Between Purification and Petrification:

Dante’s Ovidian Allegories

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Abstract

This dissertation is an exploration of Ovid’s influence on Italian poet Dante Alighieri. Particular focus is paid to the issue of allegory and how this evolves from the early, amatory work, *Vita Nova*, through the *rime petrose* and into the *Commedia*. Throughout the dissertation, special attention is paid to those Ovidian moments in Dante’s oeuvre where the influence of St. Paul, and his theology of language, also comes into play. By the end of the study, following John Freccero’s insights, a case is made for reading Ovid with St. Paul, as reading according to the spirit, in many ways, aligns with what Ovid’s metamorphic poetics comes to represent. Ovid and Paul are interwoven throughout the dissertation by a focus on the figure of Medusa, who introduces a key problem for the pilgrim of the *Commedia*: the depetrification of the mind.
Introduction: The Reason for it All.

*Ubi est nostri pars modo Naso chori?*¹

*(Tristia V.III.52)*

This dissertation is an exploration of the Roman poet Ovid’s (d.18 AD) function in the works of Dante Alighieri, which picks up on Teodolinda Barolini’s comment that a study doing “justice to Dante’s escalating use of Ovid as the poet of transgression and metamorphosis in all senses”² is waiting to be written. It is Dante’s consistent and, more importantly, *systematic* deployment of Ovidian material that so strongly contrasts with the decreasing impact and presence of that other Latin poet, “O degli altri poeti onore e lume” (*Inf.* I:81)³: Publius Vergilius Maro, or as he is known to the pilgrim, “Virgilio, dolcissimo patre” (*Pg.* XXX:50).⁴ The turning point is that once Virgil has disappeared in the narrative upon the arrival of Beatrice, his presence as an active intertext declines, with a reduction in

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² Teodolinda Barolini, “Arachne, Argus and St. John: Transgressive Art in Dante and Ovid”, in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 171. While Van Peteghem recently counted that Dante’s use of Ovidian references in total actually decreases in the course of the *Commedia* (while the number of Ovidian-inspired similes remains roughly consistent), this is because *Inferno* contains such an abundance of character names, and so Barolini’s point remains. Julie van Peteghem, *Italian Readers of Ovid from the Origins to Petrarch: Responding to a Versatile Muse*, (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 194-195. Due to copywrite restrictions I have been unable to access this book in its entirety via the Interlibrary loan system during Michaelmas Term in Lockdown 2020. The only chapter I could access was Chapter 4: “Ovid in Dante’s Commedia”. This book is a development of the same scholar’s PhD Thesis (*Italian Readers of Ovid: From the Origins to Dante*, (Columbia University PhD Dissertation, 2013)), which I have perused in preparation for this dissertation, and cite further on.
³ “O light and honor of all other poets”, all English translations from the *Commedia* are from *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum, (London: Everyman’s Library, 1995). All references to the works of Dante are, unless noted otherwise, henceforth from *Dante. Tutte le opere*, Introduzione di Italo Borzi e Commenti a cura di Giovanni Fallani, Nicola Maggi e Silvio Zennaro, (Roma: Newton Compton, 2019).
the number of Vergilian similes, resonances and references as one continues throughout the *Paradiso*.\(^5\) The entry into Heaven, in the narrative, and into the *Paradiso*, textually, marks the point of departure from Vergilian material. Furthermore, the canto that declares Virgil missing (*Pg. XXX*) is handled quite tellingly: a tribute is paid in the form of a direct quotation of *Aeneid* VI:883 in line 21: “Manibus, oh, date lilïa plenis,” which is intensified when Dante then translates the words of Dido from *Aeneid* IV, thus registering, at one of the most poignantly significant moments of the pilgrim’s—and the poet’s—entire journey and career, the immense sense of debt and gratitude owed to that former poet: beloved father, guide, *maestro* and *autore* (*Inf. I*:85), Virgilio: “conosco i segni de l’antica fiamma” (*Pg. XXX*:48).\(^6\) A moment of intense pathos for the pilgrim, poet, and reader alike, the sweetness of re-uniting with Beatrice is emotionally acerbated by the loss of a character that, as Barolini has shown, the author went to such great lengths to humanise and build sympathy for during the first two *cantiche*.\(^7\)

The respect implicit in direct quotation at such a celebratory narrative moment is a gesture not once made to Ovid. Where Virgil exists as a character in all his tragic humanity, Ovid’s name appears only twice: in the *Inferno*, as an inhabitant of Limbo in the first instance,\(^8\) and being effectively told to *shut up* in a classical *taceat* trope in the second.\(^9\) But while Ovid as a character is near non-existent, his texts continue to insist,\(^10\) profoundly influencing the *Commedia*’s own

\(^{5}\) Barolini, *Origins*, op cit., p. 171.
\(^{6}\) “I recognize the signs of the old flame”.
\(^{7}\) See Barolini, *Origins*, op cit., Chapter 7: “Q: Does Dante Hope for Vergil’s Salvation?” pp. 151-157, for a narratological analysis of this issue.
\(^{8}\) One of the “grand’ ombre” (“giant shades”) of the “bella scola” (“splendid school”) (*Inf. IV*: 83, 94).
\(^{10}\) The rhetorical flourish of insistence as the opposite of existence (rather than non-existence), is borrowed from Caitríona Leahy, “*Der wahre Historiker*” Ingeborg Bachmann and the Problem of
poetics. Betwixt the two already mentioned quotes in the final tribute to Virgil, there is one sentence forming an elaborate, twelve-line simile immediately following line 21’s Vergilian Latin, commencing

“Io vidi già nel cominciari del giorno
la parte oriental tutta rosata
e l’altro ciel di bel sereno adorno”

(Pg. XXX:22-24).¹¹

This simile pulses with language from a passage from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (II:111-115).¹² Phaethon marvels at the appearance of rosy-fingered Dawn, Aurora, chasing away the night,¹³ and sees a mixture of lush purples and rosy colours.¹⁴ Dante evidently follows Ovid in the position of the ‘rosy’ adjective at the line’s end and the reference to the east¹⁵ and both the pilgrim and Phaethon are gazing wondrously at a chariot.¹⁶ This passage is thus representative: Vergil has the benefit of belonging to the narrative’s *dramatis personae*, but Ovid remains a continual source of inspiration in moments of heightened poetic grandeur and

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"I have at times seen all the eastern sky becoming rose as day began and seen, adorned in lovely blue, the rest of heaven”

¹² "Dumque ea magnanimus Phaethon miratur opusque / perspicit, ecce vigil nitido patefecit ab ortu / purpureas Aurora fores et plena rosarum / atria”. This allusion to Ovid was sourced from the Digital Humanities Web Project developed by Julie van Peteghem—“Intertextual Digital Dante”, available at https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/intertext/index.html#purgatorio_30 (03.11.20). All further references to this website’s comparative tools will be given as Van Peteghem, *Intertextual Digital Dante*, op cit., etc.

¹³ "diffugient stellae”, v. 114,

¹⁴ purpureas”, “rosarum”. At *Purg. XXIX* the poet had described the personified cardinal virtues as being “in porpore vestite” (“dressed in crimson”) (v. 131).

¹⁵ “oriental”, cf. Ovid’s “ab ortu”

virtuosity. In the Heaven of Mars, likewise, a simile describing Cacciaguida’s arrival is adapted from Ovid’s description of Phaethon falling tragically though the sky, yet the canto is laden with references to the *Aeneid* that construct the pilgrim as Aeneas, and Cacciaguida as his father, Anchises (vv.25-27), and Vergil himself is referred to indirectly as “nostra maggior musa” (v. 26); but again, the scene is set by an elaborate simile inspired by the poetic consciousness of Ovid. If the pilgrim is like Aeneas, perhaps the poet is more like Ovid, or another important influence in this dissertation’s quadriptych of figures, St. Paul, who also appears in the terzina spoken by Cacciaguida immediately after the reference to Aeneas and Anchises, in which it is suggested that either St. Paul, or nobody, had the gates of Heaven opened twice to them (vv. 28-30). The association of the pilgrim-poet with St. Paul is further enforced when the pilgrim is made “stupefatto” (a biblical word connected to Paul on the road to Damascus).

The potential link between Paul’s doctrine of the Spirit and Dante’s deployment of Ovidian language will be a theme of this dissertation. Keeping in mind Barolini’s closing hypothesis that Ovid is fundamentally a “visionary comrade” and underappreciated poet-philosopher, I explore the trajectory of Dante’s engagement with Ovid that brings him to envision a work of radical difference:

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19 "our greatest muse"
20 Even if by his own word, he is not, cf. *Inf* II: 32.
21 The four key figures will be: Ovid, Dante, Medusa and St. Paul.
signifying *per verba* the event of transhumanizing (*Par. I*:70). Given that Dante may have understood Ovid as a philosopher poet,24 I aim to determine the extent that the metaphysical aspects inherent in his major theme (i.e. change and flux) and his poetic representations of that theme are essential for Dante, whose “legno” (*Par. II*:3) is setting out on the waters of the absolutely new.25

Dante and Ovid align insofar as both are readers of Vergil,26 and both develop their poetic identities in a very conscious *agon*27 with that former poet. Vergil—epic, impersonal, stately, sublime, unhurried, pathos-filled, prophetic, and treating the linear history of the Roman Empire from its origins down to a recognisable past. Ovid—elegiac, personal, urban, playful, swift, witty, lavishly rhetorical, and chaotic, whirling back and forth in the labyrinthine tapestry of an ‘epic’ poem that constantly threatens the foundations of its own literary class by jumping freely from genre to genre, theme to theme, and only barely following through on the promise to weave a ‘linear’ and continuous thread28 “*ab origine mundi / ad mea … tempora*” (*Met. I*:3-4).29 Ovid, as classical scholarship has

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24 Although, it would seem, certain voices in Ovidian scholarship would dispute the idea of Ovid as a philosopher. See for example the reading of the philosophical Pythagoras episode in *Met. XV* by Segal, who teases out the potentially underhanded humour and irony implicit in Ovid’s representation of Pythagoras — Charles Segal, “Myth and Philosophy in the Metamorphoses: Ovid’s Augustanism and the Augustan Conclusion of Book XV”, *The American Journal of Philology*, (90:3): 1969, pp. 257-292, esp. pp.280 ff. Although while Segal is sceptical about Ovid as a philosopher, one might retort that it is precisely in his ironic undercutting of Pythagoras’ authority, if one accepts Segal’s reading, that a certain philosophical motivation nonetheless comes to the fore.


28 “*perpetuum … carmen*”, *Met.* I:4. Cf. Leahy, *der wahre Historiker*, op cit.: “Oneness with the continuity of all things, continuity in the face of rupture […] The text of the *Metamorphosen* will bring together all stories, all times, all facts, events and people, and return them to their original rightful home of undifferentiated (‘indifferent’) existence.” p. 120

demonstrated, aims to subvert Vergilian epic by being, in this way, its opposite, joying in a poetics of unpredictability and speed—flux, or metamorphosis—diametrically opposed to the pathos-laden, destiny-driven world of the overtly Augustan *Aeneid*. Both Ovid and Dante each “swerve” away from Vergil while paying due respect, converting to a new kind of epic poetry. This dissertation aims for a reading of Dante’s Ovid that extends individual case studies to a consideration of the *Commedia*’s poetics as a whole. It is therefore relevant that the analysis of Dante’s Ovidian poetics keeps in view the broader issue of what

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31 The image of swerving as a “creative revisionism” is Bloom’s, *Anxiety*, op cit., p. 42, adapted from Lucretian atomic theory.

32 In this regard the following two volumes were essential: Rachel Jacoff, Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Ed.), *The Poetry of Allusion: Vergil and Ovid in Dante’s Comedy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); and Madison U. Sowell (Ed.), *Dante and Ovid. Essays in Intertextuality*, (Binghamton: New York, 1991).

33 Warren Ginsberg, “Dante, Ovid and the Transformation of Metamorphosis”, *Traditio* (46): 1991, pp. 205-233 has a similar aim. However, although Ginsberg does venture into canto XXV of the *Paradiso*, his major emphasis is on the poetics of the *Inferno* in particular, with references to the two later *cantiche* employed to develop his reading of the *bolgia* of the thieves.
type of allegory the *Commedia*, and especially the 'mystical' *Paradiso*, wishes to be read by; it is especially noteworthy that he connects Ovid’s name to the ‘allegory of the poets’ in the *Convivio*, and yet claims to use the ‘allegory of the theologians’ in the Epistle to Can Grande, which addresses *Paradiso* I. To show that the coinciding of Dante’s *Ovidian* language with the emergence of an apophasic mysticism is not merely happenstance will be an aim of this dissertation: how does mystical speech intersect with the allegories of the poets and/or theologians, and to what extent does Dante employ Ovid to transcend this binary opposition between poetry and theology, delineate a space for himself as something else entirely? Ovid’s presence in the ‘mystical’ canticle problematizes a reading according to a purely ‘theological’ allegory described in *Epistle XIII*. Schnapp points out that after the biblical pageant of *Purgatorio* there is a movement to more “mystico-contemplative scriptural models that will prevail in the Paradiso.” And yet there remains the traces of *Nasonis adempti* (*Tr*. III. x.1).

The reception of precursor poets is an issue of old versus new, and within scholarship on the topic it is not uncommon to see the distinction set up between Ovid as the old pagan (“antico”/“pagano”), and Dante as the new, or modern, (“moderno”) who rewrites or “corrects” the old from a theologically informed point

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35 The traditional problem is between reading the *Commedia* as either the ‘allegory of the poets’ or the ‘allegory of the theologians’ as Dante himself explains these terms in Book II of the *Convivio* and in the *Epistle to Can Grande*. For a handling of this problem, see Robert Hollander, “Dante ‘Theologus-poeta’”, *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, (118): 2000, pp. 261-302, who argues for the latter allegory.


37 See, for instance, this opposition arise in Michelangelo Picone’s articles on Dante’s reception of Ovid, collected in Picone, *Scritti Danteschi*, op cit., e.g. pp. 176, 180, 197, among others.
of view, a method of reading (in bono or in malo) that both Barolini and van Peteghem have cautioned against, stressing instead Dante’s ever dialectical approach to the issues he faces. Chapter I explores the foundation of Dante’s Ovid in the Vita Nova, setting the stage in chapter II for a metapoetic reading of the Commedia focused on genre, combining “horizontal” with “vertical” readings to analyse how both poets begin. Chapter III then combines the established thread of Dante’s use of Ovid to another one that has its roots in the famous rime petrose (stony rhymes). Chapter IV homes in specifically on certain Ovidian-inspired instances in the Paradiso, linking the depetrification of the pilgrim’s mind to a receptiveness to received mystical vision. The dissertation ends with a brief conclusion.

38 E.g. Picone’s “La riscrittura di Ovidio nella «Commedia»”, Scritti Danteschi, op cit., pp. 253-293, who discusses the implications of imitation and emulation (pp. 254-5) as stressing the identity or (inferior) alterity of the precursor, respectively; he does however view Dante’s imitation and emulation as a dialectical process, see p. 256; likewise some of the case studies in the volumes by Sowell and Jacoff/Schnapp, such as Brownlee’s summative assessment of the Ovid reception as a “dynamic process of corrective rereading and rewriting,” although his own treatment is also dialectical in its approach, alluded to in the word ‘dynamic’, (Kevin Brownlee, “Pauline Vision and Ovidian Speech in Paradiso 1”, in: The Poetry of Allusion, Jacoff & Schnapp (Ed.), ibid, pp. 202-213, here: p. 204).


40 Where ‘horizontal’ refers to reading a “narrative sequence across cantos” and ‘vertical’ to a consideration of the same cantos across the three cantiche. See: Corbett’s and Webb’s Introduction to Vertical Readings in Dante’s Comedy, Volume 1, ed. George Corbett and Heather Webb, (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), p.2. This approach stresses the intratextuality of the Commedia, its moments of recollection of earlier scenes, in a way that stresses circularity, repetition and sameness, perhaps not coincidentally also major features of the narrative strategies employed by Ovid throughout the Metamorphoses. On this, see for example chapter five (“Discourse and Time”, pp. 117-140) of Stephen M. Wheeler, A Discourse of Wonders. Audience and Performance in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).
Chapter I: Wanting Reason

*et, quod nunc ratio est, impetus ante fuit.*

(_RA: 10_)

By Dante’s time, Ovid was the exemplary Latin poet, overtaking Vergil in and around the beginning of the 12th century, returning to literary fashion as early as the 9th C, being taught in schools and theology faculties as a poetic exemplar.41

Ginsberg, stressing the diversity of medieval ‘Ovids’ available to Dante,42 calls attention to his “silencing” of the _Ars amatoria_43 even when bolstering his own _Vita Nova_’s developmental poetics by referring back to classical authority to justify his use of _prosopopoeia_ ( _VN_ XXV).44 Among the canon of authors listed,45 it is Ovid who has the final say because he in particular personifies _Amor_. Picone claims that in this regard, it is under Ovid’s, rather than Vergil’s, _auctoritas_ that the _Vita Nova_ as a whole is placed,46 with the _Remedia amoris_ commencing with the god believing the title to be an assault against himself.47 This recourse to Ovid occurs as Dante is contextualising his work within the immediate lyric tradition while simultaneously departing from it, implicitly critiquing some of its practitioners.48

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42 Ovid the _magister_ and _praecceptor amoris_, Ovid the mythographer, Ovid the exile etc. Warren Ginsberg, “Dante’s Ovids”, in _Ovid in the Middle Ages_, 143-159, op cit., p. 143.
43 Ginsberg, ibid., p. 146.
44 “Per Ovidio parla Amore, sì come se fosse persona umana, ne lo principio de lo libro c’ha nome Libro di Remedio d’Amore, quivi: _Bella mihi, video, bella parantur, ait_. E per questo puote essere manifesto a chi dubita in alcuna parte di questo mio libello. E acciò che non ne pigli alcuna baldanza persona grossa, dico che né li poete parlavano così sanza ragione, né quelli che rimano deono parlare così, non avendo alcuno ragionamento in loro di quello che dicono”
45 Vergil, Lucan, Horace, Homer.
46 Picone, “Dante e il canone degli “auctores””, in _Scritti Danteschi_, op cit., p. 150.
48 Especially Guido Cavalcanti, who, it is implied, has fallen out of love, having swallowed the pill of the _Remedia amoris_, a pill that Dante himself does not need, given his recognition of the marvellous
The Italian lyric tradition had its own internal debates regarding the role of the Latin *magister amoris* and modern experiences of love, in which Dante da Maiano and Dante Alighieri participate by exchanging sonnets with each other, with da Maiano’s opinion being exemplary of the emergent ‘vernacular’ tradition in Italy that questions, rather than merely repeats, Ovid’s authority, while Alighieri’s ultimately finds use of Ovid’s *Remedia amoris*, including it in his understanding of general knowledge (“savere”). Building on Van Peteghem’s work, it can be added that here Alighieri is himself ironically donning the mantle of a *praecensor amoris*, in effect offering Da Maiano the precise kind of advice that the latter had just admitted to finding useless in Ovid. Alighieri instead contends that the variety of “grazie e vertute” (*Savere e cortesia*, v.5) and the pleasure in their operations can beat Amor, but in what is perhaps the truly Ovidian gesture, and a preview of his own future submission to Beatrice’s *caritas*, he subtly and paradoxically contradicts himself: now Da Maiano should use those graces and virtues not to overcome Amor, but to submit to him. Apart from proclaiming lovers as soldiers in *Amores*, Ovid had advised becoming a soldier as an option to distract the bored mind from
erotic desires and the otium that allows them to develop and fester. Alighieri takes up this military vocabulary, redeploying it in his warning to beat Amor only through submission, but a submission that instead of forsaking “forza”, “arte” and “ingegno” (vv.10-11), and instead of only calling for mercy in sufferance as Da Maiano helplessly proposed, Alighieri stresses busyness in the adoption of those virtues, patiently listed in his sonnet like a medical prescription. In this early sonnet exchange, then, there is an ironic self-posturing as Ovid at the same time that Dante subverts the forebearer by inverting the prescribed course of action. It is as if, on the heels of his Ovid’s own self-ironising gestures, he were saying: “adice praeceptis hoc quoque, Naso, tuis” (italics mine, AR: 558).

The quote from Remedia amoris in the Vita Nova functions on two levels: it grants Dante the authority to use personification allegory, levelling the playing field between the ancient poets “in lingua latina” and the mere “dicitori per rima”. It also acts as a subtle palinodic manoeuvre suited to a poet in the process of fundamentally changing his poetry and exploring something new. Thus where metamorphosis is effected at the metaliterary level, it is registered in the text itself.

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59 “sol merzé chiamare”, Amor mi fa, v. 8.
60 either inborn or learned, “virtute naturale od accidente”, Savere e cortesia, v. 10. Significantly, some of these particular virtues and graces find themselves scattered variously throughout the Vita Nova, in which Dante-persona engages his own ingegno ed arte to navigate the experience of Amor and Beatrice’s first, miraculous saluto that proves to be the foundation for the rest of his new life and new poetry. In the sonnet: savere, cortesia, ingegno, arte, nobilitate, bellezza, ricorre, forza, umiltate, largo core, prodezza, eccellenza; in VN, e.g. III: “ineffabile cortesia”, “e tanto si sforzava per suo ingegno”, “l’arte del dire parole per rima”; XV: “uno pensamento forte ”, “un altro umile pensero”; XIX: “voi di sua virtù farvi savere”; XXVI: “ne le quali io dessi ad intendere de le sue mirabili ed eccellenti operazioni”.
61 Ginsberg likewise stresses “due motivi” that “stanno dietro alla scelta di Dante.” That is, for Ginsberg, (1) Dante distances himself from Guido Cavalcanti and (2) enacts a palinode. See: Warren Ginsberg, “In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas corpora: La Traduzione e La Metamorfosi in Ovidio e in Dante”, in Miti, Figure, Metamorosì: L’Ovidio di Dante, cur. Carlota Cattermole & Marcello Ciccuto, 81-95 (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2019), here: p. 82.
through what Aquinas called the *sensus metaphoricus*, as opposed to the *sensus proprius*. At this point of the *Vita Nova*, Dante has just imbued the generic elements of the courtly love lyric, seeing the lady passing by, with the transcendent qualities of Christian autobiography (the profound effect on the authorial 'I') and figural illumination (the anagogical import, that is, the future “advent of Beatrice”). In chapter XXIV, Beatrice was specifically aligned with Christ in the analogy where Cavalcanti’s *Primavera* was John the Baptist. This is the crux of his “nova condizione,” (*VN* XXIV) and yet its veracity is bound up in a discourse ridden with red herrings regarding visions and false dreams: in a “dolorosa infermitade” lasting nine days (*VN* XXIII) he dreams, in a complete delirium, that Beatrice dies, then is reduced to tears by the strength of his imagination; after being comforted by the ladies, he recognises it as “Lo fallace imaginare / [che] mi condusse a veder madonna morta”. It is clear from this chapter’s insistently dense vocabulary of what Hollander would term ‘non-actual vision’ that that which the Dante-persona

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67 “painful illness” (Trans. Frisardi)

68 “si come farnetica persona [...] si forte era la mia imagazione”.

69 “and the straying fantasy was so intense that it showed me this lady dead” (Trans. Frisardi)

70 Hollander does not explicitly call it “non-actual”, here I am merely inverting the name of the first “mode of seeing” (“actual seeing”) that he names in order to accommodate the two others he names (dreams, visions). Robert Hollander, “Vita Nova: Dante’s Perceptions of Beatrice”, In: *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, (92): 1974, pp. 1-18, here: p. 3.
experiences is likened in the narrator’s mind to an error. And yet while using a repetitive vocabulary to stress the non-actuality of the situation, the canzone draws up an analogy between Beatrice and Christ that will be confirmed in the following chapters, and which ties in to the Vita Nova’s insistence as a whole on the redemptive, Christological immanence of Beatrice as the new life. In chapter XXIV, the day of the figural vision comes “[a]ppresso questa vana imaginazione”, and the reader is therefore inclined to view it with similar suspicion, considering the dreamlike, subjunctive mood governed by a hazy verb inflection in the imperfect tense nonetheless contending with indicative future tense verbs for dominance in the chapter. But after the metapoetic excursus on prosopopoeia (VN XXV), the copying of the canzone Sì lungiamente (VN XXVII) is, as Barolini points out, quite ‘literally’ interrupted by the news of Beatrice’s death, casting new light on the poet’s imaginative powers and attesting to the truths that can be communicated through imagined—even dreamt up—personifications. Indeed, in the (greatly Ovidian inspired) dream of Purgatorio IX, the reality of such visions is registered with reference to the same imaginative faculty (ll. 31-33):

Ivi parea che ella e io ardesse;  
e si lo 'ncendio imaginato cosse,

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71 He is struck by “uno sì forte smarrimento” that leads to “lo incominciamento de lo errare che fece la mia fantasia […] Così cominciando ad errare la mia fantasia” etc.
72 Coseriu and Künkel, Vita Nova / Das neue Leben, ibid, pp. 144-145, refer in their notes to Augustine’s commentary to Psalm 95: “Vetus (canticum) cantat cupiditas carnis, novum cantat caritas Dei”, which specifically maps on to Beatrice as the new love and as evolution of the old love, the eros of troubadour and Italian lyric traditions, to Christian caritas.
73 “unreal imaginings” (Trans. Frisardi)
74 “e pareami che lietamente mi dicesse nel cor mio” e.g. Lines such as this seem to me almost lullaby-like in their lilting syllabic sounds and overall prosody. Furthermore, the opposition of subjunctives with indicatives seems to play out, on the sentence level, the opposition between historical reality and that reality’s allegorical or anagogical import. In this sense the linguistic texture of the Vita Nova embodies in itself one of the work’s central issues: the dual nature of Beatrice as historical personage and analogical-analogical miracle.
75 “Beatrice si mostrerà dopo la imaginazione…”
76 Barolini, Origins, op cit., p. 188.
che convenne che 'l sonno si rompesse.\textsuperscript{77}

The reality of the \textit{imagined} heat is marked by the point in time implied by the historic past “cosse”, contrasting to the two imperfect subjunctives bracketing it, governed by “parea” and “convenne” respectively. In this instance, “lo ‘ncendio \textit{imaginato}” is correlated to a real event, so that dream vision and reality are simultaneously linked.\textsuperscript{78} Here, the ambiguity of the speaker’s \textit{forte fantasia}, introduced by the \textit{Vita Nova}, is resolved by the \textit{Commedia}.\textsuperscript{79} Apart from the pilgrim’s dreams intermittently structuring key transitional moments in the \textit{Purgatorio}, as well as mirroring numerically the ages of Dante during his visions of Beatrice in the \textit{Vita Nova},\textsuperscript{80} it is also one of the key lessons of the \textit{cantica}, the transition from purely sense-based understanding towards an imaginative intellection that will be necessary in the \textit{Paradiso}, as the pilgrim ponders with regard to the visions received on the terrace of wrath.\textsuperscript{81} Oneiric visions are there suggested to be sent either from the celestial heavens or from God directly.\textsuperscript{82} Later, he will have another

\textsuperscript{77}“And there it seemed that he and I were burning; and this imagined conflagration scorched me so—I was compelled to break my sleep.” (Trans. Mandelbaum)

\textsuperscript{78} It furthermore prefigures, as Hollander points out, the pilgrim’s arrival in the true ring of fire, which is the Empyrean. Cited from the commentary to \textit{Purgatorio}, IX. 31-33, \textit{Purgatorio}, translated by Robert and Jean Hollander, (Anchor: New York, 2003) as found on Dante Lab, http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu. (Accessed 04.11.20).

