

# The Siren's Song: Dante's Differentiation from Virgil in *Purgatorio* II, XIX, and XXX

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## ABSTRACT

Many have been fascinated by Dante's treatment of Virgil in his *Commedia*. He is simultaneously Dante's beloved master, and a character who does not escape Hell. Robert Hollander famously asserts that Dante wields Virgil to classify him as a failed poet-vates, and therefore by contrast, to show himself, Dante, as *theologus-poeta*. In this paper, I will show that more than demonstrating himself a true prophet, Dante also utilises Virgil to suspend Christian comedy above classical tragedy. This paper will explore the Siren theme throughout *Purgatorio*, namely in Cantos II, XIX, and XXX, for observing how Dante himself moves beyond the Siren, and concurrently evinces Virgil's failure to do so. As Beatrice is contrasted to the Siren, Dante is paired with Virgil, his *Commedia* with the *Aeneid*. In making this argument, I tie everything together by showing how the appearance of Beatrice alludes to Nisus and Euryalus (a hitherto unnoticed allusion), the very characters that Virgil had written to insert higher morality into Homer's Odysseus and Diomedes. While those characters met tragic end, Dante and Beatrice, by contrast, are reunited in Christian splendor—that is, redemptive and transformative grace. Dante's *Commedia* is therefore a comedy because Dante moves beyond the Siren to Beatrice, a feat that Virgil was not able to accomplish.

For classical poets, allusion was not only a way to draw upon "significant emotion" as T.S. Eliot asserts, but also a way to insert elevated morals.<sup>1</sup> This is partially what makes the relationship between classical texts so complex, or as Logan points out, ambivalent. Speaking of Virgil's relationship to Homer, he remarks that on the one hand, Virgil is "closely indebted" to Homer: his formal diction, his material, and the poetic conventions he employs. On the other hand, Virgil is "keenly aware" of the vast distance between Greek and Roman ethical values and "everywhere reflects" this distinction.<sup>2</sup> Moving forward another millennium to Dante, this labyrinthine relationship is taken to a new level, as Dante not only nominates himself beholden to Virgil, but then viscerally writes the author into

the actual narrative of his text and leaves him in Hell. Accordingly, just as with Virgil and Homer, Hollander asks, "how can Dante make himself at once a champion of Virgil, loyally following in the master's footsteps, while he simultaneously condemns the master to Hell?"<sup>3</sup> For Hollander, Dante's most important use of Virgil is to show him a failed poet-vates, and with juxtaposition to establish himself *theologus-poeta*.<sup>4</sup> If this is true (and I believe it is), it is certainly not something that Dante takes on without due discretion and even a fair bit of trembling. That is, after all, one of the functions of Ulysses, to "attract and defuse [Dante's] own consciousness of the presumption involved in anointing oneself God's scribe."<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this paper, then, is to explore how Dante utilizes the Siren of Ulysses to differentiate himself and his poetry from Virgil. This is especially remarkable because Ulysses is the same character that Virgil had re-wrote into his *Aeneid* to moralize Homer.<sup>6</sup> There are two juxtapositions in *Purgatorio* that will allow us to properly assess this symbol, namely, Casella's "Siren song" in Canto II with Psalm 113 sung by the incoming arrivals at the base of Mount Purgatory, and Dante's Siren dream in Canto XIX with the appearance of Beatrice in Canto XXX.<sup>7</sup> It will be clear that Dante harbors Ulysses and his Siren to differentiate himself and his comedy of Christianity from Virgil and classical tragedy.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, the Siren represents the philosophy and greatness of the world, while Beatrice represents the true and worthy object of love, or *aliter notum*, God. While Virgil exposes the true nature of the Siren to Dante, ultimately, he himself cannot escape its stench.

