not.
Nor can repenting and willing go together
because of the contradiction that does not
permit it."

Wretch that I am! how I started
when he seized me, saying, "Perhaps
you didn't think I was a logician!"
He carried me to Minos, who twisted his tail
eight times around his unbending back,
and after biting it in his great rage,
said, "This one is for the concealing flame!"

And therefore, here where you see me am I lost,
and so clothed, I go lamenting bitterly.

The tragi-comedy of syllogistic errors ends with the entrance of the schoolmaster-devil with his lesson in logic. He speaks a language Guido can understand, made up of premises and conclusions - only, his logic is faultless. With his mocking cry, "You didn't think I was a logician!," the tenuous tragedy is dissipated, and truth is revealed in a comic clarity.



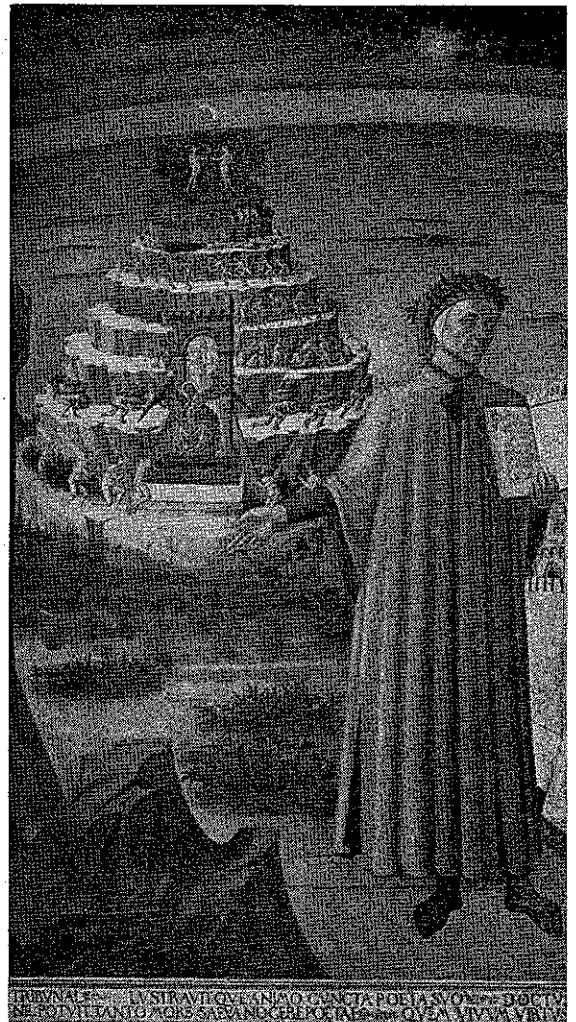
On Dante's Mount of Purgation

by
Jacob Klein

To talk *well* about anything Dante wrote requires a vast amount of knowledge which I do not possess. I propose, therefore, to give you a homespun account of the middle cantos of the *Purgatorio*, of cantos X to XXVII. My aim, modest and ambitious at the same time, is to show how these cantos are built. I shall stick to the text as closely as I can in the short time at my disposal. I shall have to leave out a great many things. I shall make some use of the commentaries I have read. Everything else I am going to say may have been said by commentators whom I have not read. You will forgive me.

It is not unimportant to mention first certain general characteristics of the mount of purgation. Let me remind you that Dante puts this mount in the southern hemisphere, exactly opposite Jerusalem. When Satan fell headlong

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Detail from "Dante and his Poem" in the Duomo of Florence by Domenico di Michelino

from heaven into the center of the terrestrial globe a lump of earth bearing the garden of Eden surged upwards. As a result of this surge the mount appears placed between Satan's feet and the rays of heavenly grace. This situation determines the intrinsic *duality* of everything pertaining to the mount.

In Hell reigns eternally the darkness of night, in the celestial paradise eternally the brightness of daylight. In purgatory there is both day *and* night. On every circle of the mount there is always both the bit of the remembered sin *and* the whip fitting the punishment, that is to say, on every circle both the sin to be punished *and* the corresponding acts of virtue are conjured up in visible or audible evocations. – I shall have to mention more examples of this duality as I proceed.

There is another characteristic feature of the purgatory which – for want of a better word – I shall call *inversion*. I mean by this term the change of something into its oppo-

site. Here are instances of this inversion. 1) Since the mount is located in the southern hemisphere the rays of the sun strike from a direction opposite to that in the northern hemisphere. 2) In contrast to our common experience, the higher one climbs up the mount the lighter the ascent — and the easier it is to converse. 3) As a pine tree in our world “grows gradually less from bough to bough upwards” so do the trees on the circle of gluttony downwards. (This is said only of the first tree the travellers meet, but I assume that the other trees grow in the same way.) 4) While here on earth an earthquake is a calamity, the shaking of the mount whenever one of the souls is freed from its penitence is a blessing. — All these inversions, however, are mere “figures,” reflections, or — in Dante’s understanding of the word — “allegories” of the fundamental inversion proper to the purgatory. It is the character of penitence itself. The bitterness of the suffering which the souls undergo is sweetness to them; their pain is solace; they enjoy immeasurably the “sweet wormwood” of their torments. And it may be added that the *progress*, the going forward of the penitent sinner, is precisely his *returning*, his going back to the state he was in before his sinning. It is through this character of penitence that the duality I mentioned before acquires its deepest significance.

A question has to be raised at this point which concerns the *Comedy* as a whole and the *Purgatory* in particular. I hesitate to raise it. What is the role of Dante, the live and shadow-casting traveller, in the kingdoms of those who have left this life? This question is inseparable from this other one: what is the underlying theme and what is the purpose of the *Comedy*? Now, Dante, in his letter to Can Grande, says explicitly, as you all must know, that the underlying theme of the *Comedy*, in its literal sense, is “the state of souls after death,” while taken allegorically it is “man as by good or ill deserts, in the exercise of the freedom of his choice, he becomes liable to rewarding or punishing justice.” The *purpose* of the *Comedy*, Dante says in that same letter, “is to remove those living *in this life* from the state of misery and lead them to the state of felicity.” This statement can be paraphrased as follows: Dante’s poem, which describes his journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, is meant to *reform* men so as to enable them to achieve happiness both here on earth and thereafter. It prescribes the ways and means to achieve this happiness by biblical and pagan examples to be shunned or to be emulated. It passes judgement on the dead and the living. It is prophetic. It mediates between men as they are and the

will of God. It is not possible to exaggerate the boldness of this undertaking. It relies explicitly on the help of Virgil, the dispenser of human wisdom, on that of Beatrice, the bearer of beatitude, and on that of Bernard of Clairvaux, the ultimate intercessor between Dante and the glory of God. The one who is thus wondrously helped is Dante, the poet. Dante’s own visionary involvement shapes the very *content* of what he sees. He is not a passive or “objective” spectator. *What* he observes is attuned to *him*; *how* he observes derives from *his* powers; not only do his experiences affect him directly and personally, — without his presence in the kingdoms of the dead those domains would not be as they are. Let me give an example.

Emerging on the terrace of the first circle of the mount of purgation (after climbing through a cleft rock which bestows upon the “needle’s eye” of the gospels the features of the “wandering” or “clashing” rocks in Homer’s *Odyssey* and in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes)¹ this is what Dante sees and describes: a high and completely upright bank of pure white marble on which examples of profound humility are vividly represented in sculptures done in relief. Dante can hardly detach his eyes from them. Now, it is important to note that the penitent souls circling this terrace are bent down, corbel-like, under heavy stony burdens and are therefore totally unable to see these engravings. What they can and do see are only examples of wrecked pride put in relief on the pavement. It is true, any one of them, purged and freed from the burden of penitence, may resume his upright posture on his way to the terrestrial paradise and thus get sight of the engravings on the wall. But then these souls have already transcended at least this stage of purgation. It is thus Dante alone — if we disregard Virgil’s shade — who sees those reliefs. They are there, on the mount, for Dante’s — and our — sake, not for the sake of the penitent souls. Dante’s presence on the mount is an *essential* part of the panorama of purgation. There is a dual reaction to penitence, that of the penitent souls and that of Dante himself.

This is *one* way of saying that Dante, the pilgrim, is not engaged in penitence while on the mount. Let us understand this more precisely. When he arrives at the gate of purgatory and faces the Guardian Angel, who seems to represent the priest confessor, Dante — upon Virgil’s prodding — flings himself at his feet, craves for mercy that the gate may be opened to him and smites his breast thrice. The letter “P” is scratched seven times on his forehead and the gate is opened with the help of two

keys which the angel holds from Peter. According to the tradition of the church based on Matthew XVI, 19 these two keys are the ability to discern the sin and the power of condemning and of absolving.² Do we witness Dante's confession and absolution in this scene? No doubt, he is contrite, but he does not actually confess nor does he receive absolution. Without Lucia's heavenly intervention he could not have entered the Purgatory. All he is told by the angel is this: "Do thou wash these wounds when thou art within," the wounds being the seven P's on his forehead which it is hard not to interpret as standing for seven *peccata*, the seven deadly sins or capital vices.³ This washing, which is the washing of sinful habits, occurs on every one of the seven circles of the mount — not by penitence but by acts of virtue. In every case a "particular virtue" (*virtus specialis*) is involved for, as Thomas says,⁴ "to any specific natural inclination is adjoined some particular virtue." And while, according to Thomas,⁵ penitence expels every sin in being "operative," that is, in actual fact and once and for all (*effective*), any particular virtue expels the habit of the opposite vice only formally (*formaliter*), that is, by way of re-formation, by way of substituting one form for another, as white may substitute for black. This difference is reducible — in Aristotelian language — to the difference between the second and the first entelechy, as, for example, to that between the actual contemplation of the truth and the quiet possession of knowledge, or as to that between waking and sleep.⁶ The "formal" washing is accomplished by Dante on every circle, and in each case an angel confirms this by removing one of the P's. But no penitence is involved in this washing. For one thing, there is not enough time for penitence on Dante's journey. Dante, the pilgrim, knows that he will have to come back to the mount of purgation after his death and does not fail to mention this time and again. He "justifies" himself, but not completely so. Let us accompany him and witness his washings.

On the first circle, on which Pride (*superbia* or *inanis gloria*) is purged, Dante spontaneously and humbly bends himself down to share the posture of the penitent souls. What the soul of Oderisi tells him a short while later fills his heart with humility and lowers his swollen pride. "Even in step, like oxen which go in the yoke," he "went beside that burdened soul," and later on, erect again, his thoughts "remained bowed down and shrunken." This is how Dante's virtue counterbalances his vice. A great deal of pride remains in him, even on the mount. And he seems well aware of that.

