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Mfenyana, Deneo Thabisa

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DEGREE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE
Dante: Traces of the Prophetic

Candidate: Deneo Mfenyana
Student Number: 500042
Research Supervisor: Prof. V. Houliston



"A research thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters by Research in English Literature within the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg."

Preliminaries

Preface

I took on this project because of an interest in the theocratic state of the Middle Ages. Being intrigued by biblical seers, namely their God-given authority to proclaim what takes place in the unknown past or the impending future and the implications thereof steered me in Dante's way. The *Commedia* had a particular appeal to me because of its claims to reveal the esoteric truths of post-mortem realms of reality. From a personal point of view, I think as any human I am fascinated by death and what goes on beyond that.

I would like to thank my mother first for her training in abstruse biblical inquiry from my teenage years, igniting in me the desire to unravel esoteric truths. I am indebted to both Dr S. Fanucchi and Professor V. Houliston for their dedication and diligence in moulding my research orientation to scholarly extents.

Note on translations

Being proficient in neither Latin or Italian, I will be using Robin Kirkpatrick's *Paradiso,* Anthony M. Esolen's *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, J.G. Nichols' *Inferno, Purgatory* and *Paradise,* and the Douai-Rheims translation of the Bible, as the closest accessible English version to the Vulgate (what Dante would have had access to in his time).

The Kirkpatrick translation has an ample body of commentaries, and not without reason *Paradiso* being Dante's most conceptually challenging canticle. Kirkpatrick nonetheless provides adequate support to undertake the mental gymnastics requisite to follow the paradisal pilgrimage set out. Providing both a general summation of prominent themes, and then a canto-by-canto breakdown of the more abstract philosophical and scientific theories underlying the Neptunian flights which Dante so often gets tangled in throughout the last canticle, Kirkpatrick comprehensively aids not just the novice in Dantean scholarship, but owing to the complexity of not only the poetic content but pitch of the elucidations, any reader is challenged to grow into fuller comprehension at each return. This is the translation I am going to use for the most part in quoting Dante's *Commedia*, specifically Canto 29—31 and Canto 33.

I am then indebted to Esolen for the gleanings which he makes in the introduction of his translation of the *Inferno*: a pointed, extensive and succinct assessment of the political historical elements overlaying the spiritual fabric of Dante's poem – he, Esolen, going

beyond the historical to touch on the numinous – making us at once aware of the mystical conception of the universe suffused in Dante's psyche which sustains, (if not reinforces) his belief of being a conduit of Divine imparting.

This paper relies on the anthology *Medieval literary theory and Criticism c.1100–c.1375: The Commentary Tradition*, edited by A. J. Minnis, A. B. Scott and David Wallace, for its emphasis on the commentary tradition, the approach to the use of vernacular in literature, the mystical senses of the Bible in literature, including an analysis on figuration in the Middle Ages, and finally, biography and its limitations on authorial authority. These are important factors contributing to Dante's strategies in securing authorial authority for his *Commedia.*

Glossary

Allegory: figments of the imagination stand for something tangible. For example a biography turned to a movie. The actors are not the real people that went through x and y, but they are modelled after the true characters in some way or another.

Anagogy: the third biblical mystical sense which deals with the afterlife. Paradise is seen as an illusion, a non-place pointing to an intangible signified. For instance, viewing the hands and feet of God are the vehicles of manufacturing and transportation. In this limited sense of anagogy, God has no human body but he acts as though he does, for the sake of condescending to the human's lack of perception.

Anagogy (unlimited): fictional signifiers that point to an event or person that is historical. An example would be Jesus Christ's parables pointing to a future tangible heavenly kingdom.

'Contrapasso': see page 72—73.

Figmentum: figments of the imagination that act as signifiers. For example, a made-up story representing something else whether imaginary or historical.

Figura: another name for strict allegory. A historical signifier indexes a historical signified. This is when real events and persons in the Old Testament symbolise Christ and his exploits (whether in the past or the upcoming future).

