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Vertical Readings  
in Dante's *Comedy*

Volume 2

*edited by*  
*George Corbett and Heather Webb*

# 16. Politics of Desire<sup>1</sup>

Manuele Gragnolati

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One of the challenges posed by the format of the vertical reading has been that none of the Sixteens are self-standing but are, instead, emphatically and explicitly part of diptychs or triptychs: like *Inferno xv*, *Inferno xvi* deals with sodomy and also initiates the episode of Geryon that will continue in the following canto; *Purgatorio xvi* is the first canto within a long and fundamental meditation on human agency, on the relationship between desire and reason, which continues in *Purgatorio xvi* and *xviii* and culminates with the dream of the Siren in *Purgatorio xix*; and *Paradiso xvi* is the central canto of the Cacciaguida episode, in which the pilgrim encounters his ancestor and is told about both the good old days of ancient Florence and the exile awaiting him in the future.<sup>2</sup> In other terms: *Inferno*

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- 1 I would like to thank George Corbett and Heather Webb for inviting me to take part in the Cambridge *Vertical Readings* series. I would also like to thank Christoph Holzhey, David Bowe, Tristan Kay, Elena Lombardi and Francesca Southerden for their comments on former drafts of this paper. I am particularly grateful to Simon Gilson for his precious comments on my reading and for letting me read his essay '*Inferno xvi*' before its publication in the *Lectura Dantis Andreapolitana*, ed. by Claudia Rossignoli and Robert Wilson (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, forthcoming). I have found it very interesting and helpful and I rely on it for several of the points I make on *Inferno xvi*.
  - 2 Indeed, Michelangelo Picone writes that *Inferno xvi* is a 'canto aperto'. See Michelangelo Picone, '*Canto XVI*', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Inferno*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2000), pp. 221–32 (p. 221). Of *Paradiso xvi* Denis Fachard writes that 'ovviamente non sta a sé e quindi non può rivendicare una qualsiasi autonomia'. See Denis Fachard '*Canto XVI*', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Paradiso*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2002), pp. 230–42 (p. 231). For a recent, compelling reading of *Purgatorio xvi–xix*, see Elena Lombardi, *The Wings of the Dove: Love and Desire in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2012).

xvi is the final canto of a diptych, while *Purgatorio* xvi and *Paradiso* xvi are the first and middle cantos of their respective triptychs.

Moreover, the sixteenth cantos are not only overtly part of a larger group of cantos, but — like all cantos of Dante's *Comedy* — are closely related to the rest of the poem and to Dante's other works. The issue of sodomy in cantos xv–xvi of the *Inferno* has been discussed together with canto xxvi of *Purgatorio*,<sup>3</sup> while the meditation on desire begun in *Purgatorio* xvi is a theme that runs throughout the entire *Comedy* and all of Dante's other works.<sup>4</sup> The relationship between papacy and empire at the centre of *Purgatorio* xvi is not only a *leitmotif* of the whole *Comedy*, but also the very topic of Dante's *Monarchia*, the Latin treatise on political theory that Dante wrote while he was already working on the *Comedy*. And, finally, the theme of the city and Florence dealt with in *Paradiso* xvi begins to be addressed explicitly in the encounter with Ciaccio in *Inferno* vi and is never abandoned for the rest of poem.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, the challenge of my vertical reading, which I am sure I share with the other contributors to the series, lies precisely in the fact that these cantos deploy many themes and motifs that reach out not only to the rest

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3 Some of the stimulating essays that have addressed and tried to explain the different treatment of sodomy and sexuality in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* include: Bruce Holsinger, 'Sodomy and Resurrection: The Homoerotic Subject of the *Divine Comedy*', in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. by Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 241–74; Gary Cestaro, 'Pederastic Insemination, or Dante in the Grammar Classroom', in *The Poetics of Masculinity in Early Modern Italy and Spain*, ed. by Gerry Milligan and Jane Tylus (Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2010), pp. 41–73 and 'Is Ulysses Queer? The Subject of Greek Love in *Inferno* 15 and 26', in *Dante's Plurilingualism: Authority, Vulgarization, Subjectivity*, ed. by Sara Fortuna, Manuele Gagnolati and Jürgen Trabant (Oxford: Legenda, 2010), pp. 179–92; Bill Burgwinkle, 'The Form of Our Desire: Arnaut Daniel and the Homoerotic Subject in Dante's *Commedia*', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10 (2004), 565–97; and Heather Webb, 'Power Differentials, Unreliable Models, and Homoerotic Desire in the *Comedy*', *Italian Studies* 68 (2013), 17–35.

4 See Lino Pertile, *La punta del disio. Semantica del desiderio nella 'Commedia'* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2005) and, most recently, Elena Lombardi, *The Wings of the Dove*, and Manuele Gagnolati, *Amor che move. Linguaggio del corpo e forma del desiderio in Dante, Pasolini e Morante* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 2013). See also the essays in the volume *Desire in Dante and the Middle Ages*, ed. by Manuele Gagnolati, Tristan Kay, Elena Lombardi and Francesca Southerden (Oxford: Legenda, 2012).

5 See at least the studies by Joan Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the 'Divine Comedy'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Catherine Keen, *Dante and the City* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003); and Claire Honess, *From Florence to the Heavenly City: The Poetry of Citizenship in Dante* (Oxford: Legenda, 2006).

of the poem,<sup>6</sup> but also to Dante's other works and to medieval culture in general, not to mention various topics related to our contemporary concerns. And yet it has been striking to realize that the Sixteens also share something significant, that is, a sense of nostalgia for a past irremediably lost that contrasts with the degeneracy of the present. My vertical reading will focus on this contrast, although it will also frame it within the larger context of each of the sixteenth cantos, in the attempt both to discuss the way in which it is specifically articulated in *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, and to delineate a common discourse that, as we shall see, raises questions about the human agency and autonomy usually celebrated in Dante's *Comedy* as well as about Dante's attitude towards politics and history. In a way, I will offer a traditional reading that proceeds through the cantos but, rather than moving from *Inferno* to *Purgatorio* to *Paradiso*, I will also invert the verticality of the format and begin with *Inferno* xvi, jump to *Paradiso* xvi and finish with *Purgatorio* xvi, which seems the most 'theoretical' of the three cantos and indeed attempts to resolve some of the issues we find in the other two, while also illuminating some of their tensions.

### *Inferno* xvi

As I mentioned before, canto xvi of *Inferno* concludes a diptych dedicated to the sinners of sodomy. Sodomy is punished in the circle of violence, the seventh circle of Dante's Hell, which is divided into violence against others, violence against the self, and violence against God. Sodomy is classified as a form of violence against God, which takes three forms: violence against God directly (blasphemy), against God's offspring, nature (sodomy), and against God's 'grandchild', art (usury). As with the blasphemers and the usurers, the punishment of the sodomites also consists of being exposed to a rain of fire in a burning desert, but while the blasphemers lay supine on the fiery sand and the usurers are sitting, the sodomites run in a continuous circle.

