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## **Weathering the Afterlife**

### **The Meteorological Psychology of Dante's *Commedia***

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**ABSTRACT:** The essay investigates the meteorological phenomena represented in Dante Alighieri's *Commedia* and their interrelation with the subjectivity of the dead in Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Examining how the dead weather the afterlife and how the elements affect them, in turn, the essay takes the complex enantiosemey of the word 'weathering' as a conceptual guiding thread for the exploration of dynamics of exposure (*Inferno*), vulnerability (*Purgatorio*), and receptivity (*Paradiso*).

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# Weathering the Afterlife

## The Meteorological Psychology of Dante's *Commedia*

NICOLÒ CRISAFI AND MANUELE GRAGNOLATI

In this essay, we investigate the meteorological psychology of Dante's *Commedia*, which we define as the way in which human subjectivity is expressed and constituted in its exposure to weather phenomena.<sup>1</sup> Weathering provides us with a guiding thread to study this relation in a twofold way. First, we take weathering in the strict etymological sense of the word, as an action associated with the weather, such as rain, wind, and snow. In Dante's representation of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, these weather phenomena affect the dead exposed to the elements, for example, with the aim of punishing them, transforming them spiritually, or rewarding them. The second meaning of weathering that we bring to this analysis is more conceptual, as a notion belonging to a special class of words called enantiosemic. Enantiosemic words, sometimes called Janus words and named for their ability to look in two directions at once, bind together opposite connotations. As Christoph Holzhey explains in his [chapter in this volume](#), the term 'weathering' is a complex case of enantiosemy. On the one hand, it can be used to express the action of wearing something

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1 We are especially grateful to Y. Ariadne Collins, Vittoria Fallanca, Elena Lombardi, Francesca Southerden, and Alison Sperling for their insight and feedback on an early draft of this paper; and to the editors of this volume Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer for their comments and revisions on the last one.

down, as well as the opposite action of resisting wear. On the other hand, the word can be used to describe processes that are detrimental but also for those that are beneficial.<sup>2</sup> In what follows, we interrogate the different dimensions of the concept of weathering and trace and track their relations to the meteorological psychology of the *Commedia*. As we will see, in the three realms of Dante's afterlife, the dead weather in different ways: the damned of the *Inferno* experience their punishments with helplessness and sometimes defiance; the purging souls of *Purgatorio* are shielded from adverse weather and progressively learn to embrace their vulnerability; and the blessed of *Paradiso* are exposed to an unexpectedly extreme environment but fully open to it.

#### A NOTE ON WEATHERING AND MEDIEVAL METEOROLOGY

Any discussion of weathering that occurs outside of the English language must contend with the fact that the word is arguably untranslatable: no direct translation of the term 'weathering', in a Romance language, does justice to the distinctive enantiosemey of wearing down and resisting wear that we have highlighted above. Moreover, Italian does not have a word exclusively dedicated to the weather but must make do with the polysemous word 'tempo'. It is a fascinating word in its own right. Similarly to the French 'temps', the Spanish 'tiempo', and the Portuguese 'tempo', Italian 'tempo' accommodates three main meanings into one term: firstly, it refers to 'il tempo che fa', the weather; secondly, it connotes 'il tempo che passa', time; and thirdly, 'il tempo dei verbi', the tense of verbs, the temporality of an action.<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps by attending to these three meanings simultaneously that one can access the connotations of the English term, 'weathering', as the action

2 On the enantiosemey of 'weathering' see Christoph F. E. Holzhey's [chapter in this volume](#). For the analysis of how enantiosemey plays in the poetic language of Dante's *Paradiso*, see Sara Fortuna and Manuele Gragnolati, 'Dante after Wittgenstein: "Aspetto", Language, and Subjectivity from *Convivio* to *Paradiso*', in *Dante's Plurilingualism: Authority, Knowledge, Subjectivity*, ed. by Sara Fortuna, Manuele Gragnolati, and Jürgen Trabant (Oxford: Legenda, 2010), pp. 223–48.

3 For this distinction and its untranslatability in another Romance language, French, see 'Tems', in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. by Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

or process by which the weather wears something down and affects it with change over time.

The definition of weather as that which produces change was central to medieval meteorology. In Dante's time, the discipline was largely informed by Aristotle's *Meteorology*, a treatise that Dante mentions twice in the *Quaestio de aqua et terra* (14 and 83) and that circulated in two Latin translations as well as through the mediation of influential scholastic commentaries such as those by Albert the Great (c. 1200–1280) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274).<sup>4</sup> Meteorology was understood as part of natural philosophy, the branch of knowledge that studied 'things of Nature', which are characterized by the fact that they 'move and change'.<sup>5</sup> Aristotle's *Meteorology* followed his other works on change in general (*Physics*), the movements of the stars and heavens (*On the Heavens*), and change undergone by matter on Earth (*Generation and Corruption*). The area of Aristotelian meteorology in the Middle Ages included 'all the transient phenomena which are caused by the action of Heat and Cold and which involve [...] the transformation of the "simple bodies" [i.e., the elements earth, water, air, and fire] one into another'.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle and his medieval commentators studied a wider range of phenomena than modern meteorology, focussing on the so-called 'sublunary' world in its entirety, from the

4 Dante Alighieri, *Quaestio de Aqua et Terra*, ed. by Francesco Mazzoni, in *Opere*, dir. by Marco Santagata, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 2011–14), pp. 693–880. See Enrico Berti, 'De Meteoris (Meteorologica)', in *Enciclopedia Dantesca Italiana* (1970), <[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/de-meteoris\\_\(Enciclopedia-Dantesca\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/de-meteoris_(Enciclopedia-Dantesca))> [accessed 18 March 2020]; Patrick Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chapter 3: 'Meteorology', pp. 74–95; also Alison Cornish, 'The Vulgarization of Science: Dante's Meteorology in Context', in *Science and Literature in Italian Culture from Dante to Calvino: A Festschrift for Patrick Boyde*, ed. by Pierpaolo Antonello and Simon A. Gilson (Oxford: Legenda, 2004), pp. 53–71.

5 Aristotle, *Physics*, ed. by Francis Macdonald Cornford and trans. by Philip H. Wicksteed, rev. edn, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library, 228 and 255 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934–57), I, pp. 16–17 (I. xii. 185a12–13) (cf. Dante Alighieri, *Dante's 'Il Convivio'*, trans. by Richard H. Lansing, Garland Library of Medieval Literature, 65 (New York: Garland, 1990): II. xiv. 8–11). As Alison Cornish notes, 'Meteorology is technically absent and poetically present in the *Commedia* for one thing because it deals with change, which is the fundamental advantage the living have over the dead. The mutation of vapour into water, wind, frost, comet or earthquake serves as an analogue for the spiritual transformation that the poem's characters have already undergone' ('The Vulgarization of Science', p. 54).

