

Rewriting Souls: *Lectio* and *Imitatio* in Dante's *Purgatorio*

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Lire c'est mediter et c'est prier.
—Jean Leclercq

For J. B.

Introduction

MUCH RECENT DANTE SCHOLARSHIP has focused on the need for enriched contextualization of the *Commedia* against the background of the cultural complexity of the Middle Ages. In contrast to many older readings of Dante in relation to a single thinker (e.g., Aquinas) or system of thought (e.g., Aristotelianism), contemporary scholarship has explored Dante's poem as an extraordinary synthesis of multiple philosophical, poetic, and theological traditions, thus bringing to light the full implications of Gianfranco Contini's *polisemia dantesca*, which "unfolds entirely on the literal level, by means of a multiplicity of internal echoes and cultural allusions."¹

¹ Gianfranco Contini, "Filologia e esegesi dantesca," in *Un'idea di Dante* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976), 113–42, at 119. Similarly, Zygmunt G. Barański, who sees much of his work as building on this insight of Contini, comments on how Dante "ably weaves together diverse elements—formal, narrative, cultural, symbolic, and intellectual—[into] a discourse created with extraordinary care and rigor, even if it remains the reader/exegete's responsibility to disentangle the various threads" ("Guido Cavalcanti tra le cruces di Inferno ix–xi, ovvero dante e la storia della ragione," in *Versi Controversi: Letture dantesche*, ed. Domenico Cofano and Sebastiano Valerio [Foggia: Edizioni del Rosone, 2008], 39–112, at 57; unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own). For more on *polisemia dantesca*, see: Barański, "Dante poeta e lector: poesia e riflessione tecnica (con divagazioni sulla *Vita nova*)," in "Dante Oggi" 1/3, special issue, *Critica del testo* 14 (2011): 81–110; Simon Gilson, "Dante and Christian Aristotelianism," in *Reviewing Dante's Theology* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), 65–110; Jason Baxter, "Through the Eyes of Landino: Dante, *Natura*,

That Scholastic moral philosophy did much to shape the architecture of Dante's Mount Purgatory is well known; that in *Purgatorio* Dante rewrites classical *auctores* and contemporary vernacular poets is also well known.² But until recently, scholarship has paid little attention to another strand that makes up the complicated textual fabric of the canticle: monastic theology.³ This paper contributes to our appreciation of the *polisemia* of *Purgatorio*, by focusing particularly on the role played by monastic affective reading (*lectio*) in effecting deep spiritual cleansing (*purgatio*).

At the same time, though, this strand of monastic *lectio* is interwoven with yet another medieval textual practice: Dante willingly conflates monastic reading (which Hugh of St. Victor and other writers associated with *imitatio*, as seen below) with that rhetorical *imitatio* taught and practiced in medieval schools.⁴ In the Middle Ages, such rhetorical *imitatio* was the writing process by which an aspiring *auctor* imitated an authoritative classic: that is, the compositional method by which an original authorita-

and the Poetics of *Varietas*," *L'Alighieri* 43 (2014): 65–89.

- ² For *Purgatorio's* debt to Scholastic moral philosophy, see Marc Cogan, *The Design in the Wax* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999). For the rewriting of classical and vernacular *auctores*, see: Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Michelangelo Picone, "Purgatorio XXVII: passaggio rituale e translatio poetica," *Medioevo romanzo* 12 (1987): 389–420.
- ³ See, for instance, Andrea Robiglio's panoramic discussion of theological and philosophical trends "beyond scholasticism" in the age of Dante in "Philosophy and Theology," in *Dante in Context*, ed. Zygmunt Barański and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 137–58. See also: Mira Mocan, *L'Arca Della Mente: Riccardo Di San Vittore Nella "Commedia" Di Dante* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2012); Erminia Ardissino, *Tempo liturgico e tempo storico nella "Commedia" di Dante* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009). For Dante and the liturgy, see: Matthew Treherne, "La *Commedia* di Dante e l'immaginario liturgico," in *Pregghiera e Liturgia in Dante*, ed. Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna: Longo, 2013), 11–30; Ronald Martinez, "Dante and the Poem of the Liturgy," in *Reviewing Dante's Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Claire E. Honess and Matthew Treherne, Leeds Studies on Dante (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), 89–156. For Dante and the "spirituality" of monophony, see Francesco Ciabattini, *Dante's Journey to Polyphony* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).
- ⁴ I am not the first to point out this conflation of the two types of *imitatio*, even if my research focuses on different aspects. Dina de Rentiis has commented on how the pilgrim follows Virgil both as his moral and literary guide in *Die Zeit der Nachfolge: Zur Interpendenz vom imitatio Christi und imitatio auctorum im 12.–16. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1996), 75–93; see also de Rentiis, "Sequere me: *Imitatio* dans la *Divine Comedie* et dans le livre du *Chemin de long estude*," in *The City of Scholars: New Approaches to Christine de Pizan*, ed. Margarete Zimmermann (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), 31–42.

tive text was internalized and then transformed in a new textual composition. In this article, I will focus on how Dante combined these two distinct medieval textual practices in his *Purgatorio*, thereby creating an image of souls who are “rewritten” by God (the results of a rhetorical *imitatio*) by means of their meditative “reading” (that is, through the practice of moral *imitatio*).⁵

***Fervor Caritatis* and *Purgatio*:
Affective *Lectio* in the Late Middle Ages**

From ancient through medieval Christianity there was a broad consensus that good yet impure souls (*boni* but *imperfecti*) would have to spend time in the afterlife undergoing purgation—suffering in *ignis quidam purgatorius*, although explanations varied as to what exactly the end of such purgation was.⁶ Scholastic theologians thought of purgatory as the place where souls paid off the *debitum iustitiae*, that is, the “the payment ‘to the uttermost farthing’ of the *temporal* penalty incurred to the Justice of God by sin, the *eternal* penalty having been already remitted by the Mercy of God.”⁷ The monastic tradition, on the other hand, emphasized not the legal element, but focused on purgatory as a place of purity, where the final deficiencies of love were burned away in an excruciatingly painful *ignis purgatorius*. It was the aim of medieval spiritual masters (such as Guigo II, Peter of Celle, John of Fecampe, Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, and Bernard of Clairvaux) to avoid the need for the cleansing fires of the afterlife by cultivating a love (*fervor caritatis*) in this life strong enough to burn away moral flaws: “This I assert without hesitation, that if the fire that the Lord Jesus has sent down to earth burns in us with the ardor envisioned by him who sent it, the purgatorial fire . . . will find in us neither wood, nor hay, nor straw to consume.”⁸ Thus, the souls within Dante’s *Purgatorio*, who were spiritually lax in life, must now submit themselves to that *disciplina*

⁵ For Italian quotations, I have used *Commedia*, ed. Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 3 vols. (Milan: Mondadori, 1995-1997). For English translations of Dante, I have almost always used that of Robert and Jean Hollande: *Purgatorio* (New York: Anchor, 2004).

⁶ Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁷ Edward Moore, *Studies in Dante: Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante*, vol. 2 (Oxford University Press, 1899), 43–44.

⁸ These words come from the Cistercian Guerric of Igny, as cited in Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 139. For the connection between *fervor caritatis* and *ardor* with *purgatio*, see Le Goff, “The Fire of Purgatory: The Early Twelfth Century,” in *Birth of Purgatory*, 133–53.

that was the hallmark of monastic spiritual experience. Even if now they have rationally renounced their choice of earthly goods (cf. *Purg.* 6.25–27), their *affectus* has not been warmed enough by the fire of love (*foco d'amor* [*Purg.* 6.38]) to burn away their habitual inclination toward creatures. And yet, although they still have their characteristic earthly dispositions (*lo modo usato* [*Inferno* 4.126]), they are now in a state of transition in which those “with keen fervor make amends, / perhaps for . . . past negligence and sloth” (“fervore aguto adesso / ricompie forse negligenza e indugio” [*Purg.* 18.106–7]). Dante’s purgatory is a school of desire, where souls grow in *ardore* and *fervore* to prepare for “that cloister” (*quel chiostro*) where “when more souls speak of *ours*, / . . . the more of love is burning in that cloister” (“per quanti si dice più li ‘nostro’. . . / più di caritate arde”; *Purg.* 15.55, 57). As we shall see, closing the gap between head-knowledge (*ratio*) and heart-knowledge (*affectus* or *cogitatio cordis*) is the central task of the souls in *Purgatorio*, that is, moving from merely assenting to truth, to loving it, desiring it, responding with *affectus*. In Carlo Delcorno’s words: “In this intermediary place the souls are exhorted and goaded no longer with arguments, given that their *metanoia* has already taken place, but with examples which sometimes comfort, sometimes terrify, but all of which act directly and efficaciously on their character.”⁹

Although monastic masters drew on a whole range of spiritual exercises to shape their *disciplina claustralis*,¹⁰ there was one *exercitium* that served as the supporting pillar for all the others: *lectio*, a fluid “movement of reading into prayer.”¹¹ For centuries, reading and commenting on Scripture had been an essential practice in Christian devotion,¹² but during the great age of renewed “interest in the *inner landscape of the human being*” (Caroline Bynum), the traditional practice of *lectio* was drawn into the

⁹ Carlo Delcorno, “Dante e l’*exemplum* medievale,” *Lettere Italiane* 35, no. 1 (1983): 3–28, at 7.

