



JÓZSEF PÁL

“The Most Secret Chamber of the Heart”

(Secretissima camera de lo cuore)

Poetry and Theology in the State-changing¹ Cantos
of the Commedia

I. COMPANY OF POETS AND PHILOSOPHERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸ St. Augustin *On Christian Doctrine* “not to love words, but the truth in words”, IV. 11. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/doctrine.xii_3.html

⁹ Boccaccio *The Life of Dante*, Chapter “The defence of poetry”.

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

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

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

II. UBI SAPIENS?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unlike his antique and contemporary counterpart, the medieval artist did not create art for art's sake, neither to win approval¹⁵ or flatter the recipient of his work, nor to show himself off. The "taxonomic place" of his activity is similar to that of a natural scientist. For the minds of both, if gifted and fair, an intermediate realm becomes available in which divine and human activity can meet. (Dante also had experience in the latter, since on January 20, 1320, he gave a lecture on geophysics in Latin in Verona about water and earth, *Questio de aqua et terra*). From above, the Creator offers the real object of knowledge, to which the scientist can rise, not by researching raw reality but the essential nature (*quidditas*)¹⁶ of things. In the other type of activity, the artist has access to a picture painted on his "mind's canvas" or *dictation* by Cupid from within. In Paradise on Earth, Beatrice almost literally repeats Cupid's inspiring words, taking on the role of revelator.¹⁷ The creative man receives from the *Mountain* (Ex. 25.40, *exemplar*) the object of knowledge or artistic representation, the "pattern" that is revealed to him in the vision. With his will and talent, the scientist and the artist can discover the essence of things and, based on his ideas, he knows what the work to be made should be like (see Figure).

III. INNER PICTURE, INSPIRED WORD

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

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

¹⁶ Dante uses this very word to repeat the definition by St Paul:

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

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

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

images of bodies, or seeing bodies through the body; but after another, grasping by simple intelligence what is above the eye of the mind, *viz.*, the reasons and the unspeakably beautiful skill of such forms." Artistic intuition, like faith, is beyond reason. "We behold, then, by the sight of the mind, in that eternal truth from which all things temporal are made, the form according to which we are, and according to which we do anything by true and right reason, either in ourselves, or in things corporeal; and we have the true knowledge of things, thence conceived, as it were as a word within us, and by speaking we beget it from within; nor by being born does it depart from us. And when we speak to others, we apply to the word, remaining within us, the ministry of the voice or of some bodily sign, that by some kind of sensible remembrance some similar thing may be wrought also in the mind of him that hears – similar, I say, to that which does not depart from the mind of him that speaks. We do nothing, therefore, through the members of the body in our words and actions, by which the behavior of men is either approved or blamed, which we do not anticipate by a word uttered within ourselves. For no one willingly does anything, which he has not first said in his heart."¹⁸ It is not any different with *pictures*, either: "Thou [made] the sense of his body, by which, as by an interpreter, he may from mind unto matter convey that which he does, and report to his mind what may have been done, that it within may consult the truth, presiding over itself, whether it be well done." "And these your words formed at the time, the outer ear conveyed to the intelligent mind, whose inner ear lay attentive to Your eternal word." (*Confessions* XI. 5–6). The internal word or picture received from God is the perfect pattern of the work to be created. It is hidden in the depth of the human mind¹⁹ and is the primary source of inspiration for the wise artist. St. Thomas of Aquinas follows the Patristic tradition: the artist works by using the internal word or idea conceived in his mind and inspired by the love of wanting some object.²⁰

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

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

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

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

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

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

chi pinge figura,
se non può esser lei, non la può porre;²²

IV. LATIN SPECULATION AND ITALIAN POETRY

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

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

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

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

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

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

Italian speakers can be made accustomed to Latinisms, thus expanding the framework and possibilities of the vernacular language and increasing its dignity. Critics of Dante soon noticed²³ that the three great parts use Latin for different purposes, in different ways and to different degrees. In the first, historical part, which describes events and depicts the reality of sinful people, there are hardly any Latinisms (but all the more so jumbled and obscene expressions). Later, the choir of angels, which controls the process of purification in a Providence-like manner, mostly prays and sings (along with souls) in Latin, in accordance with Biblical texts and church traditions. Beatrice's arrival at the top of the Mountain is prepared by a rhyme structure that Latinized all three components of the medieval mental space: Hebrew, Christian and pagan *senis*, *venis*, *plenis* (*Pur.* XXX. 17, 19, 21). *Senis* (old man) is an allegorical figure of the *Song of Solomon*, one of the 24 Old Testament books; *venis/t* (you come, he comes) are the words to greet the Messiah in the Gospels and *plenis* (full) is a reference to Virgil's *Aeneid*.²⁴ And in a *terzina* containing a strange prediction, Beatrice herself spoke in a mixed language (*Pur.* XXXIII. 10–12, *Modicum, et non videbitis me; / et iterum, ..., / modicum, et vos videbitis me*, A little while and ye shall not see me; and again, (...) a little while and ye shall see me). She quoted Christ's words from