On the second circle the aim is the purga-

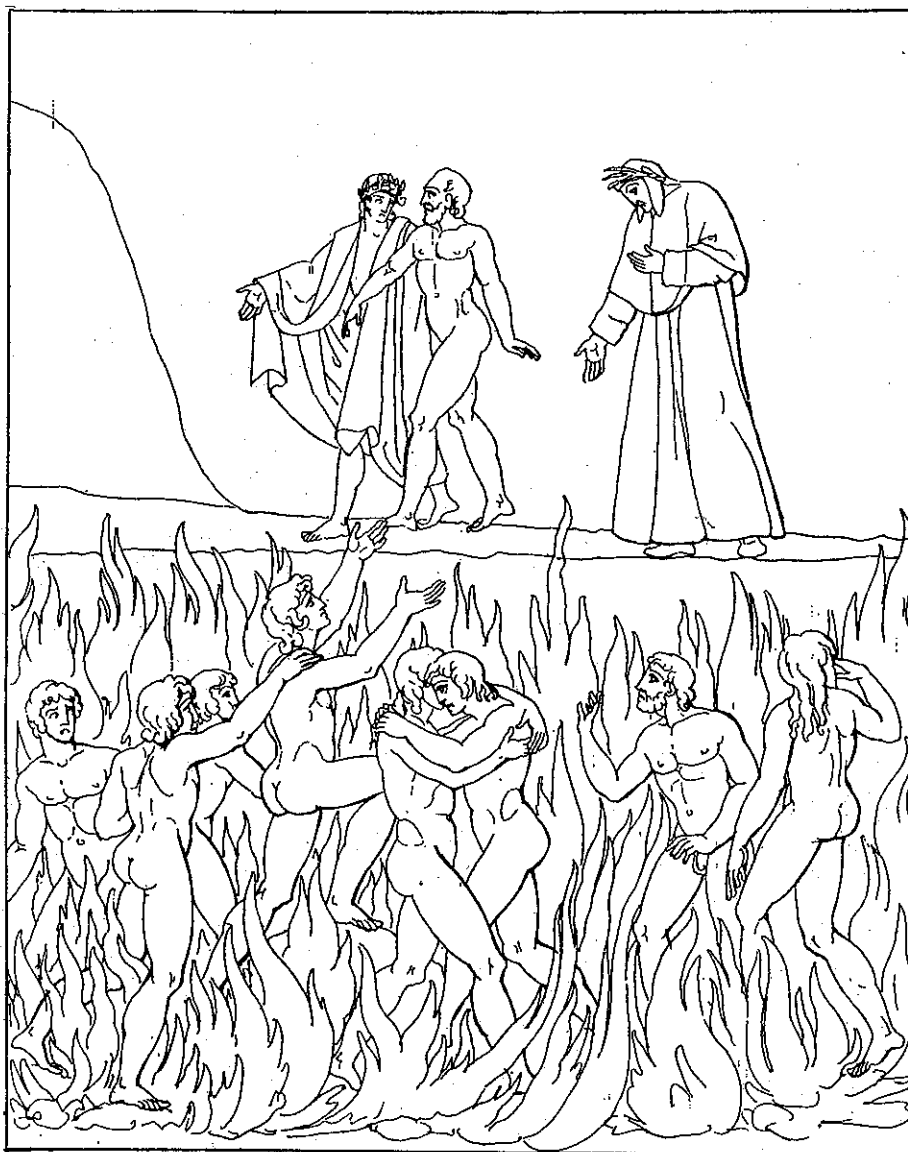
tion of Envy (*invidia*). Envy, in the context of the cantos which deal with this sin, has a dual meaning. It is both the sadness that one feels at the fortune of others and the joy that one experiences at the misfortune of others. The eyelids of the penitent souls are pierced and sewed up by means of an iron wire so that they cannot see (that is how Dante understands the Latin verb *invidere*). When Dante discovers the condition they are in, he says, full of compassion for their present misfortune: "I seemed to do them wrong as I went my way seeing others, not being seen." This is how Dante's virtue of compassion prevails.

On the third circle Wrath (*ira*) is the sin aimed at. In speaking to the soul of Marco, the Lombard, Dante manifests his anger with the world in these words: "The world is indeed so wholly bereft of every virtue, even as thy words sound to me, and heavy and covered with sin." But he adds: "I pray that thou point the cause out to me so that I may see it, and that I may show it to others." To ask for the cause of that which provokes anger means to pierce the smoky cloud with which anger envelops one's soul, means to cease being wrathful. This is the way in which Dante manifests the virtue of his meekness.

I should like to add that Marco proceeds to indicate the cause, the ultimate cause of the world's ills, which is the lack of leadership, the absence of the pacifying imperial rule. This rule has to supplement the spiritual power of the Church: *two* suns are needed to make the road of the world *and* the road of God visible. It is not insignificant that this doctrine of *dual* leadership is enunciated for the first time in the *Comedy* on the mount of purgation.

When Virgil and Dante arrive at the cornice of the fourth circle, where Sloth (in Latin: *acedia*) is punished and repented of, it is night. Virgil discourses on Love and unveils to Dante, in the middle canto of the *Purgatorio* which is also the middle canto of the entire *Comedy*, the central doctrine of the poem, the doctrine of Love, as well as the relations which the various circles of the mount bear to Love's aberrations. Rivalling the ceaseless motion of the penitent souls on this circle, a motion that does not stop even at night, Dante's thinking, Dante's intellectual movement, is raised to its highest pitch. Encouraged by Virgil, Dante, burning to understand, decides to ask his guide to clarify the nature of Love to him. It is this passionate questioning and intense thinking which reveals Dante's virtue, Dante's zeal.

On the fifth circle, that of Avarice and of Prodigality, Dante kneels before the prostrate soul of Pope Adrian V. He explains his gesture to the pope in these words: "Because of your



Sofia Giacomelli (pseud.)

dignity my conscience smote me for standing.” It is this unselfish tribute to a good which is not of an earthly kind that Dante manifests his virtue, – in this case, the particular virtue of liberality.

On the sixth circle reign hunger and thirst, the dual punishment for gluttony (*gula*). Far from succumbing to the temptations of food and drink, Dante discourses with some of the penitent souls about a nourishment of a different kind (that I shall have to deal with in a moment) and, together with Virgil and Statius, resolutely passes by the tree raised from the one “eaten of by Eve.” This is the way he shows his virtue of temperance.

Lastly, on the seventh circle, the circle of Lust (*luxuria*), Dante with utter reluctance, fearful of death, finally consents to enter the fire. He does this only after Virgil mentions Beatrice, and while Dante traverses the wall of fire Virgil keeps discoursing of her and her eyes. “When I was within,” says Dante, within the fire, that is, “I would have flung me into molten glass to cool me, so immeasurable there was the burning.” This awesome purification is, I presume, the seventh washing which takes the seventh P away. The virtue manifested here by Dante is Love, as ardent as any, yet freed from the flames of sensuality.

These, then, are the various ways in which

particular acts of virtue on Dante's part "formally" expel his sinful habits on the mount of purgation.

* * *

We have not dealt as yet with the pattern or patterns according to which the journey on the mount is built. Dante's involvement and the limits of his involvement will become more apparent in them.

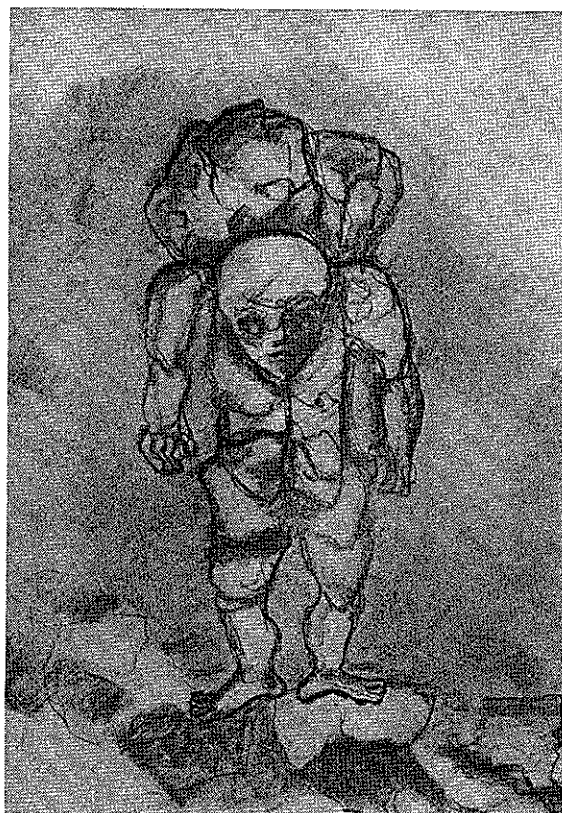
Let us remind ourselves first of all that Dante's rhyming scheme in the *Comedy* is the chain-linked tercet, conceived, no doubt, as a reflex of the trinity. The characteristic feature of this device is that the *middle* line of each tercet is the *first* line of a sequence of three rhymed lines and that the *first* line of each tercet is the *middle* line of such a sequence:

xAx ABA ByB. Rhyming schemes may have a

life of their own. But in the *Comedy*, and especially in the *Purgatorio*, they seem to adumbrate the way in which the themes of the poem are linked together or echo each other. Dante's precision is immense. Let me pursue this in the series of cantos under consideration.

Simultaneously, let us take notice of the fact that the sin purged on each of the circles is tied to a dominant medium and that the nature of the tie is different in the lower half and the upper half of the mount.

First circle. The sin is Pride. According to Ecclesiasticus X, 15 (in the Vulgate), this sin is the "beginning" of all sin.⁷ It is, according to the tradition, the first sin of Adam, the first of Man.⁸ There is an intimate relation between Pride and the organs of sight. Thomas⁹ mentions Gregory the Great who said: "pride, while extending itself outwardly to the body, is mostly indicated by the eyes," the eyes where, as Dante says in a later canto, "the soul is fixed most."¹⁰ And Thomas also quotes Psalm 131, 1: "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty." Moreover we have to consider this: the object of sight, the visible object, is potentially visible to all. Glory, the object of pride, also tends to manifest itself visibly, publicly. Monuments, visible far away, reflect it. That which is so visibly displayed in pride claims uniqueness. This claim puts a burden on the proud. The proud wants to excel, wants his uniqueness to be seen by all. There is a clear discrepancy between his claim to uniqueness and his desire to share the commonness of a visible object. The meaning of "being seen" becomes questionable. Pride thus, indirectly, perverts the faculty of seeing. Accordingly, what is *first* presented to Dante's eyes on the mount are scenes of humility. But the important thing is precisely that the theme



The Proud

Joye Zarick

of pride and humility is here taken up in the medium of *sight*. The power of the soul which dominates the first circle is *seeing*. It is an exalted seeing with which nothing on earth can be compared. The engravings on the steep bank represent above all speech. It is speech made visible, as Dante himself says. They also represent what here on earth can only be apprehended by smell – the exhalation of incense. And let us not forget – it is Dante's own seeing which is thus affected.

The middle scene on the circle of pride – corresponding to the middle line of a tercet – is the scene of the "contracted" and burdened penitent souls. Oderisi's soul repudiates worldly fame, the "inane glory of human powers."¹¹ The perspicacity of the penitent souls has grown, but their sight is narrowed. Thus the link is forged that binds the theme of this circle to that of the following, the one of *invidia*, of clumsy seeing.

The third and last part of the story of pride's purgation echoes the first: engravings on the pavement present examples of wrecked pride. Dante views them with eyes turned downward.

Second circle. The sin is Envy. There is an intimate relation between Envy and the voices one hears. Envy is not jealousy. Jealousy sees its object directly. Envy relies on what is *said* of others, on the good or bad luck of those others as reported by word of mouth. Envy listens to voices. Its object is the audible. What is audible is potentially audible to all. Envy, however, — primarily in the sense of the joy one experiences at the misfortune of others — this envy, closing its eyes, as it were, listens to hearsay, to gossip. Gossip whispers. What is being said is not supposed to be heard by all. Envy thus, indirectly, perverts the faculty of hearing. Accordingly, what is *first* presented to Dante's ears on this circle are voices which speak of compassion. Again, the important thing here is that the theme of Envy (in its dual meaning) and of compassion is taken up in the medium of *hearing*. The voices Dante hears are loud and persistent. The power of the soul which dominates the second circle is *hearing*. And it is Dante, first of all, who is engaged in listening.