¹⁰ See Peter of Celle, *De disciplina claustrali*: “The true religious voluntarily and freely desires regular discipline in order to be tied back from the appetites of the flesh as if by bands. The bonds of religion are the regular statutes: for example, silence, fasting, and seclusion of the cloister, ways of acting which do not attract attention, compassion and fraternal love, paternal reverence, reading and persistent prayer (*lectio et oratio assidua*), recollection of past evils (*recordatio praeteritorum malorum*), fear of death, the fire of purgatory, eternal fire (*Patrologia Latina* [PL] 202; English trans. in “The School of the Cloister,” in *Selected Works*, trans. Hugh Feiss [Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987], 63–130, at 73).

¹¹ Duncan Robertson, *Lectio divina: the Medieval Experience of Reading* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2011), 134.

¹² Jacques Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982).

new emotional climate of affective spirituality, a Europe-wide phenomenon that constituted a major revolution in the history of emotions.¹³ A network of related twelfth- and thirteenth-century Latin texts—Cistercian, Carthusian, Victorine, and Franciscan—led to a lasting reformulation of medieval piety, including the vernacular piety of late-medieval Europe. In what follows, I will illustrate this affective *lectio* by referencing three texts: Guigo II's *Scala claustralium* (*Ladder of Monks*), the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, and Hugh of St. Victor's *De arca Noe*. Against this background we can appreciate the role of *lectio* in Dante's *Purgatorio*.

Cogitatio cordis mei: Lectio and Imitatio before Dante

The brevity and systematic nature of Guigo II's *Scala claustralium* was one of the most important factors that led to its extraordinarily widespread influence on European piety.¹⁴ The ninth abbot of the Grande Chartreuse succinctly explains (nine pages in a modern edition) how *lectio* finds its consummation in the *experientia* of God. Like any number of his contemporaries, Guigo describes *experientia Dei* in exuberantly sensual terms: to experience God is to have desire inflamed, to be enveloped in the sweet dew of heaven, to be anointed with oil, to have hunger sated, to be made to forget earthly things, to be enlivened, and to be made drunk while still

¹³ Caroline Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31, no. 1 (1980): 1–17, repr. in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California, 1982), 82–105, at 87. For overviews of broad social changes, see: R. W. Southern, "From Epic to Romance," in *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953), 219–57; Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Dennis Martin, "Introduction," in *Carthusian Spirituality: The Writings of Hugh of Balma and Guigo de Ponte*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 1–66; Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Thoms Bestul, "Meditatio/Meditation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Beckman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 157–66; Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy, *Sensible Moyen Age: Une histoire des émotions dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2015).

¹⁴ Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, vol. 2, *The Presence of God: A History of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 357–63. For more on reception of the *Scala*, see below.

remaining sober.¹⁵ In fact, *experientia* is the distinguishing characteristic between *philosophi gentium* and the Christian. Both the secular philosopher and Christian are able to use intellectual powers (*cogitatio* and *meditatio*), but secular philosophers lack the *spiritus sapientiae* which would lead them to smell, taste, feel, and be warmed by the *experientia* of God. For this reason, Guigo outlines a four-step reading process (a ladder with four rungs) that leads from the mere *littera* (literal meaning) to *experientia*.

The first rung is *lectio*, an attentive reading of Scripture with an alert expectation that the words under consideration are “sweet and crammed full of meanings.” *Meditatio*, the second rung, seeks out fuller explanation, allowing the mind to play freely over the face of Scripture. Guigo illustrates *meditatio* with reference to the verse “blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The mind first considers the words, one at a time, locating each one in a network of related terms. The mind recalls, for instance, how Psalm 23 says only the innocent “in hands and of clean heart” will ascend to God; or how the Psalmist prayed, “cor mundum crea in me” (“create a clean heart in me”); or how Job “made a pact with his eyes” (Job 31:1). The mind then considers the final part of the verse, asking in what way *visio Dei* will satisfy all desires. Guigo continues, though, by saying this meditation on the greatness of the promise of a vision of God leads to a confrontation with the weakness of the soul, and faced with the disheartening contrast (between the greatness of the vision and the soul’s weakness), the mind is ushered into an impassioned state of panting, thirsting, and longing for heavenly things. In this third stage, known as *oratio*, the soul begins to long to know God no longer in the surface way of the letter, but in the sense of experience (“non jam in cortice litterae, sed in sensu experientiae”). In this state of prayer “increased desire” comes (*desiderium amplius*) and “fire is ignited” (*in mea meditatione mea exarsit ignis*). In short, the process of meditating on words has a state of longing where speech ends, but it is within this *oratio* that “desire is inflamed” (*inflammatur desiderium*) and “the soul’s *affectus* is stretched out broad” (*sic ostendit suum affectum*). *Oratio*, then, finds its affective consummation in the fourth and final stage of *contemplatio*, and Guigo says that tears are the certain sign that such an affective experience will soon be had, for they effect the inner washing, the inner *purgatio*: “O blessed tears, through which interior blemishes are purged” (“O felices lacrymae, per quas maculae interiores purgantur”).

¹⁵ Guigo the Carthusian, *Scala claustralium* (PL 184; in English as *The Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations: A Letter on the Contemplative Life*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh [London: Mowbray, 1978; repr. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981]).

A few decades earlier, the Victorine, Hugh of St Victor, wrote an elaborate biblical meditation on how to know God interiorly, *De arca Noe*.¹⁶ Hugh borrowed the image of Noah's ark, expecting his readers to build an image of the ark in their minds as he describes its shape and design: "This your eye shall see outwardly, so that your soul may be fashioned to its likeness inwardly" (1.7). Once the picture is built within the imagination, though, Hugh can explore the meaning of the image from within, that is, imaginatively dwell within the image: "If, then, we want to be saved, it behooves us to enter this ark. And, as I said before, we must build it within ourselves, so that we can live in it within ourselves. For it is not enough for us to be in it externally, if we have not also learnt how we should live in it within ourselves" (1.11). In the second book, Hugh explains the allegorical meaning of the interior chambers of the ark. The first room represents meditating on a text (*cogitatio recta*), which must be followed by a second, more active phase of performing good works, a stage in which one imitates (*imitatio*) what one has read, allowing one's reading to go beyond the mere communication of information (2.5). If one fails to draw some *exemplum* for good living from his reading and puts off incorporating what he has read into his moral life ("si bonum . . . imitari differo et detracto . . . si illud ad exemplum vivendi non traho"), then his *cogitatio* might be called *recta* but *inutilis* (2.5). Reading must culminate in *exercitatio mentis* or *exercitium disciplinae* (2.6). Through *imitatio* or *cogitatio cordis* (reasoning of the heart), the soul comes to "own" those "virtues which it has already learned to admire and love in others ("virtutes, quas in aliis jam amare, et admirari didici"). Thus, we have in Hugh's *De arca Noe* a description of a progressively interior reading, with an analogous emphasis on knowing God *in sensu experientiae*. And like Guigo's *oratio*, Hugh's reading program also entails the growth of interior desire. Hugh uses the biblical symbol of the olive branch brought back to the ark by the dove to symbolize this growth in affective interiority: "The olive branch in leaf denotes the good *affectus* of the mind [*bonum mentis affectum*]. For it often happens that the more holy men gaze upon divine works, the more do they burn within with love for the creator [*intus in amore conditoris inardescunt*]" (2.4)."