6 Boyde, *Dante Philomythes*, p. 74.

surface of the Earth and its atmosphere to the sphere of the Moon. As such, meteorology investigated celestial bodies that are now considered part of astronomy (such as the Milky Way, comets, shooting stars and meteors) as well as the weather phenomena of the lower atmosphere that are more readily associated with modern meteorology (such as the formation and transformation of clouds, rain, mist, dew, frost, snow, and hail through such processes as evaporation and condensation). Most importantly for our purposes, meteorology was concerned with weather as an agent of environmental change. It discussed, for instance, the ways in which the formation of rivers and their exsiccation can gradually transform the geological configuration of their environment through phenomena that modern geology identifies with erosion, rising sea levels, desertification, and emersion of land masses.<sup>7</sup> This corruptibility of the Earth, its inherent exposure to wear and tear, was the defining characteristic of the entire ‘sublunary’ world. For Aristotle and his medieval commentators, then, weather was always already *weathering*: a process whereby atmospheric phenomena arise and affect the world.

#### A FROZEN *INFERNO*

Writing within this framework, Dante is interested in the weather mainly insofar as it affects human beings. Whereas in his other works such as *Convivio*, *De vulgari eloquentia*, and *Monarchia* this anthropocentric interest focuses primarily on the effects of local climates and earthly temporality on laws, customs, and language,<sup>8</sup> the *Commedia* — in line with its existential and moral focus — delves deeper into the relation between the elements and human subjectivity. Dante’s

7 Aristotle, *Meteorologica*, ed. and trans. by Henry D. P. Lee, rev. edn, Loeb Classical Library, 397 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 105 (i. xiv. 351a19–353a28).

8 For Dante’s references to how local climates affect customs and laws see Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia*, trans. by Prue Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): i. xiv. 6; for the ways sublunary temporality (‘tempo’/‘tempus’) wears down (and renews) language, see Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, trans. by Steven Botterill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): i. ix. 6; *Convivio* i. v. 9; and *Paradiso* xxvi, 124–38. For a discussion of the latter three passages, see Elena Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire: Love and Language in Augustine, the Modistae, Dante* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 129–40.

eschatological poem does so by dramatizing different modes in which the shades of the dead relate to the atmospheric phenomena, affecting them in the three very different realms of the afterlife. How do the souls relate to this force? Do they defy it, avoid it, or embrace it? Can their exposure be perilous and beneficial at the same time?<sup>9</sup>

In Hell, the realm of the afterlife represented in the first part of Dante's poem, brutal exposure to the elements characterizes the experience of many damned. Here we find a harsh, bare exposure to weather. In Hell, atmospheric phenomena are the means to inflict physical suffering on the damned (what contemporary theologians called *poena sensus*) and are designed to play a role in the divine punishments precisely for their concrete capacity to hurt, strike, scald, deform, consume, freeze, blind the dead through the aerial bodies that the separated souls can create in the Afterlife.<sup>10</sup> One is tempted to relate this insistence on weather as punishment to the Biblical story of the Flood in Genesis 6. In *Inferno*, extreme weather announces itself even before Dante sees it first-hand, when the ferryman of the dead, Charon, defines the infernal realm in terms of 'eternal darkness, [...] heat and chill' (*Inferno* III, 85).<sup>11</sup> *Inferno* displays some of the most extreme weather of the entire *Commedia*: tempestuous winds, putrid precipitations, a rain of fire, icy winds, hailstorms. The damned are completely exposed to the violence of the elements and helpless to them. In the second circle of Hell, for instance, 'a hellish [storm], that never rests' (*Inferno* v, 31) buffets the lustful, the first damned affected by physical pain that Dante meets on his journey (Figures 1 and 2).

9 On some positive aspects of 'exposure', see Alison Sperling's [chapter in this volume](#).

10 Medieval theologians insisted that fire of Hell and Purgatory is physical and struggled to justify how a soul separated from its body could feel corporeal pain. Dante imagines that when the soul separates from its body at physical death and gets to the afterlife, it can create a body of air that allows it to have a shape and continue to express sensorial faculties. See Manuele Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), pp. 67–87.

11 Quotations from Dante's poems are taken from *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 2nd edn, 4 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994). All translations from the *Commedia* are taken from Robert and Jean Hollander's three-volume edition of *Inferno* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 2000), *Purgatorio* (2003) and *Paradiso* (2007). The notable expression 'aere senza tempo' (timeless air; *Inferno* III, 29) is generally taken to refer to the absence of any succession of day and night in Hell but could also be read as a pun on the other connotation of the Italian 'tempo': the atmosphere of Hell might be 'timeless' yet it is anything but 'weatherless'.



Figure 1. 'The hellish storm, which never rests...' (*Inferno* v, 31). Project VORTEX-99, *Occluded Mesocyclone Tornado*, 3 May 1999, Anadarko, Oklahoma. Credit: OAR/ERL/National Severe Storms Laboratory/Wikimedia Commons.

Their punishment is an early example of an important structuring principle of Dante's afterlife — called *contrapasso* in *Inferno* xxviii, 142 — whereby the form of the punishments in Hell and Purgatory fits, by analogy or contrast, the sin that has been committed on Earth. Thus, as the lustful were buffeted by the passions in life, in Hell a real wind now 'sweeps [the] spirits in its headlong rush, | tormenting, whirls and strikes them' (*Inferno* v, 32–33); 'propel[s] the wicked spirits. | Here and there, down and up, it drives them' (42–43). The storm carries them away in a manner that matches the lack of control over their desire on Earth. Among the yells, cries, and laments, the lustful are also heard swearing against the action of the elements and the divine power that regulates them (35–36), manifesting that hatred is the only form of protest available to them against the punishment that afflicts them.<sup>12</sup>

12 The dead that are waiting to cross the Acheron river 'Bestemmiavano Dio e lor parenti' (*Inferno* iii, 103). Blasphemy as an act of defiance against the punishment is also expressed by Vanni Fucci (*Inferno* xxv, 1–3) and of course, the emblematic blasphemer, Capaneus in *Inferno* xiv, discussed below.



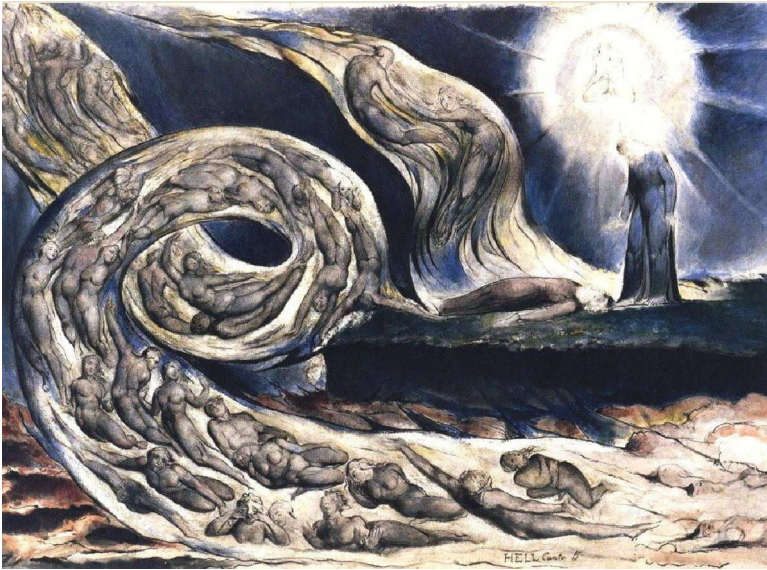


Figure 2. '[S]weeps [the] spirits in its headlong rush, | tormenting, whirls and strikes them': the torment of the lustful (*Inferno* v, 32–33). William Blake, *HELL canto 5*, 1824–27, pen, ink and watercolour, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

If the lustful lose autonomy of movement yet seem to maintain their physiognomy, the gluttons of the next circle are also cruelly disfigured in their appearance. As '[h]eavy hailstones, filthy water, and snow | pour down through the gloomy air' (*Inferno* vi, 10–11) and drown them into a malodorous mud, their anguish consumes them to the point that they are almost unrecognizable (41, 43–45).<sup>13</sup> As in the case of the lustful, the punishment of the gluttons functions in analogy with their sin and the filthy rain tormenting them replicates the effects that excessive eating and drinking has on the body.

