

Dream, Distortion, and Double Take: Dante's Poetics of Redirection

In writing the *Commedia*, Dante rewrites his life; he does this not by revising his personal history or changing the facts around its events, but in designing a purposeful pathway to the *segno lieto*, the unchanging happiness that is God, with a renewed understanding of the signposts. Dante fashions this reorientation of life's journey by writing a story whose protagonist-pilgrim is assisted by female figures who possess the mind and voice of unimpeded vision. In this way, Dante, pilgrim and poet, are redirected to the *sito decreto*, the place to which one can arrive only through deliberate and rational discernment.¹

The *Commedia* is built on the metaphor of a journey presented from the outset in a strenuous dialectic of lost and found, and it is precisely this tension that moves both pilgrim and poem forward. Inherent to the description of this journey are expressions of redirection that mark the moments in which Dante exercises his free will as integral to his personal itinerary of transformation. This drama is activated powerfully in the *Commedia* through female figures who work collaboratively to reestablish the pilgrim's passage; in some moments by overtly pointing out the right way, and at other times by rectifying visual, aural, and imaginative misperceptions experienced by Dante as they occurred both on earth and in his passage through the places of the afterlife. This essay examines how the poem's theme of redirection is signaled and activated by its poetics; nocturnal dreams, optical distortions, and gestural double-takes reveal a syncretic perspective in which the youthful errant Dante faces the mature thinker who then writes the poem as the vehicle by which he calls himself back to the right way.

The reader of the *Commedia* must then ask where, when, and how this folding of time and purpose occurs; where is the point of encounter between the poet's life and the journey that is recreated by the order of the poem? Much of this reckoning happens at the top of the mountain of Purgatory where the pilgrim is required to face his past through the lens of Beatrice's critical review. For this reason, *Purgatorio* 30 is a canto of marked conversion in Dante and its staging for spatial and temporal articulation begins when the pilgrim's company passes from male (Virgil and Statius) to female (Beatrice and Matelda). Transfer of leadership from Virgil to Beatrice is actuated by the pilgrim's double take: he first feels Beatrice's

TRIGGIANO

presence, looks for Virgil and does not find him, then turns to Beatrice's voice calling out to him from across the River Lethe:

«Guardaci ben! Ben son, ben son Beatrice.
Come degnasti d'accedere al monte?
non sapei tu che qui è l'uom felice?»

[“Look over here! I am, I truly am Beatrice.”
How did you dare approach the mountain?
Do you not know that here man lives in joy?”]
(*Purg.* 30.73-75)²

The sternness of Beatrice's command rides upon a lyricism reminiscent of the *Vita Nuova* as her imperative, “Guardaci ben,” orders the pilgrim's gaze onto her person then links the repeated “ben son” to her *essere* [being] as the fulcrum of Dante's passage to heaven.³ Two verses later, Beatrice signifies herself with the state of happiness by way of rhyme (*Beatrice / felice*) and resumes the story around her death that was left suspended in the *Vita Nuova*.⁴ In Chapter 39 of the *Vita Nuova*, Dante envisions Beatrice in glory (“una forte imaginazione in me”) and then reorders the progression of events that lead up to that moment (“Allora cominciai a pensare di lei; e ricordandomi di lei secondo l'ordine del tempo passato...”). The subsequent chapter in the *Vita Nuova* describes pilgrims passing through a Florence bereft of Beatrice, and *Purgatorio* 30 picks up this point of the narrative thread of the *Vita Nuova* by re-presenting Beatrice within the journey recounted by the *Commedia*.

Beatrice's masterful command of Dante's self-rediscovery results in full catharsis, the softening of the pilgrim's heart is like the snow of Italy's mountainous spine that with the mere breath of spring melts and seeps out into itself “poi, liquefatta, in sé stessa trapela;” (“but then, dissolving, melts into itself”; *Purg.* 30.88). The expanded reflexive construction of *trapelare* elongates the process of tearful contrition where the amalgamation of ice into water is like a gradual mixing of cold sin and warm sorrow. This display of Dante's renewed self-understanding opens the way for Beatrice's review of Dante's youthful past and subsequent reordering of events:

«Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto:
mostrando li occhi giovanetti a lui,
meco il menava in dritta parte vòlto.

DANTE'S POETICS OF REDIRECTION

Sì tosto come in su la soglia fui
di mia seconda etade e mutai vita,
questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui.
Quando di carne a spirto era salita,
e bellezza e virtù cresciuta m'era,
fu' io a lui men cara e men gradita;
e volse i passi suoi per via non vera,
imagini di ben seguendo false,
che nulla promession rendono intera.
Né l'impetrare ispirazion mi valse,
con le quali e in sogno e altrimenti
lo rivocai: sì poco a lui ne calse!»