The middle scene of the circle of Envy is provided by the penitent souls and their speaking. It is the soul of Guido del Duca who, taking up Dante's statement about his origin, launches into a diatribe about the cities on the Arno and inveighs violently against Romagna. He is full of wrath, though of legitimate wrath. Thus the link is forged that binds this circle to the theme of the next one, which is the theme of wrath.

The third and last part is tied to the first by way of contrast: new voices present examples of envy.

Third circle. The sin is Wrath. Wrath beclouds our souls, engulfs us in billows of smoke, as it were. The angrier we are the more fuel is supplied by our imagination, which makes us see things at their worst. Our anger thus feeds on itself. Whatever we imagine is by the very nature of the faculty of imagination "unreal," untruthful, is an "error," as Dante himself says. Most of the time we imagine what is not there. But wrath may also be legitimate as Guido del Duca's outburst on the preceding circle shows. We may occasionally imagine what is true. We may, as we say, "remember." We may truly recreate events of the past. It is indeed *imagination*, in its dual aspect, that dominates the third circle. Accordingly, the first sights that present themselves to Dante on this circle he owes to an exalted state of imagining, to an ecstatic vision of his own. Examples of meekness are thus supplied to him, truly representing events of the past. This happens so that his heart may be opened to "the waters of peace, which are poured from

the eternal fount," in Virgil's words.¹²

The conversation with Marco Lombardo, who remains invisible amidst the smoke, the "bitter and foul air," which envelops the penitent souls on this circle, is the content of the middle scene. Dante's inquiring into the ultimate cause of the ills of the world not only testifies to his virtue, as we have seen, but also opens the way to a reasoned discourse on the part of Marco, which discourse touches upon most weighty matters and appeals to Dante's understanding. Thus the link is forged which binds this circle to the theme of the following one, where understanding is dominant.

In the last scene Dante finds himself once again alone with his "lofty fantasy" which this time offers him true examples of punished scorn and wrath.

Fourth circle. The sin is Sloth, physical, moral, emotional, and intellectual inertia, a capital vice which, according to Thomas¹³ (and to Gregory the Great) has six daughters: malice, rancor, pusillanimity, despair, moral torpor, dissolute mind. The pattern of the three lower circles is broken on this fourth. It is Virgil who speaks, solemnly and authoritatively, about Love and Freewill. Dante's comprehension ripens. *Understanding* is the dominant medium throughout. The flow of Virgil's philosophical discourse and of the corresponding intellectual movement in Dante is interrupted — the latter only for a short while — by the appearance of the penitent souls who, in running ceaselessly ahead, conjure up in words examples of active zeal. Their running again links, this time by way of inversion, the happenings on the circle of sloth to the punishment inflicted on the next circle. — But from now on, throughout the upper half of the mount, we face a pattern differing sharply from that on the lower half.

Fifth circle. The sin is Avarice and also Prodigality. According to the tradition, which Thomas¹⁴ upholds, avarice (*avaritia* or *cupiditas*) as "an inclination of a corrupt nature towards corruptible goods which are pursued in an inordinate way" is the "root" of all sin, as pride, on the first circle, is its "beginning." Accordingly, "no more bitter penalty has the mount" than that for avarice. It consists in lying on the ground motionless and prostrate, with one's face downwards on the dusty earth. This is the spectacle Dante — and we through him — encounters from the very beginning on this circle, a spectacle of total immobility in contrast to that of never ceasing motion on the preceding circle. What is stressed here is the nearness of sin and penalty alike to — *Earth*.¹⁵ What is dominant on this circle is the first of the traditional "elements," earth, and — to an-

ticipate what is going to follow – the sway of the elemental will persist through the entire upper half of the mount.

The penitent souls themselves recite and present examples of liberality and of avarice. But, in addition, – and this is the middle scene on this circle – an extraordinary event happens here, and we should note that it is *this* circle which is chosen by Dante for this event to happen. The entire mount shakes, signaling the release of a soul from the straits of its punishment. It is a moment of highest bliss. It is said in Matthew 27, 51–52 that at the moment of Jesus' death "the earth did quake, and the rocks (were) rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose." The shaking of the mount imitates this moment. Twice before, in Hell, Dante could continue his journey only because the earthquake which coincided with Jesus' death had made rocks fall down and thus created negotiable passages. Divine grace proves efficient even in Hell. Here, in Purgatory, the shaking of the earth is a direct manifestation of the resurrecting power of Christ. Within the concatenation of the events on the mount this middle event rhymes with the theme of the following circle, as we shall see in a short while.

It is the soul of the poet Statius which is released at this juncture. As we learn later, Statius' main sins consisted in his hiding his conversion to Christianity and in his being prodigal. Statius joins Virgil and Dante, and from then on the three poets remain together until they reach the terrestrial paradise. Their conversation, which continues on the stairway leading to the sixth circle, fills the last part of the story of perverted liberality. Thus, the trinity of Poetry makes its appearance on the circle of avarice and prodigality dominated by the element "earth." We have to ask: what is the significance of this fact?

Within the household of nature the elements, especially earth and water, constitute – according to Aristotle¹⁶ and the tradition that follows him – the foundations of the nourishment on which all living beings, including humans, thrive. (We shall have to consider this point more fully when dealing with the theme of the next circle.) A common metaphor attributes a desire for "earthly" goods to the human soul, a desire that can reach extravagant proportions in the "accursed hunger for gold."¹⁷ This is what avarice in its naked manifestation is. Such hunger misinterprets the nature of the proper *human* nourishment, of what is genuinely "gold" to the human soul. Its proper nourishment, the genuine gold, is provided by – Poetry, by poetry's flavor, grace and elevation, to use Dante's words in

De vulgari eloquentia.¹⁸ Statius is a great and grave example of this fact. He was nourished by Virgil's *Aeneid* and the *Fourth Eclogue*. The former led him to his own poetry as well as to his belated liberality, the latter to Christianity. The poetic potency of the human soul shows itself in the art both of producing poetry *and* of absorbing it.

We gather that the relation of Statius to Virgil repeats itself in the relation of Dante to Virgil. But there is more to be said on this occasion. Any great work at some point justifies, explicitly or implicitly, its own existence. It seems that Dante's enterprise, of which the *Comedy* is the fruit, receives its justification and vindication on this circle of the mount. The nourishment Poetry provides is the seed out of which grows faith. The things seen in poetic vision may seem "unreal," as we say so glibly, may lack "thinghood," to use an English, if somewhat barbarous, word. The exploits on the Trojan battlefields, for example, or Aeneas' expedition into the underworld, or prophetic utterances clad in symbols and figures, do not seem credible from the point of view of our common experience. Yet poetic experience has its own validity and credibility, deplored by some, exalted by others. Dante appears to imply that the power of poetry is akin to the power of revelation. Does not genuine poetry prepare us – in Dante's view – for the "conviction about things unseen?" Does it not point to that which can be held only in faith?

We have to note, furthermore, that, while on the lower half of the mount the mention of the power of the soul *initiated* the development of the theme proper to each circle and involved Dante immediately and predominantly, here, on the first circle of the upper half of the mount, it *terminates* that development and involves Dante only indirectly. A structural inversion has taken place.

Sixth circle. The sin is Gluttony. Virgil and Statius converse about poetry and, in doing so, give Dante "understanding in poesy." They come upon a tree standing in the middle of the road "with fruit wholesome and pleasant to smell." The tree owes this bounty to clear water which falls from the high rock and spreads itself over the leaves. Thus the second element, *water*, is introduced on this circle. It dominates its climate. Water – again according to Aristotle¹⁹ – is the *main* elemental ingredient of all food. A mysterious voice from within the foliage orders the virtue of abstinence and cites examples of it. It contradicts the serpent of the bible. To prescribe abstinence means to combat gluttony. Gluttony, however, is but the extravagant outgrowth of

our natural craving for nourishment. Nourishment sustains life. Our craving for nourishment, our hunger and thirst, indicate our craving for life. Our desire of an immediate, as we say, physical satisfaction of hunger and thirst, which can be supplied by elemental nourishment, is but a symbol of our craving for everlasting life. Behind our desire of food and drink lies our deeper craving for immortality both of soul and of body. The penitent souls who suffer immeasurably from hunger and thirst so as to be reduced in their appearance to the mere skeletal outline of their frames are well aware of the full significance of their terrible want. Forese Donati's soul expresses this as follows: "From the eternal counsel virtue descends into the water, and into the tree . . . , whereby I thus do waste away."²⁰ Elemental water is but a vehicle for the divine nourishment which makes our souls strive gluttonously after eternal life. In their longing for food and drink and in their joyful suffering the penitent souls imitate the passion of Jesus Christ which passion was meant to make eternal life an achievable aim. But the thirst for immortality is understood as an original and innate power of the human soul.

Let us not forget that the shaking of the mount, the middle scene on the preceding circle, had set the theme we were just discussing. The middle scene of the circle we are now on is divided into two parts, which both again anticipate — though in a different way — the theme of the next circle. There are two speakers: Forese Donati and Bonagiunta of Lucca. Forese, continuing his conversation with Dante, castigates the licentiousness of the women of Florence, which rhymes with the sin of the lustful, the one to be purged on the last circle. Bonagiunta recognizes in Dante the champion of the "new sweet style" in poetry, which style — as far as Dante is concerned — could not have been maintained without the love of Beatrice. And Beatrice is indeed the link between Dante's poetic preoccupation and the aim of the last purgation on the mount, the overcoming of carnality by the love of the highest.

The third scene of the circle rhymes directly with the first: the three poets meet another tree laden with fruit, towards which the penitent souls lift up their hands crying and begging. But they depart "as though undeceived." A voice from the tree proclaims examples of punished gluttony.

So far, on the fifth and sixth circles, the dominant media were Earth and Water. The dominant medium of the seventh circle is Fire. The quaternity of elements would be complete but for the missing *Air*. But *Air* is not missing. It is precisely on the stairway which connects

the sixth with the seventh circle that Dante asks a question which he could have asked, with appropriate modification, anywhere else on the mount, and that he receives an answer which, without any change, could have been given to him at any other point of the purgatory. The question is: "how can one grow lean there where the need of food is not felt?" The more comprehensive question implied in this specific one is: how can the souls suffer the pain they suffer while lacking all bodily organs of sense, since they have left their bodies altogether behind them? Statius explains to Dante that the disembodied souls retain and even increase their ability to understand, to remember, and to will, but that in addition, they acquire, through their formative virtue, bodies made up of air. That is why their "semblances" are called "shades." And that is how they form "the organs of every sense even to sight." Statius' explanation could be supported by a reference to Thomas' description²¹ of the bodily appearance of angels: just as in the formation of clouds a condensation of air takes place, which makes the air appear shaped and colored, so "angels assume bodies out of air, condensing this air with divine help as much as it is necessary for the formation of the body they have to assume." We have to understand: the aerial bodies Statius talks about replace the bodies left behind, but this substitution lasts only as long as the purgation lasts. The emphasis given to the body in Dante's question and Statius' answer is directly tied to the theme of the sixth circle, the theme of immortality: the *resurrected* body is destined to re-join the soul.

At any rate, the quaternity of the elements is indeed complete on the upper half of the mount. These elements of the sub-lunar sphere are not primordial. As we learn from the seventh canto of *Paradiso*, they were not created by God directly, but were formed secondarily, so to speak, by powers already created.²² The tradition of centuries tied these elements to the four humors of the human body, which humors were thought to be responsible for the temperaments, the moral characters, the virtues and especially the vices of men. No wonder, then, that the elements are present on the mount of purgation. They keep playing here their dual role in pointing both to vices and to virtues. As to the nourishment they provide, the organic growth they ordinarily support, these are taken here as indices or carriers of a higher kind of nourishment and growth.