It is among the dead of *Inferno* xiv–xvii that the 'logic' informing the damned's brutal exposure to the infernal punishment is laid bare. A fiery rain batters and burns those that have been violent against God — blasphemers, sodomites, and usurers: 'in slow descent, | broad flakes of

13 See the 'piova | eterna, maladetta, fredda e greve' (*Inferno* vi, 8–9); '[g]randine grossa, acqua tinta e neve | per l'aere tenebroso si riversa; | puta la terra che questo riceve' (10–12); 'le ombre che adona | la greve pioggia' (32–33).



Figure 3. '[I]n slow descent, | broad flakes of fire showered down' tormenting the violent (*Inferno* xiv, 28–29). Detail of a miniature by Bartolomeo di Fruosino, *Inferno* xiv, 14th century, MS It. 74, f. 42, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Credit: gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

fire showered down | as snow falls in the hills on windless days' (*Inferno* xiv, 28–30) (Figure 3).

These shades struggle to pat themselves down to ease the pain from the rain of fire (xiv, 40–42; xvii, 46–51), and are excoriated, blackened, and disfigured by their punishment (xv, 26–28; xvi, 30 and 35). The case of Capaneus is the most emblematic here: he was one of the mythical seven kings that assaulted the Greek city of Thebes and is encountered by Dante under the rain of fire that torments the blasphemers. Dante inquires about him:

chi è quel grande che non par che curi  
lo 'ncendio e giace dispettoso e torto,  
sì che la pioggia non par che 'l maturi?

(Who is that hero who seems to scorn the fire  
and lies there grim and scowling  
so that the rain seems not to ripen him?)  
(*Inferno* XIV, 46–48)

In a paradoxical way, Capaneus is both utterly helpless and proudly weather-resistant. On the one hand, he is prostrated by the rain of fire ('lies there', 47) which, according to one interpretation of the adjective 'torto' (47), contorts him under the pain of his torment. On the other hand, he compensates for this helplessness with 'scorn' (46), remaining defiant and resistant to any change.<sup>14</sup>

One could think that Capaneus's ability to face the extreme weather of Hell without it annihilating his body or bending his will and desires represents a successful form of 'weathering the storm'. However, the rest of the episode reframes Capaneus's resistance as his own major limit. As will become apparent in the *Purgatorio*, what is missing in Capaneus according to the conceptual framework of the poem — and what is impossible in Hell — is the leap from the exposure to pain to the realization of its beneficial potential. In this attitude, he is emblematic of the kind of weathering that is specific to the atmospheric phenomena of Hell as a place of hopeless damnation, where 'one of the features of [...] punishment is the incapacity of the damned to perceive their own damnation in any way beyond the brutality of their physical torment.'<sup>15</sup> Capaneus remains fixed in his rage, arrogance, and hatred, which the punishment does not wear down. When Capaneus proudly claims that Hell does not change him ('What I was alive, I am in death', 51) and continues blasphemously to challenge God in

14 The *Commedia's* authoritative editor Giorgio Petrocchi prefers to amend the text of line 48 to 'non par che 'l marturi' ('seems not to *torture* him', as translated by Hollander), meaning that Capaneus appears psychologically unaffected or physically unhurt by the torment of the rain of fire; but if we follow the manuscript tradition, the reading 'maturi' ('seems not to *ripen* him') places the emphasis on Capaneus resisting the opportunity to be ripened by the experience of torment, i.e., by developing some insight into his sinful past. See Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife*, pp. 115–16; and 'Gluttony and the Anthropology of Pain in Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*', in *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person*, ed. by Rachel Fulton and Bruce W. Holsinger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 238–50 (pp. 244–45).

15 Elena Lombardi, *The Wings of the Doves: Love and Desire in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), p. 48.

the same way as he did on Earth (52–60), Virgil — Dante’s guide through the afterlife — explains that the identity boasted by Capaneus is actually part of the infernal punishment itself, which consists in the dull and never-ending repetition of sin: ‘O, Capaneus, | because your pride remains unquenched | you suffer greater punishment. | In your anger lies your agony’ (62–65).<sup>16</sup> Indeed, as Mark Cogan explains, the fiery rain and the heat tormenting the damned in the seventh circle of Hell are ‘an exact replica of his sin itself’ and reflect the passionate wrath and unjustified irascibility of the sin of violence, and blasphemy in particular.<sup>17</sup>

This paradigm of weather-resistance, of exposure without change, can be read as a hallmark in the subjectivity of the *Inferno* as a whole. One critic has termed this condition as the ‘tragedy of rigidity’,<sup>18</sup> whereby the aerial bodies of the damned are constantly exposed to the elements while the souls continue to be stuck in their Earthly sin and to experience its devastating effects. This experience of fixation, entrapment, and spiritual impermeability is most poignantly expressed in the climate of the last zone of *Inferno*, at the very bottom of Hell. There the condition of utmost desolation is symbolized by a freezing cold, a negative weather made of the absence of light, warmth, and any possibility of change of state. The traitors, who for Dante have enacted the worst perversion of humanity, lie icebound in the frozen lake Cocytus (Figure 4) and are tormented by a glacial wind produced by the wings of Lucifer, himself stuck in the ice (*Inferno* xxxiv, 46–52).<sup>19</sup>

These extreme conditions constitute a limit case of what ‘weathering’ can mean. Glacial temperatures are a kind of weather whose action

16 Ironically, Capaneus expresses his defiance through meteorological imagery (*Inferno* xiv, 52–60): ‘the pagan Capaneus still defies Jupiter to take his vengeance by hurling thunderbolts until the arms of his giant smiths will be weary from forging them’ (Boyde, *Dante Philomythes*, p. 81).

17 Marc Cogan, *The Design in the Wax: The Structure of the ‘Divine Comedy’ and its Meaning* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1999), pp. 53–58, quotation on p. 58.

18 Thomas M. Greene, ‘Dramas of Selfhood in the *Comedy*’, in *From Time to Eternity: Essays on Dante’s ‘Divine Comedy’*, ed. by Thomas G. Bergin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 103–36 (p. 107).

19 The atmospheric conditions of the pit of Hell are also described directly or indirectly in *Inferno* xxxii, 22–75; xxxiii, 94–128; xxxiv, 4–9, 22.



