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**Time, *Telos* and Mysticism in the
*Divina Commedia***

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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2005

To my father

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Preface

This thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university. Except where acknowledged, it represents my own work. All sources used are acknowledged in the notes. Short versions of Chapter 5 have appeared in *The Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America*, 15 March 2003, and in *Percorsi danteschi*, a supplement to *Spunti e ricerche* 19 (2004), published in 2005.

Abstract

This study takes as its point of departure Saint Bernard's obscure reference to sleep at *Par.* 32.139, a verse which also contains the last of the *Commedia*'s many allusions to the flight of time. A new interpretation of the reference to sleep is offered, and the significance of the allusion to time is explored; but the scope of the study broadens greatly, to the extent that it brings to light significant new features of the poem's mystical dimension, its concern with time, and the teleological basis of its world view. It is argued that the reference to sleep is an anticipation of the protagonist's final vision of the divine essence, the mystic *telos* or goal of the journey (*Par.* 33.140-45). It is also proposed that mystic union, the supreme goal of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Christian mysticism, is represented, not, as some scholars believe, by the final vision, but by the protagonist's slumber in the Earthly Paradise (*Purg.* 32.64-84). It is further argued that, with the fictional Bernard's allusion to the flight of time, Dante exploits specific features of the historical saint's reputation and writings in order to bring teleological closure to the theme of time. It emerges that both time and mysticism are functions of the Christian teleology or eschatology on which the poet's prophetic vision rests, and that the structure of ultimate ends which the *Commedia* has in view is more complex than, and reaches out beyond, the "duo ultima" scheme of the *Monarchia* (3.15.3-11).

Editions of Dante's Works

The text of the *Divina Commedia* is cited from *La Divina Commedia con pagine critiche*, eds. Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio, 3 vols. (Florence: Le Monnier, 1988), in which the editors adopt (with a few emendations) the text as edited by Giorgio Petrocchi in *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols. (Milan: Mondadori, 1966-67).

Dante's other works are cited from the following editions:

Convivio. Eds. Cesare Vasoli and Domenico De Robertis. In *Opere minori*. La Letteratura italiana: Storia e testi. Vol. 5, tome 1, pt. 2. Milan: Ricciardi, 1988.

Epistole. Eds. Arsenio Frugoni and Giorgio Brugnoli. In *Opere minori*. Vol. 3, tome 2. Eds. Arsenio Frugoni, Giorgio Brugnoli, Enzo Cecchini and Francesco Mazzoni. Classici Ricciardi-Mondadori. Milan: Ricciardi, 1996. First published in *Opere minori*, La Letteratura italiana: Storia e testi, vol. 5, tome 2 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1979).

Monarchia. Ed. Bruno Nardi. In *Opere minori*. Vol. 3, tome 1. Eds. Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo and Bruno Nardi. Classici Ricciardi-Mondadori. Milan: Ricciardi, 1996. First published in *Opere minori*, La Letteratura italiana: Storia e testi, vol. 5, tome 2 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1979).

Vita Nuova. Ed. Domenico De Robertis. In *Opere minori*. Vol. 1, tome 1. Eds. Domenico De Robertis and Gianfranco Contini. Classici Ricciardi-Mondadori. Milan: Ricciardi, 1995. First published in *Opere minori*, La Letteratura italiana: Storia e testi, vol. 5, tome 1, pt. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1984).

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the unfailing generosity and enthusiasm with which Diana Modesto helped me find my way to the end of a long journey through often difficult terrain. For their kind responses to various *dubbi* along the way, I wish to thank my Associate Supervisor, Nerida Newbigin, along with Teodolinda Barolini, Giovanni Carsaniga, Marsha Dutton, Mary Dwyer, George Ferzoco, Robert Hollander, Dexter Hoyos, John A. Scott and Siegfried Wenzel. Any errors which remain in the text despite Kathleen Olive's vigilant proofreading are to be attributed to the author. The University of Sydney eased the financial burden of extended full-time research with an Australian Postgraduate Award. My wife, Anne Harsanyi, carried most of this burden willingly, because she just wants me to be happy.

Abbreviations and Translations

The following abbreviations are used for frequently cited works or parts of works:

- Ben. maj.* Richard of St. Victor, *Benjamin major* (PL 196.63-202).
- De Gen.* Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* (PL 34.245-486).
- De ver.* Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae: De veritate*, ed. R. Spiazzi, 8th ed. (Turin: Marietti, 1953).
- ED* *Enciclopedia dantesca*, directed by Umberto Bosco, 6 vols. (Rome: Istituto dell' Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970-78).
- PL* *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844-66).
- SC* Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in Cantica canticorum* (PL 183.785-1198).
- SG* Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* (Turin: Marietti, 1934).
- ST* Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 5 vols. (Madrid: La Editorial Catolica, 1961).
- Super II Cor.* Thomas Aquinas, *Super secundam epistolam ad Corinthios lectura*, in *Super epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. R. Cai, 8th ed. (Turin: Marietti, 1953), Vol. 1.

All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

Introduction

The initial focus of this study is narrow in the extreme, for its point of departure is a single word in the *Divina Commedia*, one that has so far evaded the efforts of Dante scholars to arrive at an agreed or even a sensible interpretation. Its scope broadens greatly, however, as a result of the detailed analysis which this minor problem has not previously been thought to merit, and which results in the proposal of a new solution, to the extent that it also offers significant new insights, not only into Dante's fictional representation of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and his knowledge of the real saint's reputation and writings, but also regarding the *Commedia's* engagement with temporality and with mysticism, as well as the teleological-eschatological basis of its world view. The study remains, nevertheless, an extended commentary on the verse in which Saint Bernard pronounces the troublesome word, i.e., *Par.* 32.139: "Ma perché 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna."

For Dante scholars, the problematic feature of this verse has always been the meaning of "t'assonna," not Bernard's sudden realisation that "'l tempo fugge." Critics have sought to explain the significance of his use of the verb *assonnare* and have not concerned themselves with the question of why this particular character should utter the proverbial *tempus fugit* in the same verse, making it the last of the poem's many allusions to the flight of time and to time as such. This study proposes an entirely new interpretation of the character's perplexing reference to sleep, and also brings to light the fact that, by virtue of both his reputation and his writings, the historical saint as Dante and his contemporaries knew him was eminently qualified to deliver the *Commedia's* last word on time, and to do so in precisely the manner in which he does.

On the traditional crux of *Par.* 32.139, it is argued here that we are intended to understand that the "sleep" which Bernard has in mind is the protagonist's unmediated vision of God (*Par.* 33.140-45), metaphorically anticipated as an imminent participation in the *somnus gloriae* of the blessed. This anagogical figure, which has not previously been brought into play by Dante scholars, could signify the "glory of the soul," i.e., the vision of God, and it is in this sense that it is used as the basis of the metaphor of sleep. In other words, *il tempo che t'assonna* is the time which is "sending" Dante to "sleep," and

that “sleep” is the mystical experience which concludes the poem, an event which belongs to the literal sense and which is anticipated by Saint Bernard as a metaphorical (rather than allegorical) *somnus gloriae*. In accordance with the teleological role of the great mystic who acts as Dante’s third and final guide, his use of *assonnare* is thus a proleptic reference to the successful closure of the otherworld journey—or rather, in the speaker’s own terms, of the time allocated to that journey by divine Providence—in its mystic and eschatological *telos*, its teleological “end” or goal.

The necessary preliminary investigations that lead to this proposition result in the discovery and rectification of a much more substantial gap in our knowledge of the *Commedia*’s mystical dimension, which has previously been thought to reside only in the *Paradiso*, for they show that the protagonist’s literal sleep in the Earthly Paradise (*Purg.* 32.64-84) is a *somnus gratiae* (or *somnus contemplationis*), a moral or tropological figure of the mystic union of the soul and the Word, the one goal at the summit of the various contemplative ascents of the most important twelfth- and thirteenth-century writers on mysticism, among them Saint Bernard.¹ This in turn confirms the view that the poem’s conclusion attempts to represent the beatific vision, and not, as some scholars have held, mystic union, despite the fact that the pilgrim’s final guide to the *visio Dei* is the famous abbot of Clairvaux.

The prominence of Bernard’s role in the poem has long been felt to be at odds with the lack of any unequivocal evidence that Dante was familiar with the real saint’s writings, a situation which has prompted two quite different kinds of critical response. Some scholars have suggested that the poet’s choice was determined by features of the historical figure’s medieval reputation which are apposite with respect to the part which the character plays in the economy of the poem. Traditionally, and with good reason (since they are plainly exploited in the text), these features have been identified as Bernard’s ardent devotion to the Virgin and his fame as a mystic.² More recently, Steven Botterill has cogently argued that these aspects of the saint’s medieval “image” are subsumed under another, his renown as a skilled but humble preacher who applied his

¹ Although the terms *somnus contemplationis* or *quies contemplationis* are more common than *somnus gratiae* in the patristic and medieval sources, the latter term is generally used in this study in order to clearly distinguish this tropological figure from the analogical figure of *somnus gloriae*, since both refer to the supernatural contemplation or “vision” of God.

² See Raoul Manselli, “Bernardo di Chiaravalle, santo,” *ED*, vol. 1, 601-605.

great eloquence to the praise of Mary and to the mystic union of the soul and the Word. This renown, in Botterill's view, accounts for his aptness as the figure who delivers, with a sacred eloquence that transcends the power of Virgil's "parola ornata" (*Inf.* 2.67), the "parole sante" at *Par.* 32.3-138 (his survey of the blessed in the celestial rose and his discourse on the doctrine of predestination), and the "santa orazione" of *Par.* 33.1-39 (the prayer to the Virgin with which he obtains for Dante the grace needed for the final elevation to the vision of God).³ Conversely, some critics have taken the importance of Saint Bernard in the narrative as a given, one which suggests that the poet must have known and used Bernardan texts, and have therefore looked for evidence of this. Francesco Mazzoni has recently given his support to the more plausible claims that have been made along these lines, and has argued that the influence of Bernard's *Sermones in Cantica canticorum* (at once the most famous of his writings on mystic union and the most outstanding example of his skill with language) "è palese in Dante almeno da *Tanto gentile*, versi 6-7."⁴

This study examines the reputation and the writings of the real saint as Dante and his contemporaries knew them and shows that both are reflected in the fictional character's *tempus fugit*, since *Par.* 32.139, in context, brings about the teleological closure of the theme of time in the poem by exploiting the fact that the "real" Bernard as he was known in the Middle Ages was the main patristic authority on the Christian application of the ancient theme of time's flight (a very minor feature of both his renown and his works which has so far gone unnoticed by Dante scholars). It does so, moreover, in the form of a specific instance of the character's Christian eloquence, a rhetorical *clausio* or *finis* that comes directly from the historical figure's *Sermones in Cantica*, many of which end with the speaker's apparently spontaneous discovery that he is running out of time. More specifically still, it is argued, we are dealing with a precise case of Botterill's distinction

³ Steven Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the "Commedia"* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1994), "The Figure of St. Bernard in Dante's *Commedia*," in *Seminario Dantesco Internazionale – International Dante Seminar 1*, Atti del primo convegno tenutosi al Chauncey Conference Centre, Princeton, 21-23 October 1994, ed. Zygmunt G. Baranski (Florence: Le Lettere, 1997), 149-70.

⁴ Francesco Mazzoni, "San Bernardo e la visione poetica della *Divina Commedia*," in *Seminario Dantesco Internazionale – International Dante Seminar 1*, 198. In the same volume, Lino Pertile argues for intertextuality between Saint Bernard's great sermon-series and the account of the mystic procession in the last cantos of *Purgatorio* ("La puttana e il gigante [*Purgatorio* XXXII, 148-60]," in *Seminario Dantesco Internazionale – International Dante Seminar 1*, 243-72).

between Virgil's pagan "parola ornata" and Bernard's Christian "parole sante," for the proposed interpretation of *assonnare* means that the fictional saint's *clausio* transforms and transcends the traditionally *in malo* sense of time's flight, replacing *tempus fugit* as a memento mori, a reminder of the brevity of time as such and of the imminence of death, with "l tempo fugge che t'assonna," an anticipation of the impending successful conclusion of the time allocated to the journey in its ultimate mystic "end," which is a mortal's very privileged foretaste of the beatific vision as it is enjoyed by the blessed in the next life. In this way, it is suggested, Bernard's "l tempo fugge" replaces, transforms and transcends its probable source, Virgil's "sed fugit interea, fugit irreparabile tempus" (*Georgicon* 3.284).⁵

The discovery that there is a prior mystic "end" in the *Commedia*, i.e., the attainment of the mystic union of the soul and Christ, figured by the protagonist's literal sleep in the Earthly Paradise, along with the heuristic need for this study to demonstrate and emphasise what is generally taken for granted, the fictitious reality of the protagonist's body and its functionality with respect to the themes of the Incarnation and the general resurrection, call for a reassessment, not only of the *Commedia*'s mysticism, but also of its fundamental teleological structure and of the disputed continuity or discontinuity between this structure and the "duplex finis" or "duo ultima" scheme that Dante outlines at the end of the *Monarchia* (3.15.3-11). Simplifying the issue, it can be said that the two extremes in this dispute are represented, one by Michele Barbi's conviction that "la dottrina dei due mezzi, dei due fini e delle due guide è fondamento di tutto quanto Dante dice e raffigura nel poema," the other by Bruno Nardi's insistence that "nella *Commedia* non v'è più traccia dei 'duo ultima' della *Monarchia*."⁶ The gap between the two views is not quite as vast as these statements make it appear, since both scholars believe that the pilgrim's arrival at the Earthly Paradise in the poem signifies the attainment of the natural, temporal goal or *beatitudo* of the treatise, and that, in the Celestial Paradise of the *Commedia*, the protagonist arrives at the supernatural, eternal happiness which that Paradise is said to signify in the *Monarchia*, i.e., "the enjoyment of the vision of God"

⁵ For the text of Virgil's works I use Virgil, *Opera*, ed. F. A. Hirtzel (Oxford: Clarendon, 1900).

⁶ Michele Barbi, "Razionalismo e misticismo in Dante," in *Problemi di critica dantesca: Seconda serie* (Florence: Sansoni, 1941), 72, Bruno Nardi, "Intorno ad una nuova interpretazione del terzo libro della *Monarchia* dantesca," in *Dal "Convivio" alla "Commedia"* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1960), 311.

(*fruitio divini aspectus*). The difference is nonetheless an important one, for it resides in the fact that, unlike his fellow critic, Nardi believes that, in the poem, the earthly goal is no longer the autonomous *ultimum* that it is in the radically “dualistic” scheme of the treatise, but a preparatory stage on the way to what is now seen as the one, true Last End of orthodox Christianity, the supernatural goal of “the enjoyment of the vision of God.” It emerges from this study, however, that, in the Earthly Paradise of the *Commedia*, the pilgrim attains the supernatural *fruitio divini aspectus* which is the supreme Christian happiness of this life and which goes unmentioned in the *Monarchia*, namely, mystic union, signified by Dante’s *somnus gratiae* in Eden. Further, the poem’s conception of the eschatological Last End which is to be gained in the next life is not as straightforward as the treatise represents it, reflecting ambiguities in Christian thinking on the matter, since the *Commedia* reaches beyond the vision of God as the saints in Heaven enjoy it immediately after death to the resurrection of the flesh at the end of time.

The first of these conceptions of the Last End of human life was sometimes called “the glory of the soul,” the second “the glory of the body and soul together.” *Somnus gloriae* could signify either or both. Although the protagonist to some extent experiences a foretaste of the glory of body and soul throughout the *Paradiso*, he is granted a brief but otherwise perfect participation in the glory of the soul at its conclusion, the mystic *telos* of the period of time allocated by divine Providence to his prophetic “vision.” It is in this sense, I argue, that Bernard says “Ma perché ’l tempo fugga che t’assonna.”

Chapter 1 is a review and critical analysis of previous interpretations of this verse, none of which has yet gained universal acceptance by Dante scholars. All of these interpretations are found wanting, some because they are virtually incoherent, and the primary critical impediment is shown to be the fact that the mistaken presuppositions and false dichotomies of the *visio-fictio* debate have been foisted upon the puzzling allusion to sleep. Scholars in the *visio* camp, giving due recognition to the fact that the *Commedia* presents itself as the record of a prophetic “vision,” believe that it must therefore report a “visionary” experience, an “imaginative” vision of the kind usually granted to prophets (a dream or waking vision), and consequently insist that we are dealing with a reference to “visionary sleep” (the literal sleep of a dream or the metaphorical “sleep” of an ecstatic waking vision). Their opponents recognise that the poem describes a fictitiously “real”

journey in body and soul, not an imaginative vision, and see it as their main task to ward off any suggestion that *Par.* 32.139 can be construed so as to lend support to the *visio* model as it has been formulated, i.e., to ward off the spectre of an allusion to visionary slumber. Both sides tend to conflate prophetic, mystical and imaginative “vision.” Neither takes account of properly mystical “vision” and “sleep” or of the problematic nature of visionary experience. Neither understands how it is that the *Commedia* can be both the record of a prophetic vision and the account of a “real” (rather than imaginative) journey in body and soul.

Chapter 2 is a necessarily lengthy attempt to remedy this situation—to remove the principal confusions and presuppositions that have obscured what is essentially a very simple metaphorical reference to a mystic slumber—and simultaneously to lay some of the groundwork for what follows. It reviews distinctions regarding “vision” that were carefully drawn by patristic and medieval writers, for whom the term *visio*, in its widest sense, was simply the equivalent of *cognitio*, which could be sensory, imaginative, intellectual or “affective” (i.e., the “knowing with the heart” of mystic union). It also considers their less-clear notions about the nature of the ultimate “end” of human life. In proof of what one side of the *fictio-visio* dispute tends to take for granted regarding *Par.* 32.139 (that *assonnare* cannot be a reference to visionary sleep because the journey is not a visionary one) and in opposition to what the other side uses the verse to prove (that the poem is the record of a visionary journey), the central thesis of Chapter 2 is that the doctrines of writers such as Augustine and Aquinas can well accommodate the concept of a prophetic vision which includes both mystical and imaginative “visions” but consists in an actual bodily journey to the otherworld, and that the *Commedia*, whatever its original inspiration, presents itself as the account of just such a *prophetica visio*.

In Chapter 3 we turn from kinds of vision to kinds of sleep, exploring the potential “anti-*telos*” of the prologue scene, the *rovinar in basso loco* that Bernard, at *Par.* 32.138, recalls as a *chinar, a rovinar, le ciglia* (cf. “Mentre ch’i’ rovinava in basso loco,” *Inf.* 1.61, “quando chinavi, a rovinar, le ciglia,” *Par.* 32.138). This critical moment in the prologue scene, which I argue is seen by the saint as a *dormitatio culpae*, a “somnolence of sin,” is the starting point of the journey which leads to the poem’s mystic “*duo ultima*,” the successful attainment of the highest goals of this life and the next. The first

of these goals, the subject of Chapter 4, is the *somnus gratiae* in Eden, the *assonnare* which Bernard then indirectly brings to mind by saying “Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna” at *Par.* 32.139 (cf. “S’io potessi ritrar come assonnaro . . . ma qual vuol sia che l’assonnar ben finga,” *Purg.* 32.64-9). The second is the final goal of the whole journey, the vision of God which Chapter 5 will show to be the primary referent of *assonnare* in that same verse. Chapters 3 to 5 therefore consider the three key points in a teleological scheme which the text itself evokes by means of the sleep-imagery which is used by Saint Bernard.

Chapter 3 focuses on the moment of crisis and salvation in the prologue scene, proposing that it is retrospectively seen as a *dormitatio culpae*, and that the famous “piedi sonno” is another such sinful “nodding” (an incidental refinement of the most favoured gloss on *Inf.* 1.10-12). It also takes the opportunity to review the patristic and medieval “typology of sleep” in preparation for the subsequent chapters, highlighting the three kinds of repose that are most relevant for this study: the “sleep of sin” or *somnus culpae* (except that Dante makes the same pedantic distinction as the theologians do, that between “sleep” and “somnia” or “somnia”), the “sleep of grace” or “of contemplation,” *somnus gratiae* or *contemplationis* (a tropological figure of mystic union), and the “sleep of glory,” *somnus gloriae* (an analogical figure signifying the glory of the soul and/or the glory of body and soul together).

Chapter 4 traces the figure of *somnus gratiae* and the motifs associated with it through some of the most important of the works on contemplation that were known in Dante’s time, considering its place in the doctrine of the active and contemplative lives and its use by the great twelfth- and thirteenth-century writers on mysticism. These writers were unanimous in reading the literal sleep of the Bride in the Song of Songs as a figure of the soul’s affective union with Christ, the “Bridegroom” of the Song. It is argued that the pilgrim’s literal sleep in the Earthly Paradise bears so many of the hallmarks of this figure that it cannot but have the same tropological meaning as the Bride’s, even though there appears to be no reason to believe that the poet adopted any particular writer’s doctrine on this “mystic sleep,” which was thought to figure the supreme beatitude and the most immediate “vision of God” that is normally possible in this life, in a “return to Eden” that is potentially accessible to all Christians.

Somnus gloriae was not a “mystic sleep” in this sense, and there was a certain lack of clarity about that which it was thought to figure anagogically. It did not signify the immediate experience of the divine in this life, but the glory which is reserved for the next world, variously understood as that of the separated soul in Heaven “now” (which for Aquinas meant the direct, intuitive vision of the divine essence), or as that of the whole person after the Last Judgment, when the glorified body rejoins the soul. In Chapter 5, it is first argued that the *sonno* alluded to in *Par.* 32.139, whatever its nature, is a sleep which is yet to come at that point in the narrative, since *il tempo che t’assonna* means “the time which is sending you to sleep,” and that this “sleep” is in all likelihood one with the experience that concludes the journey and the text, the ultimate goal of the time which is “flying” to that pre-ordained “end.” It is then shown that the final goal is a mystic experience, while *in via*, of the glory of the soul *in patria* as Aquinas understood it. This, in the subsequent review of the *somnus gloriae* exegetical “tradition,” is then shown to be one of the meanings of that figure, after which it is proposed that the poet adopts the anagogical figure in this sense, but as a metaphor: just as “Lazarus sleeps” means “Lazarus is dead” (cf. John 11.11), so *il tempo che t’assonna*, “the time which is sending you to sleep,” means “the time which is sending you to glory,” i.e., to a participation in the glory of the soul.

“Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna” is the first verse of the transitional passage which lies between Bernard’s “parole sante” (*Par.* 32.3-138) and his “santa orazione” (*Par.* 33.1-39). With his “parole sante,” the saint guides Dante through what is nothing less than his final and most comprehensive apocalyptic-eschatological “vision,” explaining the total Christ-centred and end-directed structure of the finite time allocated by divine Providence to the created world and to human existence—a “lesson” on the providential ordering of events in time which Bernard is obliged to cut short because he suddenly realises that *tempus fugit*, in the last of a long series of references to the flight of time (and a previously obscure allusion to sleep). If this is ironic, the irony is only apparent, since there is actually nothing accidental about the point at which he brings the lesson to an end in order to turn to his “santa orazione,” his prayer to the Virgin, the last words he or any other character speaks. In Chapter 6, after a discussion of the Christian concept of time and its presence in the *Commedia*, it is demonstrated that all of this

reflects two interconnected features of the real saint as he was known to Dante and his early readers, and that it exploits them for the purpose of bringing teleological closure to the theme of time and to the text itself. One of these two features is the saint's authority on the subject of time; the other is his manner of bringing many of his *Sermones in Cantica* to a seemingly unplanned end with a *clausio* that consists of an allusion to time (and/or sleep) immediately followed by a closing prayer. It is further argued that the difference between Virgil's lofty "sed fugit interea, fugit inreparabile tempus" and Bernard's homely "Ma perché 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna, / qui farem punto, come buon sartore / che com' elli ha del panno fa la gonna" (*Par.* 32.139-141) is the difference between, on the one hand, the *tempus fugit* theme understood *in malo* and expressed in the high style of classical "parola ornata," and, on the other, that same theme finally transformed *in bono*, captured in the transcendent Christian *sermo humilis* of the fictional abbot's "parole sante."

The aims and methodology of this study, and even its primary sources, are those of traditional philology as it has been applied to Dante's works by critics such as Michele Barbi and Bruno Nardi. My intention is to contribute to our understanding of Dante's poetry by clarifying some of his intended meaning in passages where it has remained obscure or has gone unnoticed. I attempt to do so by recovering, from patristic and medieval texts well-known to Dante scholars, relevant features of the intellectual and religious culture that the poet shared with his first readers. I have not been concerned with hunting down direct sources, but with tracing pertinent ideas, images and discourses which in some form or other had long been in circulation by the time the *Divina Commedia* came to be written, so that the author and at least some of his intended audience can reasonably be expected to have been aware of them—provided that they do in fact illuminate the text of the poem. Regrettably, but of necessity, the result is one of those studies that devotes many more pages to the columns of "PL" and the questions of "ST" than to Dante's poetry. If it substantiates its claims to have corrected or refined interpretations by scholars such as the two great Italian philologists, this is only because the writer has chosen as his point of departure a textual problem so minor that it has not previously been thought to require more than the brief comments which are reviewed in the following chapter.

Chapter 1

“Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna” (I):

Literature Review

i Fictions and visions

From the period of the earliest commentaries on the *Commedia* to modern times, Dante scholars have disagreed about whether the poem should be seen as an allegorical fiction or a prophetic vision.¹ For most critics, the work is best understood as the creation of a master poet who depicts a fictitious bodily journey through the three realms of the afterlife, deploying philosophical and theological doctrines, along with visionary, mystical and prophetic motifs, in order to communicate (mediated through the fictitious literal sense) the divine will as he came to understand it through extensive study and deep reflection. On this view, the literal meaning is to be taken at face value, but as the foundation of an allegorical mode of signification: the literal sense of the poem is a manifest *factio*, a fictive supernatural journey in body and soul, its ultimately theological truths residing in the allegorical meanings of the events that are described in the narrative.

In what is by far the most influential modern formulation of this view, that propounded by Charles S. Singleton, the fundamental truth in question is the theology of Christian conversion, and the mode of signifying “imitates” that of fourfold scriptural allegory, in which the literal sense consists of the historically true events that are recorded in the Bible.² For Singleton, the moral meaning of Dante’s bodily journey is the theologically correct conception of the spiritual process by which the soul turns from sin to God, its progress from the misery of sin to the state of grace in this life and thence to God as the ultimate goal in the next life. The *Commedia* is a “vision” in the very special

¹ On the history of the debate, see Vincent Truijen, “visione mistica,” *ED*, vol. 5, 1071-73, and Amilcare A. Iannucci, “Dante: poeta o profeta?” in “*Per correr miglior acque . . .*” *Bilanci e prospettive degli studi danteschi alle soglie del nuovo millennio*, Atti del Convegno di Verona-Ravenna 25-29 ottobre 1999, vol. 1 (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2001), 93-114.

² Charles S. Singleton, “*Commedia*,” *Elements of Structure*, *Dante Studies* 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1954), *Journey to Beatrice*, *Dante Studies* 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1958), “In Exitu Israel de Aegypto,” in *Dante: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Freccero (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 102-21.

sense that its Christian poetic is that of an “embodied vision” grounded in the mystery of the Incarnation. That is, just as the real historicity of the events that Holy Scripture describes is the foundation of the fourfold system of biblical exegesis, and access to its message of salvation requires first and foremost faith in the reality of the Incarnation, the faith that the Word really did become flesh, so the fictitious historicity of Dante’s “vision” of supernatural truth by means of the literal journey is the very basis of the poem’s mode of signifying, for access to its saving truth requires of its readers an act of faith, a willingness to believe its “word made flesh,” i.e., their acceptance of the concrete historicity of the literal journey in the body.³ Thus, while most of the early commentators think of the protagonist’s journey as an allegorical poetic fiction that is intended to be seen as just that, Singleton argues that the allegorical journey is narrated as if it had really taken place, that the fiction asks to be read as if it were as literally true as Scripture itself. For Robert Hollander, this strategy, which makes Dante a *theologus-poeta*, not the *poeta-theologus* the early commentators took him to be, is the poet’s response to the Dominican theologians (above all Thomas Aquinas) who thought that poetic fictions were devoid of truth and were therefore of little or no cognitive value.⁴

This means that, within the fiction, the body of the protagonist is real flesh, as opposed to the fictitious shade-bodies of the dead, many of whom are absolutely astonished at the presence of this real body among them in the next world. This is why Dante is obliged to explain that his “membra” “son qui meco / col sangue suo e con le sue giunture” (*Purg.* 26.56-57) after one of the shades observes that “colui non par corpo fittizio” (v. 12), and why Virgil tells another that, indeed, “l corpo di costui è vera carne” (*Purg.* 5.33), just as Dante himself confirms to a third that he has come to their world “con questa vera carne” (*Purg.* 23.123). This opposition would be sheer nonsense, as would virtually all of the many allusions to Dante’s body, if that body were the imaginary one of the kind of “vision” which the proponents of the *visio* model have in mind.

Against the critical consensus, some scholars have maintained that the poem is properly understood only when it is seen as the work of an authentic prophet and

³ Singleton, *Elements of Structure*, 89-94, “The Irreducible Dove,” *Comparative Literature* 9 (1957): 129-35, “The Irreducible Vision,” in Peter Brieger, Millard Meiss and Charles S. Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts of the “Divine Comedy,”* vol. 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 1-29.

⁴ Robert Hollander, “Dante *Theologus-Poeta*,” *Dante Studies* 94 (1976): 91-136.

visionary, one who uses his exceptional literary skills to produce a text which is the record or elaboration of an experience that he believes really took place, a supernatural revelation of God's will that was granted to him so that he might in turn reveal it to an erring world. For medieval theorists, as we will see in Chapter 2, the standard mode of vision for such prophetic revelations was the "spiritual" or "imaginative" kind. In this form of prophetic vision, it was thought, the supernaturally-induced images of things that are not really there are seen in the "spirit" or "imagination" while the subject is unaware of external reality because the senses have ceased to function. Such a state of "alienation from the senses" (*alienatio a sensibus*) might be caused by sleep (*somnus*), as in the case of a dream (a *somnium*), also known as either a "vision in sleep" (a *visio in somno* or *in somnis*) or a "dream-vision" (a *visio in somnio* or *in somniis*). Alternatively, it was believed, "ecstasy" or "rapture" (*ecstasis* or *raptus*) might bring on a sleep-like alienation from the senses while one is awake, resulting in an ecstatic vision, an imaginative waking vision. This second kind of imaginative vision was commonly signified by the term *visio* when used without further qualification or when paired with *somnium*, so that the two modes of imaginative vision or "visionary" experience could be said to be *somnia et visiones*, "dreams and visions," the first experienced in actual sleep, the second in the sleep-like waking state of ecstasy (a metaphorical "sleep"). Since we know from the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio* that Dante firmly believed that he was subject to prophetic dreams and visions,⁵ and on the mistaken assumption that these standard modes of prophetic vision are either the only or the highest modes, and perhaps out of the sense that the story the poem tells must in some sense be true, the proponents of the *visio* model argue that, although the *Commedia* appears to describe a fictitious bodily journey, it is really in some way the record or elaboration, artistically shaped and refined, of what Dante took to be a real prophetic dream or waking vision, and contains more or less explicit clues to that effect. On this interpretation, the literal sense is "imaginary" but is no fiction, for it represents, not a fictitious bodily journey to Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, but the imaginary journey of what the poet believes to have been an actual dream or vision in which he saw the afterlife as it really is and in which the divine will was revealed to him so that he might tell the world. If this is the case, then the protagonist's

⁵ *Vita Nuova* 3.3-15, 9.1-7, 12.1-9, 23.1-16, 24.2, 39.1-3, 42.1-2, *Convivio* 2.7.5-6, 2.8.13.

body is itself an illusory image, ontologically and phenomenologically identical to the shade-bodies of the dead.

No modern scholar more vigorously promoted the *visio* model and refuted the notion that the poem is a fictitious theological allegory than did Bruno Nardi, not only in his well-known essay “Dante profeta,”⁶ but also in several of the many studies in which he analysed Dante’s artistic and intellectual development in terms of a *curriculum* that progresses from the *Vita Nuova*, through the “errors” of the *Convivio* and *Monarchia*, to the repudiation and correction of those errors, and the poet’s final, definitive statement on all things, in the *Commedia*.⁷ Nardi argues that the *Vita Nuova* in its original form ended with the triumph of Beatrice’s rival, the *donna gentile* who later became the symbol of Philosophy in the *Convivio*, which was immediately followed by the *Monarchia*, and that there is a radical discontinuity between the two treatises and the subsequent masterpiece, which expresses the final development of Dante’s earlier philosophical ideas on the relations between Church and Empire. It does so, according to Nardi, in the form of a prophetic revelation of God’s will, rejecting the secular dualism of the *Convivio* and the *Monarchia*, their attribution of self-sufficiency and autonomy to the order of nature (temporal happiness, human reason, philosophy), restoring the proper Christian subordination of the natural order to the supernatural order of grace (eternal happiness, faith and revelation, theology)—all of which, along with the true nature of the three realms of the next world, the imminent advent of the messianic-Imperial *Veltro*, and the conferral upon the poet of the prophetic mission of telling the world, came to Dante after he had completed the *Monarchia* in what he took to be a true prophetic vision, the “mirabile visione” which he then added to the end of the *Vita Nuova*.

Nardi is not particularly concerned with technical precision as to which kind of “visionary sleep” was involved, the literal slumber of a *somnium* or the metaphorical sleep of an ecstatic waking *visio*. As we will see, he appears to favour the latter, while other scholars who share his view of the essential nature of the poem tend to prefer the

⁶ Bruno Nardi, “Dante profeta,” in *Dante e la cultura medievale*, ed. Paolo Mazzantini, 3rd ed. (Rome: Laterza, 1983), 265-326.

⁷ Nardi’s most mature and comprehensive reflections on Dante’s *curriculum* are to be found in the essays collected in *Dal “Convivio” alla “Commedia”* and in “Filosofia e teologia ai tempi di Dante,” in *Saggi e note di critica dantesca* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1966), 3-109. For an excellent review of the development of the Italian scholar’s thinking on this matter, see Cesare Vasoli, “Filosofia e teologia in Dante,” in *Otto saggi per Dante* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995), 13-40.

former, with the result that those who argue against them see the dream-vision model as their main adversary. From Guido da Pisa's citation (in one of the earliest extant commentaries) of *Par.* 32.139 in support of his conviction that the poem narrates a prophetic dream, to Singleton's insistence (in his own commentary) that "since, within the poem, this journey to the afterlife has never been termed a *dream*, but has always been presented as *real*, it is not possible to understand this verse, with the verb *assonnare*, to contradict this fundamental postulate of the experience,"⁸ and into more recent times, the problematic reference to sleep has been entangled in the *fictio/visio* debate, torn between the terms of its misleading, if not simply false, dichotomy.

There is surely nothing to prevent someone who believes that they have had a real supernatural revelation from imparting that revelation to others in an entirely fictitious narrative, just as there is nothing to stop a talented artist, even one with no experience of and no faith in the supernatural, from inventing a realistic representation of a fictional visionary enlightenment. Nor can we ever know with certainty that the *Commedia* is or is not the result of a vision that the poet believed to be true, nor even how his idea of a "true" vision might correspond to ours. Further, both sides of the debate frequently conflate mystical, visionary and prophetic experience, ignoring distinctions that were carefully drawn in the Middle Ages, fixing on one or the other form of *visionary* sleep or "alienation" as the kind of sleep to which Saint Bernard either must or must not be referring, and therefore failing to investigate seriously the totally non-visionary *mystic* sleep that the real Saint Bernard and many other contemplatives valued far more highly than dreams and visions. Nor have scholars taken into account the fact that divine prophecy was not thought to require alienation from the senses, so that a supernatural journey to the otherworld, involving the full use of the sensory organs (not only alive, "corruttibile ancora," but also "sensibilmente," *Inf.* 2.13-15), could well be an authentic

⁸ Guido, *Inf.* 1.1 (*Expositio lictere*), Singleton, *Par.* 32.139. With three exceptions, these and all other commentaries are cited from the *Dartmouth Dante Project* database, directed by Robert Hollander, giving the short form of the commentator's name as it appears in the database followed by the verse references which identify the gloss. The exceptions are Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri commentata da G.L. Passerini* (Florence: Sansoni, 1918), *La Divina Commedia annotata e commentata da Tommaso di Salvo con illustrazioni*, 3 vols. (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1993) and *Commedia, con il commento di Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi*, 4th ed., 3 vols. (Milan: Mondadori, 2000). These are cited as "Passerini," "Di Salvo" and "Chiavacci Leonardi," respectively, followed by the verse references that identify the gloss.

mode of prophetic vision, any more than they have considered the commonplace medieval notion that imaginative visions were always in some sense contaminated with error, at the very least in so far as they consisted of the images of things that were not really present, but even to the extent that the recipient might be accused of being the instrument of demonic deception or the subject of self-delusion (the latter is, in effect, Nardi's view). These are problems that a patently *fictional* prophetic journey in the body would forestall, enabling it to attest to its truth without contamination by falsehood. Among the truths to which the fictitiously real body of the protagonist of such a journey can give prophetic witness, far more effectively than could the really fictitious body of an imaginative vision, are the Incarnation of the Word made flesh, and the resurrection of the body at the end of time, two of Dante's chief concerns in the *Commedia*. The former is the teleological end or goal of the journey and of the narrative, the latter the *telos* of time itself.

The result of these critical presuppositions, confections and omissions has been that some have failed to seriously consider the possibility that *assonnare* in *Par.* 32.139 has to do with a properly mystic and therefore non-visionary "sleep," involving an alienation not just from the senses but from images seen in the imagination, just because they insist (quite rightly) that the poem asks to be read as the record of a real journey, not of a dream or ecstatic vision, thereby throwing the mystic baby out with the visionary bathwater; others, believing the poem to be primarily a prophetic text rather than a theological allegory (as is indeed the case), have found it necessary to look for indications that a "true" dream or waking vision must underlie it, interpreting *Par.* 32.139, and just about any other allusion to sleep, dreams and visions, in this light. In reality, the *Commedia* is primarily a prophetic-apocalyptic *visio*, as Nardi argues, while being at the same time an allegorical *fictio* that asks us to believe that the journey in body and soul really took place, as it is for Singleton.

ii The critical response (a)

By the time Guido da Pisa turned his attention to this verse, Jacopo della Lana had already read the whole tercet in which it occurs as an authorial intervention indicating the

impending closure of the text; but his gloss is silent on the details of its first verse.⁹ Guido, however, finds in “t’assonna” a reference to the sleep of dreams, in accord with his belief that Dante was an authentic prophet, truly inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that the *Commedia* is the account of the dream in which all that the poem contains was revealed. That a dream was the inspiration is evident, as far as the commentator is concerned, from the fact that the “mezzo del cammin” of *Inf.* 1.1 is not the *middle* of life’s journey, but the *half* (more or less!) of our lives that we spend in sleep. Thus the experience described in the text began not when Dante was thirty-five years of age, but when he was asleep.¹⁰ *Par.* 32.139 is quoted without further explanation, along with other references to sleep and to dreams (*Inf.* 1.10-12, *Par.* 33.58-62), as proof for this interpretation of the poem’s first verse, implying that “t’assonna” means “keeps you asleep,” i.e., in the literal sleep of a dream.¹¹ It is perhaps as a cornerstone of the true prophetic *visio* model that Guido’s reading of *Inf.* 1.1 is rejected by Pietro Alighieri, who makes no mention of its source, but who substantiates in detail the already standard gloss on the poem’s first verse, according to which “nel mezzo” signifies “at the mid-point,” and insists that the *Commedia* is an allegorical *fictio*.¹²

The lines of the *fictio/visio* dispute were thus drawn up at an early date; but they were by no means as clearly defined as is sometimes supposed. Guido is said to have been the only early commentator to favour the *fictio* paradigm, yet Benvenuto da Imola often describes the poem as some form of visionary work, although his ambiguous comments could be taken to mean that it describes either a fictitious waking vision, a real waking vision, or a real dream vision.¹³ Yet no hint of this appears in his gloss on *Par.* 32.139, which stresses the self-conscious poetic art of the tailor simile as a device which Dante uses to point to the approaching end, recalling Lana’s gloss and highlighting again

⁹ “Qui fa punto cioè termino a sua poetria non volendo più nomare delli beati della rosa, e solo attendere a compiere sua poetria. Farem punto: Quasi a dire: se lo numero de’ nostri capitoli fosse maggiore e la quantità di ciascuno fosse maggiore, ancora direi. Ma perchè sono presso a tali termini, è buono fare punto” (Lana, *Par.* 32.139-141). L’Ottimo and Fiorentino rely on Lana.

¹⁰ Guido, *Prologus*, *Inf.* 1, cf. *Deductio textus*, *Inf.* 1.1 (= *Expositio lictere*).

¹¹ Guido, *Inf.* 1.1 (= *Expositio lictere*), where the list of citations is followed by the statement that “per hoc patet quod autor dimidium vite nostre somnum esse prefigat.”

¹² Pietro 1, *Inf.* 1.1-3.

¹³ For a discussion of these inconsistencies and an attempt to reconcile them, see Mariano Welber, “Visione’ e ‘fictio’ nel *Commentum super Dantis comoediam* di Benvenuto da Imola,” in *Lectura Dantis Mystica*, *Atti della Settimana Dantesca*, 28 July-3 August 1968, ed. Daniela Bertocchi (Florence: Olschki, 1969), 188-226.

an important feature of the passage that has since been neglected and that this study will later emphasise, i.e., its function with respect to textual and teleological closure. As for the first verse, Benvenuto paraphrases it as “since, that is, you wish to sleep, after your long and arduous labour and waking,”¹⁴ as if the pilgrim can look forward to a well-earned snooze at the end of his waking vision (be it a real or a fictitious one). Similarly, in his literal gloss on *Par.* 32.139, and as far as I can tell nowhere else, Francesco da Buti claims that the poem recounts a fictitious waking vision which fills the night between Good Friday and Holy Saturday 1300, a vision so long and demanding that the almost exhausted pilgrim is on the verge of falling asleep as Bernard speaks. The poet writes “t’assonna,” or as Buti puts it, “ti fa venire lo sonno e voglia di dormire,” in order to maintain this fiction. But the true meaning is the allegorical one: Bernard is referring to the sleep of death, using the traditional figure for the state of the dead between death and the general resurrection, for he is really saying “t’induce a la morte, dopo la quale dormerà lo corpo infine al dì de la resurrezione ultima.”¹⁵ As we will see, however, the poem is not the record of a waking vision, real or fictitious, although Benvenuto and Buti are absolutely right in their belief that the “sleep,” whatever it may be, is yet to come, for Bernard does indeed say to Dante that time, or some period of time, “ti fa venire,” “t’induce a,” some future slumber.

Giovanni da Serravalle appears to adopt Guido’s suggestion that *Inf.* 1.1 points to a true dream vision, yet his gloss on *Par.* 32.139 is a paraphrase which adds nothing to the text and has no visionary implications.¹⁶ In the next pertinent comment, which comes over a century later, Trifon Gabriele can only write “non so perchè dica, se non forse che

¹⁴ “Quia scilicet, post longissimum et maximum laborem et vigiliam optas quiescere. . . . sicut enim bonus sartor si habet multum de panno facit tunicam amplam et longam, et si habet parum facit gonnam brevem et arctam; ita a simili, bonus poeta facit poema succinctum at diffusum secundum magnitudinem vel parvitatem materiae” (Benvenuto, *Par.* 32.139-141). Cristoforo Landino’s gloss on *Par.* 32.139 is substantially the same as Benvenuto’s.

¹⁵ “*Che t’assonna*: cioè ti fa venire lo sonno e voglia di dormire; e finge qui l’autore questo, per continuare la fizione che puose nel principio de la sua comedia, cioè che nel 1300 lo venerdì santo la notte in sul sabato santo elli avesse questa visione, e che in visione li fusseno mostrate queste cose che si contengono in questo poema. Unde, perchè veniva il dì convenevole era che la natura affannata per la lunga fatica de la visione si ricreasse alquanto dormendo . . . ; ma allegoricamente intendere si debbe: *Ma perchè ’l tempo*; cioè tuo, de la vita tua, *fugge*; lo quale tempo *t’assonna*; cioè t’induce a la morte, dopo la quale dormerà lo corpo infine al dì de la resurrezione ultima” (Buti, *Par.* 32.139-151). Cf. Buti, *Inf.* 1.1-9, *Inf.* 1.10-12, *Par.* 17.121-132.

¹⁶ “Qui[a] tempus fugit et te sompolentum [reddit], faciamus punctum, idest finem, sicut facit qui, sicut habet de panno, ita facit vestimentum” (Serravalle, *Par.* 32.139-141, cf. *Inf.* 1.1-3).

voglia dir che venia al fin la notte ch'el teneva in sogno, e che questa vision, ove il Poeta vide le cose trattate in questa opera, fu in sogno.”¹⁷ Bernardino Daniello, who sees a purely moral sense in the “pien di sonno” of *Inf.* 1.11, nonetheless writes of *Par.* 32.139 that “dice assonna, così dimonstrandone questo suo viaggio, essere stato visione; onde disse al principio della prima cantica, Io non so ben ridir com'io vi entrai, Tant'era pien di sonno in su quel punto.”¹⁸ At the end of this first phase of the commentary tradition, Lodovico Castelvetro sums up the critical confusion about the nature of the poem by writing that “Questa è una narrazione d'una visione estatica, o sogno, che avvenne a Dante, o s'imaginò come se gli fosse avvenuto. Dice adunque che, essendo di XXXV anni, gli parve in visione estatica d'essersi trovato errare per una selva, . . .”¹⁹ Nor had the nature of the “sleep” which Bernard has in mind been made any clearer.

In the commentaries written between the eighteenth and the early twentieth centuries one often finds statements to the effect that the time which is flying is the time allocated to Dante's “vision in sleep,” even though the commentator appears to mean only that the *Commedia* is to be considered a “vision” in some vague and undefined sense. In these cases there is no mention of the possibility that the poem may describe a dream, neither in the gloss on *Par.* 32.139, nor in those on other verses where one might expect such a suggestion. That is, dreams and visions play no part, either in the commentator's discussion of the kind of experience which Dante had at the time indicated in *Inf.* 1.1, or in his explanation of the nature of the “sonno” of *Inf.* 1.11, the “vision” of *Par.* 17.128, and the “alta fantasia” of *Par.* 33.142.²⁰ Raffaello Andreoli, Giacomo Poletto and H.F. Tozer do affirm that 1300 is the year of Dante's “vision,” Poletto implying that it was a real one.²¹ On *Par.* 32.139, Tozer says only that the fleeting time is that which is allocated to “Dante's vision.” Andreoli believes that the time in question is “lo spazio di tempo da Dio concesso a questa tua celeste visione, a questo miracoloso sopimento de' tuoi sensi,” while, for Poletto, Bernard is thinking of the vision as “come avuta dormendo,” although its exact nature is unclear to the poet, and “t'assonna” means “ti

¹⁷ Gabriele, *Par.* 32.139.

¹⁸ Daniello, *Par.* 32.139, cf. *Inf.* 1.10-12.

¹⁹ Castelvetro, *Inf.* 1.1-3.

²⁰ Venturi, Lombardi, Portirelli, Costa, Tommaseo, Bianchi, Scartazzini, Campi, *Par.* 32.139.

²¹ Andreoli, Poletto, Tozer, *Inf.* 1.1.

addormenta, ti tiene in sonno, ti tiene occupato e sospeso nella visione.”²² G.L. Passerini simply paraphrases thus: “ti tien nel sonno, cioè, ti rapisce in estasi. Intendi: sta per compiersi (*fugge*) il tempo assegnato alla tua visione.”²³

John S. Carroll seems to be the one commentator who takes the trouble to consider one of Saint Bernard’s most famous statements on mystic sleep, only to blur the vital distinction Bernard and many other mystics made between this phenomenon and visionary sleep. Carroll says that the literal sense of *assonnare* refers to the sleep of dreams, but that the true meaning is metaphorical, for the journey is not a dream, but the experience is *like* a dream in sleep. Bernard uses the “comparison of ecstasy to a sleep” which his historical counterpart exploits in *Sermones in Cantica canticorum* 52, where sleep signifies “the state of contemplation.” As for how this applies to Dante’s experience, Carroll writes that “all he has seen up to this time is as a dream in sleep,” but “now he is about to awake to the eternal reality of which it is but the shadow.”²⁴ However, as we will see, Bernard’s mystic sleep is nothing other than the mystic union with the Word that is the one goal at the summit of numerous contemplative ascents, a mystic “sleep” that has nothing to do with images of any kind and which the protagonist has long since had (for by an extraordinary omission in the study of the *Commedia*’s mysticism, scholars have not noticed that Dante’s brief slumber in the Earthly Paradise is precisely the *somnus contemplationis* of the mystics).

Apart from Benvenuto and Buti, all of the commentators reviewed so far assume that the literal meaning of *assonnare* is “to hold in sleep, to keep asleep” and that Dante is therefore in some way “asleep” as Bernard speaks. They are therefore constrained to construct readings which evade, by means of vagueness and equivocation, the plain fact that the pilgrim is wide awake, enjoying the full (and indeed greatly heightened) use of his bodily senses. As far as syntax is concerned, all read the phrase “che t’assonna” as a restrictive relative clause (sometimes termed a “determinazione” or “relativa determinativa” in Italian grammars). In this kind of structure, the antecedent (e.g., “the train”) is viewed as a member of a class (in this case, the class of trains), and the relative clause (e.g., “which stops at Central”) picks that particular member out from the others in

²² Poletto, *Par.* 32.139.

²³ Passerini, *Par.* 32.139.

²⁴ Carroll, *Par.* 139-41.

that class (i.e., provided that none of those other trains stop there, “the train which stops at Central” identifies the one train which does). In our case, “il tempo” is understood as belonging to the class “periods of time” and “che t’assonna” as identifying the particular period of time devoted to doing to the protagonist whatever it is that *assonnare* signifies. This period of time is seen as that of the whole journey, dream or vision, and the reference to time’s flight as an indication of that time’s imminent closure. Read in this way, the line could be rewritten as “Ma perchè ‘l tempo che t’assonna fugge,” but with two possible literal meanings. For Benvenuto and Buti (correctly, I will argue), its meaning is “because the period of time which is sending you to sleep is flying (to its end, at which point you will fall asleep).” The other possible literal meaning, assumed by the majority of commentators, is “because the period of time which is keeping you asleep is flying (to its end, when you will awake),” be it from the literal sleep of a real, and truly divinely-inspired, prophetic dream, as Guido believes, or from the metaphorical sleep of an ecstatic rapture, the “alienation from the senses” in which waking visions occur, as most of the modern commentators considered above appear to suggest—although many seem to mean, not that the whole experience is actually a waking vision, but only that it is in some vague sense *like* such a vision, that Dante’s condition as Bernard speaks, and throughout the experience, is in some ill-defined way *like* the metaphorical waking sleep of ecstatic rapture, as if “t’assonna” were a metaphor twice-removed.

It must be said that Michele Barbi, in what is still the most frequently cited gloss,²⁵ merely complicates this vagueness and restricts its scope to Dante’s time in the Emyrean. The great Italian critic’s point of departure is the conviction that the poem narrates a fictitiously real journey in the body, not a dream, so that the literal sleep of dreams is out of the question. He asserts that “t’assonna” can be interpreted in two ways, his preference being the second. The first is as an allusion to Dante’s mortal state, which entails the need for sleep:

²⁵ Michele Barbi, *Problemi di critica dantesca: Prima serie* (Florence: Sansoni, 1934), 294-295 (first published in *Bullettino della Società Dantesca Italiana* n.s. 25 [1918]: 77-78). This gloss is adopted in the commentaries by Grabher, Momigliano, Sapegno, Petrobono, Giacalone and Chiavacci Leonardi, and also in Guido di Pino, “Canto XXXII,” *Lecture dantesche*, ed. Giovanni Getto (Florence: Sansoni, 1964), 2001-2018, Antonio Russi, *Il canto XXXII del Paradiso*, *Lectura Dantis Scaligeri* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1966), Ruggiero Stefanini, “Spunti di esegesi dantesca: due contrappassi (*Inf.* VI e XIX) e due *cruces* (*Purg.* XXVII.81 e *Par.* XXXII.139),” *Forma e parola: Studi in memoria di Fredi Chiappelli*, ed. Dennis J. Dutschke et al. (Rome: Bulzoni, 1992), 45-65.

o dobbiamo vederci un richiamo alla sua condizione di essere vivente, la quale non permette una troppa lunga vigilia (un richiamo da mettere insieme col *mortal pondo* di *Par.* XXVII, 64 e con la *nube di sua mortalità* di *Par.* XXXIII, 31-32...): . . .

The second, which Barbi adopts, is as follows:

oppure s'intende che il poeta, rapito ormai nella contemplazione dei più profondi misteri, *quasi dormiens vigilaret* (son parole di S. Agostino a proposito del ratto di S. Paolo, e cfr. *Purg.* XXIX, 144, ove l'autore dell'*Apocalisse* si vede 'venir dormendo con la faccia arguta').

In this passage, with its incorrect quotation, no doubt from memory, of a phrase from Book 12 of Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*, Barbi dissolves what Chapter 2 will show to be perhaps the most important distinction in that famous discussion of Saint Paul's rapture (2 Cor. 12.2-4), the distinction between Paul's mystical vision, the purely intellectual, entirely imageless, direct intuition of the divine essence, and Saint John's visionary experience, the "spiritual" or "imaginative" mode of seeing of his Apocalypse. This is the distinction between the mind's unmediated apprehension of present intellectual realities and seeing the meaningful likenesses of corporeal things which are not really there. As we will also see in the next chapter,²⁶ Augustine writes, not "quasi dormiens vigilaret" apropos of Saint Paul, but "et non quasi dormiens evigilaret," "and would not wake up as one asleep" (i.e., from the sleep of a dream), meaning that this is what Paul did *not* do after his rapture, for it was no dream. Barbi recalls the phrase as "quasi dormiens vigilaret," which in itself would appear to mean "awake, but as if asleep," but which, since it is illustrated by Dante's representation of John "venir, dormendo, con la faccia arguta," may be intended by the Italian scholar to signify, in the words of Teodolinda Barolini, "as though awake while sleeping."²⁷ Be that as it may, Barbi goes on to note that Dante contemplates the highest mysteries of the faith in the Empyrean, and, affirming that this requires complete alienation from the senses, he

²⁶ See pp. 58-9.

²⁷ Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine "Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 1992), 146. Barolini notes the difference between Augustine's actual remark in *De Genesi* and that which Barbi attributes to the saint (146, 314, n. 9).

proposes that the time in question is “il tempo assegnato alla contemplazione dei più alti misteri divini, per i quali occorre la totale astrazione dai sensi, e l’uomo riman quindi come dormiente.”

Since Dante is exercising his bodily senses to the full, above all his sense of vision, and since Barbi himself starts from the position that the journey is to be understood as a real one, and not that of a dream or a vision, it is unclear how this gloss clarifies the issue, nor how it can be other than a complete contradiction of the scholar’s own basic assumption, unless his intention is to suggest that we are to imagine that Dante ascends bodily to the Empyrean and that, once there, his transformed corporeal vision gives way to an ecstatic imaginative vision like John’s, followed, at the poem’s end, by a Pauline intellectual vision of the divine essence (an unlikely excogitation from what Barbi does in fact say, one which would in any case mean that what Dante sees in the Empyrean is less real than what he sees everywhere else). Alternatively, the idea may be that Dante is not actually alienated from his senses at all in the Empyrean, not even in the metaphorical visionary “sleep” of Saint John, let alone the literal sleep of a dream, but that he is “come dormiente” in the sense that he is wide awake yet in a state which is *analogous to* metaphorical visionary sleep by virtue of the status of the objects of his contemplative gaze, the elevated power of that gaze and its total concentration on those objects—i.e., we are dealing with a metaphor twice-removed. This does seem to be Barbi’s meaning, for it does not appear to be his intention to suggest that Dante’s experience in the Empyrean is an imaginative waking vision, in an ecstatic alienation from the senses, like the two such visions the protagonist has on the mountain of Purgatory, any more than he wishes to argue that it is a dream, like the three Dante has in the course of his purgatorial ascent.²⁸

It is, in any case, manifest that Dante uses his transformed corporeal vision throughout the *Paradiso*, nowhere more keenly than in the Empyrean. Indeed, the final cantos abound in what Giovanni Nencioni, in the interpretation which is the principle alternative to Barbi’s,²⁹ aptly describes as “il vedere, il guardare, il mirare, il contemplare, il chinare, levare, drizzare, fissare, ficcare l’occhio” (51). For it is clear that Dante is not in the least alienated from his senses *until* the final rapture, at *Par.* 33.139-

²⁸ *Purg.* 15.85-114, 17.13-45 (the waking visions), 9.10-63, 19.1-33, 27.91-114 (the dreams).

²⁹ Giovanni Nencioni, “Note dantesche: VII,” *Studi danteschi* 40 (1963): 50-56.

145, at which point what Barbi terms “la totale astrazione dai sensi” does in fact occur in what is, as this study seeks to prove, the very “sleep” of which Bernard is thinking. Had Barbi realised that *assonnare* refers to the transition *to* sleep, not the state of being asleep, he would very possibly have come to the same conclusion. He might then have written that the time in question is “il tempo assegnato ad indurre Dante alla contemplazione del più alto mistero divino, il mistero dell’Incarnazione, nella visione dell’essenza divina, per la quale occorre la totale astrazione dai sensi, il che significa rimanere come dormiente.”

Nicolò Mineo attempts to take account of such objections when he puts forward what he considers to be a refinement of Barbi’s view. Mineo, like other scholars, finds evidence of the influence of Richard of St. Victor’s *Benjamin major* in the description of the last moments of Dante’s ascent. In particular, he argues, there are echoes of the ascending contemplative sequence *dilatatio*, *sublevatio*, *alienatio*, the last of which is for Richard the mystic “sleep” of ecstasy. Presupposing that *assonnare* means “to keep asleep,” but noting that only the last few lines of the poem, where there is no reference to sleep, can be said to correspond to Richard’s *alienatio*, Mineo assumes that the state the pilgrim is in as Bernard speaks is the preceding stage of *sublevatio*, and suggests that the author shifts the metaphor of sleep away from the final *alienatio* to the protagonist’s immediately preceding *sublevatio* in order to anticipate the mystic alienation at the end of the poem.³⁰ If he had considered the possibility that *assonnare* might actually anticipate a future sleep, Mineo would perhaps have argued that the final *alienatio* is, as I propose, the sleep we have been seeking. However, as I will show in due course, the reality is that Richard’s mystic sleep is the same as the historical Bernard’s, the affective union with the Word that is not the privileged vision of the essence of God but that *is* the peak of the contemplative life that is potentially accessible to all and that the protagonist attains when he sleeps in the Earthly Paradise.

Nencioni will accept neither an allusion to the mortal protagonist’s need for sleep nor any visionary connotations.³¹ His interpretation is the elaboration of an earlier one by Francesco Torraca, who rejects the first of these options because “dirgli una cosa simile

³⁰ Nicolò Mineo, *Profetismo e Apocalittica in Dante* (Catania: Università di Catania, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, 1968), 288-89.

³¹ Like Manfredi Porena, in his commentary of 1946-48: Porena reviews and rejects the earlier interpretations, suggesting that “assonna” may well be a textual error and that the poet may actually have written “addonna” “nel senso di domina, governa” (Porena, *Par.* 32.139).

mentre sta per vedere Dio stesso sarebbe un'offesa grave e gratuita" (a matter of taste, perhaps), and the second because "Dante non dice mai di aver compiuto il viaggio per i tre mondi dormendo, in sogno, e non realmente, desto, ad occhi aperti" (a fact).³² Torraca suggests a quite different approach, one which rests on the distinction between the succession of things in time and the simultaneity of eternity and on Aquinas's belief that the vision of God is a participation in the latter:

Dunque, S. Bernardo intende: Perché già cessa il tuo essere nel tempo, finisco, per non ritardare la tua partecipazione all'eternità, la tua visione suprema. *Che t'assonna*: il sonno è necessario effetto dell'essere noi nel tempo, cioè mortali; cfr. *Purg.* IX, 10-11 ["quand' io, che meco avea di quel d'Adamo, / vinto dal sonno, in su l'erba inchinai"]. Si badi che, or ora, S. Bernardo pregherà Maria di 'dislegare ogni nube della mortalità' di Dante, perchè questi possa vedere Dio.

In itself, the Italian scholar's version of what Saint Bernard means to say makes perfect sense; but connecting it to the poem and to the saint's actual words is a very demanding mental task, for there is nothing in the context to support the idea of an opposition between time and eternity, there being no allusion to eternity, and it is not easy to see how "il tempo che t'assonna" can be construed as meaning "il tuo essere nel tempo, del quale il sonno è necessario effetto." Nencioni's later adaptation of Torraca's gloss may be of help here.³³

Nencioni insists that *assonnare* must have a literal non-visionary sense in order to be in accord with the context, which is in a "registro del proprio e non del visionario," for Dante is wide awake and has the full use of his senses. Untroubled by the fact that his and Torraca's stress on the opposition between time and eternity is unsupported by any allusion to eternity in that same context, he reminds us of Dante's own evocation of the opposition between the eternal *vigilare* of those in heaven and the alternation of sleep and waking in mortals (which at least belongs to the context of the poem, if not the canto), writing that

³² Torraca, *Par.* 32.139-141.

³³ Nencioni, "Note dantesche: VII."

il suo [i.e., Torraca's] contributo positivo e ben accettabile sta nello spogliare il *t'assonna* di ogni accezione visionaria, considerandolo—in termini linguistici—una rideterminazione per sineddoche di *il tempo*, il tutto equivalendo a 'il tuo tempo umano,' il tempo umano, proseguiamo noi, di Dante contrapposto, con buona e chiara ragione, alla eternità della corte celeste; come a dire: "Poiché il termine concesso al tuo viaggio oltremondano sta per scadere—e un termine doveva essergli assegnato, giacché tu sei ancora, a differenza di noi che 'vigiliamo nell'eterno die,' nel tempo umano che alterna giorno e notte, sonno e veglia [cf. *Purg.* 30.103-105]—dedicheremo alla veduta di Dio gli ultimi istanti del tuo soggiorno celeste" (53).

Where Torraca sees a contrast between Dante's present temporal mortality and his coming participation in eternity, Nencioni finds an opposition between Dante's "tempo umano" and the "eternità della corte celeste" as such. This is just as comprehensible in itself as is Torraca's gloss, but relating the later scholar's version to the context and to Bernard's actual words is an even more taxing mental task than is the case with that of the earlier critic. Further, Nencioni claims to adopt what he considers an innovative reading of the syntax by his predecessor, informing us that Torraca correctly divined that "che t'assonna" is "una rideterminazione per sineddoche di *il tempo*," and that "il tempo che t'assonna" is consequently equivalent to "il tuo tempo umano;" but he subsequently cites, as an example of such a "rideterminazione," *Purg.* 33.53-54, "a' vivi / del viver ch'è un correre a la morte"(54). However, the clause "ch'è un correre a la morte" is a restrictive "determinativa" which identifies one of the two-member class "kinds of life," i.e., mortal life as distinct from eternal life, so that it is just the kind of relative clause that "che t'assonna" had always been understood to be. To add to the confusion, both Torraca and Nencioni actually seem to have in mind a quite different kind of structure, a non-restrictive clause, an "appositiva" or "espansione," in which the antecedent (e.g., "the train") is unique (or is treated as such) and the relative clause provides information not intended to distinguish it from something else of the same kind (as in "the train, which stops at Central"). In our case, the antecedent would be, not a period of time, but time *as such*, in opposition to eternity, and we could re-write "il tempo che t'assonna" as "il tempo, che t'assonna," meaning (for Torraca) "il tuo essere nel tempo, del quale il sonno è necessario effetto," or (as Nencioni puts it) "il tuo tempo umano." The latter critic also senses the presence, as an undertone, of the non-visionary yet metaphorical "sleep" of

moral torpor, and cites St. Paul on the matter, referring us to passages that, as I will show in some detail in Chapter 3, were commonly seen as exhortations to wake from the deadly sleep of mortal sin (54-55). This makes the protagonist's condition here in the Empyrean, as he stands on the verge of sharing in beatitude and despite all the purifying labour which has preceded, even more lamentable than Torraca had implied. Nencioni's interpretation therefore exacerbates the weaknesses of that of his predecessor but lacks the intrinsic clarity which is its one definite virtue. It has nevertheless appealed to some of the scholars who have found themselves unable to agree with Michele Barbi.³⁴

iii “Dante profeta”

Both Barbi and Nencioni seek to reconcile *Par.* 32.139 with the conviction (which they hold in common with most scholars in the modern period) that the literal sense of the *Commedia* consists of a fictitiously real bodily voyage through the three domains of the next life, not the imagined visionary journey of a dream or vision. Like a voice in the wilderness, Bruno Nardi speaks out against this critical consensus, insisting that we are dealing with an authentic prophetic work in the Old Testament tradition, not a literary artifice created for the sake of its doctrine. In “Dante profeta,” Nardi argues that there is no distinction between Dante and the prophets: like them, he believed that he was communicating to the world a supernatural divine revelation regarding the causes of earthly corruption, the need for reform, and the means by which the renewal of the world was to be brought about. He believed that he had been inspired by the Holy Spirit to interpret the will of God to humanity, and that it was his mission to do so. It was for the sake of this mission, he believed, that the three realms of the afterlife were revealed to him as they really are. Dante is, in this sense, a true prophet, a genuine visionary, who uses poetry with this highest of moral and religious purposes, just like the authors of the Bible, for his discovery of the providential role of the Empire made him the prophet of

³⁴ Vincenzo Pernicone, *Il canto XXXII del “Paradiso,”* *Lectura Dantis Romana* n.s. (Turin: SEI, 1965), Tommaso Pisanti, “Il canto XXXII,” in *Casa di Dante in Roma, Paradiso: Letture degli anni 1979-81* (Rome: Bonacci, 1989), 823-824, Maria Luisa Doglio, “L’ ‘ufficio di dottore.’ ‘Institutio’ ed ‘exempla’ nel canto XXXII del *Paradiso*,” *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 106 (1989): 321-339. Among the commentators, Bosco-Reggio, Pasquini-Quaglio, Di Salvo and Singleton (ad loc) prefer Nencioni's interpretation. In his rather confused gloss, Singleton also suggests that the metaphorical meaning is Dante's “falling away from the final experience, which must happen soon, for the mortal man's experience of the light of glory is most transitory” (Singleton, *Par.* 32.139).

the messianic-Imperial *Veltro* whose advent would set things right. In short, Dante was subject to the magnificent illusion that the ideas and the vivid images which took shape in his mind as the fruition of long and deep meditation on reality were in fact of supernatural origin and constituted a true divine revelation, granted in a visionary experience of the kind known as “rapture” or “ecstasy.”³⁵

Few scholars have accepted the rationale through which Nardi identifies that experience with the “mirabile visione” which the poet reports at the end of the *Vita Nuova*. Dante tells us nothing of its content, saying only that in that vision “io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta [Beatrice] infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamente trattare di lei” (42.1). Over some fifty years, Nardi argued that Dante’s life-long intellectual and artistic journey followed a meandering but very end-directed course, proceeding, after the death of Beatrice, from one abandoned work to another, one error to another, ending with a return to the transfigured Beatrice of the *Vita Nuova* in the great prophetic poem which supersedes and repudiates the works written in between, the *Convivio* and the *Monarchia*. In Nardi’s view, the *Vita Nuova* in its original form ended with the triumph, after Beatrice’s death, of the “donna gentile,” that is, the Lady Philosophy whom Dante went on to laud extravagantly in the *Convivio* as capable of making us truly happy in this life. Finding himself unable to maintain a cogent defense of this idea, and fired with a sense of mission to share with the world his discovery of the providential role of the Empire in human history, Dante abandoned the *Convivio* and set to work on the *Monarchia*, only to fall into a dualistic secularism even more unorthodox than that of the *Convivio*, one which reaches its most radical form in the “duo ultima” scheme of *Monarchia* 3.15. He then at some point had an experience corresponding to the “mirabile visione” which radically changed him, revealing the truth as the *Commedia* presents it, including the discovery that only Christian revelation can give happiness and that Beatrice was in some way that revelation. Dante then changed the ending of the *Vita*

³⁵ “Il profeta, sia esso Mosè o Maometto, Ezechiele o l’abate Gioacchino, è l’uomo che, raccogliendosi a meditare sulle condizioni storiche del suo popolo, avverte il travaglio profondo e le ispirazioni d’un’epoca, ne intuisce le forze latenti, ne divina lo sviluppo, presentando il fatale scioglimento del dramma sociale di cui vive la passione . . . i suoi pensieri s’incarnano in vivide immagini, le vicende umane passate e gli eventi ancor non nati affluiscono alla sua fantasia a formare la drammatica visione che lo rapisce” (“Dante profeta,” 295); “In questo ripiegamento dell’anima su se stessa per risalire alle occulte scaturigini dell’essere, in questa capacità di estrarsi dalle mutevoli apparenze dei sensi, consiste appunto quello che gli antichi dissero rapimento ed estasi” (ibid., 325).

Nuova to the form in which we know it, with its closing reference to the wondrous vision, making the whole work a sort of prologue to the *Commedia*, and also attenuated the dualism of the “duo ultima” in the *Monarchia* by means of an equivocating addition at the end of the work, beginning then, or having just begun, his poetic masterpiece.³⁶

Few, if any, critics now believe that Dante amended the *Vita Nuova* and the *Monarchia* as Nardi suggests, or that the *Monarchia* was complete before the *Commedia* was begun. It is, in any case, in the context of this scheme that Nardi asserts, not that the “mirabile visione” corresponds precisely to what the poem describes, but that it is the poet’s conceptualisation of the experience that was the germ of the great poetic-prophetic vision. As for what that experience in fact was, the critic’s belief is that the ultimate fruit of Dante’s profound meditations on the state of the world, the relations between the Church and Empire, and their place in salvation history, was the discovery of a marvelous concordance regarding these themes between the Virgilian humanism of the *Aeneid* on the one hand and, on the other, biblical prophecy and the revelation of the Gospel, and that Dante believed that this was a supernatural revelation, in an ecstatic imaginative vision like those of the biblical prophets or those attributed to the saints in the *Legenda Aurea*, of the causes of the world’s troubles and of the divine plan for its political and religious reformation. Convinced that this vision had been granted him so that he might play his part in the unfolding of the eternal plan by revealing it to the corrupt world, Dante applied all his poetic skill to the representation of what he had learned in the poem in which Cacciaguida invests him with this prophetic mission with the words “tutta tua visione fa manifesta” (*Par.* 17.128), a clear indication that the *Commedia* represents the same kind of experience. All of which amounts to this: Dante’s studies and meditation culminated in a vividly imagined intuition of the fundamental ideas of the poem, an intuition that he took to be the divine revelation of a waking vision (the “mirabile visione” of the *Vita Nuova*); the poem is the account of that vision, elaborated, with all the skill and knowledge at the writer’s disposal, into “una visione profetica nella quale il viaggio di Enea ‘ad immortale secolo’ si compie col ratto di Paolo al terzo cielo.”³⁷

³⁶ See p. 13 of this chapter.

³⁷ Bruno Nardi, “Dal *Convivio* alla *Commedia*,” in *Dal “Convivio” alla “Commedia*,” 113.

In another essay,³⁸ Nardi rightly and cogently highlights both the prophetic dimension of the *Commedia* and the reality and importance for Dante of the divinatory dreams and visions to which *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio* testify, arguing that the poem records the culmination of these visionary inclinations. As for the mode of vision, the great medievalist again appears to suggest that, of the two proper modes of biblical prophecy, dreams and ecstatic waking visions, the latter applies with respect to the poem and the supernatural event which inspired it:

I sogni divinatori, secondo Mosè Maimonide e Alberto Magno, non sono che gradi o modi di quello spirito profetico che raggiunge le sue più alte manifestazioni nella visione e nell'estasi. Ora la stessa *Commedia* non è altro, per Dante, che una grande visione profetica, simile a quella di San Paolo quando fu rapito al terzo cielo, simile a quella di Er nel decimo della *Repubblica* platonica imitata dal *Somnium Scipionis*. Chi non si persuade che questa fu salda convinzione di Dante, assunto da Dio ad annunziare un rinnovamento dell'umanità traviata e la venuta del Veltro, potrà ben vedere molti fregi del mirabile edificio, ma il disegno architettonico della costruzione gli è sfuggito (238).

This implies that the *Commedia* records a waking vision rather than a dream, although Nardi is never really concerned to prove this by means of any detailed analysis of the text. It also implies that prophecy can take forms other than waking visions (which is true), and that waking visions were for Albert the Great the highest manifestation of the prophetic spirit (which is false, or at least very misleading). For the very text which Nardi has in mind, and which he argues Dante very probably knew, Albert's *De somno et vigilia*,³⁹ is a work which evinces the widespread (at least among the learned) medieval suspicion of dreams and visions, based in part on the fear that they might be cases of exactly what the Italian scholar so passionately insists really was the case for Dante, something against which the poet, if he had read *De somno* (and Nardi argues fairly convincingly that he did), would very probably have been on his guard.

One of the first things which Albert says about the visions which occur in the waking but sleep-like state that some call *raptus* or *ecstasis* (those visions in which one sees the *phantasmata* or images of things formed in the *phantasia* or *imaginativa*, the

³⁸ Bruno Nardi, "L'immortalità dell'anima," in *Dante e la cultura medievale*, 225-44.

³⁹ Albert the Great, *De somno et vigilia*, in *Opera*, vol. 5, ed. P. Jammy (Lyons, 1651), 64-109.

“imagination” as the image-forming faculty of the soul which operates through a physical organ, located in the brain) is that such visions are usually delusions, the product of a zealous contemplation of divine truth and heavenly spirits which leads the subject to believe that he or she has actually seen such divine beings (usually “she,” for women are particularly prone to such delusions, in Albert’s view, due to the greater moisture in their *complexio*, as a consequence of which their imagination is more fluid and so more readily able to form, reshape and combine images). Albert therefore writes of ecstatic visions that most are fictitious delusions, i.e., “most are fabricated in the formative process in which the imagination usually conceives and puts together images of what one desires and hopes for or fears or hates” (“plurimum sunt . . . conficta ea fictione qua fantasia fingendo componere solet imagines ad ea quae desiderantur et sperantur vel timentur vel detestantur”).⁴⁰

As for dreams, Albert says that, strictly speaking, they too are a kind of deception or error, in that the forms of absent things appearing in the imagination are taken for the things themselves (a fact which the protagonist painfully experiences in the first of his three dreams),⁴¹ and that the difficult subject of divination in dreams requires the drawing of careful distinctions, resulting in a clear hierarchy of value. The term *somnium* or “dream” designates that which is seen while the senses are not functioning because of sleep, namely images in the imagination which are not derived from things present to sensation. Dreams are sometimes meaningful and sometimes not, but even if they are there is never a full intellectual illumination of their significance. In a *visio* or “vision” in its proper narrow sense, one sees the images of absent things in the *phantasia* while one is “turned away,” “abstracted” or “alienated” from the senses while awake (in the state of *ecstasis* or *raptus*). Like dreams, these may or may not signify something and always involve phantasms, but unlike dreams they *can* be accompanied by complete intellectual understanding of their meaning. *Prophetia* or “prophecy” in the strictest sense, on the other hand, is something far superior, for it occurs “when one’s mind is illuminated, in an intellectual rapture, regarding the knowledge of future things or of other mysteries which

⁴⁰ Albert, *De somno* 1.2.6, p. 78.

⁴¹ Albert, *De somno* 2.1.1-7, cf. *Purg.* 9.10-63.

the essence of prophecy lies in intellectual understanding, not in the sensory-imaginary media of dreams and visions: “The thirteenth level is the completion of prophecy, in which, for our benefit, it anticipates hidden things by a celestial impulse, having a true understanding of them even without a great turning away of the senses. This level is the highest the human soul can attain.”⁴⁴ All of this means that, according to Albert’s ideas on prophecy, the author of the *Commedia* need only have believed that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to understand the providential meaning of the evidence of his own corporeal eyes (whether he was using them to read the Bible or the *Aeneid*, or to look at the world around him) in order to believe also that he has really been granted a prophetic revelation. It also means that a supernatural journey to the physically real places of the next world, undertaken both “*corruttibile ancora*” and “*sensibilmente*,” in which the meaning of what the traveller sees and of history itself is revealed, would be a theoretically acceptable mode of prophetic revelation. The next chapter will show that, whatever its original inspiration, this is just how the poem asks to be read.

iv The critical response (b)

Although it misrepresents the status of waking visions in prophecy, and although it has not been accepted by most scholars, Bruno Nardi’s conception of the poem is supported by Teodolinda Barolini, who cites *Par.* 32.139 among the many *loci* which have been used to argue for the *visio* model, all of which she marshals together in the most sustained presentation of the case since Nardi’s own.⁴⁵ For the American scholar, there is no conflict between Dante as prophet and Dante as poet, since there is no reason why he cannot use literary devices, including fictions, to serve his overall purpose of giving effective expression to what he takes to be divinely-revealed truth. Barolini sees the *Commedia* as both a poetic fiction and a genuine visionary text, its author at once a poet and a prophet, one who makes it clear that the journey in body and soul is a poetic fiction, despite the verisimilitude of the narrative, but who elusively hints that the truth behind the fiction is a real visionary experience. The American scholar ties together many

⁴⁴ “Decimus tertius gradus complementum est prophetiae, quando bono occulta per caelestium instinctum sic praeconcepit, quod veram intelligentiam de his habet etiam absque magna sensuum aversione: et iste gradus est summus humanae animae” (Albert, *De somno* 3.1.10, p. 102).

⁴⁵ Barolini, *The Undivine “Comedy,”* 143-65.

passages which she believes to be deliberate but subtle pointers to the fact that it was in the “waking sleep” of ecstasy that the poet “saw and experienced all the weighty matter of which he was made the scribe” (154).

In Barolini’s view, we are dealing with a work which is both a literary artifice, intended to be understood as such, and, in some way, the account of an ecstatic vision which Dante believed to be true, like those in the biblical tradition, in particular those of John and Paul, and at the same time like medieval visions in the popular tradition, such as those of Thurkill, Tundale and the Monk of Evesham, which might involve vivid bodily experiences apparently as real as any. Arguing extensively from the text, essentially in support of Bruno Nardi’s passionately-held minority view that Dante was a true prophet and the *Commedia* a true *visio*, and proposing that the ecstatic “sleep” which Barbi attributed to the protagonist in the Empyrean was a real one that took in the whole subject matter of the *Commedia*,⁴⁶ Barolini adduces, as elliptical clues indicating that “visionary sleep underlies the experience represented in the *Commedia*,” the fact that Dante was “pien di sonno” when he abandoned the true path (*Inf.* 1.10-12), and Bernard’s “Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna,” which she translates as “because the time that puts you to sleep flees” (144). Barolini means by this that the references to sleep at the beginning and end of the poem are cryptic allusions to the fact that behind Dante’s fictional voyage there lies the reality of an imaginative journey undertaken in the metaphorical “sleep” of an ecstatic waking vision like Saint John’s, *Inf.* 10-12 hinting at the beginning of this “sleep,” *Par.* 32.139 at its impending end. The scholar seems to forget that Dante was “pien di sonno” in 1290, when Beatrice died, not in 1300, when he travelled to the otherworld, and adopts Barbi’s muddled version of Augustine, extending it to the whole journey/vision: “Bernard’s cryptic verse . . . is thus to be understood with the help of Augustine on Paul: Dante is as though awake while sleeping, ‘quasi dormiens vigilaret,’ just like St. John, the author of the Apocalypse” (146).

For Barolini, the ecstatic visions of *Purg.* 15.85-114 and 17.13-45, “non-false errors” (illusions that reveal truth), are analogues of “the visionary sleep within which he [Dante]

⁴⁶ Barolini appears to interpret Barbi’s gloss on *Par.* 32.139, with its insistence that the poem describes a voyage and not a vision, as suggesting that Dante’s experience in the Empyrean is granted in a fictional ecstatic waking vision, in the metaphorical “waking sleep” of ecstasy, rather than, as I believe Barbi does mean, in the metaphorically twice-removed “sleep” of a state that is *like* that sleep-like state.

saw and experienced all the weighty matter of which he was made the scribe” (154). They are *mises en abîme* “of the writing of the *Commedia* itself.”⁴⁷ I would suggest that they have an effect quite contrary to this. The text asks us to believe that the journey was a real one, not a vision, since we are told that, after his soul “tornò di fori / a le cose che son fuor di lei vere,” Dante saw the images of the first waking vision for what they really were, meaningful illusions seen within the soul, “non falsi errori,” in contrast to external reality, the outer “cose vere” seen with the external sense of vision (*Purg.* 15.115-117). This opposition presupposes a real journey, not an imaginary vision containing other such visions within it as *mises en abîme*, for, if the latter were the case, the inner images and the outer ones, Dante’s body and the shade bodies and everything else, would be identically “non falsi errori.” The situation is in fact much more like that of a highly stylised play within a naturalistic one, the obvious artifice of the part heightening the illusion that the events of the whole are real. In other words, the pilgrim’s imaginative visions, and his dreams, only serve to reinforce the “reality” of the bodily journey within which they take place.

Another supporter of Nardi’s thesis, Ignazio Baldelli, had already written in favour of the other form of visionary sleep, that of the dream-vision, reading *Par.* 32.139 accordingly.⁴⁸ Nardi had identified the “mirabile visione” which is reported at the end of the *Vita Nuova* as the supernatural revelation which turned Dante into a true prophet. Baldelli reasons that it was a dream-vision (since the early work “reserves” the term *visione* for dreams),⁴⁹ and argues, against those who refuse to see it, that the *Commedia* describes a messianic-prophetic *visio in somniis*, probably the “mirabile visione” itself. Regarding Bernard’s “t’assonna,” the critic claims that the preceding verse, “quando chinavi, a rovinar le ciglia” (*Par.* 32.138), a reference back to *Inf.* 1.61, points to the beginning of that visionary “sleep” in the prologue scene, and that *Par.* 32.139 is a literal

⁴⁷ Teodolinda Barolini, “Why Did Dante Write the *Commedia*? or The Vision Thing,” *Dante Studies* 111 (1993): 7.