¹⁶ Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe*, ed. P. Sicard, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* [CCCM] 176. For the Victorine reading practice more generally, consult Franklin Harkins, *Reading and the Work of Restoration: History and Scripture in the Theology of Hugh of St. Victor* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2009). For Dante's relationship to Victorine spirituality, see: Mocan, *L'arca della mente*; Valentine Atturo, "Contemplating Wonder: Ad-miratio in Richard of St. Victor and Dante," *Dante Studies* 129 (2011): 99–124.

In the next century, the Franciscan spiritual treatise *Meditationes vitae Christi* combined the moral *imitatio* of Hugh and the scriptural *meditatio* of Guigo in a treatise that combed through the details of the life of Christ from the Gospels and presented them in a vivid narration (the first of the *Imitatio Christi* genre).¹⁷ This imaginative rumination on Scripture departs from Guigo's *lectio* by focusing on making the life of Christ vividly and psychologically present before the eye of the mind of the reader, more of a rhetorical exercise directed to arousing pity and compassion than a sophisticated hermeneutic activity. And yet, as we read in the *prologus*, the one who does this will have an affective encounter with Christ: "So whoever follows him cannot go astray and cannot be deceived, for following him and acquiring his virtues in the summit of perfection. And by doing this one can enter into a state in which the heart is enflamed by the fervor of love and enlightened by divine virtue, so much so that one becomes clothed in virtue."¹⁸ Unlike Guigo, who gives instruction on how the mind should create within an elaborate network of related passages, or Hugh, who attempts to peel back the allegorical layers of Scripture, the *Meditationes* dwell on the physical experience described in the *lictera*, but the intended result is the same: the affective *imitatio* helps the readers live *interiorly* the suffering Jesus and Mary experienced in their bodies, thus uniting them through contemplation to Christ and Mary.

All three of these texts exerted extraordinary influence on late-medieval

¹⁷ See Giles Constable, "The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ," in *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 143–248.

¹⁸ *Meditationes vitae Christi*: "Adonque chi lui [that is, Christ] seguita non puote errare e non puote essere inganato, la cui vertude seguitare e acquistare è summa perfectione. Unde perviene l'huomo in tanto ch'eli accende el cuore per fervore de caritade" (*Meditations on the Life of Christ: The Short Italian Text*, trans. Sarah McNamer [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018], 4–6). A vernacular manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale [still unedited], adds this reference to Francis: "The heart that wishes to follow and win Him must take fire and become animated by frequent contemplation. . . . Do you believe that the Blessed Francis would have attained such abundance of virtue and such illuminated knowledge of the Scriptures . . . if not by the familiar conversation with and contemplation of his Lord Jesus? With such ardor did he change himself that he had become almost one with Him, and tried to follow Him as completely as possible in all virtues, and when he was finally complete and perfect in Jesus, by the impression of the sacred stigmata he was transformed into Him" (*Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie Green [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961], 3). The author encourages the reader to take Mary, Francis, Clare, and Bernard of Clairvaux as guides for how to respond fully to the life of Christ. Their imitation can be imitated.

spirituality, and late-medieval Italy in particular. The short monastic letter *Scala claustralium* not only survives in over one hundred manuscripts, but had direct impact on vernacular piety in Italy, as well as the rest of Europe.¹⁹ Bono Giamboni, also responsible for *volgarizzamenti* (vernacularization) of Innocent III's *De miseria* and Brunetto Latini's *Tresor*, seems to have been responsible for an Italian epitome of Guigo's *Scala*.²⁰ Similarly, the Franciscan *Meditationes vitae Christi*, perhaps dating from the early 1300s, "was the single most influential devotional text written in the later Middle Ages."²¹ And although scholarship is still unsettled on whether the *Meditationes* was first written in Latin or Italian, or whether it was written by John de Caulibus or a spiritual Franciscan by the name of Iacobus de Santo Geminiano, it seems now that Italian versions of the *Meditationes* were circulating within the life of Dante.²² Thus, the treatise was an important bridge between the monastic *studia* and vernacular piety, as well as an important vehicle to disseminate twelfth-century practices of affective reading throughout Franciscan and lay communities.²³ And finally, Hugh

¹⁹ Giles Constable, "The Popularity of Twelfth-Century Spiritual Writers in the Late Middle Ages," *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*, ed. Anthony Molho and John Tedeschi (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1970), 3–28. For the role of Carthusians in creating a Europe-wide distribution of Latin texts into the various vernaculars, see: Michael Sargent, "The Transmission by the English Carthusians of Some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 (1976): 225–40; Marleen Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

²⁰ Simona Foà, "Giamboni, Bono," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 54 (2000).

²¹ Sarah McNamer, "The Origins of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*," *Speculum* 84 (2009): 905–55, at 905.

²² See Peter Tóth and David Falvay, "New Light on the Date and Authorship of the *Meditationes vitae Christi*," in *Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Europe*, ed. Stephen Kelly and Ryan Perry (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 17–105, and McNamer's commentary in her translation of *Meditations*.

²³ In particular, Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis are portrayed as exemplary guides for reading Scripture affectively, depictions which might have directly influenced Dante: see Steven Botterill, "The Image of St Bernard in Medieval Culture," in *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 13–63. For Dante and Franciscan spirituality, see: Nick Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans: Poverty and the Papacy in the Commedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); *Dante and the Franciscans*, ed. Santa Casciani (Leiden: Brill, 2006); George Holmes, "Dante and the Franciscans," in *Dante and the Church: Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Paolo Acquaviva and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007), 25–38; Anna Pegoretti, "Immaginare la veste di un angelo: il caso di Purg. IX, 115–16," *L'Alighieri* 27 (2006): 141–50; Nicolò Maldina, "'L'oratio super pater noster' di Dante: Tra esegesi e vocazione liturgica. Per *Purgatorio* XI, 1–24,"

of St. Victor, whose works were read throughout Europe (surviving in over twenty-five hundred manuscripts), was also being copied in Italy in the age of Dante.²⁴ His *De arca Noe* is included in dozens of surviving Italian manuscripts, including one particularly fascinating manuscript—given Dante’s known connections to Franciscan spirituality—that indicates Hugh’s *De arca Noe* was being read in Franciscan circles alongside Bonaventure’s *Lignum vitae* and Pietro Olivi’s *Principium super Matheum*, both of which modeled a reading that promoted *affectualis experienci[a]* (see the prologue to Olivi’s *Principium*) and address the *affectus* (see the preface to Bonaventure’s *Lignum*: “ut . . . attendatur affectus”).²⁵

In sum, for Franciscans, Victorines, Carthusians, and Benedictines, the ancient practice of scriptural meditation was affectively inflected in the late-medieval period, which gave rise to a process of reading that begins with an attentive, imaginative focus on the words, moves to a middle stage in which those truths are made more interior (*meditatio*, *imitatio*, and *cogitatio cordis*), and arrives at a final stage which erupts in *oratio* and *contemplatio* and is marked by the “fire” of *affectus* (or the *fervore di caritade*) that leads to interior *purgatio*. Even in the unlikely situation that Dante knew none of these widespread texts, my argument that such affective *lectio* plays a major role in *Purgatorio* is not substantially affected, for what we find in *Purgatorio* are simple echoes of what could be found in the prologues and prefaces of the most successful treatises of the day.

Secondo l’affezion: The Practice of Lectio in Purgatorio

Although Dante’s purgatorial souls on every terrace are engaged in some kind of affective *lectio*, they do not meditate on “texts” as conceived in the modern period. Medieval textuality was more fluid and demanded more from the senses and the imagination than the reading of the post-Enlightenment period. In particular, in the late-medieval period, the boundary between visual meditation and affective reading was porous, as Jeffrey Hamburger has written: “For Bernard [of Clairvaux], as for his contem-

L’Alighieri 40 (2012): 89–108. The research being conducted by the “Dante and Late Medieval Florence” program at the University of Leeds and Warwick will significantly alter our perception of Dante’s relationship to the mendicant orders and vernacular theology.

²⁴ This includes one from the library of the Dominicans of San Marco in Florence (*Iste liber est Conventus Sancti Marci de Florentia ordinis Predicatorum*). See Sicard, “Inventaire et description des témoins du texte [*De arca Noe*],” in *CCM*, 176:27–74.