### Casella and Psalm 113

In order to comprehend the dream vision of the Siren in Canto XIX, it is necessary to start with Dante's encounter of Casella in Canto II. Dante has just arrived at the base of ante-purgatory, where he and Virgil encountered the janitor, Cato the Elder.<sup>9</sup> Already, the reader is somewhat puzzled to find a pagan at the entrance of the higher realm. Not only does Cato seem to fall into the same category as those in Limbo who "did not sin; and yet, though they have merits, that's not enough, because they lacked baptism" (*Inf.* 4.34-37), but also, he died by suicide.<sup>10</sup> Pietro, Dante's son, commented that Christ delivered him from Limbo because the God who had created him so virtuous had "inspired in him the credulity of Christ's son to come".<sup>11</sup> If such credulity had been endowed upon Cato, then why not Virgil? With this on the reader's mind, Canto I finishes with soft allusion to the voyage of Ulysses (*Purg.* 1.131-33):

Then we arrived at the deserted shore,  
Which never yet had seen its waters coursed  
By any man who journeyed back again.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, unlike Ulysses, Dante's voyage transcended bounds and arrived at the mount of Purgatory.<sup>13</sup> In such a manner, the reader begins Canto II with Virgil and Ulysses subliminally present.

These characters are intentionally left in between the lines because what follows in Canto II serves as the first differentiation between the poetry of Virgil and Dante. As Canto II begins, Dante looks out over the waters and sees the light of an angel leading the incoming transport of travellers to Purgatory. Describing the approaching light, Dante draws a simile to Mars (*Purg.* 2.13-15):

And just as Mars, when it is overcome  
by the invading mists of dawn, glows red  
above the waters' plain, low in the west  
so there appeared to me.

As Daniello first noticed and Hollander (much later) expands upon, Dante's *Convivio* is essential for comprehending this simile and the canto at large.<sup>14</sup> In fact, in *Convivio* II, Dante relates the planet Mars to music. As the beautiful image of Mars glowing in the morning mist, Dante relates that "Music draws to itself human spirits, which are almost mainly vapors of the heart, so that they almost cease from every operation."<sup>15</sup> Thus, Mars is symbolic for the kind of music that, through beauty, draws people in and causes them to "cease" their work. Porena imagines a much younger Dante, looking west at hazy Mars on the horizon with his back to the sun.<sup>16</sup> Now and here, however, he gazes to the east—the right direction—where he sees the oncoming light and voyage, and the song they sing is not as the music of Dante's past. Instead, they sing a Psalm. "*In exitu Israel de Aegypto*" chants the boat of "close to one hundred spirits" (line 45).<sup>17</sup> Hence the episode starts with an important juxtaposition between two kinds of music: the music of Mars that distracts, and the music of God that directs.

After disembarking, these recent arrivals stand there in awe of Dante, "just as if they had forgotten to proceed to their perfection" (line 75). Francesco da Buti interprets their disposition as already evident, that they are negligent, "which follows from their delight in worldly things."<sup>18</sup> One of them, recognizing Dante, steps forward in jovial reunion with his long-lost friend. Dante recognizes this man as his old friend, Casella, and though they try three times, the two men are not able to embrace because the spirit has no substance. After a short exchange, we are brought to suppose that this man used to set Dante's love poetry to

music, and being weary, Dante longs for him to do so again.<sup>19</sup> In this desire, he begs “if there’s no new law that denies you memory or practice of the songs of love that used to quiet all my longings, then it may please you with those songs to solace my soul somewhat” (lines 106-10). Directly after, Casella grants Dante his wish and begins to sing a love canzone from Dante’s *Convivio*, “*Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona*,” and does this “so sweetly,” Dante relates, “I still hear that sweetness sound in me” (lines 112-14).<sup>20</sup> The song is so delightful that even Virgil stops to listen, and all other cares fall to the wayside; *Mars music*. The reader is also brought to experience the delight, as after such harsh and afflicting encounters with evil in *Inferno*, this beautiful, communal unity seems even virtuous. However, just moments into this beautiful synod, Cato fiercely rebukes the group (*Purg.* 2.120-23):

...“What have we here, you laggard spirits?  
What negligence, what lingering is this?  
Quick, to the mountain to cast off the slough  
That will not let you see God show Himself!”

Such a spurring causes all the spirits to scatter, coming to a remembrance of their duties and purpose in Purgatory.

