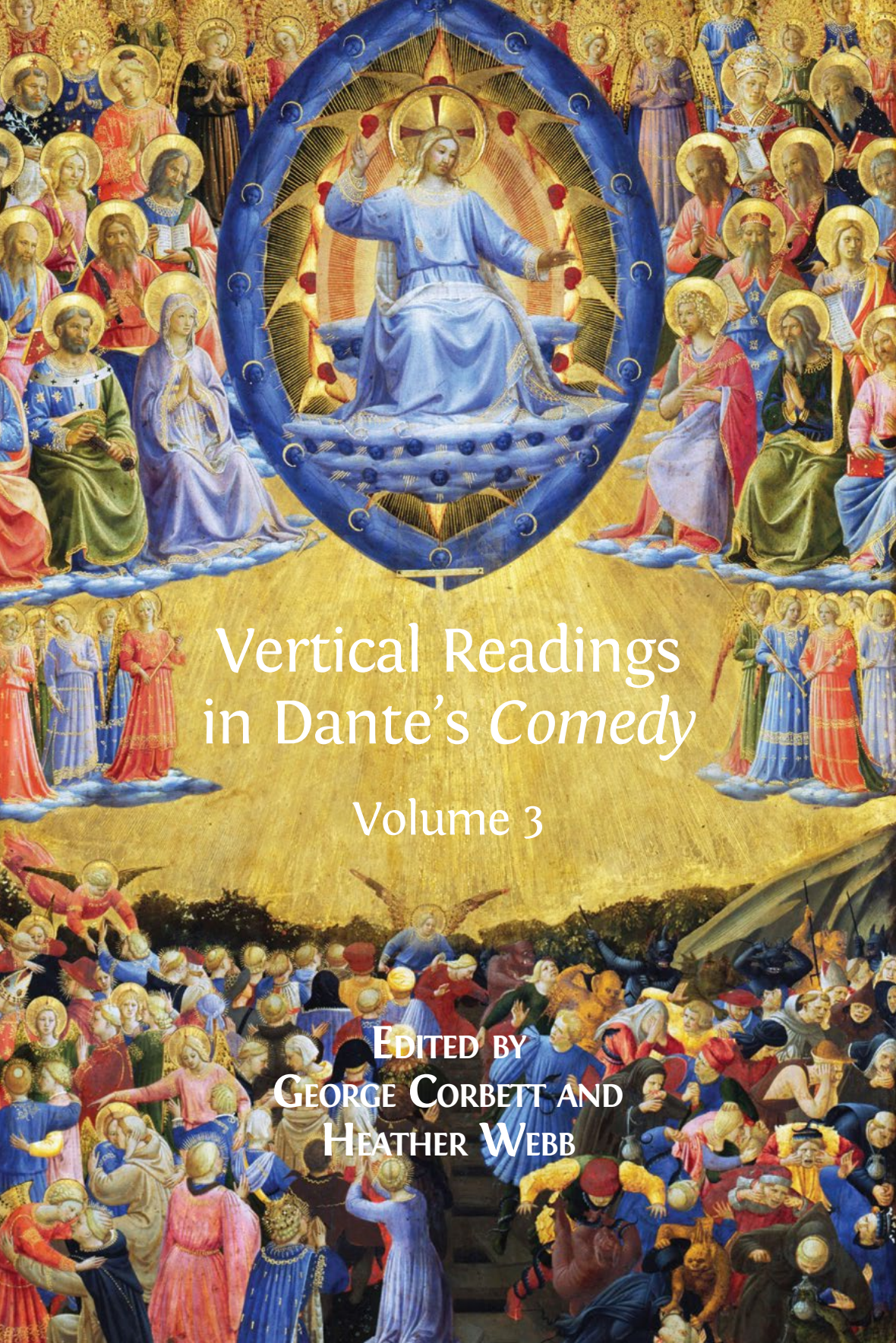

Vertical Readings in Dante's *Comedy*

Volume 3

Edited by
George Corbett and
Heather Webb

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33 and 34. Ice, Fire and Holy Water