Strict Anagogy: here the signifiers of Paradise are tangible and they point again to an intangible signified. For example, viewing the face of God is interpreted as gaining knowledge. Here God is seen as having a tangible corporeal form that nevertheless points to something abstract.

Tropology: the first biblical mystical sense with a fictitious signifier and an intangible signified. Tropology deals with what is fictional indexing something intangible like a painting of a red heart symbolising love.

Typology: same as *figura*: non-fictitious events and figures of the Old Testament are read as intimations of Christ and his feats.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE SCALE OF AUTHORITY

In this dissertation I will attempt to interrogate the viability of Dante's poetics as they relate to the *auctoritas* allegedly permeating the *Commedia*, endowing it with prophetic status.

In the introductory chapter I discuss and define key terms that will help to establish the *scala auctoritatis*, reviewing where in the spectrum of authority Dante's vocation as author of the *Commedia* fits. I go on to various considerations of aspects of the poem, each of which sheds light on the main question without settling the matter. This chapter assesses how the credibility of his poem is both enhanced and diminished through biography and self-presentation. I also consider whether his personal faults compromise his authority, or his use of art as a heuristic tool – that is, whether the sense of coming-into-beingness of the poem, reinforces its authority.

In the second chapter I review the symbolic method which deals with the mix of literal and figurative in both the signifier and the signified of the poem, and what this suggests about its mode as tropology, allegory and anagogy. I make a formal comparison of the mystical senses of the Bible (tropology, allegory and anagogy) and how they appear in Dante's *Commedia*. Then, Dante's employment of the 'anagogic' sense will be explored to show how this compares with other modes of representation and what the implications are for his authority.

In the third chapter we explore authorial authority in the High Middle Ages. Here, I review Dante's authority as a co-creator with the Author of the Bible and Creator of Nature, God. In dealing with Dante's biblical borrowings and his adaptation of the Aristotelian borrowed and Dante named theory of 'contrapasso', I present Dante as a kind of prophet, a satirical commentator sharing *auctoritas* with God as Dante claims to view the world through the eyes of God, Creator of the laws of physics and Grand Author of Scripture. I also investigate Dante's mimicry of the style of classical poets and his chosen medium of instruction, the vernacular Italian, and how these enhance or compromise his *auctoritas.*

The fourth chapter, 'Dante as Mystic' discusses the encoding of metaphysical claims in poetic and philosophical language. Through Dante's mediated mystical union with the Deific

Other, Dante as a medium of God, through Beatrice's voice, discovers to the reader mysteries of the divine cosmos that invoke faculties beyond memory and the intellect.

To conclude, I will be looking at the biblical dream vision and how it relates to Dante as sage.

1. The Critical Tradition on the Nature of Dante's Authority

Since the dissertation is about Dante's potential or claimed role as a prophet, and I expect to place him on a *scala auctoritatis*, I shall examine some of the sources of authority that he appropriates by invoking patristic methods of anagogy, by drawing on Virgil's status and by disarming any criticism based on his personal faults or history. In each case, I am going to emphasize the conscious artistic strategies he employs to achieve this effect.

At the outset I would like to focus some time reviewing the critical tradition on the prophetic claims Dante makes in his *Commedia*. Dante's overt and covert claims of being a prophet – which I deal with separately in the chapters to follow – have instigated a critical debate over the validity of these claims. Within literary criticism abounds the more sceptical position concerning Dante's intimated vocation, which has been largely inconclusive. In having read the critical material below, I came to an understanding of Dante as mystic, one with a vocation that stands somewhere between 'prophet' and 'poet' without cancelling either out, thus designating a vocation along a continuum as opposed to a simple binary.

Dante's authority is diluted in comparison to biblical prophets because he conflates historical truths with fictions, which are not equivalent to biblical symbols. For instance, Dante's inferno has ice at the hub of it (*Par.* 34:11) while biblically Hell is either a locale that is interminably hot or a lake of burning fire. The term "Sheol" in the Bible refers to the land of the dead, and this is explained as being within the soil, where the grave is set. But it also has metaphorical import which is firstly the nightmare illusionary realm of departed spirits and secondly, a difficult and unpleasant condition or place. Scientifically, the earth's core beneath the soil is molten lava marrying the scientific with the spiritual. We do not know if Dante went to Mount Etna or Vesuvius but it appears not from the compromised nature of his (prophetic) enterprise.