Seventh circle. The sin is carnal Lust. The very first experience the three poets have when they reach the terrace of this circle is that of fire, which flashes forth from the bank, while

the cornice breathes a blast upward, which bends the flames back and keeps them away from it. The *fire* is all-dominant. The poets have to walk one by one close by the precipice. The penitent souls go through the flames chanting and crying out examples of chastity as well as of lust. There are two groups among these souls, walking in opposite directions. They represent the duality of illicit and of unnatural love. It is through flames that the flames of all this love are purified.

The middle scene on this circle consists in the conversations Dante has with the poets Guido Guinizelli and Arnaut Daniel. The first one Dante considers as his father in poetry, the second is pointed out to him by Guido as "a better craftsman of the mother tongue." More important perhaps than what is said in these conversations is the fact that here again two poets are brought to the fore. In addition to Dante, Statius and Virgil, three poets (if we do not include Forese in the count) make themselves heard on the last three circles. Thus, there are altogether six poets on the upper half of the mount, while none appear on the lower half, except Virgil and Dante. Poetry is predominant in the upper region. Let us remind ourselves that, in Dante's own words taken from *De vulgari eloquentia*,²³ true poetry must rest on these three pillars: alertness of mind (*strenuitas ingenii*), steadfastness in the practice of the art (*assiduitas artis*) and familiarity with the sciences (*habitus scientiarum*). Only poetry thus endowed and equipped can serve as nourishment to the human soul. To continue quoting from *De vulgari eloquentia*: "Let therefore those who, innocent of art and science, and trusting to genius alone, rush forward upon the highest subjects, which must be sung in the highest style, be confounded in their folly and let them refrain from such presumption." The mention of the "new sweet style" on the sixth circle brings in a new dimension, brings in Love, Love that reveals itself in dictating to the poet within the poet's soul. The mention of the new style in poetry foreshadows what is going to happen on the last circle.

Now, in the third and last scene of the last circle the freeing of love from the shackles of carnality occurs. Poetry prepared for it. The burning fire accomplishes it. This fire is as much elemental as it is spiritual in its nature. It frees Dante for the love of God, for the love of Love, which is the true character of the human will. And it does this only through the beneficence and munificence of Beatrice's name.

The structural inversion of the fifth circle repeats itself on the seventh. The power of the

human soul to love God is the terminal point of the movement on the last circle. The next station is the terrestrial paradise.

* * *

Let me put together what I have been trying to report so far. In showing the working of penitence on the mount Dante has described the faculties of the human soul which are necessary for its salvation. There are seven of them: the power of seeing, the power of hearing, the power of imagining, the power of understanding, the poetic potency, the thirst for immortality, the love of God. Whatever Dante may owe to Aristotle, to Virgil, to Ovid, to Augustine, to Thomas, to Allain of Lille, to Brunetto Latini and to many others, this description is his own. The sequence of those faculties has an ascending order. The smaller the radius of the circles, and correspondingly the greater their curvature, the greater also the intensity of the soul's commitment. At the beginning of the fourth canto of the *Purgatorio* Dante criticizes a doctrine according to which the soul is divided into separate compartments, each with a specific and unchanging function. According to Dante the *whole* soul may be totally concentrated in any one of its faculties. Dante himself, in his pilgrimage on the mount, bears testimony to the truth of this view. He is engaged alternately in seeing, in hearing, in ecstatic visions, and in understanding. He is wholeheartedly a partner in the poetic companionship of Statius and Virgil, he shares in the thirst for immortality exhibited by the penitent souls, and he is finally overcome – both Virgil and Beatrice serving as mediators – by the love of God. On these last three stages of the soul's expansion the soul is not alone, does not face its object in isolation, but rather, directed by "the love of the highest sphere," possesses the good so much the more the more there are souls who claim this good as their own. That is the reason why, on the last three circles, Dante does not initiate the movement. The "initiation," on these circles, is left to the elements of this world, which elements, in turn, merely "image" the truly elemental ingredients of the nourishment of the human soul, to wit, poetry – which is of things not seen, thirst for immortality – for immortality not yet vouchsafed, love of Love – that has not yet reached its fulfilment. These three potencies *prefigure* Faith, Hope, and Charity, the virtues traditionally called "theological." Even before being admitted to the Purgatory, Dante saw these virtues in the sky as three bright stars.²⁴

The ascending order of the soul's saving faculties implies that the highest of them, the

ability to love God, ultimately determines the very being of each of them. Seeing and hearing acquire a new dignity in ecstatic imagination; imagining together with seeing and hearing is elevated in understanding; understanding, in turn, rises to a new height in poetic vision; such visions reach into the region of eternal peace that the thirst for immortality is after; and this thirst is felt most deeply in the love of God, the love of Love. The interlocking of the themes and events on the seven circles of the mount reflects the nesting of the soul's faculties of salvation inside one another. All-encompassing is the love of God. Virgil, from his vantage point of human wisdom, speaks – in the seventeenth canto – of God as “Prime Being” and identifies the love of God with the “love of good” or the love of “primal goods.” This love has paradigmatic character. Whatever inclination, whatever willing the human heart is capable of is derived from this highest power: “love must be the seed of every virtue in you, and of every act that merits punishment,” says Virgil to Dante.²⁵ This love, then, also reigns over the power of seeing, the power of hearing, the power of imagining, and, above all, the power of understanding, in which the first three merge and culminate. The power of understanding gives wisdom. But without Love this wisdom, this human wisdom, could not take shape and substance, could not become – “Philosophy.” Philosophy, we read in the *Convivio*,²⁶ “has Wisdom for its material subject and Love for its form, and the habit of Contemplation (l'uso di speculazione) for the union of the two.” However intense the thinking and understanding on the fourth circle of the mount is, this thinking and understanding, as manifestations of the intellect, are not ripe to become contemplative – if Love is not present. Indeed, Dante “rambles” in his thoughts after listening to Virgil (he says: d'uno in altro vaneggiar). The very content of Virgil's discoursing about Love is aimed at linking the faculties exhibited on the lower half of the mount with the one appearing on the last circle.

Contemplation, genuine beholding, true “philosophy,” are only possible when love unites with understanding, when the willing of the good unites with the intellection of the true.

This kind of contemplation becomes actual in Beatrice, manifests itself in the Saturnian sphere of Heaven, and is fully realized perhaps only in Bernard at the very end of Dante's journey. On the mount, Dante is given merely a glimpse of it, in a prophetic dream he has at the threshold of the summit. It is the third such dream he is permitted to have on the mount in the early hours of the morning. The three prophetic dreams, at the beginning, the middle, and the end of Purgatory, mark decisive caesuras in Dante's journey and clearly set the boundaries to the upper and the lower halves of the mount, thus underscoring its intrinsic duality. The first prophetic dream occurs before Dante reaches the gate of Purgatory and coincides with Lucia's transporting him to this gate. The second takes place before his experiences on the upper half of the mount and anticipates the sins punished there in the figure of a stuttering, cross-eyed woman, the Siren, out of whose belly issues stench. Now, in the third prophetic dream, he sees Leah gathering flowers, Leah whom, as she says, *action* satisfies. And it is Leah who speaks of her sister Rachel whom Dante does not actually see and who, according to Leah, never stirs from her mirror. Rachel is looking into her own fair eyes and is satisfied by this beholding, this *contemplation*.

This is the way the climb up the mount of purgation ends. An active life without blemish and, above all, a contemplative life beckon to Dante – and to us, his readers. Virgil releases Dante “free, upright, and whole” in his will. Crown and mitre are bestowed on Dante by Virgil. From this moment on, Dante, the pilgrim, is not subject to any temporal lordship nor dependent on the guidance of the church. But this is another theme, the pursuit of which would exceed by far the task I have set myself.

NOTES

1. Purg. X, 7–9, 16. Matthew XIX, 24–26; Mark X, 25; Luke XVIII, 25. Odyssey XII, 59 ff. Apollonius of Rhodes II, 317 ff., 549 ff. (Cf. Euripides, Medea, 2)
2. Cf. Thomas, Contr. Gent. 4, LXXII
3. Cf. Thomas, Summa 12ae, LXXXIV, 4 c
4. Summa 22ae, CLIII, 2 c
5. Summa 3, LXXXV, 2, ad 3
6. De anima II, 1, 412a 21 ff.
7. Cf. Summa 12ae, LXXXIV, 2
8. Cf. Summa 22ae, CLXIII, 1
9. Summa 22ae, CLXI, 2, o.1
10. XXI, 111
11. XI, 100, 91

12. XV, 131–132
13. Summa 22ae, XXXV, 4
14. Summa 12ae, LXXXIV, 1
15. XIX, 52, 72, 119, 120, XX, 143
16. De gen. animal. III, 11, 762b 12–13
17. Auri sacra fames – Virgil, Aeneid III, 57 – cf. Purg. XXII, 40–41
18. 2, VI
19. De gen. animal. IV, 2, 767a 29–33
20. XXIII, 61–63
21. Summa 1, LI, 1, ad 3
22. Par. VII, 124 ff.
23. 2, IV
24. VIII, 85–93
25. XVII, 103–105
26. 3, XIV



Spanish Chapel, Santa Maria Novella
(Andrea Buonaiuti da Firenze)

The Women of the Comedy

by Thomas G. Bergin

Let me begin by defining the terms of my subject. In what I shall have to say here, I am ruling out the woman-ideal who, in the person of Beatrice, may be Revelation or a symbol of personal salvation and similarly Matelda, clearly thought of in much the same level of allegory; and by the same token I exclude such obvious extra-terrestrial characters as Santa Lucia and the Virgin Mary. I mean women considered by the poet without the veil of philosophical-religious allegory, women, as it were, *qua* women. If we except the allegorical figures, so shrouded in the robes of esoteric significance as to be scarcely recognizable as women under their vestments, we shall have, I think, a rather interesting field for exploration and may emerge with some conclusions, possibly not original — what is or could be at this late date in Dante

scholarship? — but not without interest as disclosing a side of the poet commonly not put to force in this connection.

For in fact, as concerns his views of the other sex, Dante is ambivalent. This may well be his own ambivalence, but it is certainly perfectly in accord with the medieval tradition in which our poet worked. Normally the eyes of the sensitive reader, still in the twentieth century under the influence of the romantics, focuses on Beatrice and the poet's near worship of her, an attitude not always easy to define in purely personal terms, a relationship in which the sentimental element is as tenuous as it is tender. And here Dante is accepting, passing on, and refining a basic human attitude, undeniably authentic, but cultivated in a knowing and self-conscious way by his predecessors in lyric poetry. Of the

thousands of quotations that could be brought in from the Provençal literature, I shall adduce one alone from the very fountainhead of the poets of the *langue d'oc*, William of Poitou, who speaks of his lady as follows:

Never did mind of man create
Nor lover's ardent fancy feign
Such strength of love as binds us twain,
And one who would our joys relate
And our delights enumerate
Would labor half a year in vain.

In her is all nobility
And worth and valor, birth and fame
And worldly joys themselves proclaim
Liege vassals of her sovereignty;
A man might strive a century
Nor fairly favor of her claim.

Let her but smile, the sick arise
And madmen have their wits restored;
Her frown is a death-dealing sword,
A glance from her envirtued eyes
May cast a king down from the skies
Or from a churl create a lord.