⁴⁸ Ignazio Baldelli, “Visione, immaginazione e fantasia nella *Vita Nuova*,” in *I sogni nel medioevo*, *Seminario internazionale*, Rome, 2-4 October 1983, ed. T. Gregory (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1985), 1-10.

⁴⁹ In fact, Dante does not “reserve” the term *visione* for dreams in the *Vita Nuova*, but uses it, with or without *sogno*, because it is in each case clear that he was asleep, in accord with the common usage of the Latin equivalents. In this usage, a *visio* with no indication of sleep, as is the case with the “mirabile visione,” almost certainly signifies a waking vision.

statement of the fact that the sleep and therefore the dream of the whole “sogno-visione” are about to end.⁵⁰

v Conclusion

With this, we come back full circle to Guido da Pisa, without having found a coherent interpretation of Bernard’s use of *assonnare* at *Par.* 32.139. This is the crux of the verse as it has previously been perceived by scholars, who have taken no real account of the saint’s *tempus fugit*. I attempt to remedy this omission in Chapter 6, after proposing, in Chapter 5, what I believe to be a coherent and intrinsically very simple explanation of Bernard’s reference to sleep. The next chapter is devoted to removing the main obstacles to the apprehension of this explanation, primarily the failure to distinguish between prophetic, visionary and mystical “vision,” whence the enlistment of *assonnare* in the service of the presupposition that a prophetic vision such as that which the *Commedia* claims to record, one which ends in a mystic vision, must be a visionary experience (an imaginative dream in literal sleep or a waking vision in the metaphorical “sleep” of ecstasy), as well as the failure to see that the great mystic is alluding to the conclusion of the journey as an entirely non-visionary *mystic* slumber. In distinguishing between different ways of “seeing,” i.e., ways of knowing, Chapter 2 will also distinguish between the diverse patristic and medieval ways of interpreting the primary Christian exemplar of Dante’s prophetic-mystical vision, Saint Paul’s famous rapture (2 Cor. 12.1-4), and show that the *Commedia* asks us to believe that Paul’s *raptus*, and Dante’s imitation of it, were actual journeys in body and soul (and *not* visionary journeys).

This is obviously in accord with the *factio* model, but it is not a denial of the opposing view. It is simply a claim about how the *Commedia* presents itself to the reader, about how it asks to be read, not about what caused it to be written, which may well have been an experience which the author really believed to be a supernatural revelation of the truth. That experience may even have been a dream or a waking vision in which every single event the text describes occurred just as the text describes it. But the prophetic *visio* paradigm does not, from a medieval perspective at least, require that the poem

⁵⁰ “Probabilmente le due terzine [*Par.* 32.137-141] alludono all’inizio del ‘sonno’ di Dante (Lucia che manda Beatrice a Dante “quando chinavi, a rovinar, le ciglia” [*Par.* 32.138, cf. *Inf.* 1.61]) e alla fine appunto dello stesso ‘sonno’ (“perché il tempo fugge che t’assonna’), cioè all’inizio e alla fine del sogno-visione” (“Visione, immaginazione e fantasia,” 9).

actually narrate a dream or a waking vision. Nor does the *fictio* model necessarily exclude the possibility that Dante had a vision which he took to be true, since he might very well have deliberately invented a journey in the body without any sense of divine inspiration, or he might have just as deliberately decided to represent a supernatural imaginary journey, undertaken in a dream or vision which he thought to be true, or, for that matter, a genuine supernatural revelation involving no alienation from the senses, in the form of a manifestly fictitious voyage in the flesh. There would certainly be advantages in doing so: on the one hand, it would be a uniquely effective way of giving poetic and prophetic witness to truth, primarily the mystery of the Incarnation at the ideal centre of time and the promise of the resurrection of the body at time's end; on the other, it would leave the poem uncontaminated by error, for no one could accuse its author of being the instrument of demons (i.e., a false prophet), of having confused appearance with reality, or of deluding himself with the fantasies of an excessively moist imagination (like an "authentic" prophet in the sense meant by Bruno Nardi).

Chapter 2

“Tutta tua vision fa manifesta” (*Par.* 17.128):

Modes of Vision—Mystic, Imaginative, and Prophetic

i Dante profeta

The position which I have just outlined, and which I will support in detail in this chapter, is essentially that of Nicolò Mineo, who highlights in well-documented detail the extent of the *Commedia*'s prophetic-apocalyptic claims and gives the prophetic aspect, which belongs to the literal meaning, primacy over the “ascetic-mystical” dimension, which belongs to both the literal sense (the protagonist's ascent to the vision of God at the end of his prophetic vision) and the allegory (the Christian soul's *itinerarium in Deum*). In Mineo's view, the poem is first and foremost a prophetic-eschatological vision, but a corporeal one, a supernatural journey in the body (rather than in a dream or imaginative waking vision). This corporeal vision is the literal sense on which the allegory is founded. The protagonist's ascetic-mystical progress, which belongs to the literal sense, and the tropological allegory of the soul's progress to God that it signifies (which is from the Singletonian perspective the *Commedia*'s true subject), are for Mineo subordinate to the work's prophetic intent.¹ Similarly, Gian Roberto Sarolli argues that the *Commedia* is both a theological allegory and a prophetic corporeal (rather than imaginary) vision, the vision being the literal sense of the allegory.² The poem belongs to the genre of prophetic vision literature, according to Sarolli, but is unique in the genre in that “ci troviamo di fronte *non* ad una visione ‘imaginaria,’ *ma* paolina” (119). That is, unlike the vast majority of such visions, which are of the imaginative variety, Dante's is “Pauline,” by which the critic means Dante's resolution of the exegetical debate regarding whether Paul was caught up “in corpore” or “extra corpus” during his rapture (2 Cor. 12.2-4), the poet's choice being the former, a corporeal rapture; at the same time, like one of Ezekiel's imaginative prophetic visions as interpreted by Richard of St. Victor, Dante's prophetic journey in the flesh is the literal sense of an allegory.

¹ Mineo, *Profetismo e Apocalittica*. On the literal sense as a supernatural journey in the body rather than an imaginary dream or vision, see especially 195-201.

² Gian Roberto Sarolli, *Prolegomena alla “Divina Commedia”* (Florence: Olschki, 1971), 75-119.

Sarolli does not seem to realise that the debate was not so much about which of the two options was actually the case (as far as I am aware, it was always thought that Paul was “in the body”) as about what “in the body or out of the body” actually means. It is in the latter respect that Dante made the choice which justifies the Italian scholar’s thesis. While the authority of Augustine and Aquinas told the poet that Paul was expressing a genuine doubt about whether he had been “in the body” in the sense of “alive” or “out of the body” in the sense of “dead” (even though he was in fact “in the body”), this chapter will demonstrate that Dante adopts the heterodox suggestion Aquinas goes to some trouble to refute, according to which the Apostle was reluctant to admit to what he knew to be true, that his body was elevated to Paradise together with his soul, in a corporeal rapture something like that of the prophet Habacuc (“in the body”), as opposed to the imaginary or spiritual rapture of his soul alone, in an imaginative vision like those of Ezekiel (“out of the body”). Before documenting this claim by rounding up some of the usual patristic and scholastic suspects, however, I would like to make a point about the difference between mystical and visionary experience in order to begin the work of this chapter, which aims to prise apart the prophetic, the visionary and the mystical and thereby to show that, by the standards of medieval authorities on the matter, a prophetic vision need not take the form of an imaginary dream or waking vision, so that the *Commedia* can and should be taken at face value with respect to its literal sense, as the account of a supernatural journey in body and soul, with the consequence that *assonnare* in *Par.* 32.139 cannot be the allusion to “visionary sleep” that some have taken it to be.

ii The visionary and the mystical

From the perspective of the *Commedia*’s protagonist-narrator, the kindly old man who takes Beatrice’s place as his guide is first and foremost “colui che ’n questo mondo, / contemplando, gustò di quella pace” (*Par.* 31.110-11). The real Saint Bernard did, indeed, believe that he had been granted brief foretastes of the peace of heavenly beatitude while still in this world. He did not, however, claim to have had the very privileged intellectual “vision” of the divine essence which Augustine had identified with the rapture of Saint Paul, the mystic goal to which the fictional Bernard will lead the protagonist of the poem, for the historical Bernard was of the opinion that such a *visio*

Dei is simply impossible in this life (and even that it is not to be had in the next life until the general resurrection). Instead, the real Saint Bernard admitted to having had the occasional taste of heavenly peace in a quite different kind of *visio Dei*, the purely affective “vision” of mystic union, the “marriage” of the soul and Christ that is potentially accessible to all Christians in this life. This is the kind of mystic “vision” (i.e., “knowing”) of God that the real abbot of Clairvaux attributed to Paul and made the central theme in many of his works, most famously the *Sermones in Cantica canticorum*.

This study will show that the intellectual “vision” of God which Dante attains at the end of the *Commedia* is the mystic sleep which his final guide anticipates by saying “Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna,” and that the pilgrim’s literal sleep in the Earthly Paradise signifies mystic union, the summit of the contemplative ascents described by Saint Bernard and other writers on mystical experience. In neither kind of “vision,” or way of knowing, does the subject actually “see” things in the way one normally perceives the external world or imagines things in dreams and waking visions such as those which Bernard himself experienced from childhood and which so impressed his biographers.³ Although he was not unused to seeing angels and acknowledged the value of such visionary phenomena, and perhaps because he feared that this aspect of his reputation might be given too much weight by the audience of his sermons on the Song of Songs, Bernard felt it necessary to warn:

Take care not to assume that I perceive anything corporeal or imaginary in this mingling of the soul and the Word. I say to you what the Apostle said, that ‘he who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit.’ What I am trying to describe as best I can, ‘comparing spiritual things with spiritual,’ is the ecstatic ascent of the purified mind to God, or the loving descent of God to the soul. So let this union be in the spirit, since God is spirit. . . . A soul so loving and so loved will not be in the least content with the manifestation of the spouse given to many in the things made or to a few in visions and dreams, unless she also by a special privilege receives him down from heaven into her deepest affection, into her innermost heart, having the one she desires present

³ See William of St. Thierry et al., *S. Bernardi vita prima* (PL 185.225-466), 1.2, 1.4.20-21, 7.3, cf. Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, 2nd ed. (Tavarnuzze-Florence: Edizioni del Galuzzo, 1998), vol. 2, 811-826.

to her, not in bodily form, but infused, not appearing outwardly, but moving her within.⁴

This will probably have satisfied any of the brethren at Clairvaux who might have been a little confused by their abbot's earlier declaration that "rightly, then, do I reject visions and dreams; I want nothing to do with figures and enigmas. Even the beauty of the angels themselves wearies me; for my Jesus surpasses them in his beauty and splendour."⁵

Bernard's rejection of "visions and dreams" is a powerful statement of a distinction which was an important commonplace in texts on mystical experience, stretching from the works of Augustine to those of Teresa of Avila.⁶ It exemplifies Evelyn Underhill's observation that "the mystics are all but unanimous in their refusal to attribute importance to any kind of visionary experience."⁷ Cuthbert Butler, in a similar vein, makes a strong distinction between the "quasi-mystical" experience of visionaries and the mystics' yearning for "the experimental perception of God's Presence and Being," above all in mystic union as a momentary foretaste of beatitude in heaven.⁸ Carol Zaleski recognises a definite "dualism" between the mystical and the visionary, and discusses the ambivalence in the medieval attitude to dreams and visions, an ambivalence which seriously compromised their truth-value and which was "endemic to medieval religious and philosophical literature." Zaleski shows that such experiences were considered to be potentially either genuine revelations of divine truth through the mediation of images, or (and this in all but the most exceptional cases) deceptive illusions, generated by obsessive thought or mental derangement in the subject or by demons for their own purposes (even,

⁴ "Vide autem tu ne quid nos in hac Verbi animaque commistione corporeum seu imaginatorium sentire existimes. Id loquimur quod Apostolus dicit, quoniam *qui adhaeret Deo, unus spiritus est* [1 Cor. 6.17]. Excessum purae mentis in Deum, sive Dei pium descensum in animam, nostris quibus possumus esprimere verbis, spiritualibus spiritualia comparantes. Itaque in spiritu fit ista conjunctio, quia spiritus est Deus. . . . Non ergo sic affecta et sic dilecta, contenta erit omnino vel illa quae multis per ea quae facta sunt, vel illa quae paucis per visa et somnia facta est manifestio sponsi, nisi et speciali praerogativa intimis illum affectibus atque ipsis medullis cordis coelitus illapsum suscipiat, habeatque praesto quem desiderat non figuratum, sed infusum; non apparentem, sed afficientem" (SC 31.6, PL 183.945).

⁵ "Merito proinde visiones et somnia non recipio, figuras et aenigmata nolo; ipsas quoque angelicas fastidio species. Quippe et ipsos longe superat Jesus meus specie sua et pulchritudine sua" (SC 2.2, col. 790).

⁶ For Teresa, see her *Vida*, 10.1 and 27.3-6, translated in Teresa of Avila, *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus*, trans. David Lewis (London: Thomas Baker, 1911), 71, 233-35.

⁷ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1911; reprint, London: Methuen, 1977), 335.

⁸ Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life*, 3rd ed. (London: Constable, 1967), 3, 183-84.

indeed especially, in true prophetic visions, in which many correct predictions might be but so many snares set to entrap the soul in one fatal falsehood). In mystical or contemplative ascents, on the other hand, the soul strives to rise beyond images to the “direct contact with reality” for which it longs. This goal and the experience of its attainment are seen as immeasurably superior to anything images can offer, resulting in what Zaleski describes as “the contemplative disparagement of imaginative vision,” despite its potential value.⁹ Bernard McGinn, in the first volume of his monumental history of mysticism in the Latin West, takes as the guiding principle of his study the thesis that the essential feature of mysticism, the goal for which it strives, lies not in the “special altered states—visions, locutions, raptures, and the like” which are so often emphasised, but in “the experience of some form of union with God” and, above all, in “an immediate consciousness of the presence of God,” which McGinn finds to be “the central claim that appears in almost all mystical texts.”¹⁰ In the second volume, the scholar writes that

Many mystics have experienced visions of the heavenly world, often including some manifestation of God. Many others have not. Many of the mystics who have reflected on the relation between *visio Dei* as a visualizable perception of God and *visio Dei* as the conscious experience of God’s immediate presence have insisted that the two are independent, if often related, phenomena. That is to say, visions, at least visions of the corporeal or imaginative types carefully delineated by Augustine, do not constitute the essence of mysticism.¹¹

The distinction, and even opposition, between the visionary and the mystical may originate in Augustine’s sharp division between, on the one hand, sensory cognition and the “spiritual” or “imaginative” cognition of dreams and waking visions, and, on the other, the intellectual apprehension of truth. However, for Augustine, supernatural intellectual vision of the highest object of the mind, God as Truth itself, is no cold rational gaze; it has a strong affective component, being the outcome of the ardent love of

⁹ Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys* (New York: Oxford U.P., 1987), 91-93.

¹⁰ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, vol. 1 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), xvi-xix. McGinn’s work has been of immense assistance in my research into mysticism and the mystic “sleep” of contemplation.

¹¹ McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, vol. 2 of *The Presence of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 326.

God. A famous and beautiful example of the practice, rather than the theory, is Augustine's account of the vision he shared with his mother Monica at Ostia. The burning desire of mother and son to understand the nature of eternal life carries them through an ascent of the mind to God: withdrawal from the corporeal world, movement into the depths of the mind itself, and elevation above the soul and beyond the self. The result is a fleeting intuition, not just of the beatitude of the saints in heaven now, as they enjoy the vision of God, but of eternal life as it will be finally realised in the complete triumph over death at the general resurrection (as is indicated by the concluding quotation from Saint Paul's 1 Cor. 15, the primary biblical text on the resurrection of the dead). Discussing the experience afterwards, Augustine and his mother agree that

If, for anyone, the tumult of the flesh be silenced, if the images of the earth, waters, and air be silenced too, if the poles of the heavens be silent, and the very soul be silent to itself and pass beyond self by not thinking of self, if all dreams and imaginary revelations be silenced, and every tongue and every sign and all transitory things—for to anyone who hears them they say 'We did not make ourselves, he who is eternal made us'—if, having said this and raised our hearing to him who made them, they were to be silent, then he alone would speak, not through them but directly, so that we may hear his word, not spoken by any tongue of the flesh nor the voice of any angel, nor by thunder, nor by obscure likenesses. He himself, whom we love in them, we would hear without them, just as we have done, reaching out in a flash of thought to touch that eternal wisdom which abides above all things. If this could have continued, and all other visions of a vastly inferior kind be withdrawn, and this alone ravish and absorb and enclose the beholder in its more inward joys, then that moment of understanding, after which we sighed, would be like eternal life. Is this not the meaning of 'Enter thou into the joy of the Lord'? And when will that be? Surely when we shall indeed rise again; but we shall not all be changed.¹²

¹² "Si cui sileat tumultus carnis, sileant phantasiae terrae et aquarum et aeris, sileant et poli, et ipsa sibi anima sileat, et transeat se non se cogitando, sileant somnia et imaginariae revelationes, omnis lingua et omne signum, et quidquid transeundo fit, si cui sileat omnino; quoniam si quis audiat, dicunt haec omnia, Non ipsa nos fecimus, sed fecit nos qui manet in aeternum [Ps. 99.3, 5]: his dictis si jam taceant quoniam exerunt aurem in eum qui fecit ea, et loquatur ipse solus, non per ea, sed per seipsum, ut audiamus verbum ejus, non per linguam carnis, neque per vocem angeli, nec per sonitum nubis, nec per aenigma similitudinis; sed ipsum quem in his amamus, ipsum sine his audiamus, sicut nunc extendimus nos, et rapida cogitatione attigimus aeternam Sapientiam super omnia manentem; si continetur hoc, et subtrahantur aliae visiones longe imparis generis, et haec una rapiat et absorbeat et recondat in interiora gaudia spectatorem suum, ut talis sit sempiterna vita, quale fuit hoc momentum intelligentiae, cui suspiravimus; nonne hoc est, *Intra in gaudium Domini tui* [Matt. 25.21]? Et istud quando? An cum omnes resurgemus, sed non omnes immutabimur [1 Cor. 15.51]?" (*Confessionum* 9.10.25, PL 32.774-75).

This distinction of intellectual vision from “other visions of a vastly inferior kind,” the latter category including both corporeal vision and “dreams and imaginary revelations,” is reflected in the work of other writers who want to separate the visionary from the properly mystical, among them Bernard, or from the essence of prophecy, as we have seen that Albert does. It is these same distinctions that I want to highlight, and even exaggerate for heuristic purposes, in this chapter, because Dante’s expositors tend to blur them when they discuss his status as a mystic and/or visionary, debate whether the poem is a *fictio* or a *visio*, or affirm or deny that the “sleep” referred to in *Par.* 32.139 is a mystical or a visionary one. The result has been that some have failed to consider seriously the possibility of a properly mystic slumber because they insist, rightly, that the poem does not present itself as the record of a visionary one, while others have looked to visionary sleep, the literal sleep of dreams or the metaphorical “sleep” of ecstatic waking visions, because they take seriously the fact that the *Commedia* presents itself as the record of a prophetic vision which ends with a mystical experience of the divine. In reality, prophetic vision has no more need of “dreams and visions” than does mystical experience.

iii Modes of vision: Augustine

In the Greek and Latin Bibles, the Book of Daniel ends with the story of Bel and the dragon, two Babylonian deities which Daniel destroyed in order to prove that they were false gods (Dan. 14). For his pains, the prophet was thrown into the lions’ pit in Babylon, where he would spend six days. Meanwhile, in Judea, the prophet Habacuc was carrying a stew and some bread to the harvesters when an angel appeared and told him to take the food to Daniel; but the man knew nothing of Babylon or the lions’ pit, and said as much. In response, “the angel of the Lord took him by the top of his head and carried him by the hair of his head and set him in Babylon over the den in the force of his spirit.”¹³ Once

¹³ “et adprehendit eum angelus Domini in vertice eius et portavit eum capillo capitis sui posuitque eum in Babylone super lacum in impetu spiritus sui” (Dan. 14.35). Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations of the Bible are taken from the Douay Version. For the Vulgate, I use *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. R. Weber, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994).

Habacuc had fed Daniel, the angel returned him to Judea, presumably by the same hair-raising means of transport.

The prophet Ezekiel might appear to have had two very similar experiences (travelling in the opposite direction). He writes that his vision of the sins of Jerusalem began when “the likeness of a hand was put forth and took me by a lock of my head: and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven and brought me in the vision of God into Jerusalem,”¹⁴ and he says that, when he was again taken to Jerusalem, this time in order to see the New Temple of the Restoration, “the hand of the Lord was upon me and he brought me thither. In the visions of God he brought me into the land of Israel and set me upon a very high mountain.”¹⁵ Despite their superficial similarity, however, Habacuc’s transportation was quite different from those of Ezekiel.

The story of Bel and the dragon, in which Habacuc plays a minor but spectacular role, and the story of Susanna which precedes it, are not to be found in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁶ An indication of the reasons behind this exclusion of the two narratives from the Hebrew canon is given by Saint Jerome in his Prologue to Daniel. Jerome recalls a discussion with a Jewish scholar who argued that the stories were mere fables. Regarding Habacuc’s “snatching away from Judea to Chaldea” (“de Judaea in Chaldaeam raptum”), the scholar asked where in the Old Testament one might find any example of a holy man flying with his heavy body and crossing such a vast distance in an instant. An impetuous “one of ours,” as Jerome puts it, immediately adduced Ezekiel’s transportation from Chaldea to Judea. Deriding the upstart, the scholar demonstrated from the text that Ezekiel “saw himself transported in the spirit” (“in spiritu se vidisse transpositum”). “Finally,” writes Jerome, “he said that even our Apostle, an erudite man who had learned the Law from Hebrews, did not dare to assert that he had been caught up in the body, but said: ‘whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth.’”¹⁷

¹⁴ “et emissa similitudo manus adprehendit me in cincinno capitis mei et elevavit me spiritus inter terram et caelum et adduxit in Hierusalem in visione Dei” (Ezek. 8.3).

¹⁵ “facta est super me manus Domini et adduxit me illuc in visionibus Dei adduxit me in terram Israhel et dimisit me super montem excelsum” (Ezek. 40.1-2).

¹⁶ The two narratives make up Chapters 13 and 14 of the Book of Daniel in the Greek and Vulgate versions, constituting a deuterocanonical appendix to the book.

¹⁷ “Denique et Apostolum nostrum, videlicet ut eruditum virum, et qui Legem ab Hebraeis didicisset, non fuisse ausum affirmare se raptum in corpore, sed dixisse: ‘Sive in corpore, sive extra corpus, nescio, Deus sit’ [2 Cor. 12.2]” (*Liber Danielis prophetae, Praefatio, PL 28.1360*).

Because it is clearly recalled in the *Commedia*, in such a way as to constitute the primary biblical model for the protagonist's otherworld journey, Dante scholars have long been familiar with 2 Cor. 12.2-4, Saint Paul's brief and enigmatic account of how he was "caught up" or "snatched up" ("raptus") to the third heaven and paradise:

I know a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I know not: God knoweth): That he was caught up into paradise, and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter.¹⁸

Early in the *Paradiso*, the narrator twice echoes the Apostle's repeated "whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth" ("sive in corpore nescio sive extra corpus nescio Deus scit"). He echoes it, not as a genuine doubt, but as a reluctance to admit to the astonishing truth that he was taken up to Paradise "in the body" in the sense that he ascended in body and soul (*Par.* 1.73-75, 2.37-45). This does not accord with the well-known Augustinian-Thomistic interpretation of Paul's text, in which "in the body, or out of the body" is seen an opposition between two states of being and the Apostle is thought to be expressing a genuine doubt about which state he had been in during his rapture. For Augustine and Aquinas, as we will see, "in the body" means "alive," the state in which the soul is united to the body and animates it, and "out of the body" means "dead," the soul having left the body: Paul was indeed "in the body" in this sense during his rapture, but so profoundly "dead to the world," morally and cognitively, that he could not tell whether he had remained alive or had quite literally died.

As far as I am aware, it has not been noted that Dante's two echoes of Paul's doubt assume the interpretation implicit in the argument of Jerome's Jewish interlocutor, an interpretation which Aquinas refuted as the primary false explanation. On this "mistaken" view, "in the body, or out of the body" is an opposition between two ways of being snatched up, two kinds of rapture, corporeal, on the one hand, and "spiritual" or "imaginative" on the other: "in the body" means "in body and soul," as in Habacuc's

¹⁸ "scio hominem in Christo ante annos quatuordecim sive in corpore nescio sive extra corpus nescio Deus scit raptum eiusmodi usque ad tertium caelum et scio huiusmodi hominem sive in corpore sive extra corpus nescio Deus scit quoniam raptus est in paradysum et audivit arcana verba quae non licet homini loqui."

journey, a supposedly real bodily journey through real space, and “out of the body” means “in the soul only,” as in the case of Ezekiel, who undertook, not an out-of-body journey of the soul, but an imaginary journey “in the spirit,” in the kind of vision that was typically granted to the prophets, the kind in which the prophet sees the images of things which are not really there while completely “alienated” from external reality. As we will see in this chapter, this is exactly how Aquinas reports the opinion of this “certain Jew” in each of his three major discussions of 2 Cor. 12.1-4, refuting it as the first and foremost of the mistaken explanations of Paul’s doubt before stating the simple truth of the matter as it was established by Augustine, i.e., that “in the body” means “alive” and “out of the body” means “dead.” The Apostle’s rapture to the third heaven and paradise signifies his exceptional experience of the purely intellectual vision of the divine essence that is not normally to be had in this life. During that rapture, Paul was “in the body” in that he was alive, but he was no longer “in this life,” having “died to this life” by means of such a complete detachment from all sensation and all images of corporeal things that he could not tell whether he had been alive or had quite literally died. In its context, which Aquinas ignores, the Jewish scholar’s remark has a further implication: it insinuates that Paul in fact believed that he was caught up to Heaven the way Habacuc was transported to Babylon, in body and soul, but was too learned to admit openly to such a thing, preferring to say that he did not know if he had been taken up in a corporeal rapture or a spiritual one—for these are the two options, and, by the logic of the argument against the inclusion of an instance of corporeal rapture in the canon, the Apostle need not have feared to admit to having been granted a spiritual one if he believed that this had been the case. His doubt, on this reading, is identical to the two echoes of it in the *Paradiso*, for, like them, it is no real doubt at all, but a reluctance to admit to something astonishing which the speaker knows to be true, that he ascended to Paradise “in the body,” meaning, not only “alive,” but also “in body and soul” (in other words, both “corruttibile ancora” and “sensibilmente,” just as Aeneas descended to Hell, *Inf.* 2.13-15).

For the “correct” explanation of Paul’s doubt, Aquinas relies on the authority of Augustine’s *De Genesi ad litteram*.¹⁹ In that work, Augustine deploys, not a theory of “visions” as the term was then and is now popularly understood, but a theory of

¹⁹ *PL* 34.245-486.

knowledge or cognition, be it natural or supernatural, the term *visio*, in accordance with the ancient analogy between seeing and knowing, signifying any and all forms of *cognitio*, as it would throughout the Middle Ages. Aquinas explains this common usage by saying that, since sight is the “noblest” of the senses, the term *visio* has been extended to the designation, not only of all sensory cognition (so that one can say, for example, “see how this tastes”), but even further, to purely intellectual knowledge, as in the “vision” of the divine essence.²⁰ As far as the supernatural knowledge of divine truth was concerned, Book 12 of *De Genesi* became the authoritative text for the Middle Ages. Its famous explanation of what happened to Saint Paul may be described as the intersection of two typologies of “vision,” the Augustinian, an analysis of the modalities of knowledge as such into three kinds, corporeal, spiritual and intellectual, and the “Pauline” (which is not defined by Paul alone), in which the indirect way that God is known by us “now,” in this life, is distinguished from the unmediated knowledge we will have “then,” in the next.”²¹ Augustine comes to the conclusion that the Apostle’s rapture was an exceptional instance in which the purely intellectual vision of God’s essence that is proper to the next life was briefly granted to a living man who had morally and cognitively “died to this life.” Paul’s doubt about whether he was “in the body” or “out of the body,” interpreted as a doubt about whether he was alive or dead, is for Augustine evidence that such a virtual death had occurred, the end result of a moral and cognitive ascesis, in an ecstatic alienation not just from the body and its senses but also from the images of bodies seen in the “dreams and visions” of spiritual vision, a mode which Augustine regarded with considerable suspicion, as if unable to shake off the sense that it was always contaminated by error, and by absence.

Saint Paul himself, as well as Saint John, distinguishes between the imperfect vision of God which is possible in the *nunc* of this mortal life and the perfect knowledge of the Lord as he truly is that we will be granted in the *tunc* of the next. The former belongs to our mortal state “in the body,” our condition as travellers in a foreign land; the latter, as

²⁰ *ST* 1a.67.1.

²¹ On these typologies of vision, their importance in medieval culture and their relevance to the *Commedia*, see Francis X. Newman, “St. Augustine’s Three Visions and the Structure of the *Commedia*,” *Modern Language Notes* 82 (1967): 56-78, and Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, “Dante and the Pauline Modes of Vision,” in *Structure and Thought in the “Paradiso”* (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1958), 84-110.

Christ says, constitutes eternal life, and includes the knowledge of God as the Word made flesh:

We see now through a glass in a dark manner [per speculum in enigmatē]; but then face to face [facie ad faciem]. Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known.

For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made [per ea quae facta sunt].

Therefore having always confidence, knowing that, while we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord. (For we walk by faith [per fidem], and not by sight [per speciem]).

Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God; and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like to him: because we shall see him as he is [sicuti est].

Now this is eternal life: That they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.²²

God himself makes the same distinction in Exodus, declaring that no man can see his face and live, but makes a further one in Numbers, insisting on the radical difference between the enigmatic “dreams and visions” of prophecy and the clear knowledge vouchsafed only to Moses, suggesting that the great prophet may have had an exceptional experience, in the here and now, of the kind of vision which is reserved for life after death:

Thou canst not see my face: for man shall not see me and live.

Hear my words: if there be among you a prophet of the Lord, I will appear to him in a vision [in visione], or I will speak to him in a dream [per somnium]. But it is not so with my servant Moses who is most faithful in all my house:

²² “videmus nunc per speculum in enigmatē tunc autem facie ad faciem nunc cognosco ex parte tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum” (1 Cor. 13.12); “invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur” (Rom. 1.20); “audentes igitur semper et scientes quoniam dum sumus in corpore peregrinamur a Domino per fidem enim ambulamus et non per speciem” (2 Cor. 5.6-7); “carissimi nunc filii Dei sumus et nondum apparuit quid erimus scimus quoniam cum apparuerit similes ei erimus quoniam videbimus eum sicuti est” (1 John 3.2); “haec est autem vita aeterna ut cognoscant te solum verum Deum et quem misisti Iesum Christum (John 17.3).

For I speak to him mouth to mouth [or face to face]: and plainly, and not by riddles and figures doth he see the Lord.²³

Because his chief concern in *De Genesi* is the interpretation of God's word, Augustine uses the reading of Scripture to illustrate the natural operation of the three kinds of knowing.²⁴ In "corporeal vision" the soul sees present bodies by means of the bodily senses (*corpora praesentia per corpus, per oculos, per corporis sensus*); this is how we see the letters which make up the verse "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 22.39). *Visio spiritualis* takes place when the soul sees the images of absent bodies with and in the "spiritus," the image-forming power of the soul which is superior to the body but inferior to the mind (*corpora absentia, corporales imagines per spiritum, in spiritu, imaginaliter*); this is the kind of vision which occurs when Matthew's words conjure up the image of some absent and beloved friend (the Scholastics would later also call this mode *visio imaginativa* or *imaginaria*, since the image-making power of the soul was for them the *imaginativa*, also known as the *phantasia*, a faculty of the sensitive soul which operates through a bodily organ located in the brain). Far superior to these is "intellectual vision," in which the soul "sees" immaterial realities, essences or truths, which are neither bodies nor the likenesses of bodies. These are "seen" by the mind (*mente, per contuitum mentis*), as when our reading of Matthew culminates in the apprehension of the idea of Love itself. Thus, to each kind of object there corresponds a way of seeing and a power of the soul which sees.

The same is true of supernatural cognition, which can occur in any of the three modes. God can manifest himself by means of a material symbol in the form of a visible creature seen with the eyes of the body, as when Moses saw the pillar of cloud (Ex. 33.9-11). More common, however, are divine revelations in which the soul or mind sees images in the spirit, not real objects with the bodily senses. This happens in the sleep of dreams, when sensation ceases by natural causes and an external spiritual source

²³ "non poteris videre faciem meam non enim videbit me homo et vivet" (Ex. 33.20); "si quis fuerit inter vos propheta Domini in visione apparebo ei vel per somnium loquar ad illum at non talis servus meus Moses qui in omni domo mea fidelissimus est ore enim ad os loquor ei et palam non per enigmata et figuras Dominum videt" (Num. 12.6-8).

²⁴ The theory as outlined here is formally set out in *De Gen.* 12.6.15-12.7.16; the biblical examples of supernatural vision are from 12.2.3-12.5.13.

impresses the images of things in the spirit, as in the case of Pharaoh's dreams (Gen. 41.1-32). However, an alienation of the mind from the bodily senses (*alienatio animi a sensibus corporis*) can be caused by a spiritual source even when one is awake, resulting in an *excessus mentis* or *ecstasis*, a transport of the mind induced for the purpose of revealing divine truth by means of the likenesses of things seen in the spirit. Ecstatic visions of this kind were seen by Ezekiel while "in spiritu" (Ezek. 37.1-10), by Peter when overcome by a "mentis excessus" (Acts 10.10-11), and above all by John, who was also "in spiritu" when he had his apocalyptic vision (Apoc. 1.10). Supernatural spiritual vision, in which one sees (and hears, tastes, touches and smells) the meaningful likenesses of corporeal things which are not really present, therefore occurs either in dreams or in ecstatic waking visions. In this study, I use the term "visionary" and the phrase "dreams and visions" strictly to designate spiritual-imaginative vision in its two forms, primarily with the intention of correcting the frequent conflation of visionary phenomena, prophecy, and mystical experience.

It was Augustine's habit to designate spiritual vision in its two forms by means of formulaic binomial expressions signifying "dreams and visions." In this, he may be following Numbers 12.6-8, with its sharp distinction between, on the one hand, the cryptic *somnia* and *visiones* that are the standard fare of prophets, and, on the other, Moses' "mouth to mouth" (or "face to face") vision of God. Thus, spiritual visions are the visions "of dreamers or of ecstasy," and supernaturally-infused images are said to be seen "in sleep or in ecstasy," i.e., "in sleep, or in some other transport of the spirit, which in Greek is called *exstasis*."²⁵ What most people call visions are "either those of dreams or of representations seen in ecstasy," namely, spiritual visions, which occur "in sleep, or in some other transport of the mind."²⁶ In his famous account of the "vision" at Ostia, as we have just seen, Augustine pairs "dreams and imaginary revelations" ("*somnia et imaginariae revelationes*"), assimilating them to corporeal vision and considering all such knowing by similitudes as the inferior, enigmatic mode which must be transcended, "silenced," in order to reach the mystical "moment of understanding." Others would refer

²⁵ "somnia vel etiam in ecstasi visiones" (*De Gen.* 12.18.40, col. 470), "sive in somnis sive in ecstasi" (12.12.26, col. 464), "in somnis, vel in aliquo excessu spiritus, quod graece dicitur *exstasis* (8.25.47, col. 391, where *exstasis* is printed in Greek characters).

²⁶ "sive somniorum, sive quarumque in ecstasi figurarum" (*Quaestionum in Heptateuchum* 4.28, *PL* 34.730), "vel in somnis, vel in aliquo mentis excessu" (*Epistola* 120, *PL* 33.457).

to prophecy by means of “dreams and visions,” the latter term, paired with the former, designating specifically the spiritual-imaginative visions seen in ecstasy rather than in sleep.²⁷ Aquinas, more than once, defines this usage with typical clarity before employing it himself. He writes that the supernatural “imaginary” vision which is proper to prophecy, in which the likenesses of corporeal things are seen when one is “alienated” from the senses, takes place “either while sleeping, in which case it is signified by the term *dream*, or while awake, which is the meaning of *vision*,” and that “we call something that appears to a person who is asleep a ‘dream,’ and that which appears to someone while awake, but abstracted from the senses, a ‘vision.’”²⁸ Like Augustine, Aquinas also uses variations that are not so terminologically rigorous, in which the first part clearly designates dreams in sleep and the second uses a narrow range of circumlocutions to signify the other mode of spiritual-imaginative vision, i.e., the waking visions of ecstatic *alienatio a sensibus*. Augustine had pointed out, for example, that the dead are believed to appear in “visions” (“visa”), that is, “either in sleep, or in some other way” (“vel in somnis, vel quocumque alio modo”).²⁹ The latter quasi-technical expression reappears almost verbatim when Aquinas argues that those who are touched by the spirit of prophecy need not be alienated from their senses at all, for the imaginary vision that requires that alienation, even though it is the proper and normal mode of prophecy, is neither the only nor the highest mode. In fact, “in those who are abstracted from the senses, either in dreams or in some other way [“vel in somnio, vel quocumque alio modo”], knowledge is mixed with error, and is uncertain, because they cling to the likenesses of things as though they were the things themselves.”³⁰

Good examples of this are to be found in the visionary experiences which Dante has in the course of his journey, such as when he wakes in terror from the first dream because he takes the fire which burns both him and the eagle for a reality (*Purg.* 9.31-42), or

²⁷ For example, “somnia vel visiones,” (Gregory the Great, *Moralia* 8.24.41, *PL* 75.826), “vel in somnio vel in visione” (Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.23, *PL* 95.211), “vel visiones vel somnii” (Peter Lombard, *Commentarium in Psalmos*, Praefatio, *PL* 191.58).

²⁸ “vel in dormiendo, quod significatur per *somnium*, vel in vigilando, quod significatur per *visionem*” (*ST* 2a2ae.173.3, ad 1), “ut somnium dicamus apparitionem quae fit homini in dormiendo, visionem vero quae fit in vigilando, tamen homine a sensibus abstracto” (*De ver.* 12.3, resp.). Cf. “secundum differentiam *somnii*, quod fit in dormiendo; et *visionis*, quae fit in vigilando” (*ST* 2a2ae.174.3, resp.).

²⁹ *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* 10, *PL* 40.600.

³⁰ “Sed in his qui sunt abstracti a sensibus, vel in somnio, vel quocumque alio modo, est cognitio permixta errori, et incerta; quia similitudinibus rerum inhaerent quasi rebus ipsis” (*De ver.*, 12.9, sed con.).

when, at the end of the first “visiōne / estatica,” his soul returns to “le cose che son fuor di lei vere” (i.e., to the reality which exists outside the narrative, the real world of the narrator as he writes), enabling him to recognise his “non falsi errori” (*Purg.* 15.85-86, 115-117). Aquinas’s “vel in somnio, vel quocumque alio modo,” “either in dreams or in some other way” (his variation of Augustine’s “vel in somnis, vel quocumque alio modo”), reappears, translated into Italian, when Beatrice lets it be known that Dante first strayed from the true path the moment she died, ten years earlier, that she then made unsuccessful attempts to set him straight by appearing to him “e in sogno e altrimenti” (i.e., “vel in somnio, vel quocumque alio modo”), and that he eventually reached a point so low, so close to damnation, that there was nothing for it, if he was to be saved, “fuor che mostrarli le perdute genti” (*Purg.* 30.133-138)—implicitly in some way *other than* the dreams and visions in which the author really believed he had seen her, as the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio* testify.³¹ This other way of seeing is the same means by which he will then go on, via Purgatory, to see Heaven, not as innumerable visionaries had done before him, but in the “modo tutto fuor del moderno uso” of a journey “con quella fascia / che la morte dissolve” (*Purg.* 16.37-42). But why should such an exceptional mode of vision be necessary?

Augustine, whose ultimate desire was for the intimate presence of Truth itself, had a deeply ambivalent attitude to visionary experience, for he had a strong Platonic anxiety about the contamination of truth by any element of falsehood whatsoever and associated dreams and visions with the absence as opposed to the real presence of things. In Augustine’s mind, the chief difference between spiritual and intellectual vision is that, in the latter, there is not and cannot be any error, since it only occurs when truth is in fact perceived, whereas the former is associated with the possibility of some form of deception. This is partly because of the risk of demonic involvement, but, more fundamentally, the problem is inherent in spiritual vision itself, for its objects are the images of absent corporeal things, so that they can easily be confused with those of corporeal vision, with the result that one takes appearances for reality. Early in Book 12

³¹ *Vita Nuova* 3.3-15, 23.1-16, 39.1-3, *Convivio* 2.7.5-6. Scartazzini paraphrases “e in sogno e altrimenti” as “e in sogno e in visioni,” and says that this is an allusion to the dreams and visions of the two earlier works (Scartazzini, *Purg.* 30.133-41). Pietrobono writes that the alternative method Beatrice now adopts is literally “il farlo discendere vivo nell’inferno,” and that this allegorically signifies showing Dante the damnation to which he was heading (Pietrobono, *Purg.* 30.136).

of *De Genesi*, Augustine states a principle which troubles him and which he will frequently recall, citing as examples his own experience of dreams and a conversation with a peasant who claimed to have had a waking vision:

When the images of bodies are formed, either in sleep or in ecstasy, those images are not clearly distinguished from bodies until one returns to the bodily senses and becomes aware of having been among images which one did not derive from bodily sensation.³²

Because the immediate objects of spiritual vision considered in itself are always appearances and never realities, and because its appearances can be confused with the true, if material, realities which corporeal vision is quite able to apprehend, Augustine finds dreams and waking visions to be highly problematic. As a result, there is a certain ambiguity in his conception of the relationships among the three kinds of vision. Sometimes he describes a clear hierarchy of excellence from the corporeal to the spiritual to the intellectual. But he will also, as Cuthbert Butler notes, couple corporeal and spiritual vision together as inferior modes in opposition to the intellectual.³³

A large part of *De Genesi* 12 is devoted to grappling with the dubious nature of the dreams and visions, whose truth value is clear only in the most exceptional cases, as well as to the need to account for the veracity of those cases. The matter occupies much of the eighteen chapters which are devoted to elaborating the theory of vision and creates a tension between two ways of conceiving the relationships between the three modes.³⁴ This tension is accurately reflected in Augustine's concluding summary. We are first reminded that there is a clear hierarchy of excellence, in which spiritual vision is the mean between the other two modes, just as the spirit is the mean between the two extremes of body and mind; but the summary ends by placing a deep wedge between intellectual vision and the other two, in both of which the soul can be deceived because it can take appearances for reality. This occurs in commonplace errors of sense-perception

³² "Cum enim vel in somnis, vel in ecstasi, corporum exprimuntur imagines, non discernuntur omnino a corporibus, nisi cum homo redditus sensibus corporis, recognoscit se in illis fuisse imaginibus, quas non per sensum corporis hauriebat" (*De Gen.* 12.2.3, *PL* 34.455).

³³ Cuthbert Butler explains this in terms of Augustine's distinction between *scientia*, the knowledge of temporal and therefore changeable things, and *sapientia*, the intellectual apprehension of eternal and changeless realities. See Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 50.

³⁴ *De Gen.* 12.8.19-12.25.52.

and when things seen in the spirit are taken for real objects or are pure fantasies conjured up by the subject. In these cases the soul sees but errs regarding its objects. The mind, on the other hand, either sees its object, truth, in which case intellectual vision takes place, or it does not, in which case there simply is no such vision.³⁵

However, sensory illusions are a trivial matter compared to the dangers of the mode which is proper to prophetic revelation and yet is suspect with respect to truth. The spirit in itself is for Augustine primarily the locus of the production of signifiers which remain meaningless until the mind understands them.³⁶ Only then is there revelation, knowledge, prophecy or teaching. When Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream (Gen. 41.1-32), it was Joseph who was the true prophet, not Pharaoh. Although prophecy is therefore proper to the mind, the greatest prophets, such as Daniel, have both gifts, that of seeing meaningful images in the spirit and that of intellectually grasping their meaning.³⁷ As for divination in dreams and visions, Augustine does not doubt that it is a real phenomenon, even a fact of common experience, but is troubled because both good and evil spirits are the source. For it can be quite impossible, without a special gift, to tell those of angelic origin from the demonic variety, which can contain true and useful predictions about the future in order to gain the confidence of the victims and so ensnare them in a web of deceit. While revelations from good spirits reveal divine truth and make true prophets, the Evil One takes advantage of sensory disorders in illness, or induces ecstatic alienation from the senses, in order to make false prophets, to stimulate actions contrary to good morals and to faith, or simply to possess the victims or to make them deranged.³⁸

Only intellectual vision is never deceived in its judgements about the nature and meaning of things, unlike the other two ways of seeing. Only the mind's firm grip on truth can ensure that no harm is done by the two kinds of error which are associated with dreams and ecstatic visions, the mistaking of images for realities and the deviation from

³⁵ *De Gen.* 12.23.49-12.25.52. For example, in normal cognition, information flows from the senses to the spirit to the mind (12.10.21-12.11.24); the spirit is inferior to the mind but superior to the body, and the images of bodies are superior to bodies themselves (12.16.32-33); corporeal vision cannot occur without spiritual, nor spiritual without intellectual, but the second can take place without the first, and the third without either of the other two (12.23.49-12.24.51).

³⁶ "significationes velut imagines rerum ac similitudines, quae ut intelligantur, indigent mentis obtutu. Cum autem non intelliguntur, in spiritu eas dicit [Paul, in 1. Cor. 14.14-15] esse, non in mente" (*De Gen.* 12.8.19, col. 460).

³⁷ *De Gen.* 12.8.19-12.9.20.

³⁸ *De Gen.* 12.13.27-28, 12.18.39-12.21.45.

the true faith at the suggestion of evil spirits.³⁹ Which is not to say that intellectual vision does not take place in ecstasy. Indeed, just as ecstasy can alienate the mind from the senses and give rise to the vision of images in the spirit, so, in a more extreme form, it can elicit a further alienation, withdrawing the mind's attention even from likenesses in the spirit. In this way, having transcended all similitudes of bodily things, both those derived from sensation in corporeal vision and those not so derived but produced in the spirit, the mind is able to apprehend truth directly, without the mediation of images, "seeing" ideas or essences such as "charity" and "justice," or even God himself. This is ecstatic "intellectual" vision. There are thus two degrees of ecstasy, the first enabling spiritual vision, the second intellectual cognition:

But when the attention of the mind is completely turned away and carried off [from the senses of the body], then there is rather the state which is usually called ecstasy. Then any present bodies are not seen at all, even when the eyes are wide open, nor are any voices heard. The whole attentive gaze of the mind is then directed either to the images of bodies in spiritual vision, or to incorporeal things not represented by images in intellectual vision.⁴⁰

Much of the Augustinian theory as I have described it so far is implicit well before it is formally stated in Book 12, especially in the discussion of how the creator "speaks" to his creatures (Books 8 and 9). In one passage, we are told that God speaks to the spiritual nature of angels inwardly and directly, in his own substance, rather than extrinsically and indirectly through creatures. It is clear that the contemplation of God as truth in intellectual vision is not, for Augustine, a calm rational gaze directed to some external object. Rather, it is an intimately felt communion with the divine. The passage does not describe a mystic ascent, but the three steps are there, in the form of the three kinds of vision:

³⁹ *De Gen.* 12.14.29-30.

⁴⁰ "Quando autem penitus avertitur atque abripitur animi intentio, tunc magis ecstasis dici solet. Tunc omnino quaecumque sint praesentia corpora, etiam patentibus oculis non videntur, nec ullae voces prorsus audiuntur: totus animi contuitus aut in corporum imaginibus est per spiritualem, aut in rebus incorporeis nulla corporis imagine figuratis per intellectualem visionem" (*De Gen.* 12.12.25, col. 463). The examples of the three kinds of vision which I have given are those which Augustine uses in *De Gen.* 12.2.3-12.5.13.

Surely God speaks to it inwardly, in a wonderful and inexpressible manner, not by means of writing put down by corporeal instruments or voices sounding in corporeal ears, nor using the likenesses of bodies produced imaginatively in the spirit, as happens in sleep, or in some other transport of the spirit, which in Greek is called *exstasis*, a term which we use as a Latin word. For spiritual vision, although it is more interior than the things which the bodily senses announce to the mind, is nonetheless similar to them in that, when it occurs, it is either quite impossible to distinguish what one sees from corporeal things or, certainly, one can do so only with difficulty and very rarely. Further, spiritual vision is more external than the kind in which the rational and intellectual mind contemplates in unchangeable truth itself, by the light in which it judges all these things. For these reasons, I think that spiritual vision is to be counted among the kinds of vision which come from without.⁴¹

Regarding how God “spoke” to Adam before the Fall and the expulsion from Eden, Augustine says that it would have been by intellectual vision when God spoke in his own substance and Adam fully grasped some truth, but that, on occasions when Adam did not fully comprehend God’s utterance, it might have been by spiritual or corporeal vision, “either using a spiritual creature only, whether in sleep or in ecstasy, in the likeness of corporeal things, or using a corporal creature, when a visible form appears or voices are heard in the bodily senses.”⁴² In the case of Gen. 2.18, God might have spoken by means of the *resemblance* of the sounds of human speech, in a spiritual vision, “although Scripture has not said whether it was in sleep or in ecstasy, the states in which such revelations usually occur.”⁴³ But the saint is certain that what Scripture refers to as the

⁴¹ “Intus ei quippe loquitur Deus miro et ineffabili modo, neque per scripturam corporalibus instrumentis affixam, neque per voces corporalibus auris insonantes, neque per corporum similitudines, quales in spiritu imaginaliter fiunt, sicut in somnis, vel in aliquo excessu spiritus, quod graece dicitur *exstasis*, et nos eo verbo jam utimur pro latino: quia et hoc genus visionum, quamvis interius fiat quam sunt ea quae animo per sensus corporis nuntiantur; tamen quia simile est eis, ita ut cum fit, discerni ab eis aut omnino non possit, aut certe vix et rarissime possit, et quia exterius est quam illud quod in ipsa incommutabile veritate mens rationalis et intellectualis intuetur, eaque luce de his omnibus iudicat; inter illa quae extrinsecus fiunt arbitror esse deputandum” (*De Gen.* 8.25.47, col. 391 [where “*exstasis*” is printed in Greek characters]).

⁴² “aut tantummodo spiritualem, sive in somnis, sive in ecstasi in similitudine rerum corporalium; aut etiam per ipsam corporalem, dum sensibus corporis vel aliqua species apparet, vel insonant voces” (*De Gen.* 8.27.49, col. 392).

⁴³ “quamvis tacuerit Scriptura utrum in somnis, an in ecstasi; ita enim fieri haec solent” (*De Gen.* 9.2.3, col. 394).

“sleep” of Adam, in which God took a rib from his side and fashioned Eve (Gen. 2.21-24), was an ecstatic and prophetic *intellectual* vision. This is clear, Augustine believes, from Paul’s interpretation of the words Adam spoke on waking from that sleep (cf. Eph. 5.31-32), for Paul shows that they are a prophecy, under the figure of the creation of Eve and her union with Adam, of the creation of the Church out of the wound opened in Christ’s side on the cross, and of the union of Christ and the Church:

Thus the ecstasy which God induced in Adam, so that he might fall asleep, is properly understood as having been induced so that his mind might, in ecstasy, participate in the angelic court and, entering the sanctuary of God, understand what was to come.⁴⁴

When he turns to the problem of 2 Cor. 12.1-4, Augustine finds that the most obscure aspect of the passage by far is the Apostle’s doubt regarding whether he was in or out of the body when he was caught up to the third heaven. He clings to the one certainty, which is that Paul knew that he saw the real thing in itself, the “*res ipsa*,” which, like any real thing, is either corporeal or incorporeal. Paul did not see some unreal image of it, as in a spiritual vision in which he might have seen himself, in the *image* of his own body, ascending from one imaginary heaven to the next and on to a third. This excludes Augustine’s first suggestion, that Paul was unsure about *how* he saw the third heaven, since, if he had seen it by being caught up in the body to a corporeal heaven, then, knowing that corporeal things are seen “in the body,” i.e. with the eyes of the body, he would not have been in any doubt about how he saw it. If, on the other hand, he had seen an incorporeal heaven without any such physical transport, he would have known that he saw it “out of the body,” i.e. not using the bodily eyes, so that there would again be no cause for doubt. As for his being caught up in a spiritual vision, like those of Ezekiel, Isaiah, Peter and John of the Apocalypse, if that had been the case, so that “the third heaven” actually meant the *image* of that heaven, then he would simply have spoken about the image of his body in the same way, calling that image by the name of the object

⁴⁴ “Ac per hoc etiam illa ecstasis quam Deus immisit in Adam, ut soporatus obdormiret, recte intelligitur ad hoc immissa, ut et ipsius mens per ecstasim particeps fierit tanquam angelicae curiae, et intrans in sanctuarium Dei intelligeret in novissima” (*De Gen.* 9.19.36, col. 406).

it represents, just as John describes seeing the beast or the woman or the waters, meaning their images.⁴⁵ Throughout this tortuous argument, Augustine does not mention Habacuc, and makes the unspoken assumption that Paul is expressing a genuine doubt, rather than a reluctance to admit to something he knows or believes to be true, as the Jewish scholar implies that he is doing and as Dante does when he echoes the Apostle at *Par.* 1.73-75 and 2.37-45.

A new theory is then proposed, one in which “in the body” and “out of the body” signify, not how the object was seen, but the relationship of the soul to the body when it was seen, the former expression amounting to “alive” and the latter to “dead.” “In the body” means that the soul is in the body animating it, whether one is awake, asleep (and having a dream, after which one wakes), or totally alienated from the senses in ecstasy (in an ecstatic vision, spiritual or intellectual, after which one returns to one’s senses). “Out of the body” means that the soul has left the body, and, when this happens, the body dies. If the soul were actually to leave the body in order to see a vision by going somewhere, in an out-of-body experience (a purely hypothetical suggestion which receives no further consideration), then at the end of the event a person would neither wake nor return to one’s senses, but would quite literally come back to life. The suggestion is that Paul was “in corpore,” alive, but in a state of ecstatic alienation, enabling the intellectual vision of the third heaven as it really is, an alienation so extreme that it was barely distinguishable from being “extra corpus,” dead:

Let us understand him to mean that he did not know whether, when he was caught up to the third heaven, he was [on the one hand] in the body, in the way that the soul is in the body when the body is said to be alive, and one is awake, or sleeping, or the soul is alienated from the senses in ecstasy; or whether [on the other hand] he had left the body altogether, so that his body would lie dead, until, at the end of the vision, his soul would return to the dead members, so that from death he would truly return to life, and not wake as one asleep [‘et non quasi dormiens evigilaret’] nor return to his senses as one alienated in ecstasy, but as one dead truly come to life again. Hence what he saw when caught up to the third heaven, and knows with certainty, he saw in reality, and not in the form of images. But because, with his soul alienated from the body as his mind was carried away to see and hear the unspeakable things of his vision, it was doubtful whether it left his body quite dead or was

⁴⁵ *De Gen.* 12.2.3-12.5.13.

somehow present, as the soul is in a living body, because of this doubt, perhaps, he said ‘whether in the body, or out of the body, I know not: God knoweth.’⁴⁶

There then follow the formal presentation of the three modes of vision and the analysis of the problematic relations between them, after which Augustine returns to the question of Paul’s doubt. We learn then that *raptus* is an extreme form of ecstasy, an alienation from the senses greater than in sleep but less than in death in which revelations of the most privileged nature are granted, either in the spiritual or the intellectual mode. In the spiritual version, of which John’s vision of the Apocalypse is the exemplar, the soul is caught up (“rapitur”) from bodies perceived by the senses to the images of bodies seen in the spirit. All shadows of doubt are dispelled by divine guidance, so that the prophet both knows the true meaning of the images and is aware that they are just that, meaningful images, not real things.⁴⁷

Augustine’s description of *intellectual* rapture was so influential and is so pertinent here that it must be given in full. The intellectual contemplation of God is a mystical experience, the culmination of an ascent which is at once cognitive, passing through the three modes of vision, and moral, in that it is the reward and repose which is the goal of the active life of virtue as moral ascesis, an intimate and personal communion which feeds back into the active life while we are in our exile (but which, as we later learn, makes the practice of moral virtue redundant when its goal is definitively attained in heaven):

And if, just as one is carried out of the bodily senses so as to be among the likenesses of bodies seen by the spirit, one is also carried away from these, to be transported into that region of the intellectual or the intelligible where

⁴⁶ “hoc ipsum eum intelligamus ignorasse, utrum quando in tertium coelum raptus est, in corpore fuerit, quomodo est anima in corpore, cum corpus vivere dicitur, sive vigilantis, sive dormientis, sive in ecstasi a sensibus corporis alienata; an omnino de corpore exierit, ut mortuum corpus jaceret, donec peracta illa demonstratione membrum mortuis anima redderetur, et non quasi dormiens evigilaret, aut ecstasi alienatus denuo rediret in sensus, sed mortuus omnino revivisceret. Proinde quod vidit raptus usque in tertium coelum, quod etiam se scire confirmat, proprie vidit, non imaginaliter. Sed quia ipsa a corpore alienata, utrum omnino mortuum corpus reliquerit, an secundum modum quemdam viventis corporis ibi anima fuerit, sed mens ejus ad videnda vel audienda ineffabilia illius visionis arrepta sit, hoc incertum erat, ideo forsitan dixit, ‘Sive in corpore sive extra corpus, nescio, Deus scit’” (*De Gen.* 12.5.14, col. 458).

⁴⁷ *De Gen.* 12.26.53.

clear truth is seen without any corporeal similitude, then the experience is not darkened at all by the clouds of false opinion, and there the virtues of the soul are not toilsome and laborious. For there is no restraining of lust by the effort of temperance, or bearing adversity by the effort of fortitude, or punishing wicked deeds by the effort of justice, or avoiding evils by the effort of prudence. There, the one virtue and the whole of virtue is to love what you see, and the supreme happiness is to have what you love. For there beatitude is imbibed at its source, from which a few drops are sprinkled on this human life, so that in the trials of this world we may live with temperance, fortitude, justice and prudence. It is surely to reach this end, where there will be secure repose and the unutterable vision of truth, that we undertake the labour of restraining desire, of bearing adversity, of aiding the poor, and of resisting deceivers. There the glory of the Lord is not seen in a symbolic vision, either corporeal, as on Mount Sinai, or spiritual, as seen by Isaiah and John in the Apocalypse, but as it is and not in a dark manner, as far as the human mind elevated by God's grace can grasp it. In this way God speaks mouth to mouth and face to face with the person he has made worthy of such a conversation—not the mouth and face of the body, but those of the mind.⁴⁸

God was seen symbolically both by corporeal vision, in the form of fire atop Mount Sinai (Ex. 19.18), and spiritually, in the ecstatic visions of Isaiah and John, in which he appeared as a figure seated on a throne (Isa. 6.1, Apoc. 4.2). As exalted as these revelations were, they were all visions “per aenigmata.” But Moses' communion with God “os ad os” is the Pauline vision “facie ad faciem.” Moses yearned for this vision, and we know from Numbers 12.6-8 that it was granted.⁴⁹ The fact that such a vision is not for this mortal life does not mean that it can only be experienced in the next, after the soul leaves the body and the body dies. The divine essence can also be known before death, while the soul still dwells in the body and animates it, provided one dies to this life

⁴⁸ “Porro autem, si quemadmodum raptus est a sensibus corporis, ut esset in istis similitudinibus corporum, quae spiritu videntur, ita et ab ipsis rapiatur, ut in illam quasi regionem intellectualium vel intelligibilium subvehatur, ubi sine ulla corporis similitudine perspicua veritas cernitur; nullis opinionum falsarum nebulis offuscatur; ibi virtutes animae non sunt operosae ac laboriosae. Neque enim opere temperantiae libido frenatur, aut opere fortitudinis tolerantur adversa, aut opere justitiae iniqua puniuntur, aut opere prudentiae mala devitantur. Una ibi et tota virtus est amare quod videas, et summa felicitas habere quod amas. Ibi enim beata vita in fonte suo bibitur, indi aspergitur aliquid huic humanae vitae, ut in tentationibus hujus saeculi, temperanter, fortiter, juste, prudenterque vivatur. Propter illud quippe adipiscendum, ubi secura quies erit et ineffabilis visio veritatis, labor suscipitur, et continendi a voluptate, et sustinendi adversitates, et subveniendi indigentibus, et resistendi decipientibus. Ibi videtur claritas Domini, non per visionem significantem, sive corporalem, sicut visa est in monte Sina, sive spiritualem, sicut vidit Isaias, vel Joannes in Apocalypsi: sed per speciem, non per aenigmata, quantum eam capere mens humana potest, secundum assumentis Dei gratiam, ut os ad os loquatur ei quem dignum tali Deus colloquio fecerit; non os corporis, sed mentis” (*De Gen.* 12.26.54, col. 476, cf. 12.31.59).

⁴⁹ See pp. 48-9.

virtually by means of a total withdrawal from bodily sensation and images in the spirit. One need not, in other words, be dead (“out of the body”); but if one is alive (“in the body”), then one must be utterly alienated from the mortal flesh and its senses in a virtual death which is indistinguishable from the real thing. Understood in this way, Paul’s doubt proves that he, like Moses, experienced the purely intellectual vision of the divine essence “face to face,” in an ecstatic rapture. Again, the experience is a communion with the divine as an inner presence, not an intellectual exercise:

In that manner, then, in his own essence, God speaks by his unutterably more intimate presence with an unutterable speech, where none beholds him while living this mortal life in the senses of the body. But none sees him thus unless he somehow dies to this life, either by completely leaving the body, or by being so turned away and alienated from the carnal senses that one rightly does not know, as the Apostle says, whether he is in the body or out of the body when caught up and elevated to that vision.⁵⁰

Nor is merely cognitive detachment from bodies and the images of bodies sufficient to achieve the virtual death which is the precondition for this vision. Since only the pure of heart will see God (Matt. 5.8), the mind must also be “cleansed of all earthly stain” (“ab omni terrena labe mundata”). In such a state, Augustine says, Paul was shown the life which will be ours after this earthly life. Because the earthly Paradise in which Adam lived was a sign of that eternal life, Paul said that he was caught up to “paradise,” having already identified it as the “third heaven,” that is, the third and highest kind of vision.⁵¹ His rapture was not, therefore, a spiritual one, like Peter’s ecstasy (Acts 10.10-12). It was, instead, an intellectual vision, seen by the power of the elevating and purifying Love of the Holy Spirit, of “the very substance of God and the Word of God by whom all things were made.”⁵²

⁵⁰ “Illo ergo modo, in illa specie qua Deus est, longe ineffabiliter secretius et praesentius loquitur locutione ineffabili, ubi eum nemo videns vivet vita ista, qua mortaliter vivitur in istis sensibus corporis: sed nisi ab hac vita quisque quodammodo moriatur, sive omnino exiens de corpore, sive ita aversus et alienatus a carnalibus sensibus, ut merito nesciat, sicut Apostolus ait, utrum in corpore an extra corpus sit, cum in illam rapitur et subvehitur visionem” (*De Gen.* 12.27.55, coll. 477-78).

⁵¹ *De Gen.* 12.28.56, col. 478.

⁵² “ipsam Dei substantiam, Verbumque Deum per quod facta sunt omnia” (*De Gen.* 12.34.67, col. 483).

Augustine then asks why the spirits of the dead must be reunited with their bodies in the general resurrection if they can be granted this supreme beatitude (“summa illa beatitudo”) without their bodies. This question assumes that the intellectual vision of God and the Word that Paul was granted in this life constitutes the beatitude of the next, and that this “beatific vision” is not delayed until the resurrection of the flesh that Saint Paul promises as the ultimate triumph over death (1 Cor. 15), but is granted immediately after death to the purified soul which has died in grace. Augustine’s answer to the question is that the reunion of body and soul may be necessary for some mysterious reason, or because one last unsatisfied desire remains and prevents the blessed contemplating the divine essence as the angels do, with their whole being and their total attention. For whether it totally abandons the bodily senses by means of rapture while alive, as Paul did (“in the body”), or by departing the flesh altogether in death (“out of the body”), the human soul cannot give its absolutely undivided attention to the beatific vision, since it has “a certain natural appetite for managing the body” (“naturalis quidam appetitus corpus administrandi”). In a case such as Paul’s, the distraction arises from the fact that this “management” is a burden, for the body is a corruptible one and so “weighs down the soul.” In the case of the separated souls of the blessed, the desire itself is the distraction, for it remains unsatisfied. It will be satisfied, and the distraction removed, when the soul receives the glorified body that it will manage with ease and thereby achieves the full perfection of its being, which is that of a soul united to its body.⁵³

This final victory and perfection, rather than the beatific vision as such, the unending sabbath rest of the whole person, body and soul, is the longed-for and truly final repose of the unquiet heart, the ultimate object of hope and desire that animates the *Confessions* from beginning to end.⁵⁴ The same is true of the *The City of God*, whose last four books show that the supreme good which gives perfect peace and happiness, and therefore the ultimate goal, reward and hope of those who in this life rise from the dead in Christ, is the end which has no end, the everlasting union of spirit and flesh which Christ foreshadowed and made possible by his resurrection and which will be realised when he returns as judge, closing this sixth and last age of the world and initiating the perpetual

⁵³ *De Gen.* 12.34.67-12.35.68, col. 483.

⁵⁴ “You made us for yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you,” “fecisti nos ad te, et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te” (*Confessionum* 1.1.1, *PL* 32.661, cf. 13.35.50-37.52).

seventh day of rest, the repose not just of the soul but also of the now incorruptible body. “There,” Augustine concludes, “we shall rest and see; we shall see and love; we shall love and praise. Behold what will be, in the end, without end! For what end can we have, but to reach the kingdom which has no end?”⁵⁵ It is the absolute peace, the complete and secure repose in the changelessness of God, that will come only on the Last Day, and that both Augustine and Saint Bernard, as we will see, sometimes envisioned as a “sleep” in God, the immutable “selfsame” of Psalm 4.9 (“In peace in the selfsame I will sleep, and I will rest”).

Bernard, however, is generally thought to have used Augustine’s notion of the separated soul’s desire for the body to argue that the beatific vision is delayed until the resurrection. In a sermon on the feast of All Saints, for example, he explains that the souls of the elect exist in three states: the first is the *militia* or “warfare” of this life, in the corruptible body; the second is the *requies* or repose they enjoy now, separated from the flesh, possessing only the “single robe” of “the happiness and rest of souls” (“*felicitas et requies animarum*”) and awaiting the return of their bodies on the day the number of their brethren is filled; the third is the consummate future *beatitudo* they anticipate, when they will receive the “second robe” of “the immortality and glory of bodies” (“*immortalitas et gloria corporum*”). The happiness of their present state cannot be complete, in Bernard’s view, since “the gift of complete beatitude is not fitting until the man to whom it is given is complete.”⁵⁶ Further, apart from whether or not perfect happiness befits the souls of the saints now, there is the fact that, although they are free from “stain,” they are not free from a certain distracting “wrinkle” (*ruga*), due to their unsatisfied desire for their bodies: “This natural desire is so strong in them that their whole affection cannot freely reach out to God, but is in a way contorted, making a wrinkle, while ever they are still inclined by this desire.”⁵⁷ The same explanation lies behind Bernard’s affirmation, in *De diligendo Deo*, that perfect *deificatio*, or absolute concord of the human and divine wills in the

⁵⁵ “Ibi vacabimus, et videbimus; videbimus, et amabimus; amabimus, et laudabimus. Ecce quod erit in fine sine fine. Nam quis alius noster est finis, nisi pervenire ad regnum, cujus nullus est finis?” (*De civitate Dei* 22.30, *PL* 41.804). On the supreme good, see especially *De civitate Dei* Bk. 19.1, 10, 20, 27, and Bk. 22.

⁵⁶ “Neque enim praestari decet integram beatitudinem, donec sit homo integer cui detur” (Saint Bernard, *In Festo Omnium Sanctorum* 3.1, *PL* 183.468-69).

⁵⁷ *In Festo Omn. Sanct.* 3.2, col. 469.

fourth and highest degree of love, cannot be achieved until the general resurrection.⁵⁸ In one of the *Sermones de diversis*, the great abbot of Clairvaux—whose precise task in the *Commedia* is to draw to its close the process which brings about the satisfaction of Dante's desire to “veder Cristo” (*Par.* 32.87)—discusses the vision of God “with revealed face” (“revelata facie”), the contemplation of “the face of God, as it is” (“vultum Dei, sicuti est,” i.e., the face of Christ), and affirms that it is impossible in the first state of the elect soul, in this life, where we have but an imperfect “taste” (*gustus*) of the Lord's sweetness in the mystic visits of the Word; nor is it granted in the “drinking” or “draught” (*potus*) of the peace and happiness of that vision which the saints enjoy now, with their single white robes, because they still have something left to desire (i.e., the second robe, their glorified bodies); the complete “satiety” and even “drunkenness” (*adimpletio, inebriari*) of the perfect vision of the face of Christ, and the satisfaction of all desire, is therefore reserved for the day we arise perfect in body and soul.⁵⁹ This is the ultimate “end” or *finis*: “What is this end? . . . Gazing on God is the consummate end. He is the end, and when we have reached him, we will thirst for nothing more, he, Jesus Christ the Bridegroom of the Church, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.”⁶⁰ As loved and admired as Bernard was, however, it did Pope John XXII no good to cite him, in 1331-32, in support of the highly contentious proposition that the beatific vision is withheld from the souls of the just until the Last Judgement because the soul is imperfect without the body, so widely and firmly held by then was the belief that the full *visio Dei* is given immediately after death (or after purification in Purgatory, should that be necessary). This belief was made official Church doctrine in 1336 by the next Pope, Benedict XII, settling the controversy which his predecessor had ignited.

iv Modes of vision: Aquinas

Aquinas relies heavily on the authority of *De Genesi* 12 in his two major treatments of prophecy,⁶¹ and in the three which he wrote on rapture,⁶² texts that make it perfectly clear

⁵⁸ *De diligendo Deo* 10.29-11.31.

⁵⁹ *Sermones de diversis* 41.11-12, *PL* 183.659-60.

⁶⁰ “Quis est iste finis? . . . Deum enim cernere, finis est consummatus. Ipse est finis, ad quem cum venerimus, nihil amplius sitiemus, Jesus Christus sponsus Ecclesiae, qui est benedictus in saecula. Amen” (*Sermones de diversis* 41.13, coll. 660-61).

⁶¹ *De ver.* 12, *ST* 2a2ae.171-174.

that a mystical experience like Paul's might well conclude a "vision" that is prophetic without being imaginary. In considering them, the fundamental analogy between seeing and knowing, and the consequent equation "*visio = cognitio*," should always be kept in mind. Assuming this equation, Saint Thomas says that prophecy pertains mainly to the intellect, since it consists primarily in knowledge, and that this is why the pagans call a prophet a *vates* (from "vi mentis," "force of mind"), while the writers of the Old Testament use the word *videns*, "seer." Prophecy has two fundamental and essential elements, or "acts:" its secondary act is the telling, the *locutio* or *denuntiatio* of what has been revealed for the benefit and instruction of others; its primary act is the seeing or knowing, the *prophetica cognitio* or *visio*.⁶³ The typical mode of vision in prophecy is imaginary (i.e., "dreams and visions"), but this is neither the only nor the highest mode, essentially because "imaginary vision does not make a prophet, only intellectual vision does."⁶⁴ It follows from this, as we will see, that prophetic vision does not require alienation from the senses, and therefore that, in a text such as the *Commedia*, which presents itself, not as a theological allegory, but as the *denuntiatio* of a prophetic *visio* ("in pro del mondo che mal vive, / al carro tieni or li occhi, e quel che vedi, / ritornato di là, fa che tu scrive" [*Purg.* 32.103-105], "rimossa ogne menzogna, / tutta tua vision fa manifesta" [*Par.* 17.128]) prophetic "vision" by no means requires visionary sleep, be it literal or metaphorical.

Divine prophecy is a gift of grace, given by God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a gift in which the prophetic intellectual light illuminates the prophet in order to reveal supernatural truths beyond the reach of the natural light of reason. The knowledge divinely revealed in this way by God, through the mediation of angels, is not only of the future, but can be of the past and the present too; indeed, it can be the knowledge of anything inaccessible to human knowledge, be it human or divine, spiritual or corporeal.⁶⁵ This grace can be conferred on anyone, even those who are not in grace with

⁶² *Super II Cor.* 12.1.440-12.2.470, *De ver.* 13, *ST* 2a2ae.175.

⁶³ *ST* 2a2ae.171.1.

⁶⁴ "Visio imaginaria non facit prophetam, sed solum intellectualis" (*De veritate* 12.13). One consequence of this is that, if the disposition of the prophet is the criterion for determining degrees of excellence in prophetic vision, then being awake is plainly superior to being asleep, for the impression of new "forms" on the mind may be more powerful in sleep, but the intellect is more powerful when one is awake, since sleep impedes its operation (*De ver.* 12.13, cf. 12.3).

⁶⁵ *ST* 2a2ae.171.2-3.

God, for it requires no previous disposition to receive it.⁶⁶ It must be distinguished from divination, since diviners sin by attempting to foreknow future things without God's revelation, which is as much as to usurp to themselves the divine prerogative (their attempt at "divination"). It must also be distinguished from the revelations made by demons, which can be "prophetic" in the sense that they do reveal things inaccessible to human knowledge, including future events. Although God will sometimes make use of them in order to make a divine revelation and so lead us to truth, the revelations of demons are usually made in order to mislead us through false prophets, such as the diviners, whom they make plausible by mixing some truth with their lies. The evil spirits do so, not by enlightening the intellect, something which is essential in divine prophecy, but by whispering audible speech, or in imaginary visions.⁶⁷

In supernatural *visio*, the primary act of prophecy, just as in natural human knowledge, there are two parts. One is the mind's *acceptio* or "reception" of information that is presented to it, the other is *iudicium*, the mind's intellectual judgement of what it receives. In the natural human cognition, the way of knowing or seeing that is proper to this mortal life in the body, the mind understands through the mediation of the bodily senses, both external and internal. *Iudicium* is by intellectual light, the natural light of reason. *Acceptio* is by way of the senses. The "species" or "forms" of particular, sensible things are "presented" to the external senses and then passed on to the *imaginatio* or *phantasia*, the internal "sense" which in turn presents what it has received to the intellect as *phantasmata*, "phantasms" or "images" (which are not just visual images, but representations of the data received by any of the five senses). The intellect then abstracts the "intelligible forms" or abstract ideas that are its immediate object from these phantasms. The human intellect in this life can thus be said to derive the knowledge of truth from sensible things, concrete external objects, and to do so through the senses, i.e., via the external senses and the imagination, with its phantasms (including phantasms not derived directly from the senses but produced in the *phantasia* by the transformation or rearrangement of images previously drawn from sensation, as in "imagination" in the modern sense). The divine intellect, on the other hand, knows truth directly, without any

⁶⁶ *ST* 2a2ae.172.1-4.

⁶⁷ *ST* 2a2ae.172.5-6 (cf. 2a2ae.95 on divination).

sensory sources or mediation. This is the only way in which God himself can be “seen” as he truly is.⁶⁸

In an article on the modes of *prophetica revelatio, cognitio* or *visio* (terms which are used interchangeably),⁶⁹ Aquinas says that the gift of divine prophecy bestows on the mind something surpassing nature for both reception and judgement. The latter, however, has the chief place in prophecy, since judgment is the “completion” (“*complementum*”) of knowledge. Divine prophecy is without error, and its characteristic mode is *acceptio* by means of divine representations in imaginary vision (dreams and imaginary waking visions), provided there is also *iudicium* by the mind which has been enlightened by the prophetic light (so that the meaning of the likenesses seen may be understood and so that the prophet may not make the error of mistaking them for the images of real, present things). This is why we are told that “if there be among you a prophet of the Lord, I will appear to him in a vision, or I will speak to him in a dream” (Num. 12.6). However, prophets can have supernatural *iudicium* without supernatural *acceptio*: God can represent things by means of dreams, and even bodily likenesses, to persons other than the prophet who interprets them, as when Joseph explained Pharaoh’s dreams (Gen. 41), and Daniel interpreted the dream of Nabuchodonosor (Dan. 4), and when Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall after Baltasar had seen the hand writing it (Dan. 5)—for, in these cases, it was Joseph and Daniel, not those to whom the divine representations were made, who were the prophets.

It is clear therefore that “prophetic revelation is sometimes only by the influx of light, and sometimes by the impression of new species, or the reordering of species” (“*prophetica revelatio quandoque quidem fit per solam luminis influentiam: quandoque autem per species de novo impressas, vel aliter ordinatas*”). Thomas’s main point is that the diversity or “multiplicity” of visions (“*multiplicatio visionum*”) arises, not from diversity with respect to the intellectual light given for judgment, but from the diversity of “species” or “forms” in the different kinds of reception. Although he does not say it in so many words, the fundamental concept is that, whatever the mode of *acceptio, iudicium* by the illumination of the prophetic light is the necessary and sufficient

⁶⁸ *ST* 1a.12.3, 84.6, 2a2ae.173.2, 175.1, *De ver.* 13.1 (cf. *Par.* 4.40-42).

⁶⁹ *ST* 2a2ae.173.2. A similar discussion is to be found in *De ver.* 12.3.

condition of divine prophecy. The consequence of all this (as he does say) is that there are four modes of supernatural prophetic vision. The first (1) is the divinely-inspired *iudicium* of things “received” naturally, the enlightenment of the mind by the intellectual prophetic light, granting supernatural *iudicium* so that the prophet may judge what others have seen (e.g., Joseph and Daniel interpreting the dreams of others), or understand the Scriptures (e.g., the light given to the Apostles, Luke 24.45), or “judge, according to divine truth, things apprehended naturally” (“ad diiudicandum secundum divinam veritatem ea quae cursu naturali homo apprehendit”), or “discern truthfully and efficaciously regarding things that should be done” (“ad diiudicandum veraciter et efficaciter ea quae agenda sunt,” cf. Is. 63.14). The second (2) is supernatural intellectual illumination or *iudicium* combined with supernatural corporeal vision, in which sensible species are presented through the external senses and the prophet sees with the bodily eyes either things formed by God rather than by nature (e.g., the hand Baltasar saw writing on the wall, leaving a message that only Daniel could interpret, Dan. 5, and the burning bush seen by Moses, Ex. 3.2), or things formed by other causes but ordered by God’s providence to have prophetic meaning (e.g., Noah’s Ark, signifying the Church, an example of representation *per facta*, whereas Abraham’s conversation with angels was a corporeal representation *per dicta*).⁷⁰ The third (3) is supernatural *iudicium* combined with imaginary *visio*: imaginary visible forms are imprinted or re-arranged in the imagination (the dreams and visions of *visio imaginativa*), so that the prophet sees the likenesses of things that are not derived from external sensation while “alienated from the senses” by sleep or ecstasy (the typical mode of prophetic *acceptio*, hence “if there be among you a prophet of the Lord, I will appear to him in a vision, or I will speak to him in a dream,” Num. 12.6). The fourth (4) is supernatural *iudicium* combined with supernatural intellectual vision, when intelligible species are impressed directly on the mind (e.g., the infused wisdom given to Solomon, 3 Kings 3.5, and to the Apostles, Acts 2).

It follows from this, as Aquinas points out in the subsequent article, on the question of “*utrum visio prophetica semper fiat cum abstractione a sensibus*,” “whether prophetic

⁷⁰ The last two examples are given in *De ver.* 12.9.

vision is always accompanied by abstraction from the senses,” that it is not.⁷¹ There can plainly be no abstraction in *denuntiatio*, since the prophet must be able to use his or her senses for this. As far as the *visio* itself is concerned, alienation from the senses obviously does not occur in (2) above, and is not necessary in (1) and (4), which are actually better off without alienation, since humans derive perfect intellectual judgment from sensible objects, which are the first principle of human knowledge. Only the imaginary dreams and visions of mode (3) require alienation, and complete alienation at that, so that the likenesses in the imagination are not mistaken for real things perceived by the senses. As for the cause of true prophetic alienation for dreams, it is natural, since sleep is due to vapours rising to the brain, while for waking imaginative visions the cause is either “animal,” as in the intense contemplation that resulted in Peter’s *excessus mentis* (Acts 10.9-10), or divine, as in *rapture* (of the kind Ezekiel experienced). It is never due to any kind of disorder, such as demonic possession, madness, or illness.⁷²

Although the typical mode of prophecy combines intellective and imaginary vision (since most of the biblical figures who are called “prophets” had such vision), it is nonetheless true, as the authority of Peter Lombard establishes, that prophecy by intellectual vision alone is superior. For Thomas, this means judgment, which is intellectual, combined with intellectual reception, in the pure contemplation of supernatural truth without the adornment of images (either sensory, as in prophecy *per facta et dicta*, or imaginative, as in dreams and visions). Purely intellectual prophetic vision is superior to prophecy by judgement combined with imaginary reception because the intellect is nobler than the imagination, and because where there is intellectual vision there is no error (for one who errs simply does not understand), whereas the imaginary kind has a good deal of falsehood mixed with it, the likenesses being rather like “clouds” which mix obscurity with the prophetic revelation. Further, “intellectual vision is more

⁷¹ *ST* 2a2ae.173.3. The same argument occurs in *De ver.* 12.9, where *denuntiatio* is mentioned (in addition to *visio*).