Teodolinda Barolini (1992) reports Bruno Nardi in his "Dante Profeta" (1949) argued that some people have true visions and Dante believed himself to be such a person, Nardi then making the strong claim that to Dante "those who view the poem as a literary fiction misread it" (Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, 3). Barolini reports of Nardi that as a result of it not being a literary fiction we are expected to believe along with the women of Verona that Dante truly went to Hell and ascended to the Empyrean, seeing Hell, Purgatory and Paradise as they exist in reality (4). This is posited by Nardi as a journey facilitated by means of hallucinations, with the suggestion that Dante was a madman in good company with clairvoyants such as Moses and St John – to name a few (4).

Agreeing that Dante's vocation is prophetic, Singleton (1950) grapples with the intermediate space between the symbolic and the literal: "the allegory of the *Divine Comedy* is the allegory of theologians...it is an allegory of 'this and that,'...its allegory may be seen in terms of a first meaning which is in *verbis* and of another meaning which is in *facto*" ("Dante's Allegory", 82). What I find useful in Singleton's evaluation here is how the two levels of meaning, historical fact and symbolic meaning, merge to create the dimension of allegory, lending the poem spiritual authority and generating the status of theological allegory.

Then Hollander (1977) argues that Dante is not simply a *poeta-theologus*, but a *theologus-poeta* writing in the allegory of the theologians. I would contend that Singleton and Hollander fail to recognize that Dante's fiction is only 'allegorical' in a tropological, if not also what I term the (extended) anagogic sense. It is allegorical in *verbis* but not in *facto* as is the case with dense biblical signs because the history that the *Commedia* puts forth is fictive, or even better illusory, which is why Dante no matter how hard he tries does not attain to prophetic allegory in the biblical sense: that is, according to patristic exegesis which uses the term *figura* for sacred meaning translated through history (Auerbach, 29). The more I read his work, the more it seems he was 'suffering' from hallucinations, and to him those would have been real and undeniable. Dante hallucinates Hell first, which shows he is not in right standing with God. The biblical prophets on the other hand are never morally dubious, neither are they ever given glimpses into Hell, much less traverse it. Late Antiquity's dream categorisations will throw some light on the fictionality or otherwise of Dante's vision.

Paul Piehler's (1971) description of the allegorical landscape being connected to the psychological matrix of an individual opens up another dimension to allegory, perhaps not a biblical one but one that is more compatible with myth. One can categorize the allegorical

landscape in works that are not sacred as *figmentum* (that is, manufactured) rather than *figura*, thus making a basic discrimination between sacred and pseudo-sacred writings. In the former, God's omnipotently creative mind is explored, and in the latter it is the artists' own individual psychological matrix along with its dilemmas that are at the forefront.

From Auerbach (1892–1957) we learn how literal and historical the signifier and signified within Scriptural signs are. Both type and fulfilment are meant to be understood as having existed (or occurred in the instance of events) at some point in history. The fundamental difference between the two is that the signifier-type in a way physically pre-empts an event or character that the signified-fulfilment exhibits similarly, but to a greater scale/scope, particularly with regards to the level of spiritual significance. The signified-fulfilment illuminates a greater degree of significance to the mission/purpose the type pointed to in the past (not a greater substantiality) so that the fulfilment is often considered the realisation of the former – not a physical realisation, but more a spiritual one as both precursor and fulfilment are (or were at some point in history) tangible corporeally. An example of this that Auerbach addresses is Joshua and Jesus as type and fulfilment respectively, of ushering the chosen seed (Israel in the case of Joshua), into a land flowing with milk and honey, which in the Jesus parallel is the spiritual Jews into paradise.