The canto opens with three shades leaving their group and approaching Dante-pilgrim and Virgil in a way that immediately sets the dominant tone of the canto:

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6 On the implications that this has for the whole concept of vertical reading, see Simon Gilson's own vertical reading of cantos vii. Simon Gilson, 'The Wheeling Sevens', in *Vertical Readings in Dante's 'Comedy'*, ed. by George Corbett and Heather Webb (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), pp. 143–60.

Venian ver' noi, e ciascuna gridava:  
 'Sòstati tu ch'a l'abito ne sembri  
 esser alcun di nostra terra prava'. (*Inf.*, xvi. 7–9)

[Together they came toward us, each one calling: 'Stop, you, who by your garb appear to be a man from our degenerate city'.]<sup>7</sup>

Just as in *Inferno* x, among the heretics, the Florentine Ghibelline leader Farinata degli Uberti had understood that Dante-pilgrim was Florentine thanks to his accent, so too, now, these shades recognize from Dante's clothing that he and they all come from the same city, which they immediately call 'nostra terra prava' [our degenerate land]. The parallel between the encounter with Farinata in *Inferno* x and these lines at the start of canto xvi anticipates the nature of the sinners that Dante will meet in the second part of the diptych: while in canto xv the sodomites encountered by Dante were mainly 'cherici / e litterati di gran fama' [famous clerics and men of letters] (l. 107), including Dante's own 'mentor' Brunetto Latini, canto xvi is populated with civic and military leaders who were active in Florence around the mid thirteenth century, albeit in this case the shades are Guelfs and not, like Farinata, Ghibellines.

Virgil shows great respect towards these shades and even urges the pilgrim to be courteous towards them:

'Or aspetta',  
 disse, 'a costor si vuol esser cortese.  
 E se non fosse il foco che saetta  
 la natura del loco, i' dicerei  
 che meglio stesse a te che a lor la fretta'. (*Inf.*, xvi. 11–15)

[Now wait: to these one must show courtesy. And were it not for the fire that the nature of this place draws down, I would say that haste suits you far more than it does them.]

When the running shades come nearer to the pilgrim, one of them addresses him in a very elaborate tone and with a great display of rhetorical skill:

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<sup>7</sup> I quote the text of the *Commedia* from Dante Alighieri, *'La Commedia' secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols, 2nd rev. edn (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994), while translations are taken from Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander, 3 vols (New York: Doubleday, 2000–2007).

Qual sogliono i campion far nudi e unti,  
 avvisando lor presa e lor vantaggio,  
 prima che sien tra lor battuti e punti,  
 così rotando, ciascuno il visaggio  
 drizzava a me, sì che 'n contraro il collo  
 faceva ai piè continüo viaggio.

E 'Se miseria d'esto loco sollo  
 rende in dispetto noi e nostri prieghi',  
 cominciò l'uno, 'e 'l tinto aspetto e brollo,  
 la fama nostra il tuo animo pieghi  
 a dirne chi tu se', che i vivi piedi  
 così sicuro per lo 'nferno fregghi'. (*Inf.*, xvi. 22–33)

[As combatants, oiled and naked, are wont to do, watching for their hold and their advantage, before the exchange of thrusts and blows, wheeling, each fixed his eyes on me, so that their feet moved forward while their necks were straining back. One began: 'If the squalor of this shifting sand and our blackened, hairless faces put us and our petitions in contempt, let our fame prevail on you to tell us who you are, who fearless move on living feet through Hell'.]

Some critics have noticed that the comparison with the naked bodies of wrestlers carries an erotic overtone, something that is already present in the previous canto's encounter with Brunetto Latini, and it is certain that the sodomite speakers in the two cantos also share a strong investment in fame.

The shade addressing the pilgrim reveals that the group is formed of three Florentine Guelf leaders, all of whom had died by 1272 and who were renowned for their patriotic deeds in Dante's youth: Guido Guerra, Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, and the speaker Iacopo Rusticucci. In this moment the readers realize that two of these souls belong to the group of past Florentine leaders about whose place in the afterlife the pilgrim inquired when he had encountered the Florentine Ciaccio among the gluttons in *Inferno*, vi. 79–84. While on that occasion Ciaccio had already explained that these souls were all in Hell, Virgil shows the same admiration towards the Florentine sodomites that the pilgrim had shown for them in *Inferno* vi, and that, in turn, corresponds to the esteem that they enjoyed in the time of Dante's youth.

Indeed, the pilgrim's reaction on meeting these shades is still one of great appreciation:

S'ì fossi stato dal foco coperto,  
gittato mi sarei tra lor di sotto,  
e credo che 'l dottor l'avria sofferto,  
ma perch'io mi sarei bruciato e cotto,  
vinse paura la buona voglia  
che di loro abbracciar mi facea ghiotto. (*Inf.*, xvi. 46–51)

[Had I been sheltered from the fire I would have thrown myself among them, and I believe my teacher would have let me. But because I would have burned and baked, fright overcame the good intentions that made me hunger to embrace them.]

It has been argued that the pilgrim's attraction is also erotic<sup>8</sup> — and I would agree that overtones of same-sex attraction are present in both this and the previous canto — but what mainly concerns me here is that the political theme takes over and the pilgrim confirms that he also does indeed come from Florence:

'Di vostra terra sono, e sempre mai  
l'ovra di voi e li onorati nomi  
con affezion ritrassi e ascoltai.  
Lascio lo fele e vo per dolci pomi  
promessi a me per lo verace duca;  
ma 'nfino al centro pria convien ch'ì' tomi'. (*Inf.*, xvi. 58–60)

[I am of your city. How many times I've heard your deeds, your honoured names resound! And I, too, with affection spoke your names. I leave bitterness behind for the sweet fruits promised by my truthful leader. But first I must go down into the very core.]

The shades do not show any sign of interest in the pilgrim's journey of salvation from Hell to Heaven but, instead, continue to rely on fame and to care only for reports of Florence — and this interest merely in the affairs of this world is something that they share not only with Brunetto, but also with Farinata. In particular they want to know if 'cortesia e valor' [courtesy and valour] are still present in their city, because the soul of a certain Guglielmo Borsiere recently arrived in Hell had brought them worrisome news:

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8 See for instance Holsinger, 'Sodomy and Resurrection', pp. 247–52.



‘Se lungamente l’anima conduca  
 le membra tue’, rispuose quelli ancora,  
 ‘e se la fama tua dopo te luca,  
     cortesia e valor dì se dimora  
 ne la nostra città sì come suole,  
 o se del tutto se n’è gita fora;  
     ché Guglielmo Borsiere, il qual si duole  
 con noi per poco e va là coi compagni,  
 assai ne cruccia con le sue parole’. (*Inf.*, xvi. 64–72)

[‘That your spirit long may guide your limbs’, he now added, ‘and your renown shine after you, tell us if valour and courtesy still live there in our city, as once they used to do, or have they utterly forsaken her? Guglielmo Borsiere, grieving with us here so short a time, goes yonder with our company and makes us worry with his words’.]

