



BÉLA HOFFMANN

Canto XIX of the *Inferno**

I. THE MAIN TOPICS OF CANTO XIX

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. CHRIST AND/OR THE HOLY SPIRIT

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

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

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

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

IV. THE PROBLEMATIC TERCET (V. 19–21)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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