[“For a time I let my countenance sustain him.
Guiding him with my youthful eyes,
I drew him with me in the right direction.
Once I had reached the threshold of my second age,
when I changed lives, he took himself from me
and gave himself to others.
When I had risen to spirit from my flesh,
as beauty and virtue in me became more rich,
to him I was less dear and less than pleasing.
He set his steps upon an untrue way,
pursuing those false images of good
that bring no promise to fulfillment—
useless the inspiration I sought and won for him,
as both with dreams and other means
I called him back, so little did he heed them.”]

(*Purg.* 30.121-135)

Let us examine Dante's use of ambiguity in Beatrice's speech where double meaning of the verbs *rivocare* (to call again / to call back) and *impetrare* (to implore / to turn to stone) assist the poet's threading of past into present. Time is compressed at the last verse (line 135) on *rivocai* as Beatrice renders the verb in the past absolute tense while simultaneously calling out to Dante from across the river. At the beginning of that tercet, Beatrice qualifies her calling out to him from heaven, those earlier implorations had no effect where *impetrare* suggests her failed attempt to bring Dante to a conversion. The verb *impetrare* appears over the arc of the poem to signify the two acts of supplication and petrification, and these can be seen as complementary whereby the efficacy of prayer

should result in new pliancy of a hardened will. The potential good outcome is conversion, negatively exemplified by Count Ugolino in *Inferno* 33 who, even in the misery of hearing his children beg for comfort, is incapable of showing the sympathy required to soften and relieve fault. Because Ugolino cannot cry, he turns to stone inside, “Io non piangëa, sì dentro impetraï” (*Inf.* 33.49), thus echoing his frozen immobility in Cocytus.⁵

Beatrice reconstructs her place in the youthful Dante’s life as physically participatory, her face and eyes acted as beacon and if Dante and Beatrice walked the same path together, *in dritta parte* toward the same right goal, it was only for a brief time, *alcun tempo*. Divergence occurred with Beatrice’s death whereby the disappearance of her physical self, the instrument by which she drew him along with her, causes Dante to lose sight of the objective. In her second life, Beatrice employed various strategies to call him back from the “other,” *altrui*.⁶ This particular moment of syncretic recollection again hinges on the verb *rivocai*, where verses 121-123 collapse the itinerary of the *Vita Nuova* into one tercet and the following tercet quickly (*sì tosto*) pivots Beatrice’s perspective from earthly to heavenly. The equivocal rhyme of *volto* at verse 121 (noun for face) and at 123 (past participle of *volgere*) levels Beatrice’s exterior aspect as the instrument that drew the youthful Dante on the true path, but at verse 130 recurrence of the verb *volgere*, “e volve i passi suoi per via non vera,” recycles the verb to describe divergence from the true way to a path made of empty promises and false good. *Purgatorio* 30 and much of 31 focus on Dante’s errant youthful life, Beatrice’s message recapitulates that life into the present moment of the poem by clarifying the difference between transient and eternal good thus resetting proper objective, “imagini di ben seguendo false, / che nulla promession rendono intera” (*Purg.* 30.31-32). In this way, the program of the poem retrieves multiple layers of the past and brings Dante of the *Vita Nuova* to meet Dante of the *Commedia* at the top of the mountain of Purgatory.⁷

Instrumental to the progression of the journey are signposts that mark the way for pilgrim and reader, and the poem’s variety of poetic and programmatic motifs signal direction and encourage reorientation. For example, at liminal spatial junctures pilgrim and guide pause to look forward and back; this taking stock and evaluating the journey occurs at the tenth canto of the three canticles. Similarly, at the thirtieth canto of each canticle, the Narcissus story paves a complementary byway to the main journey to show Dante’s evolving sense of self-estimation.⁸ By comparison, the figure of

DANTE'S POETICS OF REDIRECTION

Ulysses is presented in the poem in a journey complicated by waywardness, its arabesque design imitates misdirected desire and absence of clear objective, and in the economy of the journey motif Dante evokes Ulysses in a similar arcane tracing of path and purpose, it is ultimately characterized as “il varco folle d’Ulisse” when seen from the vantage point of the starry sphere (*Par.* 27.79-84).