⁷² This may be why Dante insists that the prophetic vision of Beatrice’s death in the *Vita Nuova*, despite the fact that the prophecy comes true, is a “fallace imaginare,” a “vano imaginare,” or an “erronea fantasia” (*Vita Nuova* 23.1-16).

like the vision of the blessed [visionem patriae], by which truth is contemplated in the divine essence.”⁷³

Before determining the degrees of excellence of prophetic vision, Aquinas recalls his earlier statement that

prophecy [in general] involves a certain obscurity and remoteness from intelligible truth, and so those who see by imaginary vision are most properly called prophets, even though prophecy by intellectual vision is more noble (provided the same truth is revealed in each case). However, if intellectual light is infused by God into someone, not so that they may know supernatural things, but so that they may judge with the certitude of divine truth things that can be known by reason, then this kind of intellectual prophecy is inferior to that which takes place with imaginary vision leading to supernatural truth.⁷⁴

The lowest degree of prophecy (A) is beneath prophecy in the proper sense, since it does not lead to supernatural truth and is without imaginary vision. At this level, either the intelligible light directs someone to know or do what pertains to human conduct, moving them by an inward instinct to perform some outward action, or, what is superior to this, it enlightens a person inwardly so that they may know things within the bounds of human knowledge, things accessible to reason. Within prophecy proper, i.e., (B) intellectual illumination with respect to truths revealed through imaginary vision, dreams are inferior to waking visions, seeing symbolic objects is inferior to hearing words, and seeing symbols, words and deeds is inferior to seeing these *and* someone showing them and speaking to you. Such persons may appear (in order of excellence) as a human being, as an angel, or, as in Isaiah’s imaginary vision of the Lord “sitting upon a throne” (Is. 6.1), as God (which means, it should be noted, that such “visions of God” are by no means “mystical” in the sense in which that term is used in this study). The third and highest

⁷³ “Magis enim appropinquat ad visionem patriae, secundum quae in essentia Dei veritas conspicitur” (*ST* 2a2ae.174.2, cf. *De ver.* 12.12; in both articles, Peter Lombard is quoted as writing that “ille modus prophetiae ceteris est dignior, quando scilicet ex sola Spiritus Sancti inspiratione, remoto omni exteriori adminiculo facto vel dicti vel visionis vel somni, prophetatur”).

⁷⁴ “Et ideo magis proprie dicuntur prophetae qui vident per imaginariam visionem, quamvis illa prophetia sit nobilior quae est per intellectualem visionem: dum tamen sit eadem veritas utrobique revelata. Si vero lumen intellectuale alicui divinitus infundatur non ad cognoscendum aliqua supernaturalia, sed ad iudicandum secundum certitudinem veritatis divinae ea quae humana ratione cognosci possunt: sic talis prophetia intellectualis est infra illam quae est cum imaginaria visione ducente in supernaturalem veritatem (*ST* 2a2ae.174.2, ad 3).”

kind of prophecy (C) is above these grades, surpassing prophecy in the strict sense, i.e., when intelligible supernatural truth is revealed without imaginary vision, in purely intellectual knowing.⁷⁵

Moses was the greatest of the prophets, since he excelled both in prophecy in the proper sense, seeing someone speaking to him in the form of God in imaginary visions, and in prophetic intellectual vision, since he saw God in his essence.⁷⁶ Although this took him beyond the bounds of the kind of vision that is characteristic of prophecy, he remained within the scope of prophecy in so far as prophetic vision is the seeing of divine truth “from afar,” having seen the immediate intellectual *visio Dei* by way of a transitory “passion,” rather than the permanent “habit” of the blessed.⁷⁷ The same is true of Paul’s *raptus*, which is why it is treated as the highest degree of prophecy in one part of the *Summa theologiae*, even though, in another, it is adduced as the supreme degree of the contemplative life.⁷⁸ Paul’s entirely non-visionary knowledge of God’s essence (which the protagonist of the *Commedia* attains as the end of his prophetic vision, as I will need to demonstrate in Chapter 5) is thus the summit of both prophetic and mystical vision. In Aquinas’s estimation, the latter aspect of Paul’s rapture was subordinate to the former, for his mystic vision was granted in order that he might give prophetic witness to the glory of the saints (the glory that was sometimes figured as a “sleep,” the *somnus gloriae*, as Chapter 5 will show).

To sum up what we have learned from Aquinas so far, it can be said that divine prophecy consists of some form of *visio*, i.e., *cognitio* or *revelatio* (cf. “quel che vedi,” “tutta tua vision”), and the *denuntiatio* or *locutio* of what was “seen,” i.e., what was known or revealed, for the benefit of others (cf. “in pro del mondo che mal vive . . . fa che tu scrive,” “fa manifesta”). The *visio* or “vision,” in turn, consists of some form of *acceptio* or “reception” of information, which can occur in many different ways, both natural and supernatural, along with the *sine qua non* of prophecy, supernatural intellectual *iudicium*, the divinely-enlightened mind’s understanding or judgement of what it receives. The variation in the forms of *acceptio* results in the diversity of modes

⁷⁵ *ST* 2a2ae.174.3.

⁷⁶ *ST* 2a2ae.174.4.

⁷⁷ *ST* 2a2ae.174.5, Sed con., ad 1 (cf. 175.3, ad 1-2).

⁷⁸ *ST* 2a2ae.175 and 180.5, resp.

in prophetic vision. The reception can be by natural means, as when one is informed of the dreams of others, reads the Scriptures, ponders what should be done in some situation, or apprehends anything naturally. Supernatural reception can be by means of corporeal vision, in which case the prophet sees with his bodily eyes real things formed by God, such as writing on a wall or a burning bush, or things formed by other causes but ordered by Providence to have prophetic meaning, such as Noah's Ark or an angel. Supernatural reception through imaginative vision, in "dreams and visions" such as those of an Ezekiel, occurs in the typical and proper mode of prophecy, at once the mode granted to most prophets and the one most associated with error, most characterised by the "obscurity" of prophetic vision as such (i.e., by comparison with the perfect vision of supernatural truth in the *visio Dei* of the next life). It is the only mode that requires alienation from the senses. Superior to this, because it is wholly free from error and thus most like the vision of God, is supernatural intellectual *acceptio*, like the infused wisdom of Solomon and the Apostles. If one is inspired with supernatural *iudicium* without imaginary vision and without attaining supernatural truth, for instance, regarding matters of human conduct and things accessible to reason, this is the lowest degree of prophecy, below prophecy proper. The latter consists in dreams and visions that do reveal supernatural truth, the highest degree of which are waking in which someone appearing in the form of God speaks to the prophet, as happened to Moses. Surpassing dreams and visions is the purely intellectual revelation of divine truth without imaginary vision, which is to say without alienation from the senses. For Albert, as we have seen already, this is at once the proper and the highest form of prophecy.⁷⁹ The peak within this mode, in the opinion of Aquinas, is one with the summit of the contemplative life, i.e., the vision of God that was granted to Moses and to Paul.

Michele Barbi need not, therefore, have insisted that the *Commedia* describes a "viaggio" as opposed to a "visione," nor reduced the meaning of "vision" in "tutta tua vision" (*Par.* 17.128) to the bland "ciò che hai veduto,"⁸⁰ rather than (for example) "ciò che ti è stato rivelato, ciò che hai conosciuto, nel tuo viaggio profetico." In effect, "tutta tua vision" means "tutto il tuo viaggio" as a supernatural corporeal vision or revelation

⁷⁹ See pp. 31-2.

⁸⁰ Barbi, *Problemi di critica dantesca: prima serie*, 295.

within which imaginative, intellectual and even affective *visio* or *revelatio* is granted to the protagonist. The overall *viaggio-visione* is Dante's supernatural journey in body and soul, a prophetic corporeal vision that is seen almost entirely without any alienation from the senses (least of all his sense of vision) in a perfectly legitimate and in fact quite comprehensive form of *prophetica visio*. In the course of this total "vision," Dante has five supernatural imaginative visions, the standard mode of prophecy but by no means the highest, in the accounts of which he uses *sogno* to mean "dream" and *visione* to signify either "dream" or "ecstatic waking vision."⁸¹ At its conclusion (I leave aside for the present the affective mystic sleep in Eden) he experiences, for the sake of his prophetic mission, the intellectual *visio Dei*, the supreme degree of prophecy and at the same time the exceptional height of mystical experience, in a complete alienation from both the senses and the imagination or "fantasia" (*Par.* 33.140-45, verses which attempt to describe the vision of God which is, I will argue, the referent of *assonnare* at *Par.* 32.139). None of these supposed insinuations that the total vision is an imaginary one contradict the plain indications that it is not, such as Beatrice's "e in sogno e altrimenti," which tells us that we are dealing with no visionary journey, as do the echoes of Paul's account of his rapture in the *Paradiso*; nor do we need to seek out such supposed clues in order to recognise the *Commedia* as the record of a prophetic vision.

Aquinas says that Peter Lombard rightly defines *raptus* as "an elevation, by the power of a higher nature, from that which is according to nature to that which is above nature," for it is a "violent" elevation or "snatching away" of the mind by a higher power, the power of God, from the natural human mode of cognition, in which the intellect knows truth by means of the senses (both the external senses and the images of the interior sense of *imaginatio* or *phantasia*) to the contemplation of supernatural truth in higher way of knowing, a mode of knowing without the use of the senses, in "abstraction" from them. One may be thus "caught up," either from external sensation to imaginary vision, as in the visions of Ezekiel and John, or from both external sensation and the images of the *phantasia* to purely intellectual vision, the divine mode of

⁸¹ *Purg.* 9.13-21, 15.85-6, 17.34, 18.145, 19.7, 27.97.

cognition, as Paul was so that he might contemplate the essence of God.⁸² This means that he was elevated, while still a *viator* in this life, still in the *status viae*, from the *actus* of *visio viae* (knowing God through creatures and images) to that of the *visio patriae* of the next life (knowing God directly, “face to face”).⁸³ In order to do this, however, he had to “die to this life,” which he did, not by leaving the body, but by being completely alienated from the senses and from the imagination’s *phantasmata*.⁸⁴

The human intellect cannot by its own power attain the *visio patriae* which constitutes true beatitude, the glory of the soul, and eternal life. It requires the aid of grace, in the form of the light of glory, the *lumen gloriae* which “disposes” the mind to “receive” God, raising and strengthening the intellect so that it may see the divine essence by actually receiving that essence into itself as an intelligible form.⁸⁵ In this way, the divine raises man to the divine, for God, the “agent,” assimilates man, the “patient,” to himself; in this way, God unites himself to man; in this way alone is the “likeness” of God in the intellect; and, in this way, the blessed are made “deiform, that is, like God” (“deiformes, idest Deo similes”).⁸⁶ This is what occurred to Paul in a “transitory passion.” Since the light of glory elevated him, while he was still *in via*, to the beatific vision of the next life *in patria*, it follows that “the supreme degree of contemplation in the present life is that which Paul experienced in his rapture, through which he was in a middle state between the state of this life and that of the future life.”⁸⁷

Now, Aquinas twice argues at length that our *ultimus finis*, our “last end” or ultimate goal (and therefore our perfect *beatitudo* or “happiness”), is attained only in the next life and only with the aid of grace, since it consists in nothing other than the “face to face” vision of God, the intellect’s direct apprehension of the divine nature, from which there follows as a consequence the repose of the delighted will in the Supreme Good. The principal reason is that only the knowledge of the essence of the first cause, which is

⁸² *De ver.* 13.1-2, cf. *ST* 2a2ae.175.1, *Super II Cor.* 12 1.445-449. Peter Lombard’s “Ab eo quod est secundum naturam, in id quod est supra naturam, vi superioris naturae elevatio” is quoted in all three texts. See also *ST* 1a.12.2-4.

⁸³ *De ver.* 13.1 ad 1, *ST* 2a2ae.175.5, ad 1.

⁸⁴ *ST* 2a2ae.175.4, cf. *De ver.* 13.3, *ST* 1a.12.11.

⁸⁵ *ST* 1a.12.2, 4, 5.

⁸⁶ *De ver.* 13.1, *ST* 1a.12.4, 1.12.2, 1.12.5, respectively.

⁸⁷ “Unde supremus gradus contemplationis praesentis vitae est quem habuit Paulus in raptu, secundum quem fuit medio modo se habens inter statum praesentis vitae et futurae” (*ST* 2a2ae.180.5, resp.).

God, can satisfy our natural desire to know.⁸⁸ Thomas does admit the existence of an earthly goal or happiness that can be reached by natural human powers, identifying it with human happiness as described in Aristotle's *Ethics*, but will by no means allow that it is "perfect" or "ultimate," strictly reserving qualifiers such as *ultimus finis*, *ultima perfectio* and *beatitudo perfecta* for the beatific vision which is enjoyed by the saints in heaven.⁸⁹ This alone is the reward and goal of the practice of virtue, and the glory of the soul, and it is given immediately after death to the separated soul that has purified itself sufficiently in life (or, if it has not, after adequate purification in Purgatory).⁹⁰ The doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh, however, forces Aquinas to explain the need for such a further "end" beyond the "last end." His solution is to argue that the happiness of the soul in the beatific vision is indeed "perfect," but only the happiness of the glorified body and soul together is "perfect in every way."

Contrary to the opinion of certain unnamed persons (such as Bernard, perhaps?), who claim that the vision of God is not possible until the general resurrection, authority reveals that the separated souls of the saints do see God "face to face," and reason demonstrates that the soul alone suffices for man's perfection with respect to the essence of that perfection, which *is* the vision of God—even though the body is also necessary with respect to the perfection of human nature, which is to be a soul united to a body as its form (hence Augustine's comment, in *De Genesi* 12, about the soul's desire to "manage" the body). "Happiness" is the perfection of the soul as an intellectual being, not as the natural form of a body. The unsatisfied natural desire to manage the body does not hinder the operation of the soul by preventing it from seeing God, but only by a sort of deficit; that is, it does not counteract perfect happiness, but only prevents "its being perfect in every way" ("omnimodae perfectioni ipsius"), i.e., such that it overflows into the body. Since the beatified soul is happy, but does not yet possess its happiness in this way, its reunion with the flesh will increase its bliss only in extent, *extensive*, but not in intensity, *intensive*.⁹¹ The perfection of the soul includes its natural perfection, which is to be united to the body. As a result, the resurrected body, which will not weigh down the

⁸⁸ SG 3.1-63, ST 1a2ae.1-5. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae*, in *S. Thomae Opera Omnia*, vol. 16 (Parma: Fiacadori, 1865), 1.104, 1.149-150.

⁸⁹ SG 3.48, ST 1a2ae.3.2, ad 4, 3.6, resp., 3.5, resp., 4.5-7, 5.4-5, cf 1a2ae.62.1, 1a.23.1, 64.1.

⁹⁰ SG 4.91.

⁹¹ ST 1a2ae.4.5, resp., ad 1, 4, 5.

soul and so will not turn it from the vision of God (having been glorified by the overflow of the glory of the soul), is necessary “for that happiness which is in all ways perfect” (“ad beatitudinem omnibus modis perfectam”).⁹²

The glory of the body will consist in four gifts or *dotes*: *impassibilitas*, incorruptibility, *subtilitas*, the ability to penetrate solid matter, *agilitas*, the capacity to move rapidly in response to every movement of the soul, and *claritas*, the radiant beauty visible even to the non-glorified eyes of the Apostles at Christ’s Transfiguration. These gifts assimilate the body to the spirit, making it completely responsive and obedient to the soul’s every spiritual motion, even though it will remain a real body of flesh and blood.⁹³ For Bonaventure, this means that the faculties of sight and touch will certainly be present and active in the saints after the resurrection, since their respective media (“the translucent” for sight, flesh for touch) and objects (colour and luminosity for sight, “levitas” or lightness for flesh) will be present in the resurrected bodies themselves—which is to say that the blessed will be able to see and touch each other after the Last Day.⁹⁴ Bonaventure says that there are two facets to the glory of Paradise, the eternal reward of virtue which is promised to the just: the beatific vision is the substantial reward, the glory and “first robe” of the soul, while the glory of the body, the “second robe,” is the “consubstantial” reward, made up of the four gifts “by which it [the body] is enabled to follow the spirit and take its place in the heavenly region where the blessed abide.”⁹⁵

It is crucial that the resurrected body nonetheless be a real body of flesh and blood, constituting the same identical body as that which was laid down in death. It must be so, in the view of Aquinas, because Christ chose not only to liberate us from sin by his Passion, but also to free us from death by his Resurrection, and because the resurrection to eternal life is intended to be the perpetual existence of the individual person. For a living human being, as Aristotle shows, is a composite of form and matter, a particular soul animating a particular body as the form of that body (and not, as the Platonists

⁹² *ST* 1a2ae.4.6, resp.

⁹³ *ST* Suppl., 75-85 (see 85.2 on *claritas* and the Transfiguration). See also *SG* 4.79-87.

⁹⁴ *Commentarius in Libros Sententiarum* 4, in *Opera omnia*, 10 vols. (Florence: Quaracchi, 1882-1902), vol. 4, d. 49, pars 2, sectio 1, a. 3, qu. 1, Conclusio.

⁹⁵ “ratione quorum idoneitatem habeat sequi spiritum et locari in regione caelesti, quae est regio Beatorum” (*Breviloquium* 7.7, *Opera omnia*, vol. 5, 290).

thought, a soul using a body as its instrument, the way a sailor uses a ship, a notion favoured by those who have been deceived by the Manichean heresy, with its false dualism between the spiritual alone as good and all that is corporeal as evil). Thus, Abraham's soul is not Abraham, but only a part of him, as form to matter.⁹⁶ The resurrected body must therefore be of the same specific kind of matter as that of the body which died, namely, human flesh and bone, and this must be the same numerical matter, that is, it must be the identical particular body which that individual soul had in life.⁹⁷ It cannot, for example, be a body made of air.⁹⁸ It will be real skin and flesh of which the soul can say "my skin" and "my flesh," wherefore Job says, "for I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth. And I shall be clothed again with my skin: and in my flesh I shall see my God" (Job 19.26).⁹⁹

There would be no future resurrection, and no redemption from sin, if Christ's own flesh had been, as Manicheus taught, the imaginary flesh of a phantom body, of a *phantasma* or *similitudo phantastica*, rather than the real, corruptible flesh of a true human body. Indeed, the mystery of the Incarnation would be meaningless, the Gospels would be false, and Christ the Truth would have deceived us. For the Manichean heresy, according to which the Son of God did not assume true flesh because the whole of material creation was the work of the Devil rather than of the good God, denies Christ's human nature, and therefore denies the reality of everything pertaining to Christ's human nature which is narrated in the Gospels, as if Christ was not truly born of a Virgin, did not truly hunger and thirst and eat and drink, did not truly suffer and die on the cross for us, and was not truly resurrected. "Thus," says Thomas, "to say that Christ did not have true flesh [veram carnem], and endured such suffering not in truth, but only in imaginary appearance [in phantasia], is to accuse Christ of lying."¹⁰⁰ Since "the likeness of flesh is not flesh," the Manicheans "reduce the entire mystery of the Incarnation to a kind of fiction," for if what they say is true then Scripture lies in saying that "the Word was made flesh" [John 1.14]; indeed, "the whole story of the Gospels, if it narrated the apparent

⁹⁶ *ST* Suppl., 75.1, cf. 76.1, 79.1-3, *SG* 4.79-84.

⁹⁷ These points are made most clearly and concisely in *Compendium theologiae* 1.153-154.

⁹⁸ *SG* 4.84.

⁹⁹ *ST* Suppl., 79.1.

¹⁰⁰ "Dicere ergo, Christum veram carnem non habuisse, nec hujusmodi in veritate, sed solum in phantasia eum fuisse perpressum, est Christo imponere falsitatem" (*Compendium theologiae* 1.207, p. 56; cf. *SG* 4.29, *ST* 3.5.1-2).

likenesses of things as if they were the things themselves, would be a poetic fable,” whereas the reality is that when Scripture narrates things which had appearance, but not real existence, it makes this clear, as in the imaginary visions of the prophets, which are set down as prophecy, not as history, as when Ezekiel says that “the likeness of a hand” took him by the hair, lifted him between heaven and earth, and took him to Jerusalem (Ezek. 8.3).¹⁰¹

With such reasoning, Thomas argues that the Son of God assumed a “true body” (“verum corpus”), relying also on the authority of Augustine (who wrote that “if the body of Christ was a phantasm, then Christ deceived us, and if he deceived us, then he is not the truth; but Christ is the truth: therefore his body was not a phantasm”) and adding an argument from the dignity of the person assuming the body, “whom it did not become to have any fiction in his work, since he is the truth” (“quae cum sit veritas, non decuit ut in opere eius aliqua fictio esset”).¹⁰² Since it was a “true body,” it was a “carnal body” (“corpus carnale”), one made up of “flesh and blood,” “flesh and bones” (“caro et sanguis,” “caro autem et ossa”).¹⁰³ At the Transfiguration, it was this body that took on glory by taking on *claritas*, Christ’s face shining like the Sun and his garments becoming as white as snow; it was not a *corpus phantasticum* or *spirituale*, nor a *corpus aereum*.¹⁰⁴ By some mysterious means, Moses and Elias were really present as witnesses, not merely in appearance, since “truth, not fiction, is becoming in a witness to truth” (“testes veritatis non decet aliqua fictio, sed veritas”).¹⁰⁵

Returning, after this digression, to the Thomistic analysis of Paul’s *raptus*, we learn that the vision of God which the saints in heaven enjoy now as the substance of their reward and beatitude is in them as a permanent intelligible form, making them *beati simpliciter*, and that Paul was *beatus* only *secundum quid*, since he received the intelligible form of God in a transitory manner. Hence his body was not glorified, and his

¹⁰¹ “Cum enim carnis similitudo caro non sit, . . . patet quod totum Incarnationis mysterium ad quandam fictionem deducunt. . . . Esset praeterea tota evangelica narratio poetica et fabularis, si rerum similitudines apparentes quasi res ipsas narraret” (SG 4.29, p. 476).

¹⁰² ST 3a.5.1, sed con., resp. Augustine writes “Si phantasma fuit corpus Christi, fefellit Christus: et si fefellit, veritas non est. Est autem veritas Christus. Non igitur phantasma fuit corpus ejus” (*De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII* 14, PL 40.14).

¹⁰³ ST 3a.5.2.

¹⁰⁴ ST 3a.45.1, resp., obj 1, ad 1.

¹⁰⁵ ST 3a.45.3, obj. 1, ad 1.

rapture belongs to prophecy, in which the prophetic light is received in the same temporary way.¹⁰⁶ The *purpose* of his elevation was “that he might be a witness to the glory which is promised to the saints;” however, since the substance of that glory and beatitude is the intellect’s vision of God, he was an apt witness regardless of the fact that he did not see God without alienation from the senses, as the saints will after the resurrection, “for there was no need for him himself to experience everything the blessed will have, but only that, from the things he did experience, he might know the others; for he was not caught up that he might be blessed, but that he might be a witness to beatitude.”¹⁰⁷ Perhaps one of the other things Paul somehow knew from the vision of God, the glory of the soul, was the promise of the glory of the body, since he wrote the key text on this doctrine (1 Cor. 15).

In any case, the “third heaven” and “paradise” in 2 Cor 12.2-4 both signify the same thing, “the glory of the saints” (“gloria sanctorum”). The “third heaven” represents the intellect’s vision or apprehension of the goal of the contemplative life, and “paradise” the sweet delight which flows from the repose of the will in that attained object of desire. As a corporeal place, the third heaven is the place appointed for the contemplation of the blessed, the Empyrean, above the airy and stellar heavens. In saying that he was caught up both to the third heaven and to paradise, Paul’s meaning is that “God showed him the life in which he will be seen in eternity” in the highest of the three Augustinian modes of vision, and that he knew the divine sweetness of “the delight of the enjoyment of God.”¹⁰⁸ “And in this way it is said that the Apostle was caught up to the third heaven, that is, in order to see the things which are in the Empyrean heaven, not in order to be there, for then he would have known whether he had been in the body, or out of the body.”¹⁰⁹ He was, in fact, “in the body,” in the sense that his soul was not separated from

¹⁰⁶ *ST 2a2ae.175.3*, ad 2.

¹⁰⁷ “ut testis existeret illius gloriae quae sanctis repromittitur” (*De ver.* 13.3, obj. 8), “non tamen oportuit quod omnia in se experiretur, quae beatis inerunt; sed ex his quae experiebatur etiam alia scire posset: non enim rapiebatur ut esset beatus, sed ut esset beatitudinis testis” (*De ver.* 13.3, ad 8).

¹⁰⁸ “quod Deus ostendit ei vitam in qua videndus est in aeternum” (*ST 2a2ae.175.3*, ad 4), “gaudium de divina frutione” (*Super II Cor.* 12.2.460). The meaning of the “third heaven” and “paradise” is discussed in *ST 2a2ae.175.3*, ad 4 and *Super II Cor.* 12.1.450-51, 2.460. On the intellect and the will in the contemplation of God, see *ST 2a2ae.180.1*.

¹⁰⁹ “Et hoc modo dicitur quod Apostolus erat raptus usque ad tertium caelum, id est usque ad videndum ea quae sunt in caelo empyreo, non ut existeret ibi, qui sic sciret si fuisset sive in corpore, sive extra corpus” (*Super II Cor.* 12.1.450).

his body as in death, for it remained united to the body as its form. For, as Augustine shows, he did not need to literally die in order to see God, but only to “die to this life” by means of the profound state of alienation from sense-perception and the phantasms of the imagination that was induced by his rapture. For this reason, with respect to his *status*, he was still a *viator*, a pilgrim away from God, but with respect to the act of seeing God, he was *in patria*.¹¹⁰ Why, then, did he say “whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth”?

In each of his three discussions of this problem,¹¹¹ Thomas relies almost entirely on *De Genesi* 12, assuming that Paul’s remark expresses a genuine doubt, and concluding that it is a doubt regarding his very being, “*ipsum esse*,” i.e., Paul did not know whether he had been alive, his soul “in the body” as its form, or dead, his soul separated from the body, “out of the body,” in death, for although the former was the case, his state was one of such profound alienation from the bodily senses that it was indistinguishable from the latter. However, Aquinas begins by refuting an incorrect solution which Augustine does not mention, that of the “certain Jew” who seems to imply that Paul was not willing to admit to something incredible which he nonetheless believed to be true, namely, that he was “caught up” to the third heaven in body and soul, in a bodily rapture analogous to that in which an angel supposedly carried Habacuc “in the body” from one real place to another, as opposed to the far more acceptable imaginary rapture in the soul or spirit only, i.e., “out of the body,” of an Ezekiel. For Aquinas, this mistaken view asserts that the doubt has to do, not with the Apostle’s very being, but with the mode of rapture, *modum raptus*, “that is, he did not know whether his body was caught up together with his soul to the third heaven, or his soul alone” (“*ut scilicet ignoraverit an corpus eius fuerit simul raptum cum anima in tertium caelum, vel non, sed solum anima*”).¹¹² Without disputing its reality, Thomas adduces Habacuc’s bodily transport from Judea to Chaldea (Dan. 14.35) as an example of the first of these modes of rapture, and cites Ezekiel’s two imaginary journeys in the opposite direction (Ezek. 8.3, 40.1-2) as instances of the second. Having refuted this view of the Pauline opposition, Aquinas need not attend to its

¹¹⁰ *ST* 2a2ae.175.5, resp., ad 1.

¹¹¹ *ST* 2a2ae.175.6, *Super II Cor.* 12, 1.456, *De ver.* 13.5. The structure and content of these three discussions is substantially the same. Ezek. 8.3 is the example of a spiritual flight in the first, Ezek. 40.1-2 in the second and third, where Habacuc appears as the instance of a bodily trajectory.

¹¹² *ST*, 2a2ae.175.6, resp.

further implication, which is that Paul believed that he was caught up in body and soul, rather than in the soul alone, but would not openly admit to such a thing, preferring to say that only God knows which had actually been the case. Yet this version of Paul's doubt, according to which there is no real doubt at all, but a reluctance to admit to something astonishing which the speaker knows to be true—that he ascended to Paradise “in the body,” meaning, not only “alive,” but also “in body and soul”—is precisely the version which Dante adopts within the fiction of the *Commedia* in order to construct the “Pauline” model of his protagonist's otherworld journey. When Dante echoes Paul's doubt in the *Paradiso*, he echoes it in exactly the terms in which Aquinas paraphrases the Jewish scholar's interpretation of that doubt, as the claim to be ignorant of whether “*corpus eius fuerit simul raptum cum anima in tertium caelum, vel non, sed solum anima,*” knowing, all the while, that he was caught up in body and soul.

v “I corpo di costui è vera carne” (*Purg.* 5.33)

The “body and soul” motif in the poem, as a function of the theme of the resurrection of the body and of Dante's commitment to the concept of the self which that doctrine entails, has been analysed in considerable depth by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi and Caroline Bynum.¹¹³ For both scholars, Dante's fundamental anthropology rests on the medieval Christian adaptation of Aristotle's hylomorphism and rejects Platonic dualism (an opposition which is paralleled by Oscar Cullmann's distinction between early Judeo-Christian anthropology and the contemporary “Greek” view of what constitutes a person).¹¹⁴ In other words, a human being is for Dante the compound of matter and form, body and immortal soul, that will be restored at the Last Judgment, when the separated soul's natural desire for reunion with its own flesh, a desire which persists even after its union with God, will at last be fulfilled in the ultimate triumph over death—as opposed to an immortal soul temporarily imprisoned in a corruptible body, longing to abandon base

¹¹³ Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, “Le bianche stole: il tema della resurrezione nel *Paradiso*,” *Dante e la Bibbia*, Atti del convegno internazionale promosso da “Biblia,” Florence, 26-28 September 1986, ed. Giovanni Barblan (Florence: Olschki, 1988), 249-71, Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1995), 291-305, and Bynum, “Faithful Imagining the Self: Somatomorphic Soul and Resurrection Body in Dante's *Divine Comedy*,” *Faithful Imagining: Essays in Honor of Richard R. Niebuhr*, eds. Sang Hyun Lee, Wayne Proudfoot and Albert Blackwell (Atlanta: Scholar's P., 1995), 81-104.

¹¹⁴ Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, trans. F. Filson, 3rd ed. (London: SCM, 1962), 231-52.

matter in order to attain union with God. Bynum, at the same time, sees the self-consciously fictional “somatization” or embodiment of the souls of the dead in aerial bodies as the fundamental poetic strategy of the work. This aspect of the “body and soul” motif has also been explored by Marianne Shapiro.¹¹⁵

In fact, although the scholastic (and early Christian) view of human identity is ultimately dominant in the *Commedia*, the poem maintains much of the tension between this perspective and Platonic dualism which John Took has observed in the *Convivio*.¹¹⁶ Strangely, for Chiavacci Leonardi, Bynum, and Shapiro, the theme of “body and soul” in the poem resides entirely in the embodied souls of the dead, the aerial bodies of Hell and Purgatory and the resurrection bodies of the Empyrean, despite the repeated stress throughout on the extraordinary presence in the next world of one, and only one, real mortal body of flesh and blood: Dante’s body. Bynum briefly remarks that the presence of this real body calls attention to the fictive nature of the aerial bodies.¹¹⁷ It is equally true, and perhaps more important with respect to the themes of body and soul, resurrection, and the self, as well as the central mystery of the Incarnation, that many an encounter with a “corpo fittizio” calls attention to the fact that, within the overall fiction, “l corpo di costui è vera carne” (*Purg.* 26.12, 5.33).¹¹⁸ This distinction is a nonsense if Dante does not have the true flesh of a fictitious journey in the body, but the imaginary body of an imaginary vision in which all flesh is equally illusory. Aquinas says that Christ was a liar and Scripture a poetic fiction if the Word did not take on *veram carnem*, but a *similitudo phantastica*, for it would mean that he did not really become man, did not truly die, and was not truly resurrected. Dante creates the poetic fiction of a prophetic “vision” whose overall modality is that of a supernatural bodily journey that includes every possible kind of vision and gives witness to these same truths, in perfect

¹¹⁵ Marianne Shapiro, *Dante and the Knot of Body and Soul* (New York: St. Martin’s P., 1998).

¹¹⁶ J. F. Took, *Dante: Lyric Poet and Philosopher* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 101-105. See, for example, *Inf.* 33.61-63, 118-47, *Purg.* 10.121-29.

¹¹⁷ Bynum, “Faith Imagining the Self,” 84, 100.

¹¹⁸ In “Whether in the body or out of the body?” *Spunti e Ricerche* 11 (1995): 45-58, Mary Dwyer reviews the indications in all three canticas that the pilgrim is present “in the body” and suggests that *Par.* 1.73-75 reaffirms this, so that its meaning is “if I was only in the spirit is something God knows, but I do not, since my own experience was and is that I was in the body” (53). Dwyer concludes that this reaffirmation of the presence of Dante’s body exists for the sake of the claim to have seen the essence of God while “in the body” (in the sense of “alive”). My suggestion in this chapter that Dante’s flesh to some extent takes on two of the *doties* of the glorified body during the ascent to Paradise is a development of Dwyer’s similar proposition (50-52).

conformity with Saint Thomas's views on the modes of prophetic vision, but evading his stricture that "truth, not fiction, is becoming in a witness to truth."¹¹⁹ He does this by representing himself (or rather his protagonist) as having seen by being there, as having gone to the next world (with divine aid and for the sake of a providentially-ordained prophetic mission) "in corpore," taking this to mean not only "corruttibile ancora," as it meant for Augustine and Aquinas, and as would have been the case in any dream or vision, but also "sensibilmente," his soul having had the full use of its sensory faculties, because it was there in its body, as had been granted only to Aeneas and to Paul, who are imagined as having visited Hell and Heaven, respectively, in the same way (*Inf.* 2.13-33).

At the beginning of the *Paradiso*, Dante claims to have been in the Empyrean and to have seen things that "ridire / né sa né può chi di là sù discende" (*Par.* 1.4-9), just as Paul says that he was "caught up into paradise, and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter" (2 Cor. 12.1-4). The language implies a seeing by being there, in imitation of Paul, which is just what Aquinas excludes as the modality of the Apostle's rapture; but the emphasis here is on the ineffability topos (as it is in the section of the letter to Cangrande that presents itself as Dante's own commentary on these verses).¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ *ST* 3a.45.3, obj. 1, ad 1.

¹²⁰ *Epistole* 13.24-29. As Bruno Nardi shows, paragraph 28 of the letter demonstrates a basic misunderstanding of the literal sense of *Par.* 1.7-9, radically distorting the text with respect to the exact cause of the failure of memory which leaves one unable to describe the experience of a mystic elevation of the intellect beyond the powers of human reason (see Bruno Nardi, "Il punto sull' 'Epistola a Cangrande,'" in *Lecturae e altri studi danteschi*, ed. Rudy Abardo [Florence: Le Lettere, 1990], 220, cf. "Perché 'dietro la memoria non può ire' [*Par.* 1, 9]," *Lecturae, e altri studi*, 267-76). In the same paragraph of the letter, "hoc," i.e., the writer's mistaken account of how the failure of memory causes ineffability, is then claimed to be the meaning of Paul's "and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter," the first of six authorities (three scriptural and three patristic) that are adduced in support of what might charitably be reduced to the basic principle that such an experience is ineffable due to the inadequacy of memory, and, at the same time, in rebuttal of some undefined attack on the poet by certain unnamed critics. Although Paul's words do express ineffability, there is no allusion to memory in 2 Cor 12.1-4 or anywhere near it, while neither ineffability nor memory arise in the other two texts that are cited (Matt. 17.6, Ezek. 2.1), nor in their contexts. For the three patristic authorities, the cavillers are commanded to read all or some unspecified parts of Richard of St. Victor's *De contemplatione*, Bernard's *De consideratione*, and Augustine's *De quantitate animae*. Scholars have attempted to identify apt passages in these works, assuming that the first is Richard's *Benjamin major*, which does contain relevant material on memory and ineffability, even though, as Steven Botterill observes, it may not in fact be the *Benjamin major*, while the second patristic text does touch on ineffability, but without relating it to memory, and the third says nothing whatsoever about either (Steven Botterill, "'Quae non licet homini loqui': The Ineffability of Mystical Experience in *Paradiso* 1 and the *Epistle to Can Grande*," *Modern Language Review* 83 [1988]: 340). This would perhaps be a worthwhile procedure, were it not that, there being no criteria by which to identify the precise passages in the scriptural and patristic sources that the writer has in mind, those in the scriptural sources being knowable only because the writer makes them known, we cannot possibly determine which specific passages, if any, he is thinking of in the patristic sources. For if the writer of the letter had directed the

Near the end of Dante's passage from sphere to sphere on the way to the tenth heaven, in the ninth, where the pilgrim sees the angelic hierarchy as it really is by being there, it is made very obvious that this ascent imitates such an unorthodox Pauline model:

E Dïonisio con tanto disio
 a contemplar questi ordini si mise,
 che li nomò e distinse com' io.
 Ma Gregorio da lui poi si divide;
 onde, sì tosto come li occhi aperse
 in questo ciel, di sé medesimo rise.
 E se tanto secreto ver proferse
 mortale in terra, non voglio ch'ammiri:
 ché chi 'l vide qua sù gliel discoperse
 con altro assai del ver di questi giri. (Par. 28.130-39)

Dante's celestial ascent from the Earthly Paradise begins at midday, when he gazes directly at the Sun in imitation of Beatrice, something which he can now briefly do by virtue of his at least partial recuperation of the perfection of body and soul that was proper to humanity's condition in Eden before the Fall (*Par.* 1.43-57). He notices that the Sun appears to grow vastly larger (without yet realising, any more than the first-time reader does at this point, that this is because he is moving rapidly towards it) and then turns his gaze back to Beatrice, with which he feels an ineffable "trasumanar," an elevation beyond the human perfection of Eden to the divine, to the company of "gods" (i.e., the saints in Heaven), an experience that can only be known by those to whom it is granted by grace, in anticipation of which Dante now, as he writes of it, offers the barely-adequate example of Glaucus (vv. 58-72, cf. *Par.* 5.123). There immediately follows a

critics to the three scriptural sources by saying only "let them read Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, Matthew's gospel, and the book of Ezekiel," and we had gone to those texts in search of something on the ineffability of mystical experience on account of the inadequacy of memory, we would have found nothing, since there is no apparent connection, other than the writer's assertion—an assertion he is quite entitled to make—between the point which he is trying to support and the precise scriptural authorities that are given to support it. In other words, the writer gives six authorities in support of his thesis, three books of the Bible and three patristic works, identifying specific loci only in the first three. Just as the first three specific loci could not be identified if the writer had not identified them, so the second three cannot be identified unless the writer identifies them, which he does not. On the critical dispute regarding the letter's authenticity, see Giorgio Brugnoli, Introduction to *Epistole* by Dante Alighieri, 514-21, and Robert Hollander, *Dante's Epistle to Cangrande* (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan P., 1993).

preface to the subsequent account of what Dante can still hardly believe to be true, that the light of divine grace elevated or “transhumanised” him in both body and soul:

S'i' era sol di me quel che creasti
 novellamente, amor che 'l ciel governi,
 tu 'l sai, che col tuo lume mi levasti.” (*Par.* 1.73-75).

Since “that which you created last” is the soul as compared to the body, this amounts to saying “whether I was out of the body (or in the body), I know not; God knows,” with “out of the body” expressed as “S'i' era sol di me quel che creasti / novellamente” in the sense of “se io era solo anima” (cf. “sed solum anima”). At *Par.* 2.37, Dante will write “S'io era corpo,” amounting to “whether I was in the body (or out of the body), I know not; God knows,” with “out of the body” expressed as “S'io era corpo” in the sense of “se io era corpo ed anima” (cf. “corpus eius fuerit simul raptum cum anima”). Between these allusions to Paul there is a passage that is of course fiction, but that would be nonsense, and in which Beatrice would be a liar, if it were not the case that Dante’s version of Paul’s doubt is that of the Jewish scholar as Aquinas explains it, rather than the Augustinian interpretation that Aquinas himself approves—if it were not the case, that is, that the protagonist is ascending through the spheres in a corporeal rapture, as opposed to the spiritual rapture of an imaginary vision (or, possibly, in contrast to an out-of-body ascent of the soul, which would change nothing that pertains to the substance of my argument).

Dante describes how he saw a further increase in the brightness of the Sun and heard a strange new sound, and yearned to know their cause, and tells us that his desire was promptly satisfied by Beatrice’s explanation that he was shooting up towards his “proprio sito” (the Empyrean, Paul’s “third heaven”) just as rapidly as fire descends, in the form of lightning, from its own “proper place” (the sphere of fire). It is left to the reader to divine that the new phenomena are a great increase in the apparent size of the Sun and the sudden audibility of the music of the spheres, and that the pilgrim immediately understood that their cause was his lightning-fast ascent from Earth towards the Empyrean (vv. 76-95). Dante’s real concern now is to stress this very fact as a new

phenomenon whose cause was at the time a mystery: “ma ora ammiro / com’ io trascenda questi corpi levi,” he said to Beatrice, expressing an astonishment that would have been misplaced if “io” did not consist of a soul and a body of normally heavy, earthly flesh rising above the spheres of the light elements, air and fire, instead of clinging to the surface of the Earth (vv.96-99). Beatrice then gives a response that assumes just this, and that a human being is a compound of body and soul. Her response would be a nonsense and a lie if the protagonist’s assumption were false and he were ascending as a disembodied spirit or rising in the imaginary body of a dream or vision through imaginary spheres (regardless of whether the former out-of-body experience or the latter visionary one were presented as real or as pure fiction).

She explains that divine providence has given every kind of creature, every “nature,” from that of the element earth to that of human beings, an innate natural impulse or “istinto” that directs the individuals of that nature to their own proper good as their “segno” or goal, the “proprio sito” which is at once a place and the state of final rest which is attained there and nowhere else. It is this unerring natural impulse or desire that moves fire up towards its sphere, makes earth descend to the centre, and causes human beings to seek or “move towards” rest in the Empyrean, the abode of the blessed and of God, the supreme good; and it is by virtue of this same “corda / che ciò che scocca drizza in segno lieto,” this “concreata e perpetua sete / del deiforme regno,” that both Dante and Beatrice now ascend at enormous speed to the Empyrean (vv. 100-126, cf *Par.* 2.19-21). But human beings also have intellect and free will, enabling them to choose, by a deliberate act of the will, either to seek their true supreme good, in harmony with their “impeto primo,” or to actually turn that natural impulse in the opposite direction by seeking false “earthly” goods as their *summum bonum*, an unnatural movement like that of fire descending from clouds under intense pressure (vv. 127-135).

Beatrice’s distinction between the unerring “impeto primo” of human nature and the free but error-prone movement of the will is the same as Virgil’s distinction between morally neutral *amor naturale* or “prima voglia,” on the one hand, and the *amor d’animo* or *altra voglia* for which we are to be held accountable, on the other (*Purg.* 17.91-102, 18.55-63). This, in turn, appears to be the same as Aquinas’s distinction between “natural love” and “elective love,” both of which belong to the will (*ST* 1.60-1-3). *Amor naturale*

is an innate and permanent desire which God implants in every human soul, a desire for God himself, “la somma beninanza,” given to the soul at its creation “sì che poi sempre la disira” (*Par.* 7.142-44). As Virgil explains (*Purg.* 17.94-139), when *amor d’animo* is directed to the same goal, the two loves being perfectly aligned, there can be no evil or sinful love, no “mal diletto:” sin arises when *amor d’animo* is misdirected or distorted, either by choosing to seek evil (evil towards others, as in pride, envy and wrath, the sins of the first three terraces of Purgatory), or by seeking the primary Good with too little vigour (sloth or *accidia*, which is purged on the fourth terrace), or by pursuing secondary goods with too much vigour, as if they were the primary Good (which is to be deceived by the allure of false worldly goods, the illusion of the “femmina balba,”¹²¹ whence the sins that are purged on the last three terraces, avarice, gluttony and lust).

Since the “impediment” of distorted *amor d’animo* has been completely removed by Dante’s purgatorial ascent and his final purification on the summit, there is nothing to wonder at in his rising from there towards his “proper place;” indeed, as Beatrice points out at the end of her explanation of the cause of Dante’s “transcendence” of the spheres of air and fire, it is as natural as water running downhill, and his remaining on Earth would be as unnatural as fire failing to rise (*Par.* 1.136-41). All of which, here at the beginning of the *Paradiso*, both assumes and emphasises the fact that “Dante,” and any human being, is a compound of both form and matter—as does the next and this time inexplicable new phenomenon, which also assumes and emphasises the fact that the same is true of Christ. It even suggests that the protagonist’s body, which would appear to have taken on the quality of *agilitas*, the capacity to move rapidly in response to the every movement of the soul, has also received the gift of *subtilitas*, the power to penetrate solid matter, a gift that Christ’s body had after the Resurrection.¹²² For Dante and Beatrice enter the “body” of the Moon, a “corpo” that is as solid as a diamond or pearl but which “receives” them without breaking, just as water “receives” light (*Par.* 2.19-36, 50). The recollection of this prompts a complex address to the reader in which Dante says, in effect, “whether I was in the body (or out of the body), I know not; God knows,” and a good deal more (vv. 37-45).

¹²¹ The “femmina balba” is discussed on pp. 120-25.

¹²² It could even be argued that he acquires a certain *impassibilitas* in order to be elevated to the final vision (cf. *Par.* 33.28-33).

Having made it perfectly clear that he was “in the body,” Dante nonetheless tells us that *if* he indeed “was body” when this happened, so that one body’s “dimension” occupied the same place as another, as must be the case when one body penetrates another while both remain whole (something which here on Earth is inconceivable), *then* that should further inflame our desire to see the essence of God in Heaven, since in that beatific vision we will understand the greatest mystery of all, the union of the human and divine natures in the one person of Christ. That is, *if* the rationally incomprehensible miracle of Dante’s body and the body of the Moon occupying the same place really did occur, as it did within the fiction, *then* our desire for eternal life and the vision of God should be all the greater, since we will then understand the far greater mystery of the Incarnation, the supreme mystery of the faith. The extraordinary thing is that it makes no difference to Dante’s point that the incomprehensible miracle of two bodies in the same place is a fiction, for it is still the stimulus it is intended to be, a stimulus to our pursuit of salvation and the consequent satisfaction of our desire to know how two so disparate natures could be united in one person (which is of course Dante’s own greatest desire, satisfied, at the end of the journey, in what I will argue is the “sleep” of *Par.* 32.139). In this life we cannot attain the satisfaction of our desire to understand how one body can occupy the same place as another. This is a fictitious miracle in the *Commedia*, but is one which really occurred at the birth of Christ, whose body did not break the Virgin’s hymen, and also after his Resurrection, when he passed through closed doors.¹²³ Fictitious or real, the idea itself suffices to make the point that we should ardently desire the vision of God that is eternal life, since it really will bring the perfect satisfaction of our desire to understand the far greater miracle that we here accept on faith. In this way, Dante’s *fictio* serves the same truth as that which Aquinas sought to distance from poetry. The poet’s own words are as follows:

S’io era corpo, e qui non si concepe
 com’ una dimensione altra patio,
 ch’esser convien se corpo in corpo repe,
 accender ne dovia più il disio

¹²³ See *ST* Suppl. 83.2-3, where these miracles are given as violations of principles of natural philosophy that are expressed in terms which are very close to those Dante uses in this passage.

di veder quella essenza in che si vede
 come nostra natura e Dio s'unio.
 Lì si vedrà ciò che tenem per fede,
 non dimostrato, ma fia per sé noto
 a guisa del ver primo che l'uom crede. (Par. 2.37-45)

Having previously echoed Paul by saying “whether I was out of the body (or in the body), I know not; God knows,” Dante now writes, in effect, “whether I was in the body (or out of the body), I know not; God knows.” The Apostle’s *raptus* is the precedent, his doubt repeated as no real doubt at all but as a reluctance to glory in what he knows to be true, that he was caught up “in the body” in the sense in which that “certain Jew” interpreted the phrase, i.e., as signifying a corporeal rapture, an ascent in body and soul. The meaning of the excluded alternative, “out of the body,” is harder to define. “S’i’ era sol di me quel che creasti / novellamente . . .” suggests the ascent of a disembodied soul, although for the Jewish expert “in the body” meant “in the spirit only,” in the sense of an imaginary vision. In any case, Dante’s version of “in the body” automatically excludes this, since it means both “corruttibile ancora” and “sensibilmente” (a fact which has already been repeatedly noted in the *Purgatorio*, as we will see).

The theme of the body and its resurrection in the remainder of the *Paradiso* is sensitively discussed by Chiavacci Leonardi.¹²⁴ I would only note that, running through the passages I have dealt with here, and persisting to the end of the *Paradiso*, is a certain ambivalence about that in which the ultimate “segno lieto” of human desire consists, and that this ambivalence reflects that of Saint Augustine, rather than the certainty of Aquinas. Is it the intellectual vision of God, the glory of the soul, the vision which Dante is granted in his final “Augustinian-Thomistic” *raptus*, or is it the glory of the body and soul together, which Dante foretastes, foretasting thereby his own resurrection (which he has already done to the extent that his body has assumed the qualities of *subtilitas* and *agilitas*) when he sees the blessed in the celestial rose “in quelli aspetti / che tu vedrai a l’ultima giustizia” (*Par.* 30.44-45)? In one place, Beatrice identifies beatitude with the intellectual vision of God, just as Aquinas does (*Par.* 28.109-111, cf. *ST* 2a2ae.1-5). In another, the protagonist recites Peter Lombard’s orthodox definition of hope as the

¹²⁴ Chiavacci Leonardi, “Le bianche stole.”

“certain expectation of future glory” (*Par.* 25.67-69), and then defines that future glory or beatitude, the object or “segno” of Christian hope, as the glory of the body and soul together, even though Aquinas believes that it consists primarily in the glory of the soul (the vision of God), not that of the body (*Par.* 25.82-96, cf. *ST* 2a2ae.18.2, ad 4).

Asked to define the object of hope, Dante answers that it is the double glory, in the eternal life of Paradise, of body and soul, the glory of the two “white robes,” one of which signifies the glory of the soul alone, which the blessed possess now, the other representing the glory of the body, which will be added to the first after the Last Judgement (which will take place when the ordained number of the elect has been reached, i.e., when the few empty places in the celestial rose, where Dante sees the blessed as they will appear on that day, have been filled, Christ and the Virgin being the only ones who already possess both “robes”).¹²⁵ Dante gives this answer, having said that the “segno” is revealed in both the Old and New Testaments, by giving the traditional interpretation of Isaiah 61.7 (“therefore shall they receive double in their land. Everlasting joy shall be unto them,” “propter hoc in terra sua duplicia possidebunt laetitia sempiterna erit eis,”), which was interpreted in the light of Apoc. 6.11, “And white robes were given, to every one of them one. And it was said to them that they should rest for a little time till their fellow servants and their brethren, who are to be slain even as they, should be filled up,” “et datae sunt illis singulae stolae albae et dictum est illis ut requiescerent tempus adhuc modicum donec impleantur conservi eorum et fratres eorum qui interficiendi sunt sicut et illi;” cf. Apoc. 7.9: “After this, I saw a great multitude, . . . clothed with white robes,” “post haec vidi turbam magnam . . . amicti stolas albas”). The poet puts it this way:

Dice Isaia che ciascuna vestita
 ne la sua terra fia di doppia vesta:
 e la sua terra è questa dolce vita;
 e 'l tuo fratello assai vie più digesta,
 là dove tratta de le bianche stole,
 questa revelazion ci manifesta.

(*Par.* 25.91-96)

¹²⁵ *Par.* 25.124-29, 30.43-45, 124-32.

The *Commedia* ends with the pilgrim's brief but otherwise perfect foretaste of the glory of the soul. This is audacious enough. Yet it comes as the culmination of an ascent which is also to some extent, and to an increasing degree as it approaches its conclusion, a foretaste of both the general resurrection and of his own personal resurrection at the end of time.

However imminent the end may be, Dante will have to spend a good deal of time in Purgatory after his death. Purgatory exists for the purification of the souls of those who died in the state of grace, with their sins forgiven, but who still bear some contamination of sin (specifically, some remaining guilt or *culpa* of venial sin or some unpaid debt of the temporal punishment or *poena* that is due to forgiven sins). There, they are held back from the vision of God until they have expiated these impurities by means of “purgatorial” or “purifying” punishments.¹²⁶ In the *Purgatorio*, the presence of Dante's body, his real flesh, blood and bones, is repeatedly noted with astonishment by the dead souls and emphasised by the text as the key sign of the unique privilege by which this principle is violated for the sake of his providential “fatale andare:” his breathing or his shadow reveal that he is there in his fleshly body (“sensibilmente”) and is therefore still alive (“corruttibile ancora”), in stark contrast to the dead, with their fictive aerial bodies—evidence that such an *andare* is by a very special grace and that Dante will eventually return to this world. This is the “modo tutto fuor del moderno uso” in which Dante has seen Hell and will see Heaven (*Purg.* 16.31-45). All readers of the poem will be aware of these encounters in Purgatory (where Dante does not belong because he is alive), and of the similar ones in Hell (where he does not belong both because he is alive and because he is saved), so that I need not rehearse the relevant passages here.¹²⁷

It should be noted, however, that it is strongly intimated that such a journey through Purgatory has never happened before, that neither Aeneas nor Paul nor anyone else has ever visited this part of the next world in this way: Guido del Duca, addressing Dante with the words “O anima che fitta / nel corpo ancora inver' lo ciel ten vai,” asks him to stay a while and talk about himself, “ché tu ne fai / tanto maravigliar de la tua grazia, / quanto vuol cosa che non fu più mai” (*Purg.* 14.10-15). This is in fact but a confirmation

¹²⁶ Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae* 1.181-2, *SG* 4.91, Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* 7.2.

¹²⁷ *Inf.* 3.82-99, 121-29, 8.25-27, 12.79-96, 16.31-33, 23.85-96, *Purg.* 2.67-87, 3.16-33, 88-99, 5.1-9, 25-57, 8.55-72, 11.43-45, 13.130-47, 14.1-21, 16.23-45, 23.115-33, 24.4-6, 26.1-26.

of the most natural reading of *Inf.* 2.13-33, which is to understand that passage to establish Aeneas's bodily descent to Hell, and Paul's ascent to Heaven in the same way, as Dante's only precedents, this version of Paul's rapture, and Dante's imitation of it, being in turn confirmed by the above observations on the first two cantos of the *Paradiso*.

As the journey begins, it is dusk, and Dante, alone of all sentient creatures, or "animals," is not preparing to sleep, but is bracing himself for his arduous "cammino" (*Inf.* 2.1-6). The protagonist assumes that his journey "ad immortale secolo" will be just what it appears to be when it eventually does get under way, a real "cammino" to the real domains of the next life, undertaken both alive (i.e., "corruttibile ancora"), and wide awake, with the full use of his bodily organs of sensation ("sensibilmente"), for his body will go with him, and he will be present in the flesh (as opposed to the imaginary journey of a dream or vision, or an out-of-body experience of the soul alone, both of which many were thought to have undertaken before him while "corruttibile ancora"). This assumption, and the further presupposition that only Aeneas and Paul have ever done such a thing, underlies the anxiety which the protagonist expresses at *Inf.* 2.10-42, the passage which establishes the classical-imperial and the biblical-Christian models for this prophetic "vision," i.e., the poet's version of Aeneas's bodily descent to the underworld (*Aeneid* 6) and of Paul's elevation to Paradise (2 Cor. 12.1-4).

Aeneas, he says, went to the "immortale secolo" both "corruttibile ancora" and "sensibilmente," but this extraordinary fact is no wonder in the case of the great hero, for he went there, and went in this way, to play a part in the working out of God's providential plan that he was certainly worthy to play, i.e., so that information leading to the establishment of Rome as the centre of the Empire and eventually of the Church might be revealed to him (vv 13-27). The great Apostle Paul, the "Vas d'elezione" himself, later "andovvi," i.e., went "ad immortale secolo," and did so "per recarne conforto a quella fede / ch'è principio a la via di salvazione" (vv. 28-30). Dante, who fears that he is no Aeneas and no Paul (vv. 31-33), is nonetheless the unique successor of both, destined to learn and to reveal to the world God's plan for the restoration of the authority of the Empire and the reformation of the corrupt Church.

The parallel between Aeneas and Paul strongly implies that, like the hero of the *Aeneid*, the Apostle went to the "immortale secolo" both "corruttibile ancora" and

“sensibilmente,” and we have seen that the *Paradiso* confirms this with respect to a Pauline visit to Heaven. We have also seen that Guido del Duca makes a comment which suggests that no one has ever preceded Dante in such a journey to Purgatory. Since the “immortale secolo” therefore includes Hell and Heaven, but excludes Purgatory (“il temporal foco,” *Purg.* 27.127), it follows that Aeneas and Paul each made a bodily journey to Hell and/or to Heaven. Since there is no reason to suppose for a moment that we are to imagine that the pagan Aeneas ascended to Heaven, it further follows that, according to the *Commedia*—however heavenly or purgatorial certain scenes in *Aeneid* 6 might be, and however Dante may have been influenced by them in his representation of Purgatory and Heaven—Hell and only Hell is the “secolo” to which Aeneas travelled in body and soul, to be followed eventually by Dante. That Paul went to Heaven, as he says he did at 2 Cor 12.1-4, and not also to Hell, as the *Visio Sancti Pauli* would have it, so that *Inf.* 2.28-30 is, as most critics believe, a direct allusion to this famous biblical text, not to the *Visio*¹²⁸ (resulting in a complementarity between the *Aeneid* and the Bible, rather than between the *Aeneid* and the *Visio*, which would not be very complimentary to Christianity) is implicit in the reason for Paul’s going “ad immortale secolo,” i.e., “per recarne conforto a quella fede / ch’è principio a la via di salvazione.” This suggests that Paul, rather than going to Hell in order to return with testimony of the punishment due to sin, went to Heaven in order to be able to give witness to beatitude, the heavenly reward of virtue (as Aquinas says he did), and this as a support or reassurance, a “conforto,” for the faithful in the trials of this life. This impression, which of itself is probably no more than that, receives some “conforto” in the *Paradiso*, where Saint James tells Dante that he should proclaim his knowledge of hope because it is God’s will that he meet with the saints in Paradise before death “sì che, veduto il ver di questa corte, / la spene, che là giù bene inamora, in te e in altrui di ciò conforte” (*Par.* 25.40-45).

All of this means that, within the fiction and with respect to the overall modality and providential purpose of the prophetic vision, Dante excludes, as precedents, any and all dreams and visions, as well as the popular tradition’s out-of-body journeys of the soul (such as *Thurkill’s Vision* and *Tundale’s Vision*), its journeys in body and soul (*St.*

¹²⁸ See Francesco Mazzoni, *Saggio di un nuovo commento alla “Divina Commedia:” Inferno – Canti I-III* (Florence: Sansoni, 1967), 223-31.

Brendan's Voyage and *St. Patrick's Purgatory*), and also the *Visio Sancti Pauli* (the modality of which is less than clear),¹²⁹ and that the only such precedents are the adventures of Aeneas in *Aeneid* 6, interpreted as a bodily journey to Hell, and the rapture of Paul that is so enigmatically described in 2 Cor. 12.1-4, understood as a corporeal ascent to Heaven which includes a partial foretaste of the eternal life or glory of the whole person and which concludes with a mystical participation in the glory of the soul. This conclusion, I will argue in Chapter 5, is the mystic sleep which Bernard anticipates at *Par.* 32.139, the perfection of Dante's mystic *somnus* in Eden and the antithesis of his sinful sleep—or, rather, somnolence—in the prologue scene.

¹²⁹ This is, of course, quite a different matter from the question of whether or not such texts are actual literary precedents and models for the poem, its representation of the afterlife, and the protagonist's journey, on which see Mineo, *Profetismo e Apocalittica*, 94-96, Cesare Segre, "L'*Itinerarium animae* nel Duecento e Dante," *Lecture classensi* 13 (1984): 9-32, Eileen Gardiner ed., *Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante* (New York: Italica, 1989), and Alison Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1990). Segre categorises the *Visio Sancti Pauli* as an out-of-body journey of the soul ("L'*Itinerarium animae*," 12-13). However, depending on which part of which version one consults, and how one interprets it, the *Visio* could describe a bodily journey like Dante's, or a journey of the spirit alone. Compare, for example, the restored "in [cor]pore" in paragraph 3 of Paris MS 1631, the "in spiritu" in paragraph 11 of Arnhem Codex 6, and the "in spiritum" of paragraph 11 in Redactions II and VIII, in Theodore Silverstein and Anthony Hillhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition of Three Long Latin Versions* (Geneva: Cramer, 1997), 68, 83, 156 and 209, respectively.

“Quando chinavi, a rovinar, le ciglia” (Par. 32.138):

***Dormitatio Culpa* and the Typology of Sleep**

i Dante nods

The first two key events in the story which the *Commedia* tells are separated by an interval of ten years. The narrative opens with the second of these events, perhaps in order to highlight what most critics understand as a sudden *presa di coscienza*, in the year 1300, regarding what is clearly a perilous situation:¹

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
ché la diritta via era smarrita. (*Inf.* 1.1-3)

Within the brief confines of this opening *terzina*, the author transforms metaphor (“the journey of our life”) into allegory (a particular individual’s discovery that he is wandering in a dark wood, having lost the right road to his destination, the wilderness and the right road manifestly signifying something beyond themselves).² Dante makes

¹ For the vast majority of critics, “mi ritrovai” expresses Dante’s shocked realization that he was in mortal danger. A few scholars have argued for 1301 as the year in which the protagonist finds himself in the dark wood and then undertakes his otherworld journey, but the critical consensus has always favoured 1300, when the author was “nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,” i.e., in his thirty-fifth year, the mid-point of the biblical “threescore and ten years” of human life (Ps. 89.10) and the precise “punto sommo,” according to the *Convivio* (4.23.6-11), of the natural life span of those fortunate enough to have a perfect constitution. See Mazzoni, *Saggio di un nuovo commento*, 14-26.

² I use the term “allegory” here in the broadest sense, as in Angus Fletcher’s definition: “In the simplest terms, allegory says one thing and means another” (Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* [Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1964], 2). The prologue scene is often considered to be more metaphorical, or dream-like, than truly allegorical, because the literal sense seems to lack the coherence, concreteness and specificity that it has in the rest of the poem. However, although Dante begins “Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,” a metaphorical expression in which the literal sense is “nel mezzo della durata di questa nostra vita terrena,” he then says “mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,” an allegorical statement in which the literal sense is just that and whose allegorical meaning has been debated since the dawn of Dante studies. He does not say, for example “mi ritrovai nella selva oscura del peccato,” in which the literal sense, expressed metaphorically, is “mi ritrovai nel peccato,” nor does he then go on to climb “the mountain of virtue,” only to be beaten back by “the she-wolf of cupidity.” Although the prologue scene may be nightmarish in its disorienting insubstantiality, and although it may be similar to an extended metaphor, or be more an allegory of “this for that” than one of “this and that” (cf. Singleton, *Commedia: Elements of Structure*, 89), it is nonetheless allegorical, not metaphorical.

this transformation hinge on the coming to awareness that is implicit in “mi ritrovai:” the protagonist comes to his senses and realises, not that he is in some spiritual or psychological condition, but that he is in a certain place, a “selva oscura.”

The author could no doubt have forged an equally effective opening out of the first key event in the story, the protagonist’s abandonment of the right road and consequent straying into the dark wood. Instead, the initial reference to this occurrence is delayed until the fourth *terzina*, in which the narrator writes that he cannot tell us how he entered the dark wood because he was so “full of sleep” at the point where he abandoned the true path:

Io non so ben ridir com’ i’ v’intraï,
 tant’era pien di sonno a quel punto
 che la verace via abbandonai. (*Inf.* 1.10-12)

I will consider presently just how it is that “sleep” accounts for the cognitive blank in Dante the protagonist, in the “then” of the experience, and consequently for the identical blank in Dante the narrator, in the “now” of the telling, even though Dante the author has so contrived things that, at a later “now” of the narration, the narrator reports the protagonist’s apprehension and confession of precisely what he (Dante the narrator) has claimed not to know. This confession occurs in the Earthly Paradise, in the course of the dramatic scene in which the pilgrim, under intense psychological pressure from Beatrice, clearly enacts at least the first two of the three parts of the sacrament of penance, contrition, confession and satisfaction.³ The protagonist weeps bitter tears of remorse as a result of Beatrice’s harsh accusations about what she terms, in the space of a few lines, his “colpa,” “peccato,” and “errore” (*Purg.* 31.22-30). He then confesses his sin, which he committed immediately after the death of his accuser (which we know to have been in 1290):⁴

³ *Purg.* 30.73-31.105 (from Beatrice’s first words to the pilgrim’s crossing of Lethe, during which there is clearly *contritio cordis* and *confessio oris*, while the precise act or acts that might constitute *satisfactio operis* cannot easily be identified).

⁴ See *Vita Nuova* 29.

Piangendo dissi: ‘Le presenti cose
col falso lor piacer volser miei passi,
tosto che ‘l vostro viso si nascose.’ (Purg. 31.34-36)

Before further exploring the relevance of sleep to the admission of ignorance by Dante-narrator, at *Inf.* 1.10-12, regarding what Dante-author contrives to have made perfectly clear to Dante-protagonist in Eden, it is worth noting what that admission tells us about these many Dantes.

It suggests, for instance, that, if the narrator is omniscient, knowing all that will happen in his narrative and understanding its meaning from the perspective of eternity, his comprehension having been perfected in the final vision of God (while the protagonist, on the other hand, is his past ignorant self, in effect a different self altogether), then this “omniscient” narrator begins his narrative, fresh from that vision, with an outright lie at *Inf.* 1.10-12, since, having returned from the experience, he does know how he strayed, because Beatrice told him, and he will eventually quote her verbatim. Further, if we think of Dante the narrator as identical with Dante-*Poeta*, meaning by the latter the masterly author, blurring these two entities into one omniscient narrator-author and opposing them/him to the naive protagonist—as is usually the case when the “poet-protagonist” distinction is elevated to the status of a fundamental exegetical principle, above all when the “diachronicity” between the poet’s fully-informed retrospective view “now” as opposed to the protagonist’s limited understanding “then” is treated as fundamental to the narrative strategy of a work that is seen as fundamentally an “Augustinian” conversion narrative—then we must admit that Dante nods, *dormitat Dantes*.⁵ For he violates that very diachronicity, deleting the presumed vast gap between the “now” of the New Man and the “then” of the Old Man, since he does not *withhold* Beatrice’s copious information about exactly how he strayed “then,” as if to have the reader share, for the while, that limited point of view, but actually denies possessing it, telling us that he cannot *now* retell how he strayed just because he was *then*

⁵ Cf. Horace’s famous indignation at the discovery that “Homer nods,” “dormitat Homerus” (*Ars Poetica* 359), a play on “dormitare,” “to drowse,” “to nod,” in its figurative sense of “to be careless.” The works of Horace are cited from Horace, *Le Opere*, ed. and trans. Mario Ramous (Milan: Garzanti, 1988).

“pïen di sonno,” the two viewpoints that many scholars so rigorously try to separate coalescing perfectly.⁶

The far more nuanced reality of the *Commedia*'s diachronicity of perspectives is in fact easily grasped if we pay heed to Patrick Boyde's statement that “the two Dantes who take an active part in the poem (neither of whom is to be identified with the author) are simply the same person represented during and after a week-long adventure which radically changed his personality”⁷—provided we do not so exaggerate the change as to split that personality in two. I would simplify Boyde's notion still further: there are but two Dantes, the protagonist-narrator, one fictitious entity who recounts a series of events as if they had really happened, and the author, the inventor of the persona who claims to have visited the next world and who attempts to record that experience. This persona still feels those events as vividly and urgently present to him, and recounts them, not with omniscience, but as best he can, his point of view “now” sometimes being one with his point of view “then,” in a labile and subtle dialectic that his creator uses as it suits his

⁶ The frequent modern insistence on a rigid “poet-protagonist” binary opposition seems to be the result of a tendency to over-correct with respect to the Romantic readings of the *Commedia* by critics such as Francesco De Sanctis, a tendency which has been exacerbated by the enormous influence of the many studies in which John Freccero argues that the poem is first and foremost a conversion narrative modelled on Augustine's *Confessions*, imitating that work's diachronicity of perspectives. The most important of these studies are collected in John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1986), in which the perspective of the bumbling “pilgrim,” “protagonist,” or fictional “persona” is repeatedly placed in antithesis to that of the all-knowing “narrator,” “writer,” “author” or “poet” (e.g., pp. 25, 109, 120, 138, 218-19, 265-66). Such terms, as used in this study, should not be construed as implying that there is a large and consistent cognitive-moral gap between the limited perspective of the protagonist and the “omniscient” view of the narrator. The term “poet” will be used only to signify the author, even though, however many “Dantes” there are, they are all poets.

⁷ Patrick Boyde, *Perception and Passion in Dante's "Comedy"* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1993), 111. This means that the author and the narrator are in fact quite distinct, as in any fictional first-person narrative, and as the example of *Inf.* 1.10-12 shows, in contradiction to Freccero's claim that “from the outset, the poet's voice expresses the detached point of view toward which the pilgrim strives” (“The Prologue Scene,” in Freccero, *Poetics of Conversion*, 25). Mark Musa nonetheless applies Freccero's notion to this very *terzina* in the opening of his commentary on the poem, warning that “the reader must be careful from the beginning to distinguish between the two uses of the first person singular in the *Divine Comedy*: one designating Dante the pilgrim, the other Dante the Poet. The first is a character in a story invented by the second. The events are represented as having taken place in the past; the writing of the poem and the memories of these events are represented as taking place in the poet's present. We find references to both past and present, and to both pilgrim and poet in line 10: ‘How *I* entered there *I* cannot truly say’” (Dante Alighieri, *Dante's "Inferno": The Indiana Critical Edition*, trans. and ed. Mark Musa [Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1995], 23). Musa's intention here is not to remind readers of an obvious feature of any fiction written in the first person, but to alert them to the presupposed disjunction between the perspective of the “I” who says “I entered” and the “I” who says “I cannot truly say.” Musa fails to see that these two “Dantes” have but one point of view in this very example. It suffices that “io” occurs twice in the verse, once with a verb in the past tense and once with a verb in the present, for Freccero's paradigm to be brought to bear and for the contradiction of that paradigm to go unnoticed.

purpose of controlling the reader's response. In this case, as throughout the prologue scene, this strategy involves withholding information, highlighting the fictional persona's still present sense of the danger he was then in and could fall into again, and engaging the reader's participation in that anxiety. It not Dante the author who "nods," but the fictional persona, who twice drowns in "the somnolence of sin."

He drowns once, in this somnolence (rather than in the *sleep* of sin most critics take it to be) while "pien di sonno" in 1290. He does so again during the third key event in the story, the *rovinare in basso loco* of 1300 (cf. "Mentre ch'i' rovinava in basso loco," *Inf.* 1.61). This is recalled by Saint Bernard as a *chinar*, a *rovinar le ciglia* (cf. "quando chinavi, a rovinar, le ciglia." *Par.* 32.138), which in turn recalls Saint Augustine's distinction between those who sleep in sin (mortal sin), and those who drowse:

There are those, however, who do not sleep, but drowse: they withdraw themselves from the love of temporal things to some degree, but then revert back to them. As if drowsing, they bow their heads again and again. Awake, shake off sleep, for by drowsing you will fall! [quasi dormitantes, caput crebro inclinant. Evigila, excute somnum; dormitando casurus es].⁸

In a refinement to the accepted interpretation of "pien di sonno" that is no more pedantic than this, I will show that Bernard's re-evocation of the *rovinare in basso loco* of the prologue scene as a somnolence of sin supports my suggestion that the protagonist was guilty of just such a sinful nodding when he was "full of sleep."

For most modern scholars, this image is a thinly-disguised metaphor or moral allegory in which the vague and unmotivated literal sense serves as little more than a pretext for the metaphorical or allegorical meaning. The allegory is thought to rest on the commonplace patristic figure of *somnus culpa*e, the "sleep of sin." Among the few early commentators who adopted this view, only Boccaccio makes it clear that the sleep of sin signifies mortal sin.⁹ The classic biblical texts are "Rise thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead: and Christ shall enlighten thee" ("surge qui dormis et exsurge a mortuis et

⁸ "Sunt autem quidam qui non dormiunt, sed dormitant. Aliquantum retrahunt se ab amore temporalium, et rursus revolvuntur in eum; quasi dormitantes, caput crebro inclinant. Evigila, excute somnum; dormitando casurus es" (*Enarratio in Psalmum* 131.8, *PL* 37.1719).

⁹ Boccaccio, *Inf.* 1.3, 10-12 (*allegorica*).

inluminabit tibi Christus,” Eph. 5.14), along with “And that, knowing the season, that it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep. For now our salvation is nearer than we first believed” (“et hoc scientes tempus quia hora est iam nos de somno surgere nunc enim propior est nostra salus quam cum credidimus,” Rom. 13.11).¹⁰ The most frequently cited patristic source is Augustine’s definition of *somnus animae*: “the sleep of the soul is her forgetting her God. Any soul that has forgotten her God is asleep.”¹¹ The majority view is that, on the basis of the figure of *somnus culpa*e, Dante’s “sleep” signifies the state of sin into which he fell after the death of his beloved and from which he came to his senses or “awoke” in 1300.¹²

The imagery and meanings associated with the sleep of the soul have not been thought to merit further investigation, nor has any significant attention been given to the fact that, if we make an effort to visualise the literal sense of the protagonist’s having been “pien di sonno” at the point at which he turned from the true path into the dark wood in 1290, then we must imagine, not a sleep, but a somnolence like the one we are encouraged to see in the pilgrim’s nearly-fatal return to that miserable place by virtue of Bernard’s re-evocation of his charge’s *rovinare in basso loco* as a *chinar, a rovinar, le ciglia*. We must picture him, that is, not asleep and therefore sleepwalking in 1290, but

¹⁰ Cf. the more familiar Authorized Version: “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”

¹¹ “Somnus autem animae est oblivisci Deum suum. Quaecumque anima oblita fuerit Deum suum, dormit” (*Enarratio in Psalmum 62.4, PL 36.750*).

¹² For a review of the history of the critical response to this locus, and an exemplification of the most common modern position, which has been dominant since the nineteenth century, see Mazzoni, *Saggio di un nuovo commento*, 55-58. Among the early commentators, only Graziolo, Boccaccio and Villani see the “sonno” in question as the sleep of sin, most of the others interpreting it as youthful ignorance and dedication to sensual pleasures. As we have seen, Guido da Pisa, and, in modern times, Ignazio Baldelli, insist that it is the literal sleep of the dream which the poem describes. Mazzoni manifests the tendency of modern scholars to think in terms of an either/or opposition with respect to this locus (as for much of the prologue scene), as if the tercet must be either, on the one hand, purely allegorical or metaphorical, or, on the other, merely literal. Preference is usually given to the first alternative, perhaps due to the very same entanglement of the problem with the *fictio/visio* dispute as that which befell “t’assonna,” the idea of a literal sleep in *Inf.* 1.10-12 being identified with Guido da Pisa’s proposal, since revived by Baldelli. In other words, the literal sense is moralised away in order to ward off the spectre of a dream-vision. An awkward compromise position is available, according to which the literal sleep of the supposed dream-vision in which Dante wakes from sin allegorically signifies the state of sin from which he wakes (see Antonio Pagliaro, *Ulisse: ricerche semantiche sulla “Divina Commedia,”* vol. 1 [Messina: G. D’Anna, 1967], 2-8, 67, and Tibor Wlassics, “L’onorismo dell’ ‘incipit.’ Appunti su “Inferno” I, 1-63,” *Lecture classensi* 18 [1989]: 34). The fact that the prologue scene has a disorienting nightmare-like quality, in which things and events appear to exist only as signs that transform into other signs (the “selva oscura” becoming “l’acqua perigliosa,” for example), rather than as the concrete and particularised literal sense of allegory as Dante uses it in the rest of the poem, does not mean that there is no literal sense that in some way corresponds to and can help explain the allegorical meaning.

drowsy, somnolent, stumbling along a road “com’ om che sonnolento vana” (*Purg.* 18.87), nodding, like one who is about to fall asleep, with a tilt of the head sufficiently like a gesture of respect for Dante to write that his reverence for Beatrice “mi richinava come l’uom ch’assonna” (*Par.* 7.15). This seemingly trivial and pedantic distinction might well have been considered by scholars with regard to both events if they had been aware that Augustine and others made the same distinctions in their discussions of *somnus culpa*.

The accepted interpretation of “pian di sonno” gives Dante’s “sleep,” which occurred at the precise “punto” where and when he strayed from the right road into the dark wood, the same meaning as that which is usually attributed to the dark wood into which he strayed and remained for ten years, i.e., the state or the life of sin. In modern times, the “selva oscura” as an image of this condition has rather curiously come to be identified with, and therefore glossed with, the “selva erronea di questa vita” of the *Convivio* (4.24.12) and the “immensa silva plena insidiarum et pericolorum” of Augustine’s *Confessions* (10.35.56), even though the true path passes *through* the “selva erronea di questa vita” of Dante’s treatise, not around it, as do all paths, true and false, those taken by saints and sinners alike, for both the “selva erronea” of the *Convivio* and the “immensa silva” of the *Confessions* signify this mortal life as such since the Fall. That is, they signify, not a state into which one can stray by diverging from the true path during the “cammin di nostra vita,” but “nostra vita” itself, this life as a journey back to God that we begin at birth, seen as a dangerous passage through a world full of the temptations of the pleasures to be had in temporal goods, the lures which can so easily draw us into mortal sin and certain damnation (that is, into the “selva oscura” of the *Commedia*), a dangerous passage in which even the Bishop of Hippo, at least ten years after his conversion, struggles to resist the allure of the snares that surround him.¹³

¹³ See *Convivio* 4.12.14-19, 4.23-24, 4.28, and *Confessionum* 10.30.41-10.43.68. According to the literal sense, Dante strays from the true path and enters the dark wood in 1290. As this chapter explains, the poem itself, through the mouth of Beatrice, gives us the moral sense, which is that, immediately after his beloved’s death, Dante abandoned the pursuit of the supreme Good and devoted himself to seeking false worldly goods. Theologically, this is nothing other than to fall into the spiritual death of mortal sin and to therefore merit the eternal death of damnation. Some scholars have suggested that the “selva oscura” represents the moral and political condition of Florence, Italy or the whole of humanity in Dante’s time, a suggestion which sits rather oddly with the chronology of the literal sense. The majority view is that the wood represents the sinful life (the usual formulae are “the state of sin,” “the state of vice,” “the life of sin,” or “the life of vice”). Vellutello identified the “selva oscura” with the “selva erronea” of the *Convivio*

Be that as it may, Boccaccio seems to have sensed that there is a distinction to be made between, on the one hand, the “sleep” which he thought to be the slumber of mortal sin (Dante’s wandering from the true path and into the dark wood while “*pien di sonno*” in 1290) and, on the other, the dark wood itself, and that the former represents the transition to the latter. He therefore glossed the “*selva oscura*” by writing that “*è adunque questa selva, per quello che io posso comprendere, lo ’nferno, il quale è casa e prigione del diavolo, nella quale ciascun peccatore cade ed entra, sì tosto come cade in peccato mortale.*”¹⁴

My proposal, regarding “*pien di sonno*,” is that it signifies the transitional “*somnolence*” by which one falls into the “*sleep*” of mortal sin, but that this condition as a state or way of life is represented, not by sleep, but by a dark wood. This refinement of the accepted gloss on *Inf.* 1.10-12 is made in the light of the refinements within the medieval discourse around the principal forms of figurative and figural sleep, particularly those which play a part in Bernard’s retrospective glance at Dante’s *rovinare* on the brink of a fatal return to the dark wood in 1300. Taking account of the fact that, although the “*sleep of sin*” was a medieval commonplace, just such a sinful *somnolence* as that which Bernard detects in the pilgrim’s near-return to the dark wood was also a well-recognised spiritual malady, I will show that *Inferno* 1 describes, not one episode of the sleep of sin, but two instances of the drowsiness of sin, one involving a literal *somnolence* (“*pien di sonno*”), the other a literal *rovinare in basso loco* retrospectively seen as a drowsiness, a *chinar, a rovinar, le ciglia*, while the state that the *sleep* of sin signified, i.e., mortal sin, or rather, the life lived in this fatal “*sleep*” and “*death*” of the soul, is represented, not by a literal sleep, but by a literal wandering in a “*selva oscura*” (which is why Dante says, not “*mi svegliai*,” but “*mi ritrovai per una selva oscura*”).

(Vellutello, *Inf.* 1.2). Scartazzini later wrote the following: “Nel Conv. IV, 24, Dante chiama la vita umana una *selva erronea*. Da questa selva oscura egli venne liberato mediante la intervento di Virgilio. . . . La selva oscura è dunque il simbolo della vita viziosa, alla quale il poeta si era dato, o nella quale egli era incorso dopo la morte della sua Beatrice” (Scartazzini, *Inf.* 1.2). This strange concept, expressed in varying terms and further exemplified with Augustine’s “*immensa silva*,” then became the most common gloss on the dark wood. For reviews of the debate (and re-affirmations of Scartazzini’s interpretation), see Mazzoni, *Saggio di un nuovo commento*, 26-31, 85, Eugenio Ragni, “*selva*,” *ED*, vol. 5, 137-42, and Anthony K. Cassell, “*Inferno*” 1, *Lectura Dantis Americana* (Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania P., 1989), 14-18.

¹⁴ Boccaccio, *Inf.* 1.4-7 (*allegorica*).

However, my principal intent in this chapter, which is hopefully no more somniferous than it needs to be, is to highlight both the various kinds of slumber that will be of importance in what follows, and the retrospective linkage, by means of the fictional Bernard's use of sleep-imagery, of the *Commedia's* two mystic *ultima* and their antithesis, following Saint Bernard's pointer back to the protagonist's near-damnation in the prologue scene, a beginning that threatens to be an anti-teleological end, since it is by mortal sin, the "selva oscura" that the protagonist "drowns" towards during his *rovinar in basso loco*, that human beings are eternally deprived of their ultimate goal.¹⁵ Bernard, in this way, even as he looks ahead to Dante's foretaste of the full realisation of time's value, recalls the moment the pilgrim, but for the intervention of grace, would have let that value go utterly to waste.

ii Crisis and salvation in the prologue scene (a)

When Dante becomes aware of his perilous situation in the dark wood, then finds his way out and begins the ascent of the mountain, it is a most propitious time in both the liturgical and cosmic cycles, for it is Easter, in the Spring of 1300, the Jubilee Year and therefore itself a privileged time in the already propitious age of grace. He is nonetheless so terrified by a ravenous she-wolf, the third of three beasts which block his path, that he gives up all hope of reaching the luminous summit and is driven back down towards the "selva oscura," in a *rovinare in basso loco* during which a ghostly figure suddenly "offers itself" to him, an offer to which Dante responds with the words of the Psalmist's penitential "Miserere mei Deus" (Ps. 50.3) and an echo of the frightened reaction of the Apostles at the appearance of the newly risen Christ, whom they at first took to be an illusion or a ghost, a "fantasma" (Matt. 14.26) or "spiritus" (Luke 24.37), until he revealed himself as their Lord in "carnem et ossa" (Luke 24.39-40):¹⁶

questa mi porse tanto di gravezza
 con la paura ch'uscìa di sua vista,
 ch'io perdei la speranza de l'altezza.
 E qual è quei che volontieri acquista,

¹⁵ Aquinas *SG* 3.144.