Figure 4. 'I saw a thousand faces purple | with the cold': the traitors frozen in Lake Cocytus (*Inferno* xxxii, 70–71). Gustave Doré, *Inferno* xxxii, 1861, wood engraving. Credit: [gallica.bnf.fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr) / BnF.

expressly consists, not in gradually wearing down or consuming, but in congealing into a fixed state. The *Commedia* takes ice as the ultimate symbol of infernal subjectivity:<sup>20</sup> exposed to the punishment tormenting their body without spiritually softening their soul, the damned are petrified, trapped in their sin, and unable to change or improve.<sup>21</sup>

20 Hegel takes freezing as emblematic of the individuals as depicted in the *Commedia*. Although the passage concerns all three realms, we think that his description perfectly captures the specificity of infernal weathering: 'For as individuals *were* in their passions and sufferings, in their intentions and their accomplishments, so now here they are presented for ever, solidified into images of bronze. [...] [O]n this indestructible foundation the figures of the real world move in their particular character, or rather they *have* moved and now in their being and action are frozen and are eternal themselves in the arms of eternal justice' (G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Malcolm Knox, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), II, p. 1104 (part III. section 3. chapter. C. A. 3. ββ)). For a reflection on this passage, see Erich Auerbach, 'Dante and the Romantics', in *Time, History, and Literature: Selected Essays of Erich Auerbach*, ed. by James I. Porter, trans. by Jane O. Newman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 141–42.

21 See Manuele Gragnolati, *Amor che move: Linguaggio del corpo e forma del desiderio in Dante, Pasolini e Morante* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2013), pp. 79–83.

THE REGULATED ATMOSPHERE OF *PURGATORIO*

With its macho model of defiance against the weather and disavowal of his own vulnerability, Capaneus can be read as a version of the autonomous, closed, self-righteous subject that has been associated with Western modernity and ‘the violent practices of domination, exclusion, and devastation of which the subject itself is an accomplice.’<sup>22</sup> While this subject has been the object of critique and deconstruction for over a century, recently, feminist scholar Adriana Cavarero, in the wake of Judith Butler, has ‘concentrate[d] on the category of relation to rethink a subjectivity marked by exposure, vulnerability, and dependence.’<sup>23</sup> Moving now to *Purgatorio*, we are interested in exploring how it presents a model of subjectivity that resonates with this appreciation of vulnerability and suggests possibilities and conditions for its productivity. In particular, we will show how Dante’s Purgatory provides a regulated environment in which vulnerability can flourish and allow for the souls’ spiritual improvement and for the gradual weathering down of their disorderly dispositions and past fixations.

The Church’s official recognition of the otherworldly realm of Purgatory in the late thirteenth century was relatively recent in Dante’s time and had nothing like the extensive literary and iconographic tradition of Hell and Heaven to support it.<sup>24</sup> Unfettered by tradition, Dante had free rein in representing Purgatory as he pleased, and he devised it as a mountain lying in the Southern Hemisphere of the Earth, yet free from earthly weather. Earthly meteorology plays no role in the punishments that take place in its seven terraces. If, on this count, *Purgatorio* is deliberately set apart from the atmospheric torments of *Inferno*, its suspension of adverse weather would seem to

22 See Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*, trans. by Amanda Minervini and Adam Sitze (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), p. 12.

23 Cavarero, *Inclinations*, p. 11. Judith Butler’s work to which Cavarero is referring is *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004). For a more recent discussion of the political value of vulnerability, see *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed. by Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), especially the ‘Introduction’ by Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay, pp. 1–11, and the essay by Judith Butler, ‘Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance’, pp. 12–27.

24 Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

share the assumption that exposure is inextricable from harm. The early cantos open on beautiful clear skies (*Purgatorio* I, 13) and breezy (117, 123), sunlit (122) landscapes that will characterize the mountain as a whole, yet, as we will now see, they are also haunted by flashbacks and reminders of weather as a harmful force.

A first reminder is offered by Dante's guide Virgil who explains that in the afterlife the souls are given a body of air precisely for its capacity to suffer pain.<sup>25</sup> Extreme heat and freezing colds are central to Virgil's definition of the body of air as capable of being affected by physical torment:

A sofferir tormenti, caldi e geli  
simili corpi la Virtù dispone  
che, come fa, non vuol ch'a noi si sveli.

(The power that fits bodies like ours  
to suffer torments, heat, and cold  
does not reveal the secret of its working.)  
(*Purgatorio* III, 31–33)

'[T]ormenti, caldi e geli' here echo the line 'ne le tenebre etterne, in caldo e 'n gelo' that defines Hell in the parallel canto (*Inferno* III, 85; quoted in the previous section). The new context is notable for the absence of the adjective 'eterno'. The verb 'sofferir' (31) works like the enantiosemic 'weathering', its opposite connotations 'to bear' and 'to feel' expressing comparable dynamics. By speaking of the experience of torment in atmospheric terms, then, the tercet above articulates a theme of the wider *Purgatorio* where the torments have a weathering effect on the souls even though weather phenomena are deliberately toned down in the canticle and never directly harnessed as instruments of torment as they are in *Inferno*.

The harmful potential of the weather is thematized more directly in the tales of Manfred of Hohenstaufen (*Purgatorio* III) and Jacopo del Cassero, Buonconte da Montefeltro, and Pia dei Tolomei (*Purgatorio*

25 Perhaps because as a virtuous pagan of Limbo he is unacquainted with Purgatory, Virgil does not say more here. Later in the canticle the poet Statius will give the technical, precise explanation that when the soul separates from its earthly body and gets to the afterlife, it can indeed create a body of air that has not only an appearance but also all the senses and can therefore be affected by physical pain (*Purgatorio* xxv, 19–108).

v), which foreground the extreme vulnerability of the mortal body to weather phenomena. These shades portray their earthly body as fluid, fragile, easily dispossessed — a body susceptible to being weathered and wounded irrecoverably.<sup>26</sup> The controlled environment in the terraces of Purgatory proper will eventually allow the dead to reclaim the experience of physical torment into a means for spiritual healing; however, at this early stage of Antepurgatory, the souls appear to be haunted still by fear of the potential dangers of physical exposure and vulnerability on Earth.<sup>27</sup> Such is the emblematic case of the nobleman Buonconte da Montefeltro, whom Dante meets among those who repented at the last minute before dying a violent death. Buonconte relates the dissolution of his own corpse on Earth as it fell prey to the force of the elements, embodied by a torrential flood. His speech contains the most extended description of the causes and effects of precipitation and the formation of rivers in the *Commedia*, which accurately follows Aristotle's *Meteorology*.<sup>28</sup> The rains and ensuing flood freeze, sweep, undo, spin, overcome, cover, and enclose Buonconte's corpse:

Ben sai come ne l'aere si raccoglie  
 quell'umido vapor che in acqua riede,  
 tosto che sale dove 'l freddo il coglie.  
 [...] mosse il fummo e 'l vento  
 per la virtù che sua natura diede.  
 Indi la valle, come 'l di fu spento,

- 
- 26 See Gary Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), pp. 109–34. As Cestaro argues: 'the souls of antepurgatory had come to depend upon the apparent solidity of their temporal bodies as emblematic of a stable individual identity. They had not paid sufficient attention to the inherent fluidity of bodies so evident — as canto 5 dramatically attests — in the text of the created universe. *Purgatorio* v shows us that temporal identity mistakenly depends upon bodily integrity, for just as the elemental body (of a person, of the earth, of the universe) is fragile and fluid, so is earthly personhood in time' (p. 110)
- 27 Antepurgatory is the first of the three parts of *Purgatorio*, which constitutes a transitional, dilatory space before the proper purgation can begin (*Purgatorio* I–IX).
- 28 Buonconte's tale is demonic in origin (*Purgatorio* xxv, 111–112) yet the description of its formation through the condensation ('si converse', 117) of vapour ('umido vapor', 110) into water ('acqua', 110, 117) at higher altitudes and lower temperatures ('tosto che sale dove 'l freddo il coglie', 111), which results in it falling down as rain ('la pioggia cadde', 118) is verisimilar and scientifically accurate according to Aristotle's *Meteorologica*, pp. 68–121 (i. ix–xiv. 346b16–353a28), and indeed, with some terminological tweaks, to modern meteorology.