The vehicle of the poem also offers signs in punctuated frequency as in the occurrence of the verb and variants of *smarrire* - a reminder of how the story began and the evolving resolution to the danger that it records. In similar fashion, the *torcere / drizzare* motif marks moments where a straightening of what was twisted signals and motivates comprehension or resolution of a problem.⁹ Translated into simple spatial patterns, this motif tells us that the straight and direct way is the right way and when understood in the context of the journey, it is best to stay on the main road and keep the objective in clear view.¹⁰

The mountain of Purgatory restores and implements that spatial redirection and time passes in real terms of night and day to activate the souls’ renewed desire to unburden sin through exercise and thus satisfy a natural human desire heavenward. Climbing and unwinding the mountain traces an ascending spiral where sin is un-done as circling penitents are “straightened” and made right. The pilgrim says to Forese Donati (referring to Virgil’s guidance):

«Indi m’han tratto sù li suoi conforti,
salendo e rigirando la montagna
che drizza voi che ‘l mondo fece torti.»

[“With his support I have left all that behind,
climbing and circling the terraces of the mountain
that straightens those made crooked by the world.”]
(*Purg.* 23.124-126)

This occurrence of the *torcere / drizzare* motif defines the mountain as both subject and object in the process of the restoration of the will; in its usage as subject, it is the agent of redirection to heaven; in its usage as object, it is the thing the penitents must overtake. Instrumental to this process for the pilgrim is a series of three nocturnal dreams, let us look carefully at these by focusing on the middle dream and proceed by comparison of their female *dramatis personae*.

The purgatorial three-dream drama employs female figures that cooperate the pilgrim’s passage to Beatrice. In the first dream Lucia

TRIGGIANO

conveys the pilgrim from Ante-Purgatory to Purgatory proper; in the middle dream the *femmina-serena* and *donna santa* manifest the pilgrim's processing of Virgil's exposition on human love and appropriate measure of desire (delivered in the preceding canto), thus preparing the pilgrim's passage to upper Purgatory (sins of excess desire); in the third dream, Leah (and Rachel by implication) reflect the pilgrim's perfected will thus marking his readiness to enter the Earthly Paradise where Beatrice awaits. The dream series fuses multiple pages of time by creating a channel for both recollection of the past and exploration of potential outcomes; as such, these nocturnal imaginings might be less valued as presentations of the future and more of a staging of non-reality where free will is unrestricted to actualize redirection.¹¹ The pilgrim's middle dream stages a double vision of self-rediscovery as he struggles to couple the poem's central message on love and human desire with his own self-understanding.¹²

It is nightfall of Dante's second day on the mountain, he and Virgil leave the circle of the wrathful and as they pause to orient themselves, Virgil delivers his speech on the relationship of love and how one must pursue love for the right object and in right measure. They are now among the slothful and as the penitents depart, darkness gathers and the pilgrim's drowsiness intermingles the day's experiences, canto 18 concludes:

Poi quando fuor da noi tanto divise
quell' ombre, che veder più non potiersi,
novo pensiero dentro a me si mise,
del qual più altri nacquero e diversi;
e tanto d'uno in altro vaneggiar,
che li occhi per vaghezza ricopersi,
e 'l pensiero in sogno trasmutai.

[Then, when these shades were so far parted
from us we could no longer see them,
a new thought rose within me,
from which others, many and diverse, were born.
And I rambled so from one thought to another
that my eyes closed in drowsy wandering
and I transformed my musings into dream.]
(*Purg.* 18.139-145)

DANTE'S POETICS OF REDIRECTION

In sleep, the process of transmutation begins and Canto 19 opens in formulaic dream terms: astronomical indicators show that time has moved into the hour just before dawn, warmth yields to cold in a vista of the dark eastern sky creating feelings of isolation, surrender, and pause.¹³ By contrast, the pilgrim's first dream is marked by movement, "la mente nostra, peregrina" (*Purg.* 9.16) and bird imagery simulate Lucia's work of conveyance, while the third dream is cast in warm pastoral terms of shelter and restful stasis, "io come capra, ed ei come pastori" (*Purg.* 27.86). The middle dream is nightmarish like the anxiety-ridden dreams of the *Vita Nuova* and in its punctuated allegorical sequencing recalls the dream narrated by Count Ugolino in *Inferno* 33. Time is stamped on space as the cautionary quality of this dream is prefaced by a reference to geomancers known for using patterns of constellations to foretell the future; for this reason, the configuration of this dream is crucial as we shall see what the pilgrim must do to recover from its disturbing effects, this is an exertion to which Count Ugolino could not bring himself.¹⁴