Rowan Williams

'Freezing Fires' and Heavenly Motion

The end of the *Inferno* is shaped around images of stasis; nothing really *moves* in Hell, despite appearances. The homely image of a windmill (*Inf*., xxxiv. 4–6) evokes not only wind itself but flowing water. But for all the ferocity of the wind in Hell, its function is not to move, certainly not to grind wheat for nourishment, but to freeze: it blows in order to prevent motion, to turn flowing water to ice and to fix the damned in glassy immobility ('come festuca in vetro', *Inf*., xxxiv. 12). We have already encountered in *Inferno* xxxiii (ll. 91ff) the excruciating image of tears freezing as they flow, a kind of foretaste of the universal ice of the ninth circle. And the wind that keeps all things in their deathly stillness, in the cold that literally threatens to make Dante lose his voice (*Inf*., xxxiv. 22ff), is the effect of the beating of Satan's featherless bat-like wings, the three pairs of 'grand' ali' (l. 46) that agitate the air around him. Satan is himself immobilised in the ice: he is in some degree a parodic version of the unmoved mover of Paradise, the agitation of his wings causing only immobility and silence. It is worth noting that the cessation of movement and the cessation of *speech* go together in Hell, as the description of Dante's sense of suspension between life and death (*Inf*., xxxiv. 25–27) suggests: speech is a form of intelligent or purposive motion, and the wordless bliss of Heaven is not a cancellation of such motion but a kind of growth from and beyond it, as we shall see when we look at the culminating images of the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*.

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The contrast between the stasis and frozenness of Hell and the fluid motion of grace is very clearly signalled in the closing sections of the *Purgatorio*. The two rivers described in *Purgatorio* xxviii (ll. 121ff), Lethe and Eunoe, flow directly at the prompting of God. The water does not come from condensation produced by ice from mist; it is not the result of any cyclical process within creation. Whereas in Hell, grief is eternally fixed in frozen tears, so that destructive and painful remembrance can never be taken away, the waters of Purgatory flow (as a pure act of divine giving) to enable both forgetting and restoration, the forgetting of sin and the restoring (presumably) of the otherwise buried merit of good that has been done. The Earthly Paradise that is being described here is quintessentially a place where waters flow (*Purg*., xxviii. 25–33 and xxix. 7 etc.): the descriptions of Dante's encounter with Beatrice are shot through with the imagery of water flowing, immersion in water, even the melting of ice. When Dante hears the angelic choir singing 'In you, O Lord, have I hoped', the ice which has been constricting his heart melts into 'breath and water' (*Purg*., xxx. 82–99); the whole sequence of events up to the end of the *Purgatorio* describes his immersion in and drinking from the two rivers that will liberate him for Heaven. Beatrice teases him (*Purg*., xxxiii. 94ff) about his forgetfulness of his failures after drinking from Lethe (his forgetfulness actually indicates that there *is* something he needs to forget), and urges him on to drink from Eunoe (ll. 127–38). He rises from the *santissima onda* (l. 142), made ready for the transition to Heaven, and the language, echoing the familiar liturgical use of *unda* for the waters of baptism, makes it plain that what is happening is a recapitulation of the reality that baptism effects, swallowing the memory of evil and failure. Less insistently flagged but clearly in the conceptual landscape, the restoration of 'breath', *spirito* (*Purg*., xxx. 98), points us to biblical language about 'water and the (Holy) Spirit', as in, for example, the third chapter of St John's Gospel: it is baptism that releases both the divine spirit that adopts us into divine life and prosaically restores breath to the hoarse and constricted voice of the poet.

Thus the climax of the *Purgatorio* is depicted against the background of living water, the streams flowing in and from the Earthly Paradise like the biblical Tigris and Euphrates flowing from Eden (*Purg*., xxxiii. 112). Everything here is very deliberately opposed to the frigidity of Hell: water flows; the ice that paralyses the heart and constrains the voice melts; the water of the two rivers is both for drinking and for immersion. But the same kind of contrast is also at work in the final canto of the *Paradiso* in