Here, at least in articulate terms, it all began. Later troubadours developed William's conception of the refining and rather terrifying lady-goddess, the early Italian poets added intellectual graces to her armament; Guinizelli put her on a par with the angels and Dante refined her completely, even though he had to kill off the flesh-and-blood creature to allow the supernatural potency to prevail. But for woman, so idealized, death was not a necessary requirement, nor even complete divorce from the flesh. Here and there a provençal poet will hint at desire and indeed in the original stages desire was one element in the lady worship, even though it was tacitly assumed, for the most part at least, that passion should lack fulfillment. But from William of Poitou down to Dante the emphasis is on the ennobling qualities of one particular lady whom the poet elects to celebrate and in whom he finds all kinds of exceptional virtues. The stress is on the word exceptional. For this is *one* lady, mysteriously gifted beyond her peers and uniquely shaped for the poet's ennoblement and eventually, in dantesque terms, salvation. Toward women in general another attitude was in evidence through all the medieval period. In distinction to what I might call the poetic-inspirational, this one might be defined as the clerical-realistic. It has a very long and ancient tradition going back to the Church fathers and the Pauline uneasiness vis-a-vis sex, and, in some segments of society, it is still with us. It is at the furthest remove from idealization, unless it be indeed a kind of negative idealization of its own. It looks symbolically to the wickedness of Eve rather than to the redemptive power of Mary. A few out-

spoken and eminent authorities may here be cited.

St. Thomas, somewhat hesitantly conceding that woman has a necessary function in the order of nature, nevertheless considered her the result of defective procreation, since "the active power in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness according to the masculine sex." Earlier Clement of Alexandria had written that "Every woman ought to be filled with shame at the thought that she is a woman," and much later the great Leon Battista Alberti, faithful to the old tradition, summed it up saying simply: "They are all crazy and full of fleas, the women." And — of all people — the great lover Petrarch, in one of his less lyric moments, wrote that: "A woman is a true devil, the enemy of peace and the fount of unease."

Now if this tradition is less apparent than the poetic derivation from the love idealization of the provençal, it is nevertheless present in the works of our poet. I will say nothing of the rather odd passage in the *De Vulgari* in which he concludes, for lack of other evidence, that Adam must have spoken first rather than Eve for the simple reason that, representing the nobler of the two sexes, it would be more fitting that he should be the first to use language as an expression of his thought. This is mild enough but significant; but in the *Comedy*, which I am most concerned with here, there are other indications of his concept of woman, when not wearing a halo. In *Purgatory* xxix he reproves Eve's presumption, marvelous that a mere woman, where earth and sky obeyed could not bear any constraint, adding (somewhat inaccurately) that if she had been properly docile he might have saved the joys of the Earthly Paradise earlier and for a longer time.

Here the phrase "mere woman" (*"femmina sola"*) obviously carries with it a depreciatory tone. The impudence of the creature, not merely newly formed but a woman! To think that such a low form of life should have excluded us from Paradise! This is the very opposite of the "world well lost for love" concept; it is of course basic to primitive and medieval Christianity. But the most revealing passage of this anti-feministic position occurs somewhat earlier in the *Purgatory*. In *canto* VIII, in the vale of the princes, Dante meets Nino Visconti. As many of the souls in *Purgatory* do, so too does Nino mention those near and dear that he has left behind him. In this case he speaks with bitterness of his wife's remarriage and adds thereto a gratuitous comment on the notorious want of constancy in the weaker sex. Asking Dante to remind

his daughter of her father's need for intercession, he says:

quando sarai di là da le larghe onde,
di a Giovanna mia che per me chiami
là dove a li 'nnocenti si risponde.
Non credo che la sua madre più m'ami,
poscia che trasmutò le bianche bende
le quai convien che, misera, ancor brami.
Per lei assai di lieve si comprende
quanto in femmina foco d'amor dura,
se l'occhio o 'l tatto spesso non l'accende.
VIII, 70-78

It is true of course that Dante himself does not say these lines. But they come after all from the lips of a soul, not in Hell but in Purgatory, and well on its way to salvation. Further Dante's following *terzina* seems to add a seal of approval.

Così dicea, segnato de la stampa,
nel suo aspetto, di quel dritto zelo
che misuratamente in core avvampa.

This is still relatively gentle, but it is certainly along the line of the clerical realists. At her best, according to that theory, woman is an animal, moved only by immediate stimuli and incapable by nature of the firm resolution of her mate. And, further, both quotes carry implicitly in their wording the suggestion that woman is important only in her relation to man. Eve tempted Adam and he fell. Nino's wife could not be faithful to his memory so turned to another man. This is the only noteworthy, though perverse, thing about them.

Now if we turn to the characters of the women that Dante sets before us in the *Comedy*, we shall find this underlying thesis quite effectively developed. How many female characters are there in the *Inferno*, specifically named and identified? The total is 16; of which 8 appear in *canto IV*, 5 in *canto V* and 3 elsewhere. Those in *canto IV* are purely literary, put in as a tribute to Virgil or classical literature, and the same may surely be said of Manto, whom we meet among the soothsayers, and, to a lesser degree, of Thais, found among the flatterers, and Myrrha, one of the examples of falsifiers of persons. In fact, the only woman from what might be called Dante's own world who appears is Francesca, who is also the only woman with a speaking part. This against a considerable number of well defined and sharply drawn men, ranging from the valiant Farinata to the contemptible Vanni Fucci. At first sight this might look like some evidence either of the superior moral level of women, which we of the twentieth century cheerfully accept, or of Dante's chivalrous nature. In fact I am afraid it signifies simply that Dante thought of women only in one way: within the love relationship, honorable or otherwise. Indeed, putting aside the

ladies of the Limbo as a rather special group, it is interesting to see how he deals with Dido and Cleopatra and Semiramis. Since, as we learn from the incident of Vanni Fucci, the law of Hell requires that the soul, tarnished with more than one sin, must drop to the circle proper to the graver offense, we should expect to find Dido in the circle of Pier delle Vigne and the two other ladies in the river of boiling blood wherein the violently disposed are destined to spend eternity. But Dante saw the three oriental queens as lustful creatures first and foremost because it was in the love relationship and that alone that he thought of women. To look at it another way: in all the circles of Hell, which take in every kind of human infamy, we find the souls of women only in the circles of lust, flattery and soothsaying—proper womanly avocations according to the clerical realistic school. It is odd, parenthetically, that the poet did not sharpen his allusion to the witches seen in the 20th circle by the depiction of some particular female gifted in the art. But in any case the point I would make is that in Dante's catalog there are no women gluttons, none given over to avarice, none in the various levels of violence, none guilty of theft, hypocrisy (surely an odd omission) or treason. As for the falsifier, the unhappy Myrrha, again her sin is caused by perverse love. The absence of female characters in the gallery of simonists and barrators among others only goes to show of course that the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were still a man's world; the absence of certain other classifications (after all, Lady Macbeth was a medieval character) seems to me to indicate that Dante's mind worked as a man's mind would in a man's world. In all the rich gallery of characters, of the whole *Inferno*, the only woman that the poet lingers on is Francesca, the woman of love. We shall return to her later.

Coming to the *Purgatory*, the situation is not quite the same and generalizations are difficult. The number of female characters met with *in toto* is somewhat smaller than that of the *Inferno* (always excluding the purely allegorical, such as Beatrice and Matelda), but among the unforgettable figures in this higher level gallery are two women: Sapia and Pia dei Tolomei. It has always seemed strange to me that Dante did not match his circle of lust in the *Inferno* and his sphere of Venus in the *Paradiso* (both of which contain very articulate ladies) with a female character in the last terrace of the Holy Mountain. But, no doubt for the best reasons, he doesn't, and so we are left to consider only the aforementioned pair. Since I shall not come back to them again

I should like to linger a little, with no thesis in mind, on Dante's artistry here. At this point I am not concerned with proving any particular thesis but merely asking the reader to enjoy with me the mastery with which our poet has delineated these characters. Let us recall the episode of Sapia, remarkable I have always thought for certain realistic subtleties. Dante, confronting the souls of the envious whose eyelids are sewn together that they may not see, is moved to compassion but not so great as to prevent him trying to find out, as he always does, if any of the souls before him be Latin or, as we would say, of Italian stock. And Sapia replies:

O frate mio, ciascuna è cittadina
d'una vera città; ma tu vuo' dire
che vivesse in Italia peregrina.

XIII, 94-96

She then goes on to speak with a certain complacency, it seems to me, of the enormity of her sinful nature, her ultimate repentance and the intervention of the holy Pier which had shortened her sojourn on the outer shore of the mount. When, pausing at last to inquire of Dante's identity, she learns that he is still in the flesh, she asks him to remember her in his prayers and adds, a little gratuitously:

E cheggioti, per quel che tu più brami
se mai calchi la terra di Toscana,
che a' miei propinqui tu ben mi rinfami
Tu li vedrai tra quella gente vana
che spera in Talamone, e perderagli
più di speranza ch'a trovar la Diana;
ma più vi perderanno li ammiragli.

XIII, 148-154

What gives this character flesh and blood is the tension of contradictory elements. She is after all a saved soul, and presumably her better nature has triumphed; we must not question the sincerity of her gratitude to Pier Pettignao. At the same time in the way she picks Dante up, setting his theology straight among other things, and particularly in the contempt she still maintains for her old neighbours, there is clear portrayal of a certain type of female with which we are all familiar — self-assured, a little bossy, somewhat waspish. I should add perhaps that not all commentators see in her initial correction of Dante the same tone that I do: "come suona nuova fresca e delicata la voce di quest' anima," says Momigliano. But this is an unusual reaction. Provenzal among others feels as I do — and with a rather original tangent of his own; as one who, for envy of her neighbours, had never loved her native town, says he, Sapia is glad to point out to Dante that earthly attachments to city or region are inappropriate to the Christian. And Sapegno remarks on her "bitter and pungent detachment" from the affairs of

Siena as evidenced in her remarks about their vanity and folly. But I find "quella gente vana" a phrase more indicative of censure than detachment. The remains of envy are still there and, as most of the characters in Purgatory, Sapia is, to me at least, still earth bound.

I have reversed the dantesque order in my discussion of the two female representatives in Purgatory because I prefer to linger on Pia the gentle rather than on Sapia the still acidulous. And surely the evocation of Pia is one of the masterpieces of Dante. We are in *Canto V*, still in the ante-Purgatory among the souls whose penance was delayed until their death by violence. This is how we know what happened to Pia, for she does not herself linger on the details of her own story. Buonconte da Montefeltro has just finished his long rather melodramatic account of his death and the subsequent disposition of his earthly remains and, as one who has listened patiently nor is desirous of inflicting her own suffering on others but in simple obedience to the law of Purgatory whereby souls look to the prayers of the faithful on earth to help them, Pia speaks out. In Dante's words:

"Deh, quando tu sarai tornato al mondo,
e riposato de la lunga via"
seguitò il terzo spirito al secondo,
"ricorditi di me che son la Pia:
Siena mi fe; disfecemi Maremma;
salsi colui che 'nanelata pria
disposando m'avea con la sua gemma."

V, 130-136

In six brief lines what a beautiful picture is painted! Pia tells her name as she must, but does not linger on her family, which was noble and prominent. Most modern commentators, following the Anonimo fiorentino and Benvenuto, identify her as Pia de' Tolomei of Siena, married to Nello de' Pannocchieschi, lord of the castle of Pietra not far from Massa Marittima. She carefully avoids any personal accusation; she does not say that she died at the hands of her husband, only "Maremma mi disfece," as if to imply that her destiny was a matter of geography. But yet she is a woman, and womanly reproach as well as melancholy is certainly apparent in the lines recalling that the very one who had married her and pledged his faith with his ring is the one tragically familiar with the details of her death. But most of all the commentators, and with reason, have fastened on her opening lines as truly revealing of gentleness and courtesy in the highest sense of the words. Provenzal speaks of her "femminile gentilezza"; Hatzfeld in his *Lectura Dantis* for this canto, remarks: "È veramente una preghiera femminile, dolce, piena di delicatezza e di carità."