Because Dante's vision does not attain to the prophetic allegorical of the *figura,* Dante's vision then, in my view, can be treated as medieval allegory: not an actual physical journey where Dante is divinely elevated to the celestial spheres, seeing a glimpse of God as a carnal man (Collins, 25). This touches on the suggestion I make throughout this dissertation of Dante writing a *tropologically* mystical poem.

Singleton credits Dante's work as allegorical in the biblical sense, but it seems he does not differentiate between *figura* and *figmentum.* He concludes not only that there is arresting evidence of Dante exhibiting the allegory of theologians more than he does that of poets, but that this fact is unassailable. He then uses his impression of historicity to bolster his argument., noting that the inclusion of historical figures such as Virgil and more contentiously Beatrice gives the poem a level of historic substantiality comparable to Scripture, inclining its allegorical mode towards the historically veracious realism of the theological order rather than the abstract and creatively wrought allegory thought to be characteristic of pagan poetic 'allegory'. For Singleton, this appeal to inconsistency in human nature seals the historicity of the *Commedia*.

I would argue that there is error in positing that owing to the insertion of biblical *materia* such as the 'In Exitu Israel de Aegypto' Psalm (114 in JUB, 113 in the Vulgate) in Dante's *Commedia,* the poem by dint of this achieves theological credence – signifying not only a historical event, but one captured in biblical literature. All this does is create the illusion of an authorial continuum as opposed to demonstrating it. The particular difficulty is the notion that a simple allusion elevates the authority of a work otherwise full of fictive material, veiled beneath biblical imagery and scriptural tropes.

Moreover, Dante sets up the opening scenes of the *Commedia* back to 7–10 April of the year 1300 when it is commonly noted Dante commenced with this epic 8 years thereafter – thus already in exile at this stage. The ultimate issue with Dante's wilful reconstruction of history in relation to his professed vocation reveals reduced *auctoritas* rather than elevating it, since according to Robert Miller God as Author of the Universe is also the Orchestrator of History – the 'Book of Nature' as it unravels in space and time (4).

Miller (1977) lends understanding of how the medieval era read the universe. As created by God every aspect of it was consequently stamped with his Divine Will (4). From this I argue that ordination is not separate from the history of an individual, because it is logically consistent, that the history reflects the preparation process to fulfilling the spiritual vocation, and it likewise proves the ordination, or at least proves the reason for the individual's conviction of divine ordination. Like an extended Bible, during the medieval era the universe was also viewed as authored by God, so that what took place within it reflected its Author; Nature was perceived as Divine Will manifest in space and time, making history an expression of God's Will (Miller). From this I then mean to argue that in the medieval context, the history of an individual, in this case Dante's education, life experiences and works were to be taken as expressive of Divine Will, and if not that, these facts and works are then only indicative of how Divine Will is rooted within his life experiences.

Although as I have suggested, Dante's prophetic authority is compromised by the fictionality of his primary narrative, its basis in his own personal history may compensate for this. Looking upon Dante's works through a spiritual-poetic lens, as is the case in James Collins' *Pilgrim in Love,* one could glean that Dante was a man who went through a psychological crisis, where he lost access to his home country, lost Beatrice to death, and went morally astray. Then he came to a point where he in frustration relinquished control over his temporal life, replacing this with an immersion into a different facet of reality attuned to the

imaginative realm – seeking emotional wellbeing through undergoing experiences which literal historicity could not provide him.

Through Collins' (1984) biography of Dante we are shown that Dante was essentially a probing individual who was not content with superficial details, whether events, times and season, or persons. Owing to his contemplative and imaginative nature, as well as dissatisfaction with the mundane, everything to Dante appeared coloured with meaningfulness of a spiritual import, an aspect of his character heightened through his socio-cultural milieu, or more generally his spatiotemporal setting, again hinting at the notion of the Creator of Nature and History deliberately engineering this for the reason just expounded. Dante and most medieval scholars would argue that psychology is subservient to spirituality, such that even though Dante's beliefs can be explained from his social conditioning, this would not, through exegesis impugn the probable validity of Dante's vocation as even a historical man beyond the literary.