While such gruffness may be a surprising response to a beautiful and seemingly innocuous moment, it is here that the gravity of the situation is communicated. Contrary to the psalm that inspired action and progression in these voyagers, Dante’s canzone as sung by Casella causes them to be “motionless and fixed” (line 118). Dante’s love poetry is here identified as the music of Mars. It is precisely this disposition of loving worldly things that must be purged from these spirits before they can enter the presence of God.<sup>21</sup> Daniello comments that unfortunately for Casella, there is a “new law” here in Purgatory, where “one does not sing vain and lascivious things, but hymns and psalms in praise of God.” Even further, this canzone that he sings from Dante’s *Convivio* is about Dante’s *donna gentile*, or Lady Philosophy, for whom Dante had temporarily abandoned his love for Beatrice.<sup>22</sup> On this note, Hollander sees the failed embrace repeated three times of Dante and Casella as a potent allusion to book II of the *Aeneid*, where Aeneas fails three times to embrace the shade of his recently lost wife, Creusa.<sup>23</sup> The mighty Aeneas,

according to Creusa, is awaited by a “royal wife” in Hesperia’s land (*Aen.* 2.782).<sup>24</sup> This action of Aeneas to embrace her, Hollander describes as “a man turning back from his mission to a love that is dead.”<sup>25</sup> Likewise, when Dante tries to embrace his old friend, and then delights in his former love poetry about his *donna gentile*, Dante turns back for a love that is dead, and forgets for a moment the “royal wife” that awaits him also. Thus, Hollander posits, “Casella’s song is a Siren’s song.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, as we will see with the song in Canto XIX and just like the beauty of Mars, the song of Casella distracts these pilgrims from their mission, and more personally, Dante from his Beatrice. And, if one reads the psalm further, it finishes “not the dead shall praise thee, O Lord, nor all that go down into Hell. But we who live, bless the Lord, from now on and forever” (*Psalms* 114, King James Version). The only songs that live now are those that praise the Lord.

It should not be overlooked, however, that Dante alludes to Virgil’s *Aeneid* to poetically denounce his former love of Lady Philosophy. In fact, it is not Casella who is the target of Canto II, but Virgil himself. This love of Lady Philosophy is a love that Virgil himself is never able to move beyond. He cries in Canto III (lines 34-37):

Foolish is he who hopes our intellect  
can reach the end of that unending road  
only one Substance in three Persons follows.  
Confine yourselves, o humans, to the quia;

Following this lament, he lowers his head, “in sorrow” (line 45). As those voyagers in the previous canto “raised their brows” (*Purg.* II, line 58), Virgil, instead, “lowered his brow” (*Purg.* III, 44). This textual parity places Virgil at the center of the Canto II.<sup>27</sup> One cannot help but feel the spirit of Ulysses, one who also in the spirit of knowledge tried to “pass the infinite path.” And just as Ulysses fell short with the mount of Purgatory in sight, Virgil came close to the mark with his fourth *Eclogue* but ultimately failed to strike it.<sup>28</sup> As Dante’s former poetry is condemned as carnal, destined to be left behind by those who voyage beyond the world to God’s realm, Virgil’s poetry is also to be left behind. As Adam will tell Dante in *Paradiso* XXVI, “for never has anything produced by human reason been everlasting” (line 126-27).

## Dante's Siren Dream and Beatrice

Now that we have observed the Siren theme of Canto II, we are ready to approach the explicit encounter with Ulysses' Siren in Canto XIX. Dante, after listening to Virgil lecture on the true nature of love, enters the terrace of sloth. As the temporality and motion of Purgatory require, Dante grows weary and drifts off to sleep. Immediately, Dante tells us that a "stammering woman" comes to him in a dream (line 7). This "stammering woman" is first described as being on "crooked feet," with "her hands crippled and her complexion sallow," until Dante's gaze "set her limbs in perfect order, and, with the coloring that love prefers, my eyes transformed the wanness of her features" (lines 10-13). In other words, the woman is ugly, but Dante's gaze straightens her out and makes her beautiful. The Siren then begins to sing, introducing herself thus (*Purg.* 19.19-23):

"I am, I am the pleasing Siren,  
who in midsea leads mariners astray—  
there is so much delight in hearing me.  
I turned aside Ulysses, although he  
had longed to journey; who grows used to  
me  
seldom departs—I satisfy him so."