As Gilson explains, *cortesia* and *valore* are terms expressing ‘not just societal values and elegant behaviour, but a complex knot of ethical values linked to moral dignity, chivalric courtliness, nobility, and above all measure and order’.<sup>9</sup> With a violent tone similar to that of a prophet from the Old Testament, the pilgrim angrily confirms that courtesy and valour have indeed disappeared from Florence, replaced by the ‘orgoglio and dismisura’ [excess and arrogance] that have been created by a new social class and its economic interests:

‘La gente nuova e i sùbiti guadagni  
 orgoglio e dismisura han generata,  
 Fiorenza, in te, sì che tu già ten piagni’.  
     Così gridai con la faccia levata;  
 e i tre, che ciò inteser per risposta,  
 guardar l’un l’altro com’ al ver si guata. (*Inf.*, xvi. 73–78)

[‘The new crowd with their sudden profits have begot in you, Florence, such excess and arrogance that you already weep’. This, my face uplifted, I cried out. And the three, taking it for answer, looked at one another as men do when they face the truth.]

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9 Simon Gilson, ‘*Inferno* Canto XVI’, *Lectura Dantis Andreapolitana*, University of St Andrews, 11 March 2011, <http://lecturadantisandreapolitana.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/video/inferno-canto-xvi>

Dante's words and attitude highlight the contrast between the virtue of the past and the vice of the present and, as Lino Pertile has explained, relate it to a historical phenomenon of an economic, social and cultural nature: the phrase 'gente nuova e i subiti guadagni' indicates 'people who moved to Florence from the countryside and, through commerce and finance, made fast fortune, opening up the closeness and static character of a previous feudal system towards the beginning of capitalism'.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Dante's words recall not only Brunetto's and Ciaccio's critique of Florence's greed, envy and pride (compare, respectively, 'superbia, invidia e avarizia' in *Inf.*, xv. 68 and 'gent'è avara, invidiosa e superba' in *Inf.*, vi. 73), but also a passage from the *Convivio* on the devastating effects upon the civic community brought about by the accumulation of wealth. This creates, Dante argues, a vicious circle whereby 'cupiditate' [greed] can never end but only continually increase, to the extent that Canon Law and Civil Law aim precisely at mending and controlling it:

E che altro cotidianamente pericola e uccide le cittadi, le contrade, le singolari persone, tanto quanto lo nuovo raunamento d'averè appo alcuno? Lo quale raunamento nuovi desiderii discuopre, allo fine delli quali senza ingiuria d'alcuno venire non si può. E che altro intende di medicare l'una e l'altra Ragione, Canonica dico e Civile, tanto quanto a riparare alla cupiditate che, raunando ricchezze, cresce? (*Con.*, IV. xii. 9)

[And what imperils and destroys cities, territories, and individuals day by day more than the accumulation of wealth by some new person? Such an accumulation uncovers new desires which cannot be satiated without causing injury to someone. What else were the two categories of Law, namely Canon Law and Civil Law, intended to curb if not the surge of greed brought about by the amassing of wealth?]<sup>11</sup>

I will return to the connection between greed and the law, but for the moment I want to mention that after the sodomites depart, urging the pilgrim to speak about them on earth (and thereby confirming again their preoccupation with fame), the final part of this canto is concerned with the preparation for the arrival of Geryon. It is a very important, metapoetic episode where, for instance, the term *comedia* is used for the first time in reference to the poem itself. Rather than lingering on it, I will simply

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> I quote the *Convivio* from Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. by Franca Brambilla Ageno (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995), while the translation is taken from *Dante's 'Il Convivio'*, trans. by Richard H. Lansing (New York: Garland, 1990).

conclude by highlighting the ambivalence with which *Inferno* xvi portrays the Florentine sodomites and the Florence of their time. Despite the fact that these souls are indeed in Hell and, like Brunetto, only seem concerned with the sphere of earthly values,<sup>12</sup> and despite the parallel with Farinata exposing 'the fatal blindness of the Florentine aristocracy in its attachment to party and family at the expense of broader loyalties to city and "patria"',<sup>13</sup> *Inferno* xvi nonetheless emphasizes a contrast between Florence's negative present of 'orgoglio e dismisura' [arrogance and excess] and the positive past of 'valore e cortesia' [valour and courtesy] invoked by the Florentine sodomites. Moving now to *Paradiso* xvi will give us a different perspective and reveal that the fairly recent past presented as ambivalent in *Inferno* xvi was, in fact, quite negative and that the contrast set up in the *Commedia* between a bad present and a good past is more accurately a contrast between a very bad present, a less bad recent past and a good distant past.

### *Paradiso* xvi

As I mentioned before, *Paradiso* xvi is the mid part of a triptych staging Dante's encounter with his ancestor Cacciaguida, which is one of the most significant and justly famous episodes of the whole poem. It opens with Dante-pilgrim's vanity and pride for his ancestor's decision to follow the Emperor Conrad III in the Second Crusade and subsequent death as a martyr while fighting for the Church. The pilgrim's pride is signalled by his switch to the 'voi' form while asking for more information about the Florence of the good old days, which Cacciaguida had celebrated in the previous canto. This celebration is captured in microcosm by the famous tercet with which the lengthy passage of praise began: 'Fiorenza dentro de la cerchia antica, / ond'ella toglie ancora e terza e nona, / si stava in pace, sobria e pudica' [Florence, within the circle of her ancient walls from which she still hears tierce and nones, dwelled then in peace, temperate and chaste] (xv. 97–99). The image of a modest and peaceful city contained within the small circle of its ancient walls is exactly the opposite

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12 On the ambivalence of the judgment on Florence in *Inferno* xvi, see Picone, 'Canto XVI', pp. 225–26, who stresses that as Brunetto was only thinking of literary fame, so do the Florentine sodomites only focus on fame and human and social values, disregarding the religious ones. According to Keen (p. 48), instead, there is less ambivalence than condemnation.

13 John Najemy, 'Dante and Florence', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 236–56 (p. 242).

of the depictions of contemporary Florence that one finds throughout the poem, especially those given by Ciaccio in *Inferno* vi and by Brunetto in *Inferno* xv. As critics have acknowledged, Cacciaguida's description of Florence is meant to emphasize a contrast between past and present, but crucially it is a different past from the one mentioned in *Inferno* xvi and nostalgically recalled there by the Florentine sodomites. In other words, the *Commedia* stages three different Florences: the peaceful and entirely positive Florence of the remote past described by Cacciaguida (late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries); the Florence of the recent past referred to by the Florentine sodomites (around the mid thirteenth century), a period presented ambivalently in *Inferno* xvi but which was, in reality, factional and already degenerate; and the wholly negative Florence of the 'present' (the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries).