\textsuperscript{79} Although Ascoli has warned of the tendency in Dante criticism to read the \textit{Commedia} as the natural telos of the early works (i.e. a sort of eschatological reading) rather than reading those works for their own merit, there is at times grounds to do so, as he remarks, when it “repeats, corrects and develops in ways both explicit and covert the issues with which [the minor works] first grappled.” Albert Russell Ascoli, \textit{Dante and the Making}, ibid, p. 61.


\textsuperscript{81} “O imaginativa, che ne rube / talvolta sì di fuor […] / chi move te, se ’l senso non ti porge? / Moveti lume che nel ciel s’informa / per sé o per voler che giù lo scorge” (\textit{Pg}. XVII: 13-18).

\textsuperscript{82} See the early commentators, such as Benvenuto da Imola: “quasi dicat: haec talis imaginatio movetur a coelesti lumine per se formato, vel a Deo transmisso.” Cited from the commentary to \textit{Purgatorio}, XVII:13-18, \textit{Benevenuti de Rambaldis de Imola Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam, nunc primum integre in lucem editum sumptibus Guilielmi Warren Vernon, curante Jacobo Philippo Lacalita. Florentiae, G. Barbëra, 1887}, edited by Kevin Brownlee and Robert Hollander, as found on Dante Lab, http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu. (Accessed 22.11.20).
visionary sleep at that same hour, in which “la mente nostra, peregrina [...] / a le sue vision quasi è divina” (*Pg.* IX: 16-18),83 for which he metamorphoses, as it were, his thoughts into dream (XVIII:145).

Ovid’s authority as classical *auctor* and *poeta*, crucial in Dante’s justification of his early poetic practice, taking recourse to tropes such as prosopopoeia, grants reality an intensely subjective and allegorical aspect that goes beyond the abstruse and enigmatic verses of the Troubadour and Italian lyric poets,84 who, despite being grounded in “uno spiritualismo di derivazione neoplatonica, un misticismo fortemente soggettivo”, in Auerbach’s view at least, did not surpass an external, formal unity of composition.85 This is one of Dante’s first acts of metamorphosis, and one that will undergird his later poetics: Amor (*eros*) evolves into Christian *caritas* as embodied in Beatrice—the *figura Christi* of chapter XXIV. Amor is thus the substance of all reality, not merely “uno accidente in sostanza” as he subsequently claims.86 As Tissol writes of Ovid’s characteristic personifications: “the transformation of what is definitively insubstantial into something with bodily presence,”87 or: the evolution of Provencal *eros* into Christian grace, the infusion of sublunar reality with substantial, transcendent meaning. Amor, despite the

83 “when, free to wander farther from the flesh and less held fast by cares, our intellect’s envisionings become almost divine—” (trans. Mandelbaum).
84 I refrain from the term *Stilnovisti*, granted that it is not widely accepted that such a school ever even existed, and is only named, with no clear indication of the breadth of its membership, by Dante himself in *Pg.* XXIV: 57. To even speak of it as a school, as Baranski claims, may indeed be an anachronism arising from 19th century “historiographic and taxonomic ambitions.” Zygmunt G. Baranski, “Dolce Stil Novo”, the *Dante Encyclopedia*, ibid, pp. 308-311, here p. 310.
86 Ascoli, *Dante and the Making*, op cit., p. 195, for a further analysis of the metapoetic, self-reflexive implications of VN XXV.
young Dante’s metapoetic claims, cannot remain “uno accidente”; his role in the narrative of the *libello* is too ‘substantial’ for that to be the case, as punningly pointed out by Bernsen, and it is Amor who interprets the figural significance of the Monna Vanna and Beatrice scene in chapter XXIV. The god is after all introduced in allusively biblical terms, and introduces himself as such: “Ego dominus tuus” (*VN* III). Candido, linking the Dante-persona’s dreams to their Johannine apocalyptic intertexts, remarks that this dream-“segnore’s self-definition particularly echoes the apparition of God to issue the ten commandments to Moses (*Ex. XX*), the first of which demands that the Israelites take on no other God. Later on, Amor explains his omniscience—and his difference from the *Vita Nova’s* Dante—via the simile of the circle: “Ego tamquam centrum circuli, cui simili modo se habent circumferentie partes” (*VN* XII). The imagery of the circle and the relationship between its circumference and its centre is key to the *Paradiso*, particularly with regards to discourses of knowledge and truth (the circle as a motif in the heaven of the sun91), so Thomas Aquinas:

Or apri li occhi a quel ch’io ti rispondo,  
e vedrāi il tuo credere e ’l mio dire  
nel vero farsi come centro in tondo.

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89 See also “Ecce Deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur michi”, *VN* II. Biblical parallels, following Branca, are Is. XV:10 and *Ex. XX:2*, pointed out by Coseriu and Kunkel in their commentary. Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nova / Das Neue Leben*, Übersetzung und komm. Anna Coseriu and Ulrike Kunkel, (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), pp. 147, 149. For more on this insight, see: Bernsen, ibid., pp. 50-51.
90 And this is precisely the trajectory of Dante’s poetic career: the turn from Beatrice/caritas/God to Lady Philosophy, and his subsequent penance in the apocalyptic confession upon Beatrice’s castigation at the end of *Purgatorio*. See Igor Candido, “Per una rilettura della *Vita Nova*: La prima *visio in somnis*,” *Lettere Italiane* (71:1): 2019, pp. 21-50, here: pp. 40-41.
Most importantly, it is used to describe God as the centre of the entire universe, around which the cosmos itself moves in perfect circular motion, an example being the pilgrim’s vision of the “cerchio d’igne” (l. 25) in canto XXVIII, from whose centre (or point, punto) “depende il cielo e tutta la natura” (ll. 41-42) as Beatrice explains. Candido, looking backwards in literary-philosophical history rather than forwards in the trajectory of Dante’s career, finds a source for Amor’s simile via a close reading of Boethius’ Consolatio that, like in the Paradisean sun-heaven and the later cantos, thematises the problem of knowledge and understanding, with special regards to providence: “neque enim fas est homini cunctas divinae operae machinas vel ingegno comprehendere vel explicare sermone” (Cons. IV. pr.vi. 55). In both readings, the centre of that circle is God. It is an early example of Dante’s poetic tendency to combine different traditions and fuse them into one overarching system. The end effect of it all will be the metamorphosis of that “segnore di pauroso aspetto” (VN III) into God—"l’amor che move ‘l sole e l’alte stelle” (Pd. XXXIII: 145).

The Vita Nova is thus an early exploration of the authorial self’s relation to the universe, seeing in the things of the world forms, figurai, allegories of an underlying truth that will lead miraculously to salvation: “e par che sia una cosa
venuta / da cielo in terra a miracol mostrare” (VN XXVI). An important facet of much of the medieval reception of Ovid was defined by such *allegorising* impulses that sought to integrate his works into a Christian Neoplatonist perspective. Bernard Silvestris brought Ovid and the Bible together, fusing both the Christian and the Pagan into one, “deigned to occupy its own independent place alongside them,” a common medieval manoeuvre. In the earliest surviving commentary, Ovid as a cosmological thinker is placed in a Neoplatonic category that alludes to the possibility of a religious conversion, “enim fuit in tempore Domiciani et Augusti C(esarum).” It is reasoned that the Roman poet was instead “one of those philosophers who see the supreme God as the Platonic form of the Good [...] whose mind (Nous) contains the forms of all individual beings which are to be realised in the universe.”

Similarly, Alan de Lille’s commentary, as outlined by Dronke, exhibits the role played by Neoplatonic allegory and a mystical hermeneutics in understanding and reading: the man who would deplore the use of poetry for intuiting Christian truths is merely “nativa quadam abductus verborum caligine” and “misticas interpretaciones et sensus non curans, allegoricos nec intelligens.” Alan’s rhetoric is striking in his proposal of Ovid as a deeply metaphysical and quasi-

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98 “appearing manifest / from heaven to show a miracle on earth”, (trans. Frisardi).


100 Peter Dronke, “Metamorphoses: Allegory in Early Medieval Commentaries on Ovid and Apuleius”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, (72): 2009, pp. 21-39. Here: Latin p. 21, fn. 3; reference to Melser’s exegesis of the Domitian reference p. 22. The reference to Emperor Domitian emphasises the persecution of Christians and thus the possibility of the poet’s conversion. This possibility was likely the basis for the medieval Pseudo-Ovidius’ *De vetula*, as Dronke explains, ibid.

101 Dronke, ibid, p. 22.

102 Quoted in Dronke, ibid, p. 29.
religious diviner. In a highly elaborate and Neoplatonic Christian reading of *Metamorphoses* II (I.1-7), Alan shows how the truths of Ovid’s poetry can now be reached, because Christ has opened the doors of allegory (the allegorical, the moral, the anagogical), where before there was only the literal, or historical: “Hanc regiam verbi Christus multipliciter aperuit.” This strain of thought viewed God as the first writer-creator, and man as his first ‘metaphor.’ The relevance of this to medieval interpretations of Ovid is that metaphor (transumptio) and metamorphosis (transformatio) are linked, the latter being implicit in the former, as in the Eucharist, with the ‘literal’ bread and the body of Christ sharing a “similitudinem occultam.” Metaphoric language, it is implied, enacts a metamorphosis on its subject matter, whereby the image is transformed into the image of a like phenomenon without causing the reader’s mind to lose sight of the original, thus stressing continuity even in the act of (linguistic, rhetorical, imaginative) change, continuity even into doubleness, hence preserving, in the act of destabilising, a given phenomenon’s identity. Finally, a similar ‘transumptio’ occurs in both dreaming and prophetic visions, as explained by Boncompagno, referring to the Apocalypse of John, where the soul itself ‘transumes’ in the act, creating metaphorical figures which proffer forth truths. This prophetic quality of

103 “Quis excellencius, quis, luculenci de divinis intonuit misterium, quam ‘Peligni ruris alumpnus’, fide vacuus, expers penitus catholice veritatis?” Dronke, ibid, p. 28.
104 See Dronke, ibid, pp. 27-31.
107 Dronke, *Dante*, ibid, p. 18. Dronke is discussing Boncompagno da Signa’s vocabulary from the *Rhetorica Novissima* 9.2.1 Quid sit transumptio, in *Bibliotheca iuridica mediæ ævi* II, i, ed. A. Gaudenzi (Bologna, 1892).
108 A similar analysis of the Dantean simile can be found in Richard Lansing’s text for the entry “Simile” in the *Dante Encyclopedia*, edited by Richard Lansing, (New York: Routledge, 2010 (2000)), pp. 778-781, but particularly p. 779, where he discusses the relationship of analogy operative between the “earthly world” and the “higher, unseen spiritual reality”.
109 Dronke, *Dante*, op cit., p. 17.
dreams grants the *Vita Nova* its realism, as Dante points out retrospectively in the *Convivio*, when he relates having intuited, “quasi come sognando,” the truths that he would later read in the philosophy of Boethius, Cicero et al.\(^{110}\) Finally, as Durling and Martinez point out, it is a dream that spurs the young Dante to seek out “l’arte del dire parole per rima” (*VN* III)\(^{111}\) and send it to all the “fedeli d’Amore.”\(^{112}\) Durling and Martinez’ study charts out the significant Neoplatonist thinking that informs the *libello*, elaborating how the *divisioni* of Dante’s self-commentaries, inherited from the philosophical and biblical commentary traditions, are themselves rhetorical analogues of the process of “metaphysical division” that occurs as the transcendent One generates the cosmos by descending “into increasing differentiation and multiplicity,” a phenomenon that finds expression in the canzone *Donne ch’avete intelletto d’Amore*, which thematically and formally enacts a procession from and return to God.\(^{113}\)

Another medieval allegorist may account for Ovid’s influence in Dante’s earlier, “theologised”\(^{114}\) poetics: Arnulf of Orleans’ commentary (composed ca.

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\(^{110}\) “per lo quale ingegno molte cose, quasi come sognando, già vedea, sì come ne la Vita Nuova si può vedere” (*Conv.* II. xii. 4).

\(^{111}\) “the art of writing verse” (trans. Frisardi).

\(^{112}\) Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, op cit., p. 54.

\(^{113}\) Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, ibid, p. 62. While not explicitly related to Ovid, it is possible that Dante’s approach here was influenced by the Neoplatonising allegories imposed upon Ovid’s texts in the manuscript commentary traditions, and that his early adventures in Neoplatonic thought (i.e. the *Vita Nova*) were also informed by the medieval accessus of classical auctores, and especially of Ovid, rather than only by Boethius, as Durling suggests: Robert M. Durling, “Neoplatonism”, in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, edited by Richard Lansing, 641-646 (New York: Routledge, 2010 (2000)), here: p. 643.

Arnulf’s reading glosses outer metamorphosis in terms of the inner, defining both types of metamorphosis alongside another (the ‘magical’), and explains the *intentio scribentis* in particularly Neoplatonic language:

“In hoc titulo ['de mutatione substantie'] designatur materia: de mutatione enim agit tripliciter, scilicet de naturali, de magica, de spirituali, [...] Spiritualis que fit circa spiritum ut de sano fit insanus uel e contrario: ut Agaue uel Autonoe, que spiritu et non corpore mutabantur. [...] Intentio sua est de mutatione dicere ut non intelligamus de mutatione que fit extrinsecus tantum in rebus corporeis bonis uel malis, sed etiam de mutatione que fit intrinsecus ut in anima ut reductam nos ab errore ad cognitionem nostri creatoris.”

The change from *insanus* to *sanus* characterises and adapts the language used in Ovid’s description of Autonoe’s and Agave’s madness when driven mad by Bacchus. However, the word also has biblical resonance, used in the New Testament with reference to Christ’s miracles, as in *Luke* VIII: 36, where it describes Jesus’ expulsion of the demonic spirit possessing the man from Gerasa. The news of Jesus’ act spreads: “Nuntiaverunt autem illis et qui viderant, quomodo sanus factus esset a legione.” Paul uses the word for the sound
teaching of Christ, secured in the interiority of the holy spirit, and it is up to the *intellectus sanus* to read and interpret Scripture correctly. Arnulf then briefly explains the Neoplatonic conception of the movements of the cosmos and the soul (the rational westward movement of the firmament, and the irrational eastward movement of the planets), and the gift of reason, *ratio*, that human beings must use in intellectual contemplation. Finally, he comes to define *cui parti philosophiae subponatur* as being that of ethics:

“Vel intentio sua est nos ab amore temporalium inmoderato reuocare et adhortari ad unicum cultum nostri creatoris ostendendo stabilitatem celestium et varietatem temporalium. Ethice supponitur quia docet nos ista temporalia quasi transitoria et mutabilia contemnere quod pertinet ad mortalitatem.”

The framework, with its reference to the return of the soul out of error, multiplicity and change, and back to unity, oneness, the unchangeable, alongside Arnulf’s tendency to see Ovid in this way as monotheistic, is a Christian Neoplatonism, hugely impactful on Dante as transmitted in a poetic text such as Boethius’ “O qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas” from the *Consolatio Philosophiae*, which describes in its content and enacts in its form this very process. Reason is the guiding principle, it is what makes a poem intelligible, hence the continual emphasis throughout the *Vita Nova* on the poems’ *ragioni* and the *divisioni* that

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121 “Formam habe sanorum verborum, quae a me audisti in fide et in dilectione in Christo Jesu. Bonum depositum custodi per Spiritum sanctum, qui habitat in nobis” (II Tim. I: 13-14).
122 Mazzotta discusses the Church Fathers’ use of the term “sanus intellectus” as opposed to the “bovinus intellectus” of the heretics, whose interpretations lack faith and run amok. See: Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, op cit., p. 279.
124 Gura, *op cit.*, p. 166.
126 See Durling and Martinez’ analysis of both Boethius’ poem and the thematic and formal similarities to Dante’s *Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore* in Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, op cit., pp. 11-18 & pp. 55-70, in which poem they find a consciously crafted Boethian “structure based on the principles of procession and return”, p. 66.
ought to rationally orientate the reader to the poem itself, unless the poem itself evinces its own grounding ratio. In the canzone addressing the intellect of the ladies, *Donne ch’avete*, the speaker’s mind is promised ease by the application of reason to his condition: “*ragionar per isfogar la mente.*” [...] / E io non vo’ parlar si altamente, / ch’io divenisse per temenza vile; / ma *tratterò* del suo stato gentile" (*Donne ch’avete*, vv.4, 9-11). ‘Trattare’ is a verb that shadows forth the kind of prose reasoning of scholastic philosophy, and his reference to this canzone in chapter twenty as “cotale trattato”, broken up by the machinery of his rationalistic divisioni, seems to bring it close to realm of prose, rather than poetry, as Barolini discusses.

Ragionare and trattare go hand in hand. Likewise it is reason, Dante makes sure to stress, that ought to ground one’s Ovidian use of figurative language, so that its intendimento may be properly explained. It will be

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127 A poem should not be “sanza ragione alcuna, ma con ragione, la quale poi sia possibile d’aprire per prosa” (*VN* XXV).


129 In the Convivio, Dante will emphasise, following reason, his need to *trattare* in an even more virile manner than in the *Vita Nuova* (*Conv*. I. i. 16). On that passage see Ascoli, *Dante and the Making*, op cit., pp. 73ff, who contextualises it within Dante’s growing obsession, in the post-*Vita Nova* period, with creating himself as an author that commands authority.


131 Ovid and figurative/allegorical speech are particularly linked in Dante’s considerations, see *De vulg*. I. ii. 7: “Si vero contra argumentetur quis de eo quod Ovidius dicit in quinto Metamorfoseos de picis loquentibus, dicimus quod hoc *figurate* dicit, aliiud intelligens” (italics mine). That this figurative speech is connected to figural writing and interpretation will be explored throughout this dissertation; and another reference to Ovid in Dante’s Latin works: “Primus horum modorum apud Gentiles *figuratus* fuit in illo duello Herculis et Anthei, cuius Lucanus meminit in quarto Farsalie Ovidius in nono De rerum transmutatione; secundus *figurat* apud eodem in Athalana et Ypomone in decimo De rerum transmutatione” (*Mon*. II. vii. 10, italics mine). Dante seems to be applying biblical typology to Ovid’s text here.

132 “dico che né li poete parlavano così sanza ragione, né quelli che rimano deono parlare così non avendo alcuno ragionamento in loro di quello che dicono” etc., (*VN* XXV). On “grounding” oneself in reason, see Leahy, *Der wahre Historiker*, op cit., p. 215, who explains its relation to “the question of ownership” of one’s own language and experiences and the problems that occur when one seeks a solid foundation in reason. It is particularly in the closing pages of her book that reason (*Grund*) emerges, via some Heideggerian theorising, as an abyss (*Abgrund*), and the paradox of grounding a poetics in a principle of reason is that, as Leahy finds, “at the centre of reason, therefore, is the operation of metaphor […] *Grund is what is withheld in every representation*”, (italics author’s own, p. 221). Following Leahy’s insights, the failure of reason to ground representation will become a theme in Dante’s Ovid reception.
Dante’s guiding principle in navigating the phenomena of worldly life throughout his career, but as he remarks at the close of Monarchia, the earthly is its limit.\textsuperscript{133} Furthermore, as Picone has analysed, Dante’s vocabulary in this passage, along with the emphasis on reason, is implicated in a broader tradition of the medieval lectio that gains ground in the allegories of (Neoplatonic) commentators such as Arnulf of Orléans, all of which “si riferisce all’operazione che porta al ritrovamento e all’evidenziamento da parte del commentatore del sensus allegoricus, della verità custodita dentro la finzione poetica,”\textsuperscript{134} where the “finzione” is broadly understood to represent either the sensus litteralis or the sensus historialis in biblical (in which they are one) and pagan texts.\textsuperscript{135}

Where Durling and Martinez follow up on Dante-narrator’s hint\textsuperscript{136} that one could go on further dividing Donne ch’avete, they do not do so when Dante-persona hints to it for the libello’s final sonnet, Oltre la spera: “Potrebbesi più...”

\textsuperscript{133} “ad secundam [beatitudinem] vero per documenta spiritualia que humanam rationem transcendent, dummodo illa sequamur secundum virtutes theologicas operando, fidem sper scilicet et caritatem. Has igitur conclusiones et media, licet ostensa sint nobis hec ab humana ratione que per phylosophos tota nobis innuit, hec a Spiritu Sancto qui per prophetas et agiographos, qui per coepternum sibi Dei filium iesum Cristum et per eius discipulos supernaturalem veritatem ac nobis necessariam revelavit” Mon. III. xvi. 7-9.


\textsuperscript{135} ibid. The different uses that reason, ratio, is being put to work at in both Dante and the source text of his predecessor is noteworthy. Ovid, or so he claims, differs to his own predecessors in the Roman canon of love elegy, not being subjugated to love as an uncontrollable passion such as his forbearer Propertius (see Peter Green. Commentary to Remedia amoris ll. 1-10. Ovid, The Erotic Poems, translated with an Introduction and Notes by Peter Green, (London: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 403), and remarks ironically a few lines on in the Remedia amoris: “et, quod nunc ratio est, impetus ante fuit” (RA: 10). Ovid’s passage is also about the act of reading itself, as the god Amor has just misread the praeceptor amoris’ intention and misinterpreted the title as announcing wars against him. Ovid’s persona reassures the god that if he reads on, he will see that no wars are being planned. Like Dante, for whom authority is linked to the ability not only to write, but to read and interpret properly (on this see Ascoli, Dante and the Making, op cit., p. 196), it is a self-reflexive moment in which the poet addresses the work that is being written, belatedly justifying its poetic praxis and desired method of reading and writing. This metapoetic self-reflexivity will prove to be a key point of junction between the two poets further on in this trattato.

\textsuperscript{136} “Dico bene che, a più aprire lo intendimento di questa canzone, si converrebbe usare di più minute divisioni” VN XIX.
sottilmente ancora dividere" (VN XLI),\textsuperscript{137} which is not only Neoplatonic but also a strong prefiguration of the poetics of the Paradiso as a whole, where the ascent to God in the Empyrean is increasingly articulated via the topos of ineffability.\textsuperscript{138} Here the lover of the Vita Nova experiences an “intelligenza nova” (Oltre, l. 3) that raptures his melancholy thought up to Beatrice “oltre la spera che più larga gira” (Oltre, v.1), and while his intellect does not comprehend all of the mystical vision’s sublimity, he understands that it is she upon whom he gazes. This is registered paradoxically in that while he does not understand intellectually (“io no lo intendo”, v.10), he simultaneously achieves an affective gnosis (“so io” v.12). This is an early experience of reason’s failure to account for visions of beatific grace, those “spiritualia que humanam rationem transcendent” (Mon. III. vi. 8). Similar to the various emanations and returns found in Donne ch’avete by Durling and Martinez, Oltre la spera\textsuperscript{139} likewise recalls the Neoplatonic thematics of procession and return by an abundance of verbs that imply contrary directions. In the first quatrain the emphasis is on upward movement, passing towards and moving from: oltre, passa, esce, su lo tira; the source of this upward journey is registered in lines three to four by way of an enjambment that stresses the influence of Amore (the “intelligenza nova”) flowing into the lover’s heart (“piangendo mette in lui”). Here the enjambment allows the poem to stress formally the downward flow, further emphasised by the gerund construction combined with a present tense verb, which suggests the continuity of Love’s informing power. The terminus of the journey is

\textsuperscript{137} “It could be divided up in still more detail” (trans. Frisardi).