²⁵ Biblioteca Comunale di Assisi, Fondo Antico, Ms. Assisi Com.586 (consulted through Manus Online).

poraries, vision was closely linked to the process of reading, in particular, reading understood as meditation on the Bible. This is because by ‘vision’ was meant primarily intellectual or spiritual vision and by ‘reading,’ an understanding that probed beyond the literal sense of the text. . . . To read literally or not to see beyond the mere shell of surface appearance was the equivalent of blindness.”²⁶ Souls in *Purgatorio* “read” *exempla* (both sacred and secular),²⁷ whether they are chanted, carved into the path, reverberate as voices through the air, or are dreamed. The most clear example of such *lectio* is found in canto 20.²⁸ At the beginning of the canto, the pilgrim is

²⁶ Jeffrey Hamburger, “The Visual and the Visionary: The Image in Late Medieval Monastic Devotion,” in *The Visual and the Visionary* (New York: Zone, 1998), 111–48, at 147.

²⁷ Dante’s souls meditate on the *fabulae* of antiquity, in addition to biblical *exempla*, and with the same results! This reflects yet another strand of medieval culture, that of the “medieval renaissance” of classical literature in the schools. All of the major classical authors were recipients of extensive systems of glosses. See at least P. von Moos, “The Use of Exempla in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury,” in *Entre histoire et littérature: Communication et culture au Moyen Age* (Florence: SISMEL, 2005), 205–90, and Munk Olsen’s brilliantly useful introduction to his extensive research in *I classici nel canone scolastico altomedievale* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 1991). For further bibliography, see: Rita Copeland, “Gloss and Commentary,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin Literature*, ed. Ralph Hexter and David Townsend (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 171–91; Frank T. Coulson, “Ovid’s Transformation in Medieval France,” in *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Alison Keith and Stephen James Rupp (Toronto: CRRS, 2007), 33–60; Birger Munk Olsen, “Accessus to Classical Poets in the Twelfth Century,” in *The Classics in the Medieval and Renaissance Classroom: The Role of Ancient Texts in the Arts Curriculum as Revealed by Surviving Manuscripts and Early Printed Books*, ed. Juanita Feros Ruys, John O. Ward, and Melanie Heyworth (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 131–44.

²⁸ Scholarship on *Purgatorio* 20 has traditionally focused on *avaritia*, Hugh’s political prophesy, and Dante’s rhetorical invective: R. Scrivano, “L’orazione politica di Ugo Capeto: morale, politica e retorica di Dante,” *L’Alighieri* 12 (1971): 13–34; A. Stäuble, “Canto XX,” in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis: Purgatorio*, ed. G. Güntert and M. Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2001), 307–14; Vicent Moleta, “Canto XX: Hugh Capet and the Avarice of Kings,” in *Lectura Dantis: Purgatorio*, ed. Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 210–21; Marco Grimaldi, “Politica e storia nel canto XX del *Purgatorio*,” in *Nuova Rivista di Letteratura Italiana* 15 (2012): 9–25; Enrico Fenzi, “Tra religione e politica: Dante, il mal di Francia e le ‘sacrate ossa’ dell’eseccrato san Luigi,” *Studi Danteschi* 69 (2004): 23–117. But see now: Ciro Perna, “‘Dilci, che ‘l sai: di che sapore è l’oro?’: Il canto XX del *Purgatorio*,” *Rivista di Studi Danteschi* 12 (2012): 34–62; Valerio Marucci, “‘Secondo l’affezion ch’ad ir ci sprona’: Lettura del canto XX del *Purgatorio*,” in *Per me, Dante: Incontri e riflessioni con alcuni canti*

struck by the *pietosamente piangere* that he hears. As he will later discover, Hugh Capet is conducting a tearful meditation on Mary's impoverished condition in the inn. His meditation is so vividly affecting that he is led to shout aloud: "By chance I heard on up ahead call out / 'Sweet Mary!' through his tears, even as a woman does in labor / ("Dolce Maria!' / dinanzi a noi chiamar così pianto / come fa donna che in parturir sia" (20.19–21). In this way, Hugh's meditation conforms to the practice enjoined on the devout reader of the *Meditationes*. In chapter 4 of the vernacular *Meditazioni*, the author, reflecting on the Nativity of Christ, also apostrophizes the Virgin: "See [*vedi*] also such great humility: the Queen of Heaven and Earth rides a donkey. O most holy poverty! And Joseph walks along leading the ox. O human pride, what might you say to excuse yourself? . . . O human soul, consider here the poverty and need of the Queen of Heaven!"²⁹ In strikingly similar terms, Dante's Hugh apostrophizes the Virgin, addressing her as if she were present: "How poor you were" (20.22: "Povera fosti tanto"). In his affective meditation, then, he shows that *compassione* the author of the *Meditationes* calls for, and by doing so is being conformed affectively through *imitatio Mariae*. As he compassionately meditates on Mary's poverty in her hour of parturition, he cries out like a woman giving birth.

Hugh also turns to classical *exempla* of poverty, apostrophizing Fabricius (20.25–27: "O buon Fabrizio"), before continuing on to consider the generosity of Nicholas (20.31–33). At night, Hugh tells the pilgrim, the souls respond antiphonally with negative *exempla* (20.101–2), which are also uttered with strong affective responses. They do not just go over the *exempla* again and again (20.103: "Noi repetiam"), but "celebrate" (20.113: "lodiamo") the destruction of Heliodorus, "accuse" Sapphira (20.112: "we accuse Sapphira, with her husband [*accusiam col marito Saffira*]"), and "cry out" the *exemplum* of Crassus ("ci si grida"), disdainfully addressing him (20.116–17: "Crassus, since you know, what is the taste of gold? [*Crasso, dilci, che'l sai: di che sapore è l'oro?*]"). Tellingly, as the penitent souls envision the scene of Achan and Joshua, it becomes so vivid in their imaginations that it seems to play out before their eyes ("20.109–11: "Each then remembers, . . . so that the wrath of Joshua seems to strike again [Si

della "Commedia" (Ravenna: Longo, 2014), 81–97.

²⁹ *Meditationes*, ch. 4: "Vedi etiandio grande humilitade, che la Regina del cielo et della terra cavalcha sopra uno asenelo. O povertade sanctissima! . . . O superbia humana, che dirai per tua scusa! . . . O huomo, pensa qui la povertade et la necessitade della Regina del cielo, et siando lei Madre de Dio non trovoe albergo: hàbili adonque compassione!" (trans. McNamer in *Meditations*, 23).

ricorda . . . sì che l'ira / di Iosüè qui par ch'ancor . . . morda"). They experience an overflow of *affectus*, spontaneously calling out and addressing their "readings" as if they were living before them, in proportion to the "affezione" they have:

"Sometimes one speaks loud, another low,
 according to the zeal that spurs our speech,
 at times with greater, at times with less force
 [Talor parla l'uno alto e l'altro basso,
 Secondo l'affezion ch'ad ir ci sprona
 Ora a maggiore e ora minor passo] (20.118–20).

Hugh's whole mode of thought, though, is beginning to be molded by such responses of *affezione*, not just his biblical and classical *lectio*. After he briefly narrates his rapid ascent from being the son of a butcher to the ancestor of a dynasty (*Purg.* 20.49–60), he delivers a passionate jeremiad against his heir's insatiable hunger for conquest, likening Charles de Valois to Judas and Philip IV to Pilate. In other words, we find in Hugh a quality so admirable for Dante: the righteous conviction of the prophet (speaking in the same passionate tone found in Dante's political letters), reading contemporary political events in light of biblical paradigms.³⁰ As Hugh imagines the abuse of his dynasty, his *ira* boils over, and he calls out to God in words molded by passages of biblical longing ("O my Lord, when shall I be gladdened / at the sight of vengeance that, as yet concealed, / hidden in your mind, makes sweet your wrath? [O Segnor mio, quando sarò io lieto / a veder la vendetta che, nascosa, fa colse l'ira tua nel tuo secreto?]" (20.94–96; cf. Ps 13 and Rev 6:10). What is more, when Hugh apostrophizes avarice (20.82: "O avarice, what greater harm can you do? [O avarizia, che puoi tu più farne?]"), he uses words that echo Virgil's own condemnation of avarice, which, we are told two canti later, were responsible for the initial conversion of Statius (22.38–41: "As if enraged at human nature, you cried out:/ 'To what end, O cursèd hunger for gold, / do you not govern the appetite of mortals?' [Tu chiamo, / crucciato quasi a l'umana natura: 'Per che non reggi tu, o sacra fame / de l'oro, l'appetito de' mortali?]'"). Hugh Capet then has begun to rejoice with alacrity upon hearing the actions of the good and to respond with *ira* upon hearing the

³⁰ Ronald Martinez, "Dante's Jeremiads: The Fall of Jerusalem and the Burden of the New Pharisees, the Capetians, and Florence," in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 301–20.

actions of the evil. Indeed, Hugh is now beginning to call out *nel pianto* (20.20), in a manner which recalls those “blessed tears” Guigo says are the sign of inner *purgatio* in his *Scala claustralium*. The sin to which he was once prone—the avaricious acquisition of land—has now become repulsive to him on a visceral level. His *affectus* has been enkindled.