[...] coperse  
 di nebbia; e 'l ciel di sopra fece intento,  
 sì che 'l pregno aere in acqua si converse;  
 la pioggia cadde, e a' fossati venne  
 di lei ciò che la terra non sofferse;  
 e come ai rivi grandi si convenne,  
 ver' lo fiume real tanto veloce  
 si ruinò, che nulla lo ritenne.

Lo corpo mio gelato in su la foce  
 trovò l'Archian rubesto; e quel sospinse  
 ne l'Arno, e sciolse al mio petto la croce  
 ch'i' fe; di me quando 'l dolor mi vinse;  
 voltòmmi per le ripe e per lo fondo,  
 poi di sua preda mi coperse e cinse.

(Surely you know how a column of moist air,  
 rising to colder heights, condenses  
 and once again is changed to water.

[...] natural power  
 [...] roused the fog and wind.

Then, when the day was spent, he shrouded  
 the valley [...] in mist, and darkened the sky with clouds  
 so that the pregnant air was turned to water.  
 The rain fell and the overflow that earth  
 could not absorb rushed to the gullies  
 and, gathering in surging torrents, poured  
 headlong down the seaward stream  
 with so much rage nothing could hold it back.

At its mouth the blood-red Archiano found  
 my frozen corpse and swept it down the Arno,  
 undoing at my chest the cross  
 my arms had made when I was overcome by pain.  
 It spun me past its banks and to the bottom,  
 then covered and enclosed me with its spoils.)  
 (*Purgatorio* v, 109–29)

As a soul who has suffered a violent death, Buonconte is doubly aware of the vulnerability of his body. His powerful description is a reminder that in contrast to what happens in the Afterlife, vulnerability on Earth has limits: the living do not possess the same capacity for limitless harm that is proper to the body-of-air of the dead, and exposure will eventually result in annihilation (Figure 5).<sup>29</sup>

29 On the limits and sustainability of intensity and receptivity, see Rosi Braidotti, 'Intensive Genre and the Demise of Gender', *Angelaki*, 13.2 (2008), pp. 45–57 (p. 52).



Figure 5. Buonconte's dispossessed body: 'the blood-red Archiano found | my frozen corpse and swept it down the Arno' (*Purgatorio* v, 124–25).

Gustave Doré, *Purgatorio* v, 1868, wood engraving.

Credit: gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

Antepurgatory plays this scene of unchecked vulnerability over and over again, intertwining it, more often than not, with the violence of the elements. This is seen in the first place with the tale of the excommunicated king Manfred, whose body is wounded and broken ('rotta la persona', *Purgatorio* III, 118) and whose bones ('l'ossa del corpo mio', 127) are left at the mercy of the elements ('Or le bagna la pioggia e move il vento | di fuor dal regno, quasi lungo 'l Verde, | dov' e' le trasmutò a lume spento' [Now the rain washes and the wind stirs them | beyond the Kingdom, near the Verde's banks, there | where he brought them with his torches quenched], 130–32). The scene is then repeated in the tale of the murdered Jacopo del Cassero, who graphically describes his death by blood loss ('lì vid'io | de le mie vene farsi in terra laco', *Purgatorio* v, 83–84) 'as bodily blood flows

back to join marsh, lake, and sea.<sup>30</sup> Lastly, after Buonconte's tale, the dissolution of the earthly body also closes the canto in the pithy line by Pia dei Tolomei, who was apparently murdered by her husband: 'Siena made me, in Maremma I was undone' (Siena mi fé, disfecemi Maremma; *Purgatorio* v, 134). As these episodes show, there is only so much an earthly body can weather. Having established this, the rest of *Purgatorio* will shelter the purging shades from the inclement weather and sharpen the focus of their punishments in a regulated atmosphere where vulnerability can be reclaimed and turned into a means for positive transformation. It is on this regulated atmosphere that we reflect in the second part of this section.

The most distinctive feature of the purgatorial environment is a negative one: the absence of any adverse weather. The mountain of Purgatory is still part of Earth but, beginning with the seven terraces of Purgatory proper where the souls purge the residue of their earthly sins and recuperate their original perfection, its atmosphere is subject to a special dispensation. The microclimate of Purgatory proper is explained to Dante and Virgil by the Latin poet Statius, whom they encounter at the completion of his purgatorial process when he is ready to ascend to Heaven. Statius describes Purgatory as a regulated environment, free from weather changes:

Cosa non è che sanza  
ordine senta la religione  
de la montagna, o che sia fuor d'usanza.  
Libero è qui da ogni alterazione:  
di quel che 'l ciel da sé in sé riceve  
esser ci puote, e non d'altro, cagione.  
Per che non pioggia, non grando, non neve,  
non rugiada, non brina più su cade  
che la scaletta di tre gradi breve;  
nuvole spesse non paion né rade,  
né coruscar, né figlia di Taumante,  
che di là cangia sovente contrade;  
secco vapo non surge più avante  
ch'al sommo d'i' tre gradi ch'io parlai.

(The mountain's holy law does not allow  
anything disordered or that violates its rule.

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30 Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar*, p. 124.

Here nothing ever changes.  
 Only by that which Heaven gathers from Itself,  
 and from nothing else, can any change be wrought  
     so that not rain nor hail nor snow  
 nor dew nor hoarfrost falls above  
 the gentle rise of those three steps below.  
     Clouds, dense or broken, do not appear,  
 nor lightning-flash, nor 'Thaumas' daughter,  
 who appears in many places in the sky down there,  
     nor does dry vapor rise beyond the highest  
 of those three steps of which I spoke.)  
 (*Purgatorio* XXI, 40–53)

The prevalent rhetorical mode in these lines is one of negation, which appear eleven times over fourteen lines, concentrating in the negative list of weather phenomena that are *not* in *Purgatorio*: rain, hail, snow, dew, hoarfrost (46–47); clouds, lightning-flash, rainbows, dry vapour (which caused winds) (49–50, 52). The phenomena excluded are not only those that were harnessed in Hell as punishments (wind in the circle of the lustful; rain, hail, and snow in the circle of the gluttons; lightning evoked by Capaneus in the circle of the violent; hoarfrost in the circle of the traitors) but also those that are represented in a more positive light in the liminal spaces of the shores of Antepurgatory and Eden (dew) and in Heaven (rainbows). This atmospheric regulation by exclusion is conceived in terms of order, rule, and norm: with two double negations we are told that the sacred rule *cannot* be affected by anything 'without order' or 'outside the norm' (41–42).<sup>31</sup> The rest of the quote gives this atmospheric control a positive spin, as the exclusion of bad weather in this regulated environment is described in the language of freedom: 'Libero è qui da ogne alterazione' (The mountain is free from all change; 43).