\textsuperscript{138} Cf. Barolini, who also points out that this sonnet avoids the problem of the body in heaven, a key problem in the Paradiso. Barolini, Dante’s Lyric Poetry, op cit., p. 295.

marked by the word “giunto” that occurs in the middle of line five, close to the midpoint of the octet. In the second quatrain the verbs of motion are replaced by static, present tense verbs relating to sight and light-metaphysics: *vede, luce, mira*. Although “luce” can be taken as either a substantive or as a verb, in either case the lady is emanating a beatific light that causes marvel ("per lo suo splendore / [...] la mira" *Oltre*, 7-8). That the word “luce” is the finite form of the verb *lucere* would tie in to Neoplatonic principles of emanation, as she receives God’s light, and reconveys this light (*riluce*) to the observer.¹⁴⁰ It is ultimately Beatrice’s name, recorded in line 13, that will illuminate his mind and guide him towards paradise/Paradiso: to name Beatrice, as Ginsberg explains, is to call for beatitude itself.¹⁴¹

By now the ingredients for the potion of a Dantean-‘Ovidian’ poetry are evident: a brew of self-reflexive poetic metamorphosis vis-à-vis literary tradition, figured in rhetorical language that understands reality as allegorical,¹⁴² or allegory as intimately grounded in historical happenings as an expression of reason, in a Neoplatonic view towards the *causa finalis* of human intellectual life, which is ultimately the journey “ab errore ad cognitionem nostri creatoris”¹⁴³ a poetic

¹⁴⁰ This is the technical sense of “splendore” as elaborated by Dante in Conv. III. xiv. 4-5. Foster and Boyd (ibid, p. 156) reckon it anachronistic to grant Dante a developed understanding of technical scientific terms at this early stage of his career, but there are grounds for thinking that this poem, along with the concluding chapter XLII, were produced later on (See Coseriu and Kunkel’s commentary, ibid, pp. 197-8), and so it is in the realm of possibility that Dante was familiar with these terms. At any rate Dante, generally speaking, is not one to employ his poetic vocabulary unthinkingly. See Coseriu and Kunkel’s commentary, op cit., pp. 197-8.


¹⁴² In this sense, and as pointed out to me by Prof. Candido in our correspondence, where the historical is intimately connected to the allegorical, Dante would seem to be employing the allegory of the theologians, as outlined in Conv. II and in the Epistle to Can Grande.

¹⁴³ Arnulf, quoted in Dronke, “Allegory”, op cit., p. 43, fn. n.47.
passion, in Auerbach’s words, “che vuol racchiudere tutto il cosmo nella propria esperienza.” Dante ends on a note of ineffability in the short chapter following the sonnet *Oltre la spera*, holding off with a promise that he will not express his “mirabile visione” until he has the language necessary; a promise of radical poetic newness and change, that perhaps extends beyond the confines of a deterministic rationality that cannot fully account for the experience: reason, so sought for by the *libello*’s narrator, will itself be left wanting.

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144 Erich Auerbach, *Studi su Dante*, ibid, p. 40.
145 “infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamene trattare di lei […] io spero di dicer di lei quello che mai non fue detto d’alcuna” (VN XLIi)
Chapter II: Epic Exordia

Naso legendus erat tum, cum didicistis amare:

Idem nunc vobis Naso legendus erit

(RA. 71-72).

If the end of each canticle is unabashedly Christian in its themes and forms—the crossing of Lucifer's body, the procession of the Church, the vision of God facie ad faciem (II. Cor. 13:12)—despite all three being pervaded and bolstered by pagan imagery, they are each linked together in harmony through repetition of the final ‘cross-canticle’ rhyme of stelle. Dante’s beginnings, on the other hand, are far more varied, as it is in his beginnings that much pagan—and especially Ovidian—imagery and language is used to produce a sense of the radical change and novelty of the journey.

In both Ovid and Dante, the genre of epic is recognisable, despite a switching up of the very conventions that mark it as such: “In nova fert animus” begins Ovid (Met. I: 1), where “nova” could indicate a generic novelty topos if taken as a plural neuter accusative. However the reader is forced to change perspective come the enjambement of line 2, where the first half-line is undone by the introduction of a past participle: “mutatas dicere formas / corpora.” “Corpora” modifies “nova” and necessarily induces a rereading of the beginning of line 1. Ovid here creates a circular garden path sentence and thereby breaks with all epic tradition by opening with the preposition ‘in’, rather than the work’s main subject.

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146 Forming an “autonomous sense unit” in and of itself, see Wheeler, A Discourse of Wonders, op cit., p. 8. In the following treatment of Ovid, I mainly follow Wheeler’s analysis.

before enacting on the sentence level the principle of the poem’s main theme—
sudden metamorphosis—as the change from his previous elegiac pentameters
into epic hexameters is foregrounded before the reader’s eyes via self-reflexive
language in the invocation to the gods: “Di, coeptis, (nam vos mutastis et illa) / Adspirate meis”, where “illa” modifies the coepta of his previous literary
undertakings. \(^\text{148}\) The long syllables following the caesura (after “coeptis”), as
Wheeler points out, immediately signal the shift from what may have been a
pentameter (and thus Ovid’s previous and by then expected verse form) into the
hexameter of epic \(^\text{149}\) making “vos”, the apostrophe to the pantheon of gods, the
word that catalyses the metrical metamorphosis, and thus Ovid’s proem
incorporates formally the subject it is tasked with introducing and thematising. \(^\text{150}\)
Emerging from Ovid’s surprising play with word order, semantic shifts and
developments of the meter are important facets of metamorphosis: the
undermining of preconceived notions and the opening into alterity and diversity,

“Fraternas acies alternaque regna profanis / decertata odiiis sonesque evolvire Thebas, / Pierius menti calor incidit” (Thebaid and Achilleid. Ed. Hall, Ritchie & Edwards. Cambridge Scholars

\(^\text{148}\) Wheeler, A Discourse of Wonders, ibid., pp. 8-14. Wheeler (with relevant bibliography, footnote 25, p. 215) also alludes to the philological problems in classical scholarship regarding the reading
of “illa”, where this line, for centuries, had “illas”, with a less metapoetic and on the whole rather
banal meaning in its referring back to “mutatas … formas” rather than to the poet’s own literary
past, his coepta, a subversive playing with tradition first begun in the Amores when Cupid steals a
‘foot’ from his epic hexameters (“Arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam / edere, materia
conveniente modis. / par erat inferior versus—risisse Cupido / dicitur atque unum surripisse
pedem. / […] / cum bene surrexit versu nova pagina primo, / attenuat nervos proximus ille meos.”
Am. I. i. 1–4, 17-18). It is not clear which of the readings Dante would have known, although “illa”
appears first as a medieval variant (Anderson, commentary to Met. I: 2, op cit. p. 151). For a
vehement and positively received (Anderson, ibid.) argument against “illas”, see E. J. Kenney,
53.

\(^\text{149}\) “the rule by Ovid’s day was that no spondees were permitted in the second hemiepes of an
elegiac pentameter”, Wheeler, ibid., p. 16.

\(^\text{150}\) Or as Heyworth craftily deciphers it: “This introduction is itself metamorphosed into a record of
metamorphoses of introductions S. J. Heyworth, “Some Allusions to Callimachus in Latin Poetry”,
something never before seen.\textsuperscript{151} It is the potential of earthly “corpora” to conceal something of past “formas” within themselves—the inherent doubleness of identity and the sketchy continuity of the old within that very new.\textsuperscript{152} The danger that what appears stable is a mere pretext for the eruption of something unexpected, as Kenney writes: “Nothing is ever quite what it seems; nobody’s identity is ever wholly secure”,\textsuperscript{153} or, as Ovid himself has it: “nec species sua cuique manet” (\textit{Met.} XV: 252).

Dante likewise eschews tradition while simultaneously upholding it. There is no grandiose, Vergilian statement of theme in the opening words.\textsuperscript{154} Instead, he situates himself in the middleness of the world with the preposition \textit{in}: “Nel mezzo”, a middleness matching the injunction of classical, Horatian rhetoric to begin “in medias res.”\textsuperscript{155} This testifies to the problem of beginning, which finds expression in the multitude of ‘beginnings’ scattered throughout the first six cantos of \textit{Inferno} as analysed by Barolini. Barolini links what in another context Leahy calls the “territory of false starts”\textsuperscript{156}—a negation of absolute beginnings by self-reflexively doubling back on itself, in its multiple beginnings, by acknowledging a subjectivity

\textsuperscript{151} Cf. Dante, whose summary of human experience is a series of new things, on the “nuovo e mai non fatto cammino di questa vita” (\textit{Conv.}, IV. XII. 15). On this see Barolini, \textit{The Undivine Comedy}, op cit., pp. 21-26.
\textsuperscript{152} Wheeler, ibid, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{156} While not writing on Dante, but rather Ingeborg Bachmann’s \textit{Malina}, Leahy’s use of various twentieth century philosophers to map out the “difficulty of catching up with oneself in order to begin” (p. 19) in Bachmann yields similar results to Barolini’s use of Aristotle to understand Dante’s exploration of this problem. Furthermore, both scholars work out a theory of ‘true fiction’ (Leahy, p. 157; Barolini Ch. 7). Leahy, \textit{Der wahre Historiker}, op cit., here: pp. 18-19. Perhaps a combination of these two scholars’ insights would be a productive starting point for future work on the question of Dante as a modernist, or vice versa, the question of modernism’s relation to the medieval.
that precedes and ought to ground any absolute beginning (cf. “mi ritrovai”, Inf. I: 2)—to Aristotle’s consideration of time as precisely that of a middleness.\textsuperscript{157}

Both Dante and Ovid swerve together from the immediate announcement of their epic’s theme by reverting to a prepositional phrase, but they split again with regards to Horace’s injunction: Dante takes up his story from midway upon the journey of our life, while Ovid, railing against Horace’s warning not to stretch the scope of a poem too far back, aims at writing the entire mythological history of the world.\textsuperscript{158} He chooses instead what the \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium} deemed the \textit{naturalis ordo}, which chronicles things as they happened in sequential \textit{historical} order from the beginning,\textsuperscript{159} a further subversion of expectations given that his \textit{materia} will be composed of the many non-historical \textit{fabulae} of antiquity. Dante, invertedly, opts for the \textit{artificialis ordo} for an autobiographical narrative that will nevertheless produce truth, even in its fictitiousness. There is a doubleness of identity in each narrative instance: one that looks forward in Ovid’s case, “vivam” \textit{(Met. XV:879)}, and backwards in Dante’s, who chronicles the pilgrim’s becoming the narrator.\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{157} Teodolinda Barolini, \textit{The Undivine Comedy}, op cit., esp. chapter 2 “Infernal Incipits: The Poetics of the New” p. 40.
\textsuperscript{159} “Naturalis ordo est si quis narrat rem ordine quo gesta est; artificialis ordo est si quis non incipit a principio rei gestae, sed a medio, ut Virgilius in \textit{Aeneide} quaedam in futuro dicienda anticipat et quaedam in praesente dicienda in posterum differt.” Quoted in Adamo, “Sulla soglia iniziale della Commedia”, op cit., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{160} For this pilgrim-poet dialectic, the final essay (“The Significance of \textit{Terza Rima}”) in John Freccero, \textit{The Poetics of Conversion}, op cit., is fundamental, linking both the formal complexities of \textit{terza rima}’s rhyme scheme to the movement of the travellers in the narrative itself as well as to the thematics of Christian autobiography and the poet’s narrative of conversion.
II: 1 Departing for Paradise: Marsyas

On first glance it may be surprising that a poet setting out to describe the ineffable mysteries of Christianity should start the holiest part of his sacred poem (Pd. XXV:1) with an appeal to pagan deities: Apollo (I: 13), the “nove muse” and Minerva (II: 8-9). The appeal to Apollo is made all the more mysterious upon the poet’s request to be inspired by the God in much the same way “si come quando Marsia traesti / de la vagina de le membra sue” (vv. 19-20).\(^{161}\) Marsyas belongs to book six of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which thematises human presumption in the act of challenging the authority of the gods.\(^{162}\) Two figures from the book appeared as examples of excessive pride in *Purgatorio* 12 (Arachne and Niobe), which makes the mention of Marsyas’ live flaying at the outset of *Paradiso* all the more striking. Like Ovid’s depiction, Dante does not specify the transgression or challenge of Marsyas toward Apollo: the Sun God’s wrath simply occurs in the narrative, transforming Ovid’s depiction of excessive and extraordinary — and seemingly unjustified — divine vengeance into a scene with even broader hermeneutic possibilities: where no mortal presumption is presented that would ground the punishment, Marsyas’ suffering opens to the possibility of interpretation.\(^{163}\) Dante likewise refers to it not as explicit punishment, but, as Robson summarises, “as a genuinely awesome event containing in itself some

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\(^{161}\) “the very power you made manifest / when you drew Marsyas out from his limbs’ sheath.” (Trans. Mandelbaum)


further significance."\textsuperscript{164} It is one of two similes in the first canto of Paradiso that emphasises the extreme limits of this new, sacred poetry. The poem is such an undertaking that the first thirty-six lines constitute invocations and metaliterary reflections stressing the difficulty of writing: “Infino a qui l’un giogo di Parnaso / assai mi fu, ma or con amendue / m’è uopo intrar ne l’aringo rimaso” (vv. 16-18).\textsuperscript{165}

Aside from the Ovidian reference to Mount Parnassus,\textsuperscript{166} that central caesura, with its oppositional formulation “ma or”, stresses \textit{in nuce} the dramatic break inaugurated by the new \textit{cantica}, \textit{cantica} which, if it brings forth even the mere “ombra” (v. 23) of the blessed kingdom, will have the poet crowned triumphantly with the leaves of the laurel tree. But it is an undertaking at the limits of poetic language and human memory: “e vidi cose che ridire / né sa né può chi di là sù discende” (vv. 5-6).\textsuperscript{167}

The Marsyas simile, which was introduced via an apostrophe to Apollo in line 13, is followed by an apostrophe to God: “O divina virtù” (v.22). The divine power is, as Hollander explains, an attribute of God the Father,\textsuperscript{168} yet in the immediate context it also suggests poetic power by its syntactic proximity to Apollo, and the following lines address that divine power in the second person, referring to their “diletto legno” (v.25), that is, the wood of the tree into which Daphne was transformed (\textit{Met.} I: 452-567). The rhymes alone suggest that the journey to the blessed realm (“regno”) is but a means to obtain the laurel tree (“legno”) and become worthy (“degno”) of the crown of leaves: “vedra’mi […] / venire e coronarmi

\textsuperscript{164}C. A. Robson, quoted in Hollander, \textit{Allegory}, op cit. p. 216.
\textsuperscript{165}“Until this point, one of Parnassus’ peaks sufficed for me; but now I face the test the agon that is left; I need both crests.” (Trans. Mandelbaum).
\textsuperscript{166}And its association with the first, \textit{shipwrecked} humans, Deucalion and Pyrrha, \textit{Met.} I: 316.
\textsuperscript{167}“and I saw things that he who from that height descends, forgets or can not speak” (trans. Mandelbaum).
The coronation and “triunfare”\textsuperscript{169} of the successful poet is so rare these days, “che parturir letizia in su la lieta / delfica deïtà dovria la fronda / peneia, quando alcun di sé asseta” (vv. 31-33).\textsuperscript{170} The consonantal, alliterative, sibilant and rhythmic brilliance of these lines is then qualified by the poet’s ‘modest’ outlook, in which he likens his poem to a “poca favilla” that may be followed by a “gran fiamma”: “forse di retro a me con miglior voci / si pregherà perché Cirra risponda” (vv. 35-6).\textsuperscript{171}

This is the end of the preliminary invocations and the beginning of the \textit{Paradiso}’s ‘plot’.\textsuperscript{172} The flaying of Marsyas is reconfigured into a positive analogue and is suggestive of both what the poet experienced (the transcending of the body\textsuperscript{173}) and what he wants of himself: to shed the “scoglio” (\textit{Pg.} II: 122) that weighs the soul down and binds it to the ephemera of the sublunar world,\textsuperscript{174} as a precondition for entering paradise, and, poetically, for writing it too; one’s poetry must be flayed of the old skin in order to transform, like Marysas, into a crystal-clear and brilliantly new “liquidissimus amnis” that gives a name to its martyred poet.\textsuperscript{175} It is here that the question of identity, which inheres in the phenomenon of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{169} Which itself recalls the “Triumphum” of Roman generals described by Apollo, \textit{Met.} I:560.
\textsuperscript{170} “that when Peneian branches can incite someone to long and thirst for them, delight must fill the happy Delphic deity.” (Trans. Mandelbaum)
\textsuperscript{171} “there may / be better voices after me to pray / to Cyrrha’s god for aid—that he may answer.” (Trans. Mandelbaum)
\textsuperscript{174} This is not the same as leaving the body itself behind, as in mystic ecstasies, as Dante will make clear. It is rather, as Moevs demonstrates in the course of his book (ibid), a disidentification with one’s body, a spiritual transcendence out of the earthly, contingent domain of bodily identification.
\textsuperscript{175} “Marsya nomen habet…”, \textit{Met.} VI: 400.
\end{footnotesize}
metamorphosis,\textsuperscript{176} comes to the fore. To a certain degree it is, if not an outright killing, an ‘allowing to die’ of the old self in order to give birth to the new self, which is the theological basis underlying any conversion narrative.\textsuperscript{177} In this sense, Marsyas’ flaying invites a reconsideration of the problem of suicide, for in\textit{ Inferno} XIII those souls who tore themselves—soul from body—from themselves to the point of ruin, are hurled into the “mesta / selva” (\textit{Inf.} XIII: 106-7). In a metaliterary sense, it is another case wherein Dante-pilgrim grants Virgilio quite some authority and activity while Dante the poet playfully undercuts this authority even as he sets it up.\textsuperscript{178}

Both suicides in the seventh circle round off their speeches with Ovidian rhetoric—Piero: “L’animo mio, per disdegnoso gusto, / credendo col morir fuggir disdegno, / ingiusto fece me contra me giusto” (\textit{Inf.} XIII: 70-2);\textsuperscript{179} and the Anonymous Florentine: “Io fei gibetto a me de le mie case” (v. 151).\textsuperscript{180} Tommaseo, seemingly uniquely,\textsuperscript{181} cites \textit{Metamorphoses} VII: 604-5 for Pier’s rhetorical flourish,\textsuperscript{182} a line that uses the paradox of fleeing death via death, which may have also influenced Dante’s choice of hanging for the second \textit{exemplum} of suicide.

\textsuperscript{177} Although Freccero comes close to killing when he refers to it as the “destruction of [the] previous form”, John Freccero, “The Significance of Terza Rima”, in \textit{The Poetics of Conversion}, op cit., p. 266.
\textsuperscript{178} See Douglas Biow, “From Ignorance to Knowledge: The Marvelous in \textit{Inferno} 13”, in \textit{The Poetry of Allusion}, op cit., 45-61, esp. p. 47 for an outline of Virgil’s active presence in the canto, and the poet’s undermining of it.
\textsuperscript{179} “My mind, because of its disdainful temper, believing it could flee disdain through death, made me unjust against my own just self.”
\textsuperscript{180} “I made—of my own house-my gallows place.”
\textsuperscript{181} At least among those collected on the \textit{Dante Lab Reader} of Dante Dartmouth Project website, op cit., in which I used the search function to browse the commentators’ takes on these lines.
\textsuperscript{182} “pars animam \textit{laqueo} claudunt mortisque timorem / morte fugant ultroque vocant venientia fata”. Cited from the commentary to \textit{Inferno} XIII, Lines 70-72 by Niccolò Tommaseo, \textit{La Divina Commedia con le note di Niccolò Tommaseo e introduzione di Umberto Cosmo}, (Torino: UTET, 1927), as found on Dante Lab, http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu
However, what has gone seemingly unnoticed about both suicides is the use of rhetorical manipulations based on pronouns in a way that is very akin to how Ovid treats Marsyas: Piero’s “me contra me” and the Florentine’s “Io...a me de le mie” both recall Marsyas’ desperate cry, in which his ruptured self is reflected in his speech, through the juxtaposition of inflected pronouns, and in the subsequent splitting of both his cries of pain and his speech by the voice of the narrator: “a! piget, a! non est’ clamabat ‘tibia tanti’ (Met. VI: 386). Here, as in Dante, there is a cleavage in identity on the sentence and linguistic levels via the “play of pronouns.” In Pier’s case, the balanced split of the line “ingiusto fece me contra me giusto”, with the self split and sitting on either side of that ominous “contra”, mirrors the split in Pier’s subjectivity that turns him against himself. The logically confused thought of the previous line—fleeing death by means of death—in Ovid was a simple paradox characteristic of the poet’s wit, but in Dante becomes an even more bitter “infernal irony,” for in fleeing death by death, they damn themselves to an unending death, also acted out literally by the two souls fleeing the “nere cagne” (Inf. XIII: 125) and shouting for death to hurry up: “Or accorri, accorri, morte!” (v. 118). This death is the eternal negation of the former unity of body and soul, the annihilation of personhood, a fact to which the poet subtly nods when he tells: “Io sentia d’ogne parte trarre guai / e non vedea persona che ‘l

183 “quid me mihi detrahis?” inquit Met. VI: 385.
184 These rhetorical strategies will also be used elsewhere by Dante, for example when exemplifying the principle of contrapasso in Inf. XXVIII: 139-142: Bertran’s speech, like his head from his torso, is cleft by a cry of misery: “Perch’io parti’ così giunte persone, / partito porto il mio cerebro, lasso!, / dal suo principio ch’è in questo troncone. / Così s’osserva in me lo contrapasso.” Bertran also embodies the in malo “mysteries” (Barolini, Commento Baroliniano, Inferno 25, op cit.) of infernal metamorphosis, which is registered by the play on pronouns trope: “Di sé facea a sé stesso lucerna, / ed eran due in uno e uno in due; com’esser può, quel sa che si governa” (Inf. XXVIII: 124-6). That this episode is linked to the metamorphoses of Inf. XXV and to Pd. II’s problem of how two bodies can become one while remaining distinct is confirmed in that Pauline “quei sa”.
186 The phrase is Freccero’s, entitling one of the essays of The Poetics of Conversion, op cit.
facesse” (Inf. XIII: 22-3, italics mine). In this canto’s encounter with the squanderers, violent against themselves by way of extreme prodigality, Fulgentius’ allegory of Ovid is drawn on in the scene’s construction: Actaeon’s self-alienation as he transforms into a stag, and his subsequent dismemberment by his hounds, understood allegorically as his destruction through his beloved possessions. Dante, in a subtly Ovidian manoeuvre, enacts this dismemberment on the semantic level:

\[
\text{In quel che s’appiattò miser li denti,}
\]
\[
e \text{quel dilaceraro a brano a brano;}
\]
\[
\text{poi sen portar quelle membra dolenti.}
\]

\underline{\text{(Inf. XIII: 127-9)}}

The first singular demonstrative pronoun “quel” is unified in itself, matched with a self-reflective verb in the singular: the subject is whole. By the next line, the repeated singular “quel” starts to become undone “a brano a brano” until finally in the third line, the metamorphosis—in this instance, a falling apart of identity—is complete, and the \textit{quel} has morphed into dismembered multiplicity: “quelle membra”, no longer referring to the unified person. Medieval allegories aside, here the broader implications of Actaeon’s story resonate in the seventh circle, as both  

187 “From every side I heard the sound of cries, but I could not see any source for them, so that, in my bewilderment, I stopped.” Mandelbaum does not quite render the significance, as I am reading it, of Dante’s “persona” here with his “source” translation.

188 Durling and Martinez, commentary to \textit{Inferno} XIII, line 128. Hollander (Allegory, 1969, esp. fn. 11, pp. 202-203) argues quite vehemently against the idea that Dante was heavily influenced by the medieval allegorists of Ovid and other pagan writers. While I agree that reducing Dante’s nuanced interrogation of classical sources purely to the simplified allegories of commentators like John of Garland or Arnulf of Orléans would be an unconscionable \textit{folie vole} in understanding Dante, it seems likely that our poet, as is his wont, cherry picks from those commentators when he does want to give certain episodes another hermeneutic layer, such as here. At any rate, it seems to emerge that Dante, even in his own Neoplatonic allegorising, exceeds in scope and depth the “curiously mindless documents […] of the learned pedagogue, Mr. Medieval” (Hollander, ibid).

189 “They set their teeth in him where he had crouched; and, piece by piece, those dogs dismembered him and carried off his miserable limbs.”
are cases of severe boundary violation:\textsuperscript{190} transgressing the limits represented by Diana, in the one case, and the boundaries of one’s own body, or material wellbeing, in the other. The “disjunctive repetition” of pronouns employed by Ovid, and Dante in relation to the suicides and spendthrifts, is used to stress that the loss of self \textit{is itself} a metamorphosis.\textsuperscript{191}

The extraordinary violence suffered by Marsyas is employed by Dante as a martyrdom on the road to poetic victory, an inversion of the negative self-splitting of the \textit{Inferno}, and an experience akin to Paul’s on the road to Damascus, who knew a man “sive in corpore sive extra corpus, nescio, Deus scit [...] quoniam raptus est in Paradisum et audivit arcana verba, quae non licet homini loqui” (II Cor. XII: 3-4).\textsuperscript{192} This is a passage that Dante had in mind, as he echoes Paul’s “Deus scit” in lines 73-5, apostrophising God the creator and governor of the universe as Amor, a similar personification we met in the \textit{Vita Nova}.\textsuperscript{193} Amor is now not only the god of love, but also the governing helmsman (“governi”) of the universe, an activity taken from the Neoplatonic work of Boethius.\textsuperscript{194} Furthermore, the “membra” attributed by Dante to Marsyas, as Clay touches on, recall Paul in \textit{Romans} (VII: 23),\textsuperscript{195} who describes how the law of his members wars against the law of his mind, “et captivantatem me in lege peccati quae est in membris meis.” To

\begin{footnotes}
\item[190] For Diana as the goddess of boundaries, see Newlands, “Violence and Resistance in Ovid’s Metamorphoses”, op cit., p. 149.
\item[191] Garth Tissol, op cit., p. 61.
\item[192] For more on Dante’s deliberate misreading and revision of Ovid’s Marsyas and Glaucus, see: Kevin Brownlee, “Pauline Vision and Ovidian Speech in Paradiso I”, in The Poetry of Allusion (op cit.).
\item[193] “S’i era sol di me quel che creasti / novellamente, Amor che ‘l ciel governi, l tu ‘l sai” (italics mine).
\end{footnotes}
go by the law of the members is to be stuck in sin, redeemable only should the life of Christ be received *inside*,

\[\text{“nam prudentia carnis mors est, prudentia autem spiritus vita et pax [...] Vos autem in carne non estis, sed in Spiritu, si tamen Spiritus Dei habitat in vobis” (Rom. VIII: 6-10).} \]

Dante’s being drawn from the “vagina de le membra sue” thus manages to incorporate a pagan and biblical intertext simultaneously. It is not a killing of the body itself, but a transcending *of the sin of the body—*its sinful ‘members’—by the in-spiration of that body with Christian grace. Dante’s choice to replace Ovid’s “cutis” (*Met.* VI: 387) with “vagina” refocuses the image of skin to that of either a sheath or a womb, suggesting birth, as Clay remarks. To this it may be added that Dante had used the imagery of the womb in describing the construction of canzones in *De vulgari eloquentia*, where the “cantio est gremium totius sententie” (*De vulg.*., II. ix. 2), with each individual stanza akin to a receptacle that guarantees constancy of form. For the poet to abandon the form-limiting “gremium”/ “vagina” of his old canzones, then, is to write the *Commedia*, a poem of unprecedented novelty of form.