connection with the imagery of wind and wings. The invocation of the Mother of God gives *ali* to the soul that wishes to rise and is humble enough to seek aid from her prayers (*Par.*, xxxiii. 15); yet the *proprie penne* of the mind cannot, even when lifted by grace, rise to the mysteries of the ultimate depths of the Trinitarian life (l. 141, and compare *Par.*, xxxii. 146 where St Bernard warns Dante of the fragility of *l'ali tue*). Similarly, if we take the language of *Paradiso* xxxii. 89 as it stands, the implication seems to be that there is a wind that blows in Heaven which brings all things together, *quasi conflati insieme*, mysteriously uniting substance and accidents in intelligible form, and showing them in one single and simple moment of enlightenment (Dante may here be thinking of Gregory the Great's phrase about St Benedict seeing all things as if gathered into one in the light of God[1]). The wind stirred by the Devil's wings is a force that keeps things rigorously apart, unrelated in their icy stillness; what it is in Heaven that causes the substances of the universe to be *conflati* is a power that interweaves and connects all things. And (though this is a little more speculative) where the *Inferno* uses the image of a huge ship's sails for Satan's wings (*Inf.*, xxxiv. 46–48), the *Purgatorio* itself begins (i. 1–3) with the image of a ship in full sail. *Paradiso* ii opens with another evocation of a journey on board ship towards our final destiny in the vision of Heaven; and there is a possible indirect echo in *Paradiso* xxxiii. 94–96, with Dante's evocation of Neptune's amazement at the sight of a fleet under sail as an analogy for his own wonder at the way the heavenly wind gathers the apparently fragmentary elements of creation together.

Frozen Speech and Heavenly Inarticulacy

We have already noted the convergence for Dante of speech with movement; hence the trajectory of the *Inferno* towards one kind of silence, and of the *Paradiso* towards a wordless intensity that is both supremely free movement and the ultimate stillness of universal harmony. Throughout most of the *Inferno*, the sinners are famously loquacious — autobiographical, minatory, complaining, defiant, or simply destroyed by grief (like Ugolino in canto xxxiii). It is only at the end that we find absolute silence, in Satan and the three traitors in his three mouths. Satan and Judas silence each other: Judas's head is inside the devil's mouth; but Brutus too hangs without a

1 Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, II.35.

word ('non fa motto', *Inf.*, xxxiv. 66) even though his head hangs free. The traitors have betrayed language itself: treason (which we have hitherto seen in dreadful but slightly less extreme shapes, as with Fra Alberigo earlier in canto xxxiii) is designated here in the depths of the pit as the ultimate sin, because it is a rebellion against the dependability of words and relations, an offence against that implicit promise that is made in all intelligible speech, that words can be relied on. Betrayal constitutes a sort of suicide of language, and so an unravelling of created reality itself as a system of intelligible relatedness. Satan, the root and paradigm of all treason, is speechless because he has directly turned his back on the living truth: he can have nothing to say that can be understood, and his silence is like a black hole at the centre of Hell, holding all its inhabitants as a sort of magnetic centre. And this is why, after the deathly stasis of the *Inferno*, the journey through Purgatory is, from one point of view, a recovery of convivial speech. In contrast to the traitors, who cannot even speak of the memory of their guilt, who are even further beyond penitence than the rest of the damned, Purgatory makes possible a truthful acknowledgement of sin, the voicing of human failure in a healing communal life: when Dante, struggling to articulate ('a pena ebbi la voce che rispuose', *Purg.*, xxxi. 32), confesses his turning away from truth, Beatrice commends him for neither being silent nor denying his guilt: by the climax of his conversation with her in canto xxxiii, Dante, having drunk from the waters of Lethe, has 'forgotten' not only the memory of his abandonment of the vision Beatrice represents, but also the obscuring of truthful speech by over-ambitious speculation. He must learn to hear naked words ('nude […] parole', ll. 100–01) from Beatrice, which will show him the distance between what he can grasp and the truth to which her contemplation looks: he must become completely receptive to the active reality he confronts, although this leaves him with a stronger-than-ever sense of incapacity to grasp what Beatrice is telling him (ll. 76–84).