Particular to the middle dream is the pictorial qualification of the pilgrim's conscious to unconscious mental activity where the verb *trasmutare* animates the metamorphosing *femmina balba-dolce serena*. The rhythm of these tercets slows the reader into a dreamlike reality; dieresis of *diurno* and *oriente* and the suspension created by the adverbial phrase introduced by *quando* return the reader's attention to the cold night sky. The next series of four tercets continue in a language lacking the terminology the reader expects in preparation for the vision experience; it is only in the middle dream that the protagonist presents herself without the softening effect of *parere* to create personification and distance. Compare how Lucia enters in the first dream: "in sogno mi pareva veder sospesa / un'aguglia," ["in a dream I seemed to see an eagle"] (*Purg.* 9.19-20) and Leah in the third dream: "in sogno mi pareva / donna vedere andar per una landa / cogliendo fiori;" ["in a dream I seemed to see a lady, / young and lovely, passing through a meadow / as she gathered flowers"] (*Purg.* 27.97-99). The woman of the middle dream instead enters boldly:

mi venne in sogno una femmina balba,
ne li occhi guercia, e sopra i piè distorta,
con le man monche, e di color scialba.
Io la mirava; e come 'l sol conforta

TRIGGIANO

le fredde membra che la notte aggrava,
così lo sguardo mio le faceva scorta
la lingua, e poscia tutta la drizzava
in poco d'ora, e lo smarrito volto,
com' amor vuol, così le colorava.

[there came to me a woman, in a dream,
stammering, cross-eyed, splayfooted,
with crippled hands and sickly pale complexion.
I looked at her, and as the sun revives
cold limbs benumbed by night,
just so my gaze gave her a ready tongue
and then in very little time
straightened her crooked limbs
and tinged her sallow face as love desires.]

(*Purg.* 19.7-15)¹⁵

The *femmina-serena* is characterized by her transitory double nature: “Ne li occhi guercia, e sovra i piè distorta / ... / ... e poscia tutta la drizzava” (lines 8, 14) making this occurrence of the *torcere / drizzare* motif unique for two reasons. First, it employs the variant *distorta*; compared to a simple twisting or bending, distortion relates qualities of de-formation as in undoing what was once formed, this adjective reminds us that this figure has two identities, she is both *femmina balba* and *dolce serena*. Second, distortion also relates the quality of faulty perception as when the senses do not cooperate in receiving information; the *femmina-serena* is the object of distortion through the viewer's gaze that holds the power of transmutation. Further, distortion is recurring - in the *femmina*'s contorted true self and then in a false straightening by the viewer (Dante of the dream).

Dante's dreamed self is physically inert while his gaze re-forms her: her tongue is untied, all of her is straightened, color returns to her *smarrito volto*.

Poi ch'ell' avea 'l parlar così disciolto,
cominciava a cantar sì, che con pena
da lei avrei mio intento rivolto.
«Io son,» cantava, »io son dolce serena,
che ' marinari in mezzo mar dismago;
tanto son di piacere a sentir piena!
Io volsi Ulisse del suo cammin vago

DANTE'S POETICS OF REDIRECTION

al canto mio; e qual meco s'ausa,
rado sen parte; sì tutto l'appago!»

[And with her speech set free
she started singing in a way that would
have made it hard for me to turn aside.
“I am,” she sang, “I am the sweet siren
who beguiles mariners on distant seas,
so great is their delight in hearing me.
I drew Ulysses, eager for the journey,
with my song. And those who dwell with me
rarely depart, so much do I content them.”]

(*Purg.* 19.16-24)

If the *femmina-serena* is frightful, Dante's transforming gaze (likened to the comforting effect of the sun on stiffened limbs) makes her dangerous as it assumes the power of persuasion and allows its object the ease of mutability.¹⁶ Assuming control over its subject by way of objectification, Dante's gaze communicates the message that culpability and sin can also occur through inertia when the process of deliberation is cut short of the self-reflective act of discernment. The *femmina-serena*'s anamorphic nature dramatizes the anxiety of deliberation that is fundamental to the healthy exercising of free will, but the problem is left unresolved for both Dante-dreamer and Dante-of-the-dream until the pilgrim is able to see himself fully for what he is (through the process of full contrition in *Purgatorio* 30 and 31).¹⁷

Note the mollifying and seductive quality of the siren's song as *io son* repeats gently around *cantava* then as alliteration in the following verse *marinari, mezzo, mar dismago* develops in alphabetic order (*m* to *p*) to the alliterative and sensuous *piacere, piena, appago*. The conclusion in rhyming *vago* with *appago* suggests indiscriminating desire satisfied. Her third utterance of *io*, subject of the verb *volsi*, describes her greatest power as the personification of deviation from the right way. Beatrice will command the same attention to her *essere* in *Purgatorio* 30, but she fashions it as the conduit to the true way whereas the siren is a dead-end and *terminus* (“rado sen parte”; line 24). In the absence of *parere* there is no lens of unreality here, this quality builds the anxiety of the dream experience and complicates the potential harm of deceptive appearances. The danger of misperception is explained just inside the entrance of Purgatory at canto 10. This panoramic first tercet

TRIGGIANO

synthetically explains the quality that separates souls allowed to move forward to salvation from those left behind:

Poi fummo dentro al soglio de la porta
che 'l mal amor de l'anime disusa,
perché fa parer dritta la via torta.