Moreover, images of birth pangs is typical in biblical eschatologies where the transition from the old age to the new age is being described, and Paul himself takes up this metaphor further on in *Romans* and *Thessalonians*. A birth

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196 *Ad Rom.* VIII: 1-12; cf. “entra nel petto mio” and later in *Pd.* I: 67: “tal dentro mi fei”.
197 Clay, ibid. Also noted and discussed by Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, pp. 256-8.
198 “Nam, quemadmodum cantio est gremium totius sententie, sic stantia totam artem ingremiat; nec licet aliquid artis sequentibus arrogare, sed solam artem antecedentis induere. Per quod patet quod ipsa de qua loquimur erit congregatio, sive compages, omnium eorum que cantio sumit ab arte”, *De vulg.*. II. ix. 2-3, italics added.
199 Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, p. 257, call attention to the “etymological thread” of *vellere* that resurfaces at key transitional moments in the poem, linking it to the Marysas reference in which a similar process of ‘divellere’ occurs.
out of the “scoglio” of sin, Dante’s choice of “vagina” indicates too the peeling of the husk of a plant, an image tying in with a central motif of Purgatorio: the pilgrim has, after all, just emerged “rifatto si come piante novelle / rinovellate di novella fronda” (Pg. XXXIII: 143-4).202 Dante, following Paul, and differently to the sinners in hell who, trapped in the fallenness of the flesh, are rendered/rended quite literally nothing but “membra” (Inf. XIII: 129), escapes the inherent sin of his own “membra” by being reborn and renewed by rectifying grace: the in-spiration of Apollo, analogue of God.

II: 2 Swimming in the gran mar de l’essere—Glaucus

It is morning in Eden (v. 43), and the language used recalls Ovid: “la lucerna del mondo” (v. 37)203 and the sun, which “tempera e suggella” (v. 42).204 Beatrice, like Phaethon’s mother Clymene who “bracchia porrexit spectansque ad lumina solis” (Met. I:767), prepares their ascent by staring into the sun. The pilgrim, likened to the reflected ray of light emanating from a first ray, reflects her act, which was “per li occhi infuso / ne l’imagine mia […] e fissi li occhi al sole oltre nostr’ uso” (vv. 52-3).205 The Pauline intertext is likewise echoed in the following lines.206 Again, there is emphasis on the by now trustworthy image-receiving, visionary imagination. This “oltre” is what the Paradiso is all about: a going completely

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202 “remade, as new trees are / renewed when they bring forth new boughs”.
203 Echoing Phaethon’s address to his father, the Sun: “O lux immensi publica mundi”, (Met. II: 35).
204 Modelled on Ovid’s sun, “qui temperat orbem” (Met. I: 770). Both are pointed out by Durling and Martinez in their commentary to lines 37 and 41-42. Surprisingly, they do not comment on the likeness of Beatrice to Clymene.
205 An early paradisiacal simile tapping in to Neoplatonic light-metaphysics.
206 “fed by my eyes to my imagination, my action drew, and on the sun I set my sight more than we usually do.”
206 “Molto è licito là che qui non lece”, v.55, cf. II Cor. quoted above.
beyond “our customs” on earth, and the word itself may recall that star-wandering sonnet (Oltre la spera)\(^{207}\) and the subsequent visionary conclusion to the Vita Nova that will from here on be retrospectively illuminated\(^{208}\) as an excessus mentis that prefigures the Commedia, in which the pilgrim travels not only with his mind but with his body too. Alongside Marsyas, Phaethon is here a figura for the pilgrim to fulfil.\(^{209}\) This act of transgression “oltre nost’uso” is reflected in the language: between the first instance of ‘plot’ (the description of morning in Eden) and Beatrice’s explanation that they have been lifted to the eternal wheels by the light and grace of God (v. 88) there are five similes, and an adynaton that is almost a simile and which invites a comparison with what nature can’t do.\(^{210}\)

This is when the second explicit Ovidian character is introduced as to compensate for the ineffable. Here, a simile stands in for what language fails to grasp in the act of metamorphosis: fixing his eyes away from the sun and in Beatrice instead (“luci” v. 66), he becomes like Glaucus upon tasting the magic herbs.\(^{211}\)

“Trasumanar significar per verba non si poria; però l’esempio basti a cui esperienza grazia serba”
(vv.70-72).\(^{212}\)

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\(^{207}\) Barolini points out that Oltre la spera is the only lyric poem by Dante that begins with this adverb. Barolini, Dante’s Lyric Poetry, op cit., p. 294.

\(^{208}\) The term is Freccero’s, in reference to the revelation that is granted by faith in Pauline hermeneutics, from “Medusa” in The Poetics of Conversion, op cit., p. 122.

\(^{209}\) The identification with Phaethon runs throughout the Commedia and will be touched on again. For the importance of the concept of “figural” illumination see: Erich Auerbach, “Figura”, in Studi su Dante, op cit., 176-227; and see also Robert Hollander, Allegory, op cit., ch. 3: “Figural Density”, pp. 104-136.

\(^{210}\) Similes vv. 48, 49-53, 60, 62-3, 67-8; adynaton vv. 79-81.

\(^{211}\) “che l’fè conserto in mar de li altri dèi” (vv. 67-9), from Met. XIII: 898-968.

\(^{212}\) “Passing beyond the human cannot be worded; let Glaucus serve as simile— until grace grant you the experience.”
As will become apparent, rational understanding is insufficient here, and thus if we do not experience the same transhumanising indebted to grace (“grazia”), we must make do with the “esempiolo”, a word that since antiquity, as outlined by Curtius, became proximate to eikon and imago, and thus in a semantic territory which may include figura, “qualche cosa di reale, di storico, che rappresenta e annuncia qualche altra cosa, anch’essa reale e storica.” The relationship between the figure and its fulfilment, Auerbach goes on, is revealed precisely through concordance or similarity, which leads into the murky terrain of allegory, one thing standing for, or even simultaneously with, another, while insinuating a sense of shared historicity. Where in “God’s poem” of History, two events are correlated figurally within Christian historical time by means of similarity, in Dante’s poem two poetic events are correlated figurally on the textual level by means of rhetorical strategies such as similes, strategies which in turn foreground the problem of representation (signifying “per verba”) because even the analogy (here Glaucus) comes up somewhat short. Basic narrative contiguity, in which one event is determined by a cause susceptible to the scrutiny of reason, particularly as the prosaist of the Vita Nova might have it with his rationalistic divisioni, collapses when confronted with the absolutely new, which explodes into consciousness in the event of a radical metamorphosis—here: the sudden becoming beyond-human, and it is only through poetic devices such as similes, which while establishing concordance nevertheless point to the otherness of the phenomenon, and to a certain extent deny the narratability of it even from within that very narrative, that

213 E. R. Curtius, Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter, op cit., p.69.
214 Auerbach, “Figura”, in Studi su Dante, op cit., p. 190. Auerbach gives many examples where “figura” was substituted with “imago”, “eikon” and others, and vice versa.
215 “Il rapporto è reso riconoscibile attraverso una concordanza o somiglianza”, ibid., p. 190.
the telling becomes possible and, the poet would have it, credible. Where reason begins to fail to account for experience, metaphoric language leaps over the chasm unbridged by reason, and the poet does not stop to get entangled in a rhetoric that will only double back on itself, like Pier della Vigna does. As Leahy, considering the implications of metamorphosis as a phenomenon in modernist literature, elucidates:

“what [reason] cannot properly represent is, ironically, newness—that which is at the very core of the modern. Metamorphosis, one might argue, is the most radical form of newness—a complete change of form, and a complete break with the past. And in the temporal and structural rupture it produces, metamorphosis makes visible the radical disjunction between what is and what is narratable, and the utter stagnation of thought in the face of an ever more speedily changing world [...] If metamorphosis produces a rupture in time, that rupture is always ‘mended’ by the aesthetic version of events [...] So while metamorphosis may take the ground from beneath our historical feet, the aesthetic, complete with its metaphors and explanations, may be there to catch us.”

While Leahy is referring in particular to modernism’s perceptions of a sped-up world, the analysis nevertheless meets the mark in that metamorphosis and speed have often been associated: “in momento in ictu oculi in novissima tuba canet enim et mortui resurgent incorrupti et nos inmutabimur” (I Cor.15:52). Dante’s own celestial journey is marked by such ruptures in his experience of temporality, as Beatrice raptures him between heavens at such unnarratable speed that he resorts to what in any other realm of experience would be mere rhetorical adynaton, not

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217 See Leahy, Der wahre Historiker, op cit., p. 90, in a subsection titled “Mind the gap”.
218 “perch’ io un poco a ragionar m’inveschi” (italics added, Inf. XIII: 57)
219 Caitríona Leahy, Der wahre Historiker, op cit., pp. 115, 119-120.
220 Also referred to by Ginsberg, “Dante, Ovid and the Transformation of Metamorphosis”, op cit., p. 218.
meant literally.\textsuperscript{221} The transitions in the first two cantos of Paradiso\textsuperscript{222} foreground this speed, especially in contrast to the “lento e faticoso cammino” characteristic of Inferno I and Purgatorio II,\textsuperscript{223} where in the first instance the pilgrim’s lagging foot slows him down, and in the second the pilgrim gets distracted alongside the other “spiriti lenti” (Pg. II: 120). Indeed, in the speedy ascent to the moon in canto two, it is an expressly aesthetic poetic device that “catches” both the swiftness and the sense of wonder in its marvellous novelty: line twenty-three’s hysteron proteron simile, a device likewise used by Ovid, and often in self-reflexive instances, such as in the simile describing Daedalus’ labyrinth, which meanders, like the Maeander, lapsing playfully back onto itself and flows forward: “ludit et ambiguo lapsu refluitque fluitque” (Met. VIII: 163), which has been read as an image of his own labyrinthine epic poem.\textsuperscript{224} Furthermore, the Paradiso itself is, in its macro structure, a case of hysteron proteron, with the pilgrim moving forwards but ‘backward’ toward the origin of all Being and consciousness, and with another hysteron proteron employed twenty cantos later when the pilgrim is looking ‘backward’ to his astral origin in the constellation of Gemini (Pd. XXII: 109), as Durling and Martinez point out.\textsuperscript{225} As rhetorical structure, it invites consideration of the point of departure rather than the destination, of backward glances contained in a perpetual forward movement.\textsuperscript{226}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{221} “È Bëatrice quella che si scorge / di bene in meglio, sì subitamente / che l’atto suo per tempo non si sporge” (Pd. X: 37-39).
\textsuperscript{222} From Eden to the cosmos, I: 61 and into the heaven of the moon, II: 19-25
\textsuperscript{224} See e.g. Barbara Pavlock, The Image of the Poet, op cit., pp. 63-6.
\textsuperscript{225} Durling and Martinez, “Additional Note 14. The Paradiso as Alpha and Omega of the Comedy”, in Paradiso, ibid, p. 757.
\textsuperscript{226} Cf. Freccero’s “The Significance of Terza Rima”, The Poetics of Conversion, op cit., p. 264.
In conveying the experience of transhumanising, such a “rupture that begins newness,” the narrative begins to literally and lexically pulse with newness and marvel in the ensuing passage. And even though Beatrice, in her scholastic elucidation of “providential teleology,” fills the gaps in the pilgrim’s understanding of his own ‘transcending’ through the use of reason, the narrator’s struggle to signify per verba is one early instance of the Paradiso’s wrestle with language and rational narrative contiguity in articulating the ineffable. Glaucus’ memory (“mens”) also comes up short when telling his tale. And yet where in the Inferno, although communicating the grisly “guerra” (Inf. II:4) of hell in language is strenuous and lamented at points, the content of that experience is transcribed unerringly by the narrator’s noble “mente.” When it comes to transcribing the ineffable transformations of Christian grace, however, the narrator’s mind begins to come up blank, and we are to take it on the faith of an exemplum—a simile, analogy—rather than by any rationalistic explanations: metamorphosis, a transfer of shapes, necessitates metaphor, a transfer of signifiers, in its own representation: a leap in thought from one thing to another, similar, thing.

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228 “novellamente” (v. 74); “La novità del suono” (v. 82); “un disio / mai non sentito” (vv. 83-4); “dentro ad un nuovo più fu’ inretito” (v. 96), and the pilgrim’s wonder: “Già contento riquiervi / di grande ammirazion, ma ora ammiro / com’io trascenda questi corpi levi” (vv. 97-9).
229 The phrase is Durling and Martinez’, Paradiso, op cit., notes to canto 1, vv. 85-141.
230 She is explaining to him the cause/reason—“cagion”—of his ascent through “questi corpi levi”.
231 Hactenus acta tibi possum memoranda referre, / hactenus haec memini, nec mens mea cetera sensit” (Met. XIII: 957-8). That both Dante-narrator and Glaucus use the word mens/mente is noted by Hollander, Allegory, op cit., p. 229.
232 e.g. “S’io avessi le rime aspre e chiocce […] si che dal fatto il dir non sia diverso,” Inf. XXXII: 1, 12.
233 “che ritrarrà la mente che non erra. / […] o mente che scrivesti ch’io vidi, qui si parrà la tua nobilitate” (Inf. II: 6, 8-9).
234 “perché appressando sé al suo disire / nostro intelletto si profonda tanto / che dietro la memoria non può ire. / Veramente quant’io del regno santo / ne la mia mente potei far tesoro, / sarà ora materia del mio canto.” Pd. I: 7-12.
This is a lesson that the narrator hammers home at the outset of canto II, in which the materiality of the pilgrim’s body is problematised, and its reception by the heavenly bodies and the problem of moonspots resolved not in any of the quantitative laws of physics or natural science—the pilgrim’s chosen method—but, as Hollander distinguishes, in the qualitative, metaphysical account supplied by Beatrice’s Neoplatonic cosmology: a physical problem is addressed using metaphysical first principles, such as identity and difference, unity and diversity, and how there can be diversity in unity, “com’ acqua recepe / raggio di luce, permanendo unita” (v. 36).

Despite the earlier Pauline self-posturing in claiming only God knows whether he was rapt in body or soul, or both, the poet makes clear that the pilgrim arrived with his body into the body of the moon—the vision’s distinguishing feature. As a problem concerning the occupying of one space by two bodies, it is a problem of metamorphosis, “com’ una dimensione altra patio, / ch’esser convien se corpo in corpo repe” (Pd. II:38-39), an idea that was already explored in explicitly Ovidian terms in the bolgia of thieves where metamorphosis occurs in malo, as a complete “failure of form” that deprives the sinners, similarly to the violent against themselves, of their very selves, precisely in the indiscriminate

237 “Ciò che differenzia la visione dantesca è precisamente la presenza del corpo, il fatto che si tratti di un viaggio storico e non soltanto spirituale o mentale.” Picone, “Canto II”, LDT, op cit., p. 38.
238 The same point, but without similar development, is made by Van Peteghem, (Brill, 2020), op cit., p. 197.
239 “how things material can share one space—the case, when body enters body” Barolini, “Inferno 25: Shape, Substance, Sex, Self”, Commento Baroliniano, Digital Dante, op cit.
trading of those selves.242 This reductively metamorphic materiality that so characterises the Ovidian cantos of the seventh bolgia, an incessantly tumbling “mutare e trasmutare” (Inf. XXV: 142) of matter without any proper guiding form as its cause or telos, is a result of the absolute loss of the illuminative, transformative grace with which Beatrice enlightens the pilgrim’s intellect and occasions his own continual transformation.243 The problem of the pilgrim’s body links back to canto I, in which Paul’s uncertainty as to whether he travelled sive corpore sive extra corpus was alluded to, which in II is echoed again.244 The body problem is linked to the Christ’s245 dual nature as man and God. It is not an issue that can be resolved by reason or sensory knowledge alone,246 but rather one that will be understood by the entirety of the pilgrim’s visionary experience: “Lì si vedrà ciò che tenem per fede, / non dimostrato, ma fia per sé noto / a guisa del ver primo che l’uom crede” (vv. 43-4).247 And when it comes to poeticising ‘that which we hold by faith’, that which results from a brand new type of metamorphosis, the poem falls increasingly into the realm of metaphor, simile, analogy, allegory.248 And in crossing the gap of alterity implicit in any metaphoric or similetic structure—the difference that

243 Before emanating thirty-seven lines of Neoplatonism that account for difference in the universe as multiplicity emanating “di grado in grado” (v. 122) from the One, she proclaims: “così rimaso te ne l’intelletto / voglio informar di luce sì vivace / che tì tremolerà nel suo aspetto” (Pd. II: 109-111).
244 “S’io era corpo […] / accender ne dovria piú il disio / di veder quella essenza in che si vede come nostra natura e Dio s’unio” (Pd. II: 37-42). One cannot help but note how the sound of this last line tempers itself into a sort of musical sameness by way of the internal rhyme of Dio with s’unio, suggesting unity even in the diversity of sounded out syllables in time (cf. Freccero, “The Significance”, op cit., p. 270-271).
245 Cf. The perverted lamb, Agnel, cf. Angel of Inf. XXV.
246 As Beatrice will say: “poi dietro ai sensi / vedi che la ragione ha corte l’ali”, vv. 56-7.
247 “What we hold here by faith, shall there be seen, not demonstrated but directly known, even as the first truth that man believes.”
248 A similar line of thought, although drawn from a different analysis, is made by Lorch and Lorch, who claim that it is Ovid who truly “taught Dante how to see metaphorically”. Maristella Lorch and Lavinia Lorch, “Metaphor and Metamorphosis: Purgatorio 27 and Metamorphoses 4”, in Dante and Ovid. Essays in Intertextuality, op cit., 99-121, here: p. 120. This is a tenet to which I hold throughout this dissertation, and their intricate analysis certainly bears on my own thinking in this respect.
paradoxically constitutes what can be rendered similar—"convien saltar lo sacrato poema" (Pd. XXIII: 62). The poet, on the path of narrative continuity, the more or less steady forward progress of narrative in Inferno and Purgatorio, begins to be hit with dead ends, over which he must jump, “come chi trova suo cammin riciso” (v. 63). The Glaucus simile is the first big jump made in the Paradiso’s storytelling, from the infernal and purgatorial old to the paradisiacal and blessed new—a metamorphosis that is a narrative “Sprung that can incorporate an end and a beginning in one.”

II. 3: Sinner’s Shore

Ovid’s text is summoned at the outset of II in another invocation to Apollo and Minerva who lead and inspire the sails, respectively (v. 8), of the poet’s seafaring mind, a verse itself evoking Ovid’s nautical metaphor in his own

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249 “the sacred poem has to leap across.” Cf. Leahy, Der wahre Historiker, op cit., “metaphor is a trope which includes absence within itself. It rests on a relationship of similarity, of repetition, or echoing; it tells a parallel story because it cannot name the actual. Thus it inscribes disappearance as the inability to render directly present, and as absence, as part of the structure, the meaning and the history of the thing. […] metaphor, like metamorphosis, is disappearance as structure”, p. 134.  
250 “as does a man who finds his path cut off.” Indispensable is Barolini’s narratological analysis throughout The Undivine Comedy, op cit., but especially in her chronicling of the Paradiso’s swinging of the pendulum between what she terms the logical “narrative mode” and a more lyrical “antinarrative textuality” (p. 221) in chapter 10, “The Sacred Poem Is Forced to Jump: Closure and the Poetics of Enjambment”, which focuses entirely on this problem.  
251 Leahy, Der wahre Historiker, op cit., p. 111.  
252 These two deities are of particular importance, given that it was Minerva who punished Arachne, and Apollo who flayed Marsyas, two figures with whom Dante (negatively) self-identifies.
proem.253 Verse 9 constitutes a conundrum in the commentary tradition, as it is striking to be invoking nine pagan deities ("nove Muse") who demonstrate the way.254 Benvenuto points out the doubleness of the word "nove", meaning both *nine* and *new*.255 It is possible that the line, not only the word "nove", can be read in two ways: the nine Muses show him the Bears, traditional guides for sailors;256 or, the syntax is inverted, with "nove Muse" being the object of "l’Orse", and so it is the Ursa constellation that leads the poet into the *nine* celestial spheres that will structure the poet’s work and guide his mind, thus exposing him to *new* Muses.

The idea of the poem as a ship, and the threat of shipwreck, are key to the *Commedia*, and it is again with Ovidian characters that the poet identifies both himself and his readers: Jason and the Argonauts.257 This again has metaliterary implications, requiring a reading backwards to *Purgatorio* I, in which the narrator invokes Calliope and the “sante Muse” (v. 8) to help his “navicella” (v. 2) on these new, “miglior acqua” (v. 1). Invoking Calliope, he distances himself from the “Piche misere” (v. 11), the sisters who were transformed into mimetic magpies as punishment for blaspheming the gods in their song.258 Dante had previously discussed these magpies in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, stressing that their senseless

254 For an overview see Hollander’s commentary to verse 9, with a bibliography of the problem. Hollander, *Paradiso*, op cit.
255 “idest, novellae, quia de novo incipio poetare de vero Deo aeterno, non de aliis gentium, sicut fecerunt antiqui poetae.” Benvenuto da Imola, op cit. commentary to verses 7-9.
257 Many important implications of Dante as a reader of Ovid’s Jason, and especially as a contrast to the other great, failed sailor, Ulysses, have been thoroughly examined by Picone, who picks up on the implications of the sowing imagery (“fatto bifolco” v. 18) as well as the verbal reminiscence in his readers’ wonder: that Dante remaps Ovid’s formulation of the Colchians’ marvel ("mirantur Colchi" *Met.* VII: 120) onto the Argonauts, to which “voi altri pochi” of his readers are being likened: Michelangelo Picone, “Dante argonautica. La ricezione dei miti ovidiani nella *Commedia*”, in *Ovidius Redivivus. Von Ovid zu Dante*, edited by Michelangelo Picone and Bernhard Zimmermann, 173-203, (Stuttgart: Springer-Verlag, 1994).
repetition of human speech is not a “locutio” but rather “imitatio”, and not even of
speech itself, but of mere material sound, and that when Ovid had spoken “de
picis loquentibus, dicimus quod hoc figurate dicit, aliud intelligens” (*De vulg.* I. ii.
7). Only humans have the power of speech, to make sense beyond the mere
reproduction of sound, to communicate “nostre mentis […] aliis conceptum” with
signs and reason inter-subjectively. In sum, a combination of sound and reason,
matter and form, body and soul. The magpies, like the rhetorical self-deception of
Pier della Vigna, have lost the guiding *forma* that provides the proper referential
function of language—its substance and power to signify and pass through the
flashy (or noisy) surface of the letter. The noise of the magpies is rhetoric
revealed in its shallow materiality, akin to a ‘sticky bird lime’, a flattering noise
that covers a lack of depth or allegorical, referential richness. In this sense it is no
wonder why Dante’s dense forest of suicides attracts the harpies. Furthermore,
when the pilgrim, identified with Phaethon in seeking out information about his
heritage in one of the Paradiso’s many Ovidian similes, is prophesied his future
exile by Cacciaguida, he is told:

“Né per ambage, in che la gente folle
già s’inviscava pria che fosse anciso
l’Agnel di Dio che le peccata tolle
ma per chiare parole e con preciso
latin […]”

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259 “imitatio soni nostre vocis.” On this connection cf. Pamela Royston Macfie, “Mimicry and
Metamorphosis: Ovidian Voices in Purgatorio 1. 7-12”, in *Essays in Intertextuality op cit*, ed. Sowell,
87-97., esp. pp. 92-5, whom I largely follow here.
260 “Oportuit ergo genus humanum ad communicandum inter se conceptiones suas aliquod rationale
signum et sensuale habere” et cet., *De vulg.* I. iii. 2.
261 On this point, see Franke: “Turned to bloody substance or mechanical sound, the intellectual
quality of speech is corrupted; it becomes completely mired in the material world. This sort of
hypostatization is tantamount to a denial of the referential function of proper language to point
beyond itself. […] Befuddled by the instrumentalization of language reified into mere material to be
manipulated through rhetoric, [Pier della Vigna] takes also his own life as if it were a material thing
that could be destroyed.” William Franke, “Dante’s Hermeneutic Complicity in Violence and Fraud
Cacciaguida avoids the rhetorical stickiness conjured up in the same image of birdlime that was used in *Inferno* XIII. The word “ambage”, likewise, is a word that shadows forth shadowy language, difficult, labyrinthine structures and witchcraft. The word is found in Vergil, but twice in Ovid does it resonate with particular valence, describing the winding Cretan labyrinth built by Daedalus (“ducit in errorem variarum ambage viarum”, *Met.* VIII: 161)\(^{265}\) and by the spells cast by Circe on Syclla:

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“hic pressos latices radice nocenti
spargit et obscurum verborum ambage novorum
ter noviens carmen magico demurmurat ore.”
(Met. XIV: 56-8).
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Similar to the “variarum ambage viarum” of the labyrinth, the structure of line 57 meanders its way through a linguistic labyrinth of three long-vowelled genitives, slowing down the pace of the line, in effect, bogging down the speaker in its viscous rhetoric exactly as Pier was enmired in his, and unlike the clear, heavenly speech that will prepare the pilgrim for his future tribulations.\(^{266}\)

The Ovidian story of Calliope and the magpies is instrumentalised by Dante in an invocation that ought to allow him break out of the “morta poesi” (*Pg.* I: 7) characteristic of the *Inferno* in much the same way that the pilgrim has just emerged “fuor de l’aura morta” (v. 17) in the narrative. This invocation establishes the trope

\(^{264}\) “Not with the maze of words that used to snare the fools upon this earth before the Lamb of God who takes away our sins was slain, but with words plain and unambiguous”

\(^{265}\) Noted in Hollander, *Paradiso*, op cit., note to Paradiso 17, line 31. Hollander points out that Vergil, Aen. VI:99, uses the word *ambages* to refer to the Sybil’s undecipherable *carmina*.

that the poet is steering his ship on changing waters, and it recalls that in *Inferno* I, the pilgrim, not unlike Paul, was shipwrecked, “uscito fuor del pelago a la riva” (v. 23). Hollander has shown how Dante evidently had the *Aeneid* at the forefront of his thought when putting together his own metaphorical shipwreck on the shore of the “pelago”, a word shared by Vergil. Although Vergilian influence at the level of plot is discussed by Hollander (the shipwrecked pilgrim is like the storm-tossed Aeneas, both heroes see three beasts, etc.), at a self-reflexive, metaliterary level it is Ovid with whom the poet identifies, for in an early statement that manifests the trauma of sin for the historical poet-narrator, “che nel pensier rinova la paura” (*Inf.* 6), the autobiographical exile writings of Ovid are recalled, who writes in a *flebile carmen* (*Tr.* IV. x. 5): “mensque reformidat, ueluti sua uulnera, tempus / illud, et admonitu fit novus ipse pudor” (*Tr.* III. vi. 29-30). It is furthermore ironic that both poets mark their works in exile with reference to their lagging ‘feet’: Ovid referring to his meter, Dante to his ‘literal’ foot. This is not the first instance that Dante makes clear use of Ovid’s exilic writings to articulate his own experience. Further, in canto II, Virgilio reports Beatrice’s speech, and her words characterise the pilgrim in exilic, Ovidian terms: “l’amico mio, e non de la ventura” (*Inf.* II: 61), recalling Ovid’s mention of *Fortuna* in *Tristia* I: 34, in which he defines himself,

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267 “Ter naufragium feci; nocte et die in profundo maris fui, in itineribus saepe, periculos fluminum” (*II Cor.* XI: 25; cf. *Inf.* I: 21 “la notte ch’i passai con tanta pieta” & v. 24 “l’acqua perigliosa”
268 “having escaped from sea to shore”.
269 See Hollander, *Allegory*, p. 85, see pp. 76-92, for his in-depth treatment of Vergil in *Inf.* I and II.
272 See Van Peteghem, *Italian Readers of Ovid*, (PhD Dissertation, 2013), op cit., pp. 106-113, who sources some expressions in Dante’s *canzone montanina* “Amor, da che convien” in Ovid’s *Tristia*, also discussing Dante’s letter to Cino da Pistoia, in which he alludes to the programmatic, self-reflective opening of the *Tristia* by the verbal reminiscence “titulum mei nominis”, echoing Ovid’s “donec eram sospes, tituli tangebar amore, / quae erat mihi nominis ardens erat” etc. 273 “my friend, who has not been the friend of fortune”.
through reference to his former friends, as not a friend of Fortune: “cetera [amici] Fortunae, non mea turba fuit.”