Spanish Chapel, Santa Maria Novella
(Andrea Buonaiuti da Firenze)

She, like the other souls, is eager for Dante's prayers, and perhaps she has greater need than others since it is unlikely she will get them from her husband. And so she makes her request. But only with a consideration and a solicitude for Dante, truly unique. She is the only individual whom Dante meets among the souls of the mountainside who really thinks of his own condition. "After you have had a rest, if you have the time I hope you will think of me." A real lady, as rare in the *Comedy* as they are in life.

A good deal of the charm of Pia springs from her reticence: Francesca had been reticent too, we remember, and Dante had been obliged to coax her for further particulars of her case. But Pia is even more reserved. As with many of Dante's brief sketches, so in the case of Pia there is lacking real historical evidence which would enable us to fill in the gaps. Two stories are told by various ancient commentators; one that her husband did away with her because he wanted to marry another woman, the second presenting Pia herself as blameworthy, or at least vulnerable to her husband's suspicion of her fidelity. In this case she would be another Francesca perhaps, but to me the wording of her tale suggests the former interpretation. In any case it is again a love relationship which is the central part of her crisis and which attracts the interest of our poet.

Let us, in this cursory survey, take leave

now of Purgatory, noting once more the negative aspect of my argument: here are the traditional Christian sins of Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony and Lust, and in only one of the terraces do we meet a woman. In the ante-Purgatory of Dante's own invention, the recently arrived, the excommunicate, the tardy penitents, the unprepared – in only one of these categories do we meet a woman. Men have clear monopoly on Pride, Anger, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, and, strangely as we have noted, even Lust.

In the *Paradise* we do not find the proportion much altered nor the underlying implications of Dante's exhibits either. In this realm every one we meet is a saint, and we must assume that the incidence of sanctity is much the same in either sex. I think this may be implied in the seating arrangements of the true heaven where a row of Old Testament women faces a row of Christian male saints across the heavenly rose. But in fact the souls of women present themselves to Dante the Wayfarer only in two of the ten heavens: in the moon and – naturally, one might say – in Venus. In the moon our pilgrim meets the inconstant; that is to say those whose wills were right-directed but who were in some way ineffectual in their pursuit of their goals on earth or, it may be, a little shallow in their capacity for entertaining the vision. To exemplify this group Dante selects two nuns who, on earth, were compelled to break their vows. There must

have been quite a few monks who suffered the same unhappy fate, but it is significant that Dante chooses to exemplify this class by nuns. Is there here an implication that inconstancy may be expected from the gentler sex, buttressing the remarks of Nino Visconti in the *Purgatory*? I am inclined to think there is.

We may, as defenders of the virtues of womanhood, observe with pleasure that Dante has put some of the most beautiful words of the *Paradise* into the mouth of Piccarda, who has the cue speaking role for this sphere. He also allows her to express a dogma that is the very key to understanding the hierarchy and the psychology of that happy realm. For, on his venturing to ask her if she is satisfied with the lowest sphere of Paradise, he has from her an answer that not only contents the questioner but must, I think, inspire the reader:

Anzi è formale ad esto beato *esse*
 tenersi dentro a la divina voglia,
 per ch'una fansi nostre voglie stesse:
 sì che, come noi sem di soglia in soglia
 per questo regno, a tutto il regno piace
 com'a lo re ch'a suo voler ne invoglia.
 E'n la sua volontade è nostra pace:
 ell'è quel mare al qual tutto si move
 ciò ch'ella cria e che natura face.

III, 79-82

Piccarda then, with a modesty at once appropriate to a great lady and a saint, presents the soul of Costanza, mother of Henry II. We may admire the delicacy with which she passes over the harsh vicissitudes of her own life, while yet telling our poet what he has a right to know about her, and moves gracefully on to focus Dante's attention on another.

Perfetta vita e alto merto inciela
 donna più su "mi disse" a la cui norma
 nel vostro mondo giù si veste e vela,
 perchè fino al morir si vegghi e dorma
 con quello sposo ch'ogni voto accetta
 che caritate a suo piacer conforma.
 Dal mondo, per seguirla, giovinetta
 fuggi'mi, e nel suo abito mi chiusi,
 e promisi la via de la sua setta.
 Uomini poi, a mal più ch'a bene usi,
 fuor mi rapiron de la dolce chiostra:
 Iddio si sa qual poi mia vita fusi.
 E quest'altro splendor che ti si mostra
 da la mia destra parte e che s'accende
 di tutto il lume de la spera nostra,
 ciò ch'io dico di me, di sé intende:
 sorella fu, e così le fu tolta
 di capo l'ombra de le sacre bende.
 Ma poi che pur al mondo fu rivolta
 contra suo grado e contra buona usanza,
 non fu dal vel del cor già mai disciolta.
 Quest'è la luce della gran Costanza
 che del secondo vento di Soave
 generò il terzo e l'ultima possanza.

III, 97-120

Costanza herself does not speak, and Piccarda, her task done, and "Ave Maria" on her lips, disappears, "come per acqua cupa cosa grave,"

surely one of the most musical lines in the *Comedy*. . . . *A propos* of these ladies whose fate on earth was so similar, we may note that they have a similar relationship in one of Dante's minor devices in linking his realms together and in the exemplification of dogma. For the Donati and the Suabian royal family are uniquely endowed with representatives in all the realms of Dante's other world. Piccarda's brother Forese is met by Dante in the *Purgatory* and from Forese Dante learns that another brother, the Black chieftain Corso, is destined to ultimate residence in the *Inferno*. Likewise we have met Manfred, Costanza's grandson, wandering in the ante-Purgatory - who could forget the line "biondo e bello e di gentile aspetto"? - while the great Emperor himself somewhat alleviates by his illustrious company the sufferings of Farinata. Of both trios it is only the woman who attains salvation.

A much more vigorous and enigmatic character awaits us in the Heaven of Venus. This is to be sure a sphere rich in lofty and eloquent spirits: an entire canto is dedicated to the discourse of the Prince Charles Martel, whom Dante had known as a young man, and in the successive canto IX, we meet the souls of Cunizza da Romano, Folquet de Marseilles and Rahab, two women and one man. Rahab does not speak and Folquet is not to our purpose here, but concerning Cunizza there is much to be said. First let us see what she has to say for herself:

In quella parte de la terra prava
 italica che siede tra Rialto
 e le fontane di Brenta e di Piava,
 si leva un colle, e non surge molt'alto,
 là onde scese già una facella
 che fece a la contrada un grande assalto.
 D'una radice nacqui e io ed ella:
 Cunizza fui chiamata, e qui refulgo
 perchè mi vinse il lume d'esta stella.
 Ma lietamente a me medesima indulgo
 la cagion di mia sorte, e non mi noia;
 che parria forse forte al vostro vulgo.

IX, 25-36

Then follow 28 more lines, six dedicated to praise of Folquet de Marseille and the rest to a survey of dire events destined to befall the inhabitants of northeast Italy.

Not only the *vulgo* but such scholars as Scartazzini ("Perché Dante la mettesse in Paradiso è difficile indovinare") have been puzzled at finding this jaunty lady in such high company. To be sure, she serves some of Dante's purposes very well. Like Piccarda and Costanza, she is - for the perceptive student of the *Comedy* - a link with other incidents and themes in the poem. For, as we read her autobiographical sketch, we are reminded by her own words of her brother Ezzelino, faithful

henchman of the Emperor and by many of his enemies thought to have been begotten of the devil: him we saw in the 12th canto of the *Inferno*, boiling in blood with other cruel tyrants guilty of violence against their neighbour. And we are reminded, as in the case of Piccarda, of the inscrutable workings of Providence through nature as laid down by Charles Martel in the preceding canto: he had cited us the example of Jacob and Esau, thus laying the ground for a contemporary illustration of the same principle. Nor is this all: a reader of Dante's own time would not hear the name Cunizza without thinking at once of Sordello, since one of the more scandalous episodes in the life of this lady was her abduction by the troubadour of Goito. It is recorded, one is not quite sure why, some say at the suggestion of her brother, others out of his own interest, that Sordello persuaded Cunizza to leave her lawful spouse, Rizzardo di San Bonifazio, and so launched her on the promiscuous career that was to be so shocking to her contemporaries. And recalling Sordello, the reader's mind plays over the Provençal thread: we think of Arnaut Daniel and Bertran de Born, and we feel the aura of love, lawlessness and poetry that hovers around such characters, and so are the better prepared, whether or not we are consciously aware of it, for the appearance of yet another troubadour who, through this tangled mass of lust and valor, has found his way to salvation. Cunizza's connections may be yet further traced: she is related to the Alberti of Mangone, two of whose members we have seen locked fast in the ice of Cocitus. And her reference to the untimely end of Rizzardo da Camino makes us think too of the good Gherardo of *Purgatory* XVI – and thus another cord of association is made fast. She is also of course a convenient and appropriate mouthpiece for Dante's enumeration of the misdeeds of his political enemies: Bianchi thought she was chosen, being the sister of a ferocious Ghibelline, because most apt to predict the woes of the Guelphs. But the principle reason she is here is to illustrate a point of dogma. The ways of God are mysterious and the strangest path may lead to salvation. And once this is achieved, what can we do but look back with satisfaction on our journey? St. Augustine says something of that nature in his *Confessions*. Here is a woman who has sinned frequently and, so far as we can tell from the records, joyously. Not once but many times. I will not excite the reader's imaginations by recounting the details, but they are lively and well documented. To be sure, Edmund Gardner, with the chivalry of a late Victorian gentleman, thinks that Cunizza may

have been as much sinned against as sinning, but Benvenuto da Imola, who was several centuries closer to the records, does not hesitate to describe her as "a child of Venus." And freely here before us she admits that the star in which she now dwells had too much influence on her in her youth. Happily for her, she did not die in youth but lived to the age where one "furls the sails and clues the sheets," as another of Dante's elderly penitents had put it. God gave her time and she used it to good advantage. So, since the path she had followed eventually led her to salvation, how could she have any regrets? Nay, she looks back on those tumultuous years with a sense of satisfaction bordering on complacency. What a contrast to the tender Francesca, who, in Dante's version at least, had sinned but once, and that once out of love not wantonness, and yet, having had no time given her, having come unprepared to her last hour, flutters now in Hell on the eternal whirlwind, her only satisfaction being the vindictive assurance that her slayer will eventually find his place even lower than hers.

Now the contrast between the destinies of Francesca and Cunizza serves to reinforce another central point of Christian dogma: to wit, that one's eternal condition depends upon the state of the soul at the moment of death. But there may be more to it than this; perhaps we can see some justification for Dante's disposition even in human terms. So I would like to go back now to Francesca's story. No reader of Dante need be reminded of the seductive appeal of her words, beginning with the address to Dante, almost as considerate as Pia's lines quoted above:

O animal grazioso e benigno
 che visitando vai per l'aere perso
 noi che tignemmo il mondo di sanguigno,
 se fosse amico il re de l'universo,
 noi pregheremmo lui de la tua pace,
 poi c'hai pietà del nostro mal perverso,

V, 88-93

and concluding with the famous line of delicate reticence:

quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.