¹⁶ This allusion is noted by Gelli in his commentary (see Gelli, *Inf.* 1.66).

e giugne 'l tempo che perder lo face,
 che 'n tutti suoi pensier piange e s'attrista;
 tal mi fece la bestia senza pace,
 che, venendomi 'ncontro, a poco a poco
 mi ripigneva là dove 'l sol tace.
 Mentre ch'i' rovinava in basso loco,
 dinanzi a li occhi mi si fu offerto
 chi per lungo silenzio parea fioco.
 Quando vidi costui nel gran deserto,
 'Miserere di me,' gridai a lui,
 'qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!' (Inf. 1.52-66)

Unlike the resurrected Christ, this really is a ghost, that of the Roman poet Virgil, resurrected from the dead, as it were, in order to act as Dante's saviour and guide, in what looks much like an offer of grace and a heartfelt acceptance of that offer in the trust that God in his mercy will in turn respond with the sanctifying grace that brings about the forgiveness of mortal sin and the remission of the debt which is due to mortal sin, the debt of eternal damnation.

This first effect of the infusion of sanctifying grace is the removal of the *impedimentum peccati*, mortal sin as the offence against God that excludes the sinner from eternal life and true happiness in Paradise. Mortal sin is such an impediment because it consists in the soul's turning, not just towards temporal goods, but away from God as the Last End, away from the supreme Good that is the one true Good, since it alone can give the happiness all seek. This perverse "conversion" therefore merits, by the most fundamental *contrapasso*, the eternal loss of that Last End, and thus of eternal happiness and eternal life. By virtue of the removal of this impediment, i.e., by virtue of the forgiveness of sin and the remission of the debt of eternal punishment by the power of grace, the Christian sinner rises from sin after a fall from the grace that was first given with Baptism, converting from the state of sin back to the state of grace, and is therefore reconciled with God, and loved by him. If Dante is favoured with this first effect of grace, one might expect that he will then have need of the second, which is to assist the former sinner in the performance of voluntary acts that are meritorious of the future

reward, for “acquiring merit” in this sense must be an act of the free will, yet is impossible without the aid of grace.¹⁷

Regardless of Dante’s penitential “*Miserere di me*” and Virgil’s Christ-like “resurrection,” all this would be the far-fetched and gratuitous theologising of the poem that it no doubt appears to be, were it not for the fact that the text itself elsewhere confirms that Dante is damned just before Virgil appears, but saved when he first enters Hell, having received sanctifying grace and been converted from sin in the prologue scene, and that he has not only received grace as a remedy for sin, but also as a condition of meritorious acts—just as A. C. Mastrobuono argues, with a strident tone and a rigid adherence to the letter of Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* that should not be allowed to distract from the essential cogency of his thesis.¹⁸ This thesis is confirmed by several of Dante’s encounters in Purgatory, encounters in which the characteristic by virtue of which the pilgrim does not belong (he is present in body and soul and is therefore still alive) arouses an astonishment that highlights the more fundamental sense in which he does, namely, that he is saved, and will therefore return to Purgatory after death in order to pay the debt of temporal punishment due to the sins which have been forgiven.¹⁹ This

¹⁷ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* 5.2-3, 6.10, 7.2, Aquinas *ST* 1a2ae.86-88, 113-114, 3a.86, *SG* 2.139-63, 4.70-72. On the *impedimentum peccati* in particular, see *ST* 1a2ae.113.3-8, 114.2, 7. On the “acquisition of merit,” see especially *Breviloquium* 5.2.

¹⁸ A. C. Mastrobuono, *Dante’s Journey of Sanctification* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1990). The scholar’s main target is Charles S. Singleton’s extremely influential interpretation of the *Commedia* as an allegory about Christian conversion in which the protagonist’s journey to the Earthly Paradise prepares for and culminates in the reception of grace and conversion (see especially Singleton’s *Journey to Beatrice*). Mastrobuono shows convincingly that Singleton distorts both the *Summa theologiae* and the *Commedia*, and that the reception of grace is the necessary precondition, not the consequence, of the journey through Hell and Purgatory. His position on this important matter has recently been supported by John A. Scott in *Understanding Dante* (Notre Dame, Indiana: U. of Notre Dame P., 2004), 187-90.

¹⁹ The presence of this living compound of body and spirit, this whole person, is for the astonished souls a miracle, and thus a sign, *the* sign, that Dante is there by the grace of God (*Purg.* 3.88-99, 8.58-66, 20.40-42). This same marvel is for Guido del Duca a sign that “Dio in te vuol che traluca / tanto sua grazia” (*Purg.* 14.79-81, cf. 1-15). Both Forese Donati and Dante himself know that they will meet again after the pilgrim’s death (*Purg.* 24.74-81). The reformed sinner tells Sapia that he will spend but a short time on the terrace of envy after death, since his “offesa” in that regard was small, but that he dreads the much longer period he knows he will spend among the proud; and he tells her that he is alive, to which she answers that this is such a “cosa nuova” that “gran segno è che Dio t’ami” (*Purg.* 13.130-47). This last phrase, “che Dio t’ami,” is of itself sufficient proof that Dante is in grace with God, who has forgiven the “offesa” of his sins and freed him of the debt of eternal damnation, although he must still make satisfaction after death in order to be freed of the debt of temporal punishment. That the second effect of grace is also operative in the protagonist is evident, as Mastrobuono observes (*Dante’s Journey*, 44), from the juxtaposition of *Par.* 25.67-69 and *Purg.* 8.58-60. In the first passage, the virtue of hope is given the traditional definition, word for word: it is the certain expectation of future glory, and it is produced by grace and “precedente merito” (the merit acquired by good works performed with the aid of grace, cf. *ST* 2a2ae.17-18). In the second

means that there are *two* reasons why the pilgrim does not belong in Hell, the two causes of Charon's vexation at Dante's presence among the vast crowd of souls that are to be ferried across the Acheron (*Inf.* 3.82-93, cf. 127-29). According to the infernal boatman, the protagonist does not belong among the future inhabitants of Hell, firstly, because these bodiless souls are dead, but Dante is alive: they are "cotesti che son morti," while the interloper is an "anima viva," a living soul in its mortal flesh. Secondly, these wretches are damned, but the protagonist is saved: the dead souls are "anime prave" who died in their wickedness and are therefore doomed to the eternal darkness, with no hope of ever seeing heaven, while Dante is an "anima buona," destined to a future arrival on a different shore, to be reached via another port by means of a lighter boat than Charon's (i.e., after death he will travel on the vessel that carries the few who deserve salvation from the mouth of the Tiber to the shore of Purgatory, where he will make satisfaction for his now forgiven sins, cf. *Purg.* 2. 13-51, 103-105). There can thus be no doubt that, when Dante first enters the underworld, he has been freed by grace from the impediment of mortal sin, which is to say that he has been converted by grace in the prologue scene, that he has the aid of grace in then going on actually to earn the merit of the eternal reward, and that, unless he falls again into mortal sin and dies unrepentant, he will return to Purgatory in order to make full satisfaction for the temporal debt incurred as a result of the offence.

It was during the *rovinare in basso loco*, a falling into mortal sin and despair, that grace came to save him from certain destruction. As Augustine says in his reading of David's "Miserere mei" (which the saint sees as an example, for those who might despair of God's mercy, of the power of repentance after a fall), "sin with despair is certain death."²⁰ Even though Dante does not act out the external forms of the sacrament of Penance until he reaches the summit of Purgatory, the fact remains that his sins are forgiven by the power of grace before he enters the pit of Hell—probably, I would suggest, the moment he cries "*Miserere di me!*" A few more fragments of theology will

tercet, Dante tells Nino Visconti that "sono in prima vita, / ancor che l'altra, si andando, acquisti." But, as John A. Scott notes (*Understanding Dante*, 190), the clearest and most direct reference to the grace which has already been granted to the pilgrim comes just before his arrival in Eden: "Quinci sù vo per non esser più cieco; / donna è di sopra che m'acquista grazia, / per che 'l mortal per vostro mondo reco" (*Purg.* 26.58-60).

²⁰ "Peccatum cum desperatione, certa mors" (*Enarratio in Psalmum 50.5, PL 36.588*).

help to make this clear, even if no attempt can be made here to account for the necessity of the formal ritual of penance that takes place in the Earthly Paradise.

The difference between that ritual and Dante's salvation at the foot of the mountain may reflect the difference between *poenitentia* the sacrament of penance and *poenitentia* the virtue of repentance, since mortal sin can be forgiven without the sacrament, but not without the virtue.²¹ In any case, in both the sacrament and the virtue, the forgiveness of sins is the effect of contrition, *contritio* or *compunctio cordis*, which not only suffices for the remission of sins but can even be so strong as to take away the whole debt of punishment.²² The sacrament was widely known to theologians as the "secunda tabula post naufragium," the "life-saving (or 'second') plank after a shipwreck." According to Alan of Lille, this *similitudo* rests on the fact that, just as baptism is the remedy to the first "shipwreck," original sin, so penance rescues us from the second, which is actual sin.²³ Aquinas stresses the fact that the "secunda tabula post naufragium" is primarily and properly a remedy for mortal sin, instituted to do away with "the old life subject to death," "vetus et mortalis vita," the life lived in mortal sin and thus deserving damnation.²⁴ He explains the shipwreck simile in this way:

The first remedy for those crossing a sea is that they be safe in a ship that is intact, the second that, after a shipwreck, they cling to a plank. Similarly, the first remedy in the sea of this life is that a man preserves his spiritual integrity, but, should he lose that integrity through sin, the second remedy is that he regain it through penance.²⁵

Bonaventure says that penance is defined in this way because it is "a plank to which any man drowning in mortal sin may cling as long as he lives, whenever and as often as he

²¹ *ST* 3a.86.1, 2, 6. I cannot account for the necessity of this ritual despite the fact that Dante's sins are forgiven with the reception of grace in the prologue scene. Mastrobuono's thesis is that the ritual in Eden is the final phase of Dante's purification through the mortification of his intellect and appetites (*Dante's Journey of Sanctification*, 108-117).

²² *ST* Suppl. 5.1-2. See also Alan of Lille, *Contra haereticos* 1.55 and *Summa de arte praedicandi* 30.

²³ Alan of Lille, *Theologicae regulae* 112, *Distinctiones dictionum theologialium*, "Tabula."

²⁴ *ST* 3a.84.2, resp., ad 2-3.

²⁵ "Nam primum remedium mare transeuntibus est ut conserventur in navi integra: secundum autem remedium est, post navim fractam, ut aliquis tabulae adhaereat. Ita etiam primum remedium in mari huius vitae est quod homo integritatem servet: secundum autem remedium est, si per peccatum integritatem perdidit, quod per poenitentiam redeat" (*ST* 3a.84.6, resp.).

chooses to implore the divine mercy.”²⁶ Peter Cantor, having stated that contrition, confession and satisfaction are insufficient without the infusion of grace, says that four phrases in David’s penitential psalm stand for these four factors, “‘Have mercy on me, O God,’ for the infusion of grace” (“‘Miserere mei, Deus,’ per gratiae infusionem”).²⁷

Now, Dante describes the dark wood as “quella valle / che m’avea di paura il cor compunto” (*Inf.* 1.14-15), while the famous *similitudo* of the shipwrecked swimmer (vv. 22-27) manifestly suggests an escape of the kind Bonaventure and Aquinas have in mind, which is to say that it strongly suggests that the “selva oscura” signifies the life lived in mortal sin, the life of the “old man,” and that Dante escapes this “shipwreck” by penitential contrition. We are also told that, during his *rovinare in basso loco*, Dante was reduced to the state of one who “‘in tutti suoi pensier piange e s’attrista,” at which point Virgil appeared and was greeted with “‘Miserere di me!” (vv. 55-66), after which the protagonist undertakes his otherworld journey with his sins forgiven. It seems very likely, therefore, that we are dealing with not just one successful escape from the “selva” of mortal sin, but with two, and that the infusion of grace that brings about the remission of sin and the debt of eternal punishment in the second (the effect of grace as “operating grace,” if we are to be theologically exact) is simultaneous with “‘Miserere di me!”²⁸

Virgil then undertakes to lead his charge to safety and to his goal by means of an “altro viaggio,” in a journey which is necessitated by the presence of the famished she-wolf that still blocks the “corto andar” (*Inf.* 2.120) and will continue to do so until the advent of her nemesis, the greyhound or *Veltro* that will one day drive the “bestia senza pace” from every city in Italy; Virgil then sets off, and Dante follows behind (*Inf.* 1.88-136). They do not go far, however, before the guide finds it necessary to strengthen the pilgrim’s inadequate resolve by explaining that he was sent by Beatrice, his arrival being the last step in a divine intervention initiated by a heavenly *donna gentil* (almost certainly

²⁶ *Breviloquium* 6.10, in *The Works of Bonaventure II: The Breviloquium*, trans. José de Vinck (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild P., 1963), 257.

²⁷ *Verbum abbreviatum* 141 (PL 205.339).

²⁸ Mastrobuono proposes that *Inf.* 2.127-39 marks the fact that Dante has received sanctifying grace (*Dante’s Journey*, 33-34). Of the glosses on the simile of the shipwrecked swimmer that are to be found on the database of the *Dartmouth Dante Project*, only the most recent alludes to its obvious theological origin, the commentator effectively dismissing this as irrelevant because it contradicts his assumptions that Dante’s attempts to escape the dark wood and ascend the mountain are an act of pride that is doomed to fail, and that grace does not come until the advent of Beatrice in Eden (Fosca, *Inf.* 1.22-27).

the Virgin Mary). Virgil does this by reporting his conversation with Beatrice in Limbo (*Inf.* 2.52-114). The entire conversation, and the whole sequence of events that Beatrice describes within it, as well as Virgil's subsequent departure from Limbo and appearance before Dante, take place at the low point of the protagonist's *rovinare in basso loco*, a critical point which, both topographically and spiritually, is curiously precise and yet imprecise, a sort of extended instant in which the protagonist is damned even though the decree of divine justice that damns him has been broken, as if grace travels at the finite speed of light and has been granted by God, in response to Mary, but has not yet reached its target. It is a moment in which things hang in the balance and yet can only go one way, like the sun and moon at opposite points on the horizon (cf. *Par.* 29.1-9). For it seems eminently reasonable to read the *rovinare in basso loco* of *Inferno* 1, in the light of *Inferno* 2, as a gradual decline in which the protagonist, at a certain point, crosses over into mortal sin, the *impedimentum peccati* that damns him, upon which the intercession of Mary obtains the act of mercy, the divine grace, that will remove that impediment, and this grace is transmitted through her to Lucia, and thence to Beatrice and on to Virgil, and through Virgil to Dante. Beatrice first asks Virgil to go to the aid of her beloved, who "nella diserta spiaggia è impedito / sì nel cammin, che volt' è per paura," adding that, from what she had heard in heaven, it may already be too late (vv. 62-66); she then explains that "Donna è gentil nel ciel che si compiange / di questo impedimento ov'io ti mando, / sì che duro giudicio là sù frange" (vv. 94-96), and that this lady then went to Lucia and entrusted her with the task of saving Dante, but that Lucia turned to her (Beatrice) saying "Non odi tu la pieta del suo pianto, / non vedi tu la morte che 'l combatte / su la fiumana ove 'l mar non ha vanto?" (vv. 106-108). We later learn that the point at which Beatrice acts, in response to Lucia, is the point at which the pilgrim "tanto giù cadde" that there was nothing to be done but to show him the damnation to which he was heading (*Purg.* 30.133-38). This is all one with the critical moment at which Virgil actually appears (the whole transmission of divine grace being virtually instantaneous), i.e., the lowest ebb of Dante's *rovinare in basso loco*.

This "falling" bears no obvious imprint of sleep in *Inferno* 1; but it is later recalled by Saint Bernard, in one verse, as a *chinar*, a *rovinar*, *le ciglia*, an action that the

subsequent verse, “Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna,” strongly encourages us to conceive as a nearly fatal “nodding,” a drowsiness heading for a fall:

e contro al maggior padre di famiglia
 siede Lucia, che mosse la tua donna
 quando chinavi, a rovinar, le ciglia.
 Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna,
 qui farem punto, . . . (Par. 32.136-140)

In his commentary, Singleton says of verse 138 that “the words give to Dante’s falling back into the darkness (as told in *Inf.* I, 55-63) the connotation of falling asleep, that is, falling back into the sleep of sin.”²⁹ To understand that this “falling asleep” is a “somnolence of sin” we need to consider in some detail the figure of *somnus culpa*e. Since there was also a *somnus contemplationis* or *somnus gratiae* which the next chapter will argue is the tropological sense of Dante’s sleep in Eden, as well a *somnus gloriae* which the subsequent chapter will show to be the basis of the allusion to sleep in *Par.* 32.139, it will be well to examine the figure of the sleep of sin in the context of the whole medieval “typology of sleep.”

iii The typology of sleep

Throughout the Middle Ages, it was thought that the alternation between sleep and waking, coordinated to the alternation of night and day, is characteristic of all “animals,” i.e., all sentient creatures (including human beings) in which a soul with sensitive powers “animates” a mortal body. It was also thought that, although it is so like death, sleep is the bodily rest or *quies* which is necessary for good health. Its defining feature was believed to be the inactivity of the external senses, which are “impeded” or “bound,” although the deepest sleep also shuts down the *fantasia* or *imaginatio*, and it was an axiom that slumber impedes the judgement of reason, as a consequence of which our actions in dreams cannot be judged as morally good or evil, and the mere likenesses of absent things seen in the imagination in dreams are taken for realities (an error that also occurs when we see images in a waking vision while the senses are inoperative due to

²⁹ Singleton, *Par.* 32.138.

“ecstasy,” in extreme cases of which even the imagination can cease to function).³⁰ Repose, alienation from external reality and even from the imaginary likeness of external things, the association between sleep and the darkness of night, the similarity to death, and the failure of reason, are the implicit or explicit keynotes in the various analogies which medieval theologians found between sleep and states as diverse as the misery of sin and the joy of beatitude. Their source was of course the Bible, which was believed to mention several kinds of slumber other than the natural *quies* of the body. Alan of Lille, Innocent III, Peter Cantor and Thomas Aquinas each compiled full typologies of sleep. Innocent’s is quite exhaustive and very systematic, which may explain why Filippo Villani chose to quote it almost verbatim, if without acknowledgement, in his idiosyncratic interpretation of “*pien di sonno*” as a case of *somnus culpae*.³¹

This medieval commonplace owes a great deal to Augustine’s exegesis and exploitation of certain key Pauline verses, classic biblical loci on conversion, time, and the sleep/death of sin, above all Ephesians 5.14, “*Rise thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead: and Christ shall enlighten thee*” (“*surge qui dormis et exsurge a mortuis et inluminabit tibi Christus*”). This verse is central to the passage in the *Confessions* in which Augustine uses imagery of sleep and drowsiness to describe his deferral of conversion and his continued service of the law of sin, his inability to surrender himself to *caritas*, the love of God, as he had made up his mind to do, because of the sweet “sleep” induced by surrendering to his will’s *cupiditas*, the inordinate desire for the pleasurable goods of this world (most powerfully, in Augustine’s case, the pleasures of the flesh).³² The same Pauline text plays a crucial role in Augustine’s homily on Psalm

³⁰ The characteristics of sleep as outlined here were commonplaces well before Aristotelian natural science was applied to them; nonetheless, for convenient references, see Albert the Great, *De somno*, 1.1-2, and Aquinas, *ST* 1a.12.11, 84.8, 94.4, 1a2ae.77.2, and 2a2ae.154.5. Dante uses the human need for sleep as a distinctive characteristic of mortal life at *Inf.* 2.1-6 (which also serves to stress the fact that the protagonist was wide awake as he began his journey), *Purg.* 30.103-105, and *Par.* 3.100-01. His familiarity with the scholarly analysis of sleep is very evident in the accounts of the pilgrim’s three dreams (*Purg.* 9.10-63, 19.1-33, 27.91-114) and two ecstatic visions (*Purg.* 15.85-114, 17.13-45).

³¹ For Villani, the prologue scene represents human history from the Fall, and *Inf.* 1.10-12 is Adam’s judgement on the first sin as a *somnus culpae* in which his reason slept and he became enslaved to sensuality. He quotes Innocent III’s typology of sleep in full, but without making any significant use of it in his interpretation (Villani, *Inf.* 1.10-12). The principal “sleeps” that are discussed in this chapter are also mentioned in the catalogue given by Rabanus Maurus (*Allegoriae in universam Sacram Scripturam*, PL 112.913).

³² “The burden of the world weighed me down sweetly, in the way that sleep usually does, and the thoughts with which I meditated on you were like the struggles of those who want to get up but are overcome by

62, with its frequently-cited definition of *somnus animae*, the soul's "sleep," a slumber that leads to the "sleep in death" of eternal damnation; but the saint is also interested in its sinful "waking" (*evigilare*), "falling asleep" (*obdormire*), and "dreaming:"

The sleep of the body, by which the body's health is restored, is good; but the sleep of the soul is her forgetting her God. Any soul that has forgotten her God is asleep. And so the Apostle speaks to certain people that forgot their God and that, as if in sleep, acted out the follies of the worship of idols—for those who worship idols are like people who see vain fantasies in dreams, and, if their soul awakes, it understands by whom it was made, and does not worship things that it has itself made—and he says to such people: "*Rise thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead: and Christ shall enlighten thee*" . . . For you could not of yourself be awake unless your light should rise to wake you from sleep. For Christ enlightens souls, and wakes them; if he withdraws his light, they fall asleep, as in another psalm: "Enlighten my eyes that I never sleep in death." If, on the other hand, they fall asleep after having turned away from his light, then, although the light is present, they cannot see it, for they are sleeping.³³

In his commentary on Psalm 131.4-5, "If I shall give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids, Or rest to my temples: until I find out a place for the Lord" ("si dederō somnum oculis meis et palpebris meis dormitationem et requiem temporibus meis donec inveniam locum Domino"), Augustine teases out the distinction which the Douay translation of the verse blurs, that between *somnus* and *dormitatio*, sleep and somnolence. He does so by

deep sleep and fall back again. No one wants to sleep all the time (for the sober judgement of everyone is that it is better to be awake); yet a man often defers shaking off sleep, when his limbs are heavy with torpor, even though he is displeased with himself, the time having come to awake. In the same way, I knew that it was better to give myself up to your charity than to surrender to my own cupidity; yet, although I favoured and assented to the former course, the latter pleased and overcame me. I had no answer to your call: '*Rise thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead: and Christ shall enlighten thee.*' Although you convinced me in every way that what you said was true, I had no response but the slow and drowsy words: 'soon,' 'presently,' 'just a little longer.' But 'soon,' and 'presently,' went on without limit, and 'just a little longer' went on for a long time" (*Confessionum* 8.5.12, *PL* 32.754).

³³ "Bonus somnus corporis, quo reparatur valetudo corporis. Somnus autem animae est oblivisci Deum suum. Quaecumque anima oblita fuerit Deum suum, dormit. Ideo dicit Apostolus quibusdam oblitis Deum suum, et tanquam in somno agentibus deliramenta culturae idolorum. Sic sunt enim qui colunt idola, quomodo qui vident in somnis vana: si autem evigilet anima ipsorum, intelligit a quo facta est, et non colit quod ipsa fecit. Dicit ergo quibusdam Apostolus: *Surge qui dormis, et exsurge a mortuis; et illuminabit te Christus.* . . . Non enim vigilares in te, nisi oriretur lux tua, quae te de somno excitaret. Illuminat enim animas Christus, et facit eas vigilare; si autem lumen suum detrahatur, obdormiunt. Ideo enim illi dicitur in alio psalmo: *Illumina oculos meos, ne unquam obdormiam in morte* [Ps. 12.4]. Aut si ab illo aversae obdormiunt, praesens est illis lumen, et non possunt videre, quia dormiunt" (*Enarratio in Psalmum* 62.4, *PL* 36.750).

using the parallel distinction between *dormire* and *dormitare*, sleeping and drowsing, with a further differentiation of these from *obdormire*, “to fall asleep.” The key is still Paul’s “*Rise thou that sleepest. . .*,” now supplemented with “they that sleep, sleep in the night” (1 Thess. 5.7); but Augustine also expects us to recall that other classic Pauline verse on the sleep of sin, on the “turning” of conversion, and on time: “And that, knowing the season, that it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep. For now our salvation is nearer than we first believed” (“*et hoc scientes tempus quia hora est iam nos de somno surgere nunc enim propior est nostra salus quam cum credidimus,*” Rom. 13.11). One “falls asleep” (*obdormire*) in this dark night by desiring worldly goods rather than God, enjoying those empty images of good in a delusory “dream;” one “drowns” or “nods” (*dormitare*) by trying and failing again and again not to fall into that slumber, in a *chinar, a rovinar, le ciglia*:

He calls iniquity ‘night,’ in which people fall asleep by their cupidinous desire for earthly things. These worldly felicities are but the dreams of sleepers: just as one who sees treasures in sleep is rich while sleeping but poor after waking, so men enjoy all the vanities of this world as if in sleep and will awake when they would rather not, unless they wake now, when it would be of use to them, to see that those things were mere dreams, and that they had passed away. . . . There are those, however, who do not sleep, but drowse: they withdraw themselves from the love of temporal things to some degree, but then revert back to them. As if drowsing, they bow their heads again and again. Awake, shake off sleep, for by drowsing you will fall!³⁴

Augustine then describes the “rest” or heaviness of the temples that is felt when sleep is imminent and that then passes on to the eyes unless it is resisted, signifying the initial enjoyment of “temporal” things that leads to sin, and advises those who want to wake or to avoid drowsing not to put their trust in the pleasures of earthly goods,

³⁴ “Noctem dicens iniquitatem, in qua illi obdormiunt cupiendo ista terrena. Et omnes istae felicitates quae videntur saeculi, somnia sunt dormientium. Et quomodo qui videt thesauros in somnis, dormiens dives est; sed evigilabit, et pauper erit: sic omnia ista vana hujus saeculi, de quibus homines gaudent, in somno gaudent: evigilabunt quando nolunt, si non modo evigilant quando utile est; et invenient somnia fuisse illa, et transisse, . . . Sunt autem quidam qui non dormiunt, sed dormitant. Aliquantum retrahunt se ab amore temporalium, et rursus revolvuntur in eum; quasi dormitantes, caput crebro inclinant. Evigila, excute somnum; dormitando casurus es” (*Enarratio in Psalmum 131.8, PL 37.1719*).

because they bring more pain than pleasure.³⁵ Peter Lombard repeats the gloss I have just quoted.³⁶ For Peter Cantor, the *somnus culpa*e from which Paul's famous verses urge us to awake by repentance, before it is too late, is a threefold sleep *in* the world and *for* sin, a sleeping, a drowsing, and a final falling asleep: "Some people, in the first, sleep in sin without arising; in the second, they drowse, now repenting of sin, now falling back into sin again; in the third, they finally fall asleep, dying in their sin."³⁷ Herbert of Bosham uses this same distinction in his *Vita Sancti Thomae*, and echoes Augustine on the nodding of the head of the somnolent, who struggle and fail in their efforts to escape the love of earthly and carnal desires: "Such a one," he writes, "having both virtue and vice, does not sleep deeply, but drowzes, as it were, repeatedly nodding [crebro caput inclinans] as if about to droop into sleep."³⁸ According to Alan of Lille, for whom one of the many kinds of slumber is the love of earthly goods, "one is said to sleep when one is wholly intent on earthly things, but drowzes by now withdrawing from them and now turning back again."³⁹

In his typology of sleep, Innocent III divides the various meanings of *somnus* that are to be found in Scripture into those of life and those of death, each of which is corporeal, spiritual or eternal. The sleep of corporeal life comes about by nature; the slumber of spiritual life comes about by grace, and is figured by the sleep of the Bride in the Song of Songs, who says "I sleep, and my heart watcheth" ("ego dormio et cor meum vigilat," Cant. 5.2). The sleep of eternal life, figured by David's "In peace in the self same I will sleep, and I will rest" ("in pace in id ipsum dormiam et requiescam" in the Gallican Psalter, Ps. 4.9) comes about from glory. Christ was referring to the sleep of bodily death when he said "Lazarus our friend sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep" ("Lazarus amicus noster dormit sed vado ut a somno excitem eum," John 11.11). The sleep of spiritual death, the actual subject of Innocent's

³⁵ *Enarratio in Psalmum* 131.9.

³⁶ *Commentarium in Psalmos* 131.4, *PL* 191.1176.

³⁷ "Somnus etiam culpae triplex. Primo dormiunt quidam in culpa, non resurgentes; secundo dormitant, modo de peccato poenitentes, modo in illud relabentes; tertio obdormiunt finaliter in peccato suo decedentes" (*Verbum abbreviatum* 81, *PL* 205.248).

³⁸ "Talis quippe habens cum virtutibus vitia nequaquam profunde dormit, sed quasi dormitat, qui crebro caput inclinans quasi jam somno imminente conquiniscit" (*Vita Sancti Thomae*, *PL* 190.1082).

³⁹ "Ille dormire dicitur qui omnino terrenis intendit; dormitare dicitur qui modo ab eis retrahitur, modo ad ea redit" (*Distinctiones*, *PL* 210.890).

sermon, is mortal sin, the slumber from which Paul urges us to awake when he says “*Rise thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead: and Christ shall enlighten thee*” (Eph. 5.14). It can consist in negligence, ignorance, or concupiscence; but all three forms are mortal, leading straight to damnation, which is the sleep of eternal death (as in: “Shall he that sleepeth rise again no more?” “*numquid qui dormit non adieciet ut resurgat,*” Ps. 40.9). While all will rise from the sleep of bodily death at the Last Judgement, and some arise from the sleep of spiritual death by repentance, none arise from the sleep of eternal death, for there is no redemption in Hell. Innocent therefore urges his audience to heed the words of the classic Pauline verse on the urgent need to convert, to “awake” by repentance, *now*, in this limited time of opportunity, the age of grace in which we live knowing neither the day nor the hour of our death (cf. Matt. 25.13), so that every single moment is at once the right time and potentially the last opportunity for repentance and the forgiveness of sins: “And that, knowing the season, that it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep. For now our salvation is nearer than we first believed” (Rom. 13.11).⁴⁰

Peter Cantor says that natural, bodily sleep is “in and for the world,” but the *somnus culpae* from which Paul’s famous verses urge us to wake by repentance, before it is too late, is a sleep “in the world and for sin,” while the repose of the Bride/soul of the Song of Songs signifies the *somnus gratiae* that is “in the world but alien to it and to sin” and

⁴⁰ “Significatio somni multifarie spargitur in Scripturis. Legitur enim somnus vitae et somnus mortis. Porro, sicut triplex est vita, videlicet, corporalis, spiritualis et aeternalis, ita triplex est somnus vitae. Primus, qui provenit ex natura; secundus, qui provenit ex gratia; tertius, qui consurgit ex gloria. De primo Dominus dixit in Evangelio: ‘Dormite jam, et requiescite;’ de secundo Sponsa dicit in Cantico Cantorum: ‘Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat;’ de tertio Propheta in psalmo: ‘In pace in idipsum dormiam, et requiescam.’ Sic et triplex est somnus mortis, quia triplex est mors, corporalis, spiritualis, et aeternalis. De somno mortis corporalis Dominus dicit: ‘Lazarus amicus noster dormit;’ de somno mortis spiritualis dicit Apostolus: ‘Exsurge qui dormis, et exsurge a mortuis, et illuminabit te Christus;’ de somno mortis aeternalis inquit Psalmista: ‘Qui dormit, non adjiciet ut resurgat;’ . . . A somno mortis corporalis resurgunt omnes; a somno mortis spiritualis resurgunt quidam; a somno mortis aeternalis resurgunt nulli. . . . Porro somnus mortis spiritualis, tribus modis contingit: per negligentiam, ignorantiam, et concupiscentiam. . . De hoc triplici somno dicit Apostolus: *Hora est jam nos de somno surgere*. . . Sed dices: Cum semper sit hora surgendi a somno culpae, . . . quid est hoc quod dicit Apostolus: *Hora est jam nos de somno surgere*, tanquam semper sit hora? Teneamus ergo quod veritas ait: ‘Vigilate, quia nescitis diem neque horam;’ . . . Non igitur sibi blandiatur peccator frustra, et dicat: Secure possum ad tempus peccare, quia quacunque hora convertar, omnium iniquitatum mearum non recordabitur Dominus; quia nescio diem, neque horam. . . Jam igitur, id est in praesenti vita, vel magis in tempore opportune, surgendum est nobis a somno culpae . . . Surgamus igitur fratres et filii dum opportuna tempus et horam competentem habemus, ab illo triplici somno: quoniam quilibet est mortalis” (*Sermones de Tempore 2, PL 217.320-24*).

that the *somnus gloriae* of Ps. 4.9 is “alien to the world, to sin, and to all punishment that is due to sin.”⁴¹

Aquinas has a slightly different system in his commentary on Rom. 13.11. *Somnus naturae* is for Thomas either the normal repose of the body, or death; Paul meant the latter when he said “And we will not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep” (“Nolumus vos ignorare de dormientibus,” 1 Thess. 4.12). *Somnus gratiae* divides into two species: David’s repose in the “self same” (Ps. 4.9) is the repose or sleep of eternal glory (“quies aeternae gloriae”), while the slumber of the Bride (Cant. 5.2) is the repose or sleep of contemplation “even in this life” (“quies contemplationis etiam in hac vita”), implying that the former is the perfection of the contemplation of God in the beatific vision, the latter its beginning in this life, in accord with the standard doctrine that the contemplative life begins here and is consummated in heaven. The sleep of negligence (“How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard?” “Usquequo piger dormies?” Prov. 6.9), which consists in putting off repentance, is distinct from the sleep of sin, the *somnus culpa*e from which it is now time to awake by repentance, as per Eph. 5.14 and Rom. 13.11. The latter text continues: “The night has passed and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light” (Rom. 13.12). “Night” and “day” here signify either the darkness of ignorance in this life as opposed to the state of future glory, the darkness of sin contrasted to the state of grace of the just, or the time before the Incarnation as opposed to the “tempus gratiae Christi,” the age of grace brought by the power of the spiritual “Sun” in the world. The “works of darkness” are the works of sin, the life of vice, a life deprived of the light of reason, lived in darkness and leading to darkness, while the “armour of light” is virtue, which protects us and is perfected by the light of reason.⁴²

The message of Eph. 5.14 and Rom. 13.11 is for Alan of Lille that “now, in the time of grace, it is the hour for us to rise from the sleep of error, to rise up from the sleep of sin,” the sleep in which “reason sleeps, and sensuality runs riot . . . in the night of sin, the darkness of vice, the shadows of wickedness,” the sleep from which we are roused by

⁴¹ “Somnus etiam culpae triplex. Primo dormiunt quidam in culpa, non resurgentes; secundo dormitant, modo de peccato poenitentes, modo in illud relabentes; tertio obdormiunt finaliter in peccato suo decedentes” (*Verbum abbreviatum* 81, PL 205.248).

⁴² Aquinas, *Super Epistolam ad Romanos Lectura* 13.3.1062-1074, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura*, ed. R. Cai, 8th ed. (Turin: Marietti, 1953), vol. 1.

Christ, the *sol oriens* and *sol justitiae*.⁴³ In the same text, and in two others, Alan also mentions the sleep of prophetic dreams, the sleep and waking of Christ's death and Resurrection, the slumbers of sloth and moral torpor, and the sleep of ecstasy, "exstasis mentis," in which revelations are given by angels sent from God.⁴⁴ In all three texts, he includes Augustine's interpretation of Adam's sleep, in which God took a rib from Adam's side and fashioned Eve ("Then the Lord cast a deep sleep upon Adam, . . ." "immisit ergo Dominus Deus soporem in Adam . . .," Gen. 2.21-24). In Augustine's view, this was an ecstatic, prophetic and purely intellectual "vision." As we have seen,⁴⁵ Augustine believes that this is clear from Paul's interpretation of the words Adam spoke upon waking from that sleep (cf. Eph. 5.31-32), since Paul shows that they prophesy, under the figure of the creation of Eve and her union with Adam, the creation of the Church out of the wound opened in Christ's side on the cross, and the union of Christ and the Church.

Dino Cervigni argues that Dante's sleep in the Earthly Paradise is analogous to Adam's slumber, understood both according to this interpretation and as a figure of Christ's "sleep" in death and his Resurrection.⁴⁶ In the next chapter, I will show that Dante's literal sleep in Eden is also, and primarily, a tropological figure of *somnus contemplationis* or *gratiae*, the mystic union that was the supreme goal, potentially accessible to all Christians, of the contemplative life *in via*, and that was commonly thought to be typified by the sleep of the soul-Bride's "I sleep, and my heart watcheth."⁴⁷ This mystic sleep is the supernatural Christian earthly happiness which finds no place in the "duo ultima" scheme of the *Monarchia*. The subsequent chapter will then substantiate and develop the proposition that "Ma perché 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna" not only re-evokes that Edenic sleep but also metaphorically anticipates the literal taste of beatitude

⁴³ "Nunc ergo in tempore gratiae, hora est jam nos de somno erroris surgere, de somno peccati exurgere," "quando dormit ratio, et sensualitas exorbitat . . . nocte peccati, in tenebris vitii, in umbra delicti" (*Sermo 1* [incorrectly printed as *Summa de arte praedicatoria* 48], PL 210.195-96).

⁴⁴ *Sermo 1*, col. 195 (the sleep of dreams), *Distinctiones*, col. 949 (the death of Christ, moral torpor, ignorance and *exstasis mentis*), *Summa de arte praedicatoria* 7, coll. 126-27 (dreams and sloth).

⁴⁵ See pp. 56-57.

⁴⁶ Dino Cervigni, *Dante's Poetry of Dreams* (Florence: Olschki, 1986), 172-80.

⁴⁷ The soul's mystic sleep was also thought to be figured by the words of the Bridegroom in Cant. 2.7, "I adjure you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and the harts of the field, that you stir not up, nor make the beloved to awake, till she please" ("adiuro vos filiae Hierusalem per capreas cervosque camporum ne suscitatis neque evigilare faciatis dilectam quoadusque ipsa velit"). As we will see, Richard of St. Victor sometimes finds this sense, not the *somnus gloriae*, in Ps. 4.9.

that concludes the poem, using the tradition according to which the Psalmist's "in peace in the self same I will sleep, and I will rest" signified the state of the blessed, the *somnus gloriae* that completes the contemplative life and gives true happiness *in patria*. In what remains of this chapter, I will apply the finer distinctions within the category of *somnus culpa*e to the prologue scene and to Bernard's re-evocation of it.

iv Crisis and salvation in the prologue scene (b)

The preceding review of *somnus culpa*e has shown that, for Augustine, to "sleep," in this context, is to be in mortal sin, in the "night" of iniquity, having forgotten God, the true Good and our Creator, dedicated, instead, to the enjoyment of the pleasures given by earthly things, illusory images of the good. It is to be devoid of *caritas*, the love of God, totally devoted to and at the mercy of *cupiditas*, the excessive and unrestrained love of temporal goods, without the light of the revealed truth and grace brought by Christ. From the other theologians, we learn that the soul's sleep is the state of sin, the life of vice in the darkness of ignorance in which reason "sleeps" and sensuality runs riot, the spiritual death of mortal sin by which we deserve eternal damnation, so that those who die in this state go irredeemably to Hell. Such a "life," a life lived in mortal sin, in the *Commedia*, is "quella vita," the shameful life that Dante shared with Forese Donati and from which Virgil "turned" him as he was on the verge of returning to it irrevocably (*Purg.* 23.115-17). In the poem, this is not represented by a literal sleep, but by a heedless ten-years' wandering in a "selva oscura." There is no literal "sleep" of sin; there is instead the "dark wood" of mortal sin.

We have seen that one wakes from the sleep of sin, or rises from that death, by repentance, turning to the light of Christ, the risen sun of justice, in this age of grace. There is no literal "waking" or "rising" in this sense in the *Commedia*; but there are two acts of repentance and turning to the light of Christ by which Dante is saved from the dark wood. The first takes place on the night of the Easter full moon in 1300, and is a *ritrovarsi* after ten years of wandering, not a *svegliarsi* after a decade of sleep, prompting a saving act of contrition, or *compunctio cordis* (cf. "quella valle / che m'avea di paura il cor compunto," *Inf.* 1. 14-15). The second occurs the next day, the exact recurrence of the day of the Crucifixion, after the lapse provoked by the she-wolf, a figure of cupidity, with

the appearance of Virgil during Dante's *rovinare in basso loco* and the pilgrim's penitential "*Miserere di me.*"

In the discourse of *somnus culpae*, one "falls asleep" by surrendering to the corrupted will's *cupiditas*, against the judgement of reason, turning away from the light of Christ's grace even though that sun is shining. In the *Commedia*, we find no description of a literal falling asleep; but there are two such acts of surrender. The first is signified, not by Dante's being "pien di sonno," but by his turning his steps from the true path and into the "selva oscura," in 1290, in what seems to be not just a mere straying but a despairing *abbandonare* of the true path. The second very clearly is a falling into despair, the most mortal of mortal sins, and is definitively fatal. It occurs at the topographically indefinable low point of the *rovinare in basso loco* at which Dante, driven back by the she-wolf, finally gives up all hope of reaching the sunlit summit of the mountain.

The in-between *somnolence* of sin, that dangerous drowsing or drowsiness (*dormitare* or *dormitatio*), is the condition of those who hover between virtue and vice, continually "nodding" as if on the verge of falling into the slumber of sin. It is the struggle of those who withdraw from the love of worldly things to some degree only to fall back again, struggling to "awake" by giving themselves entirely to the love of God but being at the same time held or dragged back towards the life of wickedness (the "sleep") as their power of reason is stupified by the cupidity of their corrupted human nature. Dante does use this figure in the poem, and with this meaning, on two occasions and in two different ways. The first such somnolence is the literal "nodding" of 1290 that is alluded to in *Inf.* 1.10-12, where "pien di sonno" indicates a literal drowsiness that bears the same moral meaning as does the *dormitatio* of the theologians. This is the failing struggle of reason to remain vigilant against the blandishments of cupidity, one which ends in a defeat that is represented at the literal level, not by his falling asleep, but by his turning his steps into the dark wood, abandoning the true path on which he was drowsily struggling to progress. His second somnolence is not literal, but retrospectively metaphorical, as it were: it is the literal *rovinare in basso loco* at the foot of the mountain, at the mercy of the she-wolf, the beast that made him despair utterly of completing the ascent (*Inf.* 1.49-61), re-evoked by Bernard in the Empyrean as the *chinar*, a *rovinar*, le

ciglia during which Dante crossed the line so as to be judged as worthy of damnation, and was nonetheless saved by grace. Bernard recalls this moment in order to remind the pilgrim and the reader of the nearly tragic starting-point of the journey that is about to end happily, and of the divine intervention that made this possible (*Par.* 32.136-138, cf. *Inf.* 2.94-96), to remind them that, at that moment, on the verge of damnation in the “selva oscura,” he was one of those people of and to whom Augustine says: “as if drowsing, they bow their heads again and again. Awake, shake off sleep, for by drowsing you will fall!”

There is also, according to Augustine, a “dreaming” in the sleep of sin. To “dream,” in this sense, is to fabricate and worship deceptive “idols,” the vain fantasies of our own creation, i.e., it is to imagine that false worldly goods are true goods, enjoying the transitory vanities of this world as if they were real goods really possessed, like one who dreams of possessing treasures, and so deems himself rich, when those treasures are but delusions invented by the imagination of the dreamer. Within the dream that he has on the fourth terrace of the mountain of Purgatory (*Purg.* 19.1-33), Dante enacts both the self-deception that Augustine has in mind and its antidote, the “awakening” of reason. In this dream, the protagonist sees an ugly and horribly deformed “femmina balba” who is soon transformed by his loving gaze (“com’ amor vuol, così le colorava”) into a sweet siren, one of those who turned Ulysses from his “cammin,” an enchantress who promises to satisfy every desire. An anonymous *donna santa e presta* appears and alerts Virgil, who seems to be uncharacteristically neglectful of his duty (“O Virgilio, Virgilio, chi è questa?”), and the sage then comes forward, with his gaze fixed on “quella onesta” and averted from the gorgeous siren, whose clothes he pulls aside, exposing her belly, from which there emanates a stink of corruption so foul that it wakes Dante from his sleep, the literal sleep in which he dreams of the need for reason to awake from its metaphorical slumber so that it may reveal the truth about temporal goods. The “real” Virgil, outside the dream, then explains the meaning of it all: the siren was the “antica strega” who is lamented on the remaining terraces, those of avarice, gluttony and lust, where the penalty due to corrupt love, the excessive love of secondary goods, must be paid in full. “Vedesti,” Virgil says, “come l’uom da lei si slega” (vv. 58-60, cf. 17.124-39).

One manifestation of the modern enthusiasm for supposed “palinodes” in the *Commedia* is the claim that the *donna santa e presta* of this dream is Beatrice, while the “femmina balba” is the *donna gentile* of the *Convivio*, the personification of the complex concept of *Filosofia-Sapienza* that Dante develops in the treatise but that he supposedly repudiates in the poem as a devotion to philosophy at the expense of faith, a devotion to “the Donna Gentile, siren, puttana.”⁴⁸ However, while I cannot account for the adjective “presta,” I would point out, firstly, that no creature is more “donna,” “onesta,” and even “santa” than the *donna gentile* of the *Convivio*,⁴⁹ for she is a unitary symbol of all wisdom, human and divine, as originating in one transcendent source, the divine Logos and eternal Wisdom of God.⁵⁰ Secondly, one of the most important lessons that Christian theologians learned from human wisdom, from unaided reason and pagan philosophy, was that earthly goods are false goods that promise to give happiness and satisfy all desires but cannot deliver, and that the perfect beatitude all human beings seek as their “last end” is to be found only in the one true Good, the supreme Good, which is God. In Augustine’s view, this is the great discovery of the “Platonists,” even though they were too proud to see that faith in Christ is the only way to this goal. The philosophers’ apprehension of this truth is a major theme in *De civitate Dei*, occupying the whole of Book 19.⁵¹ Boethius’s *Philosophiae Consolationis*, well-known to Dante and famous throughout the Middle Ages, in which there is no mention of the Christian “way,” is largely about what reason, as used by Lady Philosophy, can teach about these very same truths. The *Consolation* and Book 19 of *The City of God* in turn serve as Aquinas’s main authorities, in his chief discussions of the “Last End” of human life, for the doctrine that temporal things cannot satisfy our desire for happiness, and that only the supreme Good

⁴⁸ Colin Hardie, “Beatrice’s chariot and Dante’s earthly paradise,” *Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch* 39 (1961): 160. On Dante’s presumed “palinodes,” see Albert Russell Ascoli, “Palinode and History in the Oeuvre of Dante,” in *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Amilcare A. Iannucci (Toronto: U. of Toronto P., 1997), 23-50.

⁴⁹ Especially in the third treatise (see, for example, *Convivio* 3.7.6-7, 12-17; 3.8 passim; 3.11.13-15; 3.12.12-13; 3.15 passim).

⁵⁰ See Bruno Nardi, “Note al *Convivio*” in *Nel mondo di Dante* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e letteratura, 1944), 47-53.

⁵¹ For a concise statement, see *De civitate Dei* 8.8.

can do so.⁵² For Dante, Boethius's chief claim to fame is just this aspect of the teachings of Lady Philosophy.⁵³

In the *Consolation*, this figure concludes her discussion of false goods with an indictment of the deceptive, superficial and fleeting nature of bodily beauty, an earthly good which is destroyed by death. She elevates it to the status of the paradigmatic false good and exemplifies it with the legendary beauty of the famous pretty boy Alcibiades, deploying reason in a manner that closely parallels the way the *donna santa e presta* deploys Virgil in the dream:

If, as Aristotle says, men enjoyed the use of Lynceus' eyes so that their sight penetrated obstacles, would not the superficially very beautiful body of Alcibiades seem most vile when his inwards could be seen? So it is not your nature that makes you appear fair, but the weakness of the eyes of those who look at you. But you may over-estimate the body's good qualities as much as you like, provided you realize that what you admire can be destroyed by the burning of a three-days fever.⁵⁴

It is likely, therefore, that Alcibiades is at least one ancestor of Dante's dream-girl, and that Lady Philosophy, either she of the *Consolations* or the *Filosofia-Sapienza* of the *Convivio*, far from being the "femmina balba" of Dante's dream, is the *donna santa e presta*.

What Dante saw, "come l'uom da lei si slega," is how reason, symbolised by Virgil (who is first of all himself, but who also signifies this), must be "vigilant" in order to resist the blandishments of worldly goods, the sweet deceivers so tellingly "embodied" in the "femmina balba," seeing through the seductive allure of their outer beauty to the inner truth that they are all subject to corruption and decay. The intellect's adversary in this is

⁵² *SG* 3.1-63 (esp. 27-33) and *ST* 1a2ae.1-5 (esp. 1a2ae.2.1-8).

⁵³ "Per vedere ogne ben dentro vi gode / l'anima santa che 'l mondo fallace / fa manifesto a chi di lei ben ode" (*Par.* 10.124-26).

⁵⁴ "Quod si, ut Aristoteles ait, Lynceis oculis homines uterentur, ut eorum visus obstantia penetraret nonne introspectis visceribus illud Alcibiadis superficie pulcherrimum corpus turpissimum videretur? Igitur te pulchrum videri non tua natura sed oculorum spectantium reddit infirmitas. Sed aestimate quam vultis nimio corporis bona, dum sciatis hoc quodcumque miramini triduanæ febris igniculo posse dissolvi!" (*Philosophiae Consolationis* 3, pr. 8, trans. S. J. Tester, in Boethius *The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand and S. J. Tester [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1973], 260-61).

not the “femmina,” who represents an illusion (transitory mortal things, secondary goods, falsely perceived as true goods), but the source of that illusion, the will’s cupidity, its inordinate and easily-misled desire for the pleasures that are to be had from the good things of this world. This is the corrupt love that draws us into temptation and self-deception, blinding our reason so that we do not see past the appearances to the harsh reality that lies beneath, the love that transforms the “femmina” into a charming siren (cf. “com’ amor vuol, così le colorava”). It is the love that can overwhelm the better judgment of reason, undermining its “vigilance,” as it does, if only for a moment, in Dante’s dream. In the third book of the *Monarchia*, which defends the thesis that the authority of the Emperor derives directly from God, not from the Pope, Dante classes among the opponents of this truth those “whose obstinate cupidity has extinguished the light of reason,” and, in *Epistola* 5, urging the rulers and peoples of Italy to welcome their thoroughly Christological saviour, Henry VII, he writes: “And do not let deceptive cupidity seduce you, undoing the vigilance of reason with ineffable sweetness, like the Sirens.”⁵⁵

As we know from the *Convivio* (3.13.1-8), “Filosofia” as the operation of the intellect in the contemplation of truth exists in a continuous manner in angels, being always in act, but is discontinuous in human beings in this mortal life, for we cannot be always contemplating truth, but must also attend to the things our human nature requires for the maintenance of bodily life: “Onde quando l’anima nostra non hae atto di speculazione, non si può dire veramente che sia in filosofia, se non in quanto ha l’abito di quella e la potenza di poter lei svegliare” (3.13.6). Among the bodily needs to which we must attend, of course, is sleep, the *somnus naturalis* in which reason ceases to function. Beatrice alludes to this fact in the Earthly Paradise, just before her revelation of the nature of the *errore* of 1290. She needs to tell Dante what his sin was because he must know this in order to suffer adequate remorse and to confess fully; and he does not know it, since, his accuser suggests, he was in some sense “asleep” when he turned his steps from the true path: “for he is not like you,” she tells the angels, you who “vigilate ne

⁵⁵ “Quorum obstinata cupiditas lumen rationis extinxit” (*Mon.* 3.3.8); “Nec seducat alludens cupiditas, more Sirenum nescio qua dulcedine vigiliam rationis mortificans” (*Ep.* 5.13).

l'eterno die, / sì che notte né sonno a voi non fura / passo che faccia il secol per sue vie"
(*Purg.* 30.103-108).

Beatrice is referring to the point in Dante's first *dormitatio culpae* when he gave up the struggle to control his will's cupidity and to maintain the vigilance of reason, emphasising, just as the author does in *Inf.* 1.10-12, the coincidence of the radical change of direction in the "cammin di questa vita" and the cognitive failure this entails, a failure of intellectual awareness so great that it accounts for both the error in the "then" of the story and the mental blank in the "now" of the narration:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
ché la diritta via era smarrita. . . .
Io non so ben ridir com' i' v'intrai,
tant'era pien di sonno a quel punto
che la verace via abbandonai. (*Inf.* 1.1-3, 10-12)

Having recalled this *punto*, Beatrice then informs the protagonist and the reader of what the angels already know. While she was alive she was Dante's guide, leading him with her on the right road to the goal she was then moving towards and that she has now reached, the ultimate goal of the "cammin di questa vita," God, the supreme Good, and the perfect beatitude that only that one true Good can give. This was because his love of Beatrice inspired him to *caritas*, his attraction to her miraculous beauty and virtue leading him to love and desire the supreme Good above all others. Upon Beatrice's death, however, Dante forgot her and gave himself to "another," allowing this "other" to lead him away from the true path after a tug-o-war that may be the *dormitatio* of "pien di sonno" and that culminates in the pilgrim's giving up hope of being able to advance any further towards the goal, which is to say that he abandoned the right road in despair (as he would do again during his *chinar, a rovinar, le ciglia*). The other woman, Beatrice's rival, was not *cupiditas* (nor the *donna gentile* of the *Convivio*), but the "femmina balba," the "idol" that cupidity creates and then "worships," the externally beautiful illusion it produces and by which it is then captivated, i.e., worldly goods misapprehended as the

good that can make us happy, *imagini di ben false*, “le presenti cose / col falso lor piacer.” In Beatrice’s and Dante’s own words:

Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto:
mostrando li occhi giovanetti a lui,
meco il menava in dritta parte vòlto.
Sì tosto come in su la soglia fui
di mia seconda etade e mutai vita,
questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui.
Quando di carne a spirto era salita,
e bellezza e virtù cresciuta m’era,
fu’ io a lui men cara e men gradita;
e volse i passi suoi per via non vera,
imagini di ben seguendo false,
che nulla promession rendono intera. (*Purg.* 30.121-132)

Ond’ ella a me: ‘Per entro i mie’ disiri,
che ti menavano ad amar lo bene
di là dal qual non è a che s’aspiri,
quai fossi attraversati o quai catene
trovasti, per che del passare innanzi
dovessiti così spogliar la spene?
E quali agevolezze o quali avanzi
ne la fronte de li altri si mostraro,
per che dovessi lor passeggiare anzi?’
Dopo la tratta d’un sospiro amaro,
a pena ebbi la voce che rispuose,
e le labbra a fatica la formaro.
Piangendo dissi: ‘Le presenti cose
col falso lor piacer volser miei passi,
tosto che ’l vostro viso si nascose.’ (*Purg.* 31.34-36)

And yet, Beatrice tells him, the very fact of her death should have strengthened his resolve to advance “in contraria parte,” along the right road, since the pain caused by “lo primo strale / de le cose fallaci,” the loss of the supreme mortal good that was her bodily beauty, should have taught him to resist the deceptive allure of such particular “sirene” as a “pargoletta / o altra novità con sì breve uso” (*Purg.* 31.43-63).

It is important to note, however, that the focus of Beatrice's concern here, and the subject of Dante's confession, is not any particular "pargoletta" or other transitory novelty that might have first ensnared him, nor his fall into the specific sins of lust, pride and *curiositas*, nor his intellectual error.⁵⁶ It is not his encounters with obstacles and distractions while on the direct path, nor even the despair that made him finally abandon the true way. It is, instead, the abandonment of that path, the *punto* at which he turned away from God, the Last End, to secondary goods, making them his primary objects of desire, for by turning aside from the true Last End for the sake of a temporal one, whatever the particular sin or sins involved, he fell into mortal sin, by which, in the fundamental *contrapasso*, we deserve to be eternally deprived of that ultimate goal.⁵⁷

It is also important to realise that Dante's moral awakening on the night of the Paschal full moon (indicated by "mi ritrovai" and the simile of the shipwrecked swimmer, a figure of the act of repentance by which Dante first escapes the dark wood of mortal sin, i.e., by which he receives the divine grace that brings about the remission of sins),⁵⁸ and his resumption of the right road (the ascent of the mountain), all count for nothing with Beatrice, who makes no mention of Dante's repentance and return to the true path, seeing only a continuous decline from the moment of his turning away from the supreme Good in 1290 (his entry into the dark wood of mortal sin) to the point at which, having escaped and been beaten back from the right road by the she-wolf, he "tanto giù

⁵⁶ Dante undergoes an agonising participation in the purgatorial cleansing of lust (*Purg.* 27.1-63), admits to artistic pride as his "gran tumor" (*Purg.* 11.118-120), expecting to spend a good deal of time after death on the terrace of the proud (*Purg.* 13.134-38), and sees the fate of Ulysses as a warning against his own inclination to *curiositas* (*Inf.* 26.19-24), while Beatrice appears to accuse him of a sinful estrangement from her (as the embodiment of revelation) due to a dedication to philosophical knowledge as an end in itself that in some way involved his espousal of a certain "school's" mistaken doctrine (*Purg.* 33.82-99). Many scholars have seen this accusation about a past estrangement from Beatrice in the form of an adherence to a mistaken school and doctrine, with her stress on the vast gap between reason and revelation, as the recantation of a past dedication to philosophy at the expense of the revealed truths of faith, detecting a specific repudiation of the supposed Averroistic philosophism of the *Convivio*. This sits oddly, not so much with the fictional chronology of the poem (according to which the *Convivio* had not yet been written as Beatrice speaks) as with the real chronology of Dante's works, since, after beginning the *Commedia* and perhaps around the time he wrote this very scene, Dante also wrote the *Monarchia*, which, for those who see Averroistic dualism in the earlier treatise, takes that tendency to its extreme. Ascoli proposes that this and other such palinodes are fictitious ones ("Palinode and History"), John A. Scott and Étienne Gilson that it is a real recantation of views that Dante held before writing the *Convivio*, plausibly in 1300 (John Scott, "Beatrice's Reproaches in Eden: Which School Had Dante Followed?" *Dante Studies* 109 [1991]: 1-23, Étienne Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, trans. David Moore [London: Sheed and Ward, 1948], 96-98, 159-60).

⁵⁷ *SG* 2.143-144, *ST* 1a2ae.87.3, 88.1, 89.3, 2a2ae.24,12.

⁵⁸ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* 6.10.

cadde” in his *rovinare in basso loco* (the struggle that Saint Bernard later recalls as a *dormitatio culpae*) that he crossed the line into mortal sin again, but still more fatally than before, so that the only way to save the pilgrim was to show him the damnation to which he was heading, a task which Beatrice delegated to Virgil (*Purg.* 30.124-41). Virgil’s arrival on the scene then called forth the definitive repentance expressed by “*Miserere di me!*,” the repentance by virtue of which Dante does descend to Hell, but as one whose sins have been forgiven in response to his heartfelt and humble acceptance of the offer of grace, so that, when he begins his journey from the realm of the damned to a participation in the beatitude of Paradise, he does so as one who can expect a definitive return to heaven by way of a sojourn in Purgatory.

Dante’s first repentance counts for nothing with Beatrice because it counts for nothing in the eyes of God, for “if the just man turn himself away from his justice and do iniquity . . . all his justices which he hath done shall not be remembered” (Ezek. 18.24). Theologically, by his second abandonment of the true path, his “fall” into mortal sin after repentance, Dante was just as devoid of grace, and as deserving of damnation, as he was before—not, however (at least in the opinion of Aquinas), on account of the sins he committed before repenting the first time, for the guilt of those sins, even the sin of despair, having been remitted by the first repentance, does not return.⁵⁹ All of which throws the emphasis onto the moral collapse that is due to, and the divine intervention that is necessitated by, the historical reality of the year 1300 as the *Commedia* represents it, which is to say that it throws the emphasis onto the moment Bernard re-evokes as a *dormitatio culpae*.

In the Spring of 1300, on the night of the Paschal full Moon, Dante “finds himself” in a dark wood. The Easter Moon’s reflected solar light (according to Bede, a symbol of the light of grace which the Church reflects from Christ, “the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world,” John 1.9) assists the pilgrim in his desperate struggle to find his way out of the “selva oscura,” a place which is almost as

⁵⁹ In *ST* 3.88.1, Aquinas states the doctrine that mortal sin after repentance leaves one as before, without grace and liable to eternal punishment, and tackles the difficult problem of whether or not it is also the case that the guilt of sins previously pardoned also returns with subsequent sin, as theologians of the stature of Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Lombard, Bonaventure and Albert the Great taught. Aquinas comes down against this opinion. In *ST* 1a2ae.114.7, he says that merits previously earned after conversion by grace do not help a sinner to rise again “after a fall,” only a new gratuitous gift of grace can bring this about.

bitter as death itself and which he fears even now, as he records these events, as much as he feared it then.⁶⁰ Near dawn, on the exact recurrence of the day of the Crucifixion, in this season of the first creation and annual revival of the natural world, he breaks out to the deserted lower slopes of a mountain, and notices that its summit is already illuminated by the sun, the “pianeta / che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle.”⁶¹ This would seem to be a clear enough indication that the goal lies at the summit and that the ascent of the mountain is the right road, now rediscovered, an impression that is later confirmed by Virgil (*Inf.* 1.76-78), but that will already have been formed in the minds of those readers (such as Boccaccio) who recognise that the light which directs Dante towards the summit, the light of the “pianeta / che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle,” is the light of the *sol oriens* or *sol iustitiae*, the light of the Word, the Joannine “lux vera quae inluminat omnem hominem venientem in mundo.”⁶² Accordingly, after stopping to rest and to gaze on the dark wood that was the scene of his near-destruction, like a shipwrecked swimmer who has made it to shore and who looks back, exhausted, on the menacing deep (i.e., as one who has escaped, by repentance, the spiritual death of mortal sin and the eternal death due to it), Dante begins to make his way towards the goal, but walking such that “l piè fermo era sempre l più basso,” i.e., limping, “claudicando,” as we all do, according to Saint Bernard, on the laborious ascent of humility towards the summit of truth, or, in the opinion of Saint Anselm, on the difficult path of righteousness, the *via salutis* or “way of salvation.”⁶³

⁶⁰ *Inf.* 1.1-3, 19-21, cf. 37-40 on the spring equinox, 20.127-29 on the Easter full moon’s assistance, and, on its symbolism, Bede, *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. C. W. Jones, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, 123B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977), Ch. 6, p. 292.

⁶¹ *Inf.* 1.13-18, cf. 21.112-14 on the recurrence of the day of the Passion. This has been variously understood as the traditional calendar anniversary (25 March in any year as an “ideal” Good Friday), the liturgical commemoration (8 April, the actual Good Friday of 1300), or the cosmic recurrence of the day of the Crucifixion, i.e., the day of the astronomically real first full moon on or after the equinox (5 April in 1300—another kind of “ideal” Good Friday).

⁶² Boccaccio, *Inf.* 1, *allegorica*, 1.13-18.

⁶³ *Inf.* 1.19-30. In *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* Bernard writes “thus we cautiously begin to progress along the narrow road, thus, step by step, we securely climb the steep ladder; thus miraculously, if haltingly, and securely, yet limping, we ascend to the truth” (“sic arcta via cautius inceditur strictim, sic ardua scala tutius pedetentim ascenditur; sic miro modo licet pigrius, ad veritatem tamen firmius claudicando ascenditur” [*De gradibus* 9.26, PL 182.956]). In *Oratio* 25, Anselm acknowledges the difficulty of returning to the service of the Lord after ceasing from sin, but adds that “his compassion is great, and his mercy immense, so that, if he sees us limping along his way of righteousness, or falling and falling again, but without turning back from or wearying of the way of righteousness, then he will not long hold back, but will help our undertaking, and guide our steps on the way of salvation” (“immensa est enim ejus pietas, immensa ejus misericordia, qui etsi viderit nos viam suae rectitudinis vel claudicando ambulare,

The wanderer is confronted by three wild beasts, the third of which, an insatiably ravenous she-wolf, makes him give up all hope of ever reaching the summit, driving him irrevocably back to the dark wood where the sun is “silent” (as if the Word does not “speak” there). Despite this most propitious time within the already opportune time of grace, so corrupted is the world of 1300 that Dante’s progress in the arduous ascent to the Last End is stopped and he turns his back on that goal again, falling into the sin of despair, the most mortal of mortal sins. There is no obvious allusion to sleep or drowsiness in the prologue scene itself (although the “gravezza” the she-wolf induces in the protagonist suggests an appropriate torpor),⁶⁴ but there is an obvious allusion to time, time as loss:

questa mi porse tanto di gravezza
 con la paura ch’uscita di sua vista,
 ch’io perdei la speranza de l’altezza.
 E qual è quei che volontieri acquista,
 e giugne ’l tempo che perder lo face,
 che ’n tutti suoi pensier piange e s’attrista;
 tal mi fece la bestia senza pace,
 che, venendomi ’ncontro, a poco a poco
 mi ripigneva là dove ’l sol tace.
 Mentre ch’i’ rovinava in basso loco,
 dinanzi a li occhi mi si fu offerto
 chi per lungo silenzio parea fioco.
 Quando vidi costui nel gran deserto,
 ‘Miserere di me,’ gridai a lui,
 ‘qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!’
 (*Inf.* 1.52-66)

He has already crossed the line into the “certain death” of “sin with despair” as Mary turns to God in order to plead for mercy on his behalf, and, having obtained it, entrusts

etsi saepius labendo et relabendo, non tamen ab ejusdem viae rectitudine velle recedere; si nos non lassemur, non diu se retinere poterit, sed conatum nostrum adjuvabit, et diriget gressum nostrum ad viam salutis” [*PL* 158.912]). See Cassell, *Inferno 1*, for a comprehensive and extreme statement of the ideas (which originate in the work of Singleton and Freccero) that the ascent of the mountain is a false path, a sinful ascent of pride, rather than the true way that it appears to be, and that Dante’s weakness or “limp” is the fatal flaw that makes the ascent impossible, rather than the inevitable concomitant, since the Fall, of even the most saintly life of virtue (as in Augustine’s post-conversion struggle to be virtuous in the face of three besetting temptations, *Confessionum* 10.30.41-10.41.66).

⁶⁴ In medieval bestiary lore, the sight of a wolf was supposed to deprive a person of their strength. See Cassell, *Inferno 1*, 68.

Dante to Lucia, who entrusts him to Beatrice, who turns to Virgil, who then departs from Limbo and appears, like the ghost he is, before the condemned sinner. Bernard later recalls precisely this extended instant in Dante's *rovinare in basso loco*, the comprehensive and already-consummated waste of time's salvific value as a consequence of the historical reality of the world of 1300, in which the she-wolf of cupidity runs riot because the imperial power ordained by God to control it is absent, a situation that will end with the advent of the beast's nemesis, the messianic-Imperial "veltro,"⁶⁵ except that the saint re-evokes that moment as the restoration and realisation of time's value, by a very special intervention of grace, at the critical point in a somnolent *chinar, a rovinar, le ciglia*. Bernard does so in such a way as to remind Dante and the reader that, by virtue of that intervention, the protagonist did not finally succumb to his *dormitatio culpae*, but was instead enabled to undertake the journey during which he reached the mystic *somnus contemplationis* or *gratiae* that is signified by his literal *assonnare* in the Earthly Paradise (cf. "S'io potessi ritrar come assonnaro . . . , *Purg.* 32. 64 ff), even as he anticipates his charge's imminent mystic vision of God as a participation in the *somnus gloriae* of the blessed and thereby replaces the normally *in malo* meaning of time's flight (a headlong rush to death) with the *in bono* sense of a providentially-ordained progress towards a taste of eternal life:

e contro al maggior padre di famiglia
 siede Lucia, che mosse la tua donna
 quando chinavi, a rovinar, le ciglia.
 Ma perché 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna,
 qui farem punto, come buon sartore
 che com' elli ha del panno fa la gonna;
 e drizzeremo li occhi al primo amore,
 sì che, guardando verso lui, penètri
 quant' è possibil per lo suo fulgore. (Par. 32.136-144).

⁶⁵ *Inf.* 1.91-111, cf. *Purg.* 6.75-151, 16.85-129, 20.1-15, 33.34-45, *Par.* 27.61-63, 121-48. It is difficult to see what earthly or unearthly use the "veltro" would be if the ascent of the mountain which his adversary the "lupa" blocks were the wrong path. The idea seems to make a nonsense of the *Commedia's* fundamental prophetic message, which is that the "veltro" will soon make that way accessible again by destroying the she-wolf.

Chapter 4

“Ma qual vuol sia che l’assonnar ben finga” (*Purg.* 32.69): *Somnus Gratiae* and Mystic Union in the Earthly Paradise

i Dante sleeps

Dante’s arduous purgatorial ascent lasts three days and three nights. On each of these nights, he falls asleep and dreams. At dawn on the fourth day he reaches the last step, the “grado superno” that is the Earthly Paradise, with which Virgil announces that his task as guide is now complete: Dante may go where he pleases (“lo tuo piacere omai prendi per duce”), for his will is at last “libero, dritto e sano” and therefore entirely obeys the judgement of reason, so that what pleases him can only be good (*Purg.* 27.124-42). This event, and the pilgrim’s subsequent tranquil wandering among the delights of the “divina foresta” or “selva antica” which is the manifest antithesis of the dark wood of the prologue scene (*Purg.* 28.1-36), strongly suggest the attainment of a point of arrival, as if the pilgrim has reached a major goal of his journey and this goal is the opposite pole of his point of departure. It would seem obvious that Virgil has played the role which, according to the *Monarchia* (3.15.3-10), ought to be played by the Emperor, leading humanity (the protagonist), by means of the teachings of philosophy based on human reason (which Virgil himself embodies), to the final goal of man as a mortal being, “that is, the happiness of this life, which consists in the operation of our own powers and which is figured by the earthly paradise” (“beatitudinem scilicet huius vite, que in operatione proprie virtutis consistit et per terrestrem paradisum figuratur”), just as it seems clear that Beatrice then guides him to the Empyrean as the treatise affirms that the Pope should guide us all, by means of the revealed truth she represents, and that Dante there reaches the supernatural *finis* of man as an immortal soul, namely, “the happiness of eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of the vision of God, to which our own powers cannot ascend except with the aid of the divine light, and which is signified by the heavenly paradise” (“beatitudinem vite eterne, que consistit in fruitione divini aspectus ad quam propria virtus ascendere non potest, nisi lumine divino adiuta, que per paradisum celestem intelligi datur” (*Mon.* 3.15.3-10).

This apparent continuity between the twofold teleological scheme of the treatise and the structure of the poem's goal-directed narrative underlies Michele Barbi's conviction that "la dottrina dei due mezzi, dei due fini e delle due guide è fondamento di tutto quanto Dante dice e raffigura nel poema," even though Bruno Nardi declares that "nella *Commedia* non v'è più traccia dei 'duo ultima' della *Monarchia*," meaning by this that the natural, earthly goal of the treatise becomes, in the poem's Earthly Paradise, not an autonomous *ultimum*, an *ultimate* end or goal, but a "luogo obbligato di passaggio e di purificazione" on the way to the one true "last end" of orthodox Christianity, the supernatural happiness of the next world that consists in the vision of God.¹ At issue here is the nature of and the relationship between, on the one hand, the teleological scheme of the *Monarchia* and, on the other, the end-directed structure and ideology of the *Commedia*, a key point of contention in the major scholarly discussion about Dante's fundamental ideas and their development. Where Barbi sees a continuous and coherent development, Nardi finds a radical break, for he believes that the poem repudiates the *Monarchia*'s twofold scheme.² The most important alternatives are the more nuanced views of Étienne Gilson, whose *via di mezzo* really emphasises continuity, and of Kenelm Foster, for whom the discontinuity stressed by Nardi is real but results from a shift in perspective rather than from the rejection of a past "error."³

¹ Barbi, "Razionalismo e misticismo in Dante," in *Problemi di critica dantesca: Seconda serie* (Florence: Sansoni, 1941), 72, Nardi, "Intorno ad una nuova interpretazione del terzo libro della *Monarchia* dantesca," *Dal "Convivio" alla "Commedia,"* 311, "Pretese fonti della 'Divina Commedia,'" *Dal "Convivio" alla "Commedia,"* 360.

² Barbi maintains that there is perfect continuity between (on the one hand) the politico-religious ideology of the *Convivio* and the *Monarchia*, which reaches its definitive form in the latter's *duo ultima* scheme and is not fundamentally unorthodox or un-Thomistic, and (on the other) the structure and ideology of the *Commedia*, such that the two sets of ends, means and guides of the Latin treatise constitute the basic ideological and structural framework of the poem. See Barbi, "Razionalismo e misticismo in Dante" and *Problemi fondamentali per un nuovo commento della "Divina Commedia"* (Florence: Sansoni, 1955), 21-27, 91-114. Francesco Mazzoni takes a similar line in "Teoresi e prassi in Dante politico," in Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia, Epistole politiche* (Turin: ERI, 1966), lxvi-xcvi. Nardi's understanding of the poet's artistic and intellectual development hinges on the conviction that the politico-religious ideas of the *Convivio* which are given their final and extreme form in the the twofold scheme of the *Monarchia* are thoroughly dualistic and anti-Thomistic, and that this "Averroistic" dualism is repudiated in the *Commedia* (which the Italian scholar maintains was written after the the completion of the Latin text). For Nardi, the poem rejects the philosophical separateness of the two last ends which constitutes the basis for the separate roles of Church and Empire in the treatise, adopting the orthodox and Thomistic hierarchical subordination of the natural end to the supernatural one, while maintaining, as a supernaturally revealed truth, the autonomy of the two powers.

³ Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher* (see especially 161, 278, 304), Foster, "Religion and Philosophy in Dante," in *The Mind of Dante*, ed. U. Limentani (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1965), 47-78, "The Two Dantes I-

However, none of these critical positions takes account of the fact that the teleology of the *Commedia* is more complex than that of the *Monarchia*. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the “last end” which the poem has in view reaches beyond the *fruitio divini aspectus* as such to the end of time, when human beings will again become the compound of body and soul they were meant to be. Further, while all readers of the *Commedia* would be aware that Virgil leaves out the small matter of the sometimes spectacular aid of grace when he says that he led Dante to Eden “con ingegno e con arte” (*Purg.* 27.130), and that there is an inner sanctum in the Earthly Paradise to which the pagan poet has no access, it does not seem to have been noted that, when the pilgrim there falls into his fourth and last literal sleep, this time without dreaming (*Purg.* 32.64-84), he enjoys the *fruitio divini aspectus* that is the supreme supernatural Christian “happiness of this life,” a *beatitudo* which goes unmentioned in the treatise. For this sleep, I will argue here, is the *somnus contemplationis* or *somnus gratiae* of the mystics, signifying the mystic union of the soul and the Word.

The possibility that Dante’s Edenic slumber might have some symbolic meaning does not appear to have been considered by the commentators until Giacomo Poletto’s relatively late proposal that it signifies the ideal state of unity and peace that was established under the Empire of Augustus and that endured until the Donation of Constantine, the period during which the Emperors, fulfilling their divinely-ordained role, restrained cupidity and guided humanity to the Earthly Paradise of temporal happiness.⁴ In the *Monarchia*, Dante says that this goal cannot be reached unless, “the waves of seductive cupidity calmed, the human race reposes free in the tranquillity of peace;”⁵ in Poletto’s view, Dante’s sleep symbolises this repose. More recently, Dino Cervigni has argued that the protagonist who has just emerged spiritually “reborn” from the waters of Lethe is the New Adam, and that his sleep is to be read as the Fathers read the slumber of Adam during which God took a rib from Adam’s side and formed Eve (Gen. 2.21-24). Adam’s falling asleep and then waking was traditionally seen as a typological figure of Christ’s death and Resurrection, the creation of Eve from the

III,” in *The Two Dantes* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977), 156-253, and “Tommaso d’Aquino,” *ED*, vol. 5, 626-49.

⁴ Poletto (1894), *Purg.* 32.64-69.

⁵ “nisi sedatis fluctibus blande cupiditatis genus humanum liberum in pacis tranquillitate quiescat” (*Mon.* 3.15.11).

sleeping Adam was thought to prefigure the origin of the Church out of the Passion, and, for Augustine (as we have already seen),⁶ Adam's "sleep" was an intellectual ecstatic vision in which all of this was revealed to him, enabling him to prophesy the future creation of the Church and its union with Christ. Cervigni's thesis, proposed in the context of his study of the symbolic and structural functionality, with respect to the process of Dante's spiritual purification and regeneration, of his various swoons, dreams and sleeps, is that the sleep in Eden crowns this process and is analogous to Adam's slumber as patristic writers interpreted it, so that the culmination of Dante's spiritual rebirth is represented as a participation in the effects of Christ's death and Resurrection and an initiation into the mysteries of the Church.⁷ Robert Hollander, in his recent commentary, alerts us to the neglected "self-conscious literary humor" of Dante's comparison of himself to the hundred-eyed Argus, and describes the slumber (without further explanation, but apparently because it takes place after the "visionary experience of the griffin and his Church") as a "mystic sleep."⁸ In this chapter, I hope to demonstrate that the dreamless sleep at the summit is indeed a properly mystic, rather than visionary, sleep, *the* mystic sleep, the authentically mystical and entirely non-visionary *somnus contemplationis* that signifies the one goal of numerous medieval contemplative ascents. This goal is the ecstatic union or "marriage" of the soul and the Word that Étienne Gilson, in a rather neglected article on Dante's final "vision" of God, describes as the "sommet ardu, mais accessible à tous, de la vie chrétienne."⁹

In this article, Gilson rightly draws attention to the resemblance between the last phase of Dante's ascent in the *Paradiso* and the closing stages of the contemplative ascents described by Richard of St. Victor and Saint Bonaventure, even though, as I will

⁶ On pages 56-7.

⁷ Cervigni, *Dante's Poetry of Dreams*, 172-80. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, in his discussion of the importance of the Transfiguration in the *Commedia* (*The Transfiguration of History at the Centre of Dante's "Paradise"* [Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1986], 90-120), also proposes that Dante's sleep and waking are to be understood as a symbolic death and resurrection, and notes the existence of the properly "mystical" interpretation of the Transfiguration that will emerge, in this chapter, as one of the key motifs associated with *somnus contemplationis*.

⁸ Hollander, *Purg.* 32.64-69, 70-71.

⁹ Étienne Gilson, "La conclusion de la *Divine Comédie* et la mystique franciscaine," *Revue d'histoire franciscaine* 1 (1924): 63. My thesis does not conflict with those of Poletto and Cervigni, there being no reason why all three cannot be simultaneously true. Nor does it mean that the humour noted by Hollander would be out of place.

argue later, the goal the pilgrim reaches at the end of the *Commedia* is not, as the French scholar claims, the one which those mystics had in mind, but the direct *visio Dei* of the blessed. Gilson very reasonably supposes that Dante borrowed the Victorine's and/or the Franciscan's threefold sequence for the contemplation of the divinity which precedes the final attainment of the goal in the poem (the unity of all things in God, the Trinity, and the Incarnation, *Par.* 33.85 ff.), but he mistakenly concludes, against the text itself, that this object is attained in the mystic affective union of the soul and Christ as Richard and Bonaventure described it, namely, the Pseudo-Dionysian "darkness of God," a knowing with the heart after renouncing all attempts to know with the mind, rather than in the purely intuitive intellectual possession *per speciem* of the supreme good that inflames affection first by its absence and then by its presence.

Although Gilson does not conflate the poet's mysticism with his interest in visionary phenomena, as Dante scholars sometimes do, his essay does typify another common tendency in the critical approach to mysticism in the *Commedia*, which is to explore the presence in the *Paradiso* of elements of Cistercian, Victorine and Franciscan mystic discourse, with its imagery, concepts and themes, its "technical" language and formal structures, in the light of Dante's supposed specific "sources" ("supposed" because many of the elements of this discourse are commonplaces in the tradition of mystical writing), all without taking due account of the fact that the poet uses that discourse to conceptualise and represent his protagonist's ascent *beyond* the goal envisioned by the likes of Bernard, Bonaventure, and Richard of St. Victor, and without realising that Dante wishes us to understand that the protagonist has already reached that goal in Eden, in the sleep which signifies the mystic repose at the summit of the various *itineraria mentis in Deum* that were outlined by these and other great mystics.¹⁰

¹⁰ In *Dante and the Mystics* (London: Dent, 1913), Edmund Gardner gives a very useful survey of patristic and medieval writings on mystical experience, but exaggerates the precision of many of the correspondences he detects between what we find in the *Paradiso* and the concepts, language and imagery of specific texts on contemplation. His suggestion that Dante follows the stages of the classic "threefold way" (purgation, illumination, and union), the third and properly mystical phase being reserved for the *Paradiso*, is elaborated at great length by Giuseppe Parma in *Ascesi e mistica cattolica nella "Divina Commedia,"* 2 vols. (Subiaco: Tipografia dei Monasteri, 1925-27), on which see also Giorgio Petrocchi, "Dante e l'ascetica duecentesca," *Il Velcro* 9 (1965): 663-73. Ernesto Jallonghi, in *Il misticismo bonaventuriano nella "Divina Commedia,"* ed. P. Diomede Scaramuzzi (Città di Castello: Leonardo Da Vinci, 1935) argues that Dante's mystic theology is one with Bonaventure's, a thesis which is no more plausible than Alexandre Masseron's totalising claim, in *Dante et Saint Bernard* (Paris: Albin Michel,

He has reached it in the sense that, as this chapter will show, his literal Edenic sleep, the sleep that the fictional abbot of Clairvaux later recalls by his use of the verb *assonnare*, bears as its tropological meaning the mystic marriage of the soul and Christ, just as did the literal sleep of the Bride in the Song of Songs. This purely affective *visio Dei* (in the person of Christ) is the summit of the contemplative life in this world, a mystic peak potentially attainable by any Christian. At the same time, just as mystic union was thought to be the supreme foretaste of the *visio Dei* as it will be enjoyed in Heaven, so Dante's sleep is also an internal typological figure, a prefiguration of its fulfilment in the pilgrim's final vision of the Word in the unmediated vision of the divine essence (the "sleep" which Bernard *anticipates* with his use of *assonnare* at *Par.* 32.139, as I will propose in the next chapter).