So in Purgatory, there is a skilfully evoked tension between speech and listening; this is not the dead and despairing silence of Hell, but a chastening of fluent and confident speech that arises from the most extended efforts of the mind, a silence on the far side of mental and spiritual action and attention to what has been spoken and shown by the grace-filled interlocutor. The poet's speech is presented as halting, uncertain of itself. When the mind is so closely held by what it contemplates that it cannot

formulate an impression of it (indeed it is what the mind contemplates that literally and actively 'impresses'), there will be no subsequent words that can carry what has been communicated. And so in Paradise, this tension is again brought into focus at a point of climax: as sight takes over from speech, memory itself is 'outraged' ('cede la memoria a tanto oltraggio', *Par.*, xxxiii. 57), almost 'violated'. When you wake from a dream, you may know you are changed, that something has imprinted itself, even though nothing can be remembered. What has been experienced is still *present* in or to the mind in some sense, but cannot be summoned up as an object for mental examination (ll. 55–61). All that Dante can do is to pray that something may surface in the memory by God's gift, so that it may be left for posterity ('per tornare alquanto in mia memoria / e per sonare un poco in questi versi', ll. 73–74). The active mind at its supreme stretch of activity has to yield to vision; vision 'impresses' and leaves a lasting mark, but does not lend itself to easy, let alone adequate, speech; however, the 'outraged' memory may still be able to find some words to point to what has been encountered.

What Dante is bringing into view here is the transforming role of *interruption* in the encounter with God: speech is neither simply affirmed nor simply denied in its active relation to Him, but stretched, broken and re-established. Between the silence of utter shame and emptiness or self-evacuation in Hell and the silence of self-excess and ecstasy in Heaven, the poet's imaginative language exists: it seeks to give linguistic form to what has impressed itself upon the mind, but — precisely because it is stumbling in the wake of an action beyond its own comprehension or capacity — it will necessarily convey only 'un poco' [a little] (*Par.*, xxxiii. 69, 74). The more we try to speak, the more we fall short, failing to make sense even more dramatically than babies at the breast (ll. 106–08). In other words, we are warned by the poet that what we are reading is baby-talk, but also alerted that the reason it is baby-talk is not a shortage of things to say but an abundance, informed directly by the action of what is spoken about upon the receptive mind. Just as — in Beatrice's playful response to Dante's forgetfulness (*Purg.*, xxxiii. 94–97) — the fact of oblivion paradoxically shows that there was something to be forgotten, so the fact of inarticulacy shows that there is something to talk about, even if in bare fact we *cannot* adequately talk about it. The point echoes that made by St Thomas Aquinas, following Pseudo-Dionysius when he argues that it is the crudest or 'less

noble' metaphors for God that may be most communicative in some circumstances because we know they cannot literally apply.[2]

The language of interruption reminds us sharply that the entire narrative of the *Commedia* is about an interruption. Dante is really alive on earth but temporarily, imaginatively in the next world: what leads up to the climactic vision at the end of the *Paradiso* is a sequence of events and encounters out of due time, breaking into Dante's earthly life. The rationale of the whole narrative structure is this ultimate vision and its articulation in inarticulate words. In this sense, the whole poem that is the *Commedia* is the fruit of interruption: the poetic voice when turned upon its highest and most demanding subject, at the end of the *Paradiso*, demonstrates its authenticity by its own awkward and imperfect character, and the preceding narrative will show how and why this is so.

The point about interruption is ironically reinforced by the apparently bizarre episode, in *Inferno* xxxiii, that introduces a living person, Alberigo (ll. 121–27). If Dante is really on earth and only transiently, interruptively, in the next world, Alberigo, alive at the time of writing is only apparently alive on earth, as his eternal destiny is already fixed and he is 'really' in Hell; what now inhabits his body on earth is assumed to be some diabolical presence. Alberigo is a betrayer, one who has undermined the significance of the language we share; his fate foreshadows the climactic vision of the three great traitors in Satan's mouth. In a sense he *cannot* as a breaker of his word survive in human society on earth. He has already denied the convivial reality for which humanity is created and has shut himself off from grace — so we may as well imagine him in Hell and his body on earth preserved as a fictive covering only. Alberigo informs Dante that this punishment is not unique to him (mentioning the case of Branca Doria, also still 'alive' on earth): it is the natural penalty for those who break away from truth. Thus the fatally corrupted speech of the traitor like Alberigo is set over against the broken and remade speech of the believing poet: the traitor's plausible fluency takes him from earth to Hell, the poet's awkward witness to the active truth that has overtaken and impressed itself upon him allows him to survive in Hell, Purgatory and Paradise while still living out his time on earth. Dante's sojourn in the afterlife is like the sleep that overtakes him in *Purgatorio* xxxii (ll. 64–69), which is, significantly, compared with the sleep or trance that overtakes the apostles Peter, James

2 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 1, a. 9, ad 3.