[Once we had crossed the threshold of the gate
not used by souls whose twisted love
attempts to make the crooked way seem straight.]
(*Purg.* 10.1-3)

Mal amor, or love used badly, corrupts one's ability to distinguish good from bad thus barring passage of the gate. The analogy of straight / twisted is reiterated in the landscape as Dante hears the gate close behind and looks with hesitation at the winding path leading out from the mountain's gate. The pilgrim will later formulate this worry into a question posed to Virgil:

«ché, s'amore è di fuori a noi offerto
e l'anima non va con altro piede,
se dritta o torta va, non è suo merto.»
Ed elli a me: “Quanto ragion qui vede,
dir ti poss' io; da indi in là t'aspetta
pur a Beatrice, ch'è opra di fede.»

[“For if love is offered from outside us
and if the soul moves on no other foot,
it has no merit in going straight or crooked.”
And he to me: ‘As far as reason may see in this,
I can tell you. To go farther you must look
to Beatrice, for it depends on faith alone.’]
(*Purg.* 18.43-48)

Anatomical reference to the foot reminds us of the pilgrim's *piè fermo* that hindered his ambulation back in *Inferno* 1. In *Paradiso* 5 Beatrice says that perfect vision moves the foot whereby the foot of the soul is love directed by the intellect.¹⁸ That the *femmina-serena* is “sopra i piè distorta” indicates that her brand of love makes her very foundation faulty and imbalanced. Conversely, Beatrice is the “opra di fede” – love that leads to God by discernment through faith.¹⁹

DANTE'S POETICS OF REDIRECTION

Returning to the dream, a subsequent phase of correction occurs by a second female figure, she also enters boldly but without the blurry mutability that characterizes the *femmina-serena*:

Ancor non era sua bocca richiusa,
quand' una donna apparve santa e presta
lunghezzo me per far colei confusa.
«O Virgilio, Virgilio, chi è questa?»
fieramente dicea; ed el venìa
con li occhi fitti pur in quella onesta.
L'altra prendea, e dinanzi l'apria
fendendo i drappi, e mostravami 'l ventre;
quel mi svegliò col puzzo che n'uscìa.

[Her lips had not yet closed
when at my side appeared a lady,
holy and alert, in order to confound her.
“O Virgil, Virgil, who is this?”
she asked, indignant. And he came forward
with his eyes fixed on that virtuous one.
The other he seized and, ripping her garments,
laid her front bare and exposed her belly.
The stench that came from there awoke me.]
(*Purg.* 19.25-33)

This scene dramatizes the ability to discern good love from bad in a syncretic unveiling of the truth; Virgil-of-the-dream knows that the *femmina-serena* is bad and Virgil-not-of-the-dream knows why she is bad. The *donna santa* makes no effect on Dante in the dream but her interruption results in Dante-dreamer awakening. His faculties are disturbed at his role in the dream, his body is bent in a posture reminiscent of his reaction in *Inferno* 20 to the physical contortion of the diviners. There and here, Virgil's remedy is an imperative to his charge to raise his eyes, readjust perspective, and to remember the task at hand. God is falconer and the pilgrim is falcon that first looks down at its feet before looking up, this self-check resets moral compass; perspective is no longer presented in blurred double vision but focused to the star-filled heavens that are God's eternal lure, “li occhi rivolgi al logoro che gira / lo rege eterno con le rote magne” (*Purg.* 19.62-63).

TRIGGIANO

In *Paradiso* 2, Beatrice will reapply the same directive as the pilgrim transitions from the grounded thinking essential to the navigation of the mountain to the transcendent viewpoint required for movement through the heavenly spheres:

giunto mi vidi ove mirabil cosa
mi torse il viso a sé; e però quella
cui non potea mia cura essere ascosa,
volta ver' me, sì lieta come bella,
«Drizza la mente in Dio grata,» mi disse,
«che n'ha congiunti con la prima stella.»