Apart from aspiring to quasi-biblical authority, Dante also drew widely on pagan poetry, and adopted a theology also influenced by pagan *auctors* such as the philosopher Aristotle and Plato. This not only broadens the legitimacy of Dante's own eschatological contemplations, but those of the antecedent Greco-Roman societies as well.

Gilson (1948) argues that Dante was not a prophet and certainly not a cleric but a philosopher, settling on an intermediary position, where Dante is neither prophet nor poet. Gilson reports a particular Father Mandonnet in his *Dante the Theologian,* was convinced of Dante's vocation as cleric and whom Gilson argues is misguided in this. In particular Gilson argues that it is mistaken to believe, as this Father Mandonnet does, that Dante only meant for us to understand Beatrice as an allegorical mode, as her presence, qualities and interactivity with Dante suggests a more direct and palpable interaction between himself and this individual. Merely applying the title of some or other theological form (baptism, the tonsure, minor orders, a bishop, the light of glory, etc.) to the figure of Beatrice ends up detracting from the already meaningful literal sense that can be garnered from a text such as the *Commedia*, and *La Vita Nuova* – the sense of her actual presence as a real person.

It becomes clear that the reason for Father Mandonnet's misapprehension of Dante's vocation is symptomatic of the broad exegetical error of being boundless when dealing with the mystical senses of Scripture, and particularly in the case of Mandonnet, expecting a mystical sense behind every literal/and historical event or figure. In the case of Mandonnet, he even

more erroneously allows himself to be swayed into not only concealing the unfavorable facts jeopardising Dante's authority, but actively, however unconsciously, fabricating in favour of one already deemed an *auctor* through his imaginative assent.

Father Madonnet rejects the idea of Beatrice being more substantial than an allegorical form, yet Dante intends for us to perceive her as a historical person, according to Gilson who writes on the differing treatments of description and narration around and about Beatrice in comparison to *Donna Gentile* – one who, unlike the former, is explicitly relayed as representing a trope (87). Along with desiring to set time aside preparing a fitting ode in praise of Beatrice, conveying to audiences his inability to depict her glory as it appears to him, Gilson additionally remarks that in the *Convivio*, after having received a vision of Beatrice from the celestial spheres, Dante yearns to die in order to be 'reunited' with her, reinforcing that here we are dealing with a man who is – if not purely on an imaginative level, also historically – a character full and complete. On the other hand, noting he is for the time restricted from reunion with her, he began to entertain an alternative thought to love another lady whom Dante identifies as the "wisdom of the philosophers", explaining that the genre of chivalric romance necessitates he [Dante] personify her as "a Lady, the *donna gentile*" (87). A bit further on Gilson remarks on this *donna gentile*, "but this time it is no longer a question of anything but a poetic fiction, as he [Dante] himself explicitly states when he intentionally repeats that she was born of his imagination" (87). Concerning Beatrice, it is clear that Dante means for us to interpret her as someone who once was incarnated, and not an insubstantial enigma originating from his fancies, however illustrious his depictions of her are.

Another view of Dante's myth-making is presented by Barolini (1992). She posits that Dante is the 'god' of his created universe (42). As analysts on different sides of the prophet-poet debate, Singleton posits that Dante essentially writes as a theologian (precisely a sage) presenting historical reality to the extent that it allows him to simultaneously draw out its symbolic and spiritual significance, underlining that the *Comedy* has two levels of meaning, both the literal and symbolic, which he mistook as being tantamount to the *figura* as reflected in Scripture. On the other hand, through Barolini's cutthroat criticism, we are introduced to Dante the master illusionist, an ingenious poet who intentionally compels readers into thinking his text is an extension of the biblical narrative he inserts himself into.