and John as they are about to witness Christ's Transfiguration in the gospel narrative of Luke (9:32): just as the apostles wake up and see clearly the transfigured face of Jesus, so Dante wakes and sees Beatrice's handmaid, pointing him towards Beatrice herself among her heavenly companions (ll. 76–78). The sleep is an interval of grace as well as simply an interruption, a suspension of ordinary consciousness that will show itself in what is said after the episode and in the new capacity for clear sight that is given to the poet, but will escape anything like detailed description, however hard the poet tries. Or to put it another way again, the word-breaker like Alberigo treats words as cheap, to be discarded at will in the service of the greedy ego; the poet recognises words as monumentally weighty and even costly to bring forth, revealing among other things just how far short of reality the words of the still not-fully-redeemed self always are.

So in addition to the conversation about movement and stasis between the concluding cantos of the three sections, there is a conversation about speech itself. As we have seen, speech is tied up with motion: the lack of one accompanies the lack of the other. Hell is thus silent as well as frozen; and the ultimate silence and frozenness have to do with the primordial sin, the betrayal of the truth and in particular of pledged loyalty, truth in the sense of 'troth', we might say. When words are used to obscure reality and to break covenant, they damn us. So deeply is this true that the traitor still alive on earth is already dead in his or her sins, having resigned their life to the diabolical power of falsehood. Meanwhile, the poet struggling to find words for the excess of truth and reality or life that is encountered in the territories of the afterlife has to recognise that the best he or she can do is to allow grace to 'displace' the usual functioning of the mind — not in the way in which a demon displaces the soul of the living traitor, but with the same transforming effect that a dream exhibits. Something is changed, we live in another element, and so the words will not work exactly; but it is a work of sustained exactitude to say where and how they stop working. In this territory, image and metaphor operate, struggling to give form to what has been 'impressed', and the mind, so far from being simply arrested, journeys a literally unimaginable distance ('più e più intrava', *Par.*, xxxiii. 53). Something is seen and absorbed at ever-increasing depth, with language unsuccessfully trying to keep up.

And that is why we can trust what the poet says, because the language faithfully embodies its own challenge and struggle, breaking and healing repeatedly, but not being in any way frozen (note the unfreezing image yet

again at *Par*., xxxiii. 64, 'Così la neve al sol si disigilla', to describe the inner unloosing or releasing that is given in the trance of loving sight). Language, repeatedly challenged and purified, purged of the darker and more guilty memories which threaten to immobilise it, emerges from Purgatory ready to take the imprint of the divine mystery. Hell is the state in which the sinful, treasonous human attempt to reduce language to what we want and what will serve our distorted desires culminates at last in the ice of the ninth circle. Water — holy, baptismal water — flows again in Purgatory, rising simply at God's will, so that it is always flowing in the direction of our healing, so to speak, and its flowing becomes a potent metaphor for the renewal of speech.

The Movement of Love and the Fixity of Contemplation

The silence of Hell is necessarily a silencing or negating of *relation*. There is an anecdote in the fifth or sixth century *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* in which Hell is described as a place where no-one ever sees another's face; and Dante's Hell has at its centre a complex picture of relation dissolved, presented precisely in an image of faces turned away from each other. It is clear that — as has often been observed — Dante wants to present the central circle of Hell as a parodic version of the ultimate reality of Heaven: Hell is the radical denial of relation, faces that do not engage with each other, Satan's three faces all looking in different directions, and the faces of the arch-traitors either hidden or with their heads hanging downwards, out of Satan's sight. The supreme reality in Heaven is the vision of greater and greater 'involution', interdependence — first in the gathering together of all created things into a 'simple light' ('un semplice lume', *Par*., xxxiii. 90), which kindles fire in the mind ('la mente mia […] accesa', ll. 97–99), then in the climactic vision of the three circles, each three-coloured ('tre giri / di tre colori', ll. 116–17), two mirroring one another, the third infusing fire into the other two (ll. 118–20). Is Dante saying that each of the *giri* is of a different colour, or that each is three-coloured? There is a good case for the latter, especially as two are compared to 'iri' [rainbows] (l. 118): Satan's three faces are of different colours, and it would be appropriate for the three dimensions of the Trinitarian life to appear as the opposite of this. If so, the image is a visualisation of the fact that, in the Trinity, according to orthodox Catholic teaching, nothing is exclusively the property of any