31 Manfredi Porena has understood the phrase 'sacra religione | de la montagna' (*Purgatorio* XXI, 40–41) to refer not to the constitution of the mountain but more specifically to the 'community of the purging souls'. If this interpretation is correct, then the verb 'senta' ('to feel', 'to be affected', 41) would support the idea that the purging souls cannot feel or be affected by any distracting weather forces. See Manfredi Porena on *Purgatorio* XXI, 40–42; references to commentaries of the *Commedia* are taken from the Dartmouth Dante Project available online at <<https://dante.dartmouth.edu/>> [accessed 8 April 2020].

Freedom is a keyword of *Purgatorio*, strategically placed through the beginning, middle and end of the cantica.<sup>32</sup> The freedom to be attained in Purgatory is not conceived in terms of a positive liberty to do whatever one pleases but as a negative liberty from disorderly disposition and affect; in other words, as control of one's desires through reason. There thus seems to be a relation between this specific form of free subjectivity in the making and the atmosphere that enables it in *Purgatorio*. Purgatory, the realm predicated on the possibility of controlling passion and effecting (spiritual) change, is itself tightly controlled and free from all (atmospheric) change. To some of the readers of this paper in the early twenty-first century, the status of Dante's Purgatory as a fantasy of controlling and even harnessing the weather in a protected, productive, and well-structured environment may evoke problematic fantasies of geoengineering as a strategy to alter the effects or pace of climate change.<sup>33</sup> There is certainly a sense in which the atmospheric regulation is conceived, anthropocentrically, as a space for the souls to undertake their normative spiritual path. However, from the perspective of the souls of Purgatory, the mountain is not an opportunity for asserting their mastery over their environment, but a place where they can experience, exercise, and achieve, in all safety, a protected form of vulnerability. In this way, and in contrast with the extreme exposure which the damned attempt to weather, or that have the potential to annihilate the living, the vulnerability to pain depicted in *Purgatorio* is channelled into a productive experience of understanding and growth, a veritable transformation that gradually

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32 Key passages are the opening canto, where Virgil famously refers to Dante as one who goes searching for freedom ('libertà va cercando', *Purgatorio* I, 71); the discourse of freedom is then theorised more at length in the central canti of the *Commedia*, *Purgatorio* XVI–XVIII, which discuss the theological doctrine of free will ('libero arbitrio', *Purgatorio* XVI, 71); and the word returns as the poet reaches the top of the mountain and Virgil proclaims that Dante's will is finally free ('libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio', *Paradiso* XXVII, 143):

33 For a feminist critique of geoengineering in the face of climate change, see Holly Jean Buck, Andrea R. Gammon, and Christopher J. Preston, 'Gender and Geoengineering', *Hypatia*, 29.3 (2014), pp. 651–69. For a critique of architecture that adopts instead strategies of resilience: Orit Halpern, 'Hopeful Resilience', *e-flux*, 19 April 2017 <<https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/accumulation/96421/hopeful-resilience/>> [accessed 8 April 2020]. We are grateful to Alison Sperling for these insightful suggestions.

wears down the wrong dispositions of the past and re-opens the self to a correct form of love and desire.

This is the action of weathering in the Purgatory imagined by Dante. Earthly or infernal weathering involves the violent action of concrete weather phenomena; in Purgatory, these are suspended so that a more meaningful and productive form of weathering can take place, independent of the weather phenomena themselves but capturing their transformational powers. It is a beneficial connotation of ‘weathering’, like the action of airing one’s linen or ‘lifting [a hawk’s] confinement and putting them back in their element.’<sup>34</sup> What is weathered away, in this weathering without weather, are the incrustations, accretions, and bad habits accumulated over the course of a lifetime, which targeted torments safely exfoliate, erode, and consume. As the gatekeeper of Purgatory Cato of Utica puts it on the shores of Antepurgatory, the mountain’s purpose is precisely to help these souls shed their past accretions: ‘spogliar[si] lo scoglio | ch’esser non lascia a voi Dio manifesto’ (shed the slough | that lets not God be known to you; *Purgatorio* II, 122–23).<sup>35</sup> The punishments of *Purgatorio*, thus, do not coincide with a senseless exposure but operate weathering with focus, direction, and an end as a way to target, in progressive steps, the seven deadly dispositions of Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Greed, Gluttony, and Lust. In particular, the process of Dante’s Purgatory is centred around the figure of the suffering Christ and imagined as the experience of suffering that teaches the soul how to gradually erode these dispositions and conform to Christ’s gratuitous and selfless love.<sup>36</sup> As an example of this targeted weathering, we will turn to the sixth terrace, where the gluttons are punished not by the force of the elements but by their own longing for sweet-smelling fruits and a murmuring spring of fresh water, tantalizingly out of reach. Their

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34 See Holzhey, ‘Weathering Ambivalences: Between Language and Physics’, in this volume, p. 29.

35 This process can be conceived in terms of the ‘logic of complementarity’ inherent in the action of weathering, whereby something is gained through a process of weathering away; thus in *Purgatorio* the process of purgation transforms the souls spiritually as it erodes their disordered accretions. On the logic of complementarity, see Damiano Sacco’s chapter in this volume.

36 Manuele Gragnolati has written about the Christological paradigm of Dante’s Purgatory and the concept of ‘productive pain’, *Experiencing the Afterlife*, pp. 89–137.



Figure 6. ‘The sockets of their eyes resembled rings | without their gems’: the emaciated gluttons (*Purgatorio* xxiii, 31–32). Detail of a miniature by Priamo della Quercia, *Purgatorio* xxiii, 1440s, MS Yates Thompson 36, f. 107, The British Library, London.  
Credit: The British Library/europeana.

environment is idyllic in all other respects. Yet, in their purgation, these souls are worn to their bare bones: emaciated, their eyes hollow, their face pale, their skinned stretch out over their bones (Figure 6):

Ne li occhi era ciascuna oscura e cava,  
palida ne la faccia, e tanto scema  
che da l’ossa la pelle s’informava.

Non credo che così a buccia strema  
Erisittone fosse fatto secco,  
per digiunar, quando più n’ebbe tema.

Io dicea fra me stesso pensando: ‘Ecco  
la gente che perdé Ierusalemme,  
quando Maria nel figlio diè di becco!’

Parean l’occhiaie anella senza gemme:  
chi nel viso de li uomini legge ‘omo’  
ben avria quivi conosciuta l’emme.

(Their eyes were dark and sunken,  
their faces pales, their flesh so wasted  
that the skin took all its shape from bones.

I do not believe that Erysichthon had become  
so consumed, to the very skin, by hunger  
when he was most in terror of it.