1953), that the poet relies wholly on the doctrines of Saint Bernard. For a more nuanced view, see Petrocchi, "Dante e la mistica di San Bernardo," in *Letteratura e critica: studi in honore di Natalino Sapegno*, ed. Walter Binni et al., vol. 1 (Rome: Bulzoni, 1974), 213-229. For R. Migliorini Fissi ("La nozione di 'deificatio' nel *Paradiso*," *Lecture classensi* 9/10 [1982]: 39-72) and Steven Botterill (*Dante and the Mystical Tradition*, 195-249), the "transhumanising" ascent in the *Paradiso* culminates in the specifically Bernardan version of *deificatio* (although Botterill has some reservations about the Italian scholar's presentation of her case). In the opinion of Nicolò Mineo (*Profetismo e Apocalittica*, 222-96), Gervasio Dumeige ("Le mysticisme surnaturel chez Richard de Saint-Victor," in *Lectura Dantis Mystica*, 95-96), and Manuela Colombo (*Dai mistici a Dante: il linguaggio dell'ineffabilità* [Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1987], 61-71), Dante relies on Richard of St. Victor for the final stage of the vision in the Empyrean. Francis X. Newman, in "St. Augustine's Three Visions," proposes that the whole structure of the *Commedia* rests on Augustine's theory of the three modes of vision, even though the text repeatedly contradicts this, as Gian Roberto Sarolli observes in *Prolegomena*, 113, n. 2. Marguerite Mills Chiarenza nevertheless offers a refinement of Newman's thesis that the third *cantica* corresponds to purely intellectual vision in "The Imageless Vision and Dante's *Paradiso*," in *Dante*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea, 1986), 77-91. Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, in "Dante and the Pauline modes of vision," argues that the poet deploys the Apostle's modes of vision in the *Paradiso*. In Egidio Guidubaldi, *Dante europeo III: Poema sacro come esperienza mistica* (Florence: Olschki, 1968), Nardi's thesis that the *Commedia* describes what Dante took to be a prophetic vision is explored on the supposition that it was a dream, this visionary mode, which is constantly spoken of as the means of "mystical" experience, being analyzed in terms of the Jungian psychology of dreams. Similarly, the contributors to *Lectura Dantis Mystica* are concerned, not with *mysticism* in the poem, but with the traditions behind its *visionary* aspects, seen in the light of the Jungian theory of archetypes. For Giuliana Carugati (*Dalla menzogna al silenzio: la scrittura mistica della "Commedia" di Dante* [Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991]), the ineffability topos is the defining feature of the *Commedia's* mysticism and is a correlative of its poetics. Critical interest in the theme of the ineffability of mystical experience is motivated in part by its presence in the letter to Cangrande, on which see Botterill, "'Quae non licet homini loqui.'" For the reasons I have already outlined (see p. 83, n. 120), I find the letter to be of little value for the purposes of this study. Angela G. Meekins, in her article "Mysticism" (*The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. Richard Lansing [New York: Garland, 2000], 634-36), observing that it is in the *Paradiso* that we find the elements which characterise writing about the ascent to mystic union, asserts that the conclusion of the work represents the attainment of that goal (as does Gilson in "La conclusion de la *Divine Comédie*"). Steven Botterill defends Dante's mystic credentials with respect to the *Paradiso*, but concedes the first two *canticas* to the skeptics, in "Mysticism and Meaning in Dante's *Paradiso*," in *Dante For the new Millennium*, eds. Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham U.P., 2003), 143-51.

ii The slumber of the soul

In the long commentary tradition that culminated in Saint Bernard's *Sermones in Cantica canticorum*, the series of erotic love poems which constitute the Song of Songs were thought of as the unified celebration of a marriage in which the lovers praise each other's beauty and express their passionate mutual desire. The text was interpreted allegorically as the expression of spiritual love and of the desire for mystical union between Christ and the collectivity of souls in the Church (the ecclesiological interpretation), and between Christ and the individual soul (the personal interpretation). In the works of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century mystics which will be reviewed later in this chapter, the imagery of the flesh and of carnal love is enthusiastically exploited, so that the natural and artificial adornments of the Bride, the nuptial pleasures of food and drink, kisses, embraces and "sleeping together" in the "bedroom" become vivid signs of the intensity of divine *caritas*. The audience is encouraged to identify with the female Bride/soul, ever longing and receptive, yearning to surrender herself to Christ the Spouse. The promised delights of the "inner senses" are more those of taste and touch than of vision, for the goal is the Word as a real, intimately felt presence, not an external object of cognition, in what is nonetheless understood as a "knowing" or "seeing," a beatifying *ffective* "vision" of God in the person of Christ, who is "known" with the heart or will rather than the intellect. This experience is a sublime if imperfect foretaste of the ultimate object of desire, its perfection in heaven, yet it is also, at the same time, the perfect beatitude and the ultimate goal with respect to what is normally possible in the here and now. Although the sleep in the "selfsame" of Psalm 4.9 was occasionally adduced as a figure of this "sleeping with Christ" (rather than of the *somnus gloriae* of the blessed in heaven), it was far more common for writers to cite the words of the Bride at Cant. 5.2 ("I sleep, and my heart watcheth," "ego dormio et cor meum vigilat"), or those of the Bridegroom at Cant. 2.7 ("I adjure you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and the harts of the field, that you stir not up, nor make the beloved to awake, till she please," "adiuro vos filiae

Hierusalem per capreas cervosque camporum ne suscitatis neque evigilare faciatis dilectam quoadusque ipsa velit").¹¹

Establishing a coherent literal meaning for this sleeping with the Spouse and its associated imagery was of little importance compared to grasping its significance with respect to the contemplative life. Just before using the figure of the Bride's repose in his *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, Bonaventure locates it in the context of the theory of fourfold biblical exegesis. Working from the familiar mnemonic couplet "The literal teaches the deeds, the allegory what to believe, / The moral what to do, the anagoge whereto you should strive," he points out that the moral sense, or *tropologia*, teaches us, not only about what we should do in the active life, but also about "how we should contemplate, how the soul is to be brought to God."¹² By Bonaventure's time, the Bride's sleep signified precisely the transcendent state which grace may or may not grant to those who reach the last step of the contemplative ascent, a complete cognitive and spiritual "sleep" or "death" to the world and to all external and fleshly preoccupations for the sake of an inner affective "waking" to the divine, above all to God as Christ the present Word of God, in the highest "vision of God" that is to be had *in via*. This is not the *visio Dei* of the next life, but the consummation to which grace sometimes elevates the soul in this world after it has achieved the necessary purity of heart and mind by means of a step-by-step ascetic process. For the mystics, most of whom held that the kind of vision of God which Augustine and Aquinas attributed to Paul was an impossibility in this life, the Apostle's rapture was the exemplary case of this "somet ardu, mais accessible à tous,

¹¹ For comprehensive surveys of the traditional interpretation of the Song of Songs, see Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1990) and E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Medieval Western Christianity* (Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania P., 1990). For an overview of the history of the figure of the Bride's "mystic sleep," see Pierre Adnès, "sommeil spirituel," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, 17 vols. in 21 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1932-95), vol. 14, 1041-53, and, on the contemplative state termed *excessus*, *alienatio* or *extasis*, Joseph Goetz et al., "extase," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 4, 2045-2189 (articles that treat mystic "sleep" and mystic "ecstasy" largely as distinct subjects, even though the former is a figure for the latter). On mystic sleep as the contemplative goal and reward of virtuous action and ascetic self-mortification, and its eschatological orientation to its fulfilment in the beatific vision of the next life, see Jean Leclercq, *Études sur le vocabulaire monastique du moyen âge* (Rome: Herder, 1961), 87-93, 117, and *Otia monastica: études sur le vocabulaire de la contemplation au moyen âge* (Rome: Herder, 1963), 13-26, 50-58, 104-127.

¹² "quomodo contemplandum, quomodo anima feratur in Deum" (*Collationes in Hexaemeron* 2.17, *Opera omnia*, vol. 5, 339). The translation of "Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, / Moralis quid agas, quod tendas anagogia" is Robert Hollander's (*Allegory in Dante's "Commedia"* [Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1969], 27-28).

de la vie chrétienne,” and one of its most important biblical figures was the sleep of the Bride of the Song of Songs.

In the Christian tradition, the Bride’s sleep first acquired its mystical tropological meaning with Gregory of Nyssa, well before the various *itineraria* by which this goal is attained were elaborated. Taking his cue from Philo of Alexandria, Gregory tries to capture the idea of a waking sleep, a state in which the external senses no longer function, as in the sleep of the body, leaving the soul free of worldly concerns and passions so that it can attend to the highest things, concluding:

When they [the senses] have all ceased to function, as if overcome and oppressed by a sort of sleep, then the activity of the heart is pure, and thought contemplates freely, undisturbed by sensation. . . . Thus the soul, in the enjoyment of pure contemplation, is no longer awake, as it were, to sensual delight; rather, withdrawn from all bodily sensation, through the bare purity of the mind it receives, in a divine waking, the manifestation of God.¹³

The relevance of this repose to the contemplative life was then established by Gregory the Great, whose treatment of the active and contemplative lives became definitive for the Middle Ages.¹⁴ While Augustine believed that Saint Paul’s *raptus* was an exceptional elevation to the unmediated vision of God while in this life, Gregory the Great was the principal authority for the much more common conviction that Paul’s rapture, although it was the paradigmatic summit of contemplation, was no exception to the principle that the nature of human beings in this world is such that their vision cannot under any circumstances break through the *caligo*, the “fog” or “darkness,” of earthly images and inclinations sufficiently to be able to see the divine light in itself. In the *Commedia*, the arduous ascent of the mountain of Purgatory cleanses the soul of this impediment to the vision of God, in a purificatory ascetic process, a process of self-mortification, in which Dante participates (“Correte al monte a spogliarvi lo scoglio / ch’esser non lascia a voi

¹³ “Quae omnia cum propter cessationem ab opere, tanquam somno aliquo sint victa et oppressa, pura est cordis operatio, et rursus aspicit cogitatio, ut quae a sensus motione sit libera et minime perturbata . . . Propterea anima quando delectatur sola eius quod est contemplatione, ad nihil dicitur vigilare eorum quae ad voluptatem fiunt per sensum, sed omni sensu corporali exuta, nuda et pura mente per divinam vigiliam Dei suscipit apparitionem” (*In Canticum canticorum* 10, in J.-P. Migne ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca*, 162 vols. [Paris, 1857-66], 44.992-993).

¹⁴ Gregory is the principal patristic authority in Aquinas’s treatment of the two lives in *ST* 2a2ae.179-182.

Dio manifesto,” *Purg.* 2.122-23; “quell’ ombre orando, andavan sotto ’l pondo, . . . purgando la caligine del mondo,” *Purg.* 11.26-30).

According to Gregory the Great, the labour of the active life of virtue is the necessary means to the last end, eternal life and the vision of God in our heavenly homeland. It is the doing of charitable good works, the exercise of the moral virtues in the form of external actions out of love of one’s neighbour, and it is “perfected,” fully realised and completed, in this world, since there will be no external action once the heavenly goal and reward are reached. That reward is the perfection of the contemplative life, the life which is intrinsically superior to the active kind yet is not necessary for salvation.¹⁵ The contemplative life has as its end the unmediated vision of God, and it begins imperfectly here, but reaches towards heaven, where it will be perfected in the “face to face” *visio Dei* that is impossible before death. The contemplative life, in Gregory’s classic definition, consists in

resting from exterior action, clinging only to the desire for the maker, so that the mind may now take no pleasure in doing things, but rather, having overcome all cares, may be afire to see the face of its Creator, able to bear with sorrow the burden of the corruptible flesh and to seek with all its desires to take part in the hymn-singing choirs of angels, to mingle with the heavenly citizens, and to rejoice in its eternal incorruption in the sight of God.¹⁶

The two lives are aptly figured by Martha and Mary, the first anxious about what needed to be done for Christ, the second wanting only to sit and listen to him (Luke 10.38-42). As the Lord himself made clear on that occasion, Martha’s work was necessary and good,

¹⁵ “The two lives of the holy preachers are the active life and the contemplative life. The active life is prior to the contemplative in time, since from good works one is inclined to contemplation. . . . It is possible to enter our heavenly homeland without the contemplative life, provided we do not neglect to do the good actions we are able to do; but we cannot enter there without the active life, if we neglect to do the good actions we can do” (“duae autem sunt sanctorum praedicatorum vitae, activa scilicet, et contemplativa; sed activa prior est tempore quam contemplativa, quia ex bono opere tenditur ad contemplationem. . . . Sine contemplativa ergo vita intrare possunt ad coelestem patriam, qui bona quae possunt operari, non negligunt; sine activa autem intrare non possunt, si negligant bona operari quae possunt”) [Gregory the Great, *In Ezechielem prophetam* 1.3.9, *PL* 76.809]. See also *ST* 2a2ae.182.4.

¹⁶ “ab exteriori actione quiescere, soli desiderio conditoris inhaerere, ut nil jam agere libeat, sed, calcatis curis omnibus, ad videndam faciem sui Creatoris animus inardescat; ita ut jam noverit carnis corruptibilis pondus cum moerore portare, totisque desideriis appetere illis hymnidicis angelorum choris interesse, admisceri coelestibus civibus, de aeterna in conspectu Dei incorruptione gaudere” (*In Ezechielem* 2.2.8, col. 953).

but Mary had chosen the “best part,” for it would never be taken away from her, from which we are to understand that moral virtue is essential here if we are to attain, in heaven, the perfect and eternal vision of God which is the object of the contemplative life. And we know from 1 Cor. 13.12 that, however great the ardour and force with which the mind reaches out to know God, it does not yet see the object of its love “facie ad faciem,” but only begins to see it “per speculum in enigmatē.” The two lives are also represented by the story of Jacob’s two wives, the fertile but “blear-eyed” Leah, whose name means “toilsome,” and her beautiful and clear-sighted sister Rachel, whose name signifies both “the simple one” and “the vision of the origin” (cf. Gen. 29-35). The active life therefore labours in work, but the contemplative life yearns only to see Christ, the origin (cf. John 8.25). Jacob greatly desired Rachel, but accepted Leah by night. In other words:

all who convert to the Lord desire the contemplative life and hunger for the repose of our eternal home; but first they must do the good works of which they are capable in the night of this present life, toiling in labour, that is, accepting Leah, so that afterwards they may rest in the embraces of Rachel in order to see the origin.¹⁷

In the meantime, there is the *gustus*, the “taste” or beginning of that *quies aeternae patriae* in the imperfect *quies contemplationis* or *quies mentis* of this life that is figured by the waking sleep of Cant. 5.2, “I sleep, and my heart watcheth.” This slumber of the Bride signifies the sweetness of those raptures in which the soul abandons the objects of bodily vision for spiritual goods, the exertions of outward activities for inner peace: “She sleeps while her heart wakes because she progresses through inner contemplation, and reposes from restless external works.”¹⁸ The soul ascends to the vision of God in this state by degrees, firstly by gathering itself into itself by crushing and rejecting the disturbing host of bodily sensations and carnal images, the likenesses of all things,

¹⁷ “Omnis qui ad Deum convertitur, contemplativam vitam desiderat, quietem aeternae patriae appetit; sed prius necesse est ut in nocte vitae presentis operetur bona quae potest, desudet in labore, id est Liam accipiat, ut post ad videndum principium in Rachel amplexibus requiescat” (*In Ezechielem* 2.2.10, col. 954).

¹⁸ “Vigilanti etenim corde dormit, quia per hoc quod interius contemplando proficit, ab inquieto foris opere quiescit” (*In Ezechielem* 2.2.13, col. 956); cf. 2.2.14.

earthly and heavenly, which blind and “scatter” it, secondly by “seeing” its own invisible nature so gathered, as it is without any of these external things, and thirdly by at last rising above itself to consider the invisible nature of God.¹⁹

The toil of the active life of virtue is the means to the restful “vision of the origin” in heaven, but also to our foretaste of it here: it is the necessary preparation or prior disposition for the repose of the contemplative life, the “asceticism” or spiritual “training” that removes the impediments to contemplation, for it quells the disturbing inner passions and the distracting images of earthly things.²⁰ The cloud of our corruptible human nature is such that it impedes any perfect apprehension of the unchanging eternal light, just as fog obscures the rays of the sun: “however much the human mind has progressed in virtue, it does not yet grasp something of eternity clearly, but still under the fog of some sort of imagining.” Of course, “the peak of this elevation cannot be reached at all unless the importunate and noisy throng of carnal desires is repressed.” This, for Gregory, is the moral sense of Job 4.13, “In the horror of a vision by night, when deep sleep is wont to hold men.” The first part of that verse figures the still obscure “nocturnal” vision of God which is to be had in this world, where “we are in the darkness of unclear contemplation” (“sub incerta contemplatione caligamus”). The second signifies the detachment from earthly things which is the precondition of that vision, since “One who desires to do worldly things is as if awake, but one who, seeking inner quiet, flees the clamour of this world, is as if falling asleep.” The contemplative “peak” then attained is figured by the sleep of Cant. 5.2, which Gregory defines as “the repose of life, when earthly desires have been crushed” (“calcatis terrenis desideriiis, quies vitae”). Without this sleeping to the world and earthly impulses there are no contemplative raptures, and the more deeply one sleeps the more intense they are, for “the more the holy mind withholds itself from the clamour of temporal desire, the more truly it knows inner things, and the more keenly it wakes to that which is within, the more it hides itself from external anxieties.” The “closing of the eyes” to temporal desires in this sleep is the recovery of humanity’s original innocence, the undoing of the first sin, for it was Satan who first opened the way to such desire when he tempted Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and

¹⁹ *In Ezechielem* 5.5.8-9, coll. 989-90.

²⁰ *Moralia* 6.37.10. See also *ST* 2a2ae.182.3.

evil: “Certainly, sin opened the eyes of concupiscence, which innocence had kept closed” (cf. Gen. 3.7: “and the eyes of them both were opened: and when they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig leaves, and made themselves aprons”). This complete detachment from the allure of worldly things is figured by Jacob’s stopping to sleep on his journey (Ex. 28.11), since “To sleep on a journey is to rest from the love of temporal things during the passage of this present life. To sleep on a journey is to close the eyes of the mind, in the course of these passing days, to the appetite for visible things.”²¹ As we will see, Dante does just this, becoming a second Jacob, when he closes his eyes in sleep (a closing of the eyes which the narrative strongly foregrounds) in the Earthly Paradise. In the poem, as in the doctrine of the two lives, this mystic detachment from the world is the product of the toil of the active life of virtue by which we merit the perfect vision of God, for the ascent is both the purgation of “la caligine del mondo” and the carrying out of works that merit eternal life (“sono in prima vita, / ancor che l’altra, sì andando, acquisti,” *Purg.* 8.59-60).²²

The eyes of concupiscence must be closed to inferior corporeal things so that the intention of the eyes of the heart and mind can be raised to heaven. Those who are best able to do this, when they are elevated by divine grace and “caught up in contemplation” (“contemplatione rapitur”), are figured by the eagle of Job, which mounts up to nest in high places and looks on its prey from afar (Job 39.27-29). The eagle itself symbolises “the acute intelligence of the holy and their lofty contemplation,” because it ascends to the “inaccessible cliffs” of the highest heavens and because, gifted with the keenest vision of all birds, it is able to gaze into the rays of the Sun without harm. Its resting in

²¹ “quantalibet virtute profecerit, non jam manifestum aliquid de aeternitate comprehendit, sed adhuc sub cuiusdam caligine imaginationis conspicit;” “ad huius sublevationis culmen minime pertingitur, nisi prius desiderium carnalium importune perstrepens turba reprimatur;” “Quisquis ea quae mundi sunt agere appetit, quasi vigilat; quisquis vero internam quietem quaerens, huius mundi strepitum fugit, velut obdormiscit;” “sancta mens quo se ab strepitu temporalis concupiscentiae comprimit, eo verius interna cognoscit; et tanto alacrius ad intima vigilat, quanto se ab exteriori inquietudine occultat;” “Culpa quippe oculos concupiscentiae aperuit, quos innocentia clausos tenebat;” “In itinere quippe dormire, est in hoc praesentis vitae transitu a rerum temporalium amore quiescere. In itinere dormire, est in dierum labentium cursu ab appetitu visibilium mentis oculos claudere;” (*Moralia* 5.30.53-5.31.55, *PL* 75.708-710). Gregory interprets the “dream in a vision by night” of Job 33.15 in a similar way: “Quid est quod per somnium nobis locutio divinitatis innotescit, nisi quod Dei secreta non cognoscimus, si in terrenis desideriiis vigilemus? In somnio enim exteriores sensus dormiunt, et interiora cernuntur. Si ergo interna contemplari volumus, ab externa implicatione dormiamus” (*Moralia* 23.20.37, *PL* 76.273). Cf. “In hoc itaque silentio cordis, dum per contemplationem interius vigilamus, exterius quasi obdormiscimus” (*Moralia* 30.16.54, *PL* 76.554).

²² Cf. *ST* 1a2ae.109.2, 5, 9-10, 111.2, 114.2.

high places represents the contemplative ascent above earthly desires, and its gazing on its prey from afar figures the ardent raising of the eyes of the heart to the rays of the true Sun which cannot yet be seen as it is because, however much we progress in virtue in this life, the “fog” of corruptibility impedes our vision of the incorruptible light, so that we see God “from afar,” i.e., “through a glass in a dark manner.”²³ According to Isaiah 33.15-17, “he that walketh in justices” arrives at the point where he “shutteth his eyes that he may see no evil,” after which “He shall dwell on high” and “his eyes shall see the king in his beauty,” if still from afar. For Gregory, this means that the virtues of the active life are the steps by which one ascends to the peaks to which the contemplative “eagles” are “caught up beyond themselves” (“*ultra semetipsos rapti*”) in order to gaze on the Redeemer’s divinity (but not yet as it truly is). This is why Paul, the greatest of them, “the lofty eagle” who flew up to the third heaven, wrote that “we see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face.”²⁴

In the *Purgatorio*, grace comes in the form of a keen-eyed eagle that snatches Dante up towards this contemplative summit. During his first night in Purgatory, the pilgrim dreams that he is on Mount Ida, from where Ganymede “fu ratto” up to heaven by Jupiter’s eagle in order to become the cup-bearer of the god, and sees a golden-winged eagle that first hangs suspended high above him, as if ready to swoop, and then shoots down, snatching the dreamer up (“*me rapisse*”) all the way to the sphere of fire, where they both burn with such vividly-imagined heat that the pain wakes him (*Purg.* 9.13-33, cf. *Aeneid* 5.252-57). Virgil then tells his charge that during his exhilarating sleep Lucia came and carried him (i.e., carried Dante, whom we know to be Lucia’s “fedele,” *Inf.* 2.98) from the Antepurgatory to the gate of Purgatory proper, which she indicated with a movement of her beautiful eyes, “*li occhi suoi belli*” (*Purg.* 9.52-63). “The touch is especially appropriate,” Singleton writes in his commentary, “this being St. Lucy, who, according to the well-known legend, plucked out her eyes when they were admired by a noble suitor. They were then restored to her more beautiful than before, and she became

²³ “*subtilis sanctorum intelligentia et sublimis eorum contemplatio;*” “*sub incerto visu caligamus;*” “*a luce enim incorruptibili caligo nos nostrae corruptionis obscurat;*” “*quasi per caliginem non videret*” (*Moralia* 39.47.95-39.51.101, *PL* 76.625-628).

²⁴ *Moralia* 39.51.102-103, *PL* 76.629-630.

thereby the special patroness of those who suffer from ailments of the eyes.”²⁵ Since Dante tells us in the *Convivio* that he himself once had this misfortune (*Conv.* 3.9.15), we may conjecture that this is at least one reason for his fidelity to the saint who was usually depicted carrying her eyes in a dish and who was martyred by being put to the sword after she proved impervious to fire. Certainly, this dream signifies the aid of grace at the beginning of the purgatorial process and the conclusion of that process in the agonising cleansing by fire on the last terrace, as well as the contemplative *raptus* (by which I mean Gregory’s version of Paul’s rapture) that will thus be made possible, and that is signified by the sleep of *Purgatorio* 32.

On the second night, the pilgrim dreams of Beatrice’s rival, the “femmina balba” (*Purg.* 19.1-33). As we have already seen in Chapter 3, the Beatrice of the *Vita Nuova*, while alive, had led Dante to God, the one true good in which real happiness resides, by transforming his *eros* into *caritas* (“per entro i mie’ disiri, / che ti menavano ad amar lo bene / di là dal qual non è a che s’aspiri,” *Purg.* 31.22-24). Upon her death in 1290, however, he “diessi altrui” (*Purg.* 30.126), pursuing that seductive illusion, the “imagini di ben . . . false, / che nulla promession rendono intera” (*Purg.* 30.131-32), “le presenti cose / col falso lor piacer” (*Purg.* 31.34-5), the earthly good which, despite appearances, “non fa l’uom felice; / non è felicità” (*Purg.* 17.127-39)—namely, the “femmina balba” or “antica strega” whose attraction is bitterly lamented on the three terraces the dreamer is about to confront (*Purg.* 19.58-60). The overtly erotic figuration of this creature foreshadows the final burning away of the excessive desire for the secondary good on the terrace of the lustful, with its wall of fire, a mortification in which Dante participates with agonising intensity (even though his body is as impervious to the flames as was Lucia’s, for this fire burns the soul, not the body) and which constitutes the last rite of passage on the way to the summit (*Purg.* 27.33-60). Virgil induces the terrified protagonist to enter the flames with the reminder that “tra Bēatrice e te è questo muro” (v. 36), and Dante does so, at last, like a child “ch’è vinto al pome” (v. 45). Since *eros* is then burnt away, the powerful sexual overtones of the dream that immediately follows, and of its fulfilment in the Earthly Paradise, show that the flames of lust have again become the flames of *caritas*.

²⁵ Singleton, *Purg.* 9.62.

On the third night, the wayfarer has a dream whose prophetic nature is plainly announced. In an atmosphere suffused with ardent “foco d’amor,” he sees a beautiful young woman gathering flowers in a field and singing (*Purg.* 27.91-114), just as he will later see Matelda doing in the Earthly Paradise, a sight which so heats the protagonist with the same “raggi d’amore” that warm Matelda herself that he yearns to be with her on the other side of the stream that separates them (the purifying waters of Lethe), as much as Leander yearned to cross the Hellespont in order to spend a little time with his beloved Hero (*Purg.* 28.37-75). Dante’s wish is fulfilled, not in a dream, but after he swoons into Lethe and finds himself, on coming to his senses, in the arms of Matelda, who cries “Tiemmi, tiemmi!” (*Purg.* 31.89-93). In the prophetic dream, the young woman who prefigures Matelda declares that she is Leah, and the manner in which she comports herself, as well as the way she describes both herself and her notably absent sister Rachel (“Ell’ è d’i suoi belli occhi veder vaga, / com’ io de l’addornarmi con le mani; / lei lo vedere, e me l’ovrare appaga,” *Purg.* 27.106-108), can leave us in no doubt that, as in the tradition that was codified by Gregory the Great, Leah represents the active life of good works, which is “consummated” in this world (in Dante’s case, in the waters of Lethe, with Matelda, who, whatever else she may signify, also signifies this). It is just as clear that her missing sister Rachel represents the contemplative life, which yearns only to see God and which therefore begins here, in the marvellous but imperfect *gustus* for which we are disposed by the active life (which is consummated in Dante’s embrace of Matelda), reaching its full realisation only in the “face to face” vision of the blessed in the heavenly Paradise (where Dante at least, and at last, *sees* Rachel, even if he does not embrace her, just before his brief but otherwise perfect elevation to the direct vision of God, *Par.* 32.7-9).

The fact that things go so swimmingly with Matelda, signifying the absolute perfection of the active life that follows Dante’s final penitential mortification at the hands of Beatrice (*Purg.* 30.55-31.105), sealed by a cleansing, not of sin, but of all *memory* of sin (*Purg.* 28. 121-33), therefore means that there is at least the possibility that Dante, having undergone the preparation, will experience the result—the possibility that, at some point after his crossing to “la beata riva” (*Purg.* 31.91-105), he will experience the foretaste of eternal beatitude that is the supreme contemplative goal, the highest kind

of “vision of God” that is normally attainable in this life and that is figured by the slumber of the Bride of the Song of Songs, signifying the soul’s “sleeping” to external, worldly anxieties, images and desires while on the journey of this life, the closing of the “eyes of concupiscence” that were opened by the serpent in Eden and its inner “awakening” to the vision of Christ, “the origin.” The realisation of this possibility in the dreamless slumber of *Purgatorio* 32 will become evident after a review of what the sleep of the Bride meant to some of the most important twelfth- and thirteenth-century writers on mystical experience.

iii Sleeping with Christ

Like Gregory the Great, the major exponents of Victorine, Cistercian and Franciscan mystic theology saw Paul’s rapture, not as the direct vision of God, nor as a literal sleep, but as the exemplary “mystic sleep” in the sense that it was thought to have been the paradigmatic elevation of a mortal, after the purificatory labour of virtuous action and ascetic detachment from all worldly concerns and all carnal needs and desires, to the most exalted contemplation of the divine that is possible in this life, the purely affective “vision” of God in the mystic union of the soul and Christ. The most common technical term for this contemplative summit was *excessus mentis*, and the most common biblical figure was sleep, primarily the literal slumber of the Bride in the Song of Songs, but also Adam’s sleep in Eden, the sleep of the Apostles at Christ’s Transfiguration, and, for some writers, the sleep in the “selfsame” of Psalm 4.9. Paul’s elevation to the “third heaven” was thought to be the attainment, in the transcendent state of *excessus*, of this mystic sleep.

Regarding the mystical interpretation of the Transfiguration, the great contemplatives may have been influenced by Saint Anselm’s thoughts on mystic repose. In his eighteenth *Oratio*, Anselm prays for the peaceful sleep of the Bride/soul in anticipation of its perfection in heaven:

Let it sleep, I beseech you, my Lord my God, let my memory sleep to all things under heaven, awake to you, as it is written: ‘I sleep, and my heart watcheth.’ May my soul be safe, may it be always secure under the wings of your protection, my God. Let it abide in you and always be warmed by you.

May it contemplate you in a transport of the mind and sing your praises joyfully. Let these your sweet goods be my consolation in the midst of these whirlwinds for this while, until I come to you, the true peace.²⁶

Anselm believes that the same joyful “transport of the mind” or *excessus mentis* is one of the allegorical senses of the sleep of Christ’s disciples at the Transfiguration. The three biblical accounts of this event agree that it took place at the summit of a mountain; but only Luke says that the three apostles who witnessed Christ’s glory fell asleep (Matt. 17.1-9, Mark 9.1-8, Luke 9.28-36). Bede is the principal authority for the doctrine that the overwhelming radiance of the Lord’s body was a foretaste of the future glory of the resurrected Christ and of the faithful after their resurrection at the end of time.²⁷ Although Luke’s narrative does not make it entirely clear how the sleep of the Apostles fits into the sequence of events, Bede understands him to mean that they first fell asleep, and then awoke to see Christ’s majesty.²⁸ St. Anselm finds a number of “mystic” senses in this. For example, as the Apostles fell asleep and then awoke to a foretaste of glory, so the elect will sleep in the grave then arise to eternal glory.²⁹ This would seem to be the analogical or eschatological sense. Alternatively, in what must be the tropological meaning, we must strive to sleep to the world in order to wake inwardly to the glory of Christ, like the Bride of the Song of Songs:

The holy are weighed down by sleep when they rest from worldly actions and the love of temporal things, and close the eyes of the mind to the appetite for visible things . . . for those who sleep to external things, as I said, and wake to things within, pass into inner mysteries. Hence the Bride says: ‘I sleep, but my heart waketh.’ As if she were saying, ‘When I make my external senses sleep to the anxieties of this life, my mind is free to know inner things more keenly.’ The soul does this in order to entirely rid itself of the troubling desires of this world, and to abandon noisy thoughts of earthly things. It wakes as it sleeps when it focusses its powers in a restful effort. Nor can it

²⁶ “Dormiat, obsecro, Domine deus meus, dormiat memoria mea ab omnibus quae sub coelo sunt, vigilans te, sicut scriptum est: *Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat*. Sit tuta, sit semper segura sub pennis protectionis tuae anima mea, Deus meus. Maneat in te, et foveatur semper a te. Contempletur te in mentis excessu et cantet laudes tuas in jubilatione; et haec dulcia bona tua sint inter hos turbines consolatio mea interim, donec veniam ad te pacem veram” (*Oratio* 18, *PL* 158.899).

²⁷ Bede, *In Matthaei Evangelium expositio* 1.17, *In Marci Evangelium expositio* 3.8 (cf. *ST* 3a.45.1, resp).

²⁸ Bede, *In Lucae Evangelium expositio* 3.9.

²⁹ Anselm, *Homilia* 4 (*PL* 158.607).

attain inner contemplation, without studiously withdrawing itself from external entanglements.³⁰

Anselm insists that this sleep is the result of a strenuous effort to purify oneself by rising above earthly things. This is the moral sense of Christ's choosing the top of a high mountain for his Transfiguration. He did so in order to teach those who desire to see his glory that, rather than lie low in base pleasures, clinging to the desire for worldly goods, they should "always be lifted up to heavenly things by the love of eternal goods, and should always imitate, as much as mortals can, the life of angelic purity, piety, peace, delight, goodness, and justice."³¹ Such a sleep (and "death") is the one goal at the summit of the various step-by-step mystic ascents that were elaborated by the greatest contemplatives of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

No mystic mountain was more carefully drawn than the intricately articulated sequence of stages to be found in *De Contemplatione et eius speciebus*, a work almost certainly written by Hugh of St. Victor, the founder of the great twelfth-century tradition of Victorine mysticism.³² So finely delineated are its many steps³³ that it will be best to skip straight to the summit, *gaudium felicissime visionis*. This is the fifth and supreme degree of contemplation in this life, enjoyed by a happy few when "ravished by the extreme sweetness of the taste of the divine, they contemplate God alone." In this state, "the soul is fully illumined by the splendour of the eternal light, consistently and perfectly hates sin, puts aside the world and abandons itself, and entire, alone, naked, and

³⁰ "Somno gravantur sancti, dum ab actione terrena et ab amore temporalium rerum quiescunt, et ab appetitu visibilium mentis oculos claudunt. . . quia qui exterioribus, ut dictum est, obdormiunt, et in interioribus evigilant, interna mysteriorum penetrant. Hinc est quod sponsa dicit: *Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat*. Ac si dicat: Dum exteriores sensus ab hujus vitae sollicitudinis sopio, vacante mente vivacius interna cognosco. Agit enim talis anima, ut hujus mundi inquietam concupiscentiam a se penitus ejiciat, et terrenarum cogitationum strepitum deserat; ac per quietis studium virtutibus intenta vigilans dormit. Neque enim ad contemplanada interna perducitur, nisi ab his quae exterius implicant, studiose subtrahatur" (*Homilia 4*, col. 614).

³¹ "aeternorum amore ad superna semper erigi, et angelicae munditiae, pietatis, et pacis et dilectionis, et bonitatis, et justitiae vitam, quantum mortalibus possibile est, semper imitari" (*Homilia 4*, col. 604).

³² Hugh of St. Victor, *La contemplation et ses espèces* [*De contemplatione et eius speciebus*], ed. Roger Baron (Tournai: Desclée, 1958).

³³ The fourth and highest species of contemplation is *ascensio*, within which one ascends through three levels. The most exalted of these, *ascensio intellectualis*, in turn rises in three stages, of which the highest is *scrutinio morum*. The latter has three forms, the last, *cognitio Dei*, involving a hierarchy of five modes, *gaudio felicissime visionis* being the fifth. The three ascending peaks at this summit are contemplation *per suspensum*, *per silentium* and *per sompnum*.

pure, reaches out to God, not parting from him, but uniting itself totally to the one God.”³⁴ On arrival, however, we find that there are three peaks to scale, each higher than the one before and each rising through three levels. The first peak, which pertains to purification, is the one Job called *suspendium* (cf. Job 7.15). We ascend it by means of the familiar threefold movement in which the soul “collects” itself by turning away from the distracting objects of the senses and their images, turning into itself, into its bare and pure inner nature, which it sees to be superior to those things, before rising above itself to the invisible things of God. The result is the attainment of *silentium*, John’s term for the next peak (cf. Apoc. 8.1), which pertains to charity. As we climb it, first speech, then the mind, then discursive reason are silenced, so that the mind may be imbued inwardly with a divine anointing. We then reach the highest peak, *somnus*, as Solomon chose to call it when he wrote ‘I sleep, but my heart waketh.’ Its keynote is happiness, *felicitas*. Yet it is also a death, one which the Apostle Paul well understood:

Thus the fully-anointed mind is seized by a sleep of heavenly sweetness, and now rests, dissolved in the embrace of the supreme light. The sleep of the soul is threefold, for it is caught up to those ineffable things according to its threefold power. Then it experiences a kind of dream of happiness, when it reposes in beatitude as it is set before and on the throne of God, forgetting the world and itself. The soul’s reason sleeps, because, ignorant of the cause of such happiness, it cannot comprehend its origin, growth and end. The memory sleeps, because it is wholly lulled by such joy and ineffable sweetness that it cannot recall any part of its experience. The will truly sleeps, for it feels the sweetness of indescribable joy unawares. Hence the Apostle says, ‘He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit’ [1 Cor. 6.17]. And thus, dead to the world and to itself, the soul blissfully sleeps . . . ³⁵

³⁴ “nimia divini gustus dulcedine rapti, Deum tantum contemplantur. . . animus splendore lucis eterne totus illustratur, constanter et perfecte peccatum odit, mundum postponit, seipsum abicit, et totus, solus, nudus, et purus, in Deum tendit, totus nunquam digrediens, sed uni Deo se totum uniens” (*La contemplation*, 86-87).

³⁵ “Sic perunctam [mens] somnus eam celestis arripit dulcedis, et tunc quiescit liquefacta in amplexu summi luminis. Sompnus autem anime triplex dicitur, quia secundum triplicem eius potentiam ad illa ineffabilia rapitur. Tunc quasi quoddam felicitatis sompnium patitur, dum beata requiescens, mundi et sui obliuiscens, pro sede et in sede Dei collocatur. Ratio anime dormit, quia, causam tante felicitatis ignorans, originem, prouentum et finem apprehendere non sufficit. Memoria dormit, quia que iocunditate et suavitate ineffabile tota sopitur, nichil eorum que passa est reminiscitur. Voluntas vero dormit, quia illam ineffabilis gaudii suauitatem quam sentit, sentire se nescit. Unde Apostolus dicit: *Qui adheret Deo unus spiritus est*. Sic ergo sibi et mundo mortua feliciter obdormit anima. . .” (*La contemplation*, 87-89).

Having “died to” or rejected both the world (in *suspendium*) and the wilful self (in *silentium*), in *somnus* one at last “dies in the Lord” by seeking beatitude (“moritur . . . in Domino, beatitudinem consequendo”). This sleep is both the nuptial feast where we feed on the dishes of eternal beatitude (“eterne beatitudinis fercula”), celebrating the union with the immortal Spouse, and an anticipation of “the supreme peace of eternal bliss” (“summa pax eterne felicitatis”) which that union brings. It is also the third heaven of 2 Cor. 12.2-4, about which Paul said that one could not speak. “Therefore,” concludes the writer, “there remains only the vision of God face to face, about which we will be able to speak fully then, when we see him as he is.”³⁶

Ecstatic slumber also lies at the end of the contemplative ascent for Richard of Saint Victor, Hugh’s famous student. It is clearly the culmination in two works in which Richard (like Gregory the Great) discovers an entirely non-visionary tropological sense in the historical dreams of Old Testament patriarchs and prophets. In both texts, such dreams tell us about what we should do in contemplation, the essential analogy being that, just as we may dream during the sleep of the body, after the Sun has set, so, during the “sleep” of *excessus* or *alienatio mentis*, we may see those intellectual “visions” which illuminate the mind and reveal the divine judgement of our own spiritual condition, but only after we have prepared ourselves by putting an end to the love of vanity. Only then is a man “caught away outside of himself” (“extra semetipsum rapitur”); only then, if and when it pleases God, is the mind “led out beyond itself, and caught up to the contemplation of divine judgements” (“supra semetipsam ducta, et ad divinorum iudiciorum contemplatione rapta”).³⁷

In *Adnotatio in Psalmum* 30, Richard sees the sleep in the “selfsame” of Psalm 4.9 as a figure of this *excessus* or *alienatio*, which is nothing other than the same mystic union that is signified by the sleep of the Bride in the Song of Songs (rather than as the state of the blessed in heaven, the *somnus gloriae* which is the subject of the next chapter). That repose, the end-result of moral-ascetic purification, is for Richard the ultimate intrinsic goal of the mind’s journey to God in this life, in the sense that it is the perfect fulfilment

³⁶ “Restat igitur sola Dei facie ad faciem uisio, de qua tunc ad plenum dicere poterimus quando eum sicut est uidebimus” (*La contemplation*, 90-93).

³⁷ *De differentia sacrificii Abrahae a sacrificio Beatae Mariae Virginis* (PL 196.1050-51), cf. *De eruditione hominis interioris* 1.19, 2.2 (PL 196.1261,1300).

of what is possible before death. Richard uses lush sensory images to express the sublime sweetness of the far from inert *tranquillitas*, *quies* and *pax* of the soul whose every desire for celestial things has been satisfied in the embrace of the Word made flesh. It begins with “seeing,” in the contemplation of the Spouse as truth, external to us; it is perfected in the “tasting” of mystic union, in the satiety of inner sweetness, since “tasting is more than seeing, for we incorporate what we taste, and become as if one with it.” Here, *gustare* denotes the complete plenitude that comes from the complete realisation of our ability to “incorporate” the Word in the here and now, rather than, as it more commonly does in mystic works, the foretaste of something yet to be fully enjoyed. Richard lingers on the sweet taste of this peace as he describes the degrees through which it grows, as gradual alienation from externals brings deeper repose and greater freedom from cupidity. Six steps lead to *dulcedo*, within which a further six grades culminate in *tranquillitas*, the soul’s sleep “in the self same:” “This tranquillity is the peace which we have so loquaciously sought, to which we have at last, with such effort and by so many steps, ascended. This is the peace in which the soul sleeps.”³⁸ In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Richard says that “the spiritual coupling, that is, the concord and union of wills,” is figured by the blissful slumber of Cant. 2.7 (“I adjure you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and the harts of the field, that you stir not up, nor make the beloved to awake, till she please”), and evokes the intensity of the soul’s experience of this union with a torrent of sensual imagery, exploiting to the full the erotic potential of the idea that the Bride “sleeps with Christ, when she closes her eyes to external things, and knows inner things by contemplation.”³⁹

It is therefore no surprise to find that ecstatic slumber is the goal of the ascent which Richard outlines in his famous *Benjamin major*, the one text on contemplation that can be cogently identified, by means of close correspondences, as a specific source of some of

³⁸ “Plus est gustare quam videre. Quod enim gustamus nobis incorporamus, et cum eo quasi unum efficimur;” “Haec autem tranquillitas, est pax illa quam diu loquendo quaesivimus, ad quam tot gradibus vix tandem ascendimus. Haec est illa pax in qua anima obdormit” (*Annotationes mysticae in Psalmos 30* (PL 196.273-76).

³⁹ “Est ibi spirituale connubium, concordia videlicet et conjunctio voluntatem;” “Hic dormit cum Christo, dum ab exterioribus oculos claudit, et interna per contemplationem cognoscit” (*In Cantica Canticorum explicatio 8*, PL 196.426).

the mystic language and imagery of the *Paradiso*.⁴⁰ According to this well-known work, there are three kinds of mental activity, three ways in which the mind “sees” or “gazes at” some object: in *cogitatio*, its gaze wanders and searches restlessly, but in *meditatio* it settles on some one object, in a focussed mental effort to gain knowledge, proceeding then to *contemplatio*, which is not an active and discursive process but “the free penetrating gaze of the mind, suspended in wonder, at manifestations of wisdom,” a joyous and wondering coming-to-rest of the mind on an attained object of cognition.⁴¹ In contemplation itself, the mind progresses through six levels, looking with loving wonder on an ascending series of objects in the order of being, from things perceptible to the senses to the supreme spiritual mystery of the Incarnation, using the ascending sequence of its cognitive powers, imagination (at the first and second stages), reason (at the third and fourth) and pure understanding (at the fifth and sixth levels).⁴²

These two highest levels are radically separate from and superior to the first four: in the fifth, the mind rises above but not beyond reason in order to contemplate the unity of God, but in the sixth it passes above and entirely beyond reason, fixing its gaze on the Trinity of persons in the one God and the relations among them, and even, at last, on the most secret mystery of all, the principle which unites the human and the divine in Christ.⁴³ To reach these heights, images derived from the senses, which are presented to the mind by the imagination, and even reason itself, must be abandoned, since images can play no part, and are even a hindrance, in the mind’s ascent to things which can in no way be represented by likenesses, nor apprehended by reason:

⁴⁰ *Benjamin major*, PL 196.63-202, cf. Gardner, *Dante and the Mystics*, 162-83, 314-23, Gilson, “La conclusion de la *Divine Comédie*,” passim, Dumeige, “Le mysticisme surnaturel,” 95-96, Mineo, *Profetismo e Apocalittica*, 222-96, Colombo, *Dai mistici a Dante*, 61-71. The reasonably plausible examples of direct borrowing that are usually cited are, in order of increasing plausibility as direct borrowings from this source rather than any one of several possible sources, *Par.* 33.79-145 (the progression from the unity of God to the Trinity and then to the Incarnation, as per *Ben. maj.* 4.17-18), *Par.* 33.141 (the image of lightning, recalling *Ben. maj.* 5.5), and *Par.* 21.34-42 (very probably inspired by Richard’s use of bird-imagery in *Ben. maj.* 1.5). Colombo concentrates on *Par.* 23.40-51, which echoes a number of Richard’s motifs, among them, according to the critic (it is by no means self-evident), the assimilation of ecstasy to sleep that is “peculiarmente e originalmente riccardiana” (67). It should be now be apparent, however, that this comparison or “assimilation” was by no means original or peculiar to Richard’s writings.

⁴¹ *Ben. maj.* 1.3-5. “*Libera mentis perspicacia in sapientiae spectacula cum admiratione suspensa*” (*Ben. maj.* 1.4, col. 67).

⁴² *Ben. maj.* 1.6.

⁴³ *Ben. maj.* 4.17-18.

Let the imagination cease for a while, let it cease, let it withdraw, for in this task there is nothing in which it can assist. What can imagination do where reason gives way? What would imagination do there where there is no change, no shadow of vicissitude?⁴⁴

Using pure understanding, or *intelligentia*, the mind thus attains the supreme mode of knowing God and Jesus Christ that is possible in this life, the supreme foretaste or beginning in the here and now of eternal life, which is the perfection and consummation of this contemplative summit.⁴⁵

The quality of *contemplatio* as such, at all six levels, may vary according to a hierarchy of three modes.⁴⁶ *Mentis dilatatio* is the enlarging of the mind by human effort alone and within the scope of human activity. In *mentis sublevatio*, the mind is raised by divine grace in cooperation with human efforts to a level beyond the mode of human operations. In neither case is there *alienatio*, “alienation” from the self and the outer world, *sublevatio* being the mode of prophecy when prophetic revelations are made without such alienation, as when the Lord showed Moses the Promised Land from atop Mt. Nebo in a revelation by real things actually seen (Deut. 34.1, cf. most of the *Commedia*).⁴⁷ *Alienatio*, or *excessus mentis*, commonly translated as “ecstasy,”⁴⁸ is in fact the third and highest mode. It occurs, by the power of grace alone, “when the mind, by a divinely wrought transformation, forgets present things and passes over to a state

⁴⁴ “Cedat itaque imaginatio interum, cedat, penitusque recedat, non est utique in quo hoc opus adjuvare valeat. Quid enim imaginatio possit ubi ratio succumbit? Quid ibi faciat imaginatio ubi nulla est transmutatio nec vicissitudinis obumbratio?” (*Ben. maj.* 4.4, col. 138).

⁴⁵ *Ben. maj.* 4.5, cf. 4.17-18. Whether or not Dante takes from Richard the sequence that we find in *Par.* 33.79-145 (the contemplation of the unity of the divine essence, the threefold personhood of the Trinity, and the mystery of Incarnation, a sequence which we also find in Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* 5-6 and in Saint Bernard’s *De consideratione* 5.3.5-5.12.26), what the poet does with it is something quite different from Richard’s conception. The author of the *Benjamin major*, for whom the *visio Dei* is impossible in this life, has in mind a purely intuitive contemplation, after the abandonment of sensory images and discursive reason, of what the Christian believes about these three mysteries. In the *Commedia*, on the other hand, what the Christian believes is embodied in images, and the protagonist tries unsuccessfully to apply discursive reason to the last of these, until the moment his mind is elevated by the light of glory beyond images and reason to the intuitive vision of the divine essence and, within that vision, of the principle that unites the two natures in Christ. That is, Dante uses this aspect of the mystic discourse about the height of the still-imperfect “vision” of God in this life in mystic union (the “sleep” of *Purgatorio* 32) in order to represent his protagonist’s ascent beyond it to a direct experience of its consummation in heaven.

⁴⁶ *Ben. maj.* 5.2.

⁴⁷ *Ben. maj.* 5.4.

⁴⁸ As in Richard of St. Victor, *The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, Book Three of the Trinity*, trans. Grover A. Zinn (London: SPCK, 1979) and Joseph Goetz et al., “extase,” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*.

which is alien and inaccessible to human effort. . . . when the sharpness of the contemplative's understanding is gathered into the innermost recess of the mind, cut off from the memory of external things by the veil of forgetfulness and alienation."⁴⁹ According to Richard, the state of *alienatio* or *excessus* is not unique to the two supreme levels of contemplation (although just how one might ascend to the highest levels without alienation, or experience the lowest levels with it, is not made clear); it is, however, *proper* to those two levels, and the author of *Benjamin major* overwhelmingly treats it as such, to the extent that he often writes as if it were in fact unique to them, as when he writes that "in order that it may see something in these [two levels] more keenly and clearly, the human mind passes beyond itself, and crosses over into alienation."⁵⁰

The ecstatic alienation of the fifth and sixth degrees is a gift of grace, obtained by the arduous struggle to attain and make habitual the soul's detachment from external worldly things. This preparation, this purity of heart and mind, and ardent longing, are necessary, but not sufficient: once purity has been achieved, once we have been cleansed of the dross of earthly loves, we can only wait, with eager hearts, remaining ready at every hour for the hour at which grace comes with the advent of Christ the Bridegroom to his lover, the Bride/soul that must be ready at all hours for the moment she can share her beloved's embraces in the bedchamber.⁵¹ Just as Moses remained on the peak of Mt. Sinai for six days and then, on the seventh, was called by the Lord from within the cloud to a "conversation" or divine revelation (Ex. 24.12-18), so we toil for six days to purify and elevate our minds as much as we can in order to be ready for the seventh day of rest, when the Lord grants a divine revelation and our labour becomes ease and tranquillity, and "sleep:" "finally, at some time, the mind is settled in supreme tranquillity, so that it not only puts aside all cares and preoccupations, but also passes almost beyond the entire

⁴⁹ "Mentis alienatio est quando praesentium memoria menti excidit, et in peregrinum quemdam et humanae industriae inivium animi statum divinae operationis transfiguratione transit . . . quando contemplantis acumen ad intimum mentis sinum colligitur, et ab exteriorum memoria oblivionis et alienationis velo secluditur" (*Ben. maj.* 5.2, col. 170).

⁵⁰ "ut aliquid in his perspicacius et limpidius cernere possit, ipsa mens humanam semetipsam excedit, et in abalienationem transit" (*Ben. maj.* 4.22, col. 164).

⁵¹ *Ben. maj.* 4.6-16.

limit of human experience . . . and is put to sleep, with complete forgetfulness of self.”⁵²

Indeed, nothing is so like *alienatio* as sleep:

For at one and the same time, for the human understanding, the divine is illuminated and the human is obscured. This peace, obscuring, and enlightening of the uplifted soul is expressed by the Psalmist in a few words when he says ‘In peace in the self same I will sleep, and I will rest.’ The soul truly finds peace when, having been led above itself, it does not feel the tribulation of human suffering at all. It falls asleep in this peace when, lulled into supreme tranquillity, it forgets the things it was wont to consider with a sober mind. For one who sleeps is totally unaware of what is around him, and even of himself. Rightly then is alienation of the mind expressed by sleep, for in alienation the mind is absent from the usual places and, as if occupied by sleep, leaves human things and journeys to the contemplation of the divine. It falls asleep ‘in the self same’ when it rests, in contemplation and wonder, in him for whom it is one and the same thing to be all that is, and who alone can truly say ‘I am who am.’ What Moses calls the seventh day David more clearly terms ‘peace.’ And what for Moses is to enter the middle of a cloud, for David is to fall asleep. And what the latter means by ‘he rests in the same,’ the former means by ‘he goes up and remains with the Lord.’⁵³

There is another revelation at the top of a mountain that signifies the contemplative’s going into ecstasy, the *mente excedere* that Richard conceives very much as a Pseudo-Dionysian crossing-over into the darkness of God.⁵⁴ This is the experience of the disciples when they were overshadowed by a bright cloud at the top of Mt. Tabor, to which Christ had led them so that they might witness his Transfiguration (Matt. 17.1-9):

⁵² “tandem aliquando, ad summam animus tranquillitatem componitur, ut non solum omnem curam et sollicitudinem deponat, imo universas pene humanae passibilitatis metas excedet . . . summa sui oblivione sopitur” (*Ben. maj.* 4.22. col.165).

⁵³ “Nam uno eodemque tempore humana intelligentia, et ad divina illuminatur, et ad humana obnubilatur. Hanc sublevati animi pacem, obnubilationem et illuminationem Psalmista paucis verbis comprehendit, cum dicit: *In pace in idipsum dormiam et requiescam*. Veraciter anima pacem tunc invenit, quando supra semetipsam ducta humanae passibilitatis molestias omnino non sentit. In hac pace obdormit, quando ad summam tranquillitatem consopita, quidquid sobria cogitare consueverat, ei in oblivionem venit. Qui enim dormit, quae circa ipsum sunt, imo et semetipsum omnino non novit. Recte ergo per soporem, mentis alienatio exprimitur, per quam ab assuetis absentatur, et quasi per somnum occupata, a rebus humanis, divinarum rerum contemplatione peregrinatur. Et tunc quidem in idipsum obdormit, quando in eo per contemplationem et admirationem requiescit, qui unum idemque est esse omne quod est, cui solus veraciter dicere potest: *Ego sum qui sum* [Ex. 3.14]. Quod igitur Moyses designat per septimum diem, hoc David apertius nominat pacem. Et quod apud illum est ingredi medium nebulae, hoc apud istum est obdormire. Et quod unus requiescit in idipsum, hoc est quod alius vocatus accedit, et moratur apud Dominum” (*Ben. maj.* 4.22, col. 165).

⁵⁴ This is especially evident in *Ben. maj.* 4.23.

For what is it to enter a cloud to a divine calling, if not to experience a transport of the mind, and to have the memory of present things obscured, as if by a cloud of oblivion? The overshadowing of Christ's disciples by a bright cloud also pertains to this, for it at once obscured and, in obscuring, illuminated, since it both illuminated with respect to the divine and clouded with respect to the human.⁵⁵

There are, of course, three modes of *alienatio*, according to its three possible causes. The third and highest is due to *magnitudo exsultationis*, the greatness of exaltation and joy.⁵⁶ At considerable length, and on the basis of Scripture, Richard advises those who have experienced such ecstasy (in effect, the supreme degree of mystic sleep), but who find themselves unable to do so again, that the best remedy is listening to sacred music and song, for the external harmony of melodious singing in praise of the Lord can restore the inner spiritual harmony needed for such a grace. This is figured for us by the restoration to Elisha of his lost prophetic spirit through listening to the singing of minstrels (4 Kings 3.15), an indication that by listening to the singing of psalms we can prepare the way for the visit of the Word in *alienatio*.⁵⁷

At the conclusion of the work, we learn that Paul's rapture was an ascent of Richard's own contemplative ladder, achieved by the abandonment, successively, of sensation, imagination and discursive reason:

Sometimes alienation ascends beyond the corporeal senses, sometimes beyond the imagination too, and sometimes even beyond reason. Who can deny that there is alienation beyond the bodily senses and imagination, when apostolic authority assures us that alienation rises even beyond reason? 'I know a man,' says the Apostle, 'whether in the body or out of the body, God knows, such a man caught up to the third heaven.' Thus we know that he,

⁵⁵ "Quid enim est ad divinae vocationis accessum nebulam intrare nisi mente excedere, et per oblivionis nebulam quasi adjacentium memoria mente caligare? Ad idem respicit quod discipulos Christi nubes lucida obumbravit. Una itaque obumbravit, et obumbrando illuminavit, quia et illuminavit ad divina et obnubilavit ad humana" (*Ben. maj.* 5.2, col. 171).

⁵⁶ *Ben. maj.* 5.5.

⁵⁷ *Ben. maj.* 5.17-18.

unaware of what was happening around him, passed beyond human reason in an alienation of the mind.⁵⁸

Presumably, at the sixth and highest level, Paul contemplated the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation, not yet face to face, but as clearly as one can in the here and now.⁵⁹

Before considering Saint Bernard's mystic theology (his concept of what the soul's union with Christ is and how it is achieved) in order to discover what the real abbot of Clairvaux has to say about sleep, I will look at Saint Bonaventure's, since his doctrine borrows much from that of Richard of Saint Victor and is even more Pseudo-Dionysian in inspiration yet also bears strong traces of Bernard's mysticism, which is centred, not on the transition into the divine darkness, but on "the soul's recovery of its likeness to God effected through devotion to the man whose likeness to God was never corrupted,"⁶⁰ envisioned as a "return to Eden."

In his *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, Bonaventure discusses the highest form of the contemplative life, the one he believes Paul taught to Pseudo-Dionysius. In this supreme form of wisdom, one abandons and transcends, by the power of grace and the Holy Spirit, all sensory, imaginative and intellectual cognition, all *scientia*, in an ascent which leads to the total beatitude of affective union: "these powers must all be relinquished," Bonaventure writes, "and at the summit there is the union of love, which transcends them all."⁶¹ The sleep of the Bride figures this ineffable union with the divine in *alienatio* or *ecstasis*, and the fact that Paul heard unutterable things in his *raptus* makes it clear that it was just such a "sleep:"

And so, since the mind is conjoined with God in that union, it in a way sleeps, and in another wakes: 'I sleep, and my heart watcheth.' Only the affective

⁵⁸ "Ascendit autem aliquando supra sensum corporalem, aliquando etiam supra imaginationem, aliquando vero supra rationem. Quis autem illam quae supra sensum corporeum, seu illam quae supra imaginationem est negare audeat, cum illam etiam quae supra rationem est, apostolica illa auctoritas convincat? *Scio*, inquit, *hominem sive in corpore, sive extra corpus, Deus scit, raptum ejusmodi usque ad tertium coelum*. Ecce quia humanam rationem mentis alienatione transierat, qui quid circa se plenius ageretur penitus discernere nequibat" (*Ben. maj.* 5.19, col. 192).

⁵⁹ See p. 154, n. 45.

⁶⁰ James I. Wimsatt, "St. Bernard, the Canticle of Canticles, and Mystical Poetry," in Paul E. Szarmach ed., *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1984), 82.

⁶¹ "Et omnes oportet relinquere, et in vertice est initio amoris, et haec omnes transcendit" (*Collationes in Hexaemeron* 2.29-30, *Opera omnia*, vol. 5, p. 341).

power wakes, imposing silence on all others; and in this state one is alienated from the senses and put into ecstasy and hears ‘secret words which it is not granted to man to utter,’ since they are in the affection only. For one can only express what has been conceived, and can only conceive what has been understood, and, since the understanding is silent, it follows that almost nothing can be said or explained.⁶²

For Bonaventure, in this affective slumber of the mind, this Pseudo-Dionysian transition into the divine darkness, one nonetheless “sees” God, which means that one also in some sense “dies,” for the Lord says that “man shall not see me and live” (Ex. 33.20). One “dies” by abandoning not just sensation and intellect but also the imaginary phantasms of dreams and visions:

This love separates, puts to sleep and elevates. It separates us from all other affections because of the one love of the Bridegroom; it puts to sleep because it quiets and silences all powers; it elevates because it lifts us to God. And thus one is as if dead; hence it is said ‘my love is strong as death,’ for it separates us from all things. One must therefore die by this love, in order to be lifted up. For ‘man shall not see me and live.’ And so in this union the faculties of the soul are gathered together and the soul thus unified enters into its intimate inner part and thereby rises to its supreme part, for the inward and the supreme are the same, as Augustine says. Of this height it is said in the Canticle: ‘I adjure you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and the harts of the field, that you stir not up, nor make the beloved to awake, till she please.’ . . . And we attain this sleep by being carried above all sensory and intellectual operations, which are connected to images, dismissing even the angelic intelligences.⁶³

⁶² “Unde cum mens in illa unione coniuncta est Deo, *dormit* quodam modo et quodam modo *vigilat*: *Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat* [Cant. 5.2]. Sola *affectiva* vigilat et silentium omnibus aliis potentiis imponit; et tunc homo alienatus est a sensibus et in ecstasi positus et audit *arcana verba, quae non licet homini loqui* [2 Cor. 12.4], quia tantum sunt in affectu. Unde cum exprimi non possit nisi quod concipitur, nec concipitur nisi quod intelligitur, et intellectus silet; sequitur, quod quasi nihil possit loqui et explicare” (*Collationes* 2.30, p. 341).

⁶³ “Iste autem amor est *sequestrativus, soporativus, sursumactivus*. *Sequestrat* enim ab omni affectu alio propter sponsi affectum unicum; *soporat* et quietat omnes potentias et silentium imponit; *sursum agit*, quia ducit in Deum. Et sic est homo quasi mortuus; et ideo dicitur: *Fortis ut mors dilectio* [Cant. 8.6], quia separat ab omnibus. Oportet enim, hominem mori per illum amorem, ut sursum agitur. Unde *non videbit me homo et vivet*. Et tunc in tali unione virtus animae in unum colligitur et magis unita fit et intrat in suum *intimum* et per consequens in *sumum* ascendit; quia idem *intimum* et *sumum*, secundum Augustinum. De illo *summo* dicitur in Cantico: *Adiuvo vos, filiae Ierusalem, ne suscitatis neque evigilare faciatis dilectam, donec ipsa velit*. . . . *Iuvat* autem nos ad veniendum ad illum somnum superferri omnibus sensibus, omnibus operationibus, quae sunt cum phantasmatibus annexis, dimittere etiam angelicas intelligentias” (*Collationes* 2.31-32, pp. 341-42).

Here, Bonaventure is talking about a contemplative *ecstasis* which few actually achieve, but which is potentially open to all Christians. Later in the same work he appears to distinguish it from *raptus*, a term which designates the elevation to a height that is accessible only to the most humble of souls. The prime example of this humility and elevation is Paul, but Pseudo-Dionysius apparently had the same experience, at least to some undefined degree. Bonaventure says that, in addition to Augustine's three modes of vision, there is a sixfold "vision of the understanding," an ascent which is prefigured by the six days of creation. Many take the first two steps, by nature and then by faith; few take the next two, by meditation on Scripture and by the contemplative *suspensio* that is signified by the experience of the Apostles at Christ's Transfiguration; fewer still rise to prophetic revelations and then to being absorbed in God "per raptum." This "sixth day" is nothing less than the transitory *actum* of glory itself, if not the stable *habitus* of the blessed, the experience, while *in via* and still in the body, of what it is to be *in patria*, separated from the body. It is the maximum possible likeness to God in this life, an in-between state signalled by Paul's doubt about whether he was in or out of the body during his mystic vision. Beyond this is only the "seventh day of rest," the vision of the glorified soul with God in Paradise after its departure from the body, to be followed at last by the "eighth day," when the soul rejoins its glorified flesh.⁶⁴ In his rapture, the highest mystical achievement *in via*, Paul was lifted through these stages to become the most elevated of believers because he was the most humble, making him soar like the eagle that nests in high places, since he first descended in humility by dying like the slain down below (cf. Job 39.27-30).⁶⁵

In another work, the difference between *raptus* and *ecstasis* is seen as the difference between, on the one hand, a special privilege rarely granted by God and, on the other, the restoration in all Christians of the ability to contemplate the divine as Adam did before the Fall and to thereby attain the mystic goal which humanity was originally meant to enjoy in this life. On the basis of the distinction between this *status viae* where we are *viatores* and the *status patriae* where we will be *comprehensores*, Bonaventure argues that the *visio* or *contemplatio* to be expected in heaven is the "face to face" or unmediated

⁶⁴ *Collationes* 3.23-31.

⁶⁵ *Collationes* 3.30.

vision of the divine substance, but that Christians as *viatores* have for their supreme object the elevation to the *docta ignorantia* which is the vision of God *per speculum*, yet not *in aenigmate*, that was enjoyed by Adam in the state of innocence and that is available to all in whom justice has been restored.⁶⁶ He concludes: “this mode of knowing should, I think, be sought by any just man in this life; but if God works anything beyond it, then that is by a special rule, not that which is common to all.”⁶⁷

Bonaventure’s most famous treatises on the ascent which God intends as the “common rule” for the faithful in this world are his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* and *De triplici via*. In the latter, the mystic teaches that the goal of this life is meriting eternal life in the next by attaining its likeness as much as possible, conforming oneself to it in holiness in a foretaste of the ultimate end which is also the foundation of one’s right to it. Since beatitude or glory consists in the eternal possession of supreme peace, the clear vision of divine truth and the full enjoyment of supreme good and love, one must seek to achieve these to the maximum degree possible. This is done according to the classic “threefold way,” whose three levels are hierarchical but unfold simultaneously. The *via purgativa* leads to peace, the *illuminativa* to truth, and the *unitiva* or *perfectiva* to love, and all three are undertaken by meditation on scripture, by prayer, or by contemplation.⁶⁸ A “sleep” which consists in complete freedom from both the desire for worldly things and the fear of punishment for past sins is the summit in two forms of ascent. The first is perfection by means of prayer, in which one passes through the six degrees of the love to the highest condition open to mortals:

The sixth degree is true and complete tranquillity, in which there is such peace and repose that the soul is in a way in silence and asleep, as if placed in the Arc of Noah, where it cannot be disturbed at all. For what can disturb the mind which is neither troubled by the pangs of cupidity nor harassed by the sting of fear? In such a mind there is the ultimate state of being and peace and repose, and there Solomon truly rests, for ‘his place is in peace.’⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *Commentarius in Libros Sententiarum 2 (Opera omnia, vol. 2), d. 23, a. 2, qu. 3.*

⁶⁷ “Hunc modum cognoscendi arbitror cuilibet viro iusto in via ista esse quaerendum; quodsi deus aliquid ultra faciet, hoc privilegium est speciale, non legis communis” (*Commentarius in Libros Sententiarum 2, d. 23, a. 2, qu. 3, ad 6, p. 546*).

⁶⁸ *De triplici via, Opera omnia, vol. 8, Prologus and Ch. 3.*

⁶⁹ “Sextus gradus est vera et plena tranquillitas, in qua est tanta pax et requies, ut anima quodam modo sit in silentio et in somno et quasi in arca Noe collocata, ubi nullo modo perturbatur. Quis enim potest perturbare

However, it is in contemplation by the threefold way that wayfarers conform themselves most fully to the blessed, the purgative way leading to “the slumber of peace,” since it consists in the expulsion of sin, for after shame, fear, sorrow, calling to God, resoluteness, and ardour, “there follows, in the seventh place, slumber in the shade of Christ, where there is stability and rest, and one feels protected in the shadow of God’s wings, no longer consumed by burning concupiscence or the fear of punishment.”⁷⁰

Bonaventure does not use the image of sleep in the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, but he does emphasise, time and again, the *pax* or *quies* that is the very essence of the goal to be found in ecstasy and the key feature of its likeness to sleep, along with the idea that it is a “death” without which we cannot have the “vision of God” that gives peace in this life. The contemplative process that leads to this vision is conceived as six steps of searching effort, a laborious ascent undertaken with the aid of grace, succeeded by a crossing-over to the transcendent repose which lies beyond the last step. The sequence is figured, for example, by the way six days passed before God, on the seventh, called Moses from within the cloud on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24.16), by the six days after which Christ led his disciples to the high summit of Mount Tabor to see his Transfiguration (Matt. 17.1-2), and by God’s creation of the macrocosm in six days, after which he rested on the seventh: in the same way, in the human microcosm, six steps of illumination lead to *quies contemplationis*.⁷¹

Man as first created was by nature able to reach this “repose of contemplation,” and was for that very reason placed by God in the “paradise of pleasure” (cf. Gen. 2.15). However, by turning from the true light to changeable goods, Adam corrupted both his own nature and, through original sin, his whole race, leaving human nature stained with ignorance of mind and concupiscence of the flesh. As a result, we cannot see the light without the aid of grace and justice against concupiscence, and of science and wisdom against ignorance, all of which come through Christ, the Word made flesh who heals

mentem, quam nullus cupiditatis stimulus inquietat, nullus timoris aculeus exagitat? In tali mente pax est et status ultimus et quies, et ibi requiescit verus Salomon, quoniam *in pace factus est locus eius* [Ps. 75.3]” (*De triplici via* 2.11, p. 10).

⁷⁰ “Septimo loco sequitur sopor in obumbratione Christi, ubi status est et requies, dum homo sentit se protegi sub umbra alarum divinarum, ut non uratur ardore concupiscentiae nec timore poenae” (*De triplici via* 3.2, p. 12).

⁷¹ *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* 1.5, *Opera omnia*, vol. 5, p. 297.

those wounds. The faculties and steps which are in us by nature but were deformed by the sin of the Fall must therefore be restored by grace, purified by justice and used by science, before they can be perfected by wisdom in the contemplative ascent of the high mountain where God shows himself—which is to say that, before seeking the repose of contemplation, we must first avoid sin, that deforms our nature, obtaining reforming grace by prayer, after which we need to gain purifying justice by living a holy life in the active life of virtue, before turning to illuminating “science” in meditation. Only then can we regain the ability to contemplate the divine as Adam did before the Fall.⁷²

The *via pacis* or *itinerarium* that takes us to the goal is a six-stage cognitive ascent from creatures to the Creator, driven by ardent love of the crucified Christ and by the aid of illuminating grace which comes in response to that love, rising through the six levels of the soul’s natural cognitive faculties to the contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation. The contemplation of the union of God and man in the Word made flesh, the last step of the toil and searching effort that disposes us for the goal, elevates our humanity to the peace of the union with God in Christ. That much-desired end is not to be found at the last step of the climb, but in the transcendent state of *ecstasis* that lies above and beyond the cognitive ascent and into which one passes by a *transitus*, *transire*, or *pascha*, a “passing over,” an *excessus* or “passing beyond.” This passing-over is a *Pascha*, a death with Christ on the cross through loving meditation on and identification with the crucified Word. It is a crossing of the Red Sea from Egypt. What one passes beyond and abandons, or “dies to,” are all sensory, imaginative and intellectual operations, and even oneself, renouncing all knowledge so that the affection may be totally transferred to and transformed in God.⁷³

The final result, in ecstasy, is the “*ecstaticam pacem*” which Saint Francis (Bonaventure’s primary model) yearned after in his every contemplation, “the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding” (Phil. 4.7) and which was announced and given by Christ. It is a “tasting” or *degustare* of God while still in this vale of tears, and it is therefore the enjoyment of the supreme good (“*summi boni fruitio*”) and beatitude (“*beatitudo*”). Attained not by natural effort or intellectual clarity and light, nor Christ as

⁷² *Itinerarium* 1.6-8.

⁷³ See *Itinerarium* Ch. 1.2-8 for Bonaventure’s outline of the overall itinerary, Chs. 5-6 for the last step, and Ch. 7.1, 2, 4 for the transitional *excessus* or *transitus*.

teacher, but by grace, burning desire, divine darkness, and Christ as the Spouse, the goal is the peace which *surpasses* understanding, which lies beyond the light of the mind, where the intellect surrenders but the heart reaches out in love to mystic union in the divine darkness. It is a resting with Christ in the tomb, dead to one's outer self but feeling, as much as is possible in this life, his words on the cross to the thief: "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise" (Luke 23.43). When Paul was caught up to the third heaven he experienced this same death in Christ so that Christ might live in him—as he must have done, for the Lord says "man shall not see me and live" (Ex. 33.20).⁷⁴ The goal is thus the "vision of God" in this life, the beatitude and peace which come from the contemplative enjoyment of the supreme good to the greatest degree possible before the actual death of the body, in a union with God in Christ, a becoming like Christ through an ecstatic cognitive death to the world for the sake of the affective knowledge of the Lord. This is what happens in the *ecstasis* that is figured by the sleep of the Bride in the *Collationes*, but is conceived as a death in the *Itinerarium*, which concludes:

He who loves this death can see God, for it is certainly true that 'man shall not see me and live.' Let us therefore die and enter into the cloud of darkness; let us impose silence on all cares, worldly desires and sensible images; let us cross over with Christ crucified 'out of this world to the Father,' so that, having been shown the Father, we may say with Philip 'it is enough for us,' hear with Paul 'my grace is sufficient for thee,' and exalt with David, saying: 'my flesh and my heart hath fainted away. Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever.'⁷⁵

Saint Bernard, too, saw the "sleep" at the summit of the mystic ascent as a "death," and as an experience exemplified by Paul's elevation to the third heaven. He often also saw it

⁷⁴ See *Itinerarium*, Prologus 1-4 on peace and the taste of God as the goal, and on Francis and Paul as exemplars, Ch. 1.1, on the "end" as the enjoyment of the supreme good or beatitude, Ch. 7.5-6 on the abandonment of the intellect in *docta ignorantia*, Ch. 7.2 on lying in death with Christ in the tomb, and Ch. 7.6 on "dying" in order to "see God."

⁷⁵ "Quam mortem qui diligit videre potest Deum, quia indubitanter verum est: *Non videbit me homo et vivet*. Moriamur igitur et ingrediamur in caliginem, imponamus silentium sollicitudinibus, concupiscentiis et phantasmatis; transeamus cum Christo crucifixo *ex hoc mundo ad Patrem* [John 13.1], ut, ostenso nobis patre, dicamus cum Philippo: *Sufficit nobis*; audiamus cum Paulo: *Sufficit tibi gratia mea* [2 Cor. 12.9]; exultemus cum David dicentes: *Defecit caro mea et cor meum, Deus cordis mei et pars mea Deus in aeternum* [Ps. 72.26]" (*Itinerarium* 7.6, p. 313).

as a return to the Earthly Paradise, the restoration, in this life, of the divine likeness that was lost because of the first transgression, with which the being created in the “image and likeness” of God (Gen. 1.26) was cast out into sin and misery in the “region of unlikeness.”

The enduring “image” of God remained after the Fall, according to Bernard,⁷⁶ since that image is the will’s free choice, *liberum arbitrium*, the freedom to choose good or evil according to the judgment of reason. Free choice was not and cannot be lost because it is an inalienable part of human nature, and is a condition of voluntary decisions by virtue of which we deserve misery or happiness. What was lost, corrupting human nature in the will and leaving it enslaved to sin and in wretched misery, and what must be restored by grace if we are to return to God, is the will’s twofold “likeness.” This likeness consists, firstly, in *liberum consilium*, freedom from sin, the will’s ability not to sin because only the good is pleasing, and, secondly, *liberum complacitum*, “free accord” or “free enjoyment,” freedom from misery because nothing that pleases is lacking. The first likeness is restored in this life, liberating us from slavery to sin, in the will’s conversion to the good through the redeeming grace brought by Christ. This makes us good and just, so that we do what is right willingly—which does not necessarily mean that we are happy. The full restoration of the second likeness, bringing the complete peace and happiness which comes with freedom from even the possibility of misery or disturbance of any kind, is a gift of the grace of glory that is reserved for the next life. It completes the perfect likeness and loving accord of the human and divine wills, and the saints in heaven enjoy it now. Nonetheless, writes Bernard, it must be admitted that those contemplatives who are able to taste the sweetness of heavenly bliss, however slightly, whenever they are carried out of themselves in an *excessus* or *raptus* (the terms are not distinguished as they are by Bonaventure), since they are then free from misery, must “plainly and undeniably enjoy free accord, even in this flesh, albeit rarely and for an instant.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ In *De gratia et libero arbitrio* (PL 182.1001-1030), esp. 3.7, 4.9, 4.11, and 6.19.

⁷⁷ “Attamen fatendum est eos, qui per excessum contemplationis rapti quandoque in spiritu, quantumcunque de supernae felicitatis dulcedine degustare sufficiunt, toties esse liberos a miseria, quoties sic excedunt. Hi plane (quod negandum non est) etiam in hac carne, raro licet raptimque, complaciti libertate fruuntur” (*De gratia* 5.15, coll. 1009-10). Raymond D. DiLorenzo proposes that this doctrine provides the pattern for the pilgrim’s entire experience in the *Commedia*, but gives no evidence that Dante

Alternatively,⁷⁸ we undo the effect of Adam's sin by purging and thus reforming our corrupted love of self for the sake of self, the carnal love of *cupiditas*, in a four-stage process which transforms it, at the fourth level, into the spiritual love of self purely for the sake of God, or *caritas*. The passage beyond the third step, love of God for God's sake, to the consummation of this spiritual process in the fourth, love of self only for the sake of God, brings the perfect harmony of the human and divine wills, and is therefore a "deification." That is, God made and loves all things for himself, and when we love ourselves purely for his sake we make our will conform to God's, both wills loving with the same love, and "to be so affected is to be deified" ("sic affici, deificare est").⁷⁹ This deification, this peace and beatitude atop the Lord's mountain (cf Ps. 23.3), is fully and finally attained only in the perfect "adhering" or clinging to God that is wrought by the binding force of charity in the next world, but not until the general resurrection.⁸⁰ It has nonetheless been granted, to some degree, to a few in this mortal life:

I will declare blessed and holy those to whom something of such an experience has been given in this mortal life, if but rarely or once only, and that with a rush, for barely a moment. To somehow lose yourself, as if you no longer *are*, totally unaware and emptied of yourself, to be almost annihilated, belongs to celestial dwelling, not to human affection. And if one is indeed with a rush now and then swept up from mortal things and admitted to this, the world immediately begrudges, the troublesome business of the day disturbs, the mortal body weighs one down, the needs of the flesh importune, the defect of corruption will not hold up, and, most disruptively of all, the duties of brotherly charity call one back.⁸¹

distinguishes the image and the twofold likeness as Bernard does. See DiLorenzo, "Dante's Saint Bernard and the Theology of Liberty in the *Commedia*," *Bernardus Magister: Papers Presented at the Nonacentenary of the Birth of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Kalamazoo, Michigan*, ed John R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications; Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses, 1992), 497-515.

⁷⁸ *De diligendo Deo* (PL 182.973-1000), 10.27-28.

⁷⁹ *De diligendo Deo* 10.28, col. 991.

⁸⁰ *De diligendo Deo* 10.29-11.31.

⁸¹ "Beatum dixerim et sanctum, cui tale aliquid in hac mortali vita raro interdum, aut vel semel, et hoc ipsum raptim, atque unius vix momenti spatio experiri donatum est. Te enim quodammodo perdere, tanquam qui non sis, et omnino non sentire teipsum, et a teipso exinaniri, et pene annullari, coelestis est conversationis, non humanae affectionis. Et si quidem e mortalibus quispiam ad illud raptim interdum (ut dictum est) et ad momentum admittitur, subito invidet saeculum nequam, perturbat diei malitia, corpus mortis aggravat, sollicitat carnis necessitas, defectus corruptionis non sustinet, quodque his violentius est, fraterna revocat charitas" (*De diligendo Deo* 10.27, col. 990).

As this passage suggests, one of the blessed few is the busy abbot himself. Indeed, Bernard is distinguished from the other writers whose works on contemplation are reviewed here primarily by his claims to have personally experienced the mystic marriage of the soul and the present Word, above all those which he makes, sometimes with a deliberately “Pauline” reluctance, in his *Sermones in Cantica canticorum*,⁸² the most famous of all works on affective union. In other words, among the great contemplatives, and principally on the evidence of this renowned sermon-series, Bernard stands out as the one who had personally “tasted” heavenly peace in the repose of affective union, the central object of his ardent desire throughout the text that is therefore the outstanding manifestation of “la vivace / carità di colui che ’n questo mondo, / contemplando, gustò di quella pace” (*Par.* 31.109-11).

In the second sermon of the series, Bernard expounds the meaning of Cant. 1.1, “Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.” Since a kiss is a contact which brings union and signifies peace, and since “his mouth” is the Word of God, “the kiss of his mouth” is the *incarnate* Word of God, the union of the human and divine which made peace between God and man after the Fall. To desire the “kiss” of this kiss is to desire union with God through Christ. In the persons of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, humanity yearned, not for the obscure words of prophecies, but for the presence in the world of the Word made flesh, the mediator who would rejoin and reconcile man and God. In the same way, speaking on behalf of the individual soul after the first and past advent, Bernard says that he desires, not the wordy effusions of the prophets, but the kiss of the Word, not the enigmas of dreams and waking visions, even those filled with beautiful angels, but mystic union as the present advent of Word in the soul:

For his living, active word is to me a kiss, . . . an infusion of joys, a revelation of secrets, a wondrous and indistinguishable commingling of the divine light and the enlightened mind, which thus joined to God is one spirit with him. Rightly, then, do I reject visions and dreams; I want nothing to do with figures and enigmas. Even the beauty of the angels themselves wearies me; for my Jesus surpasses them in his beauty and splendour.”⁸³

⁸² *PL* 183.785-1198.