one divine person. This unsurpassable divine reality is *circulazion* (l. 127), the eternal movement of each into the other, in absolute contrast to the multidirectional, fundamentally fractured faces of Satan; as if, while God knows and loves what God is and turns his gaze on his own life, Satan cannot and will not see himself: there is nothing there to see, no substantial good that can be contemplated with joy. The 'circles' of Heaven might be more appropriately rendered 'circular motions', 'orbits', to capture the movement implied in the use of *giri*. Again the contrast is being drawn between the simple stasis of Hell and the endlessly stable, even still, movement of Heaven.

The human image is either occluded or defaced in Hell: Satan consumes human bodies. But within the circling motion of the Trinitarian life, a human form is to be seen — *la nostra effige* (l. 131), our image. In some sense this is 'coterminous' with the circling orbits, but grasping how this might be or what language might express the coincidence of the two forms is, says Dante famously, like a geometer trying to calculate a circle's area without having the mathematical tools (ll. 133–35). The point is unmistakable, though: the focal contrast between Heaven and Hell is this ultimate *visibility* in Heaven of the human face and form, as opposed to its destruction in Hell. And if this is what characterises Heaven, there is always an invitation to engagement, and so to movement. As Robin Kirkpatrick puts it pithily in his notes on this canto, 'Dante is concerned to make action rather than being the ground of existence' — or perhaps we should say that he refuses to understand being without reference to action and relation.[3] At the end of the *Paradiso*, Dante's mind or imagination is fully aligned with the 'turning' of the universe by love; his desire now moves in rhythmic unity with the sheer motion of divine self-knowing and self-loving, enacted and embodied in the created world and supremely in the created yet ultimately revealing form of Jesus. The description of lightning striking the mind so as to bring God's will to inhabit that mind (ll. 140–41) picks up the recurrent imagery of fire and kindling, the spark, *favilla*, of human intelligence (l. 71) brought to a flame by God's lightning stroke, yet more unable than ever to find words for it (l. 142). What is left is the movement of longing that is activated by divine love.

Dante finds his mind, he tells us, *messo* (l. 132), set or arrested, like the mind of the baffled geometer which *s'affige* (l. 133) on the mystery:

3 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy 3: Paradiso*, trans., ed. with comm. by Robin Kirkpatrick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2007), p. 480.

the vision begins as bewildered, near-obsessive concentration on the strangeness of what is seen, and this intensity of bafflement has to be displaced or lifted to another plane by the divine 'percussion' of the *fulgore* (l. 140) that is sent from God (Augustine's language in *Confessions* IX.25 about the 'blow' by which we experience encounters with God may be in the far background here). But the language of being 'fixed' at this juncture of the poem's argument recalls the way the same imagery is used at the beginning of the canto, where we are told how God's eternal purpose or counsel is 'fixed' ('fisso', l. 3) in Mary. The paradox inbuilt into this language is that, while it might appear to the unwary reader to echo the immobility that characterises Hell, it actually designates a fixity of dependable relationship, within which the creature can move and even decide with the freedom that it is designed for. Throughout the history of creation, divine love realises itself in and through the liberty of the creature, neither substituting for it nor being absorbed into it. God's will for Mary is that she shall so display the nobility of human nature that its maker will not disdain to become 'made' as a result of her consent. The eternal self-consistency of God is now able to express itself, embody itself in humanity because the fixed purpose of God generates in Mary a fixed resolve of love in return. Similarly, at the end of the canto, with a neat twist on the same theme, the inexhaustible vitality of mobile interpenetration in the Trinitarian life produces a stillness in the contemplating mind, an acceptance of how permanently inadequate the created mind will be for reflecting the intense mobility of divine life. Mary is kindled into the motion of love by the stability of divine purpose; Dante is brought to stillness, even stupefaction, by the motion of divinity. But in both instances, what is happening is love moving itself eternally and moving creatures in their proper motions of harmony. The poem ends with just this evocation of the love that moves the heavenly bodies in perfection, a love with which the *disio* and *velle* (l. 143) of the creature are at last perfectly aligned — both fixed and free.