After his ancestor's praise of this remote Florence in canto xv of *Paradiso*, in canto xvi the pilgrim wants to know more details about his ancestor and the Edenic Florence of the past that he had celebrated. His particular interest is in the size of its populace and the identity of its most important families, 'quanto era allora, e chi eran le genti / tra esso degne di più alti scanni' (ll. 26–27). In this way, as Catherine Keen notes, '[t]he emphasis [...] shifts from the private detail of the domestic scene to the consideration of families as aggregates of their individual members, highlighting the collective nature of citizenship and civic activity'.<sup>14</sup>

In a language that is not 'questa moderna favella' [this our modern tongue] (and it has been long debated whether this is Latin, with which Cacciaguida had begun to speak in canto xv, or — as seems more likely — the old dialect of Florence),<sup>15</sup> Cacciaguida first gives some more details about his family and then moves on to speak about 'his' Florence, which is what interests us here. The first piece of information that Cacciaguida gives is that in his time the number of 'those fit to bear arms' was one fifth of those who live there now, stressing thereby the small size and containment of ancient Florence. But the main difference between the positive Florence of his past and the negative one of the present, Cacciaguida adds, is that the former was 'pure down to the last artisan', while the latter is mixed with people coming from the countryside:

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<sup>14</sup> Keen, p. 213.

<sup>15</sup> See Elena Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire: Language and Love in Augustine, the Modistae, Dante* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2007), pp. 142–44.

'Ma la cittadinanza, ch'è or mista  
 di Campi, di Certaldo e di Fegghine,  
 pura vediasi ne l'ultimo artista.  
 Oh quanto fora meglio esser vicine  
 quelle genti ch'io dico, e al Galluzzo  
 e a Trespiano aver vostro confine,  
 che averle dentro a sostener lo puzzo  
 del villan d'Aguglion, di quel da Signa  
 che già per barattar ha l'occhio aguzzo!' (*Par.*, xvi. 49–57)

[But the city's bloodline, now mixed with that of Campi, of Certaldo, and Figline, was then found pure in the humblest artisan. Ah, how much better would it be had those cities which I name remained but neighbours, had you kept your borders at Galluzzo and Trespiano, than to have them in your midst and bear the stench of the lout from Aguglion and of him from Signa who already has so sharp an eye for graft!]

The contrast between the purity of Florence's citizenry in the ancient past ('pura') and its contamination in the present ('mista') recalls *Inferno* xvi's contrast between 'la gente nuova e i subiti guadagni' of contemporary Florence and the 'valore e cortesia' of the previous generation. The contrast is highlighted here by the emphasis on the 'puzzo' [stench] that this contamination produces and that is here represented by two political figures associated with corruption and barratry and connected in one way or another with Dante's exile: Baldo d'Aguglione and Fazio dei Morubaldini da Signa.

Cacciaguیدا then hints at the fact that the destructive movement of people from the countryside into the city (and the subsequent societal contamination and corruption) is but another consequence of the Church's damaging opposition to the Emperor's control over Italy (*Par.*, xvi. 58–66). This opposition has meant that several lords, no longer protected by the Emperor, have been forced to give their castles and territories to the communes and have moved to Florence. Ultimately, Cacciaguیدا insists, it is the resultant 'intermingling of persons' that has caused the city's growth and subsequent decay:

'Sempre la confusion de le persone  
 principio fu del mal de la cittade'. (*Par.*, xvi. 71–72)

[Intermingling of peoples has ever been the source of all the city's ills.]

As Justin Steinberg has recently underlined, critics have debated and disagreed about Dante's political statements in the Cacciaguida cantos, especially about Dante's attitude towards the guild-based government of the *popolo* (and its mercantile values, social mobility and new wealth).<sup>16</sup> A focal point in this debate has been the question of the extent to which the *Commedia* rejects the guild-based system and offers, instead, an idealized version of feudal aristocracy or, on the other hand, how far, and despite his imperial convictions, Dante continues to be attached to the *popolo's* critique of the nobility's excessive consumption and factionalism.<sup>17</sup> I tend to side towards the latter hypothesis. In any case, Dante's insistence on the positive purity of old Florence as opposed to the negative intermingling of the new Florence is, from a contemporary perspective, both puzzling and distressing. It is worth mentioning, therefore, that Keen has argued that Cacciaguida's critique of immigration is to be understood as an attack against a materialistic attitude towards civic life that is exploitative rather than contributory and brings corruption to the old, simple order.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile Steinberg has argued that Cacciaguida's attack on sylvan citizens is only incidentally concerned with their mercantile, upstart nature; rather than a particular class, Cacciaguida rejects a political/juridical phenomenon in which citizenship is treated purely as a private contract, as a title that can be bought and sold in a way that harms the principle of shared obligations and responsibilities.<sup>19</sup>

Change may not always be good, but it is inevitable. The second part of the canto introduces the new theme of the necessity of mutability, firstly of human affairs in general and, then, of Florentine families in particular:

'Le vostre cose tutte hanno lor morte,  
sì come voi; ma celasi in alcuna  
che dura molto, e le vite son corte.  
E come 'l volger del ciel de la luna  
cuopre e discuopre i liti senza posa  
così fa di Fiorenza la Fortuna:

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16 Justin Steinberg, *Dante and the Limits of the Law* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 123–23.

17 The former thesis is maintained by Umberto Carpi, 'La nobiltà di Dante (a proposito di *Paradiso* xvi', *Rivista di letteratura italiana* 8:2 (1990), 229–60, while the latter by Najemy, 'Dante and Florence'.

18 Keen, pp. 213–20.

19 Steinberg, pp. 124–26.

per che non dee parer mirabil cosa  
 ciò ch'io dirò de li alti Fiorentini  
 onde è la fama nel tempo nascosa'. (*Par.*, xvi. 79–87)

[All your concerns are mortal, even as are you, but in some things that are more lasting this lies hidden, because all lives are brief. And, as the turning of the lunar sphere covers and endlessly uncovers the edges of the shore, thus does fortune deal with Florence. Then it should not seem strange or marvellous to you to hear me talk of noble Florentines, whose fame is buried in the depth of time.]

It is interesting that, unlike the Florentine sodomites and other Florentines mentioned in Hell, those good ones mentioned by Cacciaguida were not famous in Dante's time. In particular, Cacciaguida gives a lot of details about several notable Florentine families from his time, mentioning first those which had been important but were already losing their importance, then those which were at the height of their power, and finally those which were not powerful yet but were about to begin to gain significance and power. It is a long section, running from ll. 87–147, which exemplifies the natural alternation of human vicissitudes and concludes by mentioning the episode that was traditionally considered to be the origin of the factionalism between Guelfs and Ghibellines, that is, the murder of Buondelmonte dei Buondelmenti in 1215.