⁸³ “Cujus utique sermo vivus et efficax osculum mihi est, . . . infusio gaudiorum, revelatio secretorum, mira quaedam et quodam modo indiscreta commixtio superni luminis et illuminatae mentis. Adhaerens quippe Deo, unus spiritus est. Merito proinde visiones et somnia non recipio, figuras et aenigmata nolo; ipsas

For the benefit of his monks, the abbot several times justifies this statement by reluctantly admitting to having experienced the presence of Jesus, just as Paul, out of necessity, “glories” in his “visions and revelations” for the sake of the flock in Corinth (2 Cor. 12.1, 5).⁸⁴

In Sermon 23, Bernard describes what it is like to progress through the first two of the King’s rooms, or kinds of “vision,” into the third, the “bedroom” (which, in another text, as we will see presently, is Paul’s “third heaven”). Only in that third kind of vision, which Bernard says he has been granted rarely and all too fleetingly, is the King beheld as spouse, and only there does one find true rest.⁸⁵ In Sermon 31, in the context of what amounts to a coherent theory of vision modelled on Augustine’s, he uses his own experience to exemplify the highest form of *visio* of the Word that we can have while still in the body. The Sun of Justice is seen in “exterior” vision when he is seen in things made, in which all who have the power of reason can see *that* he is. Just as “exterior” are theophanies, the images and voices in which he has manifested himself to some, by grace, in visions and dreams. But, says Bernard,

there is a divine seeing which differs from these in that it takes place inwardly, when God himself deigns to visit the soul which seeks him, provided it devotes itself wholly in desire and love to that seeking. We know from one who experienced it what the sign of his visit is: ‘A fire shall go before him, and shall burn his enemies round about’ [Ps. 96.3]. The fire of

quoque angelicas fastidio species. Quippe et ipsos longe superat Jesus meus specie sua et pulchritudine sua” (SC 2.2, col. 790). It should be pointed out that Bernard acknowledges the value of the imaginative visions in which angels accommodate spiritual truths to human understanding in the form of visible likenesses, even though such images can also be implanted in the imagination by demons (SC 41.1-5). However, these do not count as “ecstasies of blessed contemplation” (“*beatae contemplationis excessus*”), which are either purely intellectual or affective (SC 49.4). The latter form is Bernard’s central concern. The former is exemplified by Adam’s sleep as Augustine interpreted it, a purely intellectual prophetic revelation (Bernard, *In Septuagesima* 2.1-2).

⁸⁴ James I. Wimsatt (“St. Bernard, the Canticle of Canticles, and Mystical Poetry,” 88) notes the affinity between Bernard’s mysticism, with its emphasis on the presence of Jesus in contemplative union, and the spirit of the opening stanza of the famous poem from Bernard’s time, “*Dulcis Jesu memoria*.” “Sweet is the memory of Jesus / that gives true heartfelt joy; / but beyond honey and all else / is his sweet presence” (“*Dulcis Jesu memoria, / Dans vera cordi gaudia; Sed super mel et omnia / Eius dulcis presentia*”).

⁸⁵ “*Nec etiam jactantiae deputandum est, quod in vestros pando profectus,*” “*Sed est locus, ubi vere quiescens et quietus cernitur Deus,*” “*O verae quietis locus, . . . Visio ista non terret, sed mulcet; . . . Hic vere quiescitur*” (SC 23.11, 15, 16, coll. 890, 892, 893). In this case, Bernard uses the sleep of Cant. 5.2 as a figure of the *restless* delight of the first room (23.11).

holy desire ought to precede his face in every soul it will visit, to burn up the rust of bad habits and thus prepare a place for the Lord.⁸⁶

On the “taste of the divine presence” (“*divinae gustum praesentiae*”) which follows ardent desire and prayer, Bernard offers his own experience:

Take care not to assume that I perceive anything corporeal or imaginary in this mingling of the soul and the Word. I say to you what the Apostle said, that ‘he who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit.’ What I am trying to describe as best I can, ‘comparing spiritual things with spiritual,’ is the ecstatic ascent of the purified mind to God, or the loving descent of God to the soul. So let this union be in the spirit, since God is spirit. . . . A soul so loving and so loved will not be in the least content with the manifestation of the spouse given to many in the things made or to a few in visions and dreams, unless she also by a special privilege receives him down from heaven into her deepest affection, into her innermost heart, having the one she desires present to her, not in bodily form, but infused, not appearing outwardly, but moving her within.⁸⁷

In Sermon 74, his most sustained and passionate account of the “advent” of the Word to his soul, Bernard stresses the fact that only the spirit’s inner movements reveal “the comings and goings” which he admits to having known many times, an admission made in direct imitation of Paul’s self-deprecations.⁸⁸ It was not bodily sensations or images that revealed the presence of the Word in him, but the fact that the vital power of the

⁸⁶ “Sed divina est inspectio, eo differentior ab his quo interior, cum per se ipsum dignatur invisere Deus animam quaerentem se, quae tamen ad quaerendum toto se desiderio et amore devovit. Et hoc signum istiusmodi adventus ejus, sicut ab eo qui expertus est edocemur: *Ignis ante ipsum praecedet, et inflammabit in circuitu inimicos ejus*. Oportet namque ut sancti desiderii ardor praeveniat faciem ejus ad omnem animam, ad quam est ipse venturus, qui omnem consumat rubiginem vitiorum, et sic praeparet locum Domino” (SC 31.4, col. 942).

⁸⁷ “Vide autem tu ne quid nos in hac Verbi animaque commistione corporeum seu imaginorium sentire existimes. Id loquimur quod Apostolus dicit, quoniam *qui adhaeret Deo, unus spiritus est*. Excessum purae mentis in Deum, sive Dei pium descensum in animam, nostris quibus possumus esprimimus verbis, spiritualibus spiritualia comparantes. Itaque in spiritu fit ista conjunctio, quia spiritus est Deus. . . . Non ergo sic affecta et sic dilecta, contenta erit omnino vel illa quae multis per ea quae facta sunt, vel illa quae paucis per visa et somnia facta est manifestio sponsi, nisi et speciali praerogativa intimis illum affectibus atque ipsis medullis cordis coelitus illapsum suscipiat, habeatque praesto quem desiderat non figuratum, sed infusum; non apparentem, sed afficientem” (SC 31.6, col. 945); “*divinae gustum praesentiae*” (SC 31.7, col. 945).

⁸⁸ “constat in anima fieri hujusmodi vicissitudines euntis et redeuntis Verbi” (SC 74.4, col. 1140), “Non expedit quidem. . . . Fateor et mihi adventasse verbum, in insipientia dico, et pluries” (SC 74.5, col. 1141, cf. 2 Cor. 12.1, 11.16-17).

Spouse struck and moved and transformed his heart and awakened his sleeping soul. He sums up his “experience of the Word:”

Only by the movement of my heart, as I have said, did I perceive his presence, and I sensed the power of his strength by the putting to flight of my vices and the suppression of my carnal yearnings. . . . and the glory of his beauty by the renovation and reformation of the spirit of my mind, that is, of my inner self.⁸⁹

This “awakening” is also a sleep, and even a death, as we learn when Bernard comes to the sleep of the Bride at Cant. 2.7 (after fifty-one sermons, which may account for the fact that Bernard died before finishing his commentary).⁹⁰

The Bride’s slumber is for the great preacher the most apt figure of the *excessus* in which the Bridegroom gives peace to the soul in exile, the *contemplatio* that is most like heavenly beatitude and of which a few have been granted the inner *experimentum*.⁹¹ It is neither the deadly sleep of persistence in sin, nor the sleep of death, nor the natural rest of the body:

Rather, this sleep is a vital waking which illuminates the interior senses and, driving away death, gives eternal life. It is truly a slumber, yet one that does not so much dull the senses as transport them. And it is also, I can say with certainty, a death, since the Apostle himself commends those still living in the flesh when he says ‘For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.’ Therefore I can without absurdity call the ecstasy of the Bride a death, which snatches away not life, but the snares of life, so that she can say ‘Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers.’⁹²

⁸⁹ “experimentum de verbo” (SC 74.7, col. 1142), “tantum ex motu cordis, sicut praefatus sum, intellexi praesentiam ejus; et ex fuga vitiorum, carnaliumque compressione affectum adverti potentiam virtutis ejus . . . et ex renovatione ac reformatione spiritus mentis meae, id est interioris hominis mei, percepti utcumque speciem decoris ejus” (74.6, coll. 1141-42).

⁹⁰ Gilbert of Hoyland continued from where Bernard had left off (Gilbert of Hoyland, *Sermones in Canticum Salomonis*, PL 184.11-252). Three of Gilbert’s sermons on the Song (sermons 12, 14 and 42) are particularly dense concentrations of many of the key motifs to be found in the works that are discussed in this chapter.

⁹¹ SC 52.1-2.

⁹² “Magis autem istiusmodi vitalis vigilque sopor sensum interiorem illuminat, et morte propulsata vitam tribuit sempiternam. Revera enim dormitio est, quae tamen sensum non sopiat, sed abducat. Est et mors, quod non dubius dixerim, quoniam Apostolus quosdam in carne adhuc viventes commendando sic loquitur:

The “snares” are the temptations of this life, the allure of sensuality, the impulse of cupidity, the goad of anger, the miseries of anxiety . . . , all of which are “snares of death” because they can draw us into the spiritual death of sin. They cause no fear when the soul transcends its usual way of thinking by fixing on some holy thought in order to cast off the desire for corporeal and inferior things, for it is thus “drawn out of itself and flies away” (“secedat et avolet”), and (as Beatrice tells Dante when she says that her death should have taught him to do just this), “a net is spread in vain before the eyes of them that have wings” (Prov. 1.17).⁹³ This casting-off of the desire for corporeal and inferior things is itself a death, the “death of the just,” *mors justorum*. It is a good death, but it is not the sleep or ecstasy of the Bride of Cant. 2.7; it is not the *excessus* Bernard most desires. “In truth,” he says, the sleep of the just is “the death of men;”

but let my soul also die the death of angels, if I may call it that, so that, transcending the memory of present things, it may rid itself not only of longings for inferior and corporeal objects, but even of their likenesses. May it have pure conversation with those who bear the image of purity. I think that it is this ecstasy, either exclusively or principally, that is called contemplation. Not lusting for things in this life belongs to human virtue; but gazing in contemplation without involvement in the likenesses of bodies belongs to angelic purity. Each is a divine gift, an ecstatic transport, a transcendence of the self; but one takes us far, and the other does not. . . . You have leapt past the pleasures of the flesh, so that you no longer respond to its yearnings and are not held by its allure. You have advanced, you have placed yourself apart, but not yet far away, unless you also succeed in flying beyond the fantasies of corporeal likenesses which rush in from all sides. Until then, expect no rest. You are mistaken, if you expect, before then, to find the place of repose, the hidden solitude, the clear light, the abode of peace. . . . Suppose, then, that the bride has withdrawn into this solitude and that there, because of the beauty of the place, in the embraces of her lover, she has fallen asleep, that is, she has passed beyond in the spirit.⁹⁴

Mortui estis, et vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo [Col. 3.3]. Proinde et ego non absurde sponsae extasim vocaverim mortem, quae tamen non vita, sed vitae eripiat laqueais, ut possit dicere: *Anima nostra sicut passer erepta est de laqueo venantium* [Ps. 124.7]” (SC 52.3-4, col.1031).

⁹³ SC 52.4, col.1031, cf. *Purg.* 31.58-63.

⁹⁴ “Verum haec hominum est. Sed moriatur anima mea morte etiam, si dici potest, angelorum, ut praesentium memoria excedens, rerum se inferiorum corporearumque non modo cupiditatibus, sed et similitudinibus exuat, sitque ei pura cum illis conversatio, cum quibus est puritatis similitudo. Talis, ut opinor, excessus aut tantum, aut maxime contemplatio dicitur. Rerum etenim cupiditatibus vivendo non

Sermon 18 is a particularly clear statement of the principle that rest of *quies contemplationis* is the ultimate and transcendent reward of toil, lying beyond what is termed “the death of the just” in Sermon 52, beyond the healing and strengthening of the morally “sick” that is achieved by the strenuous ascetic practices and charitable service to others for which Bernard was himself famous, i.e., the penitential self-mortification of fasting, vigils and prayer, and the labour of good works. This good spiritual “sustenance” cures the wound of sin and saves us from damnation; but “having taken that food and drink, what now remains to the invalid but to rest, and, after the sweat of action, to recline in the repose of contemplation?”⁹⁵

This sleep, according to Bernard’s *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*,⁹⁶ is also the transcendent goal to be sought once the summit of the ascent of humility has been gained. One climbs three steps of truth on that peak, which is reached when the pride that prevents us seeing ourselves as we really are has been removed; in the same way, Paul ascended through the first and second heavens to the third.⁹⁷ The Son leads us to the first step or heaven, purifying and strengthening our reason so that we can see truth in ourselves, understanding how liable to sin we are. The Holy Spirit leads to the second stage, inspiring purifying love and strengthening the will, enabling us to see truth in others and share their miseries, so that out of love and compassion we undertake works of mercy for them. These two stages are a phase of ascetic preparation and purgation, the first of reason, or the mind, the second of the will, or the heart; the third is the

teneri, humanae virtutis est, corporum vero similitudinibus speculando non involvi, angelicae puritatis est. Utrumque tamen divini muneris est, utrumque excedere, utrumque te ipsum transcendere est, sed longe unum, alterum non longe. . . . Transilisti carnis oblectamina, ut minime jam obedias concupiscentiis ejus, nec tenearis illecebris: profecisti, separasti te, sed nondum elongasti, nisi et irruentia undique phantasmata corporearum similitudinum transvolare mentis puritate praevaleas. Hucusque noli tibi promittere requiem. Erras, si citra invenire te existimas locum quietis, secretum solitudinis, luminis serenum, habitaculum pacis. . . . Puta ergo in solitudinem hanc secessisse sponsam, ibique prae amoenitate loci inter amplexus sponsi suaviter obdormisse, id est in spiritu excessisse” (SC 52.5-6, col. 1031-32).

⁹⁵ “Sumpto cibo potuque, quid jam restat, nisi ut pauset aegrotus, et quieti contemplationis post sudores actionis incumbat?” (SC 18.5-6, col. 862).

⁹⁶ PL 182.941-72. This treatise presents itself as a work on the twelve-step “ascent of humility” of the Benedictine Rule. However, Chapters 1-8 are actually concerned with what lies at the summit of that ascent from habitual sin to humility, i.e., a three-step progress to truth, while Chapters 9-22 deal with the antithetical twelve-step “descent of pride,” a descent whose stages must be traversed in the reverse order so that the error at each may be righted. That is, “the steps of pride and humility” are seen as one set of steps, the ascent being an advance in humility, the descent a decline or “fall” in pride.

⁹⁷ *De gradibus* 7.21-8.22.

culminating *excessus* or *raptus* of contemplation, when the Father “snatches up” the purified soul, the soul that has entirely cleansed itself of error and vice and is settled in “good habits and holy virtues,” uniting it to himself in his “bedchamber” so that it may see truth in itself and partake in the fruits of true wisdom:

We ascend to the first by the labour of humility, the second by the feeling of compassion, the third by the ecstasy of contemplation. . . . Reason, by which we examine ourselves, leads to the first; love, by which we feel compassion for others, draws us to the second; purity, by which we are lifted to invisible things, snatches us up to the third. . . . There, for a little while, perhaps half an hour, silence having been made in heaven, sweetly resting in the yearned-for embraces, the soul indeed sleeps, but her heart wakes, for she searches into the mysteries of truth, then feeds on the memory of them when she returns to herself. There she sees the invisible, and hears the ineffable, ‘which it is not granted to man to utter.’ . . . Do you doubt that Paul, who attests that he was ‘caught up to the third heaven,’ passed through these very steps?⁹⁸

As far as I am aware the steps of Dante’s purgatorial ascent do not correspond to those of any particular mystic itinerary. His sleep in Eden, however, does bear the hallmarks of the common goal of the contemplative ascents which we have now reviewed, among them the fact that it is also a closing of the eyes in death.

iv Mystic sleep in the Earthly Paradise

The four animals in the procession which the protagonist witnesses in the Earthly Paradise, which represent the four Gospels of the New Law, each have six wings that are “full of eyes,” and we are told of these many eyes that “li occhi d’Argo, / se fosser vivi, sarebber cotali,” which is to say that the hundred eyes of Argus, had they not been closed in death, would be as wide open and vigilant as the eyes on the wings of these creatures (*Purg.* 29.91-105, cf. *Apoc.* 4.6-8, *Ezek.* 1.4-14). This touch reflects Ovid’s description

⁹⁸ “Ad primum ascendimus per laborem humilitatis, as secundum per affectum compassionis, ad tertium per excessum contemplationis. . . . Ad primum ratio ducit, qua nos discutimus; ad secundum affectus perducit, quo aliis miseremur; ad tertium puritas rapit, qua ad invisibilia sublevamur” (*De gradibus* 6.19, col. 952), “Ibi modicum, hora videlicet quasi dimidia, silentio facto in coelo, inter desideratos amplexus suaviter quiescens, ipsa quidem dormit, sed cor ejus vigilat [cf. *Cant.* 5.2], quo utique interim veritatis arcana rimatur; quorum postmodum memoria statim ad se reditura pascatur. Ibi videt invisibilia, audit ineffabilia, quae non licet homini loqui [2 *Cor.* 12.4]” (7.21, coll. 953-54), “Putas, hos gradus Paulus non transierat, qui usque ad tertium coelum se raptum fuisse testatur?” (8.22, col. 954).

of the dead Argus, with its emphasis on the hundred closed eyes as the cause, locus and sign of the creature's death. In Ovid's account of the story of Io (*Metamorphoses* 1.568-747),⁹⁹ Jupiter, having had his way with the girl, changes her into a cow in order to conceal her from Juno, but is forced to give the unfortunate creature to his jealous wife, who sets the hundred-eyed and therefore outstandingly alert Argus the task of watching over her prize on a high mountaintop. Jupiter then sends his son Mercury to kill Argus. Appearing as a herdsman, Mercury so charms Argus with the music of his reed pipes that he is invited to sit down, giving him the opportunity to lull his target to sleep by telling tales and playing tunes on the reed pipes; but Argus resists, managing to keep some of his eyes open (although many have closed), and asks about the origin of the pipes. Mercury then launches into the story (which he presumably sings) of the chaste naiad Syrinx, who fled from the passionate attentions of Pan but was mercifully transformed into reeds the moment he caught up with her, whence the reed pipes—except that Mercury only tells the story up to Pan's first sight of Syrinx, because at that point, the point at which "Pan videt hanc," he notices that Argus's eyes are all closed in sleep (vv. 699-700, cf. 713-14). Mercury therefore abandons his story (Ovid having meanwhile narrated the part that went untold), seals Argus's hundred eyes in slumber with his wand, and cuts off his head. "There you lie, Argus," writes Ovid, "the light you had in so many 'lights' is extinguished, and one night occupies your hundred eyes" ("Arge, iaces, quodque in tot lumina lumen habebas, / extinctum est, centumque oculos nox occupat una," vv. 720-21). The once-bright eyes now closed in the darkness of death are thus vividly described by Ovid, while the actual falling asleep, the fatal closing of those once relentlessly open *lumina* under the influence of the god and his lascivious tale, is not narrated at all (although the reader's memory of Argus's previous struggle against this influence may well create the illusion that his falling asleep *has* been described).

After the apocalyptic procession has come to a halt opposite Dante, on the other side of Lethe, the beloved Beatrice at last appears, only to submit the pilgrim to the distressing interrogation in which the nature of his error in 1290 is made brutally clear and is duly confessed (*Purg.* 30.1-31.90). At the sight of her transcendent beauty, Dante feels such

⁹⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. Frank Justus Miller, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P.; London: Heinemann, 1977).

sharp remorse for having turned his love from her that the seductive false goods he loved most are now his most hated enemies, such painful “*riconoscenza*” of his error that he swoons (*Purg.* 31.85-90). He comes to his senses in the water, supported by Matelda, who delivers him to the four maidens on the inner shore after making him drink deeply, deleting the bitter memory of sin (*Purg.* 31.91-111), leaving him something of a *tabula rasa* until the memory of the good he has done is restored by drinking from Eünoè, from which he returns “*puro e disposto a salire a le stelle*” (*Purg.* 33.127-145). The subsequent ascent takes Dante to an exceptional taste of the vision of God that constitutes perfect happiness and that is proper to the blessed *in patria*, in the heavenly paradise; but there is every reason to believe that he has already, in the Earthly Paradise, been granted the foretaste of that vision and happiness that is the height of mystical experience as it is normally known *in via*.

On the last terrace of the mountain, Virgil urges Dante to hurry to the summit by promising him that “*Quel dolce pome che per tanti rami / cercando va la cura de’ mortali, / oggi porrà in pace le tue fami*” (*Purg.* 27.115-17). Virgil’s promise is that when Dante reaches the summit, on the fourth day of the ascent, he will attain “happiness.” His authority, in this definition of happiness, is the probable inspiration for the *donna santa e presta* of the second dream, Boethius’s Lady Philosophy, who says that “the whole concern of men, which the effort of a multitude of pursuits keeps busy, moves by different roads, yet strives to arrive at one and the same end, that of happiness. . . . for the desire for the true good is naturally inborn in the minds of men, but they are led astray after false goods.”¹⁰⁰ Her point is that, since this universally-sought and therefore innately-desired goal is the good that leaves nothing further to be desired, it must be identical with the supreme true good, which means that all seek the real thing, even though many, mistaking transitory goods like wealth or carnal pleasure for the *summum bonum* that will satisfy their inborn desire for happiness, seek instead those *imagini di ben false*. Virgil would seem to have in mind the kind of happiness he understands and to which, “*con ingegno e con arte*,” independently of grace and revelation, he is capable of leading, i.e., “the happiness of this life, which consists in the operation of our own

¹⁰⁰ “*Omnis mortalium cura quam multiplicium studiorum labor exercet, diverso quidem calle procedit, sed ad unum tamen beatitudinis finem nititur pervenire. . . . Est enim mentibus hominum veri boni naturaliter inserta cupiditas, sed ad falsa devius error abducit*” (*Philosophiae Consolationis* 3, pr. 2, pp. 231-33).

powers and which is figured by the earthly paradise" (*Mon.* 3.15.7). However, the *summum bonum*, in the view of Lady Philosophy, is God, who is philosophically knowable as the creator and providential governor of the harmonious cosmos and is beautifully celebrated as such in the poem "O qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas," in which the end all seek, the satisfaction of all desire, is said to consist in *seeing* this supreme good.¹⁰¹ The love with which this same God regulates the movement of the heavens is celebrated in the poem "Quod mundus stabile fide," in which happiness is defined as *loving* with this same love.¹⁰² While Dante attains this seeing and loving in the perfected form known by the blessed in heaven there among them, in the Empyrean,¹⁰³ what Virgil does not understand is that the happiness, the "dolce pome," that Dante will enjoy "today," is not only the kind of earthly beatitude he himself knows and to which he can lead, the natural happiness that the *Monarchia* tells us is figured by the Earthly Paradise (which is very possibly what the outer part of Eden signifies in the *Commedia*), but also the supreme Christian beatitude of this life, for which Dante has been prepared by the aid of grace and which he will attain after crossing Lethe. This sweet and satiating "happiness of this life," which is quite beyond Virgil's ken, is the beatitude of seeing *as loving* which is mystic union.

After Dante joins the procession, it turns back towards the east, moving through an Eden left empty because of the Fall, the griffin dragging its "benedetto carco" as the protagonist, Statius and Matelda walk along by the right wheel (*Purg.* 32.1-33). The procession comes to a halt and Beatrice descends from the chariot, with which all murmur "Adamo," circle the now barren tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and praise the griffin for not attempting to break food from the tree with its powerful beak; the griffin responds with "Sì si conserva il seme d'ogne giusto" and attaches the chariot to the tree, with which the latter is instantly regenerated as earthly plants are in spring, putting forth leaves and flowers of a colour between red and violet, its prelapsarian vitality renewed (vv. 34-60). The moral meaning of this tree, Beatrice later tells Dante, is "la giustizia di Dio, ne l'interdetto," i.e., divine justice, which is God's will, manifest in

¹⁰¹ "Tu requies tranquilla piis, te cernere finis, / Principium, vector, dux, semita, terminus idem" (*Philosophiae Consolationis* 3, m. 9, vv. 27-28).

¹⁰² "O felix hominum genus, / Si vestros animos amor / Quo caelum regitur regat" (*Philosophiae Consolationis* 2 m. 8, vv. 28-30).

¹⁰³ See Peter Dronke, "L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle," *Studi medievali* 6 (1965): 389-422.

the prohibition against eating from the tree (*Purg.* 33.71). It was by refusing to obey God's will, in this manifestation of it, that Adam sinned, with the result that human nature lost its original "justice" or right order (the subjection of the body to the soul, of the soul's lower powers to reason, and of reason to God).¹⁰⁴ Submitting to the divine will is, as the griffin says, the "seed" of "every just man," that by virtue of which human beings are or again become "just," reminding us that this is the example Jesus himself gave ("For so it becometh us to fulfil all justice," Matt. 3.15), above all in his atoning and redemptive death, the exemplary act of obedience to divine justice by virtue of which sin is forgiven and "justice" is restored ("For as by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners: so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just," Rom. 5.19). In Peter Armour's analysis of this episode, which he gives in the context of his convincing study of the griffin as the symbol of the ideal Roman Emperor or Empire, rather than the symbol of Christ that it was previously thought to be, the actions of the griffin represent the mission of the Empire in the providential plan as Dante sees it.¹⁰⁵ They symbolise its role as God's instrument when Rome's universal authority was at its peak during the time of Jesus, its part in the redemption and regeneration of humanity after the Fall through the punishment of Adam's sin in Christ. For Armour, the regeneration of mankind through Christ's blood is symbolised in the renewal of the tree of divine justice, with its blood-red flowers, and the hymn Dante then hears celebrates "the accomplishment of this mystery" (187).

The hymn is not of this world, and Dante can neither understand it nor "suffer" to hear out the whole melody, which is presumably of such ethereal sweetness that it overcomes him: "Io non lo 'ntesi, né qui non si canta / l'inno che quella gente allor cantaro, / né la nota sofferesi tutta quanta" (*Purg.* 32.61-63). It overcomes him, so that he does not hear it all, by putting him to sleep, just as Argus, to his cost, was lulled to sleep by Mercury's song of Pan and Syrinx, of which he heard only the beginning. Dante does not draw attention to the fact that both events took place on a mountaintop. His overt point, in bringing Argus in again so soon after his first appearance, one which highlighted the fact that the hundred eyes were closed in "the big sleep," is that he cannot describe

¹⁰⁴ See *ST* 1a2ae.113.1.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Armour, *Dante's Griffin and the History of the World: A Study of the Earthly Paradise* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 180-214.

the way he fell asleep under the influence of the celestial song because the artistic representation of the act of falling asleep, of which the case of Argus is both a renowned and a similar example, is beyond his poetic ability, and probably that of any other poet (even, we are meant to understand, Ovid, who may well give the illusion, in the *Metamorphoses*, that he describes Argus's *assonnare*, but who does not actually do so):

S'io potessi ritrar come assonnaro
 li occhi spietati udendo di Siringa,
 li occhi a cui pur vegghiar costò sì caro;
 come pintor che con essempro pinga,
 disegnerei com' io m'addormentai;
 ma qual vuol sia che l'assonnar ben finga.
 (*Purg.* 32.64-69)

The correspondence between Dante as protagonist and Argus takes up and emphasises the Ovidian stress on the closure of the eyes in death. It is embedded within the parallel between Dante as narrating poet and Ovid, one which is superficially about poetics, in a playful twist on the poetic rivalry topos that Dante has already exploited in his account of the metamorphoses of the thieves (“Taccia Lucano omai,” “Taccia . . . Ovidio,” *Inf.* 25.94-102). There, Dante claims to outdo his Ovidian model in mimetic power, and, from a Christian perspective, he does, for he transforms it into the bearer of spiritual truths inaccessible to the pagan poet. Here, he seems to be prepared to admit defeat, not by Ovid, but by the subject matter that defeated Ovid himself. There may well be a further twist in that the first of the above two tercets, with its emphasis on the determined vigilance of the “occhi spietati” and its opposition between *assonnare* and *pur vegghiar*, may well give the reader the sense of having witnessed exactly what Dante claims neither he nor Ovid can record, so that the Christian poet in fact manages to equal or outdo his model in this way. Whether this is true or not, the principal writerly topos that underlies these six verses is that in which poetics and mysticism intersect, i.e., ineffability.

The foregrounding of this topos, and of the closure of the pilgrim's eyes under the influence of divine music in a sleep that the reader cannot but associate with death, are of themselves enough to suggest that the classical *assonnare* of Argus has been re-written as a figure of the Bride/soul's falling asleep to the world in the *somnus contemplationis* of

mystic union, that ineffable sleep/death that grace sometimes grants after an ascetic climb to the top of a high mountain that is also a return to Eden. This suggestion is reinforced by the scriptural model on which Dante's *svegliare* is based, the "waking to Christ" of the Transfiguration, another of the key motifs in the discourse around mystic union. Before turning to that complex awakening, it is worthwhile examining just how contrastive this "contrastive re-writing" of Ovid (as Kevin Brownlee describes it)¹⁰⁶ really is, as well as the subtle presence, through the allusion to Argus, of the erotic dimension of mystic union. For the contrast is not only with the story as it is told in the *Metamorphoses*, but also with that lascivious narrative as already interpreted from a Christian point of view, one in which the closing of the hundred eyes is the very antithesis of Dante's ineffable *assonnare*.

Argus appears, identified as an Argive king who sanctioned and enjoyed the singing of wanton love songs at royal banquets, at the conclusion and climax of the chapter "On Music, Instruments, Modes and Their Enjoyment" in John of Salisbury's *Polycraticus*.¹⁰⁷ The chapter hinges on the contrast between, on the one hand, the proper use of music in the Church, which is to praise God and his works through the singing of psalms and lauds, using sweet but simple melodies that express the true meaning of the texts, and, on the other, the prostitution of music in the fashionable singing of love songs, with their florid, sensuous tunes based on the Phrygian and other such decadent modes at the banquets of the rich and powerful. The former captivates the mind with its beauty and wipes away the clouds of disturbing thoughts; it exalts and purifies the soul, infusing into the soul its harmony, which is the harmony that governs the macrocosm; it improves morals and turns the mind to the love of God; its melodies "free the mind of cares and expel temporal preoccupations, and, by a certain participation in joy and repose, and a

¹⁰⁶ In his chapter on "Dante and the Classical Poets," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1993), Kevin Brownlee includes *Purg.* 32.64-69 among the *Commedia*'s many Christian "corrections" or "re-readings" of Ovidian models (111-18). Brownlee sees the passage as a "contrastive rewriting" of Ovid by virtue of the fact that, while the pilgrim's falling asleep has the pagan poet's story of Argus as its model, the protagonist's awakening has a scriptural exemplar, that of the Transfiguration (114-15).

¹⁰⁷ "De musica, instrumentis, et modis, et fructu eorum" (John of Salisbury, *Polycraticus* 1.6, *PL* 199.401-404).

loving elevation to God, draw human minds to the company of angels.”¹⁰⁸ The other kind of music seduces the mind so that it can no longer judge what it hears and even stirs illicit sensations in the loins, subverting morals, weakening the character and leading to the abyss of lust and corruption, and we must therefore resist its influence. It is indulged in especially at the royal feasts that the Lord condemns (cf. Dan. 5.24-28). John concludes:

For the divine judgment certainly deems unworthy the dominion that exposes the human body, the vessel of the Lord, to the empty joys of sensuality, and opens the bedchamber of the Bridegroom to the filth of the evil spirit. ‘Argus’s head was surrounded by a hundred lights,’ all of which, with the seduction of a single pipe, were not so much put to sleep as extinguished. Who are you to think yourself more circumspect than he?¹⁰⁹

This Argus, even more than Ovid’s, is the counter-type of the protagonist in the *assonnare* of *Purgatorio* 32, for he is an example of the fatal consequences of failing to be vigilant against the seductive charm of a decidedly this-worldly music, a music that induces, in effect, the sleep and death of *somnus culpae*, in direct antithesis to the sleep and death Dante experiences in Eden, i.e., the total surrender of “vigilance” with respect to earthly things, brought about by heavenly psalmody in praise of God and his works (such as the regeneration of humanity after the Fall), and the consummation, in *somnus contemplationis*, of the mystic marriage of the soul and Christ. The result is that, at *Purg.* 32.64-69, Dante simultaneously affirms and overcomes the ineffability of his *assonnare*, admits poetic defeat (Argus as an Ovidian “*essempro*” of inexpressible subject-matter) and achieves poetic victory (Argus as a counter-*essempro*, a transformed Ovidian image of spiritual transcendence to be ranked with those of Marsyas and Glaucus).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ “Animum a curis redimunt, exterminant temporalium sollicitudinem, et quadam participatione laetitiae et quietis, et amica exultatione in Deum, mentes humanas trajiciunt ad societatem angelorum” (*Polycraticus* 1.6, coll. 402-03).

¹⁰⁹ “Divino siquidem iudicio principatu iudicatur indignus, qui vasa Domini, humana videlicet corpora, in vanae voluptatis gaudia exponit, et sponsi thalamum maligni spiritus immundiciis aperit. *Centum luminibus cinctum caput Argus habebat* [Ovid, *Metam.* 1.625]: quae omnia unius fistulae voluptate, non tam sopita sunt, quam exstincta. Tu quis es, qui te circumspectiorem esse confidis?” (*Polycraticus* 1.6, col. 404).

¹¹⁰ On the basis of Kevin Brownlee’s reading of the use of the story of Marsyas in the *Commedia* (*Par.* 1.13-27, Brownlee, “Dante and the Classical Poets,” 115-16), Argus and Marsyas, between whom there are many suggestive parallels, are very similar kinds of “corrected” Ovidian models of transcendence. In both cases, a literal death *in malo* at the hands of a god becomes an *in bono* figure of spiritual transcendence through a divinely-induced “death” to the flesh. The poet’s claim that he cannot describe the way he fell

Saying nothing about the sleep itself, he passes directly to his abrupt awakening by a bright light (the source of which can only be guessed at) and a voice (which will turn out to have been Matelda's): "Però trascorro a quando mi svegliai, / e dico ch'un splendor mi squarciò 'l velo / del sonno, e un chiamar: 'Surgi: che fai?'" (*Purg.* 32.70-72). This light is forgotten in the simile that follows. The "tenor" of this simile (the thing which it aims to describe by means of a comparison with something else) is simply the way Dante was woken from his sleep by Matelda's "Surgi, che fai?" and looked up to see her standing alone, as a result of which he anxiously asked her what had become of Beatrice. The preceding "vehicle" (the "something else" that resembles and elucidates the tenor) appears to be the way Peter, John and James, having been led to the top of a high mountain in order to see Christ's Transfiguration, during which they saw him talking with Moses and Elias, and having, after seeing this, been overcome by sleep, were then woken by the Lord's "Arise," "surgite" (a word with the power to wake others from the far deeper "sleep" of death),¹¹¹ upon which they looked up to see that Christ had returned to his normal state and was alone, Moses and Elias having vanished. In other words, as the Apostles were woken from sleep by Christ's "arise" (a word that resurrected others from the sleep of death, prefiguring the resurrection of the body) and then looked up to see that Moses and Elias were no longer present, so Dante was woken from his slumber by Matelda's "Surgi," and looked up to see that Beatrice was no longer there. In still other words, this time closer to Dante's own: *Quali Pietro e Giovanni e Iacopo, condotti a veder . . . , e vinti, ritornaro a la parola da la qual furon maggior sonni rotti, e videro scemata loro scuola così di Moïse come d'Elia, tal torna' io, e vidi quella pia sopra me starsi che conducitrice fu de' miei passi lungo 'l fiume pria* (cf. *Purg.* 32.73-84).

This would be straightforward enough, were it not that this is not quite the way things happened at the Transfiguration. Of the three scriptural accounts of that event (Matt. 17.1-9, Mark 9.1-8, Luke 9.28-36), only Luke's mentions the sleep of the Apostles, and only Matthew's gives Jesus' words "Arise, and fear not." Luke leaves some room for confusion regarding the place of the sleep in the sequence of events, since he

asleep because he cannot depict the way Argus did, incorporating as it does the image of the counter-protagonist Argus falling asleep, is also a more subtle parallel to his use of the "essempro" of Glaucus as a provisional expression of ineffable "trasumanar" for those readers who will know it in the only way it can be known, by personal experience (*Par.* 1.67-72).

¹¹¹ Matt. 17.7 (cf. Luke 7.14 and 8.54, where Christ's "surge" wakes the dead from their "sleep").

first says that Christ's countenance was changed and his garments shone, and that Moses and Elias were talking with him of his coming death (Luke 9.29-31), and *then* writes that "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep. And waking, they saw his glory and the two men that stood with him" (v. 32). The sequence of events that emerges from the three versions taken together, however, is as follows: Christ leads the Apostles to the top of a high mountain, where they are overcome by sleep and then wake to see the Lord's face shining like the sun and his garments as white as snow and that Moses and Elias are talking with him of his coming death; the Apostles then fall to the ground in terror when they are overshadowed by a bright cloud from which there issues the voice of God saying "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him;" Jesus then says "Arise, and fear not," and the three look up to see only him. That is, the Apostles wake from sleep to see their transfigured Lord talking with Moses and Elias, then fall to the ground in terror because of the bright cloud and the voice of God, and *then* rise, not from sleep, but from what may well be a faint, in response to Christ's "Arise, and fear not." Dante's simile, on the other hand, implies a conflation of the Apostles' slumber and their being "vinti" by the bright cloud, as if, as I said above of the simile's vehicle, they first saw Christ transfigured, speaking with the two Old Testament figures, were then "vinti" by sleep, and then, woken by Christ's "arise," saw him standing alone.

Further, the length and intricacy of the vehicle make it difficult to grasp the ostensible *tertium comparationis* (that which the tenor and the vehicle have in common, here, the waking from sleep at the word "arise" to see that the speaker, who was accompanied before the slumber, is now alone), so elaborately does the vehicle foreground and intertwine the resurrection of the body and the union of the soul with the Word made flesh, as if the foretaste of the glory of body and soul that was granted to the Apostles had been, not just a tropological *figure* of mystic union, but an *actual* taste, in this life, of the perfect union of the soul and Christ that is reserved for the next. For the vehicle tells us that Peter, James and John were led by Jesus (to the top of a high mountain) in order to see some of the "fioretti" (to be granted a foretaste) of the "melo"

(Christ the “apple-tree,” the Bridegroom of the Song of Songs,¹¹² resurrected and glorified in body and soul), he whose “pome” (the full fruition or enjoyment of Christ’s glory in which ultimate happiness resides) is greedily fed on by the angels, and by the blessed in their perpetual “nozze” (the perfected nuptials of the soul and the Word made flesh in heaven), and that, having had that foretaste in the witnessing of Christ’s Transfiguration (during which they saw Moses and Elias talking with Jesus), and having then been overcome by sleep, the Apostles were brought back to their senses by Christ’s utterance of the word “arise,” the word that had the power to wake others from the sleep of death, with which they saw that Moses and Elias had departed and that Christ had returned to his normal state. In the same way, we are expected to understand, the protagonist returned to his senses from sleep and looked up to see Matelda standing alone, without Beatrice. In Dante’s very own words:

Quali a veder de’ fioretti del melo
 che del suo pome li angeli fa ghiotti
 e perpetüe nozze fa nel cielo,
 Pietro e Giovanni e Iacopo condotti
 e vinti, ritornaro a la parola
 da la qual furon maggior sonni rotti,
 e videro scemata loro scuola
 così di Moïse come d’Elia,
 e al maestro suo cangiata stola;
 tal torna’ io, e vidi quella pia
 sovra me starsi che conducitrice
 fu de’ miei passi lungo ’l fiume pria. (*Purg.* 32.73-84)

This complexity of this simile is such that the comparison regarding that which Dante awakes *to* is virtually overwhelmed by the elaborate implication that what he awakes *from*, his dreamless sleep, is, like the sleep of the Bride, a figure of “veder de’ fioretti del melo / che del suo pome li angeli fa ghiotti / e perpetüe nozze fa nel cielo,” i.e., the mystic sleep of affective union, the supreme *gustus* that is normally to be had in this world of the heavenly beatitude that is its fulfilment in the next.

¹¹² “As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons” (“sicut malum inter ligna silvarum sic dilectus meus inter filios,” Cant. 2.3).

Our earlier review of some important writings on contemplation has shown that, for Gregory the Great, the moral or tropological sense of the Bride's "I sleep, and my heart watcheth," of the dream-visions of Old Testament prophets, and of Jacob's stopping to sleep on his journey, is a mystical (rather than visionary) "waking sleep" at the contemplative "summit" which is attained by means of the labour of the active life of virtue as a purificatory ascetic process. This waking repose consists in the soul's complete detachment from external worldly concerns and inclinations, its "sleeping to" the sensory and the sensual, its "rest" from the disturbances of carnal passions, its freedom from the desire for temporal things and even from their images, enabling it to "wake" inwardly with a heightened receptivity to the self-manifestation of the divine in an elevation of the soul to the "vision of God" in which the divine light of Christ's divinity is seen to the maximum degree which is possible in the contemplative life with respect to its beginning in this world, the *quies contemplationis* which is a sublime if imperfect foretaste of its perfection in the "face to face" vision of the next in the *quies aeternae patriae*. It is a "return to Eden," as it were, a recovery of the innocence that was lost at the Fall, since it is the "closing of the eyes" that were opened by the first sin, the "eyes" of concupiscence (the desire for temporal visible things). The contemplative "eagle" Paul, in his rapture to the "third heaven," was elevated to the highest peak of this summit. Saint Anselm finds that the soul's waking sleep is also signified by the literal sleep and waking of the Apostles at the Transfiguration, at the top of a high mountain, a literal vision of the glory of Christ and a foretaste of the bodily resurrection, by which we are to understand that we can only contemplate eternal higher goods in mystic "sleep" after ascending a high mountain, i.e., by rising above inferior temporal things.

In the works of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century writers, the Bride/soul's slumber becomes its "sleeping with Christ," its mystic union with the Word at the summit of sometimes very elaborately articulated and toilsome ascetic mountains or ladders. Paul's rapture remains the paradigm, and the sleep of the Bride in the Song of Songs the principal biblical figure, but that of the Apostles at the Transfiguration is almost as important, and Moses' conversation with God at the top of another high mountain is added. The sleep is now also a "death" to the world. At the same time, it is perfect *pax* and *beatitudo*, the supreme peace and bliss of this life, for the experience is seen more as

the perfection of what is possible in this world than as an imperfect glimpse of what is to be had in the next, more as the most excellent form of *visio Dei* that is proper to temporal life than as a clouded version of the full *visio* which constitutes eternal life and happiness. It is the consummation of the return to Eden, granted rarely and briefly to those who have been restored to the state of perfect virtue by penitential ascetic practices and the labour of good works. It is the *deificatio* of the full accord of human and divine wills atop the Lord's mountain, achieved when *cupiditas* has been completely replaced by *caritas*, a transitory taste of the peace and beatitude of the Heavenly Paradise, and therefore of the lost bliss of the Earthly Paradise too, in the full restoration of the divine likeness that was lost by Adam's sin. It is a state of inner harmony that can be induced by listening to the sweet melodies of psalm-singing.

Given all this, it seems very likely that, even though Dante does not seem to adopt any particular mystic itinerary or doctrine, the literal sleep which a celestial psalmody induces in the pilgrim in the Earthly Paradise, after his arduous purgatorial ascent, is intended to have the same tropological meaning as the literal slumbers of the Bride of the Song of Songs, of Jacob on his journey, and of the Apostles at the top of Mount Tabor, namely, the *somnus contemplationis* or *gratiae* of mystic union, the "sommet ardu," as Gilson describes it, "mais accessible à tous, de la vie chrétienne."¹¹³ So many recurring and key motifs from the major instances of the patristic and medieval discourse on mystic sleep which I have discussed in this chapter are present in Dante's representation of his protagonist's slumber that we do not need to hunt down precise individual sources in order to perceive this—provided we first discard the presupposition that the *Commedia's* engagement with the mystical tradition is restricted to the *Paradiso*.

¹¹³ Gilson, "La conclusion de la *Divine Comédie*," 63.

becomes, from the point of view of the protagonist, nothing less than an apocalyptic-eschatological vision of the total shape of time, the final revelation of the complete structure and imminent conclusion of the providential plan (vv. 4-138). Bernard “manages” this vision, as it were, by pointing out key individuals in the celestial rose and explaining their distribution, which spatially manifests the providentially-ordered and end-directed structure of time, his constant point of reference being the Virgin, for she defines the centre of the whole scheme and it is gazing at her that will fully dispose Dante to the “veder Cristo” which he so desires, since her face is the face that most resembles Christ’s (vv. 85-87).

Curiously, the manner in which Bernard brings this lesson to an end suggests that he has not been very provident in his management of time, for he appears to realise suddenly that *tempus fugit*, even though the exact point at which he cuts his discourse short implies anything but a lack of foresight. It implies, in fact, that the saint ends his speech with cunningly disguised art in the exact manner and at the precise point where he wanted it to end all along, with an allusion to the imminent end of the providentially-ordained time that is dedicated to the temporal unfolding of this particular part of the divine plan (Dante’s “fatale andare”) as well as a reference back to its beginning in the prologue scene, when the pilgrim was shaken from his *dormitatio culpa*e, the imagery of sleep and eyes and the verb *assonnare* reminding us also of his slumber in Eden, in a seemingly artless example of carefully deployed *sermo humilis* (with its “humble” simile of the humble tailor) that marks the transition to the last phase of the speaker’s mission of disposing his charge to gaze directly into the divine light through which he will attain his supreme object of desire:

e contro al maggior padre di famiglia
 siede Lucia, che mosse la tua donna
 quando chinavi, a rovinar, le ciglia.
 Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna,
 qui farem punto, come buon sartore
 che com’ elli ha del panno fa la gonna;
 e drizzeremo li occhi al primo amore,
 sì che, guardando verso lui, penètri
 quant’ è possibil per lo suo fulgore.
 Veramente, *ne* forse tu t’arreti

movendo l'ali tue, credendo oltrarti,
 orando grazia convien che s'impetri
 grazia da quella che puote aiutarti;
 e tu mi seguirai con l'affezione,
 sì che dal dicer mio lo cor non parti.⁷
 E cominciò questa santa orazione:

(*Par.* 32.136-151)

The “holy prayer” is the prayer to the Virgin (*Par.* 33.1-39), in which the contemplative turned “dottore” who has just delivered “parole sante” becomes “l’orator” (*Par.* 33.41) giving a “santa orazione.” By means of this prayer, he obtains for Dante the grace that elevates his power of vision so that he can look directly into the light of glory (vv. 40-54). The final “veder Cristo” is the mystic vision of Christ which the journey and the poem that records it have been moving towards all along and with which they simultaneously end (*Par.* 33.133-45). As I will need to argue presently, it is a vision of “the face of God” in the person of Christ in a sense that the historical Bernard thought impossible, for it consists in the full comprehension, in the beatifying vision of the divine essence seen while “in the body,” of the greatest mystery of the faith, the mystery of the Word made flesh.

Bernard’s specific task is to bring about the successful end of the teleological process that leads to this mystic *finis*, which is the ultimate end of the journey and of the poem which describes it. His role in the economy of the text and of the divinely-willed “fatale andare” which it records is one and the same, since the ends are one and the same. Although each of the three guides can be said to play a teleological role, Saint Bernard is the third and *final* guide: even more significantly than Virgil and Beatrice, “Bernard comes as a figure having a teleological meaning.”¹ From the point of view of the saint himself and of Beatrice—in other words, from the perspective of eternity as Dante wishes us to understand it—his goal is the *terminar* of Dante’s desire to understand the mystery of the Incarnation in the satisfaction of that desire, which is one with the *assommar* of his “cammino,” the bringing to its consummation of the entire journey. His means to that end are directing Dante’s gaze to the blessed in the Empyrean as the objects of vision which will dispose him to that end, above all the Virgin, and obtaining from her the necessary last act of grace which enables him to receive the light of glory. In this chapter, I will

¹ DiLorenzo, “Dante’s Saint Bernard and the Theology of Liberty,” 502.

argue that the primary meaning of the verb *assonnare* in *Par.* 32.139 is as teleological as the meaning of the speaker who uses it, that, although the verb recalls the sleep in Eden, it is first and foremost a metaphorical and proleptic reference to the ultimate end which Bernard himself has in view, the intellectual “vision” of the mystery of the Incarnation in the unmediated *visio Dei* that belongs to the literal sense and that is recorded at the conclusion of the poem. His task as guide is to bring about teleological closure in this mystic end, the actual record of which contains no apparent allusion to sleep. He nonetheless anticipates this imminent *finis* as a metaphorical slumber, a participation in the *somnus gloriae* of the blessed in Heaven. In order to make this clear it will first be necessary to clarify two rather banal linguistic features of *Par.* 32.139, one semantic and the other syntactic, which have been the source of some confusion. The first is the basic literal meaning of *assonnare*, the other the syntax of the whole verse. Both, when properly understood, point to the end of the text and of the journey it describes.

ii A sleep which is yet to come

In the verse in question, the verb *assonnare* is used transitively: whatever its meaning, *assonnare* is what the rapidly passing time (the grammatical subject), does or is doing to the protagonist (the grammatical object). As we have seen in Chapter 1, the tendency has been to assume that the literal sense of “t’assonna” is, as Passerini puts it, “ti tien nel sonno,” “holds you in sleep, keeps you asleep,” so that Dante is to be thought of as in some way asleep as Bernard speaks. Buti’s “ti fa venire lo sonno,” “sends you to sleep, makes you sleepy,” the idea of which is that the actual sleep is yet to come, has not found favour. However, if the poet is being consistent with the very notable earlier use of the verb that I have already discussed at length, then Buti is right regarding the fundamental literal sense, and *assonnare* in the problematic verse is merely a synonym of *addormentare*, “to send to sleep, to put to sleep,” so that the sleep Bernard has in mind for his charge, whatever its nature, is yet to occur.

In the earlier instance, *assonnare* is used *intransitively*, as the action of the grammatical subject (which happens to be the protagonist), and in a highly foregrounded manner, appearing twice in the space of a few lines where the theme is the difficulty of describing the transition between waking and sleep. Its ineffability is as great as that of

the “trasumanar” of Dante’s ascent to Paradise, and prompts the same reliance on a classical “esempio” (*Par.* 1.67-72), even though the literal occasion is only his brief slumber in the Earthly Paradise:

S’io potessi ritrar come assonnaro
 li occhi spietati udendo di Siringa,
 li occhi a cui pur veggliar costò sì caro;
 come pintor che con essempro pinga,
 disegnerei com’ io m’addormentai;
 ma qual vuol sia che l’assonnar ben finga. (*Purg.* 32.64-69)

Here, *assonnare* is manifestly a synonym of *addormentarsi*, “to fall asleep.” If intransitive *assonnare*, like *addormentarsi*, means “to fall asleep, to go to sleep” (rather than “to sleep”), then the most natural meaning of transitive *assonnare* in *Par.* 32.139 is the same as transitive *addormentare*, “to send to sleep, to put to sleep” (rather than “to keep someone asleep”). In other words, just as intransitive *assonnare* in *Purg.* 32 is a synonym of *addormentarsi*, so transitive *assonnare* in *Par.* 32 is a synonym of *addormentare*, “to send to sleep.” The verb is again used intransitively in “mi richinava come l’uom ch’assonna” (*Par.* 7.15), where Dante compares himself to someone who is nodding with drowsiness, who is falling asleep, not someone who is asleep. To put it another way, just as intransitive *disonnare* in *Par.* 26.70 is a synonym of intransitive *svegliarsi*, “to wake up” (not “to be awake”), so transitive *assonnare* in *Par.* 32.139 is a synonym of transitive *addormentare*, “to send someone to sleep” (not “to keep someone asleep”). The most natural literal translation of the phrase “il tempo che t’assonna” would therefore be “the time which is sending you to sleep,” where the continuous present tense expresses the idea that the process of sending Dante to sleep is continuing as Bernard speaks, while the sleep is yet to come, as the end result of that process—all of which is as one would expect of a verb composed of *a* and *sonno*. We might therefore ask when this slumber happens, and if we knew the “when” we would be much closer to identifying the “what.” Clarifying the ambiguous syntax of the line, another source of critical disarray, can help here.

We have already seen that, before Torraca's gloss, the phrase "che t'assonna" had been read as a restrictive relative clause, that is, one in which the antecedent is viewed as a member of a class and the relative clause picks it out from the other members of that class. In this reading, "l tempo" belongs to the class "periods of time" and "che t'assonna" identifies the particular period of time which is "doing" whatever it is that *assonnare* signifies, so that the line could be rewritten as "Ma perchè 'l tempo che t'assonna fugge" ("because *the* time which . . . is flying"). Torraca, however, believes that the line is about time as such, and that sleep is introduced as a necessary effect of our temporal existence, in order to oppose Dante's present mortal condition in time to the taste of eternal life which he is about to enjoy. That is, he interprets "che t'assonna" as a *non*-restrictive clause, one in which the antecedent is viewed as unique and the relative clause provides information not intended to distinguish it from something else of the same kind. If this is correct then the line can be re-phrased, with commas, as "Ma perchè 'l tempo, che t'assonna, fugge" ("because *time*, which . . . , is flying"). Taken in isolation, and without any presuppositions about sleep, the syntax is perfectly amenable to both readings.

It does not, of course, exist in isolation. In the context of the whole work, "Ma perchè 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna / qui farem punto" recalls three previous allusions to time, each referring to the rapid passage of the time allocated by God to the phase of the "fatale andare" in which it occurs: "E già la luna è sotto i nostri piedi; / lo tempo è poco omai che n'è concesso, / e altro è da veder" (*Inf.* 29.10-12); "Figliuole, / vienne oramai, ché 'l tempo che n'è imposto / più utilmente compartir si vuole" (*Purg.* 23.4-6); "Ma perchè siam digressi assai, ritorci / li occhi oramai verso la dritta strada, / sì che la via col tempo si raccorci" (*Par.* 29.127-29). If we focus on the speaker and the very essence of his task (leaving for later his special qualification to make this last reference in the poem to the *tempus fugit* theme, the most conspicuous aspect of time in the *Commedia*), we will recall that he has already told his charge that he was sent "A terminar lo tuo disiro," "Acciò che tu assommi / perfettamente . . . il tuo cammino" (*Par.* 31.65, 94-95), and that he has described the pilgrim's supreme object of desire as simply "veder Cristo" (*Par.* 32.87). The immediate context is the passage that acts as a bridge between Bernard's "parole sante" (*Par.* 32.1-138) and his "santa orazione" (*Par.* 33.1-38), which are but

means to that end. The former discourse is the last disposition of the protagonist's gaze by a human agent of God: by means of that speech, the final guide makes his charge ready to gaze directly into the divine light. The latter is the prayer to the Virgin with which he obtains for Dante the necessary aid of grace. He cuts the first short, once he has pointed out Lucia in the celestial rose, in order to turn to the second, lest Dante fail by attempting to penetrate the *lumen gloriae* by his own powers, however elevated they may now be. Bernard suddenly concludes his "parole sante," not because they are perhaps the most soporific passage in the entire poem, but because he appears to discover suddenly that he is running out of time. He clearly speaks with a view to the imminent end:

Ma perché 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna,
 qui farem punto, come buon sartore
 che com' elli ha del panno fa la gonna;
 e drizzeremo li occhi al primo amore,
 sì che, guardando verso lui, penètri
 quant' è possibil per lo suo fulgore.
 (Par. 32.139-144)

All of which strongly suggests that Bernard is thinking of the pilgrim's entire *tempo concesso* and *imposto* (an echo of the *datum tempus* of Aeneas's "fatale andare" in *Aeneid* 6, which I will discuss in the next chapter) and of the coming attainment of its end, its goal or purpose, with respect to Dante's personal journey. If he is concerned, instead, about the time set by God for the third realm, or for the stay in the Empyrean, this amounts to the same thing, since both end with the end of the journey. It is not time as such, but the allocated period of time, the period of time which is characterised by its "*assonnare*" the protagonist, that is drawing to a close. It is therefore very likely that Bernard is saying, not "Ma perchè 'l tempo, che t'assonna, fugge," but "Ma perchè 'l tempo che t'assonna fugge," with a restrictive relative clause in which *assonnare* means "to send to sleep," so that we would translate the verse into English as "But because the time which is sending you to sleep is flying," and it is at least possible that its full import at the literal level is

“because the period of time allocated by the divine will to sending you to the goal of sleep is rapidly approaching that ‘end.’”

If this is correct, then the “when” we are seeking in order to discover the “what” would be at once the moment Dante’s supreme object of desire is attained and the end of the *tempo concesso*. These coincide in the last six verses of the text, when the pilgrim appears to be granted the satisfaction of his yearning to “veder Cristo,” to apprehend fully the mystery of the Word made flesh by understanding the principle that unites the human and divine natures in Christ. He struggles to do so by his own now exalted powers, his “proprie penne,” applying reason to the images he sees, gazing at the divine circle of the second person of the Trinity and the flesh-coloured human face within it and trying to grasp rationally the principle by which the human image—the glorified human body of Christ, represented, as the body usually is for Dante, by the face—fits into the divine circle. He is like a geometer who tries to reason out the value of π which, multiplied by the diameter, gives the circumference, the value that will make the diameter rationally “fit into” the circumference.² He does so in vain (π is not, after all, a rational number); but the light of glory violently strikes the principle he seeks into his mind, at which point his supernaturally-elevated *fantasia*, the faculty which presents the images derived from sensation to the mind, fails to keep up, for this supreme truth cannot be apprehended through images of any sort:

Quella circolazion che sì concetta
pareva in te come lume riflesso,
da li occhi miei alquanto circunspetta,
dentro da sé, del suo colore stesso,
mi parve pinta de la nostra effige:
per che 'l mio viso in lei tutto era messo.
Qual è 'l geomètra che tutto s'affige
per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova,
pensando, quel principio ond' elli indige,
tal era io a quella vista nova:
veder voleva come si convenne
l'imago al cerchio e come vi s'indova;

² This is the problem of “squaring the circle” which Dante mentions in *Mon.* 3.3.2.

ma non eran da ciò le proprie penne:
 se non che la mia mente fu percossa
 da un fulgore in che sua voglia venne.

A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa;
 ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l *velle*,
 sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,
 l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.

(*Par.* 33.127-145)

There is no allusion to sleep; but if there were some sense in which a mystic like Bernard might think of this conclusion as a slumber, and anticipate it as such from the perspective of *Par.* 32.139, then we would have the solution to our problem. A solution which fits the bill with tempting simplicity is available. It is incorrect, but so instructively so that it is worth pursuing.

In his essay on the final vision,³ Étienne Gilson challenges the critical consensus regarding the nature of the experience which closes the *Commedia*. Gilson concedes that Dante takes the Thomistic position that beatitude consists essentially in the cognitive act of the intellect rather than the affective act of the will, in knowing rather than in loving God (as per *Par.* 28.109-111), but disputes the belief that the poem ends with the protagonist's very privileged enjoyment in this life of a transitory but otherwise perfect intellectual vision of God. In Gilson's view, Dante's "voglia venne," not in the form of an intellectual intuition, in the vision of the divine essence, of the principle which unites the human and the divine in the person of Christ, but in the form of the affective union which is not the perfect vision of God yet constitutes the supreme goal, potentially accessible to all Christians in this life after the purification of the soul by *ascesis* and with the aid of grace, as in the various contemplative ascents described by Saint Bonaventure and Richard of St. Victor. When he addresses the question of Bernard's aptness as the final guide in later studies, the French scholar has this concept of the final goal in mind. For Gilson, Dante chose Bernard, not just because of his special renown in the theory and practice of "contemplation," but as the embodiment of the affective mysticism that was common to the Franciscans around Bonaventure, the Victorines around Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, and the Cistercians around Bernard, whose various mystic ladders

³ Gilson, "La conclusion de la *Divine Comédie*."

all lead to the loving union with the Word which (in Gilson's view) Dante attains at the end of his journey.⁴

Gilson's argument, in his essay on the poem's finale, rests mainly on the similarities between Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* 5-6, Richard's *Benjamin major* 4.17-18, and *Par.* 33.85 ff, where we find the same ascending sequence of (a) the last stage of the ascent (the contemplation of the mysteries of the divine Being and Good as the all-containing One, then of the Trinity, and then of the Incarnation, followed, in Dante and Richard, by a flash of lightning), then (b) the attainment of the goal at the summit (when the contemplative's "voglia venne"). The scholar makes the reasonable assumption that Dante took the final stage of the ascent from Bonaventure and/or Richard, and the more hazardous one that, because the three-stage lead-up to the final goal is the same or very similar in all three texts, so too is the goal itself, resulting in the quite spurious claim that the "voglia" which is satisfied by the "flash of lightning" is not the understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation which Dante previously "veder voleva," but the mystic affective union which is exemplified by the end of Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*. It is not, in other words, the intellectual vision of the divine essence, but rather the purely affective or loving "knowledge" or "vision" of God which is achieved in the mystic union of the soul and the Word as both Bonaventure and Richard conceived it, an entering into the Pseudo-Dionysian "divine darkness," the ecstatic mystical experience of God as *beyond* all sensory or intellectual cognition, a "knowing" God precisely by abandoning and transcending all futile attempts to know with the cognitive powers.

If it were a tenable proposition that the end of the poem represents this "sommet ardu, mais accessible à tous, de la vie chrétienne," as Gilson describes it in his early essay,⁵ then we would have the solution to our problem, since, as I have already shown, that summit was commonly figured as a sleep. If the critic had tackled our problem, he might well have proposed that this is the "sleep" to which Dante is moving, for he twice quotes passages in which Bonaventure, following the well-established tradition, gives the sleep of the Bride as the biblical figure of the mystics' imperfect taste of heavenly beatitude (61-2). However, two obstacles to such a conclusion present themselves.

⁴ Gilson, *The Philosophy of Bonaventure*, trans. Iltyd Trethowan and F. J. Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward, 1938), vii-x, 486-88, *Dante the Philosopher*, 47-9, 237-38.

⁵ Gilson, "La conclusion de la *Divine Comédie*," 63.

The first is that Dante has already attained this “*sommet ardu*,” for as I have shown in the preceding chapter, this mystic goal is the moral or tropological meaning of the pilgrim’s literal sleep at the summit of the mountain of Purgatory—but in a sense more in accord with Gilson’s later position than with his original proposal. According to this later position, Dante attains, at the end of the poem, “the unitive ecstasy of the Christian mystic,” by which the critic means, not any particular mystic’s conception of the affective “*sommet ardu*,” but loving union as the common goal of Cistercians, Victorines and Franciscans alike.⁶ As the preceding chapter of this study has demonstrated, this is, in essence, just what the protagonist’s slumber in Eden signifies, there being no evidence that the poet adopted any particular version of the *itinerarium* or of the *finis*.

The other obstacle is that Gilson’s interpretation of the final experience cannot be accepted. The plain, incontrovertible sense of *Par.* 33.127-145 is that Dante’s desire to understand intellectually the mystery of the Incarnation is satisfied, while the poem tells us elsewhere that this only happens in the intellectual vision of the divine essence. The “*voglia*” of the mind which “*venne*” with the flash of lightning is clearly the intellectual desire which the pilgrim yearned to have satisfied just before, that which he “*veder voleva*” by means of discursive reason, namely, “*come si convenne / l’imago al cerchio e come vi s’indova*,” how the human (the flesh-coloured “*nostra effige*”) can be assimilated and united to the divine (the circle of the Son) in Christ. He initially and unsuccessfully tries to grasp this with his elevated cognitive “*proprie penne*,” sense, imagination and discursive reason, like a geometer pondering the images of geometrical shapes derived from sensation and presented to the mind by the “*fantasia*,” until at last his mind “*fu percossa / da un fulgore in che sua voglia venne*.” It follows that Dante is elevated, not to the “*divine darkness*” that is possible for all those who can transcend and give up futile attempts to know God with the mind in order to know him with the heart, but to a transitory participation in the eternal life of the blessed, which consists in the unmediated intellectual vision of the divinity and of the supreme mystery of the Word made flesh *in* the vision of God, knowing as the saints themselves do, by simple immediate intuition, after the failure and abandonment of human discursive reason.

⁶ Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, 49.

This follows quite logically, because we have already been told, firstly, that intellectual vision is the essential feature or foundation of beatitude (*Par.* 28.106-111), and, secondly, that the prospect of clearly understanding the Incarnation “accender ne dovia più il disio / di vedere quella essenza in che si vede / come nostra natura e Dio s’unio,” because “Lì si vedrà ciò che tenem per fede, / non dimostrato, ma fia per sé noto / a guisa del ver primo che l’uom crede” (*Par.* 2.40-45). That prospect should, in other words, further inflame the desire of the intellect to see the essence of God (the supreme “vero in che si queta ogni intelletto,” known in the unmediated vision which is the foundation of beatitude and from which there follows the will’s love of the apprehended intellectual object, *Par.* 28.106-111), and it should do so because it is in the beatific vision that the greatest mystery of all, which is utterly beyond the power of demonstrative reason, will be understood with the same immediate intuition with which we grasp self-evident first truths, such as the principle of non-contradiction, according to which, in the case of two contradictory propositions, one is necessarily true and the other false. Dante therefore joins Justinian, who now understands the union of two natures in Christ “chiaro sì, come tu vedi / ogni contradizione e falsa e vera,” and this just because he had faith in it in life (*Par.* 6. 16-21), just because he believed that, at a certain point in history, “al Verbo di Dio discender piacque / u’ la natura, che dal suo fattore / s’era allungata, unì a sé in persona / con l’atto sol del suo eterno amore” (*Par.* 7.30-33). To put it syllogistically: the mystery of the Incarnation is only understood in the unmediated intellectual vision of God; Dante understands the mystery of the Incarnation; therefore, he has the unmediated intellectual vision of God. The ultimate object of desire which Bernard describes as “veder Cristo” is thus for Dante the perfect comprehension of the mystery of the Word made flesh, and this desire is fully satisfied, by a supra-rational intellectual intuition, in the satisfaction of the yearning for the intellectual *visio Dei*.⁷ Thus, as Joseph Mazzeo argues, Dante’s “fatale andare,” so evidently intended to be seen as modelled on the otherworld experiences of Aeneas and Paul, ends not with a Pauline *somnus contemplationis*, the *raptus* of 2 Cor. 12.2-4 as Bernard and others understood it,

⁷ Dante’s representation of the final vision is clearly informed by the Scholastic distinction between two kinds of intellectual operation, the characteristically human process of discursive reasoning, *ratio* or *discursus rationis*, on the one hand, and the immediate grasp of first principles, the simple *intellectus* or *intuitus* of angelic cognition, on the other (see, for example, ST 1a.58.3-4). Dante appears to distinguish the two kinds of “speculazione” in *Conv.* 3.13.5.

but with the Augustinian-Thomistic interpretation of that rapture, i.e., a transitory, direct intellectual vision of God's essence, attributed only to Moses, and, among Christians, to Paul, in a brief ecstatic elevation while still *in via* to the condition of the saints *in patria*.⁸ These same considerations refute Richard Kay's recent refinement of Gilson's thesis.⁹

Now, just as it has not been realised that Dante also enjoys the Pauline *somnus gratiae* or *contemplationis* in the Earthly Paradise, so that he is Paul's successor in this way, too (as all Christians can be), so Dante scholars have not observed that the peaceful beatitude of the saints *in patria*, the state in which Dante directly participates at the end of the journey (as Augustine and Aquinas thought Paul had done) was also often represented as a "sleep," the *somnus gloriae*. The historical Bernard, for example, devoted a whole sermon to the tranquil *somnus* that the blessed enjoy now and that will be consummated at the end of time. Using the figure of beatitude as the *somnus gloriae*, therefore, one might think of Paul's rapture (in Aquinas's version) as a brief participation in the "sleep" of the saints in heaven. One might also think of the protagonist's unique imitation of that mystic experience (albeit in *Dante's* adaptation of it, i.e., the "end" of a journey in the body to the Empyrean) in the same way, as a transitory but otherwise perfect participation, while still *in via*, in the "sleep" of the saints *in patria*. My proposal is that Dante intends us to understand that his fictional Bernard does precisely this when

⁸ Mazzeo, "Dante and the Pauline Modes of Vision." See also Kenelm Foster, "Dante's Vision of God," in *The Two Dantes* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977), 66-85.

⁹ Richard Kay, "Dante in Ecstasy: *Paradiso* 33 and Bernard of Clairvaux," *Mediaeval Studies* 66 (2004): 183-212. Kay proposes that the moral sense of the *Commedia's* finale is precisely mystic union as Saint Bernard conceived it. His fundamental presuppositions are, firstly, that the protagonist cannot reach the beatific vision because he is still alive, the intellectual *visio Dei* being unattainable in this life, so that the "voglia" which was satisfied cannot have been the desire to understand the mystery of the Incarnation, and, secondly, that, since Saint Bernard is the final guide, he must be leading Dante to the specifically Bernardine form of purely affective *visio Dei* that is possible in this world. The first of these presuppositions is untroubled by any serious consideration on the scholar's part of the Augustinian-Thomistic interpretation of Paul's rapture, according to which one can be "alive" ("in the body") and yet sufficiently "dead to this life" (in intellectual ecstasy) to see the essence of God, nor by the plain sense of the text, which Kay obliges to mean that Dante wanted to affectively "see" the likeness between human nature and Christ's divinity (as the historical abbot understood it). The second assumption does not reckon with the fact that Bernard does not actually lead Dante to the final experience itself, God does. The saint is the "final guide" in the sense that he is the last human instrument by which God leads the pilgrim to Himself, after which God Himself takes over in the form of the ray of divine light, an intellectual light (cf. *Par.* 30.40) which behaves very much like the light of glory, elevating Dante *after* the highest point he reaches with Bernard, the point at which (in the narrator's words) "l'ardor del desiderio in me finii" (*Par.* 33.48). The saint plays no part at all in the subsequent "veder" (v. 55). Even if he did, he is a fictional character whom the poet may use as he pleases, which might well include representing him as holding beliefs of which the historical figure would not have approved, as in the cases of Bonaventure (*Par.* 12.139-41) and Gregory the Great (*Par.* 28.133-35).

he says “Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna,” anticipating his charge’s full taste of the peace of beatitude as a participation in or a final “falling into” the *somnus gloriae* of the blessed.

iii *Somnus gloriae*

The real Bernard’s description of the “sleep” of the saints is a contribution to a very minor exegetical tradition regarding the slumber of David’s “In peace in the selfsame I will sleep, and I will rest” (“in pace in id ipsum dormiam et requiescam,” Ps. 4.9). In this tradition, “id ipsum,” “the selfsame,” is the immutable and therefore eternal divinity, the eschatological goal, and the sleep which the psalmist anticipates is an anagogical or eschatological figure of the peace and beatitude which comes with the future attainment of that goal as the blessed enjoy it now and/or as they will at the end of time. Saint Augustine, who may be the originator of the tradition, and who used the Old Latin text (“in pace in idipsum obdormiam, et somniam capiam”), favoured the latter interpretation.

Augustine believed that the Platonist philosophers knew the goal, even though they did not know the way. That is, he believed that, although they were too proud to accept that the way is Christ, the Word made flesh, the Platonists nonetheless understood that happiness consists in the enjoyment of God, the supreme Good, and even knew what God truly is, in accord with the manner in which God names himself by saying “I AM WHO AM” (“ego sum qui sum”) and is then named by Moses as “HE WHO IS” (“qui est,” Ex. 3.14), and also in line with the Joannine teaching that “In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God: and the Word was God” (John 1.1). For they understood that God is immutable being and the changeless Creator of all changing things by and through his eternal Idea or Word, who *is* God and who is also, therefore, immutable being, so that it can be said of the Word, as of God, that it is “idipsum,” “the selfsame:” “It is the selfsame, existing in the same way; as it is, it always is, and cannot change; that is, it *is* [or: ‘it is God’]” (“Idipsum est, eodem modo est; sicut est, semper sic est; mutari non potest: hoc est est [or: ‘hoc est Deus est’]”).¹⁰ Gilson writes that “idipsum” tends to

¹⁰ Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium* 2.2, PL 35.1389. The Platonists’ understanding of God is discussed in 2.2-4.

become a name for God in Augustine's works, in which it signifies "that which is absolutely identical with itself."¹¹

We have seen that Richard of St. Victor thought of the "selfsame" in very similar terms, but interpreted the literal sleep of Ps. 4.9 as a tropological figure of the summit of contemplation in this life, and that Dante's sleep in Eden has this same meaning. In the relatively obscure tradition we are considering now, the significance of David's slumber corresponds much more closely to the ultimate mystic goal of Dante's journey; yet this tradition can usefully be approached by recalling the nearly disastrous beginning of the pilgrim's *cammino*, specifically, the manner in which he echoes David's penitential "miserere mei" when he spontaneously clutches at the offer of grace, crying out from his misery to the as yet unidentified shade of Virgil "'*Miserere di me,*' . . . , / 'qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!'" (*Inf.* 1.65-66).

"Miserere mei" occurs most famously in Psalm 50, the Miserere, the fourth of the seven penitential psalms, which begins "Miserere mei Deus." At *Purg.* 5.24 the singing of "'*Miserere*' a verso a verso" almost certainly signifies the singing of the whole of this particular psalm, and the identification of David, at *Par.* 32.11-12, as the singer who "per doglia / del fallo disse '*Miserere mei,*'" is probably another reference to the Miserere, even though the psalmist makes the same plea in the tenth verse of Psalm 30, crying "miserere mei Domine" immediately after the renowned (for Dante scholars) "statuisti in loco spatioso pedes meos."¹² "Miserere mei" also appears, much less famously, in Psalm 4, a text of great personal significance to Augustine, who was especially interested in the sleep of verse 9. Since it is of substantial importance here, but has never, to my knowledge, been brought into play in Dante studies, the psalm merits quotation in full:

1 Unto the end, in verses. A psalm for David.

2 When I called upon him, the God of my justice heard me: when I was in distress, thou hast enlarged me. Have mercy on me: and hear my prayer.

3 O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?

¹¹ "L'absolument identique à soi-même" (Étienne Gilson, "*Regio Dissimilitudinis* de Platon à Saint Bernard de Clairvaux," *Mediaeval Studies* 9 [1947]: 123).

¹² On the enigma of why the angels in the Earthly Paradise sing Psalm 30 only as far as "pedes meos" (*Purg.* 30.82-84), see Robert Hollander, "Dante's Use of the Fiftieth Psalm (A Note on *Purg.* XXX, 84)," in *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 1979), 107-13.

4 Know ye also that the Lord hath made his holy one wonderful: the Lord will hear me when I shall cry unto him.

5 Be ye angry, and sin not: the things you say in your hearts, be sorry for them upon your beds.

6 Offer up the sacrifice of justice, and trust in the Lord: many say, Who sheweth us good things?

7 The light of thy countenance O Lord, is signed upon us: thou hast given gladness in my heart.

8 By the fruit of their corn, their wine, and oil, they are multiplied.

9 In peace in the selfsame I will sleep and I will rest [‘in pace in id ipsum dormiam et requiescam’].

10 For thou, O Lord, singularly hast settled me in hope.¹³

In his commentary on Psalm 4,¹⁴ Augustine writes that the “end” to which the work is dedicated is Christ, the *finis* which signifies perfection rather than destruction. The cry of “miserere mei” is the sinner’s call for divine aid, a call which brings liberation from the anxious tribulation and “constriction” of the state of sin (as it does in the prologue scene). In the state of sin one is detained, held back, blocked by the love of worldly goods, the pursuit of those vanities and lies which promise to last but which pass away like shadows (4.1-3). God responds to those who cry out to him in their heart and with all their heart, granting them illumination in this life and the hope of rest (*requies*) in the next, provided they repent, in their heart, by becoming angry with themselves for their past sins and resolving to sin no more, feeling in their hearts the sting of remorse, the *compungi* which is the pain of repentance and by which the soul punishes itself (4.5-6). This achieves “the sacrifice of justice” which is conversion, “the passing over from the old life to the new life” (“transitum de vita veteri ad vitam novam”) in which the old man dies and the regenerated new man is offered to God (4.7). Those who ask to be shown good things are the vast crowd of the foolish and the wicked who either look for peace in this world, without success, or doubt that there is true peace in the next. True happiness

¹³ “[1] In finem in carminibus psalmus David [2] Cum invocarem exaudivit me Deus iustitiae meae in tribulatione dilatasti mihi miserere mei et exaudi orationem meam [3] filii hominum usquequo gravi corde ut quid diligitis vanitatem et quaeritis mendacium [4] et scitote quoniam mirificavit Dominus sanctum suum Dominus exaudiet me cum clamavero ad eum [5] irascimini et nolite peccare quae dicitis in cordibus vestris in cubilibus vestris conpungimini [6] sacrificate sacrificium iustitiae et sperate in Domino multi dicunt quis ostendit nobis bona [7] signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui Domine dedisti laetitiam in corde meo [8] a fructu frumenti et vini et olei sui multiplicati sunt [9] in pace in id ipsum dormiam et requiescam [10] quoniam tu Domine singulariter in spe constituisti me.”

¹⁴ *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 4, PL 36.78-83.

will not be found by those who search for it in externals, loving vanity and seeking lies, but in the “light of the face of God” (“*lumen vultus Dei*”) which is Christ within us, the likeness and light of God which dwells in the inner person (4.8).

“Multiplicity” with respect to earthly things signifies want, not abundance, for the soul which is consumed by cupidinous desire for temporal pleasures can never be satisfied, nor can it see the single good when it is “stretched out” or “distended” in thoughts about the many. Thus the insatiable desires of the corruptible body weigh down the soul; nor can it concentrate on seeking the simplicity of the good within when “it is so multiplied by the countless images which fill it, due to the withdrawal and succession of temporal goods, the seasonal ‘corn, wine and oil’” (“*temporalium bonorum decessione et successione, id est, a tempore frumenti, vini et olei sui, innumerabilibus completa phantasmatis sic multiplicata est*”). Augustine encourages the faithful few to strive to distinguish themselves from the many who are “multiplied by the desire for temporal things” (“*multiplicati . . . temporalium cupiditate*”), putting before them the promise of the “sleep” of verse 9, the perfected end which follows from and rewards its virtuous beginning in this life (4.9).

That reward, as in the vision at Ostia, is not the dimly-understood state of the blessed between death and the resurrection (also a “sleep”), but the eternal life, repose and perfect *alienatio* of the soul in God that will come when the soul is reunited with the body (as the citation of the primary biblical text on that supreme object of Christian hope indicates):

Rightly do they [the faithful few] hope for the complete alienation of the mind from mortal things, the total forgetting the miseries of this life, which are aptly and prophetically termed sleep and rest, figuring the supreme peace which no tumult can disturb. This is not to be attained in this life; rather, we must hope for it in the next, as the psalmist’s use of the future tense reveals. For he says neither ‘I slept and rested’ nor ‘I sleep and rest,’ but ‘I will sleep, and I will rest.’ Then will this corruptible put on incorruptibility, and this mortal put on immortality; then death shall be swallowed up in victory [1 Cor. 15.54].¹⁵

¹⁵ “Recte enim speratur a talibus omnimoda mentis abalienatio a mortalibus rebus et miseriarum saeculi hujus oblivio, quae nomine obdormitionis et somni decenter et propheticè significatur, ubi summa pax nullo tumultu interpellari potest. Sed hoc jam non tenetur in hac vita, sed post hanc vitam sperandum est. Hoc etiam ipsa verba ostendunt, quae futuri sunt temporis: non enim dictum est, aut Obdormivi et somnum cepi; aut, Obdormio et somnum capio; sed, *Obdormiam et somnum capiam*. Tunc corruptibile hoc induetur

The psalm's closing verse expresses David's secure hope that this peace will be his, inspiring Augustine to conclude: "Singularly and in simplicity, withdrawn from the swarming crowd of things which arise and pass away, we must be lovers of eternity and unity, if we desire to hold fast to the one God, our Lord" ("Singulares ergo et simplices, id est, secreti a multitudine ac turba nascentium rerum ac morentium, amatores aeternitatis et unitatis esse debemus; si uni Deo et Domino nostro cupimus inhaerere," 4.10).

Augustine's identification of God as "the selfsame" is reminiscent of Dante's description of the divine light "uno manendo in sé come davanti" (*Par.* 29.140-45), the immutable object which "tal è sempre qual s'era davante" (*Par.* 33.109-14). However, neither these commonplace formulaic expressions, nor the resonances between the drama of the prologue scene and Augustine's commentary on Psalm 4, authorise us to assume that the poet and his readers were familiar with the ideas in that commentary. Yet there are two good reasons why we can make just this assumption.

The first is the eminently reasonable prior assumption that Dante and many of his audience were very familiar with Augustine's *Confessions*, in which the saint recalls the key role which meditation on Psalm 4 played in his preparation for baptism, in a passage which narrates a re-living, in memory, of his recent conversion and which patterns that event on the same interpretation of Psalm 4.¹⁶ The psalm gave him the means by which he could consciously understand the nature of his own conversion, the change from the old man that he was to the new man he had become. It made him see clearly that, until God responded to his plea for help, he had been one of those who are multiplied by the desire for external goods, loving vanity and seeking after lies, taking those mere fantasies or illusions of good for the truth itself, when all the time that true good was not to be found in external things seen by the light of the Sun, but within, by the light which is the face of God ("lumen vultus Dei"), "the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world" (John 1.9). He angrily rejected this past self, feeling the pang of

in corruptione, et mortale hoc induetur immortalitate; tunc absorbebitur mors in victoriam" (*Enarrationes* 4.9, *PL* 36.82-83).