Ovid, like Dante in *Inferno* VII, recognises Fortuna beaming with joy in her fickleness, and uses this recognition to chastise one of his detractors, who does not consider how his own fate may suddenly change one day. It is a similar sentiment to that used by Dante in the *Commedia* to emphasise the arbitrariness of earthly goods. For Dante, Fortuna “volve sua spere beata si gode” (*Inf.* VII: 96), and likewise for Ovid she is joyful in her operations: “dum iuvat et vultu ridet Fortuna sereno” (*Tr.* I. v. 27). Although Dante’s primary source for Fortuna is Boethius’ *Consolatio*, the context of two exiles taking recourse to the goddess to imply that their enemies may fall just as soon is striking. Like the narrator too, and similar to Paul’s description, Ovid uses the metaphor of shipwreck throughout the exile writings to describe his experience, as immediately in the passage just quoted, he pleads for his few friends to help his desperate cause: “et date naufragio litora tuta meo” (*Tr.* I. v. 36).

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274 Discussed by Smarr, see: Janet Levarie Smarr, “Poets of Love and Exile”, in *Essays in Intertextuality*, ed. Sowell, 139-152, op cit., p. 142. Smarr outlines the importance of Ulysses for both Dante and Ovid, but does not relate the metaphorical shipwrecks to Paul.

275 “Quae tibi res animos in me facit, improbe? Curue / casibus insultas, quos potes ipse pati? / Nec mala te reddunt mitem placidumque iacenti / nostra, quibus possint inlacrimare ferae; / nec metuis dubio Fortunae stantis in orbe / numen, et exosae uerba superba deae.” (*Tr.* V. viii. 3-9).

276 “she turns her sphere and glories in her bliss.”

277 Durling and Martinez, *Inferno*, commentary to Inf. VII, line 96.


279 Like Boethius and Ovid being linked as exile writers, Paul and Ovid were often linked in rhetorical treatises as writers of the middle, elegiac style. Keen quotes Bene da Firenze’s *Candelabrum*: “At mediocris censetur que constat ex altiore neque tamen ex summa et honnissima dignitate verborum, ut in epistolis Pauli et elegis Ovidianis.” In Catherine Keen, “Dante e la risposta ovidiana all’esilio”, in *Miti, Figure, Metamorfosi. L’Ovidio di Dante*, a cura di Carlota Cattermole e Marcello Ciccuto, 111-139 (Pontedera: Le Lettere, 2019), p. 118.

280 See e.g. also *Tr.* I. ii. 52; I. vi. 8; *Ex. pont.* I. ii. 60; II. ii. 126; II. iii. 25-28; II. vi. 11 etc.
Ovid, writing becomes a necessity, a type of ploughing, albeit in vain, akin to Dante making himself the new “bifolco”, and it is also rendered in terms of a sea-voyage. While Ovid labours away in vain like a shipwrecked man always returning to the pelago, profitless in his continual “studium non utile” (v. 41), Dante marks his swerve from his exilic forebear by showing his poem’s transformation on a meta level. He is like Ovid’s shipwrecked sailor, but with a difference: the journey through hell, dragging his left foot along, got him onto a “navicella”, which while too small for the pelago of Inferno I that shipwrecked him, leaving him “smarrito” in the dark wood of Neoplatonic materiality, nonetheless will suffice for riding/writing the better waters of Purgatorio; come Paradiso, that little bark has been transformed into a formidable “legno” (Pd. II: 3) that can now sail the uncharted “pelago” of verse 4. Furthermore, the brink of spiritual death in the forest of sin, the “diritta via […] smarrita” in Inferno I, finds a reverberation in his once more being “smarrito” (v. 24) in canto XIII, a verbal parallel that, as Hollander notes, suggests a suicidal melancholy lurking in the background of the poem’s exordium. The word “m’arrestai” in the same line likewise continues the parallel of the pilgrim with Aeneas in this later canto, and there are other reminiscences between the two cantos scattered throughout: both take place in a dense wood, both Pier and Virgilio define themselves in similarly authoritative, but substantially differing,

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281 Ex Pont. I. v. 29-35.
282 “cur igitur scribam, miraris? miror et ipse […] Nil sibi cum pelagi dicit fore naufragus undis et ducit remos qua modo nauit aqua. Sic ego constanter studium non utile seruo et repeto nollem quas coluisse deas. (Ex Pont. I. v. 29, 39-42)
283 See Ex pont. I. v. 33-4.
284 On the “selva oscura” as hearkening back to the “silvae vitio” (Calcidius, 298) of Neoplatonic thought, see Moews, *Metaphysics*, op cit., p. 39.
286 Tommaseo, commentary to *Inferno* 13, op cit., lines 22-24, cites Aeneid VI: 559 “Constitit Aeneas, strepitumque exterritus hausit” as a source for Dante’s “m’arrestai” (Inf. XIII: 24).
words;\(^{287}\) the spendthrifts are torn to pieces by wild animals, in much the same way as the pilgrim may have been destroyed—however allegorically one reads it—by the three beasts encountered between the *selva oscura* and the mountain; and yet where Vergil is a fountain, “che spandi di parlar si largo fiume” (*Inf.* I: 80),\(^{288}\) an image that suggests a current of timeless inspiration, a mobile dynamism and depth, Pier is stuck hissing forth a viscous extrusion of words and blood, a sticky, ‘enlimened’ cryptodome of rhetoric that only attracts the harpies and eventually caves on itself for lack of depth and meaningful foundation.

The pilgrim’s plight of *Inferno* I is further aligned with the suicide’s in the verbal recall contained in Pier’s reference to his fleeing *anima* that similarly thematises the discordant drama between the will and intellect alluded to by the poet in canto I.\(^{289}\) Both Pier and the spendthrifts are described with the verb *fuggire*, and the theological weight of the term “persona viva”, rebounds somewhat in the narrator’s later remark that he “non vedea *persona* che ‘l [the ‘trarre guai’ of v. 22] facesse” (*Inf.* XIII: 23, italics mine). A “persona” properly speaking, as Freccero mentions apropos canto 1, would be a unity of soul *and* body.\(^{290}\) Thus in Paradiso XIV one of the souls\(^{291}\) explains:

\(^{287}\) “Non omo, omo già fui” (*Inf.* I:67); “Poeta fui, e cantai di quel giusto figliuol / d’Anchise” (vv. 73-4); cf. Pier’s: “Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi” (*Inf.* XIII: 37). Pier furthermore can only ‘sing’ of his making himself *ingiusto*.

\(^{288}\) “that freely pours so rich a stream of speech”

\(^{289}\) Pier: “L’animo mio, per disdegnoso gusto, / credendo col morir fuggir disdegno, / ingiusto fece me contra me giusto” (XIII: 70-72), cf. the narrator: “così l’animo mio, ch’ancor fuggiva, / si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo / che non lasciò già mai persona viva” (vv. 25-27).

\(^{290}\) Freccero quotes A. Pagliaro (1956): “È palese che *persona viva* costituisce una unità concettuale, poiché *viva* è attributo di *persona* e non ha il valore predicativo che l’interpretazione corrente si attribuisce. Si tratterà perciò di ‘persona viva’ nel senso più proprio di uomo che sia in vita, anima e corpo.” Freccero, *The Poetics of Conversion*, op cit., note 9, p. 279.

\(^{291}\) Suggested to be that of Solomon by Jacopo della Lana based on the description in *Pd.* X:109: “Questa luce si era la quinta che fue connumerata, che si com’è detto, era alma di Salamone”. Cited from the commentary to Paradiso 14, line 34, by Jacopo della Lana, *Comedia di Dante degli Allaghieri col Commento di Jacopo della Lana bolognese*, a cura di Luciano Scarabelli, (Bologna: Tipografia Regia, 1866-67), as found on Dante Lab, [http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu](http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu)
In this sense the suicides seem representative of precisely those souls whom the
dreaded wood never let out alive, and it was the pilgrim’s conversion and
awakening to the light, “che mena dritto altrui per ogne calle” (I: 18), which allowed
him to get out of that dreaded wood and onto the middle ground of the “piaggia
diserta” (I: 29).293 Dante escaped the sylvae vitio, the “nove radici d’esto legno”
(Inf. XIII: 73) that ‘enlimen’ suicidal souls lost in the alluring, rhetorical fluctuations
of a desperate materiality, in order to embark on the “navicella” of his “ingegno”,
(Pg. I: 2). With the force of redemptive grace and theological illumination, that
“navicella”, a metaphor for the poem itself, metamorphoses into the “legno” that will
carry him through the Paradiso; and the dangerous “legno” that characterises the
“selva oscura” is itself redeemed by the end of the Purgatorio through the
redemptive gesture of Christ the Gryphon towards the “legno”294 that Eve ate
from—Christ alone withstanding the allure of its sweet fruit—so that it can come to
signify per metonymy both this new, sacred poetry and Christ himself, whom the
poet literally inscribes on the cross of the “legno” in canto 19.295

292 “When, glorified and sanctified, the flesh
is once again our dress, our persons shall,
in being all complete, please all the more”
293 Freccero, “Dante’s Firm Foot and the Journey without a Guide”, in The Poetics of Conversion,
294 “Beato se’, grifon, che non discindi / col becco d’esto legno dolce al gusto, / poscia che mal si
torce il ventre quindi”, (Pg. XXXII: 43-45).
295 The cross on the page is pointed out by Hollander, citing Joan Ferrante (1983). See Hollander,
commentary to Paradiso 19, op cit., lines 104-108.
esso ricominciò: «A questo regno
non salì mai chi non credette ‘n Cristo,
né pria né poi ch’el si chiavasse al legno.
Ma vedi: molti gridan “Cristo, Cristo!”,
che saranno in giudicio assai men prope
a lui, che tal che non conosce Cristo;
In both opening cantos of the Paradiso this legno is used reflexively for the poetry itself. The “legno” of Apollo’s tree (Pd. I:25) of poetry is rhymed with both “degno”, a word used reflectively on the pilgrim-poet in various cantos (e.g. Inf. II:33), and “regno”, signifying the heavenly kingdom of God, thus bringing together the singular subjectivity of the poet (degno) and the universality of Heaven (regno) through the link that is the laurel tree of a poetry (legno)—the “poema sacro” (Pd. XXV: 1)—that is revelatory in its spirit-redeeming poetics. Thus there is a seemingly continual development of the significance of the word “legno” that accounts for its sublime metamorphosis from the literal suicide of the sinners, scattered sporadically throughout the vitiae silva (legno), through the metaphoric sacrifice of the slough as figured in the Marysas simile for a new poetry (Apollo’s legno), that is, the self-sacrifice on the cross (legno) of a conversion, an imitatio Christi. Dante therefore transcends Ovid’s own vaguely Marsyan description of himself, when he relates how, in departing for exile, he had to tear himself from himself, as if torn from his own “membra.” Dante’s ongoing references to a given “legno” may then constitute what Hollander termed the Commedia’s inner “verbal figuralism”, the process whereby a single term evolves in meaning over the course of the poem, coming to its escatological, anagogical fulfilment by the poem’s

(Pd. XIX: 103-108)

296 “O divina virtù, se mi tì presti / tanto che l’ombra del beato regno / segnata nel mio capo io manifesti, / vedr’mi al piè del tuo dilettio legno / venire, e coronarmi de le foglie / che la materia e tu mi farai degno” (Pd. I: 22-27) and: “dietro al mio legno che cantando varca” (Pd. II: 3).

297 Cf. Moevs: “A human intellect that gazes on a finite form (a text) and glimpses the ultimate ontological principle has, like Statius, recognized the Incarnation, Christ, the infinite in and as the finite: such an intellect has recognized itself. This self-revelation of the Real to itself is grace; it is the seed of what the Comedy aims to bring into the world: salvation, spontaneous morality, selflessness enduring peace, a renewed political and social order reflecting the unity that underlies and is multiplicity.” Moevs, Metaphysics, op cit., p. 12.

298 “dividor haud aliter, quam si mea membra relinquam, / et pars abruypi corpore visa sua est”, Tr. I. III. 73-4. Although the reference made is to Mettus, rather than Marsyas, the sundering of the self is nonetheless similar.
end. “Legno”, similarly to the words analysed by Hollander, follows a verbal figuralism that “reveals the relationship between subject matter and structure in the Commedia.” Finally, the poem as sea voyage will bring Dante the glory of his “poema sacro” (Pd. XXV:1), the Commedia is, continuing the analogy with Jason’s quest for the fleece, the poet’s own “vello” (v.7) that will earn him renown, the laurel wreath. In the mystical vision of Paradiso XXXIII, Ovid’s influence is felt one final time in this most metapoetic of passages: the marvel of Neptune at the passage of the Argo over unexplored waters. Yet here the deity, within the narrative, and the poet, narrating, are both marvelling: in the search for the vision facie in faciem, pilgrim and God are one—marvelling mutually at the “forma universal di questo nodo” and poem that travelled the seas to reach it.

In all of this, it is finally in the third, supremely Neoplatonic canticle that the poet’s exordium most resembles the statement of theme so characteristic of the epic genre, in an opening tercet that declares, with an absolute confidence and clarity of faith, the “ultimate ontological principle” of Christian Neoplatonism: a “splendore, the reflexive self-awareness of pure consciousness.” Not arms, or wars or even a single man, is this poet’s theme, it is rather nothing less than a shining forth of the light of God:

La gloria di colui che tutto move
per l’universo penetra, e risplende
in una parte più e meno altrove. (Pd. I: 1-3).

299 Hollander, developing this hypothesis, takes Francesca, Cato and Ulysses as his case studies. See Chapter III, “Figural Density”, Allegory, op cit., in its entirety, but particularly pp. 129-131 for his focus on the plucking of the branch of Pier and its relation to the girding of the pilgrim in Pg. I with the rush, and the ongoing relation to Ulysses’ poppa.
300 Hollander, Allegory, op cit., p. 131.
302 Moevs, Metaphysics, op cit., p. 5.
303 “The glory of the One who moves all things permeates the universe and glows in one part more and in another less.”
Chapter III: Addressing the Gorgon in the Room.

III: 1 Stumbling Stones—The Rime Petrose

When Beatrice, in Paradiso II, determines that she will illuminate the pilgrim’s intellect with a microcosmic summary of how the organs of the world function in creating difference (vv. 106-148), she is invoking a metaphor that has implications for both Ovidian metamorphosis and Christian autobiography. The pilgrim’s intellect is receptive to change, similarly to how snow is receptive to the informing power of the sun’s light, “come ai colpi de li caldi rai” (v. 106): his error will be melted away. They are, after all, still in the heaven of the moon, the planet governing mutability in the sublunar world, which in the Convivio Dante compared to the ‘science’ of “grammatica”, given language’s historical mutability. Beatrice, using a verb taken from the vocabulary of cosmology (informare, the informing powers of each planet) is creating an analogy between herself, radiating intellectual light, and the planets, that cause change by exerting their causative formal influence (their “virtu diversa”, v. 139). However, this receptivity to an informing light was never a given. In fact, an important aspect of the pilgrim’s itinerary in the Commedia is concerned with preparing his mind for such illumination.

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304 Durling and Martinez, Paradiso, op cit., note to 106-48, p. 61.
305 “E queste due proprietadi hae la Gramatica: ché, per la sua infinitade, li raggi de la ragione in essa non si terminano, in parte spezialmente de li vocabuli; e luce or di qua or di là, in tanto quanto certi vocabuli, certe declinazioni, certe construzioni sono in uso che già non furono, e molte già furono che ancor saranno: sì come dice Orazio nel principio de la Poetria, quando dice: ‘Molti vocabuli rinasceranno che già caddeo’”. Conv. II. XIII. 10.
As Durling and Martinez point out in their commentary, the metamorphosis of water alluded to by Beatrice is one of the basic ideas of the third of the *rime petrose*, “Amor, tu vedi ben”,\(^{307}\) one of many allusions to the *petrose* in the heaven of the moon in *Paradiso*.\(^{308}\) These ‘stony poems’ develop a specific style and language that haunt the poetics of the *Commedia* at various, key moments, and the allusion in *Paradiso* II to a rigidity or barrier in understanding raises an issue concerning the pilgrim’s intellect that reaches back, through the entire *Commedia*, to these cold, difficult poems that mark an existential crisis in the poet’s own view of himself, his exasperated desires for a certain *donna petrosa*, and his relation to a cosmos formidable in its alienating and coldly deterministic fatality.\(^{309}\) These poems, furthermore, are laden with specifically Ovidian allusions, both to myths such as Narcissus, Medusa and Pygmalion, as well as their geographic descriptions often deriving from Ovid’s own experience of exile in the wintry Tomis.\(^{310}\)

When the speaker considers the long-term effects of the *donna petra* in the congedo of *Io son venuto*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is active in the suggestive allusion to marble: “Saranne quello ch’è d’un uom di marmo / se in pargoletta fia un core di marmo” (vv. 71-72),\(^{311}\) recalling the barren, rocky landscape where the

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\(^{307}\) Durling and Martinez, commentary to *Paradiso* 2, lines 106-111, op cit.


\(^{309}\) Durling and Martinez, ibid, p. 71. Perhaps relatively understudied with respect to the rest of Dante’s oeuvre, the mesmerizingly elaborate systems of reference employed by the poet in the construction of these four poems have been explored in detail by Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, op cit., in a work that investigates an extraordinary vastness of medieval arcana to extrapolate these poems’ formal and thematic complexities and beauty—it is an equally dazzlingly elaborate display of scholarship. As a work of such awesome proportions it has left a remarkable impression on this post-graduate student, both in regards to the limits that the aesthetic can push itself to, and the scholarship that sets out to make sense of it afterwards.


\(^{311}\) “I shall be like a man that’s made of marble / If this young girl still keeps a heart of marble” (trans. Mortimer).
Gorgon lives who throughout Ovid’s narration of Perseus’ journey and battles, is described as petrifying men in a way that makes them resemble marble, specifically, and thus statues, a kind of abject, deathly work of art. Marble as an image of lifeless aestheticism also appears in the story of Narcissus, whose self-obsessed gazing hardens himself metaphorically into marble, and whose seemingly “tenera [...] forma” (Met. III: 354) was already suggestive of Parian marble, which hides its rigidity by appearing soft (v. 419). His youthful beauty is described as such: “nudaque marmoreis percussit pectora palmis” (Met. III: 481). The other great worker of stone is Pygmalion, whose misogynistic rancour towards the Propoetides makes him carve an ivory statue so lifelike it outdoes nature itself and becomes more beautiful than any living woman, and thus a fitting object for the artist’s desire—a similarly narcissistic tendency that only ends well in the story due to Venus’ blessing. In the petrose however, Venus the planet is at its weakest point and is of little influence to the desperate speaker, who like Pygmalion attempts to bring his stony beauty to life.

The speaker of the petrose finds himself in the process of becoming like stone, reflecting as he is upon a single thought of love that oppresses him with its gravity and occupies his mind. Saturn in retrograde—an ominous backward

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312 “gelido sub atlante”, Met. IV: 772.
313 In the battle in the palace of Cepheus, there are in total five, emphatic references made to ‘marble’ to describe the effect the Gorgon’s head on Perseus’ victims: Met. V, lines 183, 206, 214, 234, 312.
314 The impossibility of fulfilment based on a selfsame, narcissistically erotic impulse is suggested in this line by the plosive alliteration, as if to echo the ricocheting off of his “dura superbia” (Met. III: 354).
316 Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, op cit., p. 205.
317 cf. Durling and Martinez, ibid, p. 197, who point out that this is in effect an attempt to “reverse” the effect of the Gorgon, a project of depetrification. This, as mentioned below, again raises the question: who exactly is the Medusa in these poems?
318 “la mente mia, ch’è più dura che petra / in tener forte imagine di petra” (*Io son venuto*, vv. 12-13).
movement along the ecliptic of the slowest, coldest planet—has entered Dante’s natal sign of Gemini for the first time in his life, simultaneously as Venus enters into conjunction with the sun on Christmas Eve, thus suggesting that these poems, as an event, will mark a momentous change, bringing together the artistic yet sluggishly destructive melancholy of Saturn, the belligerency of Mars and the distant influence of Venus in the sun in the wintry crisis of this poem, in which “Dante tocca le radici ontologiche dell’esperienza erotica.”

“Amor, tu vedi ben” takes up the apostrophe to the God of love first begun in the *Vita Nova*; the entire poem is apostrophic in its various vocative elocutions. *Amor* is no longer all powerful, since he and the speaker are now confronted by a woman who will not receive any formal influence (“luce”) from *Amor*, because

> “per lo tempo caldo e per lo freddo
mi fa sembiante pur come una donna
che fosse fatta d’una bella petra”

(*Amor, tu vedi*, vv.9-13).

The poem, in its very form, moves towards the icy winter of its cold middle stanza, in which the word “freddo” dominates and the metamorphosis of water to ice, or “cristallina petra” (v.26), through the effects of a freezing atmosphere, is thematised and further changed to the woman itself:

> “e l’aere sempre in elemento freddo
vi si converte, si che l’acqua è donna
in quella parte per cagion del freddo”

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319 This would seemingly date the poem to December 24th, 1296, see: Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, ibid, pp. 82-83.
320 For Mars too was in retrograde next to Saturn, cf. “e io de la mia guerra”, *Io son venuto*, v. 62.
322 Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, op cit., p. 158.
323 “For in all seasons, whether hot or cold / She still shows me the likeness of a lady / That has been carved out of some lovely stone / By one who knows how best to work with stone” (trans. Mortimer)
The lady is locked between the equivocal rhyme of “freddo”, as if to underline the oppressive cold that determines her entire being. Her lifeless iciness turns her into a Medusa figure, as her frostiness begins to freeze the despairing speaker:

“così dinanzi dal sembiante freddo
mi ghiaccia sopra il sangue d’ogne tempo
e quel pensiero che m’accorcia il tempo
mi si converte tutto in corpo freddo”

(vv. 31-34).

Her presence—like the Medusan gaze—begins to turn the speaker to stone, a type of “cristallina petra” as in line 26, through the light that she emits through her face and into the lover’s heart, via his eyes.