I am impressed by Barolini's attempts at bridging the gap between Dante's poetic and theologian status. In her chapter on "Nonfalse Errors and True Dreams", a point ultimately made by Barolini is her reconciling the conventional dichotomy of poet and theologian, and this she does through the unified notion of the medieval waking dream. Barolini notes that the journey undertaken by Dante-pilgrim is described as 'real' but never explicitly characterised as a dream, and this she elaborates is to shroud in mystery the experience which Dante himself is confused by, an experience which Barolini rationalizes to conform more plausibly to a waking vision (perhaps meaning a spiritual – imaginative – illusion which only the spirit of man can access) more than an entrance into the afterlife corporeally (145). Barolini explains that this description of the visionary being awake in sleep is similar to the way Augustine describes Paul being caught up in the third Heaven, and the way that Dante himself describes the author of Revelation, whose "faccia arguta" (consciousness whilst asleep) "pierces the veil to uncover the divine mysteries while he sleeps" (146). What Barolini is here discussing is the notion of lucid dreaming, a state of awareness accessed whilst one's spirit is yet constrained within the parameters of the unconscious.

John Frecerro (1986) argues Dante being essentially a poet, ultimately positing a nothingness beyond the letter (words) to the *Commedia*, thus classifying Dante's *Paradiso* as inescapably a "non-representational poetic world" (210). Christian Moevs (2005) argues that instead of Dante's signifiers indexing nothing substantial, like Plato's Cave, Dante is throughout the *Commedia* at a few removes from reality, getting ever closer to the real, admitting to seeing reflections instead of true forms before glimpsing God, where in Canto 33 it is noted, Dante sees Him as He is (yet this is still an approximation of course since the real forms are in the reality beyond the *Commedia*). Moevs reaches this conclusion to point to the ways that we as an audience can prove Dante's prophetic claims.

2. Defining the terms

From the outset, I will be defining certain terms that will help navigate where in the hierarchy of authority Dante and his *Commedia* fit. Oscillating between the terms 'prophet'/'visionary', '(natural) theologian'/'mystic' permits me to deal with the matter of the expected hierarchy in the level of credence/authority in Dante's *Commedia.* The gradation of God as *Verace Autore* is at the top extreme. Descending the scale of authority (see below), from highest to lowest,

would be, firstly a biblical prophet of the biblical order following before Church Fathers and Doctors of the Church, mystics, theologians, and then perhaps historians near the middle. Thereafter is the philosopher, who dallied in fictive categorical syllogisms and inquiry into myths, legends and theories, deviating from historical veracity. On the bottom of the evaluative schema would then be the poet. For illustrative purposes, Virgil's a Classical poet, Thomas Aquinas a theologian, and St. Bernard a Doctor of the Church and mystic.

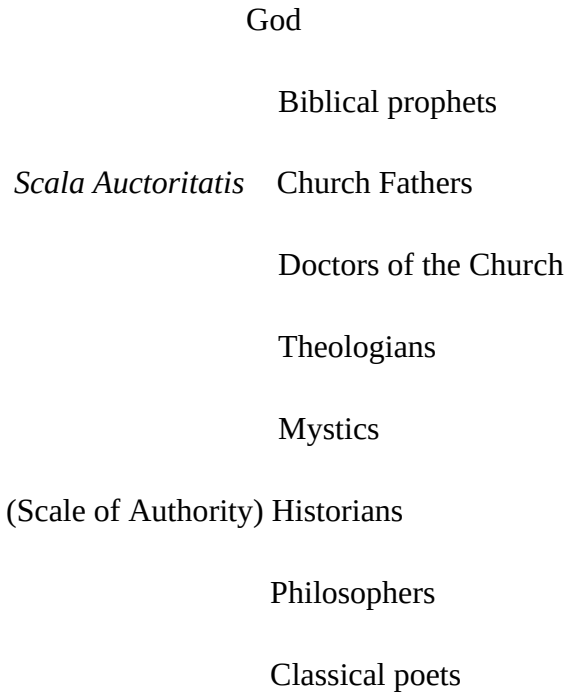


Figure 1.

Before beginning the review, a few key vocational terms should be outlined to avoid misconstrual when these are evoked at a later stage. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* defines a prophet as "Noun. 1. A person who speaks for God or a god; a divinely inspired teacher or interpreter of the will of God or a god. Also, a person who predicts or foretells future events, orig. *spec*. by divine inspiration" and "4. …a visionary leader or representative (*SOED*). These entries present a sensible definition which captures

the biblical take of this term: a far-sighted leader who is chosen by God to speak on behalf of Him.