We find another example of such affective *lectio* on the terrace of the prideful.³¹ Just as the meditations of the avaricious are so vivid that the events contemplated seem to take place sensibly before them (20.109–11: “Each then remembers . . . / so that the wrath / of Joshua seems here to strike again” [“si ricorda . . . sì che l’ira / di Iosüè qui par ch’ancor lo morda”]), so too do the carvings cast a kind of spell over the pilgrim as he “reads” them: “The angel . . . / appeared before us so vividly engraved / . . . it did not seem an image, carved and silent [L’angel . . . / dinanzi a noi pareva sì verace . . . / che non sembiava imagine che tace]” (10.34, 37, 39). In canto 12 of *Purgatorio*, the images are so vividly alive or dramatically dead (“morti li morti e i vivi parean vivi”) that Dante’s perception of the representations was “better” than those who witnessed them as historical events (12.67–68: “non vide mei di me chi vide il vero”), and as the context makes clear, the pilgrim’s viewing of the images is “better” because he views them “affectively.” The pilgrim’s reading experience is shockingly intense: he “hears” the angel’s “Ave” (10.40), the Virgin’s “Ecce ancilla Dèi” (10.43–44), and singing (10.58–60); and he seems to smell incense (10.61–63). The stories are carved so that the viewer cannot be unmoved. Perhaps most interesting for our purposes is that images produce textual meditations in the mind. In the story of Trajan and the widow, the *miserella* “one could almost hear the plea / . . . ‘M Lord, avenge [pareva dir: ‘Segnor, fammi vendetta]’” (10.82–83). Over the next three *terzine* Dante records the imagined dialogue between them that arose in his mind: these images are *visibile parlare* because they inspire an affective meditation (10.95).³²

³¹ On the art of the terrace of the prideful, see: Teodolinda Barolini, “Re-Presenting What God Presented: The Arachnean Art of Dante’s Terrace of Pride,” *Dante Studies* 105 (1987): 43–62; Georges Güntert, “Canto X,” in Güntert and Picone, *Lectura Dantis Turicensis: Purgatorio*, 139–55; Michelangelo Picone, “Dante nel girone dei superbi (Purg. X–XII),” in *Studi danteschi*, ed. Antonio Lanza (Ravenna: Longo, 2017), 515–527; but especially Matthew Treherne, “Ekphrasis and Eucharist: The Poetics of Seeing God’s Art in Purgatorio X,” *The Italianist* 26, no. 1 (2006): 177–96.

³² For more on medieval images that generate verbal reflection, as well as texts that invite affective imagination, see: Jeffrey Hamburger, “Visible Speech: Imagining Scripture in the Prayer Book of Ursula Begerin and the Medieval Tradition of Word Illustration,” in *Schreiben und Lesen in der Stadt: Literaturbetrieb im spät-*

On the terrace of the prideful we also find *lectio* of negative *exempla*. In canto 12, the images do not just narrate, but render the scenes movingly and affectively. Dante is careful to relate not only the stories, but the affective responses of the figures within the narration: Thymbraeus, Pallas, and Mars seem like they are still armed (*armati ancora*) and “wonder” (12.32–33); Nimrod is “as though bewildered” (12.35: *quasi smarrito*); Niobe has “eyes welling up with grief” (12.37: *occhi dolenti*). In fact, the figures are so powerful that the poet is moved to apostrophize the figures he sees in his memory, in yet another instance of affective overflow: “Ah, Niobe . . . / Ah, Saul . . . ; Ah, Rehoboam . . . ; My eyes beheld Troy in ashes and in ruins. / Ah, Ilion, how reduced and shameful you were / now was shown within the carving [Vedeva Troia in cenere e in caverne; o Ilión, come te basso e vile / mostrava il segno che lì si discerne!]” (12.37, 40, 46, 61–63). In short, for Dante-poet and Dante-pilgrim, just as for Hugh Capet, the “texts” of *Purgatorio* are masterfully “written” so that they cannot be read on the mere level of the *lictera*; they leap off the page, so to speak—inspire *affectus*, *cogitatio cordis*, *imitatio*. Appropriately, these texts have been written for those who had in life been untouched by the well-known stories (none of the *exempla*, as Delcorno has shown, are learned allusions³³). As the simile at the beginning of canto 12 suggests (12.16–22), these images are “more true in their resemblance [di miglior sembianza],” not because they are more naturalistic and mimetically accurate, but because they cause that prick of recollection (“la puntura de la rimembranza”) that gives rise to tears (“molte volte si ripiagne”). Here the penitent cannot encounter them without *affectus*.³⁴

From this perspective, the penitential exercises in *Purgatorio* can be understood as setting the context for affective reading. When we first meet the avaricious, we find them weeping, “lying face down on the ground and weeping” (19.72: “giacendo a terra tutta volta in giuso”). While they lie

mittelalterlichen Straßburg, ed. Stephen Mossman and Nigel F. Palmer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 117–54; Mary Carruthers, “Moving Images in the Mind’s Eye,” in *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 287–306.

³³ Delcorno, “Dante e l’*exemplum* medievale.”

³⁴ Aesthetically, then, Dante’s “art” is closer to the late-medieval affective spirituality of Giotto and Simone Martini than to the Renaissance naturalism of Quattrocento. For Dante, art, and his reception by artists; see Simon Gilson, “Divine and Natural Artistry in the *Commedia*,” in *Art and Nature in Dante: Literary and Theological Essays*, ed. Daragh O’Connell and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts, 2013), 153–86.

bolted to the ground, they recite the words of the Psalm: “My soul cleaveth unto the dust [Adhaesit pavimento anima mea]” (19.73). In this way, their *exercitium* puts them in a physical position in which the words of Scripture have affective power. Similarly, as the prideful move slowly around the terrace with heads suspended inches above the carvings in the ground, they have ample opportunity to meditate on the *exempla* of pride carved into their path (cf. 11.130-39). They go over these moral *exempla* again and again, conducting, each time they circle around, a visual meditation as they struggle to find strength to bear their loads. *Purgatorio* is a place constructed to teach sinners how to read, how to read to the point that their internal *foco d’amore* purges their inner affections.

**“Brought together into a Harmonious Whole”:
The Rhetorical *Imitatio* of *Auctores***

As we have seen, Dante crafted his purgatory as the consummate place of transformative reading; paradoxically, he also represents purgatory as the ultimate place to study the art of writing. Throughout *Purgatorio*, there are as many instances in which the pilgrim pays attention to the active production of *poesis* as there are examples of reading (moral *imitatio*). Purgatory is where Dante contemplates God’s own writing (cantos 10 and 12), where the pilgrim listens in on the conversations of ancient poets (22.127–29), and the place where he explains the secret of his success to near contemporaries (cantos 24 and 26).³⁵ For this reason, as Teodolinda Barolini has pointed out, it is within this canticle, more than in the other two, that Dante works out his self-understanding of his poetic vocation.³⁶ In other words, in addition to being a place where moral *imitatio* is practiced, purgatory is also a place of rhetorical *imitatio*.