[suddenly I found myself there
where my eyes were drawn to an astounding sight.
And she, from whom my thoughts could not be kept
turned to me, as full of joy as she was fair,
to say: “Direct your grateful mind to God,
who has conjoined us with the nearest star.”]
(*Par.* 2.25-30)

In this instance, the *torcere* / *drizzare* motif takes on a new meaning as the verb *drizzare* is employed in an imperative and in a semantic variant from “to straighten” to “to direct.” The transposition of vision in optical and mental terms relates a body language now familiar to the reader, and perceptual redirection reestablishes the journey by shifting emphasis from the body to the mind. In *Paradiso* 3, the next phase of the pilgrim’s self-rediscovery is introduced in a return to the Narcissus story:

tali vid' io più facce a parlar pronte;
per ch'io dentro a l'error contrario corsi
a quel ch'accese amor tra l'omo e 'l fonte.
Sùbito sì com' io di lor m'accorsi,
quelle stimando specchiati sembianti,
per veder di cui fosser, li occhi torsi;
e nulla vidi, e ritorsi li avanti
dritti ne lume de la dolce guida,
che, sorridendo, ardea ne li occhi santi.

[I saw many such faces eager to speak,
at which I fell into the error opposite to that

DANTE'S POETICS OF REDIRECTION

which inflamed a man to love a fountain.
As soon as I became aware of them,
believing them to be reflections,
I turned around to see from whom they came
and, seeing nothing, I returned my gaze
to the light of my sweet guide,
whose holy eyes were glowing as she smiled.]
(*Par.* 3.16-24)

Let us examine this *torcere* / *drizzare* occurrence here made fitting in its employment of two utterances of *torcere* (“li occhi torsi; / e ritorsili avanti”): the pilgrim turns his eyes away, and then turns them again in a double take as he seeks the origin of the faces before him. While the Narcissus program is marked in the *Commedia* at the thirtieth canto of each of the canticles, this episode inverts Narcissus’ error (Ovid’s figure mistakes his own image for an other’s) and appears outside of the predicted program; in this way, it feasibly constitutes a second phase to its objective in *Purgatorio* 30. There, in reaction to Beatrice’s calling out, the pilgrim looks into the water of the Lethe but seeing his reflection and feeling shame, he looks away. In *Paradiso* 3, Dante’s self-professed *error contrario* couples with the gesture of the double take to indicate the pilgrim’s new ability of self-correction and brings the pilgrim’s attention to Piccarda Donati. Piccarda responds to the pilgrim’s questions in perfect clarity, she explains that being at peace with sinfulness is a product of one’s free will that appropriately accepts all of heaven as a place of happiness, Cunizza da Romano will reiterate this point in *Paradiso* 9.

Upon entering heaven, the pilgrim is placed safely within the motion of the divine order that bears him to God:

e ora lì, come a sito decreto,
cen porta la virtù di quella corda
che ciò che scocca drizza in segno lieto.

[and there now, as to a place appointed,
the power of that bowstring bears us,
aimed, as is all it shoots, at a joyful target.]
(*Par.* 1.124-126)

In writing the *Commedia*, Dante rewrites his life by fashioning a journey assisted by female figures who cooperate and redirect his

path to God. In this way, the poet's life is recreated by the order of the poem as time and purpose meet with new result. These syncretic moments reveal that reorientation of life's journey is possible and that the *Commedia* is the vehicle by which we may call ourselves back to the right way.

Tonia Bernardi Triggiano

DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY

NOTES

¹ “e ora lì, come a sito decreto, / cen porta la virtù di quella corda / che ciò che scocca drizza in segno lieto.” [“and there now, as to a place appointed, / the power of that bowstring bears us, / aimed, as is all it shoots, at a joyful target.”] (*Par.* 1.124-126). The teleological implication described in this metaphor of God as archer is qualified by Dante's lexical choice of *decreto* from Latin *decretum* signifying decree and derived from *decernere* (to deliberate). In this way, humans participate with God in the soul's journey to its final resting place. The text of the *Commedia* cited in this study is reprinted from *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, edited by Giorgio Petrocchi, Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Dante Alighieri a cura della Società Dantesca, Florence, 1994 (1966-67).

² Translations of the *Commedia* are by Jean Hollander and Robert Hollander.

³ For a treatment of Beatrice's role in *Purgatorio* 30 as a place of transition in the journey of the pilgrim and in the youthful Dante, see Storey.

⁴ The event of Beatrice's physical death in the *Vita Nuova* comes to Dante first through presentiment (ch. 23), he records the event (ch. 28-29), postpones its treatment but continues to materialize her being (in chapter 34, he sat thinking of her while drawing an angel) until the sequences of time fall in line (at ch. 39) when he visualizes her in glory. See also Hollander, 1974.

⁵ Another example of Dante's use of *impetrare* and its semantic association with the efficacy of prayer can be found in *Purg.* 19.97-145 with the figure of Pope Adrian V whose story is emblematic of a conversion experience.