A mystic is defined as "Noun. Any person who seeks by contemplation and self-surrender to obtain union with or absorption into God, or who believes in the possibility of the spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect; a person who has mystical experiences" (*OED*). This conception, particularly the second clause of one who believes in the spiritual apprehension of truths which are beyond the intellect, is pertinent as it explains the muddied boundaries between the prophet and mystic, intimating the divergence amongst Dantisti over *the degree* of divine authority they attribute to Dante's *Comedy*.

The term mystic to describe one who through self-sacrificial rites seeks to experience a heightened level of existence through communion with supernatural beings does apply within this demarcation, but it is not foregrounded because it has a misleading focus (of mystic in the sense of a medium) which is less steered towards the writing process and textual authority as this study requires.

On the other hand, the mystic has three referents in the scope of this research. The first is the generic umbrella term for persons that are able to draw symbolic meaning from either historical facts like Julian of Norwich who in 1373 – at the age of thirty and a half years – diaries an acute illness from which she thought she would die, receiving revelations of the passion of Christ in the midst of her angst, only to be completely healed after these showings. The second referent is more generally those who are able to draw symbolic meaning from literal landscapes, which can include more abstract phenomena such as thoughts, dream plots, fictive narratives, etc. This latter, I argue, is the way in which Dante was a mystic.
The third sense of the word mystic is one that traverses an intermediate space of allegorical import between the poet that overestimates aesthetic import fabricating signs to meet this end, and the theologian, who surrenders all agency, simply writing 'ready-made' signs (accounts and meanings) as dictated to them by God through history, oracles, dreams, proverbs, parables, etc. Dante can also be seen as fitting in this category as he writes intercessory signs which he filters from dreamscapes.

A poet as well as a theologian can thus have mystical capacities, but the one often weaves it artificially, the other writes it according to the dictates of a Divine source. The difference between the mystic and the theologian is that the theologian is firstly led to these findings,

more than that they actively piece them together *independently*. Then, related to this, the second difference is that the symbolic meaning unearthed by the mystic is less discriminating, meaning unlike with the theologian it is not geared exclusively towards sacred (biblical) meanings but at times merely what is sacral.

The vocation of the poet (strictly defined to better differentiate from the mystic), deals with an often insubstantial or pieced-together history where symbolic meaning is fabricated rather than drawn out, and the driving force of the writing is to induce aesthetic appreciation in its audience members. It is easy to see how Classical poets are placed at the bottom rung of the ladder of authority – by traditional Medieval scholars – as they represent both pagan and fictitious content.

The allegory of poets has two levels of meaning: the literal sense which is fictive and the tropological sense which is the use of tropes to relay a moral. With the allegory of the theologians there are four levels of meaning and the literal is historical – it can be read at face value. The allegory of theologians has, like that of the poets, a tropological import. But above and beyond this the allegory of theologians was thought to have a deeper allegorical and anagogical interpretation of the literal. Distinguishing the allegory of the poets from the more authoritative figuration of theologians helps me demarcate the differences between a poet and a prophet, seeing how Dante assumes more than what this binary indicates. To be sure there was also a tradition of Late Antiquity that expected the allegorical and anagogical levels of meaning from pagan texts too, which is why Virgil could be seen as a sage in the Middle Ages. Virgil, as natural theologian (one who reads Nature through God's eyes) writes of Christ and his reign in the 'golden era' without intending to be theological in both his Fourth Eclogue and the *Aeneid* where Augustus exemplifies Christ during the millennium reign. But because this is artistically veiled instead of straightforwardly narrated, we can see how one might say Virgil as sage is not on par with biblical sages. But we throw a spanner in the works if we turn to the figural Song of Solomon which alludes to the conspicuously erotic union between the Church and Christ the bridegroom who in the Gospels narrates of himself, a king marrying five prudent virgins amongst ten. With that said, using figures instead of direct history, we can still see how Virgil can be labelled a natural theologian without compromise.