¹⁶ *Confessionum* 9.4.8-11, *PL* 32.767-768. Dante shows his familiarity with the *Confessions*, and assumes that of the reader, in *Convivio* 1.2.14.

repentance, and placed his hope in God, joyfully recognising that he no longer desired “to be multiplied by worldly goods, devouring time and devoured by time” (“multiplicari terrenis bonis, devorans tempora, et devoratus temporibus”). He saw in himself the truth of every verse; but it was verse 9 which set him afire and made him cry out from the depths of his heart, because it promised him perfect, everlasting unity in and with the selfsame One, and therefore liberation from otherness and multiplicity, from the sense of dispersal and fragmentation among the “alia multa” which are not the selfsame:

At the next verse I cried out loudly from the bottom of my heart: Oh, ‘in peace’! Oh, ‘in the selfsame’! Oh, those words, ‘I will lay me down, and sleep’! For who will block our way when the word is fulfilled, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’? You, who do not change, are supremely ‘the selfsame.’ In you there is repose that forgets all toil, for there is none beside you and we are not to seek the multiplicity of other things which are not what you are. Rather ‘you, Lord, have established me in hope through unity.’¹⁷

Cassiodorus seems not to rely on Augustine in his overall interpretation of the psalm, but his gloss on verse 9 is very similar to that of his predecessor:

Lest you think this means temporal peace, he adds: ‘In peace in the selfsame I will sleep and I will rest.’ ‘In the selfsame’ clearly means that it does not change according to the vicissitudes of things, but remains always and immutably its same self. ‘I will sleep’ is to be understood as the end of life, ‘I will rest’ as future beatitude, when repose and glorious rest shall have been given to the saints.¹⁸

¹⁷ “Et clamabam in consequenti versu clamore alto cordis mei: *O in pace! O in id ipsum!* O quid dixit: *Obdormiam et somnium capiam?* Quoniam quis resistet nobis, cum fiet sermo qui scriptus est: *Absorpta est mors in victoriam?* Et tu es idipsum valde qui non mutaris; et in te requies obliviscens laborum omnium, quoniam nullus alius tecum, nec ad alia multa adipiscenda, quae non sunt quod tu, sed tu, Domine, *singulariter in spe constituisti me*” (*Confessionum* 9.4.11, PL 32.768).

¹⁸ “Sed ne pacem istam temporalem putares, addidit: *In idipsum dormiam et requiescam.* In idipsum quippe dicitur, quod nulla rerum vicissitudine commutatur; sed ipsum in se permanens incommutabili perennitate consistit. *Dormiam*, finem vitae vult intelligi; *requiescam*, futuram beatitudinem indicare monstratur, quando jam requies dabitur sanctis, et gloriosa pausatio” (*Expositio in Psalterium* 4, PL 70.52).

In a commentary which may be the work of Bede, Psalm 4 is seen in terms taken directly from Augustine's commentary, with its opposition between the eternal One and the temporal Many, and the gloss on the ninth verse is vaguely like Augustine's:

'In peace in the selfsame:' The wicked do not see the true [spiritual] goods because they are dissipated [in false goods]; but I to whom you have shown those goods 'will sleep,' that is, will withdraw myself from the cares and miseries of this troublesome worldly life in the present, and in the future 'will rest' eternally, dwelling in peace and never touched by its contrary, but always remaining 'in the selfsame' peace, continuing in peace with no interruption by conflict.¹⁹

Peter Lombard follows Augustine closely, remarking that the "multiplication" of verse 8, "By the fruit of their corn, their wine, and oil, they are multiplied," signifies, not abundance, but "being distracted to many things," "ad multa distractionem," and recalling Augustine's yearning for liberation from the misery and fragmentation due to the soul's entanglement in the corruptible "alia multa" which are not the one immutable selfsame.²⁰ These identifications of the corn, wine, and oil of verse 8 as the distracting multitude of temporal goods, in opposition to the one immutable "id ipsum" in which the psalmist hopes to repose, point to a second good reason for making the assumption, prior even to any consideration of *Par.* 32.139, that the poet knew of that sleep and expected at least some of his readers to know of it too.

In the *Monarchia*, Dante argues for the superiority of unity over disunity by stating the Pythagorean principle that unity is on the side of good and multiplicity is on the side of evil, and then adds, without further comment, that "From this it is clear that sin is

¹⁹ "In pace in idipsum. Illi maii [mali?] non advertunt vera bona, quia dissipati sunt; ego autem cui ostendisti ea, dormiam, id est, retraham me a cura et miseria hujus sollicitae vitae mundanae, in praesenti et in futuro requiescam aeternaliter, existens in pace, nunquam valente recipere oppositum, sed semper eunte in idipsum pacem, paci continuando, et non intromittendo bellum" (*De Psalmorum Libro exegesis* 4, *PL* 93.506).

²⁰ "Quasi dicat: Dedisti mihi laetitiam utique de hoc quod in pace quae est in idipsum, id est, immutabilis, dormiam ab omni strepitu mundi secretus. Et hoc erit, cum mortale hoc induerit immortalitatem; et requiescam, id est fruar vita beata . . . Quasi dicat: Illi laborant multiplicari his temporalibus, ego autem in pace mentis dormiam, hic oblitus mundi tendens in idipsum, id est ad illud bonum, quod est id ipsum, id est quod nulla vicissitudine commutatur, sed ipsum in se manens immutabili perennitate consistit" (*Commentarium in Psalmos* 4.10, *PL* 191.89); the phrase "ad multa distractionem" occurs in 4.8, recalling "alia multa" in Augustine's *Confessionum* 9.4.11. Peter's "ipsum in se manens" sounds much like Dante's "uno manendo in sé" (*Par.* 29.145), but this way of describing the deity was a common patristic formula.

nothing other than disdaining the one and moving thence to the many [progređi ab uno spreto ad multa], as the psalmist well understood when he said ‘By the fruit of their corn, their wine, and oil, they are multiplied.’”²¹ In his note on this remark, Gustavo Vinay cites a passage from the commentary on Ps. 4 which may be the work of Bede and which I have just quoted, a passage that bears much less similarity to what Dante has to say than does Peter Lombard’s statement about distraction “ad multa,” which is in turn a clarification of Augustine’s identification of the corn, wine and oil of verse 8 as the “alia multa” which are the antithesis of the one “selfsame.”²² Richard Kay, in his recent edition, notes that Dante assumes that the reader will recall the context of the verse, meaning the particular psalm it comes from.²³ In fact, the author of the treatise assumes much more than this, for his citation presupposes the reader’s knowledge of the moral sense of verse 8 as Augustine established it and as it was explained by Peter Lombard, the turn of phrase reinforcing the suggestion that Dante’s direct source is one or both of their commentaries. It presupposes, that is, that the reader knows that the foods of the literal sense in verse 8 figure the many temporal goods of this world, in opposition to the one true good which verse 9 names as “id ipsum,” and that sin consists in turning from the latter to the former (just as the somnolent protagonist of the *Commedia* does the moment Beatrice dies). In the *Monarchia*, in short, Dante displays, and assumes that his readers share, an understanding of verse 8 which very strongly implies a knowledge of Augustine’s view of the sleep of verse 9, a knowledge on which Dante could rely when he gave Bernard the line “Ma perchè ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna.” Yet the strongest indication of Bernard’s meaning in this verse is probably what the historical abbot himself (as Dante and his contemporaries knew him) had to say about the psalmist’s slumber in “id ipsum.”

Psalm 4.9 is cited in two sermons for the Feast of the Purification, in a series that in Dante’s time would very probably have been attributed to Saint Bernard but which is now

²¹ “Hinc videri potest quod peccare nichil est aliud quam progredi ab uno spreto ad multa; quod quidem Psalmista videbat dicens: ‘A fructu frumenti, vini et olei multiplicati sunt’” (*Mon.* 1.15.3).

²² Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia*, ed. Gustavo Vinay (Florence: Sansoni, 1950), 95, n. 6.

²³ Dante Alighieri, *Dante’s “Monarchia,”* ed. Richard Kay (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), ad loc.

given to Gueric of Igny, a disciple of Bernard at Clairvaux.²⁴ In the events narrated in Luke 2.22-35, Gueric finds a moral sense which reinforces the aims and ideals of the monastic life of the Cistercians, for whom strenuous asceticism is the road to the contemplation of God in mystic union. His treatment of the importance of purification and of the different modes of contemplation which it allows one to achieve rests largely on the story of Simeon. Having promised Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Lord, the Holy Spirit at last led him to the temple in Jerusalem, where he was able to take the infant Jesus in his arms. He then sang: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Luke 2.29-30). Gueric uses Simeon, whose experience he sees as a promise and foretaste of eternal salvation, as a model for his monastic audience to imitate. In the third sermon he proposes that, like Simeon, the brethren should establish themselves in peace in this earthly Jerusalem by fixing their hearts on Jesus. Only then will they be ready to receive the *pax* which is a taste in this life of the absolute tranquillity to be found in the eternal Jerusalem. That the final peace which unites God and man was Simeon's ultimate desire is manifest in his song, which Gueric paraphrases thus:

Now that my eyes have seen your salvation, who is the peace which makes one of two, not only Jew and Gentile, but also God and man, and in man spirit and flesh, this only remains of thy servant's desires, that 'In peace in the self same I will sleep, and I will rest,' and that 'the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,' may absorb me wholly in the harmony of that supreme and simple unity.²⁵

The sixth sermon is especially interesting with respect to *Par.* 32.139, since it is one of the texts which account for the fictional Bernard's *tempus fugit* (to which we will turn

²⁴ *In Festo Purificationis Beatae Mariae Virginis* (PL 185.63-92). On the early inclusion among the works of Saint Bernard of these six sermons, five of which are now attributed to Gueric, see Jean Leclercq, *Recueil d'études sur saint Bernard et ses écrits*, 3 vols. (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1962-69), vol. 1, 158-71. In the modern edition (Gueric of Igny, *Sermons*, eds. John Morson and Hilary Costello, trans. Placide Deseille, vol. 1 [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970]), the sermon which appears as number 5 in *PL* has been excluded, so that number 6 from *PL* is designated Sermon 5. In this study, I use the edition in *PL*.

²⁵ "Postquam viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum, qui est pax nostra faciens utraque unum [Eph. 4.2], non solum Judaeum et Gentilem, sed etiam Deum et hominem, et in homine spiritum et carnem: jam hoc solum superest desiderii servi tui, ut *in pace in idipsum dormiam et requiescam*; et pax Dei quae exsuperat omnem sensum, me totum in illius summae et simplicis unitatis absorbeat consensum" (*In Festo Purificationis* 3.3, PL185.73-74).

in the next chapter). Gueric's principal subjects are the need for purgation, whose ultimate reward is the sleep of Psalm 4.9, and the evil of negligence, the waste of the precious time given us for our purification. Simeon is again the exemplary figure:

Oh, how happy are those of whom it can be said that 'the days of their purification are accomplished,' since nothing now remains for them but to be brought to the heavenly Jerusalem and to be presented to the Lord. This was certainly the case with old Simeon, as desirable as full of desires. His days of purgation were, I think, fulfilled long ago; so too, now, his days of expectation are fulfilled. For nothing then remained for him, according to the word of the Lord, after he had seen Christ, Christ the peace of God and man, but to depart in peace, and to sleep in peace in the selfsame; that is, to be taken to the Jerusalem of eternal peace, and to be presented to the Lord in order to contemplate the peace which surpasses all understanding.²⁶

In the peace of this sleep, Simeon enjoys the "vision" of Christ which is nothing other than the presence of the divine, the perfected mystic union of the soul and the Word in the "indissoluble embrace" which the old man had tasted when he held the child in his arms.²⁷ All of which indicates that for Gueric, in a text that Dante and his early readers would in all likelihood have attributed to Saint Bernard, the sleep of Psalm 4.9 is the affective concept of beatitude as it is known by the saints *now*, between death and the resurrection. It therefore equates to the "perpetue nozze" of the blessed that the Apostles tasted at the Transfiguration and that the protagonist, in his sleep in Eden, also tastes (*Purg.* 32.70-85). This notion of heavenly sleep is combined with Augustine's in a sermon which was attributed to Bernard in Dante's time, and which is still considered to be authentic.

²⁶ "O quam felix est, de quo dici potest: *Impleti sunt dies purgationis ejus*: ut jam nihil aliud ei supersit, nisi ut ferant eum in Jerusalem supernam, et sistant eum Domino. Talis nimirum erat Simeon ille noster senex, tam desiderabilis quam plenus desideriiis, cujus cum jam olim, ut arbitror, essent impleti dies purgationis, hodie impleti sunt etiam dies exspectationis: ut jam, secundum verbum Domini, nihil aliud ei restaret, postquam vidisset Christum domini, Christum pacem Dei et hominum, nisi ut dimitteretur in pace, et dormiret in pace in idipsum; hoc est, ut ferrent eum in Jerusalem pacis aeternae, et sisterent eum ad contemplandam pacem quae exsuperat omnem sensum" (*In Festo Purificationis* 6.1, PL 185.89).

²⁷ *In Festo Purificationis* 6.1.

In the second of his sermons on the Feast of All Saints,²⁸ Bernard takes as his theme “their shared happiness, in which they already enjoy blessed repose, and the future consummation which they expect.”²⁹ Both states are characterised as restful slumbers won by the struggles of this life. The earthly lives of the elect were “the time of war,” of the labour to be virtuous while still in the body, of the constant battle against the tumult of temptations. The present repose of their souls, their *own* rest (“*requiem suam*”), is the “victory” they have won by living as soldiers of Christ, the victory described in Psalm 114.7-8: “Turn, O my soul, into thy rest [in *requiem tuam*]: for the Lord hath been bountiful to thee. For he hath delivered my soul from death: my eyes from tears, my feet from falling.” As it awaits the “triumph” of the Last Day, when it will rejoice in body and spirit, each soul glories in this victory, delightedly “feeding” on the untroubled memory of the years of warfare by which it was gained, resting in the peaceful state of its pure, tranquil and secure conscience, its soft *stratum* or *cubile*, its “couch” or “bed:” “let her meanwhile sleep delightedly on this couch, let her rest happily. . . . This feeding, and this sleeping of theirs, my brothers, are the whole occupations of the saints.”³⁰ However, as great as this beatitude is, something further is awaited, and it, too, is a slumber:

How great is their happiness, how immense their delight! For they certainly have a threefold joy, exalting in the recollection of the past practice of virtue, the fruition of their present repose, and the certain expectation of its future consummation. For regarding that future consummation we have their own words at the end of the psalm about which we spoke earlier. For each individual soul to whom it has already been given to attain this repose says: ‘In peace in the selfsame I *will* sleep, and I *will* rest’ [italics added].³¹

²⁸ *In Festo Omnium Sanctorum 2* (PL 183.462-68). For an analysis of Bernard’s sense of the relationships among the blessed souls in this sermon, see Anna Harrison, “Community Among the Saintly Dead: Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Sermons for the Feast of All Saints*,” *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania P., 2000), 191-204.

²⁹ “de communi eorum felicitate, in qua beata jam requie perfruuntur, et de futura quam praestolantur consummatione” (*In Festo Omnium Sanctorum* 2.1, col. 462).

³⁰ “In hoc interim strato dormiat delectabiliter, feliciter requiescat. . . . Hae sunt, dico vobis, fratres, haec modo sunt universa sanctorum negotia, hic cibus, hic somnus eorum” (*In Festo Omnium Sanctorum* 2.6-7, col. 467).

³¹ “Quanta est felicitas eorum, quam immensa laetitia! qui nimirum triplici gaudio, de recordatione transactae virtutis, de exhibitione praesentis quietis, de certa exspectatione futurae consummationis exultant. Nam de futura illa consummatione habemus vocem eorum in fine ejus psalmis, de quo superius loquebamur. Dicunt enim singulae animae, quibus jam datum est ad hanc requiem pervenire: *In pace in idipsum dormiam et requiescam*” (*In Festo Omnium Sanctorum* 2.6, PL 183.467).

In another sermon, by interpreting the “seed” as the body, Bernard extracts a similar conception of the final consummation from Gen. 28.13, “The land, wherein thou sleepest, I will give to thee and to thy seed,” a verse which is thereby read as the promise of the stable and perpetual sleep of the soul united to its glorified body.³² This sleep, like that of Psalm 4.9 as interpreted by Augustine, Cassiodorus, Peter Lombard, Gueric, and Bernard himself, thus becomes an “anagogical” figure, bearing an eschatological and therefore teleological meaning, since it signifies, as Aquinas says in his summary of fourfold biblical exegesis, *futura* or *aeterna gloria*,³³ or, as the classic mnemonic has it, “whereto you should strive.”³⁴

However, there is the glory of the soul, which the saints in heaven enjoy now, and there is the glory of the body and soul together that they will have at the end of the world. According to the tradition as I have considered it so far, either or both could by Dante’s time have been given as the anagogical sense of the psalmist’s anticipated sleep, and it seems likely that the poet would at least have come across Augustine’s version in the *Confessions*. The brief remarks of the typologists of sleep, on the other hand, which contain no allusion to the resurrection of the body, seem to imply the other concept of the Christian *telos*, the one the purified soul reaches immediately after death. As we have seen,³⁵ Innocent III simply says that the sleep of Ps. 4.9 signifies “the sleep of eternal life” which comes from glory, in antithesis to “the sleep of eternal death” from which none ever rise, there being no redemption in Hell; Peter Cantor calls it *somnus gloriae*, “the sleep of glory,” and tells us that it is a state “alien” not only to this world and to sin, but to all punishment due to sin; and Aquinas sees it as the “*quies aeternae gloriae*,” the “repose [or sleep] of eternal glory,” his label for the slumber of the Bride of the Song of Songs (“*quies contemplationis etiam in hac vita*”) implying that the former is the perfection of the contemplation of God in the beatific vision, the latter its beginning in this life. For Aquinas, certainly, “eternal glory” is essentially the glory of the soul, which consists in the intellectual vision of God and is eternal life, so that, if that glory and that

³² *Sermones de diversis* 103.4, *PL* 183.730.

³³ *ST* 1a.1.10.

³⁴ See p. 138 of this study.

³⁵ See pp. 114-16.

vision are a *somnus*, then they are one in which the soul reposes as soon as it reaches Heaven. The glory of the soul in this sense corresponds to the present beatitude of the saints as the *Commedia* represents it, and Dante participates in that glory at the end of the poem.

iv The sleep at the end of time's flight

This being the case, and since an allusion to the glory of the body and soul together, on top of the simultaneous allusion back to the *somnus contemplationis* in the Earthly Paradise, would be an excessive burden for any single word to bear, my proposal is that, from the perspective of *Par.* 32.139, Dante's attainment of his final object of desire in the intellectual vision of the divine essence is fleetingly seen as a participation in the *somnus gloriae*, understood as the present beatitude or glory of the souls in heaven which consists in the intellectual vision of God that is eternal life. That is, with "Ma perchè 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna," Dante's fictional Saint Bernard (regardless of what the various "historical Bernards" may have thought about the present and future "sleeps" of the souls in Heaven) looks ahead to the protagonist's imminent participation in the bliss of the saints as a falling into their "sleep of glory," the beatifying *visio Dei*. His literal meaning is "but because the time that is to sending you to sleep (the sleep of glory) is flying," where "is sending you to sleep," "t'assonna," is simply a metaphor derived from the anagogical figure of *somnus gloriae* in the sense in which I have just defined it and signifying the literal participation in beatitude which occurs at the conclusion of the text. For just as Christ used "sleep" metaphorically, on the basis of the similarity between sleep and death, so Bernard uses it metaphorically on the basis of the likeness between sleep and the peace of satisfied desire in the beatific vision. That is, just as Christ used the "sleep of death" as a metaphor when he said "Lazarus our friend sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep" (John 11.11), by which he meant that Lazarus was literally dead and he was going to literally bring him back to life, so Bernard uses the metaphor of the "sleep of glory" in "Ma perchè 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna," by which he means that the time allocated by Providence to bringing Dante to his mystic *ultimum*, a literal participation in the eternal glory of the blessed, is about to reach that "end."

When he in fact reaches it, however, there is no mention of sleep. There is, instead, in the poem's last image, an attempt to capture the final state of bliss in a manner which accords with Aquinas' idea that uniform circular motion around a fixed centre is an apt likeness of the highest form of contemplative *quies*. There are different operations in the contemplation of truth, but only one, that which is proper to the angels, is its *final* act, its last and crowning operation, i.e., the "gazing at a simple truth" or "simple gazing on truth" ("intuitum simplicis veritatis" or "simplicem intuitum veritatis"); the other operations, such as sense-perception, imagination, and the discourse of reason ("discursus rationis"), are acts by which the human mind arrives at this end, steps in the process leading to the simple apprehension of a simple truth.³⁶ On the basis of the analogy between intellectual operations or "movements" and corporeal ones, the primary and most perfect of which is local motion, according to Thomas, Pseudo-Dionysius rightly ascribes "circular, "straight" and "oblique" movement to contemplation. Uniform circular motion around a fixed centre corresponds, in intelligible operations, to "that which is absolutely uniform," "id quod simpliciter habet uniformitatem," i.e., angelic contemplation, while straight motion accords with the way the mind proceeds ("proceditur") or moves by a process ("processu") from one thing to another, while oblique motion describes mental operations that combine uniformity and process. Angelic contemplation is uniform because, unlike human intellection, it is not derived from the variety of external, sensible things and is not acquired by the discourse of reason, but by simple intuition. This twofold lack of uniformity in human understanding must be removed before one can arrive at the uniformity of angelic intuition, in which there can be no error, just as there is no error in the mind's apprehension of first principles by simple intuition. This is done by withdrawing from external things (things known by sense and imagination), laying aside the discourse of reason and directing the mind's attentive gaze or "intuitus" to the contemplation of simple truth.³⁷

³⁶ *ST* 2a2ae.180.3. On the distinction between the rational, discursive intellection of the human mind, which acquires knowledge "discurrendo," and the immediate intuition of the angels, who know truths "intuendo," see also *ST* 1a.58.3.

³⁷ *ST* 2a2ae.180.6.

In his essay on the final image,³⁸ Bruno Nardi traces the history which lies behind Thomas's notion and argues that it underlies the *Commedia's* last simile:

A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa;
 ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle,
 sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,
 l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle. (Par. 33.142-145)

Nardi concludes:

Nella perenne uniformità del moto circolare della mente, percossa dall'apparir del sommo Bene, consiste la vita, senza tedio e senz'affanni, dello spirito beato. La quiete del desiderio appagato non significa inerzia e sonnolenza, che anzi non si scompagna dall'eterno moto dell'amore; moto circolare ed uniforme che esprime la perfetta concordia del volere umano col volere divino (349).

The fact that the final image tries to capture eternal life, not eternal sleep, in no way prevents Bernard anticipating the conclusion of the journey as a mortal's brief taste of the "sleep" of eternal life.

³⁸ Bruno Nardi, "Si come rota ch'igualmente è mossa," in *Nel mondo di Dante* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1944), 337-50.

Chapter 6

“Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna” (III):

Tempus Fugit—the *Commedia*’s Last Word on Time

i Time and eternity

Teodolinda Barolini observes that critics have attended too much to what Dante “says” in the *Commedia* as theologian and not enough to what he “does” as poet and story-teller, meaning by this that scholars have been overly concerned with understanding the doctrinal content that is either explicit in authoritative pronouncements or implicit in the moral structure of the next world as the poem represents it, neglecting the literary artifice within which Dante presents the truth as he sees it and by means of which he controls the reader’s response.¹ With respect to the theme of time, what Dante “says” from a philosophical perspective is the subject of Cesare Vasoli’s valuable overview of the Scholastic doctrines on the nature of time and on the hierarchical opposition between time and eternity that are present in both the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*,² the emphasis in the poem falling very much on the “radicale incommensurabilità” that exists between time and eternity (549). As for what Dante says in the poem from the religious point of view, the gap between the temporal and the eternal is such that the entire journey is characterised as an abandonment of time, the domain of a corrupted human existence exemplified by Florence, in order to reach eternity, the realm of the divine and the Heavenly City of the elect (“io, che al divino da l’umano, / a l’eterno dal tempo era venuto, / e di Fiorenza in popol giusto e sano,” *Par.* 31.37-39), while this time-limited mortal life is contrasted to the Christian goal of eternal life as “lo cammin corto / di quella vita ch’al termine vola,” the “viver ch’è un correre a la morte” (*Purg.* 20.38-9, 33.54). Dante’s “correre a la morte” is no doubt intended to recall Augustine’s bleak conception of life as a race towards death, a “cursus ad mortem.” For the author of *De civitate Dei*, the fact of bodily death robs time and our life in time of any intrinsic value, since it means that the true happiness we all seek cannot be found in this temporal life,

¹ Barolini, *The Undivine “Comedy,”* 17, 19, 122.

² Cesare Vasoli, “tempo,” *ED*, vol. 5, 546-51.

the only truly perfect beatitude being the happiness of the whole person, body and soul, that can never be lost and that will only be attained at the very end of time itself, when the glorified body rejoins the soul at the general resurrection. “For any period of time through which we live,” writes Augustine, “leaves us with less time to live, and that remainder decreases day by day, so that the whole time of this life is nothing but a race towards death. . . . For what else but this is going on, every day, every hour, every single moment, until the process of dying is complete?”³ This condition is the consequence of and punishment for the first sin, with which humanity fell into the necessity of dying after enduring the numerous miseries of this life (“if you can call it life”).⁴

Despite Barolini’s concern, scholars have long had the sense that, although what Dante “says” in the *Commedia* highlights the radical opposition between time and eternity and unfavourably compares temporal existence to eternal life, what he “does” is to seek to valorise time by integrating it into eternity. The initial stimulus for critical interest in this matter was the response of modern secular aestheticism to the vivid realism and individuality of Dante’s characters. In a series of lectures that was first published in 1835, Hegel uses the *Commedia* as an example of great “epic” poetry, on the grounds that, within the eternal condition of the afterlife, it preserves the particular character, the passions and the suffering, of individual human beings, since their eternally judged state, as Dante describes it, defines and captures their very essence as unique individuals.⁵ Francesco De Sanctis, in his lectures from the period 1853-55, took Hegel’s Idealist aesthetics in the direction of Romantic Realism, privileging the human over the divine and the temporal over the eternal, discovering in the poem a rebellion of temporal

³ “Quoniam quidquid temporis vivitur, de spatio vivendi demitur, et quotidie fit minus minusque quod restat: ut omnino nihil sit aliud tempus vitae hujus, quam cursus ad mortem. . . . Quid enim aliud diebus, horis, momentisque singulis agitur, donec ea consumpta mors quae agebatur, impleatur?” (*De civitate Dei* 13.10, *PL* 41.383).

⁴ “Si vita dicenda est” (*De civitate Dei* 22.22, col. 784).

⁵ “into this changeless existent it plunges the living world of human action and suffering and, more particularly, the deeds and fates of individuals. Here, in the face of the absolute grandeur of the ultimate end and aim of all things, everything individual and particular in human interests and aims vanishes, and yet there stands there, completely epically, everything otherwise most fleeting and transient in the living world, fathomed objectively in its inmost being, judged in its worth or worthlessness by the supreme Concept, i.e. by God” (G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, trans. T.M. Knox, 2 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975], vol. 2, p. 1103).

humanity against its eternal fate.⁶ This Romantic perspective was very influential in shaping the reception of the poem in the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth, until Erich Auerbach sought to correct its biases by explaining the *Commedia's* realism as a function of Dante's use of "figural" allegory, i.e., Christian typology. His notion of realism in art was nonetheless shaped by secular aesthetic values not unlike those of Hegel and De Sanctis, and in particular by his view of the representation of character in the style of the nineteenth-century novel as the endpoint in the development of a form of mimesis which originated in the *Commedia*. This explains why, in his account of that development, Auerbach detects an even more shocking insurrection of time against eternity than does De Sanctis.⁷ It was nonetheless Auerbach's important work on the role of Christian typology in the *Commedia*, work that was stimulated by Hegel's brief remarks and that came to fruition in the seminal essay "Figura,"⁸ that gave rise to the modern hermeneutic method within which our deepest understanding of Dante's Christian integration of time and eternity is to be found, that which seeks to fathom the poem's authentically medieval and Christian mode of signifying, for this way of making and finding meaning rests on the Christian concept of time.

The result has been to show that, despite its overtly Augustinian evaluation of temporality, the *Commedia* strives to affirm that time has an enormous value, one that lies entirely in its relationship to eternity, and that the value of temporal existence is discovered and realised by seeing time and history from the perspective of eternity in a specifically Christian way. They show, that is, that Dante has built into the poem the

⁶ Francesco De Sanctis, *Lezioni e saggi su Dante*, ed. Sergio Romagnoli, 2nd ed (Turin: Einaudi, 1967). Although he sees Dante's art as "Poesia unica, nella quale due mondi, terra e cielo, tempo ed eternità, umano e divino, stanno di rincontro" (86), De Sanctis feels that the poet "porta seco tutte le sue passioni di uomo e di cittadino; e fa risonare di terreni gemiti fino le serene volte del cielo: così ritorna il dramma, e nell'eterno ricomparisce il tempo" (5), to the extent that Francesca, Farinata and Cacciaguida are inclined to forget that they are dead, and will not keep to their assigned places: Francesca is seen as a romantic heroine, Farinata "dimentica il suo letto di fuoco," and Cacciaguida "abita lungo tempo con la fantasia a Firenze" (86).

⁷ Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1953). For Auerbach, the *Commedia* represents "a world of earthly beings and passions so powerful that it breaks bounds and proclaims its independence . . . We cannot but admire Farinata and weep with Cavalcante. . . . Dante's great art carries the matter so far that the effect becomes earthly, and the listener is all too occupied by the figure in the fulfillment. The beyond becomes the stage for human beings and human passions," even to the extent that, ultimately, "The image of man eclipses the image of God" (200-202).

⁸ Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes From the Drama of European Literature*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Meridian, 1959), 11-76.

christological and teleological sense of time as the medium of “salvation history,” the structured and purposeful unfolding of God’s providential plan for the redemption of humanity, fully revealed and brought to fruition as such with the advent of Christ, yet directed to its final consummation in his future return on the Last Day. This Christian eschatology is deeply embedded in the poem, which works out its integration of time and eternity within the Christian concept of history, the temporal-historical process and the world-view which that concept presupposes being immanent in the work’s narrative structure. The gap between the two states of being is bridged by apprehending and cooperating with the action of eternity in time, i.e., the unfolding of the Christ-centred providential plan for the redemption of humanity. This specifically Christian way of understanding temporality is built into the *Commedia*, but in such a way that it is progressively revealed in the protagonist’s life, the journey and the text, just as it is in the unfolding of universal history itself.

The most thorough discussion of this subject is Franco Masciandaro’s *La problematica del tempo nella “Commedia,”* a study of the dramatisation of the poem’s “problematics of time” in the struggle of the protagonist to discover and to actualise—amid and against the experience of temporality as fragmentation, ceaseless change, and directionless, pure succession—the true salvific value or “fullness” of time, i.e., its value as the mode of being within which one strives for and merits the goal of eternal salvation.⁹ Dante’s solution to the problematics of time, for Masciandaro, lies not in seeking an escape from time to eternity, but in apprehending the presence of eternity in time, in recognising the correspondences and structural relationships between events past, present and future that manifest the providential action of God in history and in one’s own life, and then accepting the opportunity that is offered by the eternal plan. The design of Providence is both revealed and fulfilled by the Incarnation, the central Christian *kairos*, the time of opportunity in which the cooperation of divine action and human response gave meaning, shape and direction to history. The Incarnation transformed what would otherwise be the empty duration of time as *chronos* by revealing that history is a process directed to an eternal end and that Christ is the way to that goal for anyone who responds by accepting this very revelation, as one can do at any moment,

⁹ Franco Masciandaro, *La problematica del tempo nella “Commedia”* (Ravenna: Longo, 1976).

now that history has been fulfilled in the Incarnation of the Word, making any moment in anyone's life a potential redemptive *kairos*, its transforming effect in the individual's life analogous to that of the Incarnation in history. The final, comprehensive revelation of the salvific "fulness" of time, according to Masciandaro, is Beatrice's discourse on the origin of time and on the providential restoration of its redemptive value by means of the divine intervention that will undo the consequences of cupidity's free reign in the world, setting humanity back on the right path to its intended goal of eternal happiness, with the result that, in the end, "vero frutto verrà dopo 'l fiore" (*Par.* 27.106-148). With this discourse, the critic writes, "si conclude la problematica del tempo nella *Commedia*" (145).

The passage certainly reveals the *teleological* nature of the problem and its resolution, for Beatrice's account of the present state of the world identifies the waste of time's value with humanity's failure to reach the goal for which it was made, while her prophecy identifies the imminent restoration of the salvific value of time with the restoration of humanity's capacity to attain the divinely-intended end, the "frutto" of true happiness. However, the problematics of time subsequently re-emerge in Dante's most extreme statement of the traditional antithesis between time and eternity ("Io, che al divino da l'umano, / a l'eterno dal tempo era venuto, / e di Fiorenza in popol giusto e sano," *Par.* 31.37-39), and only then do we come to the higher synthesis, the "parole sante" with which Saint Bernard directs Dante's gaze across the ranks of the blessed in the celestial rose and explains what amounts to nothing less than the total christological and teleological structure of time, the pilgrim's experience, as he looks and learns, constituting his final and most comprehensive apocalyptic-eschatological "vision" (*Par.* 32.4-138). Further, the poem's very last word on time, strictly speaking, is in truth Bernard's abrupt conclusion of that discourse with the troublesome "Ma perché 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna, / qui farem punto." As we will see, a remark by Jacques Le Goff suggests that this truth may be far from trivial, for Le Goff indicates that there is good reason for Dante's third and final guide to make just such a reference to time as he turns from managing his charge's apocalyptic vision of the eschatological Last End to the ultimate goal of the Dante's personal journey, since the historical abbot as Dante and his contemporaries knew him was the main patristic authority on the anxiety provoked by time's flight towards death and on the Christian assuaging of this anxiety. Further, just as

it has not been noted that Dante makes use of this minor aspect of the historical Bernard's reputation and writings (his stress on the importance of realising the value of time), so it has not been observed that the manner in which the fictional character concludes his discourse on the total shape of time corresponds to a particular rhetorical device—a form of *clausio* that involves the seemingly spontaneous realisation that *tempus fugit*—which the real abbot of Clairvaux liked to use in order to conclude his sermons. Drawing on these features of the historical figure, Dante uses his fictional representation of the saint to set the final seal on the teleological closure of the poem's "problematica del tempo," in the form of a *clausio* in which the theme that was usually taken *in malo*, time's "cursus ad mortem," is rewritten *in bono* as the successful closure of the time allocated to sending Dante to "sleep," i.e., to the "sleep of glory," his taste of eternal life.

ii The *Commedia* and the Christian concept of time

Comparative studies have shown that religion in all its forms can be productively understood as a response to time and change, a way of dealing with the insecurity that arises from the experience of temporality as loss, decay and contingency, as tending irreversibly to the disintegration and death of both the individual self and of the community. Seen from this point of view, religion's problematics of time consist in the construction and ritual reinforcement of models of time and history that guarantee endurance and continuity.¹⁰ As I have indicated, a substantial amount of work by Dante scholars has demonstrated that the Judeo-Christian response to the anxieties aroused by temporality is deeply embedded in the *Commedia*.

Christianity absorbed and modified the Jewish model of history as a structured and providentially-directed process, one in which history was in essence teleology.¹¹ The

¹⁰ S. G. F. Brandon, *Time and Mankind* (London: Hutchinson, 1951) and *History, Time and Deity* (Manchester: Manchester U.P.; 1965), Mircea Eliade, *Le Sacré et le Profane* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965) and *Le mythe de l'éternel retour* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

¹¹ Brandon, *History, Time and Deity*, 205. For the Judeo-Christian sense of time and history, I have relied mainly on the comparative discussions in Brandon's *Time and Mankind*, 177-96, and *History, Time and Deity*, 106-205, and on two important attempts to reconstruct a coherent paradigm of the early Christian concept of time, Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, trans. F. Filson, 3rd ed. (London: SCM, 1962) and John Marsh, *The Fulness of Time* (London: Nisbet, 1952). On the Christian concept of time as implicit in biblical typology and the liturgy, I have used Jean Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame P., 1956) and *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. Wulstan Hibberd (London: Burns and Oates, 1960). For a concise synthesis of the insights of all these

Jewish understanding of historical change that is expressed in the Old Testament sees the sequence of events in time as the unfolding of God's plan for his chosen people, reaching from Creation to the future advent of the Messiah. Of the key events constituting the principal manifestations of the action of God in history and demanding a response, the critical and defining one was the Exodus, the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The Exodus was the normative revelatory event for the prophets, for whom Israel had since declined into its present age of sin and who anticipated a new Exodus-type event, the coming of a future Messiah, as the final and eternal remedy to this debased situation, the inauguration of a new age and a new covenant. In the Christianity of the New Testament, the Incarnation of Christ *is* the promised advent of the Messiah, who has therefore already come, and his death and resurrection are the New Exodus that was prefigured by the Exodus from Egypt, now seen as signifying the liberation from the slavery of sin that has already been wrought by Christ's atoning death. This connection was revealed and reinforced by a divinely-willed temporal coincidence, for the Lord chose to die at exactly the same time as the Exodus, during its commemoration at the Jewish Passover or Pasch. That is to say, Christ's redemptive actions are the definitive New Exodus and Passover, the inauguration of the new age and the new covenant, the fulfilment which retrospectively reveals that Jewish history was but its preparation and foreshadowing. Israel's history is fulfilled in Christ and Christ himself reveals this by his actions and his preaching of the Gospel. The historical events recorded in the Old Testament are but a preparation for their fulfilment in the actions of Jesus as the New Testament describes them in the final manifestation of the full meaning, "shape" and direction of the providential redemptive-revelatory process. The complete structure of this teleological and christological process is revealed by certain fundamental *kairoi*, the

authors, see Germano Pàttaro, "The Christian Concept of Time," in *Cultures and Time*, ed. L. Gardet et al. (Paris: Unesco, 1976), 169-95. The influence of Cullmann, Marsh, and Danielou is present in much of the Dante scholarship that is directly or indirectly concerned with time in the *Commedia*, to the extent that it can be said many Dante scholars have argued that the poem's concept of time is one with the Christian concept as these three biblical scholars represent it. However, it should be noted that the books by Cullmann and Marsh, although very influential in twentieth-century biblical theology, were also rather controversial, their methodology and their basic assumptions being called into question. For a critique of both studies, see James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1969). Barr is particularly critical of the lexical analysis from which Cullman derives the opposition between time as *kairos* and time as *aiwn*, and that from which Marsh derives the opposition between time as *kairos* and time as *chronos*. Barr's view is that these lexical oppositions are not to be found in the Bible.

key points in time that are chosen (from the divine perspective) and opportune (from the human point of view), that reveal and actualise the eternal plan and that give what would otherwise be the empty duration and mere succession of time as *chronos* its “fulness,” its structure, direction and redemptive value. These are: the Creation, the life of Christ, at once the “centre” and the “end” of history, in particular his Incarnation, death and Resurrection, and the second coming or *Parousia* at the very end of time.

The Christian concept of time and history is presupposed by biblical typology, a way of “reading” the work of the divine Author, both Scripture and the world, both the sacred text and the succession of historical events that it records, such that the events signified by the inspired word of God signify other events. Its basic structure is the relationship between the Old Testament and the New as outlined by Saint Paul, who saw the history of Israel as a series of prophecies, promises or anticipations of the future events which are recorded in the New Testament, above all the life, death and Resurrection of Christ. The people, institutions and events of the period when works according to the Old Law were sufficient are seen as the provisional forms and promises of those in the New Testament, which records the coming of the New Law of Grace in the advent of Christ, when faith alone is the touchstone. By his advent, death and Resurrection, Christ both retrospectively reveals the Old Law as the promise and fulfils that promise. He is the second Adam, for example, since, as Adam lost Eden and brought death into the world because of his pride and disobedience, so Christ’s act of humble obedience restores us to the eternal life of paradise, and the Jewish sacrifice of the paschal lamb “figures” its “fulfilment” in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God for Christians. As Erich Auerbach puts it, “Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies the second, while the second encompasses or fulfils the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life.”¹²

The pattern of historical prefiguration (“figure,” “type” or “shadow”), on the one hand, and fulfilment (or “antitype”), on the other, could extend to the foundation, institutions and future history of the Church, so that the union of Adam and Eve could be seen as a prefiguration of the union of Christ and the Church, while events recorded in

¹² Auerbach, “Figura,” 53.

both Testaments could prefigure the sacraments and also point beyond the things of this world to those of the next, from within the temporal sequence to the eternal condition to which things have been moving all along. Typology assumes that history has a meaning and a “shape,” a centre and an end or goal, all of which are founded on the Redeemer, in whom time and eternity intersect. It assumes that history *can* and *must* be interpreted: events in time have an intrinsic underlying order which is as real as the facts themselves and which is discovered, not arbitrarily assigned, by the interpreter, and they must be interpreted in order to achieve salvation, for they reveal above all that Christ is the Messiah who was prophesied in the Old Testament. His advent at the “fullness of time”¹³ is the centre towards which time moved and from which it moves to His return at the Last Judgement. The process of interpretation is necessarily retrospective: the meaning unfolds in time and will not be perfectly complete until the Last Day. History is thus a movement forwards in time so structured as to reveal retrospectively, once Christ has come, that His advent was destined all along, and that there will be a return. Christ is both the key to the meaning of history and the meaning itself. He was even the first exegete, when, on the road to Emmaus, on the afternoon of the Resurrection, he explained to two disciples who were perplexed about the empty tomb that what had happened, and his very presence, were the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, now retrospectively revealed *by* his death and Resurrection as prophecies *of* his death and Resurrection.¹⁴

The commemoration of that event at Easter, the centre of the liturgical calendar’s consecration of time to God, has a typological basis.¹⁵ Saint Paul’s belief that the Jews’ wandering in the desert was a “figure” of and for Christians eventually led to an Exodus typology that had a clear and important meaning in the exegetical tradition, one which rested partly on temporal correspondences. The Book of Exodus describes the flight of the Jews from slavery in Egypt at the time of the very first Passover. Because the houses of the Hebrews were marked with the blood of the paschal lamb, God spared their firstborn from the death which befell those of the Egyptians. They made their escape across the Red Sea, then wandered in the desert for forty years on their way to the Promised Land. Christ’s death and resurrection, which are narrated in the New Testament

¹³ Cf. Gal. 4.4.

¹⁴ Luke 24.13-16.

¹⁵ See Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 287-302.

and which took place on the anniversary of the Passover and Exodus, came to be seen as the fulfilment of something promised by the events described in the Old Testament. Christ was the true lamb who conquered death by His blood, who endured forty days of temptation in the desert, who freed the world from the slavery to sin whose due is death, giving His followers the eternal life which baptism makes possible, just as the crossing of the Red Sea freed the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, or the marking with the blood of the lamb saved their children from death. With reference to later times, Exodus prefigures the New Exodus brought about by Christ at a precise time in history, the continuity between the two “Exodus-events” emphasising “the coincidence of time between Christ’s death and the anniversary of the Jewish Passover.”¹⁶ Both prefigure the escape from death to eternal life which the events commemorated at Easter made possible for all those who choose to follow and imitate Christ. In other words, Exodus and the Passion are also figures of Christian conversion, the radical change in which one turns from error, sinfulness and the death they bring to the true way and the eternal life which is Christ. This is achieved by a death and resurrection of the self in imitation of Christ’s sacrifice at the first Easter.

The typological relations between events in time, which rest on the Christian response to temporality, are in turn the basis of the fourfold method of biblical exegesis that is so clearly articulated by Aquinas. The power of the divine “author” of the history recounted in Holy Scripture is so great that, not only do the words signify things, as in the works of human authors, but the very things signified by the words themselves have a meaning. The literal or historical sense of Scripture is that whereby the words signify facts, be it in figurative or non-figurative language. These facts presupposed, there are three “spiritual” or generically “allegorical” senses by which Scripture reveals some mystery. The “allegorical” sense, in the specific usage of the term, is strict typology: it is the sense whereby the things of the Old Law are figures of things in the New Law, primarily the actions of Christ. Since to be a Christian is to imitate Christ, the historical deeds of Jesus are signs of what we ought to do, as are their Old Testament figures; this is the “moral” sense (often called “tropology”). The “anagogical” sense is that whereby both the things done in Christ and their Old Testament figures signify that which relates

¹⁶ Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 153.

to eternal glory.¹⁷ Underlying this is an ascending historical order which progresses through time to the eternal end: history is a sequence of events unfolding in time (the literal/historical sense), the historical realities of the Old Law signify those of the New Law (the allegorical/typological sense), and both the figures and their fulfilments are signs of what we must do in order to attain our goal (the moral/tropological sense) as well as of that future goal itself, *futura* or *aeterna gloria* (the anagogical sense, an eschatological or, as Robert Hollander observes,¹⁸ a “teleological” meaning).

By virtue of their exploration of typology, fourfold allegory, and the theology of conversion in the *Commedia*, the influential researches of Auerbach, Singleton and Freccero reveal the fundamental and structural presence, and the gradual disclosure, in the poem, of the Christian concept of time and the dialectic between time and eternity, the work of the two American scholars giving particular attention to its manifestation in the temporality of the narrative and of the journey it describes.¹⁹ This “tradition” in Dante scholarship is the background to many of the studies that are concerned, in whole or in part, with the poem’s Christian time-eternity dialectic and its representation of the human struggle to discover, within that dialectic, the salvific value of time, thereby “redeeming” time, neutralising its tendency towards fragmentation, discontinuity, decay and loss, both

¹⁷ *ST* 1.1.10.

¹⁸ Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's "Commedia,"* 27.

¹⁹ Auerbach, “Figura,” Singleton, “*Commedia: Elements of Structure, Journey to Beatrice, “In Exitu Israel de Aegypto,”* and “The Vistas in Retrospect,” *MLN* 81 (1966): 55-80, Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*. It is worth noting that the centrality of Exodus typology and/or conversion in studies such as these brings to fruition the substantive aspect of what might otherwise seem a rather barren instance of scholarly fussiness about time in the *Commedia*, i.e., the determination, on the basis of Dante’s numerous astronomical and historical time-references, of the exact chronology of the journey from hour to hour and day to day and the dispute about its precise dates, a dispute that is in essence an attempt to grasp and make intelligible the seemingly very exact temporal coincidence between Dante’s Exodus-like journey at Easter and the “Exodus” of Christ that is liturgically and cosmically celebrated at that time. The most thoroughgoing treatments of time in the poem from this perspective are Filippo Angelitti, “Dante e l’astronomia,” in *Dante e l’Italia: nel VI centenario della morte del poeta, 1921* (Rome: Fondazione Marco Besso, 1921), 205-58, “Sulla data del viaggio dantesco,” *Atti della Accademia Pontaniana* 27 (1897): 1-100, and Edward Moore, “The Astronomy of Dante,” in *Studies in Dante: Third Series* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), 1-108, *The Time-References in the “Divina Commedia” and Their Bearing on the Assumed Date and Duration of the Vision* (London: David Nutt, 1887). For a recent and thorough review of the debate on the date of the journey, in the context of a valuable contribution to the discussion, see Alison Cornish, *Reading Dante's Stars* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2000), 26-42.

of the individual self and of the community—that is, neutralising death by gaining eternal life.²⁰

As I have stated, a remark by Jacques Le Goff suggests that Dante may well have thought of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux as something of an expert on the redemptive value of time. For the French historian of ideas, Dante lived at the epicentre of a radical social and psychological change with respect to the experience of time, the transition from “Church’s time” to “merchant’s time,” and did not in the least approve of the innovation. Le Goff argues that the rise of commercial capitalism in the twelfth to fifteenth centuries gradually undermined the traditional experience and understanding of temporality, which was founded on the natural rhythms of rural life and the liturgical scansion of time that was controlled by the Church, leading to the bourgeois secular precursor of time as it is

²⁰ An exhaustive review and listing of such studies would be next to impossible, since the theme of time, being so prominent in the poem, and by its very nature, will inevitably be touched upon to some extent in numerous works of Dante scholarship. My intention here is to attempt to capture at least the essential substance of the most significant contributions to our understanding of this subject. In addition to Masciandaro’s *La problematica del tempo*, the studies cited in the previous note, and those by Jacques Le Goff which I discuss in the following pages, see Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, 166-93, Luigi Blasucci, “La dimensione del tempo nel *Purgatorio*,” *L’approdo letterario* n.s. 37 (1967): 40-57, A. C. Charity, *Events and Their Afterlife: The Dialectics of Christian Typology in the Bible and Dante* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1966), James T. Chiampì, “Augustinian ‘Distentio’ and the Structure of Dante’s *Purgatory*,” *Canadian Journal of Italian Studies* 18, 50 (1995): 1-21, Marguerite Mills Chiarenza, “Time and Eternity in the Myths of *Paradiso* XVII,” in *Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio: Studies in the Italian Trecento in Honour of Charles S. Singleton*, eds. Aldo S. Bernardo and Anthony L. Pellegrini (Binghamton N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1983), 133-50, Alison Cornish, “Eternity,” in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. Richard Lansing, 357, Franco Fido, “Dall’antipurgatorio al *Paradiso* terrestre: il tempo ritrovato in Dante,” *Lecture classensi* 18 (1988): 65-78, William Franke, *Dante’s Interpretative Journey* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1996), Giuseppe Giacalone, *Tempo ed eternità nella “Divina Commedia”* (Pescara: Italica, 1965), Amilcare A. Iannucci, “*Inferno* XV.95-96: Fortune’s Wheel and the Villainy of Time,” *Quaderni d’italianistica* 3 (1982): 1-11, Hans Robert Jauss, “Tempo trasfigurato e tempo negato: Una lettura dantis,” *Belfagor* 46, 1 (1991): 11-44, Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London: Scholar Press, 1984), 334-55, John F. Mahoney, “The Living Poet and the Myth of Time: Christian Comedy,” in *The World of Dante: Six Studies in Language and Thought*, eds. S. Bernard Chandler and J. A. Molinaro (Toronto: U. of Toronto P., 1966), 43-61, Gian Paolo Marchi, “Tempo e profezia nel canto XXVII del *Paradiso*,” *Quaderni di lingue e letterature* 18 (1993): 377-91, Franco Masciandaro, “Annotazioni sull’immagine del punto nella *Divina Commedia*,” in *La conoscenza viva: Letture fenomenologiche da Dante a Machiavelli* (Ravenna: Longo, 1998), 27-43, Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the “Divine Comedy”* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1979), Georges Poulet, “Introduction,” in *Les Métamorphoses du cercle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 25-50, Ricardo J. Quinones, “Time in Dante and Shakespeare,” *Symposium* 22 (1968): 261-84, and *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1972), 28-105, Jeffrey T. Schnapp, “Introduction to *Purgatorio*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 192-207, John Stephen Smurthwaite, “The Shape of Time: Structure and Conversion in the Works of Augustine, Dante and Petrarch” (diss., Cornell U., 1986), 64-117, Arnold Ephraim Sternheim, “Time and Narrative Construction” (diss., Columbia U., 1980), 120-55, John Took, *Dante’s Phenomenology of Being* (Glasgow: U. of Glasgow P., 2000), 34-47, Patricia Zupan, “The New Dantean Alba: A Note to *Paradiso* X, 139-148,” in *Lectura Dantis: A forum for Dante research and interpretation* 6 (1990): 92-99.

experienced in the modern industrialised world, with the result that those who controlled the means of production came to control time. In the old conception, the measurement of time was imprecise and did not provoke a sense of urgency or time-pressure. Instruments for measuring time were very inexact and the lengths of the hours and of the working day varied in length with the seasons; nor was there any desire for greater precision, there being no sense of the need to achieve maximum productivity within a given amount of time. Time was made sacred and spiritual by the daily and annual cycles of the liturgy, and the Christian concept of history as the unfolding of God's teleological plan meant that the whole purpose and direction of time was humanity's salvation in eternity. This "salvation time" was an entirely spiritual commodity, directed away from the goods of this world towards eternal salvation, and was to be used for that end. The rising commercial power typified by Dante's Florence, coinciding with the invention and spread of the mechanical clock during the poet's lifetime, meant that time was noticeably becoming more secularised, precisely quantified, and thereby commodified, in the materialist sense, as the *Commedia* was being written.²¹

Le Goff identifies the struggle over the regulation of the hours of labour as one key site of the shift between the old and the new sense of time. The old unit of labour time was the day, originally the rural working day defined by the natural time marked by the sun and divided into hours of variable length, according to the season, by the religious time of the canonical hours sounded by church bells. In the course of the fourteenth century, particularly in the textile sector, employers began to push for more rigorous regulation, control and exploitation of their labourers' time, their efforts aided by the introduction of mechanical public clocks early in the century. By the end of the century, the unit of labour time became the precisely-measured hour of sixty minutes, so that the mechanical clock, as well as being a novelty and a status-symbol, had become an instrument of domination. For the French scholar, Cacciaguida's recollections of the Florence of the good old days, with their opening reference to the old church bell of the Badia, "ond' ella toglie ancora e terza e nona" (*Par.* 15.98), emblematically but firmly

²¹ See especially Jacques le Goff, "Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages," in *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1980), 29-42, "Labour Time in the 'Crisis' of the Fourteenth Century: From Medieval Time to Modern Time," in *Time, Work and Culture*, 43-52, and *La Civilisation de l'occident médiéval* (Paris: Arthaud, 1972), 169-249.

put Dante, “the great reactionary who sums up the Middle Ages,” in the conservative camp as far as the change from the medieval to the modern experience of time is concerned.²²

Since he describes the Church’s attempts to accommodate its time to that of the merchants by allowing flexibility in the duration of fasts, giving the prescribed times “in the form of recommendations to be interpreted according to the spirit rather than the letter,”²³ Le Goff might also have cited, as evidence of Dante’s conservatism, Beatrice’s complaint that one of the consequences of the failure of leadership is the fact that “Tale, balbuzièndo ancor, digiuna, / che poi divora, con la lingua sciolta, / qualunque cibo per qualunque luna” (*Par.* 27.130-32); “cioè,” comments Buti, “quando è quaresima e quando non è; d’ogni tempo, seguendo l’appetito de la gola; ma dice *luna*: imperò che la luna è segno onde si coglie la quaresima, acciò che ’l venerdì santo sia lo plenilunio, o presso come fu quando Cristo sostenne.”²⁴

In any case, as I have said, the discourse in which Beatrice raises these problems is not quite the poem’s last word on time. Strictly speaking, and emblematically, this last word is Bernard’s simple (once “t’assonna” is understood) and homely “Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna, / qui farem punto, come buon sartore / che com’ elli ha del panno fa la gonna” (*Par.* 32.139-141), the tercet with which the saint closes Dante’s apocalyptic vision of the blessed in their resurrection bodies, a vision of beatitude both as it is now and as it will be at the end of time.

This positive and even joyful *tempus fugit*, which truly “looks forward to” the imminent happy ending of the journey and the “comedia” (*Inf.* 16.128, 21.2), is the last of many allusions to the flight of time and to time as such in a work that powerfully exemplifies Le Goff’s statement that, well before time-pressure became a factor in the modern secular experience of temporality, “the ancient, eternal theme of time’s flight was present in Christianity, where it was at once exacerbated and assuaged by transformation into fear of eternal death and stimulus to prepare for salvation.” Dante scholars have not, to my knowledge, entertained the possibility that the poet might have thought of Saint Bernard as specially qualified to deliver such a last word on time, one which sets the final

²² “le grand réactionnaire qui résume le Moyen Age” (Le Goff, *La Civilisation*, 215).

²³ Le Goff, “Merchant’s Time,” 40.

²⁴ Buti, *Par.* 27.121-38.

seal on the *Commedia's* assuaging of the anxiety it first exacerbates, even though (as Le Goff continues) “‘nothing is more precious than time,’ Saint Bernard is supposed to have said, stating a theme which was, in any case, taken up and propagated by his disciples,”²⁵ and even though the “important texts” in which, according to Le Goff, the disciples of the saint developed that theme (Geoffrey of Auxerre’s *Declamationes de colloquio Simonis cum Jesu* and Gueric of Igny’s *In Festo Purificationis Beatae Mariae Virginis*),²⁶ were in Dante’s time thought to be the work of Saint Bernard himself.²⁷

In Geoffrey’s *Declamationes*, we read that “nothing is more precious than time, but, alas! nothing is now less valued! The ‘days of salvation’ pass by, yet none take this into account, none reproach themselves for wasting the moments that will never return.”²⁸ This reappears verbatim as the second in a collection of *sententiae* which are supposed to have been pronounced by Saint Bernard,²⁹ only to pop up again as one of a number of authoritative statements on the value of time that are attributed to “the blessed Bernard,” some correctly and some not, in the fifth treatise, *De acedia*, of William Peraldus’s *Summa virtutum ac vitiorum*, a handbook on the virtues and vices which was well-known and widely-used for centuries after its completion in about 1250, and which Dante very probably consulted.³⁰ The *Summa* is throughout enriched with a vast number of

²⁵ Le Goff, “Labour Time,” 50.

²⁶ Le Goff, “Labour Time,” 296, n. 48.

²⁷ Geoffrey’s *Declamationes* (PL 184.435-476) were until quite recently thought to be a compilation of extracts from Bernard’s sermons. See the modern edition, Geoffrey of Auxerre, *Entretien de Simon-Pierre avec Jésus*, ed. Henri Rochais (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1990), 9-23. In this study, I use the edition in *PL*. On Gueric’s sermons *In Festo Purificationis*, for which I also use the *PL* edition (PL 185.63-92), see pp. 206-8 of this study.

²⁸ “Nihil pretiosius tempore, sed heu! nihil hodie vilis aestimatur! Transeunt dies salutis [cf. 2 Cor. 6.2], et nemo recogitat, nemo sibi non reditura momenta perisse causatur” (*Declamationes* 44.54, *PL* 184.465).

²⁹ *Flores seu sententiae ex S. Bernardi operibus depromptae* (PL 183.1197).

³⁰ William Peraldus, *De acedia*, in *Summa virtutum ac vitiorum*, ed. Rodolphus Clutius, 2 vols. in 1 (Lyons: P. Compagnon and R. Taillandier, 1668), vol. 2, 165-213, transcribed, with notes, by Siegfried Wenzel, *The Peraldus Project*, 1 May 2002, <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~swenzel.peraldus.html>, at p. 172b. Peraldus was a Dominican theologian and preacher who lived from about 1200 to about 1271. On the importance of his *Summa* for the rationale which underlies the system of seven capital sins in the *Purgatorio*, see Siegfried Wenzel, “Dante’s Rationale for the Seven Deadly Sins (‘Purgatorio’ XVII),” *Modern Language Review* 60 (1965): 529-33, and Alfred A. Triolo, “Purgatorio XVIII,” in *Dante’s Divine Comedy: Introductory Readings: II, Purgatorio*, ed. Tibor Wlassics (Charlottesville, Va.: U. of Virginia P., 1993), 259-78. On the *Summa* as the probable direct source of some of Dante’s ideas on nobility, see Maria Corti, “Le fonti del Fiore di virtù e la teoria della ‘nobiltà’ nel Duecento,” *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 136 (1959): 65-70. For Dante’s use of the *Summa* as a source of images and metaphors, see Franco Mancini, “Un ‘auctoritas’ di Dante,” *Studi danteschi* 45 (1968): 95-119, and R. A. Shoaf, “Dante and Peraldus: The *aqua falsa* of Maestro Adamo (A Note on *Inferno* 30, 64-69),” *Quaderni d’Italianistica* 10 (1989): 311-13. Domenico Cavalca, writing on the theme of time’s value between about 1320 and 1342,

quotations from classical, scriptural and patristic authorities. Because wasting time is for Peraldus a distinctive and dangerous feature of *acedia* (“sloth”), the fifth treatise is a veritable compendium of classic pieces of wisdom on the theme that so strongly colours the view of time in the *Commedia* and that constitutes a nexus between time, Christian teleology and conversion. Time, in this context, is no philosophical abstraction, but this temporal life, our short-lived life in time—the *time of grace* that was brought by Christ and in which we have the opportunity to earn the salvation of eternal life, and yet run the risk of meriting damnation and eternal death. This time is limited by God’s will to a determined span unknown to us, fated to end, at some unforeseeable yet definitive moment, in death, with which our eternal destiny will be sealed in accordance with the choices we have made during what Dante calls the “cammin corto / di quella vita ch’al termine vola” and the “viver ch’è un correre a la morte” (*Purg.* 20.38-39, 33.54). The longer one delays repentance and atonement, the longer one must spend in Purgatory, where “tempo per tempo si ristora” (*Purg.* 23.84), delaying the enjoyment of one’s eternal reward. This delay is why “l tempo è caro / in questo regno” (*Purg.* 24.91-92), the realm where one must make up for the failure to realise in life that “nothing is more precious than time.” For Peraldus, the chief authorities on this matter, the “chi più sa,” as it were, of Virgil’s “perder tempo a chi più sa più spiace” (*Purg.* 3.78), are Seneca, the Bible, and, among patristic writers, “beatus Bernardus.”

On “perder tempo a chi più sa più spiace,” many commentators refer us to Seneca’s *Ad Lucilium Epistulae* 1.3 and hand down Pietro Alighieri’s gloss: “unde Seneca ad Lucilium: nil pretiosius tempore, sed heu hodie nil vilis reputatur; nam reliqua a nobis aliena sunt, tempus tamen nostrum est: cum nos ipsos amittimus, tunc tempus amittimus.”³¹ Seneca does indeed write, in the first of his *Moral Letters*, “omnia, Lucili, aliena sunt, tempus tantum nostrum est” (“nothing is really ours, Lucilius, except time”),³² but not “nil pretiosius tempore, sed heu hodie nil vilis reputatur” (“nothing is more precious than time, but, alas! nothing is now less valued!”), a statement which I have not been able to find in Seneca and which appears to have originated in Geoffrey of

borrowed heavily from *De acedia*, giving the same sources and the same attributions to “Bernard.” See Domenico Cavalca, *Disciplina degli spirituali* (Florence: Antonio Miscomini, 1485), Chs. 19-21.

³¹ Pietro, *Purg.* 3.78, cf. Portirelli, Tommaseo, Andreoli, Campi, Poletto, and Sapegno ad loc.

³² Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, ed. T. E. Page, trans. Richard M. Gummere, 3 vols. (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1961), 1.3.

Auxerre's *Declamationes*, only to be subsequently attributed, along with the rest of that work, to Saint Bernard.

"Seneca morale" (*Inf.* 4.141) certainly taught that "perder tempo a chi più sa più spiace," for the value and proper use of time is a major theme, even something of an obsession, in Seneca's works of Stoic moral philosophy. His *Moral Letters*, as well as the *Moral Essays*,³³ contain many passionate exhortations, to make full use of every fleeting hour of each rapidly passing day, warnings against letting slip the gift of the brief space of time that we are destined to live, the gift of the opportunity for self-realisation that most people foolishly waste and which is fated to end at a determined instant which we cannot foresee.³⁴ The wise man, the philosopher, constantly bears this in mind, living each day that has been allocated by the divine Providence which governs the universe as if it were his last, never forgetting that time is "the most precious thing in the world."³⁵ Horace had already expressed similar concerns, and not just in his famous "carpe diem."³⁶

Among the classical writers, though, it was Dante's beloved Virgil who gave the theme of time's flight its most memorable expression when he wrote the verse which is probably the source of Bernard's "1 tempo fugge:" "but time flies, it irreparably flies," "sed fugit interea, fugit inreparabile tempus" (*Georgicon* 3.284).³⁷ However, although Virgil wrote about our lives as a brief span destined to end in decline and death (*Georgicon* 3.66-71), the interpretation of *Par.* 32.139 that I have given in Chapter 5 implies quite a different sense for time's flight, one much closer to the use of the theme of time in *Aeneid* 6, a matter which I will take up later in this chapter.

These classical motifs (sometimes connected to the theme of sleep) are found in many passages in the Bible, where they are turned to the spiritual purpose of provoking anxiety at the dangers of postponing our conversion from sin (or our "waking" from "sleep"). These passages are to be found mainly in the Wisdom or "Sapiential" books of the Old Testament and in Saint Paul's letters. The Wisdom books contain the *sapientia* of

³³ Seneca, *Moral Essays*, ed. E. H. Warmington, trans. John W. Basore, 3 vols. (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1970).

³⁴ For example, *Epistulae Morales* 1, 32, 48, 49, 88, 101, 102, *Moral Essays* 10.1-3, 8, 14-16.

³⁵ "Re omnium pretiosissima" (*Moral Essays*, 10.8.1).

³⁶ Horace, *Carminum* 1.11.7-8.

³⁷ For the text of Virgil's works I use Virgil, *Opera*, ed. F. A. Hirtzel (Oxford: Clarendon, 1900).

human sages (the greatest of whom was Solomon) and of personified divine Wisdom itself (for Christians, the Johannine *Logos*), and the wisdom they impart has to do with how to live rightly in the light of revealed truth, the practical and ethical, rather than speculative, wisdom of *prudentia*. In Prov. 1-9, Wisdom herself continually opposes the prudence and virtue of true wisdom to the folly and wickedness of the multitude, for prudence shows the true path, the “*iter rectum*” of virtue, and the folly of the many consists in leaving that path to walk along the roads of darkness, “*per vias tenebrosas*” (2.13). A significant component of this Old Testament wisdom is knowing the proper use of time, which is to “observe the time” (Ecclus. 4.23) in the light of the knowledge that there is a proper season for everything, that our time is short and is passing rapidly, so that we may at any moment hit the end of whichever road we are on (thence our salvation or damnation), and that the proper moment to turn from the wrong road to the right one is therefore this very instant.³⁸ Dante draws on some of this *sapientia*, the wisdom of his exalted *Filosofia-Sapienza*, when he talks about time and its proper use in *Convivio* 4.2.5-10, a passage that merits discussion here but which I must exclude from consideration, except to note that it concludes “E tutte le nostre brighe, se bene veniamo a cercare li loro principii, procedono quasi dal non conoscere l’uso del tempo.”

Paul, like the writers of the Wisdom books, and with essentially the same purpose, warns that “the time is short” (“*tempus breve est*,” 1 Cor. 7.29). He urges us to wake from our sinful sleep right now because that brief time will end without warning, when we least expect it, and the “Day of the Lord” will come like “a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5.1-8, cf. Matt. 24-26, Acts 1.7). However, the Apostle writes in and of the time when the Lord has already come, the age of grace that was initiated with the Incarnation at the “fullness of time” (“*plenitudo temporis*,” Gal. 4.4), and he tries to stimulate, not just the fear of damnation, but also the hope of salvation, stressing, perhaps more than the risk of wasting the opportunity and the time we have been given, the present time of grace *as* opportunity, as an offer of redemption that can be taken up “now,” on any day of the present (and final) age: “now is the hour for us to rise from sleep. For now our salvation is nearer than we believed [*nunc enim propior est nostra salus quam cum*

³⁸ Prov. 6.4-9, 19.15-16, 27.1, Ecclus. 4.23, 5.8-9, 20.6-7, Wis. 16.28, Eccles. 3.1-8, 8.5-6, Job 7.6, 9.25, 17.1, 14 *passim*.

credidimus]” (Rom. 13.11); “And we helping do exhort you that you receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith: *In an accepted time have I heard thee and in the day of salvation have I helped thee.* Behold, now is the acceptable time: behold, now is the day of salvation [ecce nunc tempus acceptabile ecce nunc dies salutis]” (2 Cor. 6.1-2); “And in doing good, let us not fail. For in due time we shall reap, not failing. Therefore, whilst we have time, let us work good to all men” (Gal. 6.9-10); “Wherefore he saith: *Rise, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead: and Christ shall enlighten thee.* See therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly: not as unwise, but as wise: redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore, becoming not unwise: but understanding what is the will of God” (Eph. 5.14-17).

In the *Commedia*, Saint Bernard, in the “parole sante” of *Par.* 32.4-138, shows how time is structured around the moment of its fullness and explains the preconditions for salvation “poi che ’l tempo de la grazia venne” (v. 82). He brings those words to a sudden end with “Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna,” recalling Virgil’s “sed fugit interea, fugit inreparabile tempus,” but turning Virgil’s anxiety-provoking pagan eloquence to a joyful Christian purpose, in what I will show to be a specific instance, taken straight from the actual rhetorical practice of the real abbot of Clairvaux, of the phenomenon brought to light by Steven Botterill, the transformation and superseding of Virgil’s pagan “parola ornata” in the saint’s Christian “parola santa.”³⁹

To properly understand this transformation we need to recover a very minor and thus hitherto neglected feature of both the writings and the reputation of the “historical” Bernard as he was known when Dante was working on the *Commedia*, i.e., his interest in and his authority on the theme of time’s flight. Enshrined in Peraldus’s *De acedia*, this aspect of the “real” abbot of Clairvaux was derived from the recorded memories of those who knew him and from a small set of texts, some of which are still accepted as authentically Bernardan, some of which are now given to others who learned of the value of time from the saint. The most important works in the latter category are Geoffrey’s *Declamationes* and Gueric’s *In Festo Purificationis*. The constant message of all the texts in question is that one attains the eternal goal by seizing now the opportunity which time gives for conversion and purgation. The following review of *De acedia*, of some of

³⁹ Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition*, 242-53.

the writings it correctly or mistakenly attributes to Saint Bernard, and of other works that were rightly or wrongly given to Bernard in the Middle Ages, is intended to show that there is good reason to believe that Dante and at least some of his contemporaries will have thought of the abbot of Clairvaux as an authority on the Christian application of the ancient theme of time's flight and time's value. It will lead us to the further discoveries that the historical abbot connected the theme to sleep, which he viewed, ascetically, as the exemplary waste of time, and that he used it rhetorically, in his guise as the great *orator* (the aspect of his reputation that Steven Botterill has recovered for Dante studies). For a favourite device with which Bernard would bring a sermon to a close, a favourite *clausio*, primarily in his *Sermones in Cantica canticorum* (which Francesco Mazzoni insists Dante knew very well indeed), was the apparently spontaneous claim that he was running out of time—sometimes along with a fatherly pastoral awareness of any signs of sleepiness among the monks in his audience, it being a key feature of his deliberate imitation of the Word, in his words about the Word, that a sermon should not be so long as to overly tax the strength of his listeners.⁴⁰

iii “Beatus Bernardus” on the theme of time’s flight

Geoffrey of Auxerre’s *Declamationes* is an elaboration of the exchange between Peter and Jesus in Matt. 19.27-29. It is a work on the renunciation of worldly things for the sake of the eternal reward, on leaving all to follow Christ, who promises eternal life. Geoffrey imagines Christ complaining that he has redeemed humanity by his blood and offers the gift of grace and the promise of future glory, yet the world continues to follow Satan, and then suggests, sarcastically, that even on the day of judgement sinful humanity will procrastinate, just as all the miserable sinners who put off conversion do now, saying (as Augustine had) “soon, presently, just a little longer.”⁴¹ “The days of man are short” (Job 14.5), yet people delay repentance and conversion, thinking that life is long and the reward far off, not wanting to give up sin and earthly things any sooner than they have to. “What is the rush?” they ask, unable to bear the thought of wasting their years in the

⁴⁰ See pp. 2-3 of this study. Botterill says that Saint Bernard was famous as “a man committed to using words to convey the Word” (*Dante and the Mystical Tradition*, 41).

⁴¹ Geoffrey borrows Augustine’s “modo, ecce modo; sine paululum” (*Confessionum* 8.5.12, *PL* 32.754, cf. pp. 11-12 of this study).

labour of penitential abstinence when they could instead have enjoyed the goods of this world before converting at the last moment.⁴² And why indeed, asks Geoffrey, should we waste so much time and give up so many benefits, since we may live to a ripe old age? He continues:

Nothing is more precious than time, but, alas! nothing is now less valued! The 'days of salvation' pass by, yet none take this into account, none reproach themselves for wasting the moments that will never return. Do you imagine that the Almighty can recompense but the labour of two or three years, as if the hand of the Lord were so miserly that it could not reward the effort of a hundred years? Sit, and calculate what you can gain day by day, assured that, with the Lord, no good goes unrecompensed, and that not a moment of your time, any more than 'a hair of your head,' shall perish. Why do I keep repeating the advice of the Sage, 'Delay not to be converted to the Lord,' 'for thou knowest not what the day to come may bring forth'? Why do I reproach the folly of those who so boldly presume about the future, as if 'the times or moments which the Father hath put in his own power' had instead been put in your power? And finally, what should I say of the uncertain end, the certain brevity of the labour and the eternity of the retribution? The Lord knows us and takes account of our weakness. He comes to meet our human thought, dissipates anxiety, and prevents fear.⁴³

On the brevity of the labour, Saint Bernard himself says "My labour is scarcely that of a moment."⁴⁴

I have already introduced the reader to Gueric of Igny's sermons *In Festo Purificationis* as a "Bernardan" locus for the sleep of glory.⁴⁵ Simeon now reposes in that sleep, according to Gueric, and in order to do the same we must use time wisely, which

⁴² *Declamationes* 43.52-44.54, *PL* 184.464-65.

⁴³ "Nihil pretiosius tempore, sed heu! nihil hodie vilis aestimatur! Transeunt dies salutis [cf. 2 Cor. 6.2], et nemo recogitat, nemo sibi non reditura momenta perisse causatur. An putas, o homo, biennii tantum aut triennii opus ab Omnipotenti posse recompensari? Sic abbreviata est manus Domini, ut centum annorum non possit remunerare laborem? Sede, et computa quid diebus singulis acquirere valeas, certus equidem apud Deum nullum omnino bonum irremuneratum fore; et sicut non capillum de corpore, sic nec momentum de tempore periturum. Quid illud Sapientis consilium ingeram: *Ne tardes converti ad Dominum* [Eccus. 5.8], *nescis quid superventura pariat dies* [Prov. 27.1]? Quid insaniam causer de futuro tam temerarie praesumentis: quasi vero tempora et momenta Pater in tua, et non magis in sua posuerit voluntate [Acts 1.7]! Postremo, quid de incerto fine, quid de certa brevitate laboris, retributionis aeternitate loquar? Novit Dominus figmentum nostrum, consulit pusillanimitati nostrae, humanae obviat cogitationi, anxietatem abigit, praevenit trepidationem" (*Declamationes* 44.54, col. 465).

⁴⁴ "Opus meum vix unius horae" (Saint Bernard, *SC* 14.4, *PL* 183.841).

⁴⁵ On pp. 206-8.

means undergoing penitential purification (*purgatio*) now, through contrition of heart, corporeal suffering, works of piety and faith, and patience in tribulations.⁴⁶ For we must purify ourselves, not only of sin, but of the temporal punishment due to sin, the *poena peccati*,⁴⁷ lest we have to do so in the fire of Purgatory after death:

Oh sons of men, the time for purification has come, now that the Mother of supreme purity, whose purification we celebrate today, has at once given us the wellspring and the example of our own purification. It is surer and sweeter, oh my brethren, to be purified by the spring rather than by the fire. Certainly, those who are not purified by the spring now will have to be purified by the fire, if they merit that purification when the Judge himself, 'like a refining fire, shall sit refining and cleansing the silver, and shall purify the sons of Levi.' Now Christ is cleansing water, but then he will be a consuming fire.⁴⁸ . . . Oh, how happy are those of whom it can be said that 'the days of their purification are accomplished,' since nothing now remains for them but to be brought to the heavenly Jerusalem and to be presented to the Lord. This was certainly the case with old Simeon, as desirable as full of desires. His days of purgation were, I think, fulfilled long ago; so too, now, his days of expectation are fulfilled. For nothing then remained for him, according to the word of the Lord, after he had seen Christ, Christ the peace of God and man, but to depart in peace, and to sleep in peace in the selfsame; that is, to be taken to the Jerusalem of eternal peace, and to be presented to the Lord in order to contemplate the peace which surpasses all understanding.⁴⁹ . . . Brethren, 'purge out the old leaven' while there is still time for purgation, so that when the days of your purification are accomplished you too may be found apt for the joy that now fills the soul of Simeon. And, certainly, we do accomplish the days given us for our purification, whether we wish to or not; but woe betide us if our days should be accomplished when our purification is not, for then we will have to be purged by the fire that is more cruel and keen, more violent, than any fire of

⁴⁶ *In Festo Purificationis* 4.4.

⁴⁷ *In Festo Purificationis* 6.5, col. 92.

⁴⁸ "O filii hominum, tempus purgationis advenit, quando Mater summae puritatis, de cujus purgatione dies festus est nobis, pariter et fontem edidit, et exemplum dedit nobis quod debeamus purgari. Satius est, o fratres, et suavius fonte purgari quam igne. Prorsus qui fonte non fuerint modo purgati, igne habent purgari, si tamen purgari meruerint: quando scilicet Judex ipse, *quasi ignis conflans, sedebit conflans et emundans argentum, et purgabit filios Levi* [Mal. 3.2-3]. Nunc Christus aqua diluens; tunc ignis consumens" (*In Festo Purificationis* 4.2, col 76).

⁴⁹ "O quam felix est, de quo dici potest: *Impleti sunt dies purgationis ejus* [Luke 2.22]: ut jam nihil aliud ei supersit, nisi ut ferant eum in Jerusalem supernam, et sistant eum Domino. Talis nimirum erat Simeon ille noster senex, tam desiderabilis quam plenus desiderii, cujus cum jam olim, ut arbitror, essent impleti dies purgationis, hodie impleti sunt etiam dies exspectationis: ut jam, secundum verbum Domini, nihil aliud ei restaret, postquam vidisset Christum domini, Christum pacem Dei et hominum, nisi ut dimitteretur in pace, et dormiret in pace in idipsum; hoc est, ut ferrent eum in Jerusalem pacis aeternae, et sisterent eum ad contemplandam pacem quae exsuperat omnem sensum" (*In Festo Purificationis* 6.1, col. 89).

this world. . . . Few are chosen, and among those few, I think very few indeed are so perfect as to have completed the purification of which the Sage says 'for thy negligence purify thyself with a few.'⁵⁰

Guerric then hammers the theme of *negligentia*, and that of excessive sleep, which is a waste of the time given for purgation, for this particular manifestation of the vice of negligence is characteristic of the monks who constitute his audience, perverting the sleep of the Bride that they ought to seek into a pseudo-*somnus contemplationis*. He does not exempt himself:

How often 'my soul has slumbered through heaviness,' consuming almost a whole day in indolence, as if time could be called back. Would that my soul did not drowse thus, so that with open and waking eyes I imagine vain and false dreams. Instead, twisting the text into its opposite, I wake, and my heart sleeps, in such a heavy sleep that I am hardly able to be woken at last by that thundering reproach 'How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard?' . . . It is surely deplorable how nowadays it is considered a gain, not a waste, if the days given us for our purification flee while we sleep, passing and perishing through our neglect. . . . Thus almost no one values time at its true worth, none consider within themselves the value of a single day for gaining eternity. . . . Brothers, 'the days of man are short,' yet they are extremely precious, and the shorter they are the more precious, for they are days of purification, to be followed immediately by the day of retribution.⁵¹

⁵⁰ "Fratres, expurgate vetus fermentum [cf. 1 Cor. 5.7], dum tempus habetis ad expurgandum; ut cum impleti fuerint dies vestrae purgationis, inveniarnini et vos capaces illius gaudii, quo plena est jam anima Simeonis. Et quidem dies qui ad purgandum nobis dati sunt, velimus, nolimus, implemus: sed vae nobis si dies implentur, et purgatio minime impletur; ut postea necesse sit illo nos igne repurgari, quo nihil poenalius, nihil acrius, aut vehementius in hac vita excogitari potest. . . . Pauci quidem sunt electi; sed inter illos paucos paucissimi sunt, ut arbitror, ita perfecti, ut purgationem illam impleverint, de qua Sapiens dicit: *De negligentia purga te cum paucis* [Ecclus. 7.34]" (*In Festo Purificationis* 6.2, col 89).

⁵¹ "quoties dormitat anima mea prae taedio [Ps. 118.28], diemque fere totum, ac si tempus revocabile esset, inertia consumo? Et utinam sic dormitaret anima mea, ut apertis et vigilantibus oculis, ipse mihi misero non fingerem somnia vana et illusoria! At nunc in perversum mutata sententia, ego vigilo, et cor meum dormit [cf. Cant. 5.2], somnoque tam gravi, ut vix aliquando valeat expergisci ad tonitruum supernae illius increpationis: *Usquequo, piger, dormis?* [Prov. 6.8]. . . . Illud sane miserrimum est, quod hodie non putatur jactura, sed lucrum, si dies qui nobis ad purgationem dati sunt, elabantur nobis dormiendo, praetereant et pereant negligendo. . . . Sic nullus fere est qui tempori pretium ponat, qui cogitet apud se quantum valeat ad comparandam aeternitatem dies una" (*In Festo Purificationis* 6.3, col 90), "Fratres, breves dies hominis sunt [Job 14.5], sed tamen valde pretiosi sunt; imo quo breviores, eo pretiosiores; quia dies sunt purificationis, cum statim postmodum futuri sint dies retributionis" (6.5, col. 91).

Immoderate sleep and time-wasting among the brethren troubled the unknown author of another text that was attributed to Bernard during the Middle Ages, as did idle chatter and gossip.⁵² The writer carefully explains the principles by which to regulate sleep, so that it should be neither excessively long and bestial nor too ascetically brief,⁵³ and warns the religious against sitting around listening to rumours and anecdotes, since this is not only a misuse of speech, but also a waste of time. This is a serious thing, “since all the time you spend will be demanded of you on the day of judgement.”⁵⁴ Such matters were indeed of great concern to Saint Bernard, who took his duty of care as an abbot very seriously, all the more so as he himself had in his youth taken his ascetic zeal to such extremes of self-mortification, such fasting and prayerful vigils, that his health was permanently damaged. In a sermon on the anniversary of Bernard’s death, Geoffrey of Auxerre fondly recalls the fatherly care shown by the abbot of Clairvaux towards his charges, the incredible degree of concern he felt for their physical, psychological and spiritual well-being.⁵⁵ He observed them carefully, able to notice, with acute sensitivity, any signs of anxiety, depression, obsessiveness, weariness due to excessive labour, or sloth due to too much ease. Geoffrey says that “He weighed, as it were, the very sleep of each and every brother in the balance of his kind affection, keeping the strong in body from idleness, urging those with an ardent spirit to take rest. I believe that he knew, by a divine intuition, the strength, the state of mind, the very stomach of each one, having become the servant of all through Jesus Christ.”⁵⁶

In the first book of the *Vita prima*, William of St. Thierry’s contribution to the oldest and the most influential of the three hagiographical lives of Saint Bernard,⁵⁷ the writer enthusiastically and fondly describes the paternal care shown by his old friend towards the brethren (especially the novices), as well as his visionary gifts and his keen, even

⁵² *Opusculum in Haec Verba: Ad Quid Venisti?* (PL 184.1189-98).

⁵³ *Opusculum* 10, col. 1193.

⁵⁴ “cum omne tempus tibi impensum exigetur a te in die iudicii” (*Opusculum* 23, col. 1198).