I said to myself in thought:

'Behold the people who lost Jerusalem  
 When Mary set her beak into her son!  
     The sockets of their eyes resembled rings  
 without their gems. He who reads 'omo"  
 in men's faces would have easily made out the 'm'.)  
 (*Purgatorio* XXIII, 22–33)

In addition to comparing the gluttons' emaciation to two horrible cases of starvation, the poem also associates it with Christ: the word 'omo' that the pilgrim reads on the face of the shades (32–33) recalls the passage in John's Gospel, where, during his Passion, the flagellated Christ is crowned with thorns and presented by Pilate to the crowd with the expression 'Ecce homo': 'Ecce homo' sounds very similar to the Dantesque 'legge omo', and 'Ecco' (28) and 'omo' (32) are rhyme words within four lines of each other.

In contrast with the damned from Hell, the distortion of the shades' features is a manifestation, not of sin, but of conforming to the crucified Christ, his selfless love, and productive pain. In a paradoxical way that does not mask the intensity of the suffering, the souls in Purgatory embrace pain, through identification with Christ, as a form of pleasure:

E non pur una volta, questo spazzo  
 girando, si rinfresca nostra pena:  
 io dico pena, e dovria dir sollazzo,  
     ché quella voglia a li alberi ci mena  
 che menò Cristo lieto a dire 'Eli',  
 quando ne liberò con la sua vena.

(And not once only, circling in this space,  
 is our pain renewed.  
 I speak of pain but should say solace,  
     for the same desire leads us to the trees  
 that led Christ to utter *Eli* with such bliss  
 when with the blood from His own veins He made us free.)  
 (*Purgatorio* XXIII, 70–75)

The gluttons become increasingly raw and exposed but in a protected, controlled, and well-structured environment that does not destroy them but exfoliates their rigidity and allows them to recuperate the original likeness with God that sin had hidden. In the process of



purgation, disorderly dispositions are softened, and the souls learn such virtues as humility, meekness, temperance, and generosity. They can experience a form of vulnerability that overcomes self-righteous and self-referential fixation and makes them 'inclined' and open to others.<sup>37</sup> Significantly, as Joan Ferrante has argued, the experience of Purgatory also teaches the souls to reconstruct societal bonds, rebuild a sense of community, and 'become citizens of the ideal society'.<sup>38</sup>

Dante's Purgatory is attractive in imagining the possibility for a productive experience of pain, a viable vulnerability, and an inclined subjectivity. At the same time, the importance of a highly regulated environment would seem to correspond to the widespread view that Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay take as the starting point of their feminist critique, namely 'that vulnerability requires and implies the need for protection and the strengthening of paternalistic forms of power'.<sup>39</sup> However, Purgatory is meant as a transient rather than ideal state, and it prepares the souls for Heaven, where, as we will see in the next section, the weather conditions are far less restrained but the blessed no longer need protection.

#### HEAVENLY HEAT

At the top of the mountain of Purgatory, what awaits the newly weathered soul is the idyllic garden of Eden, a *locus amoenus* where spring is eternal ('qui primavera sempre e ogne frutto' [here it is always spring, with every fruit in season], *Purgatorio* XXVIII, 143) and the atmosphere is characterised by 'un'aura dolce, senza mutamento' (A sweet breeze, without any change; *Purgatorio* XXVIII, 7). This also is a controlled environment, one last stop for the souls to experiment

37 On the ethical posture of inclination, see Cavarero, *Inclinations*. Both in Antepurgatory and especially in the seven terraces of Purgatory proper, souls gather in groups and assume postures defying straightness and autonomy. For instance, the indolent Belacqua is found leaning over his knees among a group of late-repentants who are resting in the shade (*Purgatorio* IV, 103–109), the proud are bent under the weight of rocks (*Purgatorio* X, 130–39), the envious lean against the wall of the terrace and against each other (*Purgatorio* XIII, 59–60), and the avaricious lie flat on the ground (*Purgatorio* XIX, 70–75).

38 Joan Ferrante, *The Political Vision of Dante's 'Comedy'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 198–252 (p. 198).

39 Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay, 'Introduction', p. 1.



Figure 7. 'Nor will such shining have the power to harm us' (*Paradiso* xiv, 58). Detail of a miniature by Giovanni di Paolo, *Paradiso* xiv, 1440s, MS Yates Thompson 36, f. 154, The British Library, London.  
Credit: The British Library/europeana.

with exploration and wandering a while longer, before their leap to Heaven. Given this portrayal of Eden, one might expect the garden to be an anticipation of what Heaven might look like — a place of imperturbable bliss and enjoyment, free from the distraction and pain of the elements' most adverse effects. However, Dante's representation of Heaven overturns this comforting expectation. In *Paradiso* the weather is not controlled or sublimated but, on the contrary, its intensity is dialled up. The weather of the canticle does not feature precipitations, supernatural phenomena, freezing temperatures, or earthquakes but is dominated instead by a relentless atmospheric condition of extreme light and heat — we call this the heavenly '*canicule*' after the heatwave that hit the planet in the Summer of 2019, as we were beginning to write this paper in France.

As Lino Pertile and Heather Webb pointed out, there is more fire in *Paradiso* than in *Inferno*, and references to fire, heat, and burning are accordingly much more numerous in the third canticle than in the previous ones.<sup>40</sup> The condition of being in Dante's Heaven resembles that of being exposed to a heatwave, which the blessed experience as a

40 Lino Pertile, 'L'antica fiamma: La metamorfosi del fuoco nella *Commedia* di Dante', *The Italianist*, 11.1 (1991), pp. 29–60; Heather Webb, *Dante's Persons: An Ethics of the Transhuman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 123–62, esp. p. 125.

sensation of intense burning: they are ‘infiammati’ (inflamed; *Paradiso* III, 52) and ‘ard[ono]’ (burn; xxxi, 100). While light is the external and visible indication of the divine love informing Heaven, fire also manifests the intensity of the vision attained by the blessed souls and that of the joy resulting from it:

La sua chiarezza séguita l’ardore;  
l’ardor la vision, e quella è tanta,  
quant’ha di grazia sovra sua valore.

(Its brightness answers to our ardor,  
the ardor to our vision, and that is given  
in greater measure of grace that we deserve.)  
(*Paradiso* XIV, 40–42)

Having themselves become ‘sempiterno fiamme’ (eternal flames; XIV, 66) and ‘lucenti incendi’ (fiery lights; XIX, 100), the blessed souls are not only affected by the weather but also contribute to it insofar as they radiate the heat they feel back to one another. In this way, far from being simply immersed in the heatwave, the blessed are sources of extreme heat in turn.<sup>41</sup> As Heather Webb has shown, *ardore* qualifies ‘the intensity of attention that one person can offer to another,’<sup>42</sup> and the blessed souls’ ardent burning is a sign that they have overcome any self-enclosure or rigidity and are now enjoying a form of radical dispossession that merges them with God and opens them to others. Yet, while the souls open up to the divine environment and melt with it, they are not completely annihilated and, paradoxically, their fusion occurs without fully dissolving them, their memories, desires, or consciousness.<sup>43</sup>

The heat and burning running throughout the *Paradiso* culminate in the final cantos of the poem. Dante the character’s final leap into

41 See Pertile, ‘L’antica fiamma’, pp. 31–32. The heavenly condition of exposure to the heatwave and embodiment of it can be read as suggesting the collapse of distinctions between human beings and their environment. For this idea in contemporary new materialism and in particular in the work of Stacy Alaimo, and Astrida Neimanis and Rachel Loewen Walker, see Christoph F. E. Holzhey’s [chapter in the present volume](#).