This is, as everyone knows, one of the most moving episodes in the *Comedy*. And, emotionally if not dogmatically, Dante is on Francesca's side. (at least the wayfarer: clearly the poet himself whatever be his feelings, knows where one belongs.) So are the overwhelming majority of commentators. Scartazzini, to be sure, remarked that, while aesthetic beauty could be found in the Francesca episode, moral beauty was totally lacking, but De Sanctis speaks for the great majority of readers when he says:

"Francesca is a woman and nothing but a woman, she is a complete poetic personality of Homeric clarity. True, she is ideal, but she is not the ideal of something else; she is the ideal of herself, and an ideal perfectly realized, with a wealth of attributes that give her all the semblance of a living person. Her traits — love, gentility, purity, modesty, charm — are already found in all the concepts of woman prevalent in the poetry of the time; but in her case these traits are not mere epithets, but the true qualities of a real person, qualities that are operative and therefore alive."

But is Francesca all this sweet? Recently Dorothy Sayers has come forth with a sharper distinction. Perhaps it takes a woman to know a woman. Anyway, this is what she has to say, seeing in Francesca what she calls the egotism of the damned:

"Even at his tenderest, Dante deals ruthlessly with this egotism; listen to Francesca: 'If the King of the Universe were our friend' — one begins to think it is all God's fault; 'Love took hold of us' — well, Love (as Dante had once said) is an abstraction, an accident in a substance; are we to put the blame on an abstraction? 'My beautiful body was torn from me, I had no time to repent —' and then, like the lash of a whip, the sudden savage snarl: 'Cain's place awaits our murderer!'"* The soft voice resumes: 'You are so kind — I will tell you how it was; we were reading that lovely story — we thought no harm — something came over Paolo and he kissed me — the book was a pander and he that wrote it!' God, Love, Gianciotto, the novelist, were to blame, not we; we were the helpless prey of our own and other people's passions, and now we drift on the black wind.

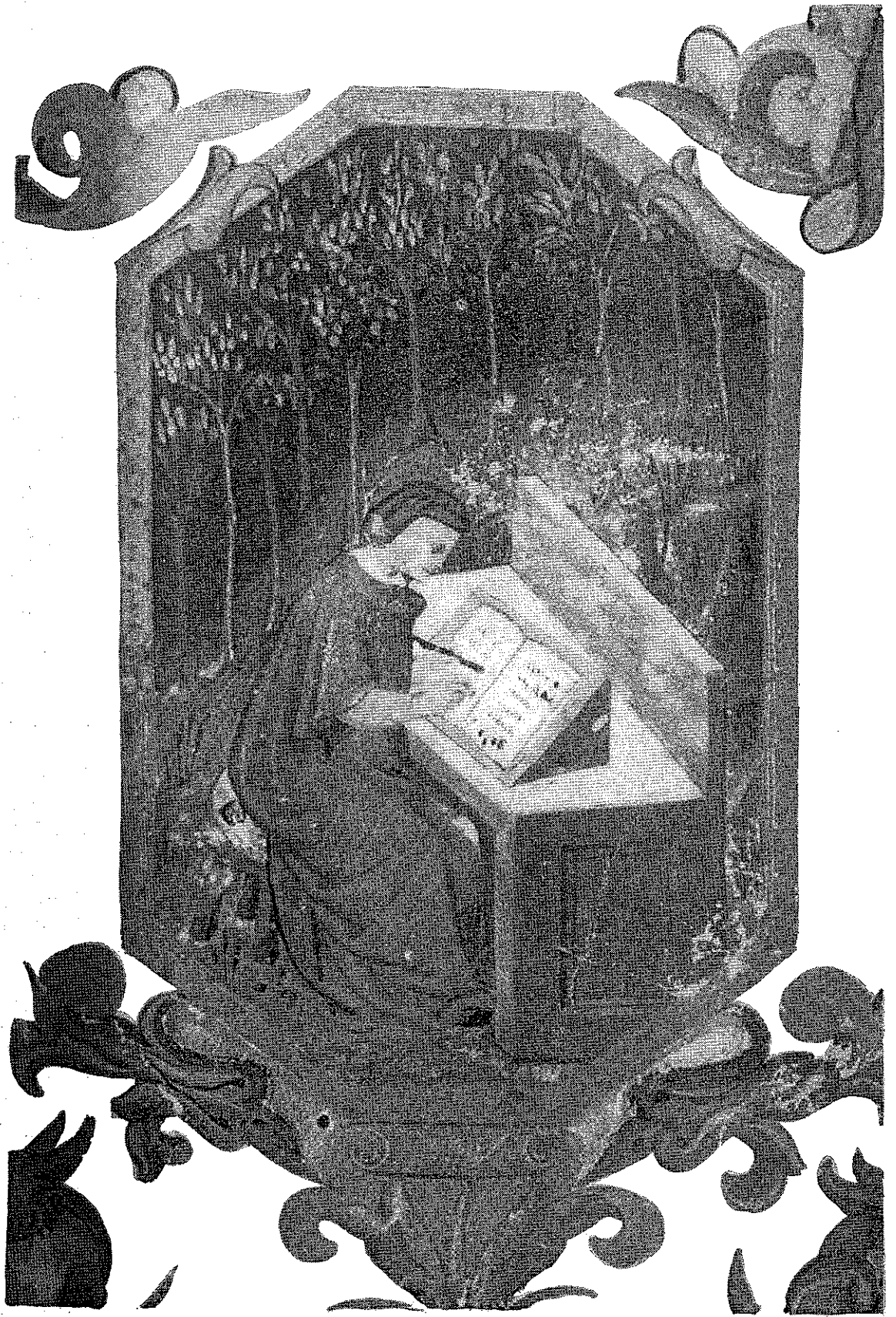
"So piteous are the accents here, and so moving the sheer poetry that it might deceive the very elect. Many indeed have been deceived into swallowing Francesca's version of things, hook, line and sinker, and transferring to Dante the resentment they feel on her behalf against God, love, vindictive husbands, 'suggestive' literature and all the rest of it."

And pondering a little on this line of argument, with every willingness to accept with sympathy the picture of the love-tossed and love-betrayed heroine of the fifth canto, yet there is, compared to Cunizza, a kind of egocentricity if not egotism in her. All her story is about herself and her tragic love: there may be even a kind of narcissism in the phrase

*But is the line really hers? I find the suggestion, originally made by E. Roncaglia and picked up by Donadoni, that it may more correctly be assigned to Paolo, very appealing. But the notion has not met with general favor.

"la bella persona che mi fu tolta." Cunizza has a larger scope, she is able to give Dante an account of things to happen in her native region, the affairs of which, it would seem, she still follows with interest. She is able to feel strong indignation for social and political injustices which do not affect her personally. (So much so in fact that she may be regarded as still too much involved with terrestrial and parochial affairs to be a fitting citizen of the eternal city.) A kind of altruism she has, a kind of generosity of temperament, which in a way makes her sin almost irrelevant. Perhaps she was not so much a lustful woman as a generous woman; though her sin was as grave as Francesca's and more frequent, yet it was not, to the same degree, self-indulgent. I am inclined to think that in the varying fates of these two ladies Dante was not merely illustrating a point of dogma but drawing a picture of two different kinds of temperament: one, intense, tragic, beautiful if you will but self-centered; the other kindly, careless it may be of one or two laws of moral behavior but with an element of genuine unselfishness. Perhaps, had she been killed at the moment of sin as Francesca was she yet would have found the necessary second in which to repent because after all she had not been totally involved in the sin — perhaps had Francesca lived to repent it would never have occurred to her to do so because of total commitment to her own self-indulgence. Or perhaps the wisdom and the outgoing nature of Cunizza can come only with age and she was merely lucky. There are people, one sees them or senses them, somehow destined to pass through the fire safely, others whose lot is to be consumed by it. Truly, as Dante says himself, who can fathom the divine predestination?

I suppose in conclusion we have found only what we might have expected to find. The range of female characters in the *Comedy* is limited because the range of a woman's activities in Dante's time was limited. And if there were, as there must have been, women who committed sins represented only by male characters in the *Comedy*, they were, by nature of the social milieu, not so prominent as the men and so not such good examples for the instruction of posterity and prominent examples our poet must have, if he is to follow the advice of old Cacciaguada. We should give thanks rather for the few we do have: Francesca, Sapia, Pia, Piccarda, Cunizza — it is as varied a group as a medieval poet could have given us, and in fact more varied than any other I can think of. No doubt he could do better nowadays — but can a woman's world produce a *Divine Comedy*?



Detail from folio 1 of Cod. 4776, Biblioteca Vaticana



REVIEWS

Dante. By Thomas G. Bergin. New York: The Orion Press, 1965.

This is an eminently readable and reasonable volume. Its three-fold aim is to present the essential facts of Dante's life and times, to summarize the content of his works, and to suggest his significance for our age. This modestly stated but by no means easy project is admirably carried out by the author, who has a long experience as a teacher of Dante and is thoroughly at home in his subject.

The opening chapter presents Europe and Italy in the thirteenth century—a busy, restless century that brings the new mathematics in Arabic numerals, the new optics and the invention of eyeglasses, the founding of the Dominican and Franciscan orders, the high tide of the conflict between pope and emperor, the full emancipation of the city states, the impressive figures of Frederick II and Thomas Aquinas, and the belated emergence of Italian literature.

Florence is sketched into the picture in Chapter 2, with some account of the legends of its founding, its destruction by Attila, and its rebuilding under Charlemagne, and the more authentic struggles between businessmen and nobles, Guelphs and Ghibellines, Blacks

and Whites. Bergin describes the expanding boundaries, the expanding economy, the cultivation of poetry, painting, and architecture, and what we know or can conjecture of the life of young Dante in the buzzing city (Chap. 3). We are told the circumstances of his exile and the few certain facts and dates of his later years, his death and burial in Ravenna.

Chapter 4 deals with "Dante's Reading" and surveys, with examples, the poetry of the troubadours, the Sicilian group, Guinizelli, and the Tuscans, which Dante knew well. He cites Dante's broad acquaintance with the narrative literature of northern France, didactic works in French and Italian, a large number of Latin authors in prose and verse, the Bible and the Church fathers, Aristotle and the theologians, the astronomers and the mystics. Dante is "the most scholarly of poets" and he gives us in the *Commedia* a synthesis of medieval learning.

Bergin next summarizes (Chap. 5) the *Vita Nuova*, "one of the earliest examples since the classics of a coherent and carefully planned 'book' in the modern sense of the word," and points out its main literary features and its importance. Chapter 6 discusses the *Rime*, under the groupings used in Michele Barbi's edition, and the varied inspiration that they manifest.

The *Convivio* is patiently and usefully analyzed in Chapters 7 and 8. Its varied arguments and ideas, its ethical and didactic drives, its philosophical attitudes, its passion for erudition, its ultimate failure to satisfy its author, who left it unfinished, are clearly set forth and briefly explained. Equally enlightening is the presentation of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, the *De Monarchia*, the letters and the lesser works (Chaps. 9–11).

The last four chapters deal with the *Commedia*. Here the summary is reduced to the bare bones, as the author concentrates (Chap. 12) on Dante's mature skill as a narrator—the structure and the action; the general design of the work; the correspondences, contrasts, and recurrences in the three *cantiche*; the tone, tempo, and progressions in each; the effects of light and darkness; the variety and treatment of the episodes; the gradual maturing of the pilgrim; the adherence to a pattern and the subtle variations within the pattern; the felicitous combining of narrative with allegory and dogma, of tourism with mystic quest; and the vivid human interest that is constantly maintained.