Douglas Kelly has characterized such rhetorical *imitatio* as the “medieval apprenticeship tradition,” whereby a *modernus* wrote a text within the authoritative framework provided by a model author. The preface to Macrobius’s *Saturnalia*, in particular, was an invaluable text for medieval literary theorists and practitioners, those writing in Latin and the vernac-

³⁵ For a short but powerful introduction to Dante’s relationship to his near contemporaries, see Teodolinda Barolini, “Dante’s Lyric Past,” in *Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 14–33. See also: Manuele Gragnolati, “Authorship and Performance in Dante’s *Vita Nuova*,” in *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*, ed. Manuele Gragnolati and Almut Suerbaum (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 125–41; Tristan Kay, *Dante’s Lyric Redemption: Eros, Salvation, Vernacular Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³⁶ Barolini, *Dante’s Poets*, 13.

ular alike.³⁷ In that influential passage, Macrobius described how he had compiled for his son a compendium of Latin and Greek classics he had read over a lifetime (preface, 1–2).³⁸ Macrobius insists, nevertheless, that the passages he has recorded in his *Saturnalia*—often word for word copies—make up a unified body, not just a pile of ill-digested bits (preface, 3). Besides digestion, Macrobius uses three other metaphors to describe how he formed these variegated texts into a unified whole: the author is like a bee, who gathers sweet nectar from a variety of places (preface, 5), like a perfume maker, and like a chorus whose many voices blend to become one (preface, 8). Macrobius then concludes:

We should draw upon all our sources with the aim to of making a unity [*unde unum fiat*], . . . Let this be the mind's goal: to conceal its sources of support and to display only what it has made of them, just as those who make perfumes take particular care that the specific odor of any ingredient not be perceptible, since they aim to blend all the aromatic essences into a single fragrant exhalation. You know how a chorus consists of many people's voices, and yet they all produce a single sound. . . . That is my goal for the present work: it comprises many different disciplines, many lessons, examples drawn from many periods [*exempla*], but brought together into a harmonious whole [*sed in unum conspirata*]. (preface, 8–10)

In this passage, Macrobius spelled out for generations of medieval writers how to achieve originality through “conspiracy,” that is, through the blending together of those diverse “odors” into “one flavor/fragrance.” John of Salisbury’s description of the pedagogy of Bernard of Chartres

³⁷ Douglas Kelly, *The Conspiracy of Allusion: Description, Rewriting, and Authorship from Macrobius to Medieval Romance* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). See also, *The Medieval Opus: Imitation, Rewriting, and Transmission in the French Tradition*, ed. D. Kelly (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996); Kelly, *The Arts of Poetry and Prose* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991); P. Godman, “*Opus consummatum, omnium artium. . . imago*: From Bernard of Chartres to John of Hauvilla,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 124 (1995): 26–71; Jean-Yves Tilliette, *Des mots à la parole: une lecture de la Poetria nova de Geoffroy de Vinsauf* (Geneva: Droz, 2000); Jan Ziolkowski, “The Highest Form of Compliment: Imitatio in Medieval Latin Culture,” in *Poetry and Philosophy in the Middle Ages: A Festschrift for Peter Dronke*, ed. John Marenbon (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 293–307; Ziolkowski, “Cultures of Authority in the Long Twelfth Century,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 108 (2009): 421–48.

³⁸ For edition and translation, see *Saturnalia*, ed. and trans. Robert A. Kaster, Loeb Classical Library, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

has preserved an anecdote of the practice of this *imitatio* in the medieval classroom. Mark Kauntze explains:

According to John, Bernard of Chartres' Latin instruction rested on three main activities: the careful grammatical and rhetorical exposition of the *auctores*, the memorisation and recitation of passages from the day's reading, and "introductory exercises" (*praeexercitamina*) in which his pupils would compose poetry and prose in imitation of the authors they had been studying. . . .

The imitation of ancient authors was an important exercise in the classroom of Bernard of Chartres. But, according to John of Salisbury's account, Bernard enforced a strict distinction between genuine imitation and mere plagiarism, or, in Horace's phrase, the sewing on of a patch of cloth filched from an external source. If Bernard detected such literary theft, he would reprimand the student in question. Then: "After he had reproved the student, if an unsuitable theme had invited this, he would, with modest indulgence, bid the boy to rise to real imitation of the authors, and would bring about that he who had imitated would come to be deserving of imitation by his successors (*fieret posteris imitandus*)."³⁹

Reworking antiquity, then, was not only a path to *auctoritas*, but brought with it its own aesthetic pleasure. Medieval authors delighted in detecting the past built into the present, of finding the work of a *modernus* studied with remains from the past, literary *spolia*, analogous to the ancient columns woven into the architectural fabric of medieval basilicas.⁴⁰ In the verse prologue to *Anticlaudianus*, Alan of Lille refers to the *novitas* that will delight his readers. They will find the poetry of antiquity rewritten: the "ancient parchment" rejoices in being renewed (a palimpsest in the making?: "scribendi novitate vetus iuvenescere carta / Gaudet").⁴¹

In Dante, too, we find that medieval "aesthetic" of *imitatio*, the flash of joy that accompanies the spark of recognition of the old in the new. Just a few canti before Dante's elaborate description of the relief carvings on the terrace of the proud, Sordello had directed Virgil and Dante to the Valley

³⁹ Mark Kauntze, *Authority and Imitation: A Study of the Cosmographia of Bernard Silvestris* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 132.

⁴⁰ For the medieval pleasure of finding the past renewed in the physical arts, see: Beat Brenk, "Spolia from Constantine to Charlemagne: Aesthetics versus Ideology," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 103–109; Paul Binski, *Gothic Wonder* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

⁴¹ Alan of Lille, *Literary Works*, ed. and trans. Winthrop Wetherbee, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 4–5.

of the Princes, which is the subject of the following celebrated *descriptio*:

Gold and fine silver, carmine and leaded white
 Indigo, lignite bright and clear,
 An emerald after it has just been split,
 Placed in that dell would see their brightness fade
 Against the colors of the grass and flowers,
 As less is overcome by more.
 Nature had not only painted there in all her hues
 But there the sweetness of a thousand scents
 Was blended in one fragrance strange and new.
 [Oro e argento fine, cocco e biacca,
 indaco, legno lucido e sereno,
 fresco smeraldo in l'ora che si fiacca,
 de l'erba e da li fior, dentr'a quel seno
 posti, ciascun saria di color vinto,
 come dal suo maggiore è il meno.
 Non avea pur natura ivi dipinto,
 ma di soavità di mille odori
 vi faceva uno incognito e indistinto] (*Purg.* 7.73–81)

On the most literal level, Dante describes the valley as a painted masterpiece of *Natura* (7.79: “ivi dipinto”), with flowers and grass that outshine the most lustrous earthly substances. *Natura*, then, has “rewritten” an earlier text, now giving the brilliant *colores* of earthly gems to purgatorial flowers. And yet, there is an even greater feat: *Natura* has brought together what was a variegated and scattered host on earth into an aesthetic unity, in which each flower contributes to the single unified fragrance of the whole (7.81: “vi faceva uno e indistinto”). *Natura* has, then, brought together a number of *loci* on earth, in order to create a single, surpassingly beautiful valley. *Natura* has rewritten the texts she herself had drafted on earth: we could say that *Natura* practiced *imitatio* to create a work of originality.

But in order to construct this description of *Natura's* work of *imitatio*, the poet himself cobbled together variegated bits of texts. In his brilliant *lectura* of *Purgatorio* 7 (“All’ombra di Sordello”), Michelangelo Picone identifies Dante and Virgil’s encounter with Sordello as the poem’s “first systematic reflection on poetry, taking into account its cultural, genealogical context (from the classical to the medieval, Christian world.”⁴²

⁴² Michelangelo Picone, “All’ombra di Sordello: una lettura di *Purgatorio* VII,” *Rassegna europea di letteratura italiana* 12 (1998): 61–77, at 62.

Although Dante in every canto has something to say about his art, Picone notes an “extraordinary eclipse of Dante-character” as compensated for by the special presence of the voice of the author, in whose words we recognize “a neat web of textual allusions.”⁴³ As is well known, Dante carefully modeled Sordello on Musaeus, who leads Aeneas and the Sybil to Anchises in *Aeneid* 6.⁴⁴ For his *descriptio* of the valley, Dante “systematically rewrote” Cavalcanti’s *plazer* “Biltà di donna.” At the same time, Dante included *spolia* from the *Salve Regina*, before concluding by taking as a model the “Planher vuelh en Blacatz” of Sordello himself.⁴⁵ In sum, Dante-poet blends together a number of *auctores* in the very passage given to describing the *imitatio* that Nature practiced. Tellingly, we also hear echoes of *Saturnalia* within *Purgatio* 7. Dante’s *Natura* “blended in one fragrance strange and new” (7.81: “di soavità di mille odori / vi facea uno incognito e indistinto”), analogously to how Macrobius’s perfume makers aim to have no one ingredient perceptible “since they aim to blend all the aromatic essences into a single fragrant exhalation” (preface, 8: “confusuri videlicet omnium sucos in spiramentum unum”). Whether Dante knew the *Saturnalia* directly or indirectly, he seizes the occasion to rewrite his friend and rival, Cavalcanti, correcting him with allusions to Virgil and sacred texts, at the very moment he describes *Natura*’s practice of *imitatio*.