Dante is utterly entranced by this beautiful song, when an ambiguous woman appears, "alert and saintly" and asks Virgil to reveal the true identity of the Siren (line 28). Virgil then steps forward and tears her clothes, revealing her belly and exposing a "stench" that is so terrible it wakes Dante from his sleep.

It is important to regard in approaching this vision that Virgil's description of love in Canto XVIII becomes the basis for the dream of Canto XIX. Though there is much disagreement on where Dante sourced the Siren, it is undeniable that she has her source in the *Commedia* just like the story of Ulysses' voyage in *Inferno* XXVI.<sup>29</sup> When Dante summarizes Virgil's discourse on love in Canto XVIII, he describes the conditions in which the Siren would come (*Purg.* 18.43-45):

... "For if love's offered to us from without  
and is the only foot with which soul walks,  
soul—going straight or crooked—has no  
merit."

Here we are taught that the only power the Siren

has to lead men astray comes from her being "taken as one who leads to the truth."<sup>30</sup> It is more telling, then, to look to this passage as a source for Dante's Siren rather than some other classical text. But here sees Boethius, who stated, "It is not your nature to make you look beautiful; but the weakness of the eyes of the beholders renders it."<sup>31</sup> It is thus "the weakness of human sight" that could turn such ugliness into beauty.<sup>32</sup> We are introduced to this idea through the words *piede* (foot), *dritta* (straight), and *torta* (crooked) which Hollander claims "give a conceptual basis for the figuration of the Siren" in the dream of the following Canto.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, we enter *Purgatorio* XIX with a philosophical description of a fraudulent Beatrice by Virgil and a warning of mankind's faulty vision that renders her beautiful.

Yet, just what is this fraudulent Beatrice whose song, even after Virgil's preparation, brings Dante to say, "it would have been most difficult for me to turn aside" (*Purg.* 19.17-18)? Again, auto-citation gives us reference. As Bianchi first identified, Dante's words that the Siren is colored "with the coloring that love prefers" (lines 14-15) is a self-allusion to *Vita Nuova* XXXVI.<sup>34</sup> In this text, after mourning the death of Beatrice, Dante sees a woman who is "gracious, beautiful, young and wise" staring down at him from a window (*Vita Nuova* XXVII).<sup>35</sup> After concluding that this woman has a "sublimely noble love," he describes her as having a color "pale almost like love's" (*Vita Nuova* XXV). He then writes a sonnet, called "*Color d'amore*." Dante's auto-citation here pairs the "weakness of human sight" that causes him to beautify the wanton features of the Siren with the sonnets he wrote to the "*donna gentile*" in the window in his *Vita Nuova*.

Beatrice's words to Dante in *Purgatorio* XXX give us further information on just what Dante is demonstrating. Wilson identifies the "central drama" of the Siren dream as one of "turning away."<sup>36</sup> This is apt considering Beatrice delineates in *Purgatorio* XXX that Dante turned away from her, following "counterfeits of goodness, which will never pay in full what they have promised." (lines 131-32). As well, this very moment in the *Vita Nuova* that Dante references in describing his encounter with the Siren, Beatrice condemns (*Purg.* 30.124-26):

As soon as I, upon the threshold of my second age, had changed my life, he took himself away from me and followed after another.

Hence, Dante turned away from Beatrice for this “*donna gentile*” in the window. Of course, this lady in the window is not a real lady at all. Dante, in his *Convivio* would describe her as “love that reasons in my mind” (line 112) just as Casella sang in Canto II. She is Boethius’ Lady Philosophy—the delight of worldly learning and knowledge.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, as the beauty of Casella’s song did not seem to temper Cato’s rebuke in Canto II, Dante’s Lady Philosophy does not escape Beatrice’s condemnation in Canto XXX. Philosophy, as Beatrice put it, reveals itself to be a counterfeit of goodness which cannot fulfill all that it promises. This is substantiated by the futility of Virgil’s philosophical description of love and Dante’s subsequent inability to withstand the Siren’s song. It is not until Virgil—at the behest of feminine Grace—reveals to Dante the “stench” of the “stammering woman” that he wakes up and escapes her song. And, just as the “other” in *Inferno* XXVI (line 141)—who was pleased with the fate of Ulysses’ voyage—represents *judicium Dei* (the judgement of God), Beatrice here uses the same word “other” to condemn this Lady Philosophy to which Dante had turned. She pairs such an object of love with the same fate as Ulysses, which would have been Dante’s end had she not intervened.<sup>38</sup> Ergo, it is not necessarily that philosophy and worldly love are evil in and of themselves, but rather that they *turn away* voyagers from the true and everlasting object of love—God—for one that will perish with the world.