⁵⁵ Geoffrey of Auxerre, *Sermo in anniversario obitus S. Bernardi* (PL 185. 573-588).

⁵⁶ “ipsos, si dici potest, singulorum fratrum somnos pio pensavit affectu. Valentes corpore a desidia semper discutiens, ferventes spiritu cogebat ad requiem. Omnium vires, omnium animos, omnium stomachos instinctu, ut credo, Dei noverat, vere servus omnium factus per Jesum Christum” (*Sermo in anniversario* 11, col. 580).

⁵⁷ William of St. Thierry et al., *S. Bernardi vita prima* (PL 185.225-466). Steven Botterill observes that the *Vita prima* was widely known in Italy in Dante’s time and that the poet may well have read it (*Dante and the Mystical Tradition*, 23-4).

fanatical, asceticism. From childhood, Bernard had been granted visions, and he had habitually mortified his flesh by taking the bare minimum of food and drink, wearing a hair-shirt, and staying awake in order to pray, while standing, day and night, until his feet became swollen.⁵⁸ For the sake of meditation, it was above all the body's need for sleep that he fought against:

What shall I say of sleep, which for others is the usual rest from labour and sensation, and a refreshment of the mind? From the time of his novitiate to now he has displayed a more than human wakefulness. For it is his habit to complain that time spent sleeping is for him the greatest waste of time, agreeing with the comparison between sleep and death, since the sleeping appear dead to men, just as the dead, for God, are sleeping. And so he cannot bear to hear a monk snoring loudly or to see him sleeping in an undignified position, and reproaches such a one with sleeping in a carnal or worldly manner. For him, little sleep and little food go hand in hand: in neither will he satisfy his body, in both giving it but the bare minimum. In vigils, his rule is simply to not pass the whole night without some sleep.⁵⁹

This passage appears word for word both in Alan of Auxerre's *Vita secunda* and in the life of Bernard in the *Legenda aurea*.⁶⁰ William of St. Thierry passes the wisdom of his close friend on to others in his well-known *Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei*, which was thought to be by Saint Bernard himself in Dante's time and which the poet may well have known, warning against excessive sleep on the grounds that "sleep is a suspect thing, . . . nothing is such a waste of the time of this life as that which is given to sleep."⁶¹

As for Bernard's concern about the time spent in gossip, rumour-mongering and idle chit-chat, we have the saint's own authentic words on the matter, and some reason to

⁵⁸ See especially *Vita prima* 1.2, 4, 5, 8.

⁵⁹ "Quid enim dicam de somno, qui in caeteris hominibus solet esse refectio laborum et sensuum, aut mentium recreatio? Ex tunc usque hodie vigilat ultra possibilitatem humanam. Nullum enim tempus magis se perdere conqueri solet, quam quo dormit, idoneam satis reputans comparationem mortis et somni: ut sic dormientes videantur mortui apud homines, quomodo apud Deum mortui dormientes. Unde etiam si quem forte religiosum in dormiendo seu durius stertentem audiert, seu minus compositae jacentem viderit, patienter ferre vix potest, sed carnaliter eum seu saeculariter dormire causatur. In ipso namque tenuem victum tenuis somnus comitatur. In neutro enim ullam indulget corpori suo satietatem, nisi quod in utroque sumpsisse aliquid sat ei est. Quantum enim ad vigilias, vigiliarum ei modus est non totam noctem ducere insomnem" (*Vita prima* 1.4.21, col. 239).

⁶⁰ Alan of Auxerre, *S. Bernardi vita secunda* 10.28 (PL 185.485-86), Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda aurea*, ed. Maggioni, vol. 2, 811-26.

⁶¹ "Suspecta res est somnus, . . . nihil temporis tam deperit de vita nostra, quam quod somno deputatur" (*Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei*, PL 184.329).

believe that Dante may have known them directly. The parallel between the paradise as cloister image in the *Commedia* (*Purg.* 26.128-29, *Par.* 25.127) and Bernard's depiction of the cloister as paradise in *Sermones de diversis* 42 is perhaps the one precise correspondence which Alexandre Masseron is able to offer in his argument that Dante knew Saint Bernard's works intimately and borrowed extensively from them, and Francesco Mazzoni has recently supported Masseron's conviction that the sermon is Dante's source.⁶² If this is correct, then Dante may have known the seventeenth sermon in that series, in which Bernard, making use of a combination of scriptural and classical authorities, reproaches those who squander their time in vacuous chattering. Saint Paul, after quoting the words of the Lord in Isaiah, "In an accepted time have I heard thee and in the day of salvation have I helped thee," immediately adds "Behold, now is the acceptable time: behold, now is the day of salvation;" Horace, on the other hand, advises against careless talk because "the word once spoken flies off irrevocably."⁶³ In *De diversis* 17, Bernard warns:

Let none of you, my brethren, underestimate the time which is consumed in idle talk, for 'now is the acceptable time,' and 'the day of salvation.' The word flies irrevocably, and time flies irremediably [*volat tempus irremeabile*], and fools do not perceive what they thereby lose. 'Let us chat,' they say, 'just until the hour has passed.' Oh, this 'until the hour has passed!' Oh, this 'until the time is over! until the hour has gone!' the hour granted you by the Creator's mercy for your repentance, for obtaining forgiveness, for acquiring grace and for meriting glory! 'Until the time is over,' in which you ought to seek God's kindness, hurry to the company of angels, yearn for your lost inheritance, aspire to the promised happiness, rouse your lazy will, and weep for your transgressions!⁶⁴

⁶² Alexandre Masseron, *Dante et Saint Bernard*, 192-95, Mazzoni, "San Bernardo e la visione poetica della *Divina Commedia*," 203-14.

⁶³ "ait enim tempore accepto exaudivi te et in die salutis adiuvavi te ecce nunc tempus acceptabile ecce nunc dies salutis" [cf. 2 Cor. 6.2, Is. 49.8]; "et semel emissum volat inrevocabile verbum" (Horace, *Epistularum* 1.18.71).

⁶⁴ "Nemo vestrum, fratres, parvi aestimet tempus quod in verbis consumitur otiosis: siquidem tempus acceptabile est, et dies salutis. Volat verbum irrevocabile, volat tempus irremeabile, nec advertit insipientis quid amittat. Libet confabulari, aiunt, donec hora praetereat. O donec praetereat hora! O donec pertranseat tempus! donec hora praetereat, quam tibi ad agendam poenitentiam, ad obtinendam veniam, ad acquirendam gratiam, ad gloriam promerendam miseratio Conditoris indulget! Donec transeat tempus, quo divinam tibi repropitiare debueras pietatem, properare ad angelicam societatem, suspirare ad amissam haereditatem, aspirare ad promissam felicitatem, excitare remissam voluntatem, flere commissam iniquitatem!" (*Sermones de diversis* 17.3, *PL* 183.584).

The sentiment and much of the language of this passage finds its way into yet another text that was formerly thought to be Bernard's, in which the unknown author rails against the misuse of the fleeting time given by God, not for feasting and japes, but for tearful repentance, seeking the forgiveness of one's sins, attaining grace, and meriting glory, even as the souls who wasted the opportunity burn in Hell, without hope or mercy.⁶⁵ In the authentic *De diversis* 106, Bernard takes Paul's "now is the acceptable time, . . . now is the day of salvation" as evidence that time, along with body and place, are three things that are necessary for repentance. Time, he says, is divided into past, present and future,

none of which are lost to those who repent rightly. For repentance restores the lost past when the remorseful soul reconsiders all its years, and preserves the present through the practice of good works and the future through constancy in the intention to be good. The Apostle refers to the past when he says 'redeeming the time, because the days are evil.' He exhorts us to present action when he says 'Therefore, whilst we have time, let us work good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith.' The Lord urges us to consider the future when he says 'he that shall persevere until the end, he shall be saved.'⁶⁶

In *De diversis* 22, Bernard stresses that it is Christ to whom we are indebted for the time and the life in which we are able to carry out our tearful repentance, since he gave it to us by dying on the cross.⁶⁷ The mention of time's flight occurs in a sermon on the death of a monk who was exemplary in his refusal to spend time in joking and gossiping,

because in doing so you waste much of your life, and your time. Time flies irrevocably [volat irrevocabile tempus], and while you think to avoid a little

⁶⁵ *Tractatus de interiori domo* 34.73, PL 184.543.

⁶⁶ "Horum nullum perdit, quisquis recte poenitentiam agit. Nam praeteritum quidem quod perdidit restaurat, dum in amaritudine animae suae omnes annos suos recogitat; praesens autem tenet jam per exercitium operis: futurum vero per constantiam boni propositi. De praeterito loquitur Apostolus, cum dicit: *Redimentes tempus, quoniam dies mali sunt* [Eph. 5.16]. Ad praesentis vero operationem hortatur nos, cum dicit: *Dum tempus habemus, operemur bonum ad omnes, maxime autem ad domesticos fidei* [Gal. 6.10]. Futuri nos admonet Dominus, cum ait: *Qui perseveraverit usque in finem, salvus erit* [Matt. 10.22]" (*Sermones de diversis* 106.1, PL 183.732).

⁶⁷ *Sermones de diversis* 22.5, 7 (PL 183.597-598).

pain, your incur a greater one. For you ought to know that the penance you neglect to do here will be made up in the next life a hundredfold, down to the last measure, in the place of purgation.⁶⁸

In *De acedia*, Peraldus takes from some of these texts a number of *sententiae*, attributing them all to Bernard, and deploys them (along with quite a few from Seneca and many from Scripture) as antidotes to the sin of sloth in its most dangerous aspect.⁶⁹ According to Peraldus, this consists in the loss of the goods of nature, grace and glory, amounting to the loss of “the whole usefulness of this life,” so that our earthly existence becomes a “fruitless” life, like a barren tree fit only to be cut down and burned. This prompts the assertion that “if sloth did no other harm to man than the loss of the opportunity given by time, then it would do no small harm indeed” (“Et si nullum aliud damnum faceret acedia homini nisi de amissione temporis, non parum damnificat hominem”). Peraldus therefore gives eight things which should encourage us to heed the scriptural injunction “conserva tempus et declina a malo” (Ecclus. 4.23, “observe the time, and fly from evil” in the Douay version, although Peraldus thinks of *conservatio* as a “keeping up” or “laying up” of time, in opposition to *amissio* as the “loss” or “letting slip” of time and opportunity). The first thing consists of these same words from Scripture. The second, as the Bible also teaches, is the example of dumb creatures, which take account of time as much as they are able, “for once given the opportunity to act,” writes Peraldus, “they act, and do not let time pass in vain.” Thirdly, there is the nature of time itself, which is brief (as Scripture says), passes quickly (as several statements from Seneca and Scripture affirm), and which, once gone, can never be restored, as “Bernard” says (the authentic *De diversis* 17.3). Fourthly, time is precious, which we have on the authority of “the blessed Bernard” (i.e., Geoffrey of Auxerre’s “Nihil pretiosius tempore, . . .,” from the *Declamationes*). Peraldus also has a threefold demonstration of time’s value which seems to owe something to the real Bernard’s *De diversis* 17:

⁶⁸ “quia in his multum perditis et de vita vestra, et de tempore vestro. Volat irrevocabile tempus; et dum creditis vos cavere poenam istam minimam, incurritis ampliorem. Illud enim scitote, quia post hanc vitam in purgabilibus locis centupliciter, quae fuerint hic neglecta, reddentur usque ad novissimum quadrantem” (Bernard, *In obitu Domni Humberti* 8, PL 183.518).

⁶⁹ *De acedia* 1.3, 171b-173b.

The preciousness of time can be shown in three ways. Firstly, time is a rare possession, since there is only one time, just as there is said to be only one phoenix, and, since every rare thing is precious, time must be very precious indeed. Secondly, there is a place where one moment of time for repentance would be more desired than a mass of gold as vast as the whole world, and that place is hell. Thirdly, one can, in a moment of time, by the grace of God, merit the discharging of the debt of eternal punishment, the remission of sins, and eternal glory.⁷⁰

Fifth, we should consider Bernard's teaching that we are debtors to Christ for all the time, that is, the life, that we have, since Christ gave his life for ours (*De diversis* 22). Next, there is "Bernard's" authoritative statement of the fact that we will be required to give an account of our time on the day of judgement (the anonymous *Opusculum in Haec Verba*). The seventh thing to recall is Seneca's indication that time is in a spiritual sense our possession, such that the loss of time is the loss of our very selves; the eighth, the same Stoic writer's insistence that the loss or waste of time, as a loss of life, is a sort of death.

Peraldus has recourse to "Bernard's" authority on sleep as a loss of time in his treatment of *somnolentia*, one of the specific sins which pertain to sloth (i.e., William of St. Thierry's *Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei*).⁷¹ *Otiositas* is a particularly reprehensible sin in "the time of grace" brought by Christ, because we are promised better "wages" for our repentance than were the Jews. They were promised land, but Christians are promised heaven. Even if we understand the promised land as a figure for heaven, the Jews had to wait until the Passion of Christ for their reward, while now one can earn Paradise in a moment, that is, after sufficient contrition to deserve the remission of sin and of the punishment due to sin, for as Bernard says "My labour is scarcely that of a moment" (the

⁷⁰ "Ostenditur pretiositas temporis tripliciter. Primo per hoc quod possessio temporis vel {} rara est quantum ad hoc quod unicum tempus est semper, sicut de phoenice dicitur quod est phoenix unica semper avis. Unde cum omne rarum pretiosum sit, valde pretiosum debet esse tempus. Secundo ostenditur ex hoc quod aliquis locus est in quo plus amaretur una hora temporis ad agendum poenitentiam quam tanta massa auri quantus est totus mundus, Locus ille infernus est. Tertio ostenditur ex hoc quod in una hora temporis potest homo promereri dimissionem poenae aeternae et peccatorum suorum remissionem, Dei gratiam, et aeternam gloriam" (*De acedia* 1.3, 172b). I have ignored both the problem of the sense of "vel," which Wenzel's transcription indicates with the symbol "{}," and the precise meaning of the comparison between time and the phoenix.

⁷¹ *De acedia* 2.3, 176b-177b.

authentic *Sermones in Cantica* 14).⁷² *Dilatio* (procrastination) inspires a very lengthy chapter on the dangers of putting off conversion and confession, and on the need to act now, before it is too late, a chapter in which the full range of those motifs connected with the theme of time that we have encountered so far is exploited again, and in which Peraldus quotes once more from “Bernard’s” *Declamationes*, now regarding the fools who think that “the times or the moments” are in their power, rather than in God’s.⁷³

The Dominican does not, however, borrow from Sermon 36 of Bernard’s *Sermones in Cantica canticorum*, even though he might have found useful the following passage, part of the saint’s warning against inordinate enthusiasm for the kind of knowledge that does not lead to salvation:

For what does ‘to be wise unto sobriety’ mean? It means vigilantly noting which kind of knowledge is primary and most important, because ‘the time is short.’ All knowledge that is founded on truth is good in itself, but you who hasten ‘with fear and trembling’ to ‘work out your salvation’ on account of the brevity of time must be careful to know first and foremost that which you perceive to be most closely concerned with your salvation.⁷⁴

The priority of this kind of knowledge is the theme of the whole sequence to which this sermon belongs (*SC* 35-38). In that sequence, we find apparently spontaneous closures necessitated either by the fact that some in the audience are nodding or by the shortness of the time available. Looking elsewhere in the *Sermones in Cantica*, the most renowned of all commentaries on the Song of Songs, the most outstanding example of Bernard’s eloquence as a preacher, we discover that such closures were a favourite artistic device of the saint’s. They manifest at once his paternal care, his seemingly artless rhetorical skill, his awareness of the constraints of time, and his exaltation of the virtue of humility as the primary *imitatio Christi*, an imitation that he self-consciously sought to enact in his very words about the Word. I suggest that these closures, in some of which the preacher says

⁷² *De acedia* 2.4, 180-181b.

⁷³ *De acedia* 2.5, 183.

⁷⁴ “Quid est enim *sapere ad sobrietatem* [Rom. 12.3]? Vigilantissime observare quid scire magis priusque oporteat. Tempus enim breve est. Est autem, quod in se est, omnia scientia bona, quae tamen veritate subnixae sit: sed tu qui cum timore et tremore tuam ipsius operari salutem [cf. Phil. 2.12] pro temporis brevitate festinas, ea scire potius ampliusque curato quae senseris viciniora saluti” (*SC* 36.2, *PL* 183.968).

to his audience, in effect, “ma perchè il tempo che vi assonna fugge, qui faremo punto,” are the inspiration behind the particular form which Dante gives to the *Commedia's* last word on time. This last word, just like the Bernardan closures it reflects, is both a carefully-wrought artistic *finis* (including a rhetorical “brevity-formula”) and an instance of biblical *sermo humilis*.

iv How to end a sermon: time, words and the Word

One cold Christmas Day, Saint Bernard delivered a sermon that was by medieval standards relatively concise. If the written record is accurate, the shivering monks and novices in the audience must have been relieved to hear their abbot's opening words:

Today's solemn feast of the Nativity of our Lord is truly a great occasion, my dear brothers; yet the shortness of the day obliges me to give but a brief sermon. Nor is it surprising that I should constrict the word, when even God the Father did as much with his Word. Shall I tell you how long, how short, he made the Word? 'I fill the heaven and the earth,' says the Word; and yet now, become flesh, it is placed within the narrow confines of a crib. 'From eternity and forever,' says the prophet, 'you are God;' yet behold, he is made the little child of a single day. For what purpose, brothers, or out of what necessity, did the Lord so empty, so humble, so confine his majesty, but that you should do the same? On this day he calls upon us by example, as later by preaching the word: 'Learn from me, who am meek and lowly in heart.' . . . I therefore beg and plead with you, my brothers, that you do not allow this precious exemplar to have been shown you in vain; rather, conform yourselves to it, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Strive to attain humility, the foundation and guardian of virtue. Seek humility, the only thing which can save your souls; for what is more unworthy and more hateful, and more deserving of punishment, than man magnifying himself above and beyond the earth, when he sees the God of heaven so reduced?⁷⁵

⁷⁵ “Grandis quidem est, dilectissimi, hodierna Dominicae Nativitatis solemnitas; sed dies brevis cogit breviate sermonem. Nec mirum, si facimus nos breve verbum, quando et Deus Pater Verbum fecit abbreviatum. Vultis nosse quam longum, quam breve fecit? *Coelum*, inquit hoc Verbum, *et terram ego impleo* [Jer. 23.24]. Nunc caro factum, in angusto locatum praesepio est. *A saeculo*, ait Propheta, *et in saeculum tu es Deus* [Ps. 89.2]: et ecce factus est infans diei unius. Ad quid hoc, fratres, aut quae necessitas fuit ut sic exinaniret, sic humiliaret, sic abbreviaret se Dominus majestatis, nisi ut vos similiter faciatis? Jam clamat exemplo, quod postmodum praedicaturus est verbo. *Discite a me quia mitis sum et humilis corde* [Matt. 11.29]. . . . Obsecro proinde et plurimum rogo, fratres, non patiamini sine causa tam pretiosum exemplar vobis exhibitum esse, sed conformamini illi, et renovamini spiritu mentis vestrae. Studete humilitati, quae fundamentum est custosque virtutum: sectamini illam, quae sola potest salvare animas vestras. Quid enim magis indignum, quid detestandum amplius, quid gravius puniendum, quam ut, videns

The listeners must have instantly recognised this as typical of the man they knew, for it exemplifies some key features of Bernard as abbot, preacher, and mystic theologian, as well as the way these roles are all one in the words about the Word which gave Bernard such renown as an eloquent, passionate, and yet humble preacher. With seemingly artless art, Bernard connects his theme to the accidental features of the discourse situation (the lack of time, on this shortest day of the year, and the participants), in order to self-consciously model his word on the exemplary Word of God. True to his belief that we were granted the power to ascend to God through Christ as mediator when and because God descended to man in Christ, and that the imitation of that supreme act of humility is the beginning of the ascent, Bernard grounds the power of his word about the Word on its imitation of its very subject, so that its humility becomes the source of whatever greatness it has with respect to its purpose. The spoken word is humbled when its temporal unfolding is confined within a short period of time, just as the eternal Word lowered itself to become “the little child of a single day.” And just as the Word which fills heaven and earth accommodated itself to “the narrow confines of a crib,” so the written word is humbled by being confined to the small space of a few pages. Because the preacher’s words imitate Christ, Christ becomes the substance, not merely the subject, of those words. The occasion for this is perfectly natural, even banal, and yet is full of meaning: a long sermon on this shortest of days, the anniversary of the day God humbled himself, would simply be impractical.

We have seen that Erich Auerbach attributes the *Commedia's* realistic and highly individualised characterisations to Dante’s use of figural allegory (typology).⁷⁶ In the realistic and “low style” language which is to be found in the poem, Auerbach detects a reflection of biblical *sermo humilis*, Scripture’s fusion of *sublimitas* and *humilitas*, high subject matter and low, realistic language and imagery, in violation of the classical norm of the separation of styles according to the level of the subject (Virgil’s *Aeneid* being the

Deum coeli parvulum factum, ultra apponat homo magnificare se super terram?” (*In Nativitate Domini* 1.1, *PL* 183.115).

⁷⁶ See p. 216.

most renowned model of how to treat high subject matter in high style).⁷⁷ The German critic shows that Augustine was the principal theoretician of *sermo humilis* as a Christian aesthetic-stylistic ideal, and that Saint Bernard was the main exponent of *sublimitas-humilitas* as ethical-theological categories. He might well have included the above passage among the several examples of this which he gives from Bernard's works, and, had he done so, would no doubt have remarked that it is simultaneously a self-conscious adoption of *sermo humilis*, a perfect fusion of *sublimitas-humilitas* of form (the word) and of the subject it "embodies" and on which it rests (the Word).

Of course, the notion that a long sermon is a bad idea on any day of the year must be as old as the genre itself. Indeed, by Dante's time, it seems to have been established as the most fundamental principle of the art of preaching. This is suggested by Robert of Basevorn's *Forma praedicandi*, in which Saint Bernard is ranked among the greatest of preachers because "he always proceeded with devotion, and always with art," the latter being evident in his fine use of rhetorical colours and of a variety of styles and structures.⁷⁸ The *Forma praedicandi* was written in 1322, the year following Dante's death, after a century in which a whole series of such texts on the *ars praedicandi* had appeared; but given its date and its status as "a typical manual which almost perfectly embodies the entire movement,"⁷⁹ it may well be representative of notions that were in circulation during the poet's lifetime. In the view of its author, the exemplary preachers are, first and foremost, Christ, followed by Paul, Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Bernard.⁸⁰ In Chapter 1, which is entitled "What is proper to preaching and how long a single sermon should last," Robert begins by defining preaching as "the persuasion of many to meritorious conduct, kept within a moderate length of time," and goes on to discuss the difficulty of determining just what the correct length might be, unable to offer any more precise guidance than the principle that it should not be too much longer or shorter than is the usual custom, which is to say that it should be neither longer than a

⁷⁷ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 72-3, 151-56, 174-88, and "Sacrae Scripturae sermo humilis," in *Studi su Dante*, trans. Maria Luisa De Pieri Bonino and Dante della Terza, 8th ed. (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1991), 167-75.

⁷⁸ "semper devote, semper artificialiter procedit" (Robert of Basevorn, *Forma praedicandi* 12, in T.-M. Charland, *Artes praedicandi: contribution à l'histoire de la rhétorique au Moyen Age* (Paris: Libr. Philosophique J. Vrin, 1936), 247.

⁷⁹ James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1974), 276.

⁸⁰ *Forma praedicandi* 8-12.

solemn mass with music nor shorter than a common mass without music.⁸¹ Of the fifteen ornaments that have a specific place in a sermon, the last is naturally the *clausio* or *finis*, the “conclusion” or “ending.” It is defined as “a prayer ending the sermon and directing the mind to God as to an end” (“oratio sermonem terminans et mentem in Deum tanquam in finem dirigens”). Instead of a prayer, one may use something “convertible into a prayer,” either praise of God, as in “to whom may there be the honour and the glory, etc.,” or dispraise of evil, in a *clausio* such as “from that death may God, who alone can do so, defend us, lest we fall into such a great and endless evil. Amen.” But the direction of the mind to God as to an end is done in the most elegant and artistic manner by means of a prayer, since a sermon usually begins with a prayer and by ending in the same way it returns to its beginning, just as natural things return to their origins, thereby according with the Aristotelian dictum that “art imitates nature as best it can.”⁸²

Saint Bernard was well aware that a sermon should be kept “within a moderate length of time,” and brought this principle into play in a form of *clausio* that he used twenty-three times in the *Sermones in Cantica*. Jean Leclercq argues that these closures are among the key indicators of oral delivery whose existence in the written record is part of the deliberate art with which Bernard revised the sermons in order to leave us with a series that is a unified and highly polished literary artefact, not the simple record of an original oral delivery.⁸³ In each case, immediately before the last sentence that strictly-speaking constitutes the *clausio*, the sermon is suddenly cut short (at a point where it would seem that it might well have continued, and usually because of considerations of time and/or audience fatigue) with a “brevity-formula” or “distaste-formula” of the kind which Curtius adduces as manifestations of the very ideal that Robert of Basevorn sees as

⁸¹ “Quid est proprie praedicatio et quantum tempus debet una praedicatio tenere” (*Forma praedicandi* 1, 235), “Est autem praedicatio pluribus facta persuasio ad merendum, moderatum tempus retinens” (*Forma praedicandi* 1, 238).

⁸² *Forma Praedicandi* 47, 307-310.

⁸³ Jean Leclercq, Introduction to *On the Song of Songs II* by Bernard of Clairvaux, trans. K. Walsh (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1976), vii-xxx. Emero Stiegman takes Leclercq’s thesis so far as to claim that the sermons never were actually delivered, while Christopher Holdsworth refutes both Stiegman and Leclercq. See Stiegman, “The Literary Genre of Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Sermones super Cantica Cantorum*,” in *Simplicity and Ordinarity: Studies in Medieval Cistercian History IV*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 68-93, and Holdsworth, “Were the Sermons of St Bernard on the Song of Songs Ever Preached?” in *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 295-318.

so central to the *ars praedicandi*, i.e., “brevity as an ideal of style.”⁸⁴ *Brevitas*-formulas announce an intention to avoid excessive length, and *fastidium*-formulas do so with the justification that to go on any further would arouse the reader’s distaste. Both are frequent in ancient and patristic writings. By the time of the appearance of the high medieval “arts of poetry,” such as Matthew of Vendôme’s *Ars versificatoria*, what started out as a principle of judicial oratory has become a general *virtus dicendi*. Matthew even makes this virtue a distinguishing feature of the “modern” poets, in contrast to the superfluity of digressions, rhetorical figures and similes (the latter a key marker of high, epic style) to be found in Virgil, Statius, Lucan and Ovid. By the thirteenth century, according to Curtius, the ideal is that “the good poet expresses himself briefly,” so much so that “*brevis* and *bonus* approach one another in meaning” (488). This ideal is of course expressed in a very “humble” (rather than “epic”) simile in the *Commedia*, one which has met with the disapproval of some commentators, for whom it is altogether too down-to-earth for its exalted context:⁸⁵ “Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna, / qui farem punto, come buon sartore / che com’ elli ha del panno fa la gonna” (*Par.* 32.139).

The fictional Bernard’s *sermo humilis* combines and reflects the “real” saint’s concern with time’s flight and the duration of a sermon, and the particular kind of *clausio* and *brevitas*- or *fastidium*-formulas that are a function of that concern, such as that in one of the *Sermones de diversis*, which Bernard closes (just as he opens the sermon on the Feast of the Nativity) by bringing in the constraints of the discourse situation with respect to the duration of the sermon and the state of the participants:

Let today’s sermon end here, so that, in silence, we may hear God speaking inwardly, recommending his kingdom to us, all the more plainly and so all the more profitably; that is, by an inner inspiration. If the voice of the Lord suggests that there is more to be said on this theme, we shall deal with that in another sermon, so that we do not overburden your minds by the length of this one, especially regarding such a useful and spiritual matter.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series 36 (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1990), 487-94.

⁸⁵ Scartazzini gives some examples of this assessment in his commentary (Scartazzini, *Par.* 32.140-41).

⁸⁶ “Hic ergo hodiernus sermo finem accipiat, ut etiam tacentibus nobis Deum intus audiamus loquentem et suadentem de regno suo, tanto utilius quanto subtilius, per internam scilicet inspirationem. Si qua tamen adhuc de audienda hac Domini voce ipse suggesserit, alio sermone tractabimus, ne praesertim in tam utili

Bernard ends in a similar vein in one of his sermons on the Feast of Advent,⁸⁷ and in twenty-three of his eighty-six *Sermones in Cantica canticorum*.

In the first six paragraphs of Sermon 19, the abbot discourses on the order of the angelic hierarchy, just as Dante does in the *Convivio* (2.5.6-11) and as Beatrice does in the *Commedia* (*Par.*28.97-139). The order Bernard uses differs from both that of Gregory the Great, which Dante follows in the treatise, and that given by Dionysius, which Dante preferred to adopt for the poem. In all three cases, however, the point is not which angels have which rank, but the fact that their position in the hierarchy is a function of the degree of sublimity of their contemplative knowledge of God. In the *Commedia* and the sermon, the central doctrinal point is one and the same and is expressed in very similar terms, the correspondence sufficiently strong, despite the difference between Bernard's succinct and simple Latin and Beatrice's longer and more philosophically-informed Italian, as to suggest that Dante borrowed directly from Saint Bernard: referring to the angels, Beatrice tells the pilgrim that "tutti hanno diletto / quanto la sua veduta si profonda / nel vero in che si queta ogne intelletto" (*Par.* 28.106-108), just as the abbot sums up by telling his audience that "Hi ergo omnes, prout capiunt, diligunt" ("All these [spirits] love [God] according to the degree to which they know [Him]."⁸⁸

However, Bernard does not go on, as Beatrice does, to make the further point that, since the angels' love of God is a function of their knowledge, and not vice-versa, it follows that knowing, rather than loving, is the foundation of beatitude. He does have further comment in mind, but it would appear that some overly-mortified latecomers have insinuated themselves into the audience, to which he responds by turning the lesson that ardour flows from knowledge into a reproof against those who appear to have slept late because they have taken vigils too far (recalling, perhaps, the extreme asceticism of his

ac spirituali materia, mentes vestras longitudine sermonis oneremus" (*Sermones de diversis* 23.7, *PL* 183.603).

⁸⁷ "But we must reserve the consideration of this greatest of sacraments for another day, for the subject merits a sermon of its own and today's has already become rather long" ("Sed necesse est altissimi hujus sacramenti considerationem diei alteri reservare: digna est enim proprio sermone materia, praesertim quod in longum jam hodiernus sermo processerit" (*In Adventu Domini* 1.11, *PL* 183.40).

⁸⁸ *SC* 19.7, *PL* 183.865.

youth, and its consequences for his health). After warning them of the dangers of excessively ardent zeal, he ends the sermon so that they can catch up on their sleep:

This spiritual discourse is, in fact, indirectly aimed at those of you who have just come. It reproves the immoderate enthusiasm, the obstinately excessive fervour, which we have so frequently tried to repress. The common rule of life is not good enough for you. It is not enough for you to regulate your fasts and your solemn vigils by the rule which has been given, nor by the measure we have determined regarding clothing and food; you prefer your own private rule to the common one . . . On account of which I wish to give you some rules which should be observed by anyone who loves God. But since this sermon must end now, I will attempt to explain them tomorrow, if God gives me life and leisure to speak to you. For then we shall assemble refreshed by the nocturnal repose of the senses, and, above all, made more keen, by the introductory prayer, to hear the discourse on love, in dependence on our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be the honour and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.⁸⁹

In Sermon 63, on the other hand, Bernard digresses from his theme in order to praise the novices for their keen adherence to the rule, for the austerity which is evident in their mortified countenances, but warns them against the ease with which one can fall into slackness and thence into total degradation, returning to the theme, only to abandon it after a few words, concluding “but I will not deal with that in this sermon, lest I tire you, and so that our devotion will remain zealous”⁹⁰ In the closure of the fifth in the series, he is also aware that a sermon should not exceed its proper limits:

“But, truly, if I tried to include in this sermon all of the things that come to mind on this, it would exceed the proper bounds, and would perhaps also

⁸⁹ “Vel certe magis ex obliquo vos, qui nuper venistis, tangit spiritualis sermo; vestram illam, quam et nos frequenter reprimere conati sumus, minus discretam vehementiam, imo intemperantiam prorsus nimium obstinatam redarguens. Non vultis esse communi contenti vita. Non sufficit vobis regulare jejunium, non solemnes vigiliae, non imposta disciplina, non mensura, quam vobis partimur in vestimentis et alimentis; privata praefertis communibus . . . Quamobrem ego cogito modos quosdam tradere vobis, quos operae pretium est Deum diligentibus observare. Sed quia hic sermo finem desiderat, cras eos, si Deus vitam mihi et otium, quod nunc habemus ad disserendum, servaverit, explicare conabor. Tunc enim recreatis nocturna quiete sensibus, et, quod est praecipuum, oratione praemissa alacriores, ut justum est, ad sermonem de dilectione conveniemus, praestante Domino nostro Jesu Christo, cui honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen” (*SC* 19.7, coll. 866-67).

⁹⁰ “non sane sermone isto ut fastidio consulamus, et nostrae devotionis alacritas perpetuetur . . .” (*SC* 63.7, col. 1083).

overtax the strength of some of you. I therefore reserve the rest for the beginning of another sermon”⁹¹

Bernard twice ends by expressing his displeasure at being unable to finish because he is called away to other duties,⁹² and once, promising to continue the discussion of the kiss of the Bride the next day, because the time at which the rule urges the community to manual labour has come.⁹³ More frequently, however, his concern is simply that the sermon is getting rather long:

I keep saying the same thing, to make it clearer. But perhaps it will be better to defer until tomorrow, since the brief time left for this sermon does not allow me to finish.⁹⁴

But the time is already getting rather late, and the sermon should end now.⁹⁵

This would be the time to fulfil the promise I recall having made long ago, to tell you about the perfume of the Bridegroom, were it not that the length this sermon has reached forbids it. I will therefore defer it; and, in any case, the greatness of the subject does not allow it to be confined within brief limits.⁹⁶

Truly, this sermon is getting rather long, and the subject is important, containing great truths that cannot be explained in a few words, so that it seems that I must break off rather than finish. But, since the subject is

⁹¹ “Verum si cuncta, quae in hoc loco dicenda occurrunt, praesenti volumus sermone concludere, sermo modum excedet, et vires forsitan aliquorum: propterea quae restant, sub alio servemus absolvenda principio” (SC 5.10, col. 803).

⁹² “Brethren, it is good to be here, but the evil of the day calls us. Those who have just now announced the arrival of guests force me to break off rather than conclude my sermon” (“Fratres, bonum est nos hic esse; sed ecce advocat nos diei malitia. His siquidem, qui modo supervenisse nuntiantur, gratum cogunt rumpere magis quam finire sermonem,” SC 3.6, col. 796), “But see, I must unfortunately make an end where there was no end. I am called to another matter, one to which it is an unworthy thing that this should have to give way” (“Sed ecce, quod non laudamus, finis indicatur, ubi non erat finis. Evocamur in materiam alteram, et cui hanc cedere indignum,” SC 76.10, col. 1155).

⁹³ “But the hour has come at which poverty and the rule call us to manual labour. Tomorrow we will continue in the name of the Lord what we have begun” (“Sed praeterit hora, qua nos exire urget ad opera manuum et paupertas et institutio regularis. Cras in nomine Domini quod coeperamus prosequemur,” SC 1.12, col. 789).

⁹⁴ “Dico autem idem latius, ut planius fiat. Sed forte quia finiendi jam sermonis angustia non admittit, consilii magis est ut in crastinum differamus” (SC 4.5, col. 798).

⁹⁵ “Hora siquidem jam multum ascendit, et serminis urget ad finem” (SC 18.5, col. 861).

⁹⁶ “Tempus esset ut persolverem quod de unguentis sponsi longe supra promississe me memini, si non hujus sermonis longitudo vetaret. Differo ergo: nam et materiae dignitas arctari molesta brevitate non patitur” (SC 21.11, col. 877).

suspended, your memory must be alert, so that we can pick up and continue from where we left off.⁹⁷

But I will save this for the beginning of another sermon, lest I restrict to brief limits that which should be considered at length.⁹⁸

Let me break off this sermon, since it can't be finished now, and it would be beyond measure if I were to include in this one sermon all that remains to be said about the verse I have taken up. I therefore reserve what is left for the beginning of the next.⁹⁹

Since I have now spoken rather too long, the day has already come to an end, and we must unwillingly withdraw from these lilies.¹⁰⁰

But it is perhaps better to save that for the beginning of another sermon, so that I do not confine an important matter to the narrow bounds of one on the point of ending. And so, if you approve, I will make an end before the end, so that we may assemble in good time tomorrow.¹⁰¹

But of all the instances of the seemingly artless art with which the great preacher makes an end where there was no end, rather like a “buon sartore / che com' elli ha del panno fa la gonna” (*Par.* 32.140-41), perhaps the most interesting are those in the sequence comprising Sermons 35 to 38, since those sermons deal with conversion and the “region of unlikeness” in a manner that resonates very powerfully with the spiritual drama of the *Commedia's* prologue scene.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ “Verum sermo in longum pergit, quoniam locus amplius est et grandia continens, et non explicabitur paucis; atque hac neessitate videtur mihi jam rumpendus potius quam finiendus. Oportet autem, ut, quoniam materia pendet, memoria vigilet; quatenus ubi pausatam erit, inde mox resumatur et pertractetur” (*SC* 31.10, col. 945).

⁹⁸ “Verum hoc quoque alteri servabo principio, nec brevitate arctabo ea quae diligentiam desiderantia sunt” (*SC* 55.4, col. 1046).

⁹⁹ “Rumpamus sermonem, nec enim potest finiri modo; ne sit sine modo, si cuncta quae adhuc ex proposito capitulo restant, uno isto velimus sermone complecti. Ergo quod superest servemus principio alteri” (*SC* 61.8, col. 1071).

¹⁰⁰ “Jam enim disputante me longius, inclinata est dies, dum inviti abstrahimur ab his liliis” (*SC* 71.14, col. 1123).

¹⁰¹ “Nisi forte id melius servamus in aliud sermonis principium, ne rem bonam coarctemus inter angustias hujus jam prope modum finiendi. Et si probatis, facio finem etiam ante finem, ut famelici tempestive conveniamus cras” (*SC* 83.6, col. 1184). Bernard closes in a similar way in *SC* 11.8, 27.15, 34.5 and 41.6. He makes very brief statements to the effect that it is time to make an end in *SC* 2.9 and 69.8.

¹⁰² It resonates with that drama much more evidently and richly than do the passages from Augustine's *Confessions* which John Freccero sees as the model for the events described in the prologue scene. My application of Bernard's ideas on the *regio dissimilitudinis* to that scene accords with what I have already said in Chapter 3, and therefore differs significantly from Freccero's views on the relevance of this motif to the opening of the poem. See Freccero, “The Prologue Scene,” in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, 1-28.

The condition of being in the *regio dissimilitudinis* or *regio umbrae mortis* is for Bernard the antithesis both of humanity's lost pre-lapsarian innocence in the Earthly Paradise (the *regio similitudinis* where man was created in the image of God) and of the fullest possible restoration of that likeness in the cloister as the safe haven for the ascetic-penitential and contemplative practices of the brotherhood (the *paradisus claustralis* or *regio vitae et veritatis*). The Fall was a perverse "conversion," a descent "from likeness to unlikeness," from the freedom of the will that gives peace and life to the enslavement that brings sin, toil, misery and death. There are three "regions of the Lord" in the next life, three spiritual "places" or states, i.e., Hell, Purgatory and the Heavenly Paradise. In this world, the original innocence of Eden having been lost, there are but two: the Christian life as most fully realised in the *paradisus claustralis*, and the "region of unlikeness" ("unlikeness" to God) and of the shadow of death, which is nothing other than the state of the miserable sinner who deserves damnation.¹⁰³

In *Sermones in Cantica* 35-38, Bernard discusses the two kinds of ignorance that each lead to damnation, correlatives of the two kinds of knowledge that are essential for salvation. In the first sermon of the sequence, he begins with ignorance of self, which causes one to commit the sin of pride, the sin of Adam, who forgot that he was only dust and ashes and so lost paradise and his likeness to God. This same ignorance, the preacher says, causes the holy man to be "expelled" from his quasi-paradise, to pass from the life of the spirit, the inward repose of the mind and the enjoyment of the goods of the soul (prime among them the contemplative experience of the "presence of God," which is one with "adhering to" and "seeing the face" of God) to the life of the flesh and the desire for earthly goods, with its anxieties and its pandering to the needs of the body. Bernard then starts on the second fatal ignorance, ignorance of God, only to think better of it, deciding that a full treatment of his dual theme must await another day: "But not now," he says, "lest, tired as you are, and without the customary prayer as a preface, either I should treat the matter less diligently that it deserves, or you should hear without giving the proper attention things that ought to be received with ardent desire."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ *Sermones de diversis* 42.2-4, *PL* 183.661-663.

¹⁰⁴ "Non modo tamen; ne fatigati, et non praemissa ex more oratione, aut ego minus diligenter rem necessariam prosequar, aut vos minus attente, quae nonnisi magno suscipienda sunt desiderio, audiat" (*SC* 35.9, col 966).

He opens the following sermon by saying that it will fulfil his promise to complete the discussion of the dangerous twofold ignorance. The basic distinction to be made is that between the kind of knowledge that produces vainglorious self-importance and swelling pride (thence damnation) and the kind that engenders humility, sadness and tears (in response to which we receive the grace by which we are saved):

I am certain you would prefer that which saddens to that which puffs up, for the latter pretends to health, while the former expresses a need. Anyone who asks is on the way to gaining salvation, since 'every one that asketh, receiveth.' For he who heals the broken-hearted detests the proud, as Wisdom says: '*God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble.*'¹⁰⁵

It is in this context that one of the authentically Bernardan references to time arises:

For what does 'to be wise unto sobriety' mean? It means vigilantly noting which kind of knowledge is primary and most important, because 'the time is short.' All knowledge that is founded on truth is good in itself, but you who hasten 'with fear and trembling' to 'work out your salvation' on account of the brevity of time must be careful to know first and foremost that which you perceive to be most closely concerned with your salvation.¹⁰⁶

The beginning of salvation is self-knowledge, the taking stock, in the clear light of truth, of one's condition as a miserable sinner, for this brings humility, the only secure foundation of one's "spiritual edifice." In the *Confessions*, Augustine says "and I found myself far from you in the region of unlikeness," "et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis."¹⁰⁷ Bernard makes his point by echoing Augustine and reinforces it by

¹⁰⁵ "Sed non dubito quin dolentem tumentis praeferas, quia sanitatem, quam tumor simulat, dolor postulat. Qui autem postulat, propinquat saluti; quoniam qui petit accipit [Luke 11.10]. Denique qui sanat contritos corde, exsecratur inflatos, dicente Sapientia, quia *Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam* [Jas. 4.6, cf. Prov. 3.34]" (SC 36.2, col. 968).

¹⁰⁶ "Quid est enim *sapere ad sobrietatem* [Rom. 12.3]? Vigilantissime observare quid scire magis priusque oporteat. Tempus enim breve est. Est autem, quod in se est, omnia scientia bona, quae tamen veritate subnixa sit: sed tu qui cum timore et tremore tuam ipsius operari salutem [cf. Phil. 2.12] pro temporis brevitate festinas, ea scire potius ampliusque curato quae senseris viciniore salutis" (SC 36.2, PL 183.968).

¹⁰⁷ *Confessionum* 7.10.16.

repeating *se invenire*, which is precisely the *ritrovarsi* of “mi ritrovai per una selva oscura” (*Inf.* 1.2):

The soul can find nothing more effective and suitable for humbling herself than when she discovers herself truly. But let her not dissimulate: let there be no guile in the spirit, let her stand before herself as she really is, and not turn away. For understanding herself thus in the clear light of truth she will find herself in the region of unlikeness, groaning from the depths of the misery she can no longer conceal from herself, and will cry out to the Lord with the prophet: ‘in thy truth thou hast humbled me.’¹⁰⁸

This self-discovery is the soul’s realisation that she carries the burden of sin, that she is weighed down by the mortal body and troubled by the anxieties of earthly cares, prey to the corrupting influence of sensual desires, blind, weak, infirm, confused and impeded by a multitude of errors and difficulties, exposed to a thousand dangers, trembling amid a thousand fears, and inclined to vice rather than to virtue. The value of such knowledge lies in the fact that it crushes pride, bringing humility and a cry for divine aid, the cry of conversion. To make this point, Bernard quotes the second part of Ps. 40.5, “O Lord, be thou merciful to me. Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee” (“Domine miserere mei sana animam meam quoniam peccavi tibi”). I have already argued, in Chapter 3, that the *ritrovarsi* and the “*Miserere di me*” of the prologue scene represent successful conversions:

Will she not rather be ‘converted in her anguish, while the thorn is fastened’? She will be converted to tears, I say, she will be converted to lamentations and groans, she will be converted to the Lord, and cry out in humility: ‘Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee’. And having converted to the Lord she will receive consolation, because he is the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ “Porro ad se humiliandum nihil anima invenire vivacius seu accomodatius potest, quam si se in veritate invenerit: tantum non dissimulet, non sit in spiritu ejus dolus, statuat se ante faciem suam, nec se a se avertere abducatur. Nonne se ita intuens clara luce veritatis, inveniet se in regione dissimilitudinis: et suspirans misera, quam jam latere non poterit quod vere misera sit, nonne cum Propheta clamabit ad Dominum: *In veritate tua humiliasti me* [Ps. 118.75]?” (*SC* 36.5, col. 969-70).

¹⁰⁹ “Nonne magis convertetur in aerumna sua, dum configitur spina [Ps. 31.4]? Convertetur, inquam, ad lacrymas, convertetur ad planctus et gemitus, convertetur ad Dominum, et in humilitate clamabit: *Sana animam meam, qui peccavi tibi* [Ps. 40.5]. Porro conversa as Dominum recipiet consolationem, quia Pater est misericordiarum, et Deus totius consolationis” (*SC* 36.5, col. 970).

But knowing oneself is really a step to the other crucial kind of knowledge, a “vision of God” that brings about the process of restoring the soul’s divine likeness. This is the knowledge of God as he really is, good and compassionate and merciful, listening to our prayers, for it is in response to the sinful soul’s humbled recognition of her miserable state that God reveals himself to her as such for her good and she cries out for aid and he in turn responds. Bernard therefore insists that both kinds of knowledge are necessary for salvation, the first because it brings the fear of God and humility. As for the second, he gives all the appearance of intending to discuss it, only to then change his mind because some in the audience are nodding (for the wrong reason):

But listen to the rest. Or should I rather break off here because of those who are sleepy? I expected to complete my promised discourse on the two kinds of ignorance in a single sermon, and I would do so, except that it would seem excessively long to those of you whom it wearies. For I see some of you yawning, and some drowsing.¹¹⁰

Bernard says that some of the culprits can be excused because of the length of the preceding night’s vigils, but not those who slept then as they do now. Having shamed them enough, he concludes:

Reason demands that this discourse continue. However, out of charity to the offenders, I will interrupt it here, although the discussion remains incomplete, making an end where there was no end. On account of this indulgence, may they glorify with all of us the Bridegroom of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God above all things, blessed for ever and ever. Amen.”¹¹¹

The next day’s sermon begins with a reminder, not only of the general principles of the theme of knowledge and ignorance, but also of the need to stay awake. Bernard is

¹¹⁰ “Sed attendite caetera. An potius pausandum est nobis propter somnolentos? Putabam me uno sermone implere quod promisi de duplici ignorantia; et fecessim, nisi fastidiosis longior videretur. Quosdam siquidem oscitantes, quosdam et dormitantes intueor” (SC 36.7, col. 970).

¹¹¹ “Quod continuandum ratio exigebat, eorum charitate, pendente licet disputatione, partimur, facientes finem, ubi non erat finis. Ipsi vero super sibi facta indulgentia nobiscum glorificent Sponsum Ecclesiae, Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum, qui est super omnia Deus benedictus in saecula. Amen” (SC 36.7, col. 971).

keen to tell his audience that his intention is not to disparage secular learning but to stress that the study of letters and philosophy should only be engaged in after we have secured our salvation, with the knowledge that saves, by first “sowing” righteousness and then “reaping” the firm hope of eternal life. In response to the sinner’s cry for aid God’s mercy and grace give the forgiveness of sins, sanctification or holiness, and the hope of eternal life (“remissionem, sanctificationem, spem vitae”). We sow righteousness by continuing to cooperate with God’s grace “after the early period of conversion, with its bitterness and tears,” corroborating the forgiveness of sins by leading a holier life, inspired by the grace received, through charitable good works, the discipline of prayers and fasting, acts of penance and tearful petitions to heaven. These are the seeds of the “first-fruits of the Spirit” that we then reap and that make us happy in this life, namely, the secure hope of eternal life, of the final triumph to come at the resurrection of the body on the last day.¹¹² Bernard says that ignorance of self is the beginning of every sin, since it leads to pride, the sin of the Devil and the origin of all sin, while self-knowledge leads to the fear of God that is the beginning of all wisdom and the humility that brings grace. Yet again, he makes a start on ignorance of God (this time with reference to the fact that it leads to despair, the consummation of all sin), only to discover that he must make an end:

What the ignorance of God leads to we will consider on another occasion. The shortness of the time does not permit it now, since we gathered rather late today. Let it suffice for now that you have been warned not to be ignorant of yourselves, not just by my sermon but by the goodness of the Bridegroom of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ who is God, blessed for ever and ever. Amen.¹¹³

¹¹² *SC* 37.1-5, coll. 971-73.

¹¹³ “Quid etiam Dei parturiat ignorantia, alias videbimus. Nam horae brevitatis non permittit, quoniam hodie tarde convenimus. Itaque sufficiat unumquemque modo, ne se ipsum ignoret, admonitum esse, non solum sermone nostro, sed ipsius quoque dignatione sponsi Ecclesiae Jesu Christi Domini nostri, qui est super omnia Deus benedictus in saecula. Amen” (*SC* 37.7, col. 974).

v The *datum tempus* and its happy ending

As we have seen, a good deal of critical attention has been given to the *Commedia's* intense and complex engagement with temporality—the chronological, historical, philosophical, psychological, and spiritual implications of its numerous references to time, including the many (above all in the *Purgatorio*) which directly reflect the religious accountancy of time on which the historical Bernard as Dante knew him was the chief patristic *auctoritas*. Le Goff writes that “the ancient, eternal theme of time’s flight was present in Christianity, where it was at once exacerbated and assuaged by transformation into fear of eternal death and stimulus to prepare for salvation,”¹¹⁴ and the fact that what the French writer says of Christianity is also true of the *Commedia* has not gone unnoticed in Dante studies,¹¹⁵ even if scholars have been unaware of Bernard’s authority on the matter and of his special qualification to deliver just such a last word on time as that which closes the protagonist’s apocalyptic-eschatological “vision” of the providentially-ordered and teleological structure of time (*Par.* 32.1-138) and which, if my interpretation of *assonnare* is correct, sets the final seal on the poem’s assuaging of the anxiety it first exacerbates. For if that interpretation is indeed valid, then the proverbial and emblematic *tempus fugit*, when it finally appears in the poem, is not the usual reminder of time’s inexorable rush to death and judgment in which the time that is flying is the limited duration allocated by Providence to the individual’s life-span (or to the whole of history). It is, instead, a joyful anticipation of the successful conclusion, in its mystic *finis*, of Dante’s prophetic “fatale andare,” his personal participation in the temporal unfolding of the divine plan, and the time which is flying is the time devoted to sending him to the “sleep of glory” so that he may give prophetic witness to that *finis* and *beatitudo*. The *tempo che t’assonna*, on this reading, is no longer the time of Augustine’s “cursus ad mortem,” but the providentially *datum tempus* of *Aeneid* 6, one of the many facets of that primary classical model which are echoed in the *Commedia*, but transposed to a Christian and, in this last reference, a wholly positive and conclusive meaning.

¹¹⁴ Le Goff, “Labour Time,” 50.

¹¹⁵ See especially Blasucci, “La dimensione del tempo,” Chiampì, “Augustinian ‘Distentio,’” Fido, “Dall’antipurgatorio al Paradiso Terrestre,” Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 334-55, Masciandaro, *La problematica del tempo*, Quinones, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Time*, 28-105, Schnapp, “Introduction to *Purgatorio*,” and Took, *Dante’s Phenomenology of Being*, 34-47.

Virgil tells us at the outset that his hero was a man devoted to his mission, a man who had accepted his destiny, which was to endure the hardships of a journey from Troy to Italy in order to found the city and people of Rome, whose fated time had come (*Aeneid* 1.1-32). The same destiny decrees the destruction of Aeneas's original city and people at a given point in time ("Troy's last day, its ineluctable hour, has now come," "venit summa dies et ineluctabile tempus / Dardaniae," 2.324-5), and the point of death of each individual ("Every man's day is fixed, the time of all human lives is brief and irrecoverable. . . . Turnus, too, is called by fate, and has reached the given limit of his years," "stat sua cuique dies, breve et inreparabile tempus / omnibus est vitae. . . . etiam sua Turnum / fata vocant metasque dati pervenit ad aevi," 10.467-72). The divine will of Jupiter makes one exception to the principal that peoples, just like individuals, must die, namely, the Romans ("for them I set no boundaries or times, but give the gift of empire without end," "his ergo nec metas nec tempora pono: / imperium sine fine dedi," 1.278-9). It is when he encounters Anchises in Elysium during the otherworld journey of Book 6 that Aeneas learns the full import of his mission, for the old man's prophetic review of the procession of great Romans who are yet to be born reveals that Aeneas's destiny, with all the wars and toils that are to precede his glorious triumph, is a part of the providential process which is the fated history of the Romans, whose mission is to conquer and justly govern the whole world (6.752-892). In the parallel meeting in the *Commedia* (*Par.* 15-17), Cacciaguida prophesies the exile and other misfortunes that will befall Dante as he plays his role in the divine plan for bringing about the restoration of the Empire. This role, according to Cacciaguida (who is not at all averse to *sermo humilis*), is simply to tell the truth about God's will as it has been revealed in his prophetic journey or "vision, whatever the consequences: "Ma nondimen, rimossa ogne menzogna, / tutta tua vision fa manifesta; / e lascia pur grattar dov' è la rognà" (*Par.* 17.127-9).

Aeneas's journey to the underworld, in which the divine plan and the hero's role in that plan are revealed, is itself a part of the eternal design, and, like every other part, it has determined temporal limits. Time-pressure in *Aeneid* 6 is the pressure to choose to act as one is intended to act, the stimulus to complete the providential mission one has undertaken (*susceptum munus*) according to the temporal limits which define it and which manifest the eternal will (*datum tempus*). The Sibyl's first words to Aeneas, whom

she finds admiring the carved doors of the temple of Apollo, are “this time requires no lingering over such sights” (“non hoc ista sibi tempus spectacula poscit,” 6.37). At her shrine, before falling into a trance, she cries out “it is time to ask your destinies” (“poscere fata / tempus,” vv. 45-6). Aeneas stops to listen to the tragic story of Deiphobus, but, after a traditional “epic” time-reference of the elaborate astronomical kind (so abundant in the *Commedia*), the Sibyl hurries him on, as if “the allotted time” or *datum tempus* could be wasted:

At this point in their conversation Aurora, carried through her celestial course on her rosy chariot, had already crossed the meridian, and they might have spent the whole allotted time in this way, except that the Sibyl briefly said: ‘Night is falling, Aeneas, yet we spend the hours in lamentation.’

hac vice sermonum roseis Aurora quadrigis
iam medium aetherio cursu traiecerat axem;
et fors omne datum traherent per talia tempus,
sed comes admonuit breviterque adfata Sibylla est:
‘nox ruit, Aenea; nos flendo ducimus horas.’ (Aeneid 6.535-39)

She must do so again later, as if “the task undertaken,” the *susceptum munus*, might never be completed: “but come, be on your way, and finish the task you have undertaken, let us hurry” (“sed iam age, carpe viam, et susceptum perfice munus. / acceleramus,” 6.629-30). The “value of time” which must not be wasted is the value of the particular period of time within which the hero is to realise his destiny by completing the otherworld journey he has undertaken, a crucial and defining phase in his whole life’s journey. To waste the *datum tempus* is to fail to complete the *susceptum munus*, and vice-versa. Whichever way one looks at it, there is the paradox of human free will coexisting with divine Providence: nothing can impede the realisation of the divine intention, and yet its human instrument must freely intend to play his part (stimulated by some time-pressure from his guide). Although *Par.* 32.139 is the *Commedia*’s last reference both to time as such and to the pressure of time, it is more specifically the last in a series of invocations of the rapid passage of Dante’s *datum tempus*, deliberate echoes of this theme in *Aeneid* 6.

In the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* it is Virgil who plays the Sibyl to the protagonist’s Aeneas:

- ‘Andiam, ché la via lunga ne sospigne.’ (Inf. 4.22)
- ‘Or discendiamo omai a maggior pieta;
già ogne stella cade che saliva
quand’io mi mossi, e ’l troppo star si vieta.’ (Inf. 7.97-99)
- ‘Ma seguimi oramai che ’l gir mi piace;
ché i Pesci guizzan su per l’orizzonta,
e ’l Carro tutto sovra ’l Coro giace, . . .’ (Inf. 11.112-14)
- Poi disse: ‘Omai è tempo da scostarsi
dal bosco; fa che di retro a me vegne: . . .’ (Inf. 14. 139-41)
- ‘Ma vienne omai, ché già . . .’ (Inf. 20.124)
- ‘Omai convien che tu così ti spoltre, . . .’ (Inf. 24.46)
- ‘E già la luna è sotto i nostri piedi;
lo tempo è poco omai che n’è concesso,
e altro è da veder che tu non vedi.’ (Inf. 29.10-12)
- ‘Ma la notte risurge, e oramai
è da partir, ché tutto avem veduto.’ (Inf. 34.68-9)
- ‘Perché l’animo tuo tanto s’impiglia,’
disse ’l maestro, ‘che l’andare allenti?’ (Purg. 5.10-11)
- ‘non è più tempo di gir sì sospeso. . . .
pensa che questo dì mai non raggiorna!’ (Purg. 12.78-84)
- lo più che padre mi dicea: ‘Figliuole,
viene oramai, ché ’l tempo che n’è imposto
più utilmente compartir si vuole.’ (Purg. 23.4-6)

I have selected excerpts as the most evident examples of the *datum tempus* theme in the first two canticas. They are, however, interwoven with many other allusions to the principle that “perder tempo a chi più sa più spiace” (Purg. 3.78), particularly in the *Purgatorio*, where that principle applies to the protagonist with respect to the time-limits of his prophetic “vision,” but also to all the living vis-a-vis the urgent need to convert before we are overtaken by death, and to the living and the dead alike with respect to the purging away of the debt of temporal punishment that remains after the forgiveness of

sins and the remission of the debt of eternal punishment, a purification that is a precondition for access to the beatific vision and that must be carried out in Purgatory after death if it has not been achieved in this life (which is why “*l tempo è caro in questo regno,*” *Purg.* 24.91-2).¹¹⁶

There are just three references to the allocated time in the *Paradiso*. They come towards the end, are very clearly linked, and indicate that the time in question, be it that of the celestial ascent or of the whole journey, is about to end in its *ultimus finis* (cf. “*Tu se’ sì presso a l’ultima salute,*” *Par.* 22.124). The speakers are Saint Benedict, Beatrice, and Bernard, respectively:

‘Ma perché tu, aspettando, non tarde
a l’alto fine, io ti farò risposta
pur al pensier, da che sì ti riguarde.’ (Par. 22.34-6)

‘Ma perché siam digressi assai, ritorci
li occhi oramai verso la dritta strada,
sì che la via col tempo sì raccorci.’ (Par. 29.127-29)

‘Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna,
qui farem punto, come buon sartore
che com’ elli ha del panno fa la gonna.’ (Par. 32.139-41)

As I have already argued at necessarily great length, the “ultima salute,” “alto fine” and metaphorical *sonno* are one and the same, namely, the final mystic goal and successful conclusion of Dante’s prophetic *viaggio-visione*—or rather, from the perspective of *Par.* 32.139, of its *datum tempus*, “il tempo” (as Bernard describes it to his charge) “che t’assonna.”

In the third of the above tercets, the expert on the Christian application of the classical theme of time’s flight brings that theme and the whole subject of time to a happy ending with an artful yet humble *clausio* or *finis* of the kind he was wont to use in life. The historically real saint as the poet and his contemporaries knew him was the authority on the redemptive value of time, as well as the eloquent preacher who ended many of his

¹¹⁶ *Inf.* 11.10-15, 13.79-81, 34.94-96, *Purg.* 2.67-75, 91-124, 3.1-12, 136-141, 4.130-39, 6.25-57, 12.73-87, 13.1-27, 15.79-81, 133-38, 17.61-3, 82-4, 85-87, 88-90, 18.91-117, 20. 34-39, 23.1-3, 76-90, 24.76-93, 25.1-18, 33.52-4. See also *Par.* 16.1-9, 73-87, 24.1-9, 26.1-6.

Sermones in Cantica just where he thought they should end (before turning to a closing prayer, the *clausio* proper), but as if the constraints of time and/or his audience's sleepiness had obliged him to make an end where there was no end. In the *Commedia*, the fictitiously real spirit of that same saint closes the "parole sante" with which he manages the pilgrim's apocalyptic-eschatological vision of the total shape and ultimate end of time by reminding Dante of the moment of crisis and salvation that was the beginning of the journey's *datum tempus* (before turning to his closing words, the "santa orazione"), but as if he has ironically been forced to cut short his discourse on God's providential governance of time because he suddenly realises that he has been less than provident in this respect, as if he is forced to stop at an arbitrary point dictated by the fact that the time allocated by Providence to sending the pilgrim to the "sleep" of glory is about to reach that goal. In fact, Bernard's verbal art, which is of course Dante's, actually exemplifies the providential use of time which is its subject.

It does so in a manner that transcends and transforms Virgil's "parola ornata" with respect to both form and meaning, since the difference between the *tempus fugit* of the greatest of pagan poets and the fictional saint's "'l tempo fugge"—between Virgil's "sed fugit interea, fugit inreparabile tempus" and our Christian poet's "Ma perché 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna, / qui farem punto, come buon sartore / che com' elli ha del panno fa la gonna"—is the difference between, on the one hand, the *sublimitas* of a classical (and "classic") high-style reminder of the brevity of the time allocated by Providence to each individual life span and of the potential imminence of its end in death and, on the other, the *sublimitas-humilitas* of Christian *sermo humilis* anticipating the successful and imminent closure of the protagonist's *datum tempus* in its mystic goal, his foretaste of eternal life.

Conclusion

It may appear that this study has interrogated *Paradiso* 32.139 to within an inch of its life, attempting to extract (or to impose) far more meaning than this or any other single verse can possibly support. With respect to the problem as it has previously been perceived, however, it has simply been argued that the literal sense of “perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna” is “because the time that is sending you to sleep is flying,” where “is sending you to sleep” is a metaphor, based on the figure of *somnus gloriae*, the “sleep” being the protagonist’s literal mystical experience of eternal glory at the end of the journey, and where “the time” is the period of time allocated to the prophetic *viaggio-visione*, characterised as having that properly mystic vision or “sleep” as its teleological goal. An adequate paraphrase might therefore be “because the time allocated by divine Providence to sending you to the ‘sleep’ of glory is flying to that end.”

In itself, this is a relatively uncomplicated solution to a minor crux; but the investigation of the text in the light of what the historical Saint Bernard and others had to say about mystic sleep and the flight of time has resulted in more substantial claims regarding the *Commedia*’s mysticism, its engagement with temporality, and its representation of the abbot of Clairvaux. Specifically, it has been argued that the protagonist’s sleep in the Earthly Paradise represents an important mystic “ultimum” that has gone unnoticed, and that the author exploits aspects of the historical Bernard’s reputation and writings to bring teleological closure to the theme of time. More generally, it has emerged that the *Commedia*’s mysticism, its concern with time, and the narrative-poetic role of the fictional saint are functions of the poem’s Christian teleology or eschatology, and therefore of its prophetic message. *Paradiso* 32.139 does not tell us all of this; but it is, when properly understood and placed in context, a very revealing point of intersection between time, *telos* and mysticism.

The major works of the second half of Dante’s creative life—the *Convivio*, the *Monarchia*, and the *Commedia*—are all three founded on a profoundly teleological world view. In Dante’s universe, all things are directed by divine Providence to the attainment of their proper “end,” the final goal or purpose that befits and perfects their nature as a particular kind of being. They are impelled towards this goal by an innate impulse or

“desire,” and they reach it by some determinate process or means, the “way” or “road” that leads to the end they seek. For living things, the ultimate end is the activity that fully realises the nature God gave them and by which they play their intended roles in the hierarchical cosmic order and the temporal unfolding of the eternal design. The final end of many plants, for example, is to bear fruit, and they will not do so unless they develop according to the proper natural process. In the case of human beings, the ultimate end or “fruit” of life is called “happiness,” since happiness is the thing we all hunger for and seek in so many different ways and without which we cannot attain the peace of satisfied desire. There is therefore nothing of greater importance than knowing what our end and happiness actually consists in, what the best means or path to that goal might be, and whom we should trust to guide us along the way (key issues in the two prose treatises and the *Commedia*); and Virgil can therefore give his charge no greater stimulus to make the last part of the climb to the Earthly Paradise than the promise that “Quel dolce pome che per tanti rami / cercando va la cura de’ mortali, / oggi porrà in pace le tue fami” (*Purg.* 27.115-17).

In the *Convivio*, Dante’s main concern is the capacity of his lady *Filosofia* to give temporal, natural happiness, the kind that can be known and attained in this life by means of a person’s natural human powers or virtues, both moral and intellectual, and which is the proper domain of philosophy (more specifically, of Aristotelian ethics). It consists in the “active” happiness of living a morally good life and in the superior “contemplative” beatitude of the intellectual contemplation of the highest truths (the highest of which is God in so far as he can be known indirectly via his effects). Despite Augustine’s views, the existence of this “happiness of the philosophers” as a real end within the order of nature was often acknowledged by Aquinas, who just as often stressed its imperfection relative to the one transcendent and absolutely perfect Last End of Christianity. This supernaturally-revealed beatitude, the province of theology, is the eternal contemplative bliss of the next life, unattainable without the aid of grace and consisting in the direct “beatific” vision of the divine essence, in knowing God as he really is and, as an inevitable consequence, loving him perfectly.¹ In the vernacular treatise, Dante goes to a

¹ On the Thomistic integration of Aristotle’s teleological and eudaemonistic ethics into Christian eschatology, see Georg Wieland, “Happiness: the perfection of man,” in *The Cambridge History of Later*

good deal of trouble to demonstrate that natural happiness is “perfect” in its way, but leaves us in no doubt about the absolute perfection and transcendent superiority of eternal bliss.² His ideas on the vital role of the Emperor with respect to the first of these goals (*Conv.* 4.4-5) return in the *Monarchia*, where we learn that the Pope has a similar task regarding the second kind of happiness.

Book 3 of the Latin work is devoted to the proposition that the authority of the Emperor derives directly from God, not through the Church. Close to its end (at *Mon.* 3.15.3-15), Dante supports his argument by saying that man alone has a twofold nature, mortal and immortal, and therefore “duo ultima” or ultimate goals. One is figured by the “earthly paradise.” It is the temporal *beatitudo huius vite* which consists in the operation of our natural human virtues, moral and intellectual, and it is reached by following the teachings of philosophy while putting those virtues into practice. The other final goal, represented by the celestial paradise, is the supernatural *beatitudo vite eterne* that consists in the enjoyment of the vision of God, and we reach it by following the divinely-revealed spiritual teachings of the faith while putting the theological virtues into practice. Further, God’s plan incorporates not only these ends and means, which sufficed until the Fall left man with the infirmity of sin, but two guides as remedies for this weakness (cf. 3.4.14). The most egregious aspect of this infirmity is human greed or “cupiditas,” for it turns us away from the ends and means. The remedy consists in the provision of the Emperor as guide to the temporal end and the Pope as guide to the eternal goal, each by the appropriate means. Since the happiness of this world is almost impossible to attain unless human greed is suppressed so that there is universal peace and freedom, the primary goal of the Emperor must be to bring about this universal disposition; and since the disposition of this world follows from that of the heavens, which is directly ordained by God’s Providence, so too is the provision of an Emperor.

Now, we have seen that there needs to be a re-evaluation of mysticism in the *Commedia*, one which gives due weight to a neglected structural nexus between mysticism and teleology, since students of the mystical dimension of the poem need to reckon with its representation of two properly mystic “ultima,” two supernatural

Medieval Philosophy, eds. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1982), 673-686.

² See especially *Convivio* 3.4.9-3.15.10 and 4.17.2-4.22.18.

contemplative “beatitudes” in which the divine is known with the utmost intimacy, two kinds of *visio Dei* in which God is “seen” in this life without the mediation of images or discursive reason. The first, exemplified by Paul’s rapture as the great mystics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries understood it, is the affective “vision” of mystic union with the Word. It should now be taken into account that this mystic goal is figured by the protagonist’s sleep in the Earthly Paradise, the *somnus gratiae* or *contemplationis* that is the summit of the Christian contemplative life in its imperfect beginning in this world. Potentially accessible to every believer but in practice attained rarely and briefly by a few, it is the supreme “return to Eden” and the most exalted foretaste of the perfection of the *vita contemplativa* in the next life which is normally to be had before death. The second mystic “ultimum” is in a sense that very perfection, the pilgrim’s unique imitation of Paul’s *raptus* as it was explained by Augustine and Aquinas. It is the transitory but otherwise perfect direct participation in the intuitive vision of the divine essence and of the Word made flesh as it is known by the separated souls of the blessed, the supernatural goal of the *Monarchia* and the ultimate mystic “end” of the poem—familiar to Dante scholars, even though Bernard’s fleeting anticipation of it as a participation in the *somnus gloriae* of the saints in heaven has gone unnoticed.

At the same time, as I have already suggested, these results require us to revisit one of the key sites of contention in the important debate which inspired Michele Barbi’s affirmation that the *Monarchia*’s doctrine of two distinct sets of goals, means and guides is the very foundation of the *Commedia*, Bruno Nardi’s declaration that no trace of the “duo ultima” of the treatise remains in the poem, and the more nuanced views of Étienne Gilson and Kenelm Foster.³ The broader dispute is concerned with nothing less than the fundamentals of how all of Dante’s major works should be understood, both individually and in relation to each other, and with what this tells us about Dante’s literary and intellectual development in response to the art, ideas and events of his time. The specific debate of itself goes to the core of the *Commedia*’s form and meaning, for it has to do with the degree of continuity or discontinuity between the twofold teleological scheme of the *Monarchia* and the structure and ideology of the poem. On the assumption that the arrival at the Earthly Paradise of the *Commedia* represents the attainment of the temporal,

³ See the discussion on pp. 131-32.

natural happiness of the *Monarchia*, scholars have disagreed about whether or not that happiness is an autonomous, ultimate *finis* in the poem as it is in the treatise, i.e., whether or not it is subordinated to the eternal, supernatural beatitude which is assumed to be the same in both texts. In other words, the same two ends are assumed to be the fundamental goals in both works, but the relationship between them is seen to be either unchanged, the temporal one having the same kind of relative autonomy in both of its manifestations (as Barbi and Gilson believe), or radically altered, the prophetic vision representing the earthly goal as wholly subordinate to the heavenly one (as Nardi and Foster argue). In fact, the *Commedia's* ultimate beatitudes go well beyond the *duos fines* of the *Monarchia*, for we have seen the extent to which it reaches out to the Last Judgment and the resurrection of the body, and we have discovered that the pilgrim's sleep in the Earthly Paradise signifies a supernatural and mystical "earthly beatitude" which goes unmentioned both in the treatise and in the debate about its relationship to the poem. Thus, whether we take it to be an autonomous *finis* or a mere stage along the way, we cannot simply equate Dante's complex fictional Eden with the earthly happiness of his theoretical "duo ultima."

Singleton's *Journey to Beatrice*, despite the validity of Mastrobuono's critique,⁴ has the merit of grappling with the complexity of the events in the Earthly Paradise and their relationship to the *Monarchia's* ideal scheme as does no other analysis of which I am aware. For the American scholar, the autonomous natural happiness of the treatise is of the active variety (i.e., moral goodness), and it becomes, in the poem, the "first conversion" or restoration of "natural justice" to which Virgil leads the protagonist by the light of reason. This is but a disposition for the reception of grace with Beatrice, the first, intermediate end of the journey. In this "second conversion" in the inner, sacred part of Eden, Beatrice as the light of grace elevates Dante's human nature to supernatural Christian earthly happiness, first active and then contemplative. This intermediate goal is in turn a necessary stage on the way to the one and only ultimate goal, the second *ultimum* of the treatise that is reached with Bernard, the elevation by the light of glory to the vision of God. For Singleton (101-38), the contemplative supernatural beatitude of

⁴ See pp. 103-08 of this study.

this life is represented by Dante's contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation in the biform shape of the griffin reflected in Beatrice's eyes (*Purg.* 31.121-129).

This moment certainly does evoke the contemplation of divine truth; but Singleton's view of the matter is undermined less by Mastrobuono's criticisms than by Peter Armour's argument that Dante is contemplating the divinely-revealed dual nature, not of Christ, but of the Roman Empire.⁵ This study has shown that there is, nonetheless, a Christian contemplative beatitude of this life in the Earthly Paradise, a "vision" of the Word made flesh, that of affective mystic union, signified by the slumber of *Purgatorio* 32. Virgil does not lead the pilgrim to the summit exactly as the Emperor should lead humanity to the enjoyment of the "fruit" of happiness in this life, for he does not get him there by the light of reason alone, but with the aid of grace. Nor does he understand the full import of his own words when he says "Quel dolce pome che per tanti rami / cercando va la cura de' mortali, / oggi porrà in pace le tue fami" (*Purg.* 27. 115-17). However many varieties of this-worldly beatitude Dante may experience in Eden, the most exalted turns out to be "de' fioretti del melo," a beginning or foretaste of the Spouse of the Song of Songs who, with his "pome" (the full heavenly vision of the Word), "li angeli fa ghiotti / e perpetüe nozze fa nel cielo" (*Purg.* 32.74-5).

Just as Virgil can promise Dante nothing more tempting than the "sweet fruit" of happiness, so there can be no situation more catastrophic for humanity as a whole than that which exists at the time of the journey, one in which good "flowers" produce only bad "fruit," nor a more comprehensive remedy than that which is imminent, for it will restore man's capacity to attain the "true fruit." After explaining that time itself and the movement of the lower spheres originate in and are measured by the diurnal motion of the ninth heaven, and that this motion and the positive influence it "rains" down on the earth in turn originates from the divine mind (*Par.* 27.106-20), Beatrice launches into an invective against the torrential "rain" of cupidity that follows from the total failure of leadership in the world, causing the human family to stray from the right path after good beginnings so that virtually all come to a bad end, for "Ben fiorisce ne li uomini il volere; / ma la pioggia continüa converte / in bozzacchioni le sosine vere" (vv. 121-41). Other than the image of rain, there seems to be no clear link between Beatrice's lesson on time

⁵ Peter Armour, *Dante's Griffin and the History of the World*, 170-72.

and her powerful invective (which is a virtual gloss on the universal meaning of the pilgrim's aborted attempt to ascend the mountain in the prologue scene, where, despite the good beginning at a most propitious time, the she-wolf of cupidity drives Dante back almost to his ruin). The underlying presupposition that the two discourses share emerges in the subsequent prophecy of an imminent and cataclysmic change that will restore the right order of things by restoring the leadership that is lacking, and with it the ability of human beings to reach their intended end (a reiteration of Virgil's prediction that the way up the mountain that leads to happiness will become accessible with the advent of the she-wolf's nemesis, the messianic-imperial "veltro"). Beatrice declares that, before the passage of the many thousands of years that it will take for January to be "unwintered" (due to "la centesima ch'è là giù negletta," the neglected difference between the Julian calendar year and the year of the seasons)⁶—by which she means very soon—the movement of the spheres will reach the point at which its influence will initiate a complete reversal of direction, "sì che la classe correrà diretta; e vero frutto verrà dopo 'l fiore" (vv. 142-8).

If we recall the prologue scene, and also Charles Martel's explanation of how divine Providence, working through the influence of the spheres, directs all beings to their proper "salute" or "proveduto fine" "sì come cosa in suo segno diretta" (*Par.* 8.97-111), as well as Beatrice's description of the saved who are now with Christ as "tutto 'l frutto /

⁶ This "neglect" of time is very probably another aspect of the failure of leadership in the world, specifically, the failure of the Church to respond to the calls for calendar reform that had begun roughly a century before Dante wrote these verses and that were motivated by concern that Easter was not being celebrated at the "right" time with respect to the actual positions of the Sun and Moon. On the movement for reform, see J. D. North, "The Western Calendar – 'Intolerabilis, Horribilis, et Derisibilis;' Four Centuries of Discontent," in *Gregorian Reform of the Calendar: Proceedings of the Vatican Conference to Commemorate its 400th Anniversary, 1582-1982*, eds. G. V. Coyne, Michael A. Hoskin and Olaf Pedersen (Vatican City: Pontificia Academia Scientiarum, 1983), 75-113. Further, given that the souls of the next world as Dante describes it always measure time by the motions of the heavens, it may be that we should connect the this-worldly neglect of time that Beatrice has in mind to Marco Lombardo's characterisation of the living as those who divide or measure time by "kalends" ("or tu che se' che 'l nostro fummo fendi, / e di noi parli pur come se tue / partissi ancor lo tempo per calendri?" *Purg.* 16. 25-7), since, according to Faith Wallis, in the Middle Ages *kalendae* could mean not only "the first day of the month," as it did in ancient times, but also "calendar date" (Faith Wallis, "Chronology and Systems of Dating," in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, eds. F.A.C. Mantello and A.G. Rigg [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996], 384). This may amount to an opposition between the infallible, universal and natural reckoning of time by the celestial bodies and the faulty conventional measure of time by the calendar, the former associated with the intended unfolding of the providential plan, the latter with the actual subversion of that design. This may help to explain why Dante deliberately made it impossible to determine the exact calendar date of the journey.

ricolto del girar di queste spere” (*Par.* 23.20-21), we see that the underlying link between the speech on time and the invective against the corrupt state of the world is the concept of divine Providence, or, more precisely, the notion of a temporarily broken but soon to be restored nexus between time and teleology, between the passage of time as measured by the motion of the heavens and the end-directed eternal plan which is enacted through that motion. The divine mind has a design for bringing humanity to its proper “fruit,” its end and happiness. The present state of the world, like that of the protagonist at the moment in the prologue scene which Saint Bernard recalls (at *Par.* 32.138) as a *dormitatio culpae*, is an aberrant “anti-teleological” subversion of that design, which nonetheless cannot fail and will soon be realised. It is the tragic waste of the value which will soon be restored to temporal life, its value as the means to the “vero frutto” of eternal happiness—for this is the kind of bliss that Beatrice appears to have in mind in her prophecy. It is certainly the kind Dante experiences in the final *visio Dei* which I argue Saint Bernard anticipates (at *Par.* 32.139) as the imminent *somnus gloriae* at the end of the pilgrim’s *datum tempus, il tempo che l’assonna*.

Stretching between these two poles, the moment of crisis Bernard recalls and the conclusion he anticipates, this period of time is the accomplishment, in the personal journey of the protagonist, of the redemption of the totality of time that is yet to come for the whole of humanity. It is the restoration of the broken nexus between time and teleology, between temporal existence and the eternal plan for man’s salvation. In contrast to the still-corrupted human time Dante has left behind in going from time to eternity (*Par.* 31.37-9), the limited mortal life regarding which *tempus fugit* remains the traditional anxiety-provoking reminder of our headlong rush to death (*Purg.* 20.38-9, 33.54), the *datum tempus* of the prophetic journey-vision is a time redeemed by the hero’s acceptance of the prophetic mission it entails, the limited span of time in which one individual freely conforms to the providential plan and undertakes a journey which is exemplary for the way all can do the same, not least in the prompt way the pilgrim responds to Virgil’s reminders that this particular period of time is flying. Bernard’s *tempus fugit* expresses the ultimate outcome of this particular individual’s willingness to respond, namely, the secure expectation of the immediate personal experience of the end and happiness all seek—and this, too, is exemplary for all.

Le Goff writes that “the ancient, eternal theme of time’s flight was present in Christianity, where it was at once exacerbated and assuaged by transformation into fear of eternal death and stimulus to prepare for salvation. ‘Nothing is more precious than time,’ Saint Bernard is supposed to have said, stating a theme which was, in any case, taken up and propagated by his disciples.”⁷ We have seen that the works in which these disciples took up the historical saint’s Christian application of the ancient theme were in Dante’s time attributed to their more famous mentor, who was the patristic authority on the matter. We have also seen that Bernard, like some other writers, saw the state of the blessed in heaven as a “sleep,” and that his renowned skill with words, in which he took as his example the humility of the Word, included the seemingly artless art of closing a sermon at just the right time with the excuse that he had simply run out of time—or that some in the audience were sleepy. With the exception of this last form of allusion to sleep, it has been shown that there is good reason to believe that these features of the “real” abbot of Clairvaux are the background to the *sermo humilis* with which Dante’s fictional character brings teleological closure to the theme of time. Before ending with the verses that have been the inevitable last words of this study from its beginning, I will add the conjecture that even the inclination of some of the monks in Bernard’s audience to fall asleep is echoed and transformed in the *Commedia*’s misunderstood reference to slumber. We may therefore be permitted to see or at least to imagine a pleasing dramatic parallel between the great abbot addressing his monks in the *paradisus claustralis* of Clairvaux, bringing a long sermon on the Song of Songs to a conclusion because of the constraints of time or the weariness of some of the listeners, and Bernard addressing Dante in the “beato chiostro” of Paradise (*Par.* 25.127), ending his long survey of the blessed in the celestial rose and of the Christological structure of time with the words

Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna,
 qui farem punto, come buon sartore
 che com’ elli ha del panno fa la gonna.

⁷ Le Goff, “Labour Time,” 50.

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