As in the Vita Nova, in Amor, tu vedi ben a personification of love develops over the course of the poem so that by the penultimate stanza the poet is no longer evoking the Ovidian personification in his apostrophe, but rather the Christian divinity itself, praying for intervention on his behalf, combatting the donna petra, “che non mi lascia aver, com’altri, tempo” (v. 54). The answer to his woes lies only partially in God’s help: it is more precisely the reflection of God’s light combined with the poet’s own ardent desire, reified in his elaborate, crystalline poem, which he finally apostrophises directly, that ought to break through the stony outer exterior of the donna:

“si ch’io ardisco a far per questo freddo /
la novità che per tua forma luce, /

324 “And into that same element of cold / the air is changed, so water is the lady / who rules those parts by reason of the cold” (trans. Mortimer). Here I am majorly following Durling and Martinez in their analysis of the poem, “The Poem as Crystal”, Time and the Crystal, esp. pp. 158-9.
325 Cold, in medieval geography, was thought to cause change through pressure. Durling and Martinez, ibid, p. 141.
326 “In the same way, when I am in her cold / Presence, my blood congeals to ice each time, / And thoughts that will abridge my earthly time / Dissolve into a watery substance cold” (trans. Mortimer).
In this poem, and in the *petrose* more generally, it is not always clear who exactly the ‘Medusa’ is: the lady, who is so harsh as to be like stone, and thus technically cannot be Medusa, who merely turns others to stone;\textsuperscript{328} the poet himself, who fashions beautiful ‘stones’ out of the rhymes, reifying his object of desire in the aesthetic endeavour, so that the Lady becomes trapped in the stone/poem,\textsuperscript{329} its beauty reflecting the poet’s own genius, linking him to Narcissus who falls in love with his own reflection, or Pygmalion, who turns stone into a woman;\textsuperscript{330} perhaps it is even Amor, or god, who exerts the petrifying influence.\textsuperscript{331} However, peace is seemingly achieved when the three Medusas—Love, lover and beloved—are caught in each other’s gazes in the “fantasy of reconciliation” that rounds off *Così nel mio parlar*: “e poi le renderei con amor pace” (v. 81),\textsuperscript{332} where the God himself seems to echo forth in the word “amor”, involved as he was in the whole process. At this point, the existential, erotic *furor* and ongoing struggle against a Medusan experience of Ovidian petrification is quieted by the “novità” (*Amor tu vedi*, v. 65), the narcissistic poetic novelty that results from these changes and reaffirms the poet’s sense of self. Although the danger of the Gorgon seems temporarily solved,

\textsuperscript{327}“So that I dare to make for one so cold / The newness that in this your form brings light, / A form unthought-of in all earlier time.” (trans. Mortimer).
\textsuperscript{328} cf. *Al poco giorno*: “La sua bellezza ha più vertù che petra”, v. 19; *Io son venuto’s*: “Saranne quello ch’è d’un uom di marmo / se in pargoletta fia un core di marmo”, vv. 71-72; *Così nel mio parlar’s* “questa bella petra, / la quale ognora impetra / maggior durezza e più natura cruda”, vv. 2-4. etc.
\textsuperscript{329} cf. how the Lady is turned to stone by the poet in *Al poco giorno*: “e ’l mio disio però non cangia il verde, si è barbato ne la dura petra / che parla e sente come fosse donna”, vv. 5-6. The stony Lady cannot be moved by spring, “se non come petra”, v. 9.
\textsuperscript{330} On specifically these Ovidian intertexts see Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, p. 197.
\textsuperscript{331} *Amor, tu vedi ben*: “E io, che son costante più che petra / in ubidirti per bieltà di donna, / porto nascoso il colpo de la petra, / con la qual tu mi desti come a petra / che t’avesse innoiato lungo tempo, / tal che m’andò al core ov’io son petra” vv. 13-18.
\textsuperscript{332} “And then, at last, with love I’d make her peace” (trans. Mortimer). Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, ibid, p. 49.
the threat of petrification returns in the *Commedia* with much more profound implications.

**III: 2—Inferno: Summoning Stones**

When Virgilio and the pilgrim come to the “Ditis... magni moenia” (Aen. VI: 541) in *Inferno* IX, the poet must prepare to go into territory uncharted by his Vergilian source text, in which Aeneas and the Sibyl do not enter Tartarus, but take the road on the right for Elysium instead (v. 543), as “nulli fas casto sceleratum insistere limen” (v. 563). The canto thereby becomes meta-poetic in its thematising of a potential breakdown in, or petrification of, its narrative progress. And where Vergil is privileged as *maestro* and *autore* on the level of plot, it is once again Ovid’s text that is privileged on this meta-poetic level.

The meta-, self-referentiality of the text was already made felt in canto VIII, in which the pilgrim, as the author must do in canto IX in entering into lower hell without Vergil the poet’s guide, had to contend with the idea of being temporarily left alone by Virgilio, who was summoned to speak privately with the devils, “que nostri avversari” (VIII: 115). Virgilio has confidence that the devils will not be able to stop them (which they do), given that the journey has been divinely ordained. The pilgrim was however so terrified at the thought of being abandoned that the flow of narrative is interrupted by the narrator’s sudden address to the reader:

333 The following reading of *Inferno* IX has emerged out of a number of scholarly sources that will be cited as it progresses. However, Robin Kirkpatrick, in his entry for “Medusa” in the Dante Encyclopedia, op cit., ed. Richard Lansing, p. 604, references his own book *Dante’s Inferno: Difficulty and Dead Poetry*, (Cambridge UP, 1987) and specifically pages 120-141, in the bibliography for that entry. To my regret this book’s reading of the episode was noticed too late in the year (Dec. 25th, to be precise) to be able to access it, as libraries were closed and it was not available anywhere online. Any similarities that may or may not obtain between the reading carried out in this dissertation and Kirkpatrick’s book are therefore coincidental.

“Pensa, lettor, se io mi sconfortai nel suon de le parole maladette, ché non credetti ritornarci mai.”

(Inf. VIII: 94-6)\(^{335}\)

This break in narrative is nestled within two passages that contain terms that fall under what Barolini calls “the Commedia’s lexicon of Ulyssean hubris”.\(^{336}\) There is a trademark word “folle” (v. 91) and the transgressive “passar più oltre” of line 101. The narrator’s awareness of such transgressive presumptuousness, the potential moral pitfalls of a Ulyssean folle volo, particularly without the guidance of his Vergilian source text, occasions the first apostrophic address to the reader, which creates a rapport between narrator and audience as that between a teacher and a disciple; “una creazione nuova” in medieval literature,\(^{337}\) with one of the few classical forebears to which it bears any resemblance being Ovid’s construction of his reader through apostrophe in the *Tristia*.\(^{338}\)

The “parole maladette” is the first in a series of semiotic ambiguities that occurs over cantos VIII and IX, cantos which foreground problems in understanding when unaided by outside assistance.\(^{339}\) In canto IX, Virgilio’s discourse becomes truncated to a point of distressing ambivalence for the pilgrim,\(^{340}\) and where in canto VIII he was sure of the divine sanction governing their journey, in canto IX he is seemingly quick to forget his own advice, occasioned by the threat of the Ovidian Medusa, in whose power he wholeheartedly believes, “ché se ’l Gorgón si

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\(^{335}\) “Consider, reader, my dismay before the sound of those abominable words: returning here seemed so impossible” (Trans. Mandelbaum).


\(^{337}\) Auerbach, “Gli appelli di Dante al lettore”, *Studi su Dante*, op cit., p. 313.

\(^{338}\) See Auerbach, ibid, p. 309, footnote 3 for examples from the *Tristia*.


\(^{340}\) “Perch’io traeva la parola tronca / forse a peggior sentenzia che non tenne” (*IX*: 14-15).
mostra e tu ‘l vedessi, / nulla sarebbe di tornar mai suso” (IX: 56-57).341 His response to this threat is to turn the pilgrim away from her himself, an act that has perhaps both narrative and meta-poetic implications, as in these cantos, dealing with the city of Dis, Vergil’s Aeneid is but one important source text, and various details of Dante’s Dis, it can be argued, come from Ovid’s account in the fourth book of the Metamorphoses, as well as the obvious source of Aeneid VI.342 It could be said that Virgilio’s gesture here, turning the pilgrim away from Medusa—read by metonymy as Ovid’s text itself—and towards himself, is pulling the pilgrim away from a perceived danger while simultaneously pulling the author Dante away from that other great Latin epic that was so influential, in a way making a Medusa out of her very author, Ovid himself.

The episode nonetheless continues the theme of petrification from the petrose that was temporarily resolved in the mutual gaze achieved in Così nel mio parlar. As a figure that embodies the impossibility of gazing directly, the seductiveness of Medusa, her gorgonic calling to be looked upon, is an essentially apostrophic gesture. Agamben, building on the work of Frontisi-Ducroux, relates how for the Greeks, Medusa was an essentially full-frontal figure, never represented in side profile as was traditionally the case in Greek vase painting.343 He likens this to the rhetorical gesture of apostrophe, a vocative address that

341 “for should / the Gorgon show herself and you behold her, / never again would you return above.”
342 From the tale of Athamas and Ino. Three Ovidian references in Inferno IX have been excavated on the Intertextual Digital Dante Site, op cit., by Julie van Peteghem, who sources Dante’s descriptions of the Furies (Inf. IX: 37-42) and the appearance of Dis (Inf. VIII: 67-69) in Met. IV:481-511 and IV: 437-438, respectively.
confronts the reader or audience directly, exactly as Dante does in the Medusa episode here in *Inferno*:

“O voi ch’avete li ’ntelletti sani, mirate la dottrina che s’asconde sotto ’l velame de li versi strani.”

*Inf.* IX: 61-63.

A calling that can be neither resisted nor survived, the Gorgon embodies, per Agamben, the structure of testimony: “Essa designa, piuttosto, l’impossibilità di vedere di chi […] “ha toccato il fondo”, è diventato non-uomo,” and what is the *Commedia* if not a bearing witness to an experience that is essentially unnarratable, that of the vision of God, which involves first the descent to the bottom of the universe, where the old self dies in conversion to the new: “Io non mori’ e non rimasi vivo” (*Inf.* XXXIV: 25). Medusa thus comes to signify a dangerous pitfall of narration, a doubting of one’s own ability to bear witness, and the poet’s address to the reader, as a rhetorical flourish, enacts this danger while simultaneously resolving it. The reader may stumble over the stony literal sense and remain intellectually blind, or petrified, as Freccero has elaborated in his essay on this episode, in which the Ovidian metamorphosis occasioned by the Gorgon is likened to Pauline πώρωσις whereby the mind is made dead hard, or petrified, in failing to understand the spirit lying beneath the “velame” of the literal, “littera

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344 “O you possessed of sturdy intellects, observe the teaching that is hidden here beneath the veil of verses so obscure.”

345 “l’apostrofe da cui l’uomo non può distrarsi - questo, e non altro è la testimonianza” Agamben, ibid, Ch. 2.7. p. 49.


348 *porosis*, i.e. petrification, see Freccero, *Poetics of Conversion*, op cit., p. 122.
enim occidit” (II. Cor. III.6). Further, ‘that which cannot be seen’ referred to by Agamben, “un richiamo che non può essere eluso,” is precisely the false etymology of the name Medusa known to Dante, an evil smile: “itaque Medusam quasi meidusam, quod uidere non possit.” Following Paul’s injunction to look beneath the veil of the deadly Medusan letter, the pilgrim has his eyes shielded by the narrator who makes him blind to the ‘law of the flesh’ (Rom. VII: 14-25), the carnal sins of eros embodied in the Gorgon, relating as it does back to the perspective of the rime petrose (via the repetition of petrosan rhymes in Inferno IX), the poems that once articulated in such formal intricacy the existential frustration caused by an obstructed desire. He does this because, like Paul, being blind to the things of this world occasions an insight into the things of the eternal world, which the narrator has already experienced, thus enabling him to suggest to the reader not to get stuck in the literal, and so making of the Commedia and its apostrophic gesture to the reader a kind of anti-Medusa: a dialogue between narrator and reader that facilitates forward movement and narrative progression on the way to understanding.

Earlier the relationship between empty rhetoric, language and sin was explored, and here, the hermeneutic impasse manifested by the Gorgon’s name is solved not by any rational philosophy that might be symbolised in the figure in the

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349 It is worth noting that “velame” corresponds to Boncompagno da Signa’s description of “transumptio” (Rhet. nov. IX. II. 1): “Vel transumptio est quoddam naturale velamen, sub quo rerum secreta occultius et secretius proferuntur.” Dronke does cite passage, but connects it rather to the veltrō prophesy of Inferno I (Dante, op cit., p. 17). Inferno IX, however, seems just as fitting.

350 Agamben, ibid.


352 See Freccero, Conversion, ibid pp. 129-130: “Thus a passage [Inf. IX: 49-54] that threatens petrification recalls, in a reified, concrete way, precisely the poem [Io son venuto, vv. 53-60] that described such a reification at the hands of a kind of Medusa.” p. 130.
figure of Virgilio, but by a heavenly messenger whom both Freccero and Franke suggest relates to Hermes, who in Ovid descends from Heaven to visit Aglauros and breaks through the house’s doors with a wave of his wand, “caelestique fores virga patefecit” (Met. II: 819) and in Dante becomes a personification of a particularly Christian hermeneutics. Like Ovid’s Mercury, Dante’s Angel comes to the threshold of the door. Aglauros, adopting the position of the exclusus amator common to Roman elegy, will get petrified on account of her envy; the pilgrim however, also ‘excluded’ outside the gates of Dis, will escape the potential petrification originating in the scene’s intertext, the desperate elegies of the rime petrose. However, in order for this to be the case, the interpretative key is no fleshly and clearly visible philosophical ragionamento, but the truth revealed in Christ in history, that is, the invisible Spirit, “quae enim videntur, temporalia sunt, quae autem non videntur, aeterna sunt” (II. Cor. IV. 18). The experience of Medusa is the experience of pure surface materiality—akin to the suicide Pier’s experience of his own rhetoric reflected onto himself, as Franke outlines.

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353 Van Peteghem, *Intertextual Dante*, op cit., sources Dante’s “Venne a la porta e con una verghetta l’aperse”, *Inf. IX*: 89-90, in this line from Ovid.
357 An important distinction to note is that in Paul’s hermeneutics, the sins of the “flesh” are not restricted to the physical human body, but denote a domain of human acts that fail to grasp, or understand, or receive, the Spirit, hidden as it was under the veil “idipsum velamen” which is then shattered by the truth as revealed in Christ, “quoniam in Christo evacuator” (II. Cor. III. 14-15). See the note to Romans 8.8 in the *Harper Collins Study Bible*, op cit., p. 2126.
358 Cf. Freccero, ibid, p. 123.
359 “In the event of a revealed truth such as the poem posits, everything merely human, rational and rhetorical remains blocked. Interpretation is blocked not only by a literal sense acting as a veil but much more fundamentally by the human condition represented in the *Inferno* as alienated from God. […] Hell itself presents a reality devoid of interpretive openings”, Franke, *Dante’s Interpretive Journey*, op cit., p. 92.
Franke points out that the lack of “interpretive openings” necessitates transcendence, which descends from above at the end of canto IX in the form of the Heavenly messenger, an amalgamation of Christian angelology and mythography; a mixture of a Christ-like angel figure and of Hermes.\(^{360}\) As well as the usual poets cited (Statius and Lucan), Ovid should be adduced to account for the angel’s characterisation.\(^{361}\) His disdainful speech is at odds with Hermes/Mercury’s snarky and wittily ironic response to Aglauros,\(^{362}\) but it does match the descent of Juno to Hades in book IV following a passage already used by Dante for his description of Dis.\(^{363}\) Like Juno approaching the threshold (“limen”, v. 450), whose face is obscured by the gloomy air,\(^{364}\) the celestial messenger of \textit{Inferno} has to clear “quel fummo [...] più acerbo” (v. 75) obstructing his sight.\(^{365}\) Both the angel and Juno are similar in their restless and indignant demeanour—neither wish to be there and leave as quickly as possible\(^{366}\)—but differ in their wrath: the angel’s speech confirms the superiority of God’s justice, whereas Juno uses her rhetoric to summon the Furies and bring ruin on Athamas and Ino, whom she despises. They likewise differ in how their bodies interact with the landscape of hell: Juno’s weight makes the threshold groan (v. 449-450), while the angel skirts over the Stygian waters in Christlike fashion (v. 81). Juno’s wrath (“irae”, v.448)

\(^{360}\) As Freccero and Franke relate.

\(^{361}\) The following reading is not accounted for by Quint, whose discussion of the influence of other epic poems (Lucan’s \textit{Pharsalia} and Statius’ \textit{Thebaid}) in the context of \textit{Inferno IX} is otherwise insightful, but excludes any mentions of Ovid. Quint (p. 72) cites Statius, \textit{Thebaid} II: 1-6 for the angel as Mercury. See: David Quint, “Epic Tradition and \textit{Inferno} IX”, in \textit{Dante: The Critical Complex}, op cit., 71-77.

\(^{362}\) “desine!” dixit [Aglauros], / “hinc ego me non sum nisi te motura repulso.” / “stemus” ait “pacto” velox Cyllenius “istof!” \textit{Met.} II: 816-818.

\(^{363}\) \textit{Met.} IV: 432-80.

\(^{364}\) “quarn simul agnorunt inter caliginis umbras, / surrexere deae”, \textit{Met.} IV: 455-6.

\(^{365}\) “Dal volto rimovea quell’ aere grasso, / menando la sinistra innanzi spesso; / e sol di quell’ angoscia parea lasso”, \textit{Inf.} IX: 82-84.

brings only destruction; the angel’s wrath (cf. “ira” v.33) allows the pilgrim to continue on the path of redemption and redeems Virgilio’s “parola tronca” (v. 14) with his own “parole sante” (v. 105). He is thus a Christian reformulation of Ovid’s Mercury and his Juno.

Moreover, the Ovidian influence, relatively unexplored in comparison to the influence of Statius’ and Lucan’s accounts,\(^\text{367}\) illuminates the depiction of the angel as like Mercury, by the fact that Mercury was Perseus’ brother, and it was with the god’s guileful and scheming plan (the theft of the two Graia’s single eye) that Perseus managed to overcome the Gorgon.\(^\text{368}\) This is an episode of the *Metamorphoses* that Dante had already employed specifically for the poetics of the *rime petrose*,\(^\text{369}\) as in *lo son venuto*’s second stanza, which draws heavily on the landscape descriptions in Perseus’ journey.\(^\text{370}\) Perseus uses Medusa’s head to defeat his enemies, while Dante is also using her image to instruct his readers so as not to become heretical in their interpretations of his poem. He is thereby

\(^{367}\) A quick search for *Juno/Iunone/Iuno/Giunone* etc. on the *Dante Lab Reader’s*, op cit., search function yields very few results in the commentaries collected on the website that are relevant to the present analysis, nor does a search for *Mercury/Mercurio* and its grammatical Latin inflections. It seems that the majority of the commentators, citing sources for Dante’s angel in classical texts, opt for Statius. For *Inferno* IX, lines 82ff I have also scanned individually (as well as using the site’s search function for finding commentaries on certain lines and passages) Chiavacci Leonardi, Durling and Martinez, Gmelin (these two in printed editions however) Grandgent, Benvenuto da Imola, Francesco da Buti, Tommaseo, Singleton, Fallani, and Boccaccio). However, Hollander, *Inferno*, comm. to canto 9, lines 89-90, connects the angel’s descent and opening of the gates of Dis to Mercury’s entry into the room of Aglauros’ sister in the *Metamorphoses*, as discussed here. I have not been able to find reference to Juno’s descent in *Met. IV*.


\(^{369}\) Dating the *petrose* is a vexed issue, and one that is far beyond the scope of this dissertation. Durling and Martinez, whom I mainly follow here, take the “generally accepted view” and date the poems to the winter of 1296-97. This is largely based on the date the poem *lo son venuto* constructs for itself, via its astronomical descriptions. See: *Time and the Crystal*, *op cit.*, pp. 2, pp. 80-81. A more recent overview of the issue is given by Enrico Fenzi, *Le Canzoni di Dante*, *op cit.*, pp. 427-432, who takes the same conclusion as Durling and Martinez: “io resto convinto, come molti altri prima di me, che le *petrose* risalgano più o meno alla metà dell’ultimo decennio del ’200”, p. 432.

\(^{370}\) See Van Peteghem, *Italian Readers of Ovid*, (PhD Diss.), *op cit.*, pp. 94-96.
wielding the Gorgon’s head to save his allies and to petrify the enemies of responsible reading: the inimical heretics of canto X.

The transcendence needed provided by the angel also comes in the form of the intrusive voice of the poet who ruptures the narrative and addresses the reader. This voice underlines the importance of grasping that which lies beneath the veil of the strange verses, so that the subsequent wealth of mythological references can be seen in light of the deeper Spirit animating them within the text, with myth coming “to represent a means of revelation rather than a dangerously seductive veil”—the “terminal object” of Medusa’s face that allows no deeper understanding and petrifies the mind that fixates on the surface of the text: the Gorgon’s erotic body. Dante explicitly refers to the “intelletti sani” of his readers, recalling the use of the term sanus in the bible and by the Church Fathers referring to proper hermeneutic procedure, and Mazzotta points out that this episode occurs on the brink of the circle of heretics, who are forever entombed in the “cieco / carcere” (vv. 58-9) and oblivious to the future, precisely due to a hardness of mind with regards to scripture. It thus seems as if Dante in Inferno IX is demanding the ‘allegory of the poets’, which glosses over the literal and stresses instead a metaphorical significance, and yet the operative word of his address to the reader is a marker of biblical, Pauline language, which would necessitate the ‘allegory of the theologians’ and insist upon the literal sense, as well as the other allegorical senses. While not an easily disentangleable juxtaposition of ideas, the important takeaway for this study is exactly the intertwining of Pauline rapture with Ovidian

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371 Franke, *Dante’s Interpretive Journey*, op cit., p. 100.
372 Franke, ibid, p. 91.
373 See my footnote 99, above.
poetic imagery, which leads to the miraculous: angelic descent, Christian truth as narrative “event”.\textsuperscript{375} One of Franke’s interpretive insights is that in formulating a theory of truth using Heidegger’s philosophy of Being, he links Dante’s “presencing” of the reader, within the fiction, to historical instances of reading, thereby invoking the reality “outside” the text in order to blur the boundary itself between fiction and reality.\textsuperscript{376} This is similar to the structure of testimony and bearing witness as worked out by Leahy, building on Agamben et al., who argues that for any autobiographic fiction attempting to bear witness to an event that bursts the boundaries of narrative possibility (i.e., trauma), “that fiction, were it not to subsume the truth whose place it has taken, […] would have to wear its fictionality on its sleeve, so to speak.”\textsuperscript{377} This is Dante’s method: he calls attention to the fictionality of his strange verses in order to provoke the reader into considering the very boundaries of fiction and truth. Medusa may be an element of fiction, but the reader’s response to the myth would be more difficult to classify as purely fictional.\textsuperscript{378}

The ‘Gorgon’s’ presence is suggested in the icy depths of Cocytus, where the sinners are “petrified” in ice, and even the town of “Gorgona” (XXXIII: 82) is

\textsuperscript{375} Franke employs a vocabulary inherited from Martin Heidegger, particularly from his thinking on art as an event or experience that discloses ἀλήθεια (aletheia) (as developed in the essay “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes” in \textit{Holzwege}, Hrsg. Friedrich Wilhelm von Hermann, 9. Auflage, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2015, pp. 1-70) in his interpretation of Dante’s addresses to the reader, so that the “eventhood of truth and of being” (Franke, \textit{Dante’s Interpretive Journey}, op cit., p. 17) is intimately bound up with the participation of the reader, who responds to the poet’s various appeals, particularly those such as in \textit{Inferno} IX, where a participatory hermeneutics is key to the episode’s structure and to the “presencing of the reader” (p. 39) in their concrete, individual historicity, whereby “poetic fiction becomes integrated into real existence and vice versa” (p. 46). The idea of revelation “as an event of theological truth in and through interpretative acts of the reader” (p. x) that is most vividly at work in the apophatic theology throughout the \textit{Paradiso} (p. 15), is further explored by Franke in \textit{Dante and the Sense of Transgression: ‘The Trespass of the Sign’}, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

\textsuperscript{376} Franke, \textit{Dante’s Interpretive Journey}, footnote ibid.

\textsuperscript{377} Leahy, \textit{Der wahre Historiker}, op cit., p. 176.

\textsuperscript{378} Here I am following the general idea expounded by Franke.
referred to. These are the cantos of the “rime aspre e chiocce” (XXXII: 1) that take up the imagery and problematics of the petrose.\textsuperscript{379} In the frozen mirror of Cocytus, the dead waters of which “have hardened into glass”\textsuperscript{380} by the cold winds of six-winged Lucifer (XXXII: 24), the pilgrim experiences a moment of ‘self-reflection’ at the same time that the poet ‘reflects’ on the difficulty of writing it, invoking the muses anew for inspiration (XXXII: 10-12), recalling the lyre of Amphion that summoned the stones down from the mountains to build the cursed city of Thebes.\textsuperscript{381} Many commentators\textsuperscript{382} point towards Horace and Statius for this reference, but Dante would also have known it from Ovid, \textit{Met.} VI, in which it is the proud Niobe who boasts about her husband, using the very same verb that Paul justified himself using in II. \textit{Cor.} 12:1 (“Si gloriari oportet (non expidet quidem)”). Niobe, in a passage pulsing with a narcissistic self-fixation (see for example four inflections of the personal pronoun “ego” in \textit{Met.} VI: 177-179\textsuperscript{383}) also glories in her husband Amphion’s poetic prowess, using Paul’s verb to do so: “Iuppiter alter avus; socero quoque glorior illo” (VI: 176). Ovid’s is a narrative passage exemplifying mortal pride, while Dante’s is a metapoetic passage on the difficulties of

\textsuperscript{379} On the rime petrose in these cantos see Durling and Martinez, \textit{Time and the Crystal}, op cit., pp. 217-223.

\textsuperscript{380} Translation of \textit{lo son venuto}, l. 60: “e l’acqua morta si converte in vetro” by Mortimer, \textit{Rime}, op cit.