Finally, Cacciaguida ends his long speech by making it clear that Florence's good times belong to the remote past of his youth and that the period of civic strife between Guelfs and Ghibellines, which was associated with a moment of 'valore e cortesia' by the sodomites in *Inferno* xvi, was in fact already understood as a negative moment in Florence's history:

'Con queste genti, e con altre con esse,  
 vid'io Fiorenza in sì fatto riposo,  
 che non avea cagione onde piangesse.  
 Con queste genti vid'io glorioso  
 e giusto il popol suo, tanto che 'l giglio  
 non era ad asta mai posto a ritroso,  
 né per division fatto vermiglio'. (*Par.*, xvi. 148–54)

[With these noble families, and with others still, I saw Florence in such tranquillity that there was nothing that might cause her grief. With these noble families I saw her people so glorious and just, that the lily had not yet been reversed upon the lance nor by dissension changed to red.]

If it is now clear that a contrast also exists between the distant, peaceful Florence of Cacciaguیدا and the violent and factional one of the Florentine sodomites, one can also begin to ponder what kind of violence was associated with their sin of sodomy. I will return to this but, for now, and by way of concluding my reading of canto xvi of *Paradiso*, I would like to highlight that it seems to create an ambivalence or tension between a sense of inevitable change compared to the natural cycle of life and death (like that of the Florentine families of the past) and a sense of vertical degeneracy and decline into violence connected, rather, with human responsibility (as in the case of the decline from the Florence of Cacciaguیدا's good old days to the period of infighting between Guelfs and Ghibellines and, finally, to the wickedness of Dante's own time).<sup>20</sup> *Purgatorio* xvi, to which I will move now, will help us to deal precisely with this crucial question.

### *Purgatorio* xvi

*Purgatorio* xvi is the first of a triptych of cantos at the very centre of the poem, which together elaborate its central discourse on desire and free will. The canto is set in the third terrace of Purgatory where, as is typical in Purgatory, pain works as therapy and, in this case, wrath is cured. The purging shades (as well as the pilgrim and Virgil) are forced to experience a very thick smoke that blinds and impedes them from seeing anything. The first part of the canto insists on the productivity of this experience of pain and I will simply mention the fact that the shades are told that 'd'iracundia van solvendo il nodo' [they are undoing the knot of their wrath] (*Purg.*, xvi. 24), and that the experience through Purgatory is presented as the soul's journey back to God as its maker: 'O creatura che ti mondi / per tornar bella a colui che ti fece' [O creature who purify yourself to return in beauty to the One who made you] (ll. 31–32).<sup>21</sup>

When a purging soul reveals his identity to the pilgrim, he does so by mentioning that same 'valore' which, together with 'cortesia', was discussed

<sup>20</sup> For a reading with a different emphasis, see Keen, p. 223.

<sup>21</sup> See the concept of 'productive pain' that I put forward in my book *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 89–137; see also my article '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 Holsinger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 238–50.



in *Inferno* xvi as something belonging to the past. This soul simultaneously confirms that, indeed, it is a virtue no longer practiced by humankind:

‘Lombardo fui, e fu’ chiamato Marco;  
del mondo seppi, e quel valore amai  
al quale ha or ciascun disteso l’arco’. (*Purg.*, xvi. 46–48)

[I was a Lombard, known as Marco. I knew the world and loved that  
valour at which today all aim a slackened bow.]

Little is known of Marco Lombardo, who seems to have been a refined courtier operating in several northern Italian courts. Marco’s statement on the disappearance of ‘valour’ reminds the pilgrim of what the soul of Guido del Duca had told him on the terrace of envy two cantos before. While speaking about the corruption spreading through the valley of the river Arno and Romagna, where the glorious past and the values of its noble families contrast with the degenerate situation of the present, del Duca had stated that ‘vertù così per nimica si fuga / da tutti come biscia, o per sventura / del luogo, o per mal uso che li fruga’ [all flee from virtue as if it were a snake, an enemy to all, whether some curse is on the place or evil habits goad them on’] (*Purg.*, xiv. 37–39). After listening to Marco, the pilgrim reformulates del Duca’s doubt and asks about the reasons for the disappearance of virtue from earth:

‘Lo mondo è ben così tutto deserto  
d’ogne virtute, come tu mi sone,  
e di malizia gravido e coverto;  
ma priego che m’addite la cagione,  
sì ch’ì la veggia e ch’ì la mostri altrui;  
ché nel cielo uno, e un qua giù la pone’. (*Purg.*, xvi. 58–63)

[The world is barren now of every virtue, as you state, and heavy with  
and overgrown by evil. Please point out to me the cause that I may know  
it and make it known to others, for both the heavens and the earth receive  
the blame.]

Thus, like the sixteenth cantos of *Inferno* before it and of *Paradiso* xvi after it, the sixteenth canto of *Purgatorio* also establishes a contrast between the positive past and the negative present, although here the current degeneracy pertains not only to Florence, but to the whole world. But what

this canto adds to the meditations of its infernal and heavenly correlatives is the explicit question about the reason ('la cagione') for the current corruption. In particular, the pilgrim asks whether it has to be attributed to a deterministic influence of the stars on men ('nel cielo') or to men's agency and will ('qua giù'). This is no small question and its full significance is unfolded in Marco's reply — so that the reader cannot miss what is at stake.

First, Marco explains that it is absurd to think, as humans do, that the reason for everything has to be attributed to the influence of the stars because this would mean that humans have no free choice and therefore there would be no justice in being punished for doing evil or rewarded for doing good:

'Frate,  
 lo mondo è cieco, e tu vien ben da lui.  
 Voi che vivete ogne cagion recate  
 pur suso al cielo, pur come se tutto  
 movesse seco di necessitate.  
 Se così fosse, in voi fora distrutto  
 libero arbitrio, e non fora giustizia  
 per ben letizia, e per male aver lutto'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 65–72)

[Brother, the world is blind and indeed you come from it. You who are still alive assign each cause only to the heavens, as though they drew all things along upon their necessary paths. If that were so, free choice would be denied you, and there would be no justice when one feels joy for doing good or misery for evil.]