⁶ Beatrice will spell out Dante's errors clearly in the Terrestrial Paradise using an extended metaphor of waywardness that is introduced by Dante's tearful incipit, “Piangendo dissi: ‘Le presenti cose / col falso lor piacer volser miei passi, / tosto che ’l vostro viso si nascose.’” [“In tears, I said: ‘Things set in front of me, / with their false delights, turned back my steps / the moment that Your countenance was hidden.’”] (*Purg.* 31.34-39).

⁷ Barolini discusses the notion of pilgrimage (retracing that connection by beginning with *Convivio* 4.12.14-16) and Dante's recuperation of time in Purgatory as it aligns with Augustine's understanding of discernment in the desire of temporal and eternal goods.

⁸ References to Ovid's Narcissus are found at *Inf.* 30.128, *Purg.* 30.76-78, *Par.* 3.17-18 and *Par.* 30.85. See Brownlee and Starck.

⁹ The *torcere / drizzare* motif is designed by any variant of the verbs appearing together in ten or fewer verses. There are twenty-one occurrences of this motif in the *Commedia*, see Triggiano, 2010 and 2015.

DANTE'S POETICS OF REDIRECTION

¹⁰ *Convivio* IV.xii.18-19 explains the relationship between human desire and a soul's search for God through the metaphor of the pilgrim who is best advised to take the most direct route to his destination, "Veramente così questo cammino si perde per errore come le strade della terra. Che sì come d'una cittade a un'altra di necessitate è una ottima e dirittissima via, e un'altra che sempre se ne dilunga ... E sì come vedemo che quello che dirittissimo vae alla cittade, e compie lo desiderio e dà posa dopo la fatica, e quello che va in contrario mai nol compie e mai posa dare non può, così nella nostra vita avviene;" ("We may, however, lose this path through error, just as we may the roads of the earth. For just as from one city to another there is only one road which is of necessity the best and most direct, and another which leads completely away... And just as we see that the path which leads most directly to the city fulfills desire and provides rest when work is finished, while the one which goes in the opposite direction never fulfills it nor provides rest, so it is with our life.") Translation Princeton Dante Project (<https://dante.princeton.edu/pdp/convivio.html>).

¹¹ Of the many resources that shed light on the dreams of *Purgatorio*, these have been most useful in evidencing the function of dream in the education of the pilgrim: Basile, Boyde, Caligiure, Cervigni, Gregory, and Raby.

¹² Kirkpatrick's commentary of *Purgatorio* 19 highlights the quality of conversion at work in this episode as central to the personal history of Statius and in preparation for the pilgrim's catharsis in *Purgatorio* 30, "But, having established that free will is the central factor in human personality, Dante now goes on to explore an ultimate freedom that is located at the intersection of will and divine grace, whereby the mind is able to free itself entirely from the hold of ingrained habits – be they sensuous, emotional or intellectual – and embark entirely upon a new life" (413).

¹³ "Ne l'ora che non può 'l calor d'iurno / intepidar più 'l freddo de la luna, / vinto da terra, e talor da Saturno / –quando i geomanti lor Maggior Fortuna / veggiono in oriente, innanzi a l'alba, / surger per via che poco le sta bruna" ["At that hour when the heat of day, / cooled by earth and at times by Saturn, / can no longer temper the cold of the moon, / when geomancers see their *Fortuna Major* / rise in the east before the dawn, / which does not long stay dark for it"] (*Purg.* 19.1-6)

¹⁴ Count Ugolino is trapped in the frozen nature of his sin and has rendered himself incapable of conversion. While the semiotic value of his dream is not lost on him (Ruggieri = hunter; Ugolino and children = wolf and cubs), he does not apprehend its anagogical value as warning to his destructive ending. His inability to see beyond his self (he sees his face stamped on his children's faces) is subsumed in the notion of imprisonment: in his past in the Tower of Mews, and in the present and future in the frozen Cocytus.

¹⁵ Barańsky's nuanced analysis of the *femmina balba* with the discourse on love in *Purgatorio* 17 and 18 makes direct connections "as a mosaic put together from elements related to his guide's earlier account of the functioning of love in human beings" (216).

¹⁶ The cold and dark of the opening verses carry over and the reader is reminded of the simile of *Inferno* 2 when Dante, feeling bolstered by Virgil's words of promise and the guaranteed efficacy of the *tre donne benedette*, likens his renewed strength to flowers bent in the cold and dark that straighten under the light of the sun, "Quali fioretti dal notturno gelo / chinati e chiusi, poi che 'l sol li 'mbianca, / si drizzan tutti aperti in loro stelo" (*Inf.* 2.127-29).

¹⁷ See Gaunt.

¹⁸ "non ti maravigliar, ché ciò procede / da perfetto veder, che, come apprende, / così nel bene appreso move il piede" (*Par.* 5.4-6).