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

V. HISTORY WRITTEN BACKWARDS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VI. "DONNE MAGNE"

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

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

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

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

The *donna gentile* is an incarnation of a concept, an allegory in the Goetheian sense. Apart from a few simple qualities repeated several times, she has no real personality. She is like a woman born out of Boethius’s imagination of varying size, often changing her height between heaven and earth, comforting with her clever insights and arguments, or like Giotto’s monochrome depictions of the Virtues in the Scrovegni Chapel, opposite of whom stand the allegorical figures of sins (the painter friend also used the *contrappasso* scheme!). The cult of the allegory expressing the general necessarily appeared and survived in Christian art, at times with even greater force than usual (medieval moralities, Baroque fine art). When they met at the *Banquet* after the *New Life*, Dante emphasized, on one hand, that he had presumably met Philosophy, the mistress of books, ancient authors, and the sciences²⁹ by the will of God and, on the other hand

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

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

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

that the noble lady³⁰ was a poetic allegory. Within half a sentence, he used the word *immaginare* (imagine), once to define her (*immaginava lei fatta come una donna gentile*, I imagined it as having the form of a noble lady), and the second time to describe her relationship with Dante (*non la poteva immaginare in atto alcuno se non misericordioso*, and I could not imagine her with a bearing other than full of pity). She has no natural age, no individual physique, she is neither born nor dies, even her father, as we have seen, is not a real man. The allegory, the daughter of reason, "...the works of art...shove the spirit back upon itself" (Goethe 1797/1984), places the general before the particular.

The dislike for it led Goethe to create a new set of values by placing the *particular* before the *general*. Proceeding in this direction, we arrive at the symbol. "That is true Symbolism, where the more particular represents the more general, not as a dream or shade, but as a vivid, instantaneous revelation of the Inscrutable" (Goethe 1892). Contrary to his allegory of Philosophy – applying Goethe's opposition to the two ladies – Beatrice is portrayed as a real woman from the first moment, along with many everyday events related to her (her living near Dante's family, her exact age, their meeting in Florence in the street (at a festival) or in the church, her beauty, her companions, the day of her death, etc.). As opposed to her rival, she is portrayed as a real living person, body and soul,³¹ who has revealed both of her "selves" in both states of existence: on earth and in the afterlife (taking off the veil³²) alike. From Philosophy, the defining feature of the *symbol*, the "objective correlative," the specific uniqueness, that is, life itself is missing, whereas her predecessor-antagonist³³-successor, Dante's Beatrice has almost all the positive features of real existence to the maximum extent. She is spiritual and organic at the same time, continuing Goethe's separation, what is more, not only carries it but by systematically explaining the *signs*, she also reveals their meaning to Dante and through him to everyone. "The objects represented in this way appear to exist for themselves alone and

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

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

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

³³ "one drew help continually from what lay before, that is, from sight of that lady, while the other drew its help from what lay behind, that is, from my memory"; *Banquet* 2.2.

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

Beatrice was prompted by the Mother of Mercy (*Mater misericordiae*).³⁴ The previous (unsuccessful) inspirer becomes a leader, who is present all along. Descending to the porch of hell, she made Virgil the means of providence, who brought up his protégé with a steady rise³⁵ from the *selva oscura* (forest dark) to the gate of the *divina foresta*, (heavenly forest), the original state of human perfection lost with the Fall. The phenomena of earthly paradise were explained by another *donna*, Matilda, ornamented six times by the epithet *bella* (the attribute is consistently placed before the qualified word, while the other way around with *donna gentile*).

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

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

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

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

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

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

According to Virgil's definition, Beatrice will be "lume fia tra 'l vero e lo 'ntellecto" ("Who light 'twixt truth and intellect shall be", *Pur.* VI. 45). After saving him from damnation, Beatrice's *second* task is to prepare her follower for the seeing of God. In the last two cantos of *Purgatorio* and the first two of *Paradiso*, the long process of doctrinal retraining begins, during which the true image of 'good' slowly unfolds before him. In the borderline situation, the fundamental difference between the two ways of thinking becomes visible. The knowledge that Dante's *school* has provided so far is inapplicable in the new environment. His slow and cumbersome intellect, although wanting to follow Beatrice's words, falls as far behind her as the earth from the Empyrean³⁷. His new leader urges him to forget his old, erroneous views, as she experiences that, upon hearing her

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

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

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

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

ma tosto fier li fatti le Naiade,
che solveranno questo enigma forte³⁹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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