As a passage from the *Monarchia*, indebted to Boethius, indicates, 'liberum arbitrium' [free will] is to be defined as 'liberum de voluntate iudicium' [free judgment in matters of volition]:

Et ideo dico quod iudicium medium est apprehensionis et appetitus: nam primo res apprehenditur, deinde apprehensa bona vel mala iudicatur, et ultimo iudicans prosequitur sive fugit.  
 Si ergo iudicium moveat omnino appetitum et nullu modo preveniatur ab eo, liberum est; si vero ab appetitu quocunque modo preveniente iudicium moveatur, liberum esse non potest, quia non a se, sed ab alio captivum trahitur. (*Mon.*, I. xii. 2–4)

[And therefore I say that judgment is the link between perception and appetite: for first a thing is perceived, then it is judged to be good or evil, and finally the person who judges pursues it or shuns it. Now if judgment controls desire completely and is in no way pre-empted by it, it is free; but

if judgment is in any way at all pre-empted and thus controlled by desire, it cannot be free, because it does not act under its own power, but is dragged along in the power of something else.]<sup>22</sup>

Along similar lines, Marco Lombardo continues, it is true that the stars can have a certain influence on human inclinations and desires, but men are always endowed with the light of reason and with a free will that, if they are well nurtured, can overcome all inclinations emanating from the stars:

‘Lo cielo i vostri movimenti inizia;  
non dico tutti, ma, posto ch’i’ l dica,  
lume v’è dato a bene e a malizia,  
e libero voler; che, se fatica  
ne le prime battaglie col ciel dura,  
poi vince tutto, se ben si notrica’. (*Purg.*, xvi. 73–78)

[Yes, the heavens give motion to your inclinations. I don’t say all of them, but, even if I did, you still possess a light to winnow good from evil, and you have free will. Should it bear the strain in its first struggles with the heavens, then, if rightly nurtured, it will conquer all.]

Here I would like to highlight the ‘if’ clause, ‘se ben si notrica’ [if it is rightly nurtured], which suggests the Aristotelian notions of *habitus*/custom and implies, then, that a certain training is necessary for men to be able to master their inclinations coming from the stars. But, for the moment, Marco attributes all influence to a person’s autonomy and consequent potential to control desires and align them with the soul’s innate love for God and what is good:<sup>23</sup>

‘A maggior forza e a miglior natura  
liberi soggiacete; e quella cria  
la mente in voi, che l ciel non ha in sua cura.

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22 Quotations from the *Monarchia* are taken from Dante, *Monarchia*, ed. by Paolo Chiesa and Andrea Tabarroni with the collaboration of Diego Ellero (Rome: Salerno, 2013), while I quote the translation from Dante, *Monarchia*, trans. by Prue Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

23 In Bruno Bernabei’s words, therefore, ‘la libertà si realizza nel perfetto costante equilibrio fra ragione e volontà nella piena chiarezza e osservanza del bene morale’. See Bruno Bernabei, ‘Libertà’, in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani, 1971), vol. 3, cols. 641–43 (p. 642). See also G. Stabile, ‘Volontà’, in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani, 1976), V, cols. 134–40, and the recent discussion of *arbitrium* in Steinberg, pp. 53–88.

Però, se 'l mondo presente disvia,  
 in voi è la cagione, in voi si chieggia;  
 e io te ne sarò or vera spia'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 79–84)

[To a greater power and a better nature you, free, are subject, and these create the mind in you the heavens have not in their charge. Therefore, if the world around you goes astray, in you is the cause and in you let it be sought. In this I will now be your informant.]

Men can freely subject themselves to God, who is a greater force and a better nature than the stars, and the reason for this freedom is that the rational soul ('mente') is completely unaffected by any celestial influence — and this is precisely why men, not the heavens, are always responsible for their actions. And humans are autonomous from the impact of the stars because the rational part of their soul is not generated, as in the case of the vegetative and sensitive faculties (which are thereby connected to matter and its laws), but created individually and directly by God. In the *Commedia* the origin of the human soul is theorised by the figure of Statius in his embryological account in *Purgatorio* xxv and also explained by Virgil in *Purgatorio* xviii with regard to the 'innata libertade' [innate freedom] of the soul (l. 68) that allows it to exercise control over any sort of external influence. It is also elegantly restated by Beatrice in *Paradiso* vii:

'L'anima d'ogne bruto e de le piante  
 di complesion potenziata tira  
 lo raggio e 'l moto de le luci sante;  
 ma vostra vita senza mezzo spira  
 la somma beninanza, e la inamora  
 di sé che poi sempre la disira'. (*Par.*, vii. 139–44)

[The soul of every beast and every plant is drawn from a complex of potentials by the shining and the motion of the holy lights. But supreme goodness breathes life in you, unmediated, and He so enamours your soul of Himself that it desires Him forever after.]

As I have shown elsewhere, these embryological tenets are very significant for understanding Dante's anthropology.<sup>24</sup> What I want to highlight here is

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<sup>24</sup> See my *Experience the Afterlife*, pp. 53–87 and 'From Plurality to (Near) Unicity of Forms: Embryology in *Purgatorio* 25', in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. by Wayne Storey and Teodolinda Barolini (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 192–210.

that despite the emphasis placed by the poem on the rational soul's ultimate autonomy from the stars' influence, Marco's subsequent explanation of the reasons for the world's current corruption takes another track and begins to emphasise the fact that the soul is liable to go astray and therefore requires guidance:

'Esce di mano a lui che la vagheggia  
prima che sia, a guisa di fanciulla  
che piangendo e ridendo pargoleggia,  
l'anima semplicetta che sa nulla,  
salvo che, mossa da lieto fattore,  
volontier torna a ciò che la trastulla.  
Di picciol bene in pria sente sapore;  
quivi s'inganna, e dietro ad esso corre,  
se guida o fren non torce suo amore'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 85–93)

[From the hand of Him who looks on it with love before it lives, comes forth, like a little girl who weeps one moment and as quickly laughs, the simple infant soul that has no knowledge but, moved by a joyous maker, gladly turns to what delights it. At first it tastes the savour of a trifling good. It is beguiled by that and follows in pursuit if guide or rein do not deflect its love.]

Each soul is created individually by God and behaves like a child who knows nothing, but, as it originates from a joyous Maker, it is attracted to what pleases it. The soul therefore turns to whatever delights it without pondering whether it is the right or wrong choice and, unless it has a guide or a curb that controls its desire, it loses the right path and goes astray. A similar concept had already been expressed in *Convivio* IV. xii, which seems inspired by Augustine's passage on the distinction between *uti* and *frui* in *De doctrina christiana* I, 3–4 and first explains that the soul's supreme desire is to go back to God, from whom it originates:

lo sommo desiderio di ciascuna cosa, e prima dalla natura dato, è lo ritornare allo suo principio. E però che Dio è principio delle nostre anime e fattore di quelle simili a sé (sì come è scritto: 'Facciamo l'uomo ad imagine e simiglianza nostra'), essa anima massimamente desidera di tornare a quello. (*Conv.*, IV. xii. 14)

[the supreme desire of each thing, and the one that is first given to it by nature, is to return to its first cause. Now since God is the cause of our souls and has created them like himself (as it is written, 'Let us make man in our own image and likeness'), the soul desires above all else to return to him.]