\textsuperscript{381} Durling and Martinez, \textit{Time and the Crystal}, op cit., discuss Amphion and the Neoplatonic commentators such as Macrobius who insisted upon the allegorical significance of the tale: essentially the “power of music over inanimate objects and recalcitrant individuals” (p. 168). See also Franke, \textit{Dante’s Interpretive Journey}, op cit., p. 93ff (but also the whole chapter), who is similarly tracing a poetics of “literalization” as “itself a form, perhaps the literally realizable form, of damnation” in lower hell, albeit without using the rime petrose as an important intertextual foundation. Franke’s chapter and his insistence on Dante’s own insistence on the necessity of literal description, has nevertheless informed my own perspective here.

\textsuperscript{382} Commentators consulted \textit{ad loc}: Durling and Martinez and Gmelin, \textit{op cit.}; Jacapo della Lana, Benvenuto da Imola, Tommaso, Grandgent, Hollander, Chiovacci Leonardi, as found on Hollander’s \textit{Dante Lab}, op cit. Durling and Martinez, \textit{Time and the Crystal}, p. 399, footnote 17, point to Ovid as one of the sources for the Myth of Amphion, but do not discuss any of the implications of taking Ovid as a meaningful source.

summoning “tutte l’altre rocce” (v. 3) to “descriver fondo a tutto l’universo” (v. 8)—towards which all the weight of the world falls—while simultaneously figuring the most prideful, narcissistic beast of the Christian world.\textsuperscript{384} Satan is immobile and forever fixed, gazing into the glass of Cocytus, making him a Narcissus figure who is stuck reflecting on himself.\textsuperscript{385} The pilgrim must likewise gaze into the mirror, but in order to begin purging himself of the narcissism of his own poetic past by externalising the inner psychological turmoil of the petrose in the frozen outer world of hell.\textsuperscript{386} Part of this externalisation involves confronting the self that one must purge, and thus in the icy glass of Cocytus the pilgrim and Camiscion de’ Pazzi exchange glances not directly, but seeing each other’s reflection in the ice;\textsuperscript{387} in a way this is a mode of vision at its most materially mediated, a seeing located on the surface, but which at least permits one to ‘reflect’ before the moment of conversion that will occur in \textit{Inferno} XXXIV.\textsuperscript{388}

Noteworthy is the poet’s insistence on rhetorical resemblance between the utterance and the fact: “sì che dal fatto il dir non sia diverso” (v. 12). At this heavy, claustrophobic point of the universe, the reified world of Cocytus that itself reflects the deathly aridness of the Petrosan landscapes, language must be literal in its matching of the material density of its subject matter, it is a poetic quest to avoid

\textsuperscript{384} For the importance of Ovid’s tale of Narcissus operative within these cantos, see: Robert McMahon, “Satan as Infernal Narcissus: Interpretive Translation in the Commedia”, in \textit{Dante and Ovid. Essays in Intertextuality}, op cit., pp. 65-86.

\textsuperscript{385} See McMahon, “Satan as Infernal Narcissus”, ibid, p. 70.


\textsuperscript{388} Cf. Barolini, “Inferno 32”, op cit., paragraph 16.
difference, or divergence between form and content, as Barolini writes. It is seemingly at odds with the metaphoric and similetic splendour that will characterise the Paradiso, where difference, inhering in the very structure of metaphor, is celebrated. In hell, every bestial sign (v. 133) should itself be as brutish as its bestial signified, and the Spirit that breathes forth into the allegorical richness of scripture is parodied in the dead ‘piration’ from Lucifer’s wings that does nothing but lock the freezing souls in ice, and words into material signifiers, rime aspre e chioce, or the parlar aspro practiced in the rime petrose.

The pilgrim, confronting absolute privation—Lucifer—petrifies and metaphorically dies, abruptly apostrophising the reader for the final time in the canticle: “Com’ io divenni allor gelato e fioco / nol dimandar, lettor [...] / Io non mori’ e non rimasi vivo” (Inf. XXXIV: 22, 25). Van Peteghem cites Ovid’s similar experience in the Fasti upon confronting the god Janus, who is both the “celestial doorkeeper” of the year and also the god of primordial Chaos and thus a fitting authority to act as the poet’s “muse” rather than the usual Muses. Satan, like the multifaced Janus, and as an inversion of Christ on the cross, is the infernal inspiration for the “morta poesì” (Pg. I: 7) of the first canticle, the harsh, stony “scritta morta” (Inf. VIII: 127) emblematised on the dark words of the gates of hell. After this metaphoric death the crossing of Satan’s body is finally possible, for like

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389 Barolini, ibid, Paragraph 1
390 i.e., Rime XLII (in Nichols & Mortimer), “Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro”, which builds on De vulg.'s discussion of hairy, or “yrsuta” rhymes, see: De vulg. II. vii. 3-7.
391 “O reader, do not ask of me how I grew faint and frozen then—I cannot write it: all words would fall far short of what it was. I did not die, and I was not alive”
392 Inferno 34, line 22, Intertextual Dante, op cit.
393 Ovid, Fasti I: 95-8: “tum sacer ancipiti mirandus imagine Ianus / bina repens oculis obtulit ora meis. / extimui sensique metu riguisse capillos, / et gelidum subito frigore pectus erat.”
Janus he is a liminal figure the encounter with which occurs on the threshold of conversion.\textsuperscript{395} He is a ‘stepping stone’ on the path to redemption, and Christ. Once overcome, he is seen from the ‘right side up’, that is, from God’s perspective: Satan is actually thrust head down.\textsuperscript{396} Once complete, the pilgrim, and not without echoing an Ovidian text yet again—Arethusa emerging from Hades\textsuperscript{397}—may come to see the stars once more. Similarly, as Ovid himself becomes immortalised amongst the stars upon completion of his “carmen…deductum”,\textsuperscript{398} the final metamorphosis of the poem—that of the poet into his poem itself—there is a case to be made that Dante follows Ovid in this self-immortalising gesture come the end of his celestial voyage, in that he ends each cantica focussed on the image of the stars,\textsuperscript{399} a move on the poet’s part that once again links him to Ovid by way of each poet’s self-referentiality.

**III: 3—Purgatorio IX: Ascending from the Rocks**

\[Et respicientes viderunt revolutum lapidem; era quippe magnus valde.\]

\textit{Mk. XVI:4.}

\textsuperscript{395} Cf. Janus’ own claim: “‘Ut possis aditum per me, qui limina servo, / ad quoscumque voles’ inquit, “habere deos””, \textit{Fasti} I: 173-4.

\textsuperscript{396} See: John Freccero, “Infernal Inversion and Christian Conversion”, in \textit{The Poetics of Conversion}, op cit., p. 182.

\textsuperscript{397} “mihi pervia tellus / praebet iter, subterque imas ablata cavernas / hic caput attollo desuetaque sidera cerno.” \textit{Met.} V: 501-503. Also cited by Van Peteghem, \textit{Inferno} 34, line 133, \textit{Intertextual Dante}, op cit.

\textsuperscript{398} “parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis / astra ferar […] / perque omnia saecula fama, / siquid habent veri vatnum praesagia, vivam!” \textit{Met.} XV:875ff.

\textsuperscript{399} For this argument, see Hollander, \textit{Paradiso}, commentary to Paradiso 33, line 145.
In Chapter I the very Ovidian dream of Purgatorio IX was explored, with particular focus on the “realism” of that dream. When read vertically with Inferno IX, however, an aspect of that earlier canto re-emerges: the exploration of erotic violence, once more articulated by reference to both Pauline and Ovidian models. The rapture of Ganymede by Zeus is ultimately a rape, initiated by the immortal god onto an unsuspecting youth, and the violence of it is marked in Ovid’s use of the verb *abripio*, deriving from *rapio*, and becoming *rapire* when used by Dante in the opening dream passage of canto IX. The sexual violence implied by the Ganymede allusion continues from Inferno IX, where the frustrated erotic energy of the petrose as embodied in Medusa was alluded to, but gains a promise of biblical transcende by dint of also echoing the verb also used by Paul to describe his own rapture to Heaven.

When they come to enter Mount Purgatory proper, the narrative is once again interrupted by a self-referential address to the reader in which the poet reflects on the heightening of his subject matter, followed by a description of the wall of Purgatory that evokes the crack in the wall that allows Pyramus and Thisbe to communicate.

The colours of Satan’s three faces, matching the traditional allegorical gloss of the tricolour maturation of the mulberry fruit (white—in Dante a naturalistic “tra bianco e giallo” that suggests a process of becoming—red, and black), are

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401 “fu ratto”, v. 24 and “e me rapisse”, v. 30.
402 Ovid underlines Zeus’ ardour: “Re superum Phyrigii quondam Ganymedis amore / arsit”
403 “raptum”, “raptus est” etc., II. Cor. XII: 2-4.
404 vv. 70-72.
405 Moews, *Metaphysics*, op cit., p. 94, points out the Ovidian influence here in Dante’s choice of the word “fesso”, which is a direct translation of Ovid’s “fissus”.
406 See Freccero’s essay “The Sign of Satan”, esp. pp. 169-173, who contextualises this traditional allegory of the mulberry fruit with the Devil, or the cross, within a larger tradition of medieval colour
recoded and redeemed here upon the threshold of Mount Purgatory, where an
angel, as in Inferno IX, appears on the three marble steps to purgation, coloured
as they are in the same tricolour that recalls the mulberry fruit, the first so polished
it forms a mirror. Aligning with Inferno IX in both its narrative content (the crossing
of an important boundary) and its formal content, it is here that the problems of
petrification and Satan’s effects begin to be undone for the pilgrim by the turn to
Christ, who is alluded to by way of the Ovidian myth: Pyramus, whose sexual eros
brought about his own violent suicide that stained the mulberry tree red, his blood
spurting as if from a broken pipe. This sanguine imagery was recoded in
medieval allegories as the red of Christ’s redemptive and self-sacrificial caritas on
the cross. Dante alludes to both simultaneously, continuing the Pyramus analogy
from line 73 when describing the third, red step, which “porfido mi parea, si
fiammeggiante / come sangue che fuor di vena spiccia” (vv.100-102).

Finally, at the end of Purgatorio, the thread of the pilgrim’s stony, light-
receptive intellect is definitively cured by Beatrice once he crosses through the wall
of purgatorial fire, just as when “al nome di Tisbe aperse il ciglio / Piramo in su la
morte” (Pg. XXVII: 37-8). The myth brackets the entirety of the terrestrial
paradise, and within the Edenic cantos are a wealth of Ovidian allusions,

symbolism and science. See also Moevs, Metaphysics, op cit., p. 96, who likewise goes into
considerable depth in the biblical resonances.

407 Durling and Martinez point out the chiastic structure of reader addresses between Inferno VIII:94
and IX:61, and Purgatorio VIII:19 and IX:70, whereby the two bracketing addresses invite an
emotional response, and the two inner ones invite the reader to reflect and interpret. The Divine
Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Volume II: Purgatorio, edited and translated by Robert M. Durling, with
Introduction and Notes by Ronald R. Martinez and Robert M. Durling, (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 2003), notes to canto 9, “Inter cantica”, p. 156.
408 Met. IV:121-124: “ut iacuit resupinus humo, cruor emicat alte, / non aliter quam cum vitiato fistula
plumbo / scinditur et tenui stridente foramine longas / eiaculatur aquas atque ictibus aera rumpit.”
409 “As, at the name of Thisbe, Pyramus,
about to die, opened his eyes” (Trans. Mandelbaum).
410 Picone notes that many Ovidian characters and episodes, which act as analogues to the pilgrim,
the location or to Matelda, find a reference in these final cantos—he notes Narcissus, Icarus,
including the oblique references to Ovid through the thread of depetrification that was begun in the *petrose*. The name of Beatrice is the metaphoric light that will shatter the hard rock obstructing his intellect from receiving illuminative grace, following it as he has both in the narrative and in his poetics. Once Virgilio has departed, and Beatrice commences her priestly role as stern, but forgiving, confessor to the pilgrim’s former sins, the cold walls of his mind and heart begin to melt, which will make him receptive to precisely the informative light of Beatrice’s council to which she herself refers in *Paradiso* II. Where Medusa’s petrifying glance threatened to obstruct the light of spirit that informs the message of Christ, the confession to Beatrice, and the subsequent glances into her eyes that will characterise the upward mobility of *Paradiso*, converts the pilgrim’s icy, stony heart:

“lo gel che m’era intorno al cor ristretto
spirito e acqua fessi, e con angoscia
de la bocca e de li occhi uscì del petto”
(vv. 97-99).  

Sighs and tears are produced, yet that “spirito” could be read in its Pauline sense: hardness of heart, the obstruction to receiving the Spirit, has given way to a softness that is now open to the “Doni di Spirito Santo” (IV. xxi. 11), what Paul had called the “ministratio Spiritus” inscribed on the softened, fleshy tablet of the

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411 Recorded throughout the *Commedia* by a metaphorics of sight, as Franke tracks, *Dante’s Interpretive Journey*, op cit., p. 88, where the pilgrim must learn to transcend the “surface gazing of the sort so easily associated with the fatal fixation of the erotic gaze […]” (p. 88), a “threat of visual overkill that comes to a head in the Medusa” (p. 88).
412 “then did the ice that had restrained my heart become water and breath; and from my breast and through my lips and eyes they issued—anguished.”
414 II. Cor. III: 8.
heart. This softness, once conversion has occurred, offsets the “ministratio mortis” (II. Cor. III: 6) that characterised the writing on stone tablets. In this regard, part of Beatrice’s reproach is even more apt:

“quando di carne a spirito era salita, e bellezza e virtù cresciuto m’era, fu’ io a lui men cara e men gradita”
(vv.127-129).415

It is when Beatrice becomes Spirit that she appealed less to him, as he was

“ne lo intelletto fatto di pietra e, impetrato, tinto si che t’abbaglia il lume del mio detto”
(Pg. XXXIII:73-5).416

The dead literality of this stoniness has been consistently correlated in Dante’s mind to a sterile poetics of hell, the psychological and somatic effects caused by the Donna petra and finally their mythological corollary who embodies both a rhetorical literalness in her stony physicality and the apostrophic call to erotic fixation that would be ultimately nothing but a mortal asphyxiation: Medusa—the seductive minister of death. The “velame” (Inf. IX: 63) that covers the morally rectifying content of the strange verses is what must be torn down, for it prohibits understanding by prohibiting vision—it produces a bad vision, and it is to the vision of God that the pilgrim is journeying, and the transcendent, Empyrean knowledge, as the pilgrim states in Paradiso XIX, is not gazed upon through a veil:

“Ben so io che, se ’n cielo altro reame la divina giustizia fa suo specchio, che ’l vostro non l’apprende con velame.”

415 “another; when, from flesh to spirit, I had risen, and my goodness and my beauty had grown, I was less dear to him, less welcome”
416 “But since I see your intellect is made of stone and, petrified, grown so opaque—the light of what I say has left you dazed—“
Thus come *Paradiso* II the pilgrim is well able to be informed—in the fullest scholastic sense of that term—by Beatrice’s discourse and her radiant light, the “lume del [suo] detto” (*Pg.* XXXIII: 75). The angelic descent of *Inferno* IX as a *deus ex machina* to escape physical blockage was therefore a preview for a mode of experiencing reality that is intimately connected to the evolving poetics of the poem: the switch from a deathly and deadly literality to an intensely similetic one, one built out of analogy and allegory, as she teaches in *Paradiso* IV:

> Qui si mostraro, non perché sortita sia questa spera lor, ma per far segno de la celestial’ ha men salita.  
> (*Pd.* IV: 37-9)

Heaven is ‘descending’ to a level of intelligibility for the pilgrim’s intellect, making a sign of itself that is other than what it is: the structure of metaphor, or simile, a transfer that renders intelligible something that ordinary speech cannot convey. It is the structure of scriptural speech itself, which “piedi e mano / attribuisce a Dio, e altro intende” (vv. 44-5), that is, it has *personified*, or made allegorical, truth. Here, a descent occurs to accommodate the pilgrim’s intellect, made “puro e disposto” (*Pg.* XXXIII: 145) by the long process of depetrification. Lastly, the descent of the angel was compared to that of Juno in the

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417 “I know indeed that, though God’s Justice has another realm in Heaven as Its mirror, you here do not perceive it through a veil.”

418 Cf. Quint, “Epic Tradition and *Inferno* IX”, op cit., p. 76: “The descent of this Christian Mercury is analogous to the “condescension” of Scripture which Beatrice describes in *Paradiso* IV.” It is important to specify, however, that it is not merely the poetics of Scripture that Beatrice is describing, but the pilgrim’s actual experience of heaven. She is thereby explaining heaven, via a simile with Scripture, using the same “linguistic” (analogical) structure by way of which heaven presents itself to the pilgrim.

419 “They showed themselves to you here not because this is their sphere, but as a sign for you that in the Empyrean their place is lowest.”
Metamorphoses. Juno, upon leaving Hades and re-entering Olympus, has herself bedewed by Iris,\textsuperscript{420} much as the pilgrim has the dirt washed from his face at the outset of Purgatorio (I:95), and in the Heaven of the Stars is invited to bedew himself metaphorically: “ponete mente a l’affezione immense / e roratelo alquanto” (Pd. XXIV:7-8).\textsuperscript{421} Ovid uses the same verb in the same episode that narrates Juno’s return: “laeta redit Iuno, quam caelum intrare parantem / roratis lustravit aquis Thaumantias Iris” (Met. IV: 479-480).

At the outset of canto IV there is one of the Paradiso’s many Ovidian similes, this time formulating the pilgrim’s desire to have both of his doubts answered in a triple simile based on being stuck in indecision between two choices. The simile itself builds on Ovid’s, when he relates how Perseus was similarly stuck between two options, thus implicitly paralleling the drama of Inferno IX,\textsuperscript{422} where the poet “descended” into his text in the address to the reader in order to redirect their understanding, thereby on a metatextual level wielding the Gorgon against herself as Perseus does by using the reflection on his shield,\textsuperscript{423} in which he can gaze on her forma. Anderson explains how this is “literally” true: he sees the form, not the body (as that would be to see the death-producing Gorgon\textsuperscript{424}), reflected in the mirror.\textsuperscript{425} The pilgrim is similarly seeing the “form” of paradise, corresponding to

\textsuperscript{420} Tommaseo op cit., comm. ad loc., sources Dante’s verb “bedew” (rorare) in Aen. VI: 230. If one examines the passage of Metamorphoses IV that I am suggesting on Van Peteghem’s Intertextual Digital Dante site, however, it is clear from the many maniculae between lines 437 and 481 that Dante was intimately familiar with this passage, with some of the maniculae referring back to Inferno IX, perhaps justifying the choice of verb as stemming from the Ovidian passage, rather than the Vergilian one.

\textsuperscript{421} “direct your mind to his immense desire, / quench him somewhat”. Here Mandelbaum misses the sense of “bedewing” that the verb rorare carries with it.

\textsuperscript{422} Met. V: 164-6. Cited in Durling and Martinez, Paradiso, note ad loc.

\textsuperscript{423} “se tamen horrendae clipei, quem laeva gerebat, / aere repercusso formam adspexisse Medusae” Met. V: 782-3.

\textsuperscript{424} Agamben’s phrase, Quel che resta, op cit., ch. 2.7.

\textsuperscript{425} Anderson, Ovid’s Metamorphoses, op cit., note to 782-86, p. 494.
the Spirit, and not the literal bodies or matter: he sees a ‘translatio’\(^{426}\) of what Moevs refers to as the “ground of Being,” the ultimate, ontological “source of all finite being” where the souls actually ‘reside’, outside of space and time, in the divine mind.\(^{427}\) The Empyrean essentially symbolizes itself for the pilgrim, makes of itself a “collectio formarum visibilium ad invisibilium demonstrationem”,\(^{428}\) in a poetic manoeuvre that returns the poet, in his machinations, to the vicinity of older Neoplatonists like Alan de Lille, for whom God “conceives the world in poetic form, \textit{mediante trope, dictante figura}.\(^{429}\) The metaphoric, “similetic” structure of paradise means that its reality gains significance, or the referentiality proper to meaningful signification, aligned in Paul and Augustine to spiritual fulfilment and everlasting life.\(^{430}\) And it is done by tying Ovid to St. Paul, figures from the former evolving from the ‘allegory of the poets’ (“allegoria in verbis”) as expressed in the \textit{Convivio} to a “providential allegoria in factis” as Baranski argues.\(^{431}\)

\textbf{III: 4: Paradiso IX—Breaking Boundaries}

When John Freccero made a substantial reference to the \textit{rime petrose} in his reading of \textit{Inferno} IX, part of the justification to do so was on the basis of a

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\(^{426}\) cf. \textit{Pd. XIV:83}, in which he himself is “translato” from the Heaven of the Sun to Mars, in a moment where linguistic, metaphoric and narrative transferrals merge.


\(^{429}\) Who also claims that it is by dint of Plato’s imaginative dreaming that the abyss of God’s mysterious ways may be glimpsed (\textit{Anti.} I: 131-4). Dronke, ibid., p. 12, and the corresponding footnote 25 on p. 129.

\(^{430}\) On this theory of signs see Freccero’s “Infernal Irony” in \textit{The Poetics of Conversion}, op cit., pp. 100-101.

\(^{431}\) Zygmunt G. Barański, “9. ‘Without Any Violence’”, \textit{Vertical Readings in Dante’s Comedy, Volume I}, ed. George Corbett and Heather Webb, 181-202 (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), p. 187. Barański explores the three cantos from the perspective of Dante’s attitude towards violence, but as he notes in his first footnote, p. 181, he has published a more detailed version of that article, double the length (“Reading the Commedia’s IXs “Vertically”: From Addresses to the Reader to crucesignati and the Ecloga Theoduli”, \textit{L’Alighieri} 44 (2014), 5-36”), which I have been unable to access for the purpose of this dissertation but hope to for future inquiry.
repeated rhyme set: “alto”, “assalto”, and “smalto”. This rhyme set, significantly, is repeated in *Purgatorio* VIII, with the important difference that what was previously signifying stone has now switched to signify metaphorically the ever vernal splendour of Eden—“infino al sommo smalto” (v.114). The Gorgonic problem, as Freccero argued, is a problem of reading *litterate* versus *allegorice*, in the Pauline sense of the letter and the spirit. It is thus fitting that the word that embodies this entire dialectic itself comes to signify both—*smalto*: literally, the outcome of Medusan petrification; and metaphorically, the verdant life of the Earthly Garden—the two outcomes of each type of reading. *Paradiso* IX, which brings the Dantean subplot of the *rime petrose* to its close at the important boundary crossing out of the earth’s shadow, repeats two of these rhymes but omits “smalto”. The *petrose* are not wholly absent from this celestial threshold, however, as in *Paradiso* VIII a rhyme from *Così nel mio parlar* was used, and

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433 It was used once before with this meaning in *Inf.* IV: 118. Benvenuto da Imola, op cit., explains the metaphoric use for this word deriving from smithery: “Et nota quod autor appellat herbam viridem smaltum metaphorphice. Nec videatur tibi aliena metaphora, sicut multis, quoniam herba est tota viridis, tamen in pede est obtusior, desuper vero clarior. Ita et in smalto; unde aurifices solent de industria incidere inequaliter in argento, et dimittere quasdam tachas ad istum finem.” It is interesting to note how the natural world is here connected to artistic work in metals and stones—a significant feature of the *rime petrose*, as shown in Durling and Martinez’ *Time and the Crystal*, op cit., (esp. pp. 32-45, “Precious Stones”). For both meanings of “smalto” see Grandgent, op cit., comm. to *Pg.* VIII, line 114: “Smalto, ‘enamel,’ is used figuratively by Italian poets in two senses, ‘stone,’ and ‘greensward’ or ‘garden’: here it has the second meaning,” as found on *Dante Lab Reader*, op cit. Benvenuto, comm. *ad loc.*, alludes to his earlier definition: “smalto, idest, usque ad summum cacumen montis, quem poeta vocat smaltum per pulcram metaphoram, quia ibi est hortus deliciarum planus, viridis, herbosus, floridus; simili metaphora usus est Inferni capitulo IIII describens locum virorum illustrium, et ibi notavi de proprietate huius metaphorae, ideo non repeto, ne sim nimis longus”

434 “Da questo cielo, in cui l’ombra s’appunta / che ’l vostro mondo face,” *Pd.* IX:118-119.

435 “alto”, v. 28, and “assalto” v. 30. This is noted by Barański in his article on the Nines, see: Zygmunt G. Barański, “9. ‘Without Any Violence’”, op cit., p. 184, fn. n.6.