We have seen, then, how throughout purgatory the souls accomplish their cleansing through the moral *imitatio* of *exempla* from Scripture, history, and classical literature. At the same time, the poet practices and reflects upon a second kind of medieval *imitatio* (rhetorical). In the following section, I want to focus on how Dante conflates these two forms of *imitatio*.

Si quis vero hec omnia studeat imitari:

Imitating God’s Miraculous Art

In the medieval mind, the boundary between these two textual processes—rhetorical *imitatio* and *lectio*/moral *imitatio*—was porous. That delight that comes from reading is intimately related to moral *imitatio*. Here, for example, is how the author of an important commentary on the *Aeneid* links them:

The *Aeneid* gives pleasure (quedam delectatio) because of verbal ornament, the figures of speech, and the diverse adventures and

⁴³ Picone, “All’ombra,” 63.

⁴⁴ Picone, “All’ombra,” 67.

⁴⁵ Picone, “All’ombra,” 71–77.

works of men which it describes. Indeed, anyone who *imitates* all of these things diligently (*hec omnia studeat imitari*) will attain the greatest skill in the art of writing, and he will also find in the narrative the greatest *exempla*, as well as expositions on pursuing the wholesome and fleeing the vicious. Thus, there is a double usefulness for the reader: the first is skill in composition which comes from *imitatio*, and the second is the prudence of acting rightly, and this comes from the exhortation of *exempla*. For instance, we have an *exemplum* of patient suffering in the labors of Aeneas; in his *affectus* for Anchises and Ascanius we have an *exemplum* of piety.⁴⁶

For Bernard Silvestris, buried underneath the events of the plot (*narratio*) is a deep understanding (*intellectum . . . veritatis*), but it is “wrapped up” (*involucrum*) or “covered” (*integumentum*) by a “narrated fable” (*sub fabulosa narratione*). At this deeper philosophical level, Virgil provides a series of moral lessons, *maxima exempla* of things *honesta* and *illicita*. For Bernard the serious business of pursuing the wholesome (*aggreudiendi honesta*) or shunning the base (*fugiendi illicita*) comes only after developing skill in writing (*peritia*) through imitation (*hec omnia studeat imitari*), after experiencing *quedam delectatio* of the text. There is an inextricable relationship between these two forms of *imitatio*: the “poetic wrapping” (*ficmentum poeticum*) and the “deep, philosophical truths” (*veritas philosophie*) are the “twin doctrines” (*gemin[a] doctrin[a]*) of the *Aeneid*. Virgil is *et poeta et philosophus*. The reader must imitate Aeneas, while as a writer, he imitates Virgil.

One of the greatest passages of *Purgatorio* embodies this *gemina doctrina*: the prideful souls’ “recitation” of the *Padre Nostro* (*Purg.* 11.1–24). From this vantage, the vernacularization of the biblical prayer is a prime example of literary *imitatio*, a spontaneous rewriting of the old prayer *cum* new special glosses added for the benefit of prideful souls, but now both gloss and translation have been reincorporated into the text itself.⁴⁷ Forty-nine words of Latin become the Italian prayer of more than

⁴⁶ *The Commentary on the First Six Books of the Aeneid of Vergil Commonly Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris*, ed. Julian Jones and Elizabeth Jones (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 2–3. The English translation comes from *Commentary on the First Six Books of Virgil’s Aeneid*, trans. Earl Schreiber and Thomas Maresca (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 4, which I follow with some modifications.

⁴⁷ See now Maldina’s remarkable “‘L’oratio super pater noster’ di Dante.” Maldina comments how Dante has “the desire not only to comment on the Gospel text, but also to construct on its basis a new prayer” (100). And for a more general

160, as if the Latin prayer releases its potential energy when it uncoils in the vernacular. The “qui es in cielis” becomes three whole verses (11.1–3), emphasizing God’s transcendence; the “sanctificetur nomen tuum” is amplified into “Our Father, who are in Heaven, / circumscribed only by the greater love / you have for your first works on high” (11.4–6: “laudato sia ’l tuo nome e ’l tuo valore / da ogne creatura, com’ è degno / di render grazie al tuo dolce vapore”), lines replete with echoes of Francis’s hymn of creation. “Veniat regnum tuum” becomes “May the peace of your kingdom come to us, / for we cannot attain it of ourselves / if it comes not, for all our striving” (11.7–9: “Vegna ver’ noi la pace del tuo regno, / ché noi ad essa non potem da noi, / s’ella non vien, con tutto nostro ingegno”), lines that emphasize especially the complete impotence of the prideful to get to the kingdom on their own. And finally, the phrase, “libera nos a malo,” for the prideful, who spent too much time on earth using first person pronouns (see 17.116–17), must now pray, “not for ourselves” but “for the ones whom we have left behind” (11.23–24: “non . . . per noi”; “per color che dietro a noi restaro”). But this spectacular rhetorical *imitatio* seemingly can occur only because of their practice of affective *lectio* (the moral *imitatio*) of the *exempla* of the prideful. With faces inches above the text, they study the miraculous *ombre e’ tratti* described in canto 12, what Bernard Silvestris had called “maxima . . . exempla et excogitationes . . . fugiendi illicita.” Here God’s own successfully rewritten text, which outdoes nature (cf. *Purg.* 12.64–69), provides an opportunity for deep reading, and then this deep reading flows forth as a fresh composition, an *imitatio* of the all-too-common “Our Father.”

Throughout *Purgatorio* Dante intentionally allows his vocabulary for the “reading” souls and the art of the Divine Writer to overlap. For instance, the word *ombra*, most often used to indicate the airy bodies of the souls in hell and purgatory (e.g., *Inferno* 6.34, 101), is used in a particularly dense cluster (seven times) in cantos 11–12 of *Purgatorio*. The *Padre Nostro* concludes by referring to the prideful as “those shades trudged

discussion of the “unstable frontier” between original text and later accretions, see Christopher Baswell, who observes a “tendency among medieval translators to include not only the ‘primary’ text, but also parts of its surrounding commentaries,” as in Chaucer’s *Boece*, which “unites Latin text and gloss, as well as French. This absorption of framing materials into the translation—the insistent centripetal movement of the margin toward the center—suggests the extent to which textuality in the Middle Ages has vague and fluid limits, only beginning with the *auctor*’s words,” (*Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 5–6).

on beneath their burden” (11.26: “quell’ombre orando, andavan sotto ’l pondo”), but in the very next canto Dante praises the divine artist for his skillful carving of *ombre* into the ground (12.65: “l’ombre e’ tratti ch’ivi”), making a connection between the designs in the stone and the souls who are reformed through their purgatorial penances. Similarly, just after Virgil tells the pilgrim to observe all the carvings (10.46: “non tener pur ad un loco la mente”), he orders Dante to stare fixedly at the prideful and try to distinguish the souls from the stone (10.118–19: “Ma guarda fiso là”), as if they were another passage in the same text. At the beginning of canto 13, the pilgrim notices that, in contrast to the richly decorated first terrace, “there are no shades nor any carvings” (13.7: “ombra non li è né segno che si paia”). And yet, toward the middle of this canto, Dante-pilgrim will have to look closely in order to pick out the souls from the rock, because the souls blend into it on account of their being draped in cloaks “the color of stone” (13.48: “al color de la pietra”). On this terrace, the extraordinary art to be marveled at is found in the souls being remade, not in carvings. In fact, Sapia’s exclamation confirms this: “Oh . . . how wonderful it is to hear / of this great [sign] of God’s love for you” (13.145–46: “Oh, questa è a udir sì cosa nuova, / . . . che gran segno è che Dio t’ami”). The miraculous appearance of a body in *Purgatorio* is *cosa nuova*, just as the miraculous art of the terrace of the prideful is *novello* on account of it not being found on earth (10.94, 96). Here, the pilgrim is a *segno*, to be paralleled with the *segn[i]* he had studied below (14.7). The poet is insistent that we think about these things together: the miraculous skill which rewrites and outdoes nature and the souls who are being re-formed. The same divine *fabbro* who carved the miraculous *imagin[i]* (10.39) into the marble, who outdid his terrestrial composition, also remakes the souls of purgatory: “All these people . . . / here are remade holy, through thirst and hunger” (23.64, 66: “Tutta esta gente . . . / in fame e’n sete qui si rifà santa” [translation adapted]).