And yet, as the passage goes on to say, the soul's knowledge is imperfect and it can therefore let itself become attracted to other goods and thereby not choose the path (back) to God but the wrong one:

E sì come peregrino che va per una via per la quale mai non fue, che ogni casa che da lungi vede crede che sia l'albergo, e non trovando ciò essere, dirizza la credenza all'altra, e così di casa in casa, tanto che all'albergo viene; così l'anima nostra, incontanente che nel nuovo e mai non fatto cammino di questa vita entra, dirizza li occhi al termine del suo sommo bene, e però, qualunque cosa vede che paia in sé avere alcuno bene, crede che sia esso. (*Conv.*, IV. Xii. 15)

[And just as the pilgrim who walks along a road on which he has never travelled before believes that every house which he sees from afar is an inn, and finding it not so fixes his expectations on the next one, and so moves from house to house until he comes to the inn, so our soul, as soon as it enters upon this new and never travelled road of life, fixes its eyes on the goal of its supreme good, and therefore believes that everything it sees which seems to possess some good in it is that supreme good.]

In this way, going astray and desiring at first small goods and then ever greater possessions, the soul neither attains its goal (God) nor reaches the satisfaction of its supreme desire, but often ends up being consumed by a desire that cannot be fulfilled and endlessly increases (*Conv.*, IV. Xii. 16–19).<sup>25</sup>

Marco Lombardo's speech on the soul's fallibility in *Purgatorio* xvi takes an overtly political turn and indicates that, precisely because of the soul's tendency to go astray from the right path, it was necessary to set laws, with the Emperor acting as a guide:

'Onde convenne legge per fren porre;  
convenne rege aver che discernesse  
de la vera cittade almen la torre'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 94–96)

[Therefore, there was need that laws be set to act as curbs, need for a ruler to discern at least the tower above the one true city.]

As Charles Singleton explains, the image transposes *Convivio's* 'notion of the soul guided by reason in its "pilgrimage" in this life [...] to that of mankind collectively engaged in a pilgrimage. The goal, or "city",

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<sup>25</sup> For an analysis of the Augustine's passage from the *De doctrina christiana* with respect to his understanding of language, see Lombardi, *The Syntax of Poetry*, pp. 34–37.

for mankind collectively (and following Dante's ideas as set forth in *De monarchia*) is universal justice, which under the perfect rule of the monarch should prevail, and is synonymous with temporal felicity, the goal to which the emperor is ordained to lead'.

According to Marco Lombardo, Italy's problem is that, while it is true that laws have been set and do exist, they are not enforced for the reason that the throne of the empire is empty and the Pope, rather than offering spiritual guidance to humankind, wants to have temporal and earthly power and ends up as a negative influence:

'Le leggi son, ma chi pon mano ad esse?  
 Nullo, però che 'l pastor che procede,  
 rugumar può, ma non ha l'unghie fesse;  
     per che la gente, che sua guida vede  
 pur a quel ben fedire ond'ella è ghiotta,  
 di quel si pasce, e più oltre non chiede'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 97–102)

[Yes, there are laws, but who takes them in hand? No one, because the shepherd who precedes may chew his cud, but does not have cleft hooves. The people, then, who see their leader lunge only at the good for which they themselves are greedy, graze on that and ask for nothing more.]

The same image of the Emperor as the guide who is meant to curb humankind but is actually absent, is also present in *Purg.*, vi. 88–90 and *Conv.*, IV. ix. 10 (and see also *Mon.*, III. xvi. 9). As Elena Lombardi has argued, it is a very interesting image that, by suggesting reason is like a horseman that must govern passion like a horse, does not convey the necessity of extinguishing desire. Instead it hints at the taming of desire and suggests the usefulness of passion: if well directed and correctly spurred, desire must become a useful and faithful carrier for the self.<sup>26</sup>

While I agree with Lombardi that this is indeed what the poem maintains in the next two cantos and pushes to its extremes in the *Paradiso*, the emphasis in *Purgatorio* xvi is placed, rather, on the necessity of laws

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<sup>26</sup> See Elena Lombardi, "'Che libido fe' licito in sua legge': Lust and Law, Reason and Passion in Dante", in *Dantesque Dialogues: Engaging with the Legacy of Amilcare Iannucci*, ed. by Margaret Kilgour and Elena Lombardi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 125–54 (esp. pp. 131–32). On the positive and necessary potential of desire as expansion of the self and extension into (paradoxical) pleasure, see also Lombardi's *The Wings of the Dove* and my *Amor che move*.

and the consequences when they are not enforced. Thus Marco Lombardo can conclude his speech with the claim that the reason the world is going astray is to not due to humankind's corrupt nature (the remedy for which is indeed meant to be provided by the laws), but to the bad guidance offered by the papacy:

'Ben puoi veder che la mala condotta  
è la cagion che 'l mondo ha fatto reo,  
e non natura che 'n voi sia corrotta'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 103–05)

[As you can plainly see, failed guidance is the cause the world is steeped in vice, and not your inner nature that has grown corrupt.]

As Irène Rosier Catach has recently argued, these lines, together with lines 91–97 quoted above, recall a passage in the *Monarchia* in which humankind's need for the guidance of the papacy and the empire is justified on the basis of the concept that human nature is corrupted after the Fall: 'si homo stetisset in statu innocentie in quo a Deo factus est, talibus directivis non indiguisset: sunt ergo huiusmodi regimina remedia contra infirmitatem peccati' [if man had remained in the state of innocence in which he was created by God, he would have had no need of such guidance; such powers are thus remedies for the infirmity of sin] (III. Iv. 14).<sup>27</sup> As has been noted, this rather bleak, quintessentially Augustinian concept contradicts the Aristotelian/Thomistic idea, expounded elsewhere by Dante, that man is naturally social and creates institutions naturally. I agree with Rosier Catach's thesis that, albeit implicitly, some traces of the Augustinian concept seem to resonate in *Purgatorio* xvi's connection between the soul's tendency to go astray and the necessity of laws.<sup>28</sup>

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27 Irène Rosier Catach, 'Man as a Speaking and Political Animal: A Political Reading of Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*', in *Dante's Plurilingualism: Authority, Knowledge, Subjectivity*, ed. by Sara Fortuna, Manuele Gagnolati and Jürgen Trabant (Oxford: Legenda, 2010), pp 34–51.

28 The Augustinian framework of Marco Lombardo's reasoning is also noticed by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi's commentary to *Purg.*, xvi. 93. Keen also notices a parallel between Dante's doctrine and the Augustinian dictum on law as *remedium peccati*, but she argues for a less negative view than in Augustine (p. 68). On the difference between Augustine and Aristotle's and Thomas Aquinas's idea (usually also followed by Dante) that man is by nature a political animal, see also Honess, *From Florence to the Heavenly City*, pp. 37–41, who also argues that Dante's position in the *Commedia* 'represents a rethinking, though not necessarily a rejection, of many of the most common medieval ideas on the role of the Christian within political society, put forward, above all, by Augustine' (p. 39). See also the interesting survey of how Dante criticism has engaged



The rest of Marco's speech is dedicated to stressing the contrast between past and present in a way that recalls cantos xvi of *Inferno* and *Paradiso* but also emphasizes that the cause for the current degeneracy is the papal interference in the temporal sphere. Indeed, if there is one main point to Dante's political thought, present both in the *Commedia* and the *Monarchia* and emphatically maintained by Marco Lombardo, it is that emperor and pope should act in two completely separate spheres without any mutual interference; the former devoted to the pursuit of the happiness of humankind on earth and the latter to the pursuit of humankind's happiness in the afterlife.