The ascent from Hell to Heaven, then, is the progression from the absolute self-assertion of the damned — above all, the traitors who believe that they can remake the world of language according to their selfish will — to the absolute self-renunciation of Heaven, where 'naked' words are used stumblingly and awkwardly both to evoke and to frame the silence of contemplation when God's self-gift breaks through into the created mind. The damned end up incapable of moving or being moved,

deprived of speech and of the other active uses of the senses; all they know is pain, pure passivity. Their attempt at active assertion has brought them to complete impotence and they can only be acted upon by that which ceaselessly devours, de-realises, them. The blessed are likewise in a state in which they are purely 'acted upon', but acted upon by the direct presence of love, so that they are liberated to move as they are meant to do, in love and in wonder — *fissi* and *messi* in the face of God's mystery, but, precisely *because* of this, also caught up into that created echo or reflection of divine movement that is the circulation of love and mutual service among finite beings, from stars to molluscs. Hell is where wings flap furiously but nothing is moved except empty air. Heaven is where wings fail but are caught up by the breath of grace.

Conclusion

The *Commedia* thus enacts what it describes, leading us from illusory action and the denial of language towards true action — action enabled by grace — and the proper transcendence of language; from the silence that is simply meaning evacuated and cancelled (the lies that lead to the devouring mouth of Satan) to the silence that follows the most intense and concentrated efforts to speak truly. The gracious stillness at the end of the *Paradiso* has to be won by the diverse and passionate 'movements' of the whole poem; to arrive at this paradoxical condition of being fixed within the divine freedom, we have to make the journey that the *Commedia* describes, tracing the downward trajectory that leads to faceless and impotent silence, rediscovering the possibility of speech that atones or amends.[4] And beyond this, the amending and amended speech of the penitent becomes informed and transformed by divine agency — which bestows not only grace of verbal or metaphoric form but the stumbling gracelessness of uncertainty and acknowledged inadequacy, now rendered as another embodiment of grace; so that the final silence is achieved as a triumphant surrender, not a conquest or a theophany but a being-at-home with infinite action, mediated through a created face. Robin Kirkpatrick catches this superbly in his note on the end of the *Paradiso*: this is 'the face that defines and makes possible

4 I have in mind, naturally, Geoffrey Hill's great essay on 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 3–20: 'in the constraint of shame the poet is free to discover both the "menace" and the atoning power of his own art' (p. 19).

all expression and speech from childhood on'; and it is also a moment of 'proliferation', a deeply generative moment of creativity made possible by mutual regard, the shared taking of time.[5] Contemplating God is the supreme example of taking time in attending to the other; the human face at the heart of the Trinity is a sign of how the God who becomes incarnate renders all human faces worthy of contemplation — and so too renders all human speech worthy of listening, even the tragic and lost voices of the sinners Dante has spoken with and spoken for in the earlier parts of the *Commedia*.

In a way that is familiar from the practice of so many poets of faith (think of Herbert, Hopkins and Eliot), the contemplative vision is figured and gestured to not simply by an absolute silence but by the use of words that slip behind and beneath themselves to let us know that the speaker acknowledges the failure of lyrical elegance as a response to the divine interruption. When Herbert, in poems like 'The Collar' or 'Grief', allows the flow of thought or metre to be sharply interrupted either by the voice of God or by the poet's own cry of hopelessness, when, as in 'Dialogue', he in turn interrupts the divine speech in order to admit his own defeat, or, as in 'Deniall', defers a satisfying rhyme scheme until the very last line, he is deliberately breaking the lyrical and technical finish of the poem's surface so as to indicate the irruptive presence of the God who cannot be called up by skill and rhetorical command. Dante does not break the flow of his scheme, but lets us know, in both the intricacy of his metaphor and the acknowledged inadequacy of the 'fit' of his words to what has been shown, that he is making no claim to a comprehensive telling of the mysteries of grace. Words exhibit grace as they *move*: that is a part of what poetry of any sort is about. Words that have to do with the unimaginable divine have to move more than most, to move out of their own light, out of their own confidence. And in the echo chamber of the imagery of the *Commedia*'s three movements, especially in these concluding passages, we have a trajectory of movement and speech released; a mobile and fragile enacting of how the stillness-in-motion of Heaven all at once inhabits, disturbs and 'fixes' human speech.

5 Kirkpatrick, *Paradiso*, pp. 479–80.

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