Ultimately, then, the *Commedia* is a story of a poet who was *turned away* and who is redeemed. It is a tale, as Dante himself described comedy, that begins “horrible and stinking” and ends “successful, desirable, and welcome.”<sup>39</sup> There are many who have been confused by the title that Dante gave this work, but in the context of this paper the title seems to be beautifully summative.<sup>40</sup> It is here that Dante distinguishes his fate and *Commedia* most starkly from that of Virgil’s “alto tragedia” or high tragedy (*Inferno* 20.112-14).<sup>41</sup> His tendencies to be turned away by the Siren are purged in real

time throughout the narrative of *Purgatorio*, and the canticle ends in a glorious reunion with the love that made such purgation possible. Yet, the tragedy of the poem is Virgil, who is perhaps so utile for demonstrating the dangers of the Siren to Dante because he himself could not escape it. And this tension that Hollander describes, between Dante and his master Virgil whom he places in Hell, is most potent in *Purgatorio* XXX when Beatrice appears.<sup>42</sup> It is here that Dante’s comic fate is distinguished most grimly from his master’s, and the culminating episode is tied directly to the Siren.

Leading up to the moment of Beatrice’s emergence in *Purgatorio* XXX, Dante builds tension through subliminal contrast of Virgil’s tragedy with Christian marriage. Upon arriving in earthly paradise, Dante and Virgil are met by a heavenly procession.<sup>43</sup> In a show of pageantry, the 24 elders in the procession chant three times the phrase from Song of Songs, “*Veni, sponsa, de Libano*” (I have come, my bride, from Lebanon) (line 11). Immediately after, scattering flowers upon the path, all of the procession cries together, “*Benedictus qui venis*” (Blessed is He who cometh) (line 19). These potent scriptural allusions foreshadow the coming Beatrice with themes of marriage and place her in the role of Christ. The phrase *Benedictus qui venis* comes from Matthew 21, Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. As many have noticed, Dante alters the Latin enough to fit the context of his poem but does not change the verb into the feminine form for Beatrice. Some interpret this as a further identification of Beatrice with Christ,<sup>44</sup> and some see it as describing Dante as the blessed one who comes.<sup>45</sup> Regardless, the line is followed by “*Manibus, oh, date lilia plenis!*” (Hands, oh, full of lilies) (line 22), a tragic line from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, when Aeneas and Anchises mourn the premature death of Marcus Claudius Marcellus (*Aeneid* 6.1179).<sup>46</sup> Those lilies that were scattered in mourning, are here paired with the Song of Songs (2:1) when the bride calls herself the *lilium convallium* (lily of the valley).<sup>47</sup> Tragedy is placed beside comedy, mourning beside redemption, and Virgil beside Dante. Such allusions to Virgil, to his *Georgics* and *Aeneid*, fill the text and culminate in the moment when Beatrice arrives.<sup>48</sup>

In announcing who she is to Dante, Beatrice not

only alludes to the Siren from *Purgatory* XIX, but also provides one final soft allusion to Virgil. "Well I am, well I am Beatrice. How were you able to ascend the mountain?" she proclaims (*Purg.* 30.73-74). Plainly, the repetition "ben son, ben son" (well I am, well I am) is a strong allusion and contrast to the Siren, who claimed "Io son, io son dolce serena" (I am, I am the sweet Siren) (*Purg.* 19.19). In effect, the first work done by the mantra is to establish herself, Beatrice, as Aristotle's *eudaemonia*, the true form of what men think they will find with the Siren but do not. It also, however, softly alludes to the cries of Nisus in Virgil's *Aeneid* when his young friend Euryalus is captured and about to be put to death: "me, me, here I am, who put him up to it, turn the iron on me O Rutulians," Nisus cried in vain, "he only had too much love for a luckless friend" (*Aeneid* 9.427-30).<sup>49</sup> Just as Beatrice refers to herself in double emphasized pronoun, and then takes responsibility for Dante's ascent up the mountain, Nisus takes responsibility but in contrast wishes with futility that his love were enough to save his friend. Even more, Euryalus who is described as "pulchrior" (more beautiful) (line 179) than any other soldier of Aeneas, cannot escape death, and falls to the ground "purple as a flower cut with a plow" (line 435). Unlike the *lilium convallium*, this flower, as Petrarch remarked in another context, "has no lasting worth because of the body's physical corruptibility."<sup>50</sup>

In this final moment of Virgil's true influence as a character in Dante's *Commedia*, Dante differentiates himself from Virgil with the same characters that Virgil created to rewrite Homer.<sup>51</sup> Virgil wrote Nisus and Euryalus to insert *virtus* (virtue) and *pietas* (piety) into Homer's amoral tale of Diomedes and Odysseus' night sortie in book IX of the *Iliad*.<sup>52</sup> Now, Dante re-writes Nisus and Euryalus to insert eternal life. Furthermore, Virgil's creation stands at the pinnacle of the Siren's (and thereby tragedy's) failure: the beauty that cannot withstand death and the flower that withers. As Beatrice is what the Siren pretends to be, Dante is what Virgil failed to be. Beyond the reach of even philosophy and poetic grandeur, Dante arrives at the creation of scripture, the genre of the psalm, the kind of beauty that can only come from a true tale of conversion and redemption; he arrives at Beatrice. It is this Christian union that crowns

Dante's *Purgatorio* a comedy, and concurrently, Virgil's poetry and life a tragedy. While Dante owes much to Virgil for his guidance, his "sweet father" never moved beyond the "stench of paganism" (*Paradiso* 20.125), that same "stench" of the Siren that Virgil himself exposed to Dante. For, as Verdicchio denotes, Virgil's relationship to Dante is beneficial because the *Commedia* is not like the *Aeneid*.<sup>53</sup> The Siren and Virgil's tragedy are left stinking in the temporal world while Dante and Beatrice ascend beyond it.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent (1919)," *Selected Essays*, (1975): 13-22; Aaron Gorner, "Milton, Immortality, and Obtaining Eliot's Significant Emotion," *Criterion: A Journal of Literary Criticism* 16, no. 2, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Terence Logan, "The Characterization of Ulysses in Homer, Virgil and Dante: A Study in Sources and Analogues," *Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 82, 1964, 21. When referring to Homer, Virgil, and Dante, I mean the classical tradition of complex allusions, symbols, and re-writings that began with Homer. For Homer I refer to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, for Virgil the *Aeneid*, and for Dante the *Commedia*, or in other words, his *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Hollander, "Dante's Virgil: A Light That Failed," *Lectura Dantis*, no. 4, 1989, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Vates*, Latin for "prophet"; *theologian-poeta*, Latin for "poet theologian". In his *Convivio*, Dante differentiates two kinds of allegories: that of poets, and that of scripture (see *Convivio* II). With the *Commedia*, Dante undertakes to write scripture.

<sup>5</sup> Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante's Ulysses: Narrative and Transgression" in *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives*, Amilcare Iannucci and Iannotius Manettus, eds., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 116. Ulysses is the Latin for the Greek name Odysseus, and is the name used by Dante throughout the *Commedia*.

<sup>6</sup> Logan, "The Characterization of Ulysses." In Homer's *Iliad*, Odysseus and Diomedes go on a night sortie, slaughtering countless Trojans in their sleep and filling their pockets with treasure. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, he inserts higher morals by re-writing the Homeric story with Nisus and Euryalus, two friends who embark on a night sortie and lose their life as a result.

The sirens are Homeric characters who attempt to seduce Odysseus and his men on their voyage home. The sirens sing in order to draw in their victims. Odysseus is warned by the witch Circe about these creatures and avoids the sirens by plugging the ears of his men with beeswax, and has himself tied to the mast of his ship.

<sup>7</sup> *Purgatorio* is the second book of the *Commedia* and describes Dante and Virgil's ascension up the mountain of purgatory after their descent through the 9 circles of hell in *Inferno*. While both Hell and Heaven are eternal realms, Purgatory is a temporal realm, and likewise this book focuses on change and abandonment of wayward tendencies. The summation of *Purgatory* is the appearance of Beatrice, who replaces Virgil as Dante's guide before they enter Heaven.

<sup>8</sup> Classical tragedy depicts a tragic hero who faces their downfall from fate or misjudgement. Aristotle held that tragedy was the result of a choice made by the protagonist, usually a choice made from a competing set of goods where the only outcome was loss. Classical tragedy is typically from the perspective of the wealthy class, and usually ends with death. Comedy, on the other hand, depicts the rise in fortune of a sympathetic hero. Told from the perspective of the poor, and usually ends with marriage.

<sup>9</sup> Cato the Elder (234-149 BCE) was a Roman military hero, famous for his valor, integrity, and defense of Roman values. He committed suicide at the age of 85

<sup>10</sup> Limbo, the first circle of Dante's Hell, where a beautiful meadow holds many great men such as Homer, Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. Virgil tells Dante as they pass through that these souls "did not sin; and yet, though they have merits, that's not enough, because they lacked baptism, the portal of the faith that you embrace" (*Inf.* 4. 34-37). Virgil identifies himself as one of these.

<sup>11</sup> Petri di Dante, *Commentarium super Dantis ipsius genitoris Comoedia*, Vol. 1, apud Guiliemum Pitatti, 1845, I 85-90.

- <sup>12</sup> All passages from the *Commedia* are sourced from Allen Mandelbaum's English translation: *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, (Bantam, 1986); In *Inferno XXVI*, Dante meets Ulysses in the 8<sup>th</sup> circle of hell in the 8<sup>th</sup> pouch: the false counsellors. Ulysses tells of a "folle volo" or "mad flight," when he led his men on a voyage in search of "virtue" and "knowledge" beyond the landmarks that Hercules set as the limits of man. The voyage ends in shipwreck.
- <sup>13</sup> David Thompson, *Dante's Epic Journeys*, (JHU Press, 2019), 47.
- <sup>14</sup> Bernardino Daniello, *Dante con l'esposizione di M. Bernardino Daniello da Lucca sopra la sua Comedia dell'Inferno, del Purgatorio, e del Paradiso*, (Pietro de Fino, 1568); Robert Hollander, "'Purgatorio'II: The New Song and the Old," *Lectura Dantis*, no. 6, (1990): 28-45.
- <sup>15</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Il Convivio (The Banquet)* II, xiii, line 24. Trans. Richard H. Lansing (Garland Library of Medieval Literature, 1990).
- <sup>16</sup> Manfredi Porena, *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri commentate da Manfredi Porena*, (Zanichelli, 1946).
- <sup>17</sup> *In exitu Israel de Aegypto* or "When Israel went out of Egypt" is Psalm 114 in the KJV. The Psalm tells of Israel exiting Egypt and is frequently used in liturgies.
- <sup>18</sup> Francesco da Buti, *Commento di Francesco da Buti sopra la Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, T. 2 (Purgatorio), ed. Crecentino Giannini, (Nistri Lischi, 1858), Canto II vv. 75.
- <sup>19</sup> Fabio Bisogni, "Precisazioni sul Casella dantesco," *Quadrivium*, no. 12, (1971): 81-91.
- <sup>20</sup> *Amor che ne ne la mente mi ragiona* or "love that reasons in my mind" is usually left in Italian in English translations because it is an auto-citation.
- <sup>21</sup> Daniello, *Dante con l'esposizione*, [Purgatory II] vv. 106-108.
- <sup>22</sup> We first encounter Dante's *donna gentile* or "kind woman" in *Vita Nuova*, when Dante falls in love with her after the death of Beatrice. Later on, in his *Convivio*, Dante claims there was never any real woman, but that the *donna gentile* was the equivalent of Boethius' Lady Philosophy.
- <sup>23</sup> Many have interpreted the failed hug of Dante and Casella to be an allusion to the failed hug of Aeneas and his father, Anchises, in book VI of *The Aeneid*, when Aeneas travels to the afterlife and finds
- <sup>24</sup> Hesperia's land is what would become Italy after Aeneas successfully weds Lavinia and settles there the remnant of Troy.
- <sup>25</sup> Robert Hollander, "Purgatorio II: Cato's Rebuke and Dante's scoglio," *Italica* 52, no. 3, (1975): 349.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Robert Hollander, "Purgatorio II: The New Song and The Old," *Lectura Dantis*, no. 6, (1990): 36.
- <sup>28</sup> In Virgil's 4<sup>th</sup> *Eclogue*, he writes of a child who will become divine, and eventually rule over the whole world. Many Christians saw this poem as messianic.
- <sup>29</sup> The story that Ulysses tells of his "folle volo" in *Inferno XXVI* cannot be sourced from any other literature on Ulysses but was rather created by Dante to fit the allegory of his poem.
- <sup>30</sup> Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's Commedia*, (Princeton University Press, 1969), 141.
- <sup>31</sup> Francesco da Buti, *Commento di Francesco da Buti*, Canto XIX vv. 15; Boethius, *De consolation philosophiae* III.8.10.
- <sup>32</sup> Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum super Dantis Aligherii comoediam*, 1375-80, Purgatorio XIX, vv. 15.
- <sup>33</sup> Robert Hollander, *Allegory*, pp. 141.
- <sup>34</sup> Brunone Bianchi, *La Commedia di Dante Alighieri, novamente riveduta nel testo e dichiarata da Brunone Bianchi*, (Successori Le Monnier, 1868), Purgatory XIX, vv. 15.



- <sup>35</sup> All passages from the *Vita Nuova* utilise Andrew Frisardi's translation into English (Northwestern UP, 2012).
- <sup>36</sup> William Wilson, "Purgatorio XIX," *Lectura Dantis* 2, no. 12, (1993): 282.
- <sup>37</sup> For more information, see: Angelo Gualtieri, "Lady Philosophy in Boethius and Dante," *Comparative Literature* 23, no. 2, (1971).
- <sup>38</sup> Patrick Boyde, *Human Vices and Human Worth in Dante's Comedy*, (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 270.
- <sup>39</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Le Opere di Dante*, (Nella Sede della Società, 1960), 10.
- <sup>40</sup> Amilcare Iannucci, "Dante's Theory of Genres and the 'Divina Commedia'," *Dante Studies*, no. 91, (1973).
- <sup>41</sup> Virgil refers here to his *Aeneid* as his "high tragedy," an important juxtaposition to the comedy that Dante proclaims his work to be. While Virgil's text ends in slaughter, Dante's ends in marriage. Christ is in the fabric of Dante's comedy and is the element that makes Dante's fate different from Virgil.
- <sup>42</sup> Hollander, "A Light That Failed," 4.
- <sup>43</sup> Peter Dronke, "The Procession in Dante's Purgatorio," *Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch* 53, no. 1, (1979).
- <sup>44</sup> Charles Singleton, *Journey to Beatrice*, (Cambridge, 1958), 72-85.
- <sup>45</sup> Bernard Stambler, "The Confrontation of Beatrice and Dante: Purgatorio XXX," *Italica* 42, no. 1, (1965).
- <sup>46</sup> Marcus Claudius Marcellus was the nephew of Augustus who died prematurely from an illness at the budding of his political career. In Book VI of *The Aeneid*, Anchises and Aeneas see him among the heroes of Rome in the Elysian Fields.
- <sup>47</sup> Pietro di Dante, *Commentarium super Dantis*, Purgatorio XXX vv. 20.
- <sup>48</sup> Daniello, *Dante con l'esposizione*, Purgatorio XXX vv. 48-52; Robert Hollander, *Il Virgilio dantesco: tragedia nella "Commedia"*, (Olschki, 1983), 132-34.
- <sup>49</sup> Trans. Robert Fitzgerald (Random House, 1983).
- <sup>50</sup> Francesco Petrarca and Conrad H. Rawski, *Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, 5 vols, (Indiana University Press, 1991), I, 18.
- <sup>51</sup> See note 6.
- <sup>52</sup> Logan, "Characterization of Ulysses," 24.
- <sup>53</sup> Massimo Verdicchio, "Poetic Authority in Dante and Virgil," *Italica* 94, no. 3, (2017).

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