3. Dante as Mystic, Theologian, Poet and Visionary

Dante's overt and covert claims of being a prophet – which I deal with separately in the chapters to follow – have instigated a critical debate over the validity of these claims. Within literary criticism abounds the more sceptical position concerning Dante's intimated vocation, which has been largely inconclusive. In having read the critical material below, I came to an understanding of Dante as mystic, one with a vocation that stands somewhere between 'prophet' and 'poet' without cancelling either out, thus designating a vocation along a continuum as opposed to a simple binary.

Dante's authority is diluted in comparison to biblical prophets because he conflates historical truths with (historical) untruths, which have no perceivable association with biblical symbols. On a related note, the reassembling of historical timelines to accommodate a feigned prophecy through Cacciaguida concerning his exile is troublesome yet effective. Dante writes the hour was morning at the break of dawn, the sun mounting higher with those stars that shone beside him when the Love Divine in the beginning made their beauty move" (*Inf.* 1: 37—40). Dante sets the *Commedia* back to 7–10 April of the year 1300 "shortly before the morning of Good Friday" which was thought to be the same day as Creation (Esolen, 416—417). Nonetheless it is commonly noted Dante commenced with his epic 6 to 8 years thereafter – thus already in exile at that stage.

Dante-pilgrim says of Virgil: he spoke to me in grave and weighty words/ about my future life, so I should feel/ four-square against the blows that were to come/ (*Par*. 17:22—24)

The above takes place in Hell, a realm where the temporal and atemporal are fused, and consequently, hard to distinguish. Dante speaks of the ability of his afterlife guide (Virgil) seeing with an atemporal propensity, where past, present and future merge into the present. The foresight does not seem to be an asset praised by Dante as at least three other infernally bound souls, Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti, Caccio and Farinata also 'prophesy' concerning Dante's exile and the political conditions leading to this piteous calamity in Dante's life. What these three souls disclose however are only revelations if one suspends disbelief to accept Dante wrote the *Commedia* from pre-exilic conditions, which he did not.

Writing of Dante-pilgrim's exilic conditions Cacciaguida states: "As once Hippolytus was driven out/ of Athens by his father's wife, perverse/ and pitiless, so you'll leave Florence too"

(*Par.* 17: 46—48). Betrayed by his own family, the Florentine political party of the Black Guelphs, he is treacherously chased from his home, never to see Florence again. Cacciaguida goes on to speak of Dante's fellow Florentines as "that ungrateful, crazy, vicious crew" who "will turn as one against [Dante]" (*Par.* 17: 64—65). Then speaking of leaving his wife and children behind Cacciaguida states: "You'll leave behind you all you hold most dear". Cacciaguida relays further of Dante's patron Can Grande della Scala: "Your refuge and your safe abode will be/ the courtesy at first of that great Lombard/ whose blazon is a stair and holy bird" (*Par* 17: 70—72).

He goes on to write of Can Grande – the final line playing on the stair of Can Grande's blazon: "you will taste the saltiness of bread/ when offered by another's hand – as, too,/ how hard it is to climb a stranger's stair" (*Par* 17: 46—60).

The only parts of this ominous drivel that rings of true foresight is when Cacciaguida tells Dante: "Yet I'd not have you envy those around./ Your life and fame en-futures far beyond/ the punishment their perfidy receives" (*Par.* 17: 97—99).

Encouraging him to bear all even when faced with pending accusations, Cacciaguida declares that "all lies put clean aside, make plain what in your vision you have seen, and let them scratch wherever they may itch. For if at first your voice tastes odious, still it will offer, as digestion works, life-giving nutriment to those who eat. The words you shout will be like blasts of wind that strike the very summit of the trees. And this will bring no small degree of fame" (*Par* 17: 127—135). We now live in the knowledge of how far that fame arose.

In his mysticism, Dante succeeds in rendering the 'unsignifiable' (in fact complex theological matters) beneath a symbolic veil (*figmentum*). The form of the term mystic as alluded to here draws out meaning from historical events and figures to then engineer a text (sermon, book, etc.) weaving signs