A somewhat briefer chapter (13) is allotted to the discussion of Dante's allegory, or rather allegories, the first of which is that the world of the dead is a depiction of the state

of souls in this world, a revelation of the human heart, the continuous struggle between good and evil. The fusion of dantesque allegory with the story produces the peculiar texture of the poem. Not all parts are equally allegorical, nor is the allegory very often of the fourfold variety of which Dante himself speaks. There are other kinds which he does not mention, which tell us something of Dante the man as well as of Dante the representative of mankind, or of Dante the artist, Dante the citizen, etc.

The doctrine embodied in the poem, its didactic motivation are discussed in Chapter 14. Here Bergin presents the moral schematization of hell and purgatory, its sources in Aristotle and St. Thomas, its anomalies. There is also political doctrine or indoctrination involving Papacy and Empire, France and Italy, local conflicts. There are poetic theory, science, theology, history, autobiography, poet's pride and exile's hope, a sense of mission, a realization that his life work is realized in the *Commedia*.

The final chapter discusses Dante's tools and tactics, his sense of the word, his slow achievement of both language and style, his word-play, his mastery of rhetoric, his technique of association, his tonal qualities, the basic simplicity of his vocabulary and syntax, his use of simile to achieve graphic visibility or mood or atmosphere, his discreet digressions, his ornaments, his prosody, the *terza rima*, the temperate rhyming, the order and pattern, the overall creation. "The *Commedia*, rationally conceived, realized with intuition, written with passion, and adorned with a kind of tender virtuosity, is both the creation and the depiction of a mind in love."

The chapters on the *Commedia* are the finest in this fine book. They are exceedingly well-nourished with the findings of many scholars, critically selected, assessed, and fused with Bergin's own judgment, taste, and personal experience of the poem. It is here that Dante's "significance for our own century" becomes apparent, implicitly even more than explicitly, in the power to enamor and to enrich his attentive readers.

A "Bibliographical Note" indicates the best editions and translations of the works and letters; and the author's notes, grouped together at the end of the volume, constitute an excellent selective bibliography on Dante.

This book is addressed to the nonspecialist, but the author is fully justified in claiming that it "contains more factual information—biographical and bibliographical—than can easily be found in any other single study of like compass" and that it has value as a work

of reference. One can only admire the ease with which Bergin moves among his abundant materials and the grace and deftness with which he condenses them into orderly chapters. The specialist as well as the general reader will be grateful for this intelligent and handsomely printed volume.

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William De Sua. *Dante into English: A Study of the Divine Comedy in Britain and America*. University of North Carolina Studies in Comparative Literature, XXXII (1964).

Although Dante has been a living influence on English literature since the time of Chaucer, the first translations of the *Divine Comedy* did not appear until the 18th century, long after Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, Tasso, Bandello, and a host of lesser writers had been made available to the English reader. The *Inferno* was translated in 1782; and the complete *Divine Comedy* finally appeared in 1802. These dates are significant, for English appreciation of Dante is closely related to the rise of Romanticism. Ironically, the great Florentine proponent of universal order based on Thomistic theology was enlisted in the war for spontaneity, originality, and artistic freedom from Neoclassic dogma. Since 1802, thirty-eight translations of the *Divine Comedy* have been published in England and America, each reflecting in one way or another the bias of its age and author.

Professor De Sua's *Dante into English* is much more than a listing of translations. The complex task of compiling adequate bibliographies, relating translations to formal scholarship, and identifying the authors has been performed by Angeline La Piana, Werner P. Friederich, and Gilbert Cunningham; and while Professor De Sua draws on their work, he extends it significantly in the direction of critical evaluation. *Dante into English* is a useful review of the important translations from Charles Rogers (1782) to John Ciardi (1961). It is also a thoughtful and illuminating analysis of theories of translation, relating them on the one hand to major critical theories and on the other to the practice of the translators. In performing this second task Professor De Sua shows himself a skilled and sensitive close reader of poetry, able to move easily from concepts of what poetry should be to detailed analysis of word choice, syntax, rhythm, and the other aspects of poetic technique.

Concern for the details of poetic technique is rare enough in itself; when it results in commentary as consistently illuminating as in *Dante into English* it deserves special praise. Professor De Sua has a remarkable ability to make even the most unpromising material yield its quota of significant insights.

Chapter I begins by sketching in the critical background of the late 18th century. The dominant theory of translation was that of "renovation," according to which the translator was obligated to extract the "universal" elements of the original which could appeal to men of all ages and cultures, but was free to modify details. The theory, it may be observed, appears to be a last echo of the Neoclassic perversion of *Poetics IX*, according to which poetry is "poetic" to the degree that it "universalizes" the particulars of history. Chapter II deals with Romantic translators, relating the theoretical pronouncements of S. T. Coleridge and Ugo Foscolo to the still viable blank verse translation of Henry Cary (1814). The dominant theory of the period was that the work should "have an aesthetic effect similar to that the model has in the source language," a concept called the "reflection" theory by Professor De Sua and related to M. H. Abrams' recent analysis of Romantic poetics, *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Chapter III explores the "literalist" theory of the Victorians, deriving in about equal measure from the rise of scientific scholarship and the Victorian tend-

ency, apparent in Mathew Arnold and Charles Eliot Norton, to consider the "message" or "idea" of the poet essential and the "form" non-essential, if not untranslatable. Chapter V carries us into the twentieth century with its organicism, its denial that form and content are separable, its insistence on natural, colloquial diction, and its interest in the concrete visual image. T. S. Eliot emerges as the major theorist influencing Dante translations, while Dorothy Sayers and John Ciardi are the most significant translators. *Dante into English* ends with a convenient summary-conclusion, a chronological list of translators, and a useful, selective bibliography.

Professor De Sua handles a wide range of materials with wisdom and tact. His insights are uniformly valuable, and his style both graceful and succinct. The chief deficiency in his work is its lack of an index. Errors are rare, but, inevitably, a few oversights have missed the proofreader: e.g., no reference is given to the edition of *Dante* used for the Italian quotations; Chaucer's *Complaint to His Lady* (mentioned, p. 49) is 127 lines, not 300, and is only partly in terza rima; and on p. 72, for *they*, read *thy*. Obviously these are trivial matters in a book that offers so much both to the professional Dantist and to students of European literature since the eighteenth century.

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EDITOR'S NOTES:

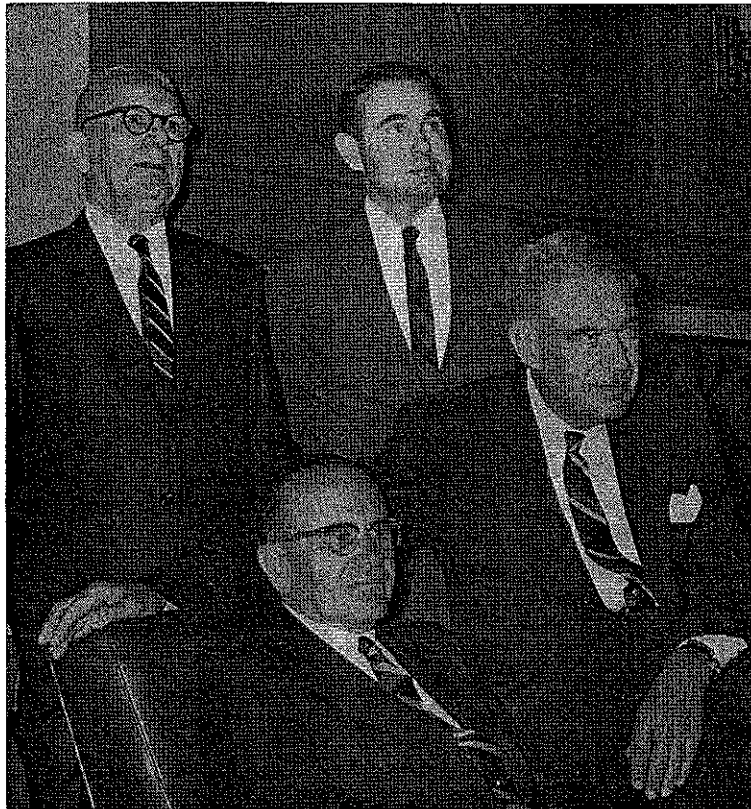
The Dante Celebrations at Trinity College

The programs sponsored by the Cesare Barbieri Center of Italian Studies to celebrate the 700th anniversary of Dante's birth consisted of a series of four lectures, along with an exhibition of rare illustrated editions of the *Divine Comedy*. The latter were from the private collection of Professor Valentine Giambatti of Mount Holyoke College. In addition, the Barbieri Center sponsored a student essay contest on a subject relating to Dante's poem and a student art competition for the best drawings or paintings illustrating the *Divine Comedy*. One of the drawings by first-prize winner, Russell M. Griffin, depicting Guido da Montefeltro and Boniface VIII, is reproduced in this issue. The Center also made progress in its preparation of a color documentary film on Dante and the *Divine Comedy*. Part I of the two-part film should be ready for public showing by early fall of this year. An example of the kind of material used in the making of the film is the illustration from ms. 4776 of the Vatican Library on page 42.

Two of the Dante lectures in the series

appear in this issue of *CBC*, those of Jacob Klein and Irma Bandeis. The third lecture of the series, "Dante's Poem: Letter and Spirit," was given by Thomas G. Bergin and the fourth, "Dante's Francesca and the Pitfall of Profane Love," by Michael R. Campo. The last lecture was followed by a concert of 14th-Century music performed by an ensemble of lute, recorder, flute and voice from the Hartt College of Music, University of Hartford, under the direction of Christopher Williams.

On the occasion of this last event of the Dante celebrations, Dr. Albert C. Jacobs, President of Trinity College, announced the appointments of the first two non-faculty Trustees to the Board of Trustees of the Cesare Barbieri Center of Italian Studies. They were Mr. Nicholas Russo of West Hartford, Connecticut, founder of Sterling Press in Hartford and member of the Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts, and Mr. Edward Mauro of Providence, Rhode Island, director of IMPACT (Independent Citizens Group for the Development of Rhode Island).



Standing: Nicholas Russo, Michael Campo
Seated: Edward Mauro, President Jacobs

CONTRIBUTORS:

• Louis R. Rossi is Professor of Italian at Northwestern University and a specialist in Dante studies.

• Thomas G. Bergin, author, editor and translator, is Professor of Italian and Master of Timothy Dwight College at Yale University. His translations of modern Italian poets have appeared frequently in *CBC*. Among other works he has translated the *Divine Comedy* and Machiavelli's *The Prince*. He is co-editor of *The Concordance to the Divine Comedy* to be issued this year and author of the recent book *Dante* (Orion Press) reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

On the occasion of his lecture on Dante at Trinity College this spring, Thomas G. Bergin was made a Fellow of the Cesare Barbieri Center of Italian Studies for his distinguished achievements in furthering the cause of Italian culture in the United States.

• Chandler B. Beall is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Oregon and Editor of the distinguished journal *Comparative Literature*. He is the author of *La Fortune du Tasse en France*, 1942.

• Irma Brandeis is Professor of Literature at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson. She has edited a collection of writings on Dante entitled *Discussions of the Divine Comedy* (Heath) and is the author of *The Ladder of Vision* (Anchor Books, Doubleday), a well-known comprehensive and concrete study of the *Divine Comedy*.

• Jacob Klein has been a member of the faculty of St. John's College, Annapolis, since 1938 and Dean from 1949-1958. His main fields of interest are Philosophy and History of Science. His publications include *Greek Logistic and the Origin of Algebra* and *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (soon to appear).

• C. B. Hardison, Jr., is Professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has published *The Enduring Moment; the Idea of Praise in Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice* (University of North Carolina Press, 1962); and has co-edited *The Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton University Press, 1965). Forthcoming in September: *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages* (Johns Hopkins Press).