436 In which the speaker, prostrate on the ground, relates his being brutalised by Amor, who stands over him, sword in hand: “Amore, a cui io grido / merzé chiamando” (vv. 40-41). It is ironic that Dante finds himself now in the position of Dante da Maiano, who had bewailed his own useless pleading Love for mercy in their sonnet exchange, discussed in chapter I, above. This connection is pointed out in Mazzotta, *Poet of the Desert*, op cit., pp. 161-164, who links the petrosan problematics to Augustine’s “erotic typology” in which “the fire [stands] for the upward spiritual ascent, the stone for the erotic fall” (p. 163).
the Heaven of Venus in general is connected to love and, significantly, rhetoric,\(^{437}\) evincing its participation in the poet’s ongoing exploration of language and its relation to desire and, by extent of its relation to the petrose, to death.\(^{438}\) *Paradiso* IX also contains an apostrophe, but to “anime ingannate e fatture empie” (v.10) rather than to the poem’s readers. However, as Barański argues, the problem of proper reading is one that returns in the canto by its end, as in contemporary Italy “l’Evangelio e i dottor magni / son derelitti” (vv.133-134) in favour of the Decretals of Canon Law, the study of which is more profitable in terms of material wealth.\(^{439}\) Medusa, envoy since ever of a perceived “disenfranchised, abject female sexuality,” to borrow Jürgen Barkhoff’s phrase,\(^{440}\) that presented itself as horrifically alluring to male writers’ imaginations, has by *Paradiso* IX effectively been slain, and it is the exuberant, lavishly lyrical discourse of Cunizza d’Este that takes the Gorgon’s place. Cunizza is wholeheartedly unapologetic about and unashamed of the extravagant, gossip-stirring and erotic escapades that characterised her early life, for having ‘seen the light’ so to speak, she recognises that while the Ulyssean “folle amore” (VIII: 2) to which the influence of Venus can lead may end in tragedy,\(^{441}\) if rectified by the turning of one’s desire towards God, with a properly penitent attitude, one need not live forever shamefully in the shadow

\(^{438}\) See Freccero, *Poetics of Conversion*, op cit., p. 130: “Ever since Augustine, the Middle Ages insisted upon the link between eros and language, between the reaching out in desire for what mortals can never possess and the reaching out of language toward the significance of silence. [...]”.
of former misguided desires.\textsuperscript{442} Like Francesca, Cunizza is a powerful wielder of rhetoric:

\begin{quote}
D’una radice nacqui e io ed ella:  
Cunizza fui chiamata, e qui refulgo  
perché mi vinse il lume d’esta stella,  
ma lietamente a me medesma indulgo  
la cagion di mia sorte, e non mi noia,  
che parria forse forte al vostro vulgo. 
\textit{(Pd. IX: 31-36)}\textsuperscript{443}
\end{quote}

The impact of these lines emerges out of strategic alliteration, as in lines 32 and 33, in which the broad, rounded endolabial \textit{u} sound ("Cunizza fui \ldots qui refulgo") brackets a play with shorter \textit{i} sounds, and the strongly felt repetition of \textit{f}s and \textit{v}s in line 36 bolsters the defiant import of her message. Likewise in line 34, where repetition of drawn-out, repeated \textit{e} sounds, along with the softly flowing bilabial consonance of the \textit{m}s suggests that the sensuality which characterised her earthly life has not been abandoned; it constitutes a part of her identity\textsuperscript{444} and for that she is unashamed.\textsuperscript{445} In this heaven, rhetoric is celebrated, rather than rejected as stony literality, because it has for its referent

\begin{quote}
\text{"[\ldots] l’arte ch’adorna  
cotanto affetto, e discernesi ‘l bene  
per che ‘l mondo di sù quell di giù torna” (vv. 106-8).\textit{}}\textsuperscript{446}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{442} Cf. Durling and Martinez, ibid.  
\textsuperscript{443} "Both he and I were born of one same root:  
Cunizza was my name, and I shine here  
because this planet’s radiance conquered me.  
But in myself I pardon happily  
the reason for my fate; I do not grieve  
and vulgar minds may find this hard to see." (Trans. Mandelbaum).  
\textsuperscript{444} What Barolini calls "the preservation of the historical that makes difference a commodity that cannot be relinquished", \textit{The Undivine Comedy}, p. 193.  
\textsuperscript{445} It seems hardly coincidental that the emphasis on \textit{m}s and \textit{u}s force one to purse and round one’s lips when reading the lines aloud, as if, if not to make the reader enact a sort of sensual kissing gesture while reciting, to allude to Cunizza’s discursive sensuality.  
\textsuperscript{446} "the art adorned  
by such great love, and we discern the good  
through which the world above forms that below."
The poet, likewise, also seems to rejoice in his own rhetorical inventions, and part of the *Paradiso*’s linguistic brilliance shines forth in cantos like this where Dante’s metaphysically visionary neologisms stand out like jewels in a crown:447

“Dio vede tutto, e tuo veder *s’inluia*”,
diss’ io, “beato spirto, si che nulla
voglia di sé a te puot’ esser fuia.
Dunque la voce tua, che ’l ciel trastulla
sempre col canto di quei fuochi pii
di sei ali facen la coculla,
perché non satisface a’ miei disii?
Già non attendere’ io tua dimanda,
s’io m’intuassi, come tu t’innii.”
(Pd. IX:73-81, italics added)448

Here, a “rhetoric of eros”, in Barolini’s formulation, is being employed in order to underscore an important aspect of paradisiacal, spiritual unity: the rhetorical, the sexual and the mystical are brought together in linguistic newness, a “rhetorical copulation”449 that could account for the mystical experience of what Dante’s contemporary Meister Eckhart might have described as a dissolving of one’s ownness into the other’s ‘theirsness’ in order to become wholly one.450

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447 Likewise, as pointed out by Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, op cit., p. 274, the image of jewels in a crown as implicit in the comparison of souls—the jewels—to circling in crowns in the Heaven of the Sun, is actually referred to by Freccero, *Poetics of Conversion*, op cit., fn. n.19, p.312.
448 “God can see all, I said, and, blessed spirit, your vision is contained in Him, so that no wish can ever hide itself from you. Your voice has always made the heavens glad as has the singing of the pious fires that make themselves a cowl of their six wings: why then do you not satisfy my longings? I would not have to wait for your request if I could enter you as you do me.”
Moreover, the resolute joy in Cunizza's own self-forgiveness (line 34) is a line for which Tommaseo cites Ovid, *Metamorphoses* X: 534, in which, notably, the verbal reminiscence of "indulgere" is applied reflexively to precisely Venus herself: "adsuetaque semper in umbras / indulgere sibi formamque augere colendo" (vv.534-5).\(^{451}\) God's providence, the "Valor ch'ordinò e provide" as Folco di Marsiglia later calls it (*Pd.* IX:105), has championed a soul like Cunizza to reside in paradise, in all her resplendent blessedness, and yet again it is an Ovidian moment that subtends the moment's novelty. The misogyny underlying the myth of Medusa—a patriarchal horror story that turns a rape victim into a monster—is dismantled and redeemed by Cunizza with her unapologetic sexuality and flashy rhetoric. That a woman who, as Hollander notes (citing Benvenuto), was "widely known to be a whore [*famosa meretrix*],"\(^{452}\) should stand out as a representative soul, one "di quelli splendori" (IX:13) in the Heaven of Venus, was a radical and controversial choice on Dante's part.\(^{453}\) And yet Medusa's sexuality and rhetoric are not the only themes redeemed by Cunizza—in her reference to "questa luculenta e cara gioia" (v.37),\(^{454}\) that is, speaking metaphorically about the neighbouring soul of Folco, she makes clear that the old stoniness characteristic of the *rime petrose* and Medusa has been transformed into the precious jewellery of heaven that is translucent to light and thus able to reflect and refract the light of God. Furthermore, her use of the word "gioia", as Durling and Martinez point out, is a pun on the Provençal term "joi" as used by the Troubadour poets (which

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\(^{451}\) Tommaseo, comm. to *Paradiso* 9, lines 34-36, op cit., as found on *Dante Lab Reader*.

\(^{452}\) Hollander, *Paradiso*, op cit., comm. to lines 31-33.

\(^{453}\) Chiavacci Leonardi, Proemio to canto 9, op cit.

\(^{454}\) "Of the resplendent, precious jewel".
included Folquet de Marsehla) for sexual gratification.\textsuperscript{455} Thus Cunizza manages, in her rhetorical use of a word that before would signify the deathly sexuality of the \textit{rime petrose}, to link the splendours of the Heaven of Venus—souls shining like gems and jewels—to earthly, erotic pleasures. To be making edgy puns of this kind in Heaven is “literally” a testament to Cunizza’s brilliance.

Ovid resurfaces in Folco’s self-comparison to various amorous heroines and figures extracted from the Latin amatory works,\textsuperscript{456} but at the introduction of Rahab, the most famous \textit{meretrix} of the Bible, Ovid is employed in a much more metaphysically significant manner. Like Cunizza and her redemptive, if playful, use of the word “gioia”, Folquet introduces Rahab with an allusion to Ovid’s amatory works that elsewhere may have been too sexually suggestive:

\begin{quote}
Tu vuo’ saper chi è in questa lumera
che qui appresso me così scintilla
come raggio di sole in acqua mera.
(vv. 112-114)
\end{quote}

The simile is from the \textit{Ars Amatoria} II:721-722: “Aspicies oculos tremulo fulgore micantes, / ut sol a liquida saepe refulget aqua”.\textsuperscript{457} Van Peteghem points out the simile of reflected water used by both poets,\textsuperscript{458} but the other resonance that links the Ovidian passage to Dante’s canto is the imagery of lightning, or gleaming splendour, contained in Ovid’s “fulgor” (used twice in the lines, in both noun and verb form: “fulgore”, “refulget”) that echoes in Cunizza’s “e qui refulgo” and even in

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{455} Durling and Martinez, \textit{Paradiso}, notes to canto 9, line 37.
\textsuperscript{456} For a summary, see Durling and Martinez, ibid, note to lines 97-102.
\textsuperscript{458} Van Peteghem, \textit{Intertextual Digital Dante}, op. cit., ad loc., by clicking the manicula next to either text in the columns.
\end{footnotes}
the etymology of Folquet’s name in Latin, Fulco, deriving from “fulgeo”.\textsuperscript{459} By introducing Rahab, in the Heaven of Venus, through a simile from a passage in Ovid that itself is a simile for a woman achieving orgasm,\textsuperscript{460} Folquet (who speaks these lines) is thereby linking Neoplatonic light metaphysics to human sexuality. It is not the only time that Ovid is used in the process of describing formations of light. In \textit{Paradiso} XVI:28-30, Medea’s burning desire to elope with Jason (\textit{Met.} VII:79-81) is alluded to in a simile that ought to convey Cacciaguida’s ardent enthusiasm at the pilgrim’s speech.\textsuperscript{461} Another amorous locus from Ovid is here desexualised in the context of the pilgrim’s genealogy and the love for his ancestral father figure. However much recontextualised, even in passages of a Christian, Neoplatonic light metaphysics,\textsuperscript{462} it is Ovid’s poetic genius that continues to influence the poetics of the \textit{Paradiso}.

\textsuperscript{459} Durling and Martinez mention this etymology in their commentary, \textit{Paradiso}, notes to canto 9, line 37.
\textsuperscript{460} Here I refer the reader to the rest of the surrounding passage of the quoted text from Ovid, too saucy as it is for the likes of a mannerly MPhil thesis.
\textsuperscript{461} Sourced in Gmelin, Bd. 6., op cit., ad loc., p. 305.
\textsuperscript{462} See Gmelin, ibid, p. 615, under “Licht-Symbolik”, for his comprehensive collection of relevant passages in the \textit{Paradiso}; and Robert M. Durling, “Dante and Neoplatonism”, \textit{Paradiso}, op cit., p. 745 for light and emanation as concepts basic to the \textit{Paradiso}. 
Chapter IV: Skipping to the Truth—Ovidian Mysticism?

In canto X the pilgrim is once more transferred up by Beatrice’s illumination at unnarratable speed (vv.34-39), and the poet takes the reader with him in an address that asks us to look up to the Heavenly spheres which move in the motions of Same and Other (vv.7-9).\(^{463}\) As Barolini states, the main issue in the Heaven of the Sun is that of multiple truths,\(^{464}\) and the alternating hagiographic narratives that are the foundation of these cantos involve a deliberate contrast between the scholastic and the mystical.\(^{465}\) In describing the formation of the souls around the pilgrim and his guide, the image of the crown is used, followed by a simile, both of which are drawn from the *Metamorphoses*.\(^{466}\) Unusually, none of the commentators who have cited *Met* XIII:1-2 for the image of the corona have commented on Dante’s choice.\(^{467}\) The image of the corona is used to describe the gathering of Greeks for the debate that is about to occur between Ulysses and Ajax.

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\(^{463}\) For a detailed reading of the specifically astronomical and astrological functions of certain Ovidian similes in the Sun, with emphasis on the Neoplatonic notion of Same and Other, see: Ronald L. Martinez, “Ovid’s Crown of Stars (Paradiso 13.1-27)” in Sowell, op cit., pp. 123-139.


\(^{465}\) St. Thomas whose, presence connotates formal logic, reason, philosophy and intellectual rigour, and St. Bonaventure, who suggests affect, suddenness, the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* and thus the mystical. On this, and the Sun as “a juncture of experience [requiring] a turning point in consciousness”, see: Giuseppe Mazzotta, “The Heaven of the Sun: Dante between Aquinas and Bonaventure”, in *Dante for the New Millennium*, op cit., here: p. 161.


\(^{467}\) Gmelin does not interpret the choice, nor do the various commentators over the centuries who have also cited that locus in Ovid. See: http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu/reader?reader%5Bcantica%5D=3&reader%5Bcanto%5D=10 (Accessed 31.12.20). By clicking on the square next to the “Commentary” tab, one can see the results of a search in the commentaries to *Paradiso* X for “Ovid”.

regarding who has the right to inherit the arms of Achilles. Ulysses, of course, will win, given his extreme rhetorical talents, and Ajax, whose rhetorical skills are not untrained, nonetheless fails to keep up and finally takes his own life. In the context of the Heaven of the Sun, however, the reference to the souls as making a “corona” (v. 65) of themselves resonates to a certain extent with Ovid’s passage, since corona in Latin has both military and judicial connotations.\(^{468}\) Similar to both Homeric heroes pleading their case before a judicial court, Dante’s Sun cantos are in a sense a hearing of the various approaches to truth. Ajax is brute strength, constancy, pure affect, whose actions have witnesses on the battlefield; Ulysses by contrast is cunning, indirect, clever and slippery.\(^{469}\) More importantly, Ulysses, in both Dante and Ovid, emerges as a significant representational figure for the poets themselves.\(^{470}\) Ulysses too points out his own genealogy, descending as he does from Mercury, who, it has been shown, plays an important role in the drama of the letter and the spirit as in Inferno IX.\(^{471}\) Mercury, however, was balanced by the Christological imagery drafted onto him (Christ walking on the waters) as “da ciel messo” (Inf. IX: 85), meaning that even as an embodiment of pagan hermeneutics, he brought the Spirit required for responsible reading. Ulysses, an attractive image of human intellectual desires unaided by grace or a sense of moral responsibility,\(^{472}\) the supreme rhetorician of mythical antiquity, will have his

\(^{468}\) See Neil Hopkinson, Metamorphoses Book XIII, ed. Neil Hopkinson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), commentary to 1-5, “corona can mean ‘ring of soldiers’ or ‘cord of troops’ (OLD s.v. 4b) as well as ‘the crown present at a judicial sitting’ (ibid., 4a)” p. 78.

\(^{469}\) Cf. Hopkinson, ibid., pp. 17-18.

\(^{470}\) For the specifically Ovidian influence in Dante’s own conception of Ulysses, see Picone, Scritti Danteschi, op cit., “Dante, Ovidio e il mito di Ulisse”, pp. 165-178. For Ulysses as a self-reflective figure on Ovid’s part, see Pavlock, The Image of the Poet, op cit., ch. 5, “Ulysses and the Arms of Achilles”, pp. 110-131.

\(^{471}\) Pointed out by Pavlock, ibid., p. 114; and Hopkinson, ibid, p. 15.

\(^{472}\) See Freccero’s argument in “Dante’s Ulysses: From Epic to Novel”, in Poetics of Conversion, op cit. p. 144.
authority qualified again in the Sun, and by St. Thomas, no less, who warns the pilgrim to be ever dialectical and nuanced in his thinking:

E questo ti sia sempre piombo a' piedi,  
per farti mover lento com' uom lasso  
e al sì e al no che tu non vedi:  

(Pd. XIII: 112ff.)

Thomas' warning here goes on to implicitly refer to Ulysses' "folle volo" (Inf. XXVI:126) much in the same way that the "folle amor" (Pd. VIII:2) of rhetoric and desire in Venus inadvertently did. Thomas describes the quest for truth in terms of a sea voyage, which was literalised in the story of Ulysses that Dante constructed. Thomas refers to two lexical items from Ulysses' speech, the "legno" (Inf. XXVI:138) and the "foce" (vv.101 & 107), and thematically recalls shipwreck. Thomas' injunction to follow the yes and the no might also be seen to embody the canto's emphasis on the dialectic of unity and diversity, or sameness and difference, that exists as the Idea ("quella idea"), that is, the splendour of God's mind, emanates light descending through the nine Heavens, which produces "le cose generate" (v.65) down to the "ultime potenze" (v.61) all the while

473 "And let this weigh as lead to slow your steps,  
to make you move as would a weary man  
to yes or no when you do not see clearly".  
Thomas continues:  
"ché quelli è tra li stolti bene a basso,  
che sanza distinzione afferma e nega  
e l'un così come ne l'altro passo;  
[...]  
Vie più che 'ndarno da riva si parte,  
perché non torna tal qual e' si move,  
chi pesca per lo vero e non ha l'arte.  
[...]  
Non sien le genti, ancor, troppo sicure  
a giudicar, [...]  
e legno vidi già dritto e veloce  
correr lo mar per tutto suo cammino,  
perire al fine a l'intrar de la foce."

474 The adjective "folle" belongs to what Barolini terms the Commedia's "Ulyssean lexicon", The Undivine Comedy, op cit., p. 57.
“eternalmente rimanendosi una” (v.60). Ovid, in his depiction of the debate between Ajax and Ulysses, does not take sides or produce a moral judgement, as Hopkinson points out.475 Ovid’s is a dialectical approach, and as a poet of metamorphosis, he is a poet of this Aquinian dialectic: the yes and the no, of sameness and difference, continuity and divergence, change and remainder, poet “of the realm of the Other”, as Martinez argues.476

It is precisely this otherness that subtends the Paradiso’s mysticism. As Barolini has shown,477 mystic, “antinarrative” speech comes increasingly to the text’s fore as the Paradiso progresses into more affected, lyrical passages of emotional outburst in which the narrator’s presence is felt. Ten cantos before the end, the pilgrim gazes upon Christ and the Triumph of the Church, in canto 23. As Hollander states, this canto has a particularly “similetic tonality”,478 containing seven similes in total and two comparisons.479 These similes alternate with apostrophic outbursts, adynata that relate the ineffability of these paradisiacal events and intrusions of the poet’s voice that halt narrative progress.480

The allusion to Ovid occurs relatively close to the canto’s centre, in effect introducing its central “jump” (it should be recalled that this is the canto in which the sacred poem begins to jump, v.62) from a highly metaliterary passage in which the poet reflects on the immensity of his task, “cosi figurando il Paradiso” (v.61) to a moment of “plot” in which the register shifts to the direct discourse of Beatrice’s speech (v. 70). Beatrice herself had previously alluded to Paul (v.37) who in I Cor.

475 Hopkinson, op cit., p. 17.
477 The Undivine Comedy, chapters 9-10, op cit.
478 Hollander, Paradiso, comm. to canto 23, lines 49-51.
479 vv. 1, 4, 25, 30, 40, 79, 121 for the similes, for the pseudo-similes vv. 14, 49; v.100 for simple comparison.
480 Apostrophes vv. 34, 85, 130; adynata vv. 22, 55, 61; narrator’s other intrusions e.g. 61-69
1:24 speaks of Christ as “Christum Dei virtum et Dei sapientiam”. Paul’s subtextual presence then reemerges in the terzina beginning in v. 43: an *excessus mentis*, or Pauline *raptus*, blinded as he is by the resplendent effulgence of Christ, which actually then enables him to gaze upon Beatrice and view her smile, which she commands of him. It was previously with reference to Ovid’s Semele, “quando di cener fessi” (Pd. XXI:6), that it was explained how the brightness of Beatrice’s smile would have smitten the pilgrim to ash, like a thunderbolt hitting a branch (v.12). Now in the mystic vision of XXIII, the overwhelming “viva luce” (31) of Christ causes the pilgrim’s mind to explode, “come foco di nube si diserra” (v.40) and in a Pauline gesture the narrator declines to give details about which he is uncertain: “di sé stesso uscìo, / e che si fesse rimembrar non sape” (vv. 44-5). Beatrice’s command to bear witness to her heavenly smile shocks the pilgrim into the present moment and temporarily stupefies him, as if, and here one of the canto’s strange “pseudo-similes” appears, he were awakening from a forgotten vision, which leads into a adynaton that actually ends up recalling a distant vision:

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degna
di tanto grato, che mai non si stingue
del libro che ’l preterito rassegna.
(vv. 52-4)
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The poet thus instances a flashback to the *Vita Nova*, in which the youthful lover recorded his experiences into the “libro de la mia memoria” (VN 1). If there is a case to be made for a theological or even mystical reading of that earlier work,

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481 Gmelin’s term is *Pseudo-Vergleich*, which he uses throughout his commentary regarding those similes, “die nur den eigenen unmittelbaren Seelenvorgang ausdrücken und damit intensivieren” (“which express directly—thereby intensifying—only the pilgrim’s own immanently experienced spiritual state”, trans. mine. Gmelin, op cit., Bd. IV, comm. to Inferno I, line 55, p. 35)

482 “deserving of so much gratitude that it can never be canceled from the book that tells the past”
here, in *Paradiso* XXIII, the Triumph of Christ as a means to gain a view to Beatrice’s smile would seem to support such a reading. To this mystical event of beatific fulfilment involving an intensity of light metaphysics, a Pauline rapture, and a flashback to the poet’s own literary past is added a metalinguistic, self-referential passage in which an Ovidian-influenced adynaton (the many tongues of Polyhymnia)\footnote{Se mo sonasser tutte quelle lingue che Polimnia con le sueore fero del latte lor dolcissimo piu pingue, per aiutarmi, al millesimo del vero non si verrà, cantando il santo riso e quanto il santo aspetto facea mero” (vv. 55-60) “If all the tongues that Polyhymnia together with her sisters made most rich with sweetest milk, should come now to assist my singing of the holy smile that lit the holy face of Beatrice, the truth would not be reached—not its one—thousandth part.” Sourced by Van Peteghem, *Intertextual Digital Dante*, to Ovid, *Met. VIII*: 532-4: “non mihi si centum deus ora sonantia linguis ingeniumque capax totumque Helicona dedisset, tristia persequer misera fata sororum.”} is employed to ignite the topos of ineffability essential to mystic visions. Van Peteghem\footnote{ibid, as well as Durling and Martinez, *Paradiso*, op cit., comm. ad loc.} sources Dante’s use of Polyhymnia to that episode in the *Metamorphoses*, which also constitutes an ‘intrusion’ on the part of the narrator, like in *Paradiso* XXIII. However, while Dante may have known the character from the *Metamorphoses*, or another classical source, there is an instance in Ovid’s exile works that may be the original source for Dante’s employment of the reference at this particular point.\footnote{Searches that I carried out on Hollander’s *Dante Lab Reader*, op cit., yielded no commentators that sourced Dante’s line to this locus in Ovid’s *Tristia.*} Ovid, lamenting his many misfortunes in exile, writes:

\begin{quote}
“si uox infragilis, pectus mihi firmius aere, pluraque cum linguis pluribus ora forent, non tamen idcirco complecterem omnia uerbis, materia uires exsuperante meas. pro duce Neritio docti mala nostra poetae scribite: Neritio nam mala plura tuli.”
\end{quote}
Here Ovid, although speaking reflexively, is at his spiritual lowest point and thus the antithesis of Dante’s pilgrim, who is at his highest. In both cases the extravagant images of “plura…ora” and “pluribus linguis”, suggesting the laments of Polyhymnia and her sisters for their dead brother, are used to express an extreme emotional and spiritual state. In both cases, too, this ineffability leads to a metapoetic reflection. Dante justifies his poem’s new technique of “jumping” and excuses himself on the basis of his “ponderoso tema” (v.66) which makes his shoulders tremble. Ovid likewise stresses his inability to bear his materia (“vires exsuperante meas”), and one has the image of him, like Dante, suffering physically under his theme’s heavy weight. Finally, both poets then allude to their poems as sea voyages. Dante’s “legno” has, confronted with Christ’s immanence, shrunk back to a “picciola barca” (v.67), and thus he refrains from making the fatal error of Ulysses (alluded to by the mention of the “prora”, v.68). Ovid, by his own account, has suffered even more in his exile than the Naritian Odysseus. For all the imaginative, metamorphic wealth of poetry that Dante mined from Ovid, the latter’s tragic fate was not something to be imitated, for the pilgrim has faith and knows that the tribulations of the sublunar world are, in the end, “brevi contingenze” (Pd. XIII:63). It is in his mystic visions, enabled by Christian revelation, that allow his imagination, and his text, to jump: “Però salta la penna e non lo scrivo” (Pd. XXIV:25).
Conclusion

Dante's Ovid, in this dissertation, has been shown to emerge specifically at points of maximum self-referentiality, when the narrator reflects on the status and progress of his poem, and the relationship between himself and his reader. In addition to this, Paul's theology and raptus proved a fruitful and complimentary intertext that shed new light, at least in this postgraduate's eyes, on Dante's reading of Ovid. Moreover, the readers' interpretation of the poem is of maximum importance, and thus all of these Ovidian, self-reflexive moments in some way or another raise issues regarding allegory and the status of representation; bearing witness to an event that overwhelmed consciousness to the point of becoming unnarratable,\textsuperscript{486} forcing the poet to increasingly reside within the strictures of allegory, metaphor, and analogy—structures of language that harbour absences within their very “presence” and thus testify, in a poetic way, to everything that reason fails to account for, all those “spiritualia que humanam rationem transcendunt” (\textit{Mon.} III. vi. 8), and that allow the reader a brief glimpse into eternity. The “non-falso errore” of Dante's \textit{Commedia} rests upon this dynamic, for the experience, ultimately, is the reader's proper \textit{experience} of its poetic language itself,\textsuperscript{487} and Ovid, it has been shown, plays a very important role in making this experience work.

\textsuperscript{486} For “Disappearance as metamorphosis” and the recourse to the aesthetic that “catches” what falls out of continuity, so that “the event [of rupture, or metamorphosis] is reintegrated back into the linear narrative from which it erupted in the first place”, see: Leahy, \textit{Der wahre Historiker} op cit., here: p. 119, but also chapters three and four.

\textsuperscript{487} Botterill, “Mysticism and Meaning”, op cit., p. 150.
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