The first contrast made by Marco between the past and the present is the famous image of the two suns that remained separate in ancient Rome, while now one (the Pope) has obscured the other (the Emperor):

'Soleva Roma, che 'l buon mondo feo,  
due soli aver, che l'una e l'altra strada  
facean vedere, e del mondo e di Deo.  
L'un l'altro ha spento; ed è giunta la spada  
col pastorale, e l'un con l'altro insieme  
per viva forza mal convien che vada;  
però che, giunti, l'un l'altro non teme:  
se non mi credi, pon mente a la spiga,  
ch'ogn'erba si conosce per lo seme'. (*Purg.*, xvi. 106–14)

[Rome, which formed the world for good, once held two suns that lit the one road and the other, the world's and that to God. The one has snuffed the other out, the sword is fastened to the crook, and these two, forced to be together, must perforce go ill, since, joined, the one fears not the other. If you don't believe me, think of a grain of wheat, for by its seed each plant is known.]

Marco's second contrast between the past and the present focuses instead on northern Italy and on the same virtues of 'valore e cortesia' mentioned in *Inferno* xvi as the symbol of a world that has disappeared:

In sul paese ch'Adice e Po riga,  
solea valore e cortesia trovarsi,  
prima che Federigo avesse briga;

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with Dante's relationship with Augustine by Elisa Brilli, *Firenze e il profeta. Dante fra teologia e politica* (Rome: Carocci, 2012), pp. 239–70.

or può sicuramente indi passarsi  
 per qualunque lasciasse, per vergogna  
 di ragionar coi buoni o d'appressarsi.  
 Ben v'è tre vecchi ancora in cui rampogna  
 l'antica età la nova, e par lor tardo  
 che Dio a miglior vita li ripogna. (*Purg.*, xvi. 115–23)

[In the land watered both by the Àdige and Po valor and courtesy could once be found before Frederick encountered opposition. Now it may with impunity be crossed by anyone who for shame would shun all discourse with the virtuous or even coming near them. Three old men are left on earth, longing for the better life when God will take them, in whom the ancient times rebuke the new.]

This passage is interesting for at least two reasons: on the one hand, the reference to the three 'old men' (l. 121), who offer a rebuke to modern times, recalls the three Florentine sodomites of *Inferno* xvi and creates a contrast between three truly honest men and the Florentine leaders, whose portrayed ambivalence now reveals its limits and who appear, especially after also reading *Paradiso* xvi's celebration of the remote past, as very much part of that factional world of civic strife and personal interests that characterizes the political scene of Florence in the second part of thirteenth century. (The Florentine sodomites seem in this sense to represent the Guelf correlative of Farinata in *Inferno* x.) And, as Simon Gilson has argued, the words 'valore' and 'cortesia', which were used by the sodomites as a symbol of what has been lost in the present, return here, but 'are now set within a broader context of individual and institutional responsibilities'.<sup>29</sup>

While in a certain way one might consider that, according to the standpoint of the *Commedia*, the political situation in Italy and Europe was ill-governed in virtue of the conflicts between papacy and empire and that, as a result, these Florentine leaders were themselves misguided, it is also clear that they are responsible for their actions and for being, in their turn, misguiding leaders. Arguably, what the Florentine politicians share with Brunetto and, possibly, with the other sodomite teachers and grammarians presented in the previous canto, is an obsession with fame, which was presented by Brunetto as the means for gaining eternal life ('voi m'insegnaste come l'uom s'eterna', *Inf.*, xv. 85). Therefore, it is perhaps

<sup>29</sup> Gilson, '*Inferno* Canto XVI'. See also Emilio Pasquini, 'Cortesia', in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana G. Treccani, 1970), II, cols. 225–27.

possible to consider these pedagogues and civic leaders, categorised as sodomites, as — more precisely — having misguided their pupils and the citizenry by violating their natural desire to return to God. The fact that the sodomites are respected by the pilgrim (and by the Florence of his youth) would not so much show that their Florence was better but, rather, would demonstrate their corrupting power — their success in convincing people, including the pilgrim, that it is by focusing on fame that one achieves immortality.

On the other hand, the line ‘prima che Federigo avesse briga’ (l. 117) refers once more to the war between the Emperor and the Pope and is meant to stress, once again, that the Pope’s greed has been and still is responsible for the decadence of Italy:

‘Dì oggimai che la Chiesa di Roma,  
per confondere in sé due reggimenti,  
cade nel fango e sé brutta e la soma’. (*Purg.*, xvi. 127–29)

[Spread the word, then, that the Church of Rome, confounding in herself two governments, stumbles in the mud, befouling herself and her burden.]

The bad leadership of the Pope (and, to some extent, the Emperor) is deemed responsible for the current degeneracy of human affairs; and yet one should not conclude that the Pope has replaced the stars in bearing responsibility for men’s behaviour. As Marco Lombardo has also made it clear, each individual is, and remains, entirely responsible for his or her own actions (independently, that is, from the conditions that the Emperor or the Pope have created for them); and this is precisely why the Florentine sodomites are punished in Hell. In other words, there seems to be a tension in the *Divine Comedy* between stressing the full responsibility of individuals for what they do on earth (and receive in the afterlife), and highlighting the importance of the political context and the weight it bears on them.<sup>30</sup>

This is, surely, a symptom of the notion that the poem, albeit eschatological, is indeed written, as Erich Auerbach said, by a *Dichter der irdischen Welt*, a poet of the terrestrial world, of the world on earth.<sup>31</sup> But it

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<sup>30</sup> See Keen, pp. 234–39.

<sup>31</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Dante Dichter der irdischen Welt* (Berlin-Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1929); English translation as *Dante, Poet of the Secular World*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

is also a sign that when Dante deals with politics, he is more interested in showing the effects of government on men rather than their full freedom or 'autonomy'. In these cases, Dante's vision of humankind seems bleaker and we can perceive the wound of his exile. If, as scholars have shown, the last cantos of the poem stage the pilgrim's progressive detachment from Florence, finally replaced by the entrance into the community of the heavenly Jerusalem,<sup>32</sup> I wonder whether the nostalgia for the past, so prominent in the cantos sixteen, reminds us, in fact, of the extent to which the poet continued to be affected by the thought and memory of his old city to the end of his life.

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<sup>32</sup> See especially Honess, *From Florence to the Heavenly City*, but also Ferrante, *The Political Vision*.