TRIGGIANO

¹⁹ St. Augustine says in his *Exposition* on Psalm 9, verse 15: “The foot of the soul is well understood to be its love: which, when depraved, is called coveting or lust; but when upright (*cum autem rectus*), love or charity.”

WORKS CITED

- Alighieri, Dante. *Convivio*, edited by Piero Cudini, Aldo Garzanti, 1980.
- . *The Divine Comedy 2: Purgatorio*. Edited and translated by Robin Kirkpatrick, Penguin Books, 2007.
- . *The Inferno, A Verse Translation*. Edited and translated by Jean Hollander and Robert Hollander, Anchor Books, 2002.
- . *The Paradiso, A Verse Translation*. Edited and translated by Jean Hollander and Robert Hollander, Anchor Books, 2008.
- . *The Purgatorio, A Verse Translation*. Edited and translated by Jean Hollander and Robert Hollander, Anchor Books, 2004.
- . *Vita Nuova e Rime*, edited by Fredi Chiappelli, Mursia, 1983.
- Augustine of Hippo. *Expositions on the Psalms*. Translated by J.E. Tweed, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First Series, vol. 8, edited by Philip Schaff, New York, Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888. Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1801009.htm>. Accessed 6 May 2020.
- Barańsky, Zygmunt G. “Dante’s Three Reflective Dreams.” *Quaderni d’italianistica*, vol. 10, no.1-2, 1989, pp. 213-36.
- Barolini, Teodolinda. “Purgatory as Paradigm: Traveling the New and Never-Before-Traveled Path of This Life/Poem.” *The Undivine Comedy*. Princeton UP, 1992, pp. 99-121.
- Basile, Maria Adelaide. “Al mattin del ver si sogna: i sogni di Dante nelle albe del *Purgatorio*.” *Dante: Rivista internazionale di studi su Dante Alighieri*, vol. 3, 2006, pp. 41-68. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26480903>. Accessed 1 April 2020.
- Brownlee, Kevin. “Dante and Narcissus, (*Purgatorio* XXX, 76-99).” *Dante Studies*, no. 96, 1978, pp. 201-06. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40166263>. Accessed 1 March 2020.
- Boyde, Patrick. “Imagining and dreaming.” *Perception and Passion in Dante’s Comedy*. Cambridge UP, 1993, pp. 119-39.

DANTE'S POETICS OF REDIRECTION

- Caligiure, Teresa. "La 'femmina balba' e la 'dolce serena.'" *Rivista di studi danteschi*. Roma, Salerno Editrice, anno 2, fascicolo 2, luglio-dicembre 2004, pp. 333-66.
- Cervigni, Dino S. "Dante's Poetry of Dreams." *Pacific Coast Philology*. Penn State UP, vol. 17, no.1/2, 1982, pp. 24-30. Accessed 19 May 2020. https://www-jstor.org.dom.idm.oclc.org/stable/1316391?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents
- Gaunt, Simon. "The Look of Love: The Gender of the Gaze in Troubadour Lyric." *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality, and Sight in Medieval Text and Image*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 79-95.
- Gregory, Tullio. "I sogni e gli astri." *I sogni nel Medioevo; seminario internazionale, Rome, 2-4 October 1983*, edited by Tullio Gregory, Edizioni Ateneo, pp. 111-48.
- Hollander, Robert. *Allegory in Dante's Commedia*. Princeton UP, 1969.
- . "The Invocations in Dante's *Commedia*." *Yearbook of Italian Studies*, vol. 3, 1976, pp. 235-40.
- . "Vita Nuova: Dante's Perceptions of Beatrice," *Dante Studies*, vol. 92, 1974, pp. 1-18.
- Kirkpatrick, Robin, editor and translator. *The Divine Comedy 2: Purgatorio*. By Dante Alighieri. Penguin Books, 2007.
- Raby, F.J.E. "Some notes on Dante and Macrobius." *Medium Ævum*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1966, pp. 117-21.
- Starck, Caroline. "Dante's Narcissus." *The Classical Outlook*, vol. 86, no. 4, Summer 2009, pp. 132-38.
- Storey, H. Wayne. "The Other Sword of *Purgatorio* XXX." *Dante Studies*, vol. 107, 1989, pp. 85-99.
- Triggiano, Tonia Bernardi. "Dante's Heavenly Lessons: Educative Economy in the *Paradiso*." *Essays in Medieval Studies*, ed. Mickey Sweeney, vol. 26, 2010, pp. 15-26.
- . "Imperative Persuasion: Educative Rectification in Dante's *Commedia*." *Essays in Medieval Studies*, edited by Elizabeth D. Weber, vol. 30, 2015, pp. 179- 192.