42 Webb, *Dante’s Persons*, p. 125.

43 On the paradox of Heaven as at once losing and finding oneself, see Manuele Gragnolati, ‘Diffracting Dante’s *Paradiso*: Transformation, Identity, and the Form of Desire’, in *Reception, Translation, and Transformation of Italian Literature*, ed. by Brian Richardson, Guido Bonsaver, and Giuseppe Stellardi (Oxford: Legenda, 2017), pp. 352–66.

Transcendence can take place only when his *ardour* reaches its peak of intensity:<sup>44</sup>

E io ch'al fine di tutt' i disii  
 appropinquava, sì com'io dovea,  
 l'ardor del desiderio in me finii.

(And, as I neared the end of all desire,  
 I extended to its limit, as was right,  
 the ardor of the longing in my soul.)  
 (*Paradiso* xxxiii, 46–48)

However, if the heatwave is the hallmark of Dante's Heaven, its status should not be taken for granted. Spiritualizing interpretations maintain that, unlike the weather phenomena of Hell, it is entirely and exclusively metaphorical, to be understood as a fire of love and desire.<sup>45</sup> In Lino Pertile's view, emblematic of this position, the fire of love is reified as a form of *contrapasso* in *Inferno* and has a therapeutic purpose at the end of the terrace of the lustful in *Purgatorio* xxvii, 10–57 (anticipated in xxv, 138–39), as a 'real' fire, with a flame that burns literally; but in Heaven, it is reduced to a metaphor whose meaning takes on positive connotations.<sup>46</sup> Instead, in stressing the concreteness of the extreme atmospheric conditions of Heaven and the intense burning of the blessed, we insist on the literal character of the heavenly *canicule* even as it acquires a spiritual dimension as a manifestation of the love and vision of Transcendence that are disclosed in Heaven.

*Paradiso* reiterates that the light and heat of heaven are intense enough to be destructive on any mortal body that were to be exposed to them. For instance, they are so violent that they must be temporarily tempered for the benefit of Dante, who is travelling through the afterlife with his earthly body and would otherwise burn alive. This restraint, which is reminiscent of the suspension of weather in *Purgatorio*,

44 See Webb, *Dante's Persons*, pp. 160–63. On this understanding of the term *finii*, see Lombardi, *The Wings of the Doves*, p. 125.

45 'il fuoco del *Paradiso*, contrariamente a quello infernale, non fa fumo ne brucia nessuno, perché è tutto e soltanto metaforico, e fuoco d'amore e di desiderio, ove non sia ardore di luce' (Pertile, 'L'antica fiamma', p. 30). Curiously, Pertile concedes that the spiritualising interpretations comes 'at the risk of contradicting Dante himself' (*ibid.*).

46 Pertile, 'L'antica fiamma', p. 30.

only lasts as long as Dante's journey, thus indicating the physical violence of the heavenly *canicule* by human standards. Beatrice illustrates its force by comparing it to the myth of Semele, who burned to ashes the moment she chose to see the pagan god Zeus face-to-face in all his splendour. For the protagonist Dante, who, exceptionally, is voyaging through Heaven, the myth of Semele still functions as a cautionary tale:

E quella non ridea; ma 'S'io ridessi,  
 mi cominciò, 'tu ti faresti quale  
 fu Semelè quando di cener fessi;  
     ché la bellezza mia, che per le scale  
 de l'eterno palazzo più s'accende,  
 com'hai veduto, quanto più si sale,  
     se non si temperasse, tanto splende,  
 che 'l tuo mortal podere, al suo fulgore,  
 sarebbe fronda che trono scoscende.'

(She was not smiling. 'If I smiled,'  
 she said, 'you would become what Semele became  
 when she was turned to ashes,  
     for my beauty, which you have seen  
 flame up more brilliantly the higher we ascend  
 the stairs of this eternal palace,  
     is so resplendent that, were it not tempered  
 in its blazing, your mortal powers would be  
 like tree limbs rent and scorched by lightning.)  
 (*Paradiso* XXI, 1–12)

Beatrice explains that if she were to smile fully, she would risk annihilating Dante's mortal body with her radiance like a lightning strikes a tree (11–12). Temporarily tempering her splendour (10), she makes heaven safe for Dante, and lets herself be seen.

Such self-restraint and protectiveness, as Beatrice displays in this passage, does not concern the fleshless souls of the blessed in their constant exposure to their environment. Far from sheltered and insulated, they are able to feel heavenly weather and burn with its ardour without being harmed. Similar to Hell, there is no change here but the blessed souls have a different way of 'weathering the storm' to the impermeable rigidity of a Capaneus: they are able to sustain the full intensity of the environment, yet they simultaneously demonstrate a

radical receptivity to it, which is in turn an integral part of their bliss. While this ability, at once to receive and endure paradisiac warmth, is essential to the experience of the blessed souls, in the heaven of the Sun Solomon explains that earthly bodies will also be unharmed once they resurrect and reunite with their souls at the end of time:

né potrà tanta luce affaticarne:  
ché li organi del corpo saran forti  
a tutto ciò che potrà dilettarne.

(Nor will such shining have the power to harm us,  
For our body organs shall be strengthened  
to deal with all that can delight us.)  
(*Paradiso* XIV, 58–60)

The organs of the resurrected body are exposed but ‘strengthened’ (59), the ‘shining’ (58) of the flesh is intense but does not ‘have the power to harm’ them (58). The weather can be dialled up in Heaven precisely because the blessed are ready to enjoy intensity without annihilation (Figure 7).

Radically open even to the extreme conditions of its environment, the ideal subjectivity represented in *Paradiso* is not self-involved or defiant (as in Hell) or sheltered (as in Purgatory) but discovers that it does not have to fear being radically receptive even as it is radically exposed. The weathering of *Paradiso* constitutes an answer to the mitigated, ‘safe’ weathering of *Purgatorio* just as much as to the antagonistic weathering of *Inferno*. *Paradiso* dramatically removes the protected setting of *Purgatorio* and reveals a form of subjectivity that is finally capable of abandoning all rigidity and closure even in the most extreme of circumstances. Having relinquished aggressiveness, self-enclosure, and pretence of autonomy, heavenly subjectivity neither needs protection nor fears unmediated exposure, but is capable of enjoying the blinding light without having to close itself off from its burning intensity.



Figure 8. '[S]o much of the sky seemed set on fire | by the flaming sun' (*Paradiso* I, 79–80). Olafur Eliasson, *The Weather Project*, 16 October 2003 – 21 March 2004, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London.  
Credit: Bradley Clark/Wikimedia Commons.

Nicolò Crisafi and Manuele Gragnolati, 'Weathering the Afterlife: The Meteorological Psychology of Dante's *Commedia*', in *Weathering: Ecologies of Exposure*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer, *Cultural Inquiry*, 17 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2020), pp. 63–91 <[https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-17\\_04](https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-17_04)>

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