All these themes are woven together in the canti dedicated to the terrace of gluttony (*Purg.* 23–24), where the souls also meditate on *exempla*: they sing “Labia mea, Domine” (23.11); a voice from a tree recalls Mary’s generosity at the wedding banquet, the temperance of the ancient Roman matrons, Daniel’s preference for wisdom over the Babylonian king’s polluted meats, the Golden Age diet of acorns and water, and the honey and locust of John the Baptist (22.142–54); a second tree provides negative *exempla*, including the spawning of the centaurs and the Hebrews Gideon did not enlist (24.121–26). Thus, the terrace has been structured to guide the souls on this terrace in practicing *meditatio*, a free play that ranges across the whole of Scripture and classical literature, the very

method Guigo had recommended for meditating on a beatitude. At the end of canto 24, we hear an angel practice rhetorical *imitatio*, rewriting the beatitude as he vernacularizes it: “Blessed are they / whom grace so much enlightens that appetite / fills not their breasts with gross desires, / but leaves them hungering for what is just” (24.151–54: “Beati cui alluma / tanto di grazia, che l’amor del gusto / nel petto lor troppo disir non fuma, / esuriendo sempre quanto è guisto”; cf. Matt 5:6: “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice for they will be satisfied [beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt iustitiam quoniam ipsi saturabuntur]”). The new formulation, which emphasizes the right kind of hunger, makes sure the beatitude is heard as if for the first time.

Among those practicing *lectio* on this terrace, we find Forese Donati. He tells the pilgrim that the same “voglia” which caused Christ to shout “Eli” aloud in an act of voluntary, joyful suffering, pulses through the souls of this terrace and inspires them to go and listen to the *exempla* of the tree whose fruit they voluntarily forgo (23.72–75). In this way, we find Forese consciously practicing an *imitatio Christi*, reliving Christ’s life in his own. But what is most interesting is that Dante describes Forese’s *imitatio* as occurring simultaneously with his rewriting. The very soul who is *singing* “Labia mea, Domine” is at first unrecognizable because of “his changed features” (23.47: “la cangiata labbia”): his face, like a text, is being rewritten. Indeed, the faces of the gluttonous are texts where one may “read” their restored, rewritten humanity: the pilgrim observes the word *omo* etched in the visages of the penitential gluttonous (23.31–33), in contrast to the indistinguishably fleshy visage of Ciaccio and the gluttons of hell. The faces, then, of those who are imitating moral *exempla* are being rewritten as texts which more clearly signify their humanity (rhetorical *imitatio*). And indeed, the pilgrim experiences an intense moment of delight when he recognizes in the transformed face of Forese the visage of an old friend: “I never would have known him by his features, / but the sound of his voice made plain to me / what from his looks had been erased. // That spark relit the memory / of his changed features / and I knew Forese’s face” (23.43–48: “Mai non l’avrei riconosciuto al viso; / ma ne la voce sua mi fu palese / ciò che l’aspetto in sé avea conquiso. // Questa favilla tutta mi raccese / mia conoscenza a la cangiata labbia, / e ravvisai la faccia di Forese”) The pilgrim is so overcome by wonder (“mentr’io mi maraviglio”) that he can do nothing but follow up on his curiosity (23. 59). The pilgrim experiences what Alan of Lille described, when the *carta vetus* grows “younger” and surprises through its *novitas*.

The full implications of Dante’s choice to marry these two forms of *imitatio* cannot be explored here, for it would force us to consider passages

in *Paradiso* which take us beyond the scope of this paper. And yet, I would like to conclude with one final set of observations to hint, at least, at what a rich and central theme this conflation of the two forms of *imitatio* is for the *Commedia*.

Conclusion

At the end of canto 30 in *Paradiso* and then again at the beginning of 31, the poet uses a series of images to try to capture the extraordinary splendor of the heavenly community of saints. He describes them at first as a collection of flowers in a meadow, then as a single rose, then as a city, before returning again to likening the saints to so many petals on a white rose. As the ineffable reality to which Dante gestures eludes words, the shifting, kaleidoscopic imagery is appropriate. More importantly for our purposes, Dante-poet revisits and rewrites two passages of his own: cantos 7 and 10 in *Purgatorio*, two passages which had also described feats of “rewriting.”

Dante describes this vision of the Empyrean as *novella vista* (*Paradiso* 30.58), and the sparks which emerge from the river and land on the adjoining banks are “painted with the wondrous colors of spring” (*Par.* 30.63: “dipinte di mirabil primavera”). The sparks fall on flowers (*Par.* 30.65), which are likened to “rubies inscribed in gold” (*Par.* 30.66: “quasi rubin che oro circunscrive”). Beatrice continues the metaphor, referring to the sparks as *li topazi* (*Par.* 30.76) and saying that the “grassy places” are smiling (*Par.* 30.77). Dante later likens this whole vision to a hill which is reflected in a body of water at its base, as if it were studying itself in a mirror, “as if it saw itself adorned / when it is lush with grass and flowers” (*Par.* 30.110–11: “quasi per vedersi addorno, / quando è nel verde e ne’ fioretti opimo”). Dante, as mentioned, shifts his image of the heavenly community from a collection of flowers to a single “candida rosa” (*Par.* 31.1), “adorned with many petals” (*Par.* 31.10–11: “che s’addorna / di tante foglie”), into which angels dive, with faces of “living flame,” “wings of gold,” and “all the rest so white, / that no snow ever arrives at that limit” (*Par.* 31.13–15: “Le facce tutte avean di fiamma viva / e l’ali d’oro, e l’altro tanto bianco, / che nulla neve a quel termine arriva”).

To create this extraordinary passage, to be sure, Dante has woven in bits and pieces of numerous other passages throughout the entirety of the *Commedia*, but especially, the passages I have commented upon above, that is, those passages in which Dante reflects upon the art of God (*Purg.* 10) and the *imitatio* of Nature (*Purg.* 7). The vision he is given (*Par.* 30.58: “novella vista”), like the miraculous art of God in *Purgatorio* 10 (10.96: which is “novello a noi”), is of a rose which is *candida* (*Par.* 31.1) like the

“white, adorned marble” (“marmo candido e addorno”) of *Purgatorio* 10.31. *Candido* is used only three times in the whole of the *Commedia*. Furthermore, the brilliant *fioretti* of *Paradiso* are said to be *addorno*, the term used for the *segni* and *imagini* of *Purgatorio* 10 and for the *fiori* in the Valley of the Kings (retrospectively recalled at *Purg.* 9.54). In *Paradiso* 30, Dante, too, uses an extraordinary set of synesthetic metaphors. Beatrice, for example, tells him to drink in the vision of the river (*Par.* 30.73–75), which recalls the synesthetic “speech made visible” (*Purg.* 10.95: “visibile parlare”) and medium-transgressing art of the terrace of the prideful. Indeed, all the souls in heaven are said to combine their beauties to the end of making one tremendous show (*Par.* 31.27: “tutto ad un segno”). The idea of joining various properties into a unity, of course, invokes many passages from the *Commedia* (not the least of which is the Eagle of Justice), but, within the context of the rich botanical imagery, it is especially redolent of the *mille odori* which *Natura* made into *uno incognito e indistinto* (7.80–81). The brilliance of the flowers and the angels’ wings, described as gold, the likening of the flowers to rubies and topazes, the description of the place as a meadow, the intoxicating fragrance released from the flowers, all echo the great passage in *Purgatorio* 7, not to mention that both are described as “painted” (“avea . . . ivi dipinto,” [*Purg.* 7.79]; “due rive / dipinte” [*Par.* 30.62–63]).

Dante has then rewritten *Purgatorio* 7 and 10 in *Paradiso* 30–31; rather, he has transformed his own work, or practiced *imitatio* on his own text. The brilliance of the vision in paradise is blinding, and in its variety of colors, bewildering. The peaceful meadow of purgatory has become a blazing, fulsome, searing river of light (*Par.* 30.61–62: “And I saw light that flowed as flows a river / pouring its golden splendor between two banks” [“e vidi lume in forma di rivera / fulvido di fulgore”]). We note how appropriate this is: the souls in the heavenly community are those whom God radically rewrote in life. The tranquil flowers of *Purgatorio* 7 are now the burning, blinding saints and angels of the mystical rose. What we have is, again, a rich interplay of the various ideas of *imitatio*, and the various kinds of “transformations” possible. As a writer, Dante has *imitated* his own passage, and transformed it; but he models his own auto-imitation on the divine Author who rewrote Nature herself in purgatory, and who translated his rough drafts into their superior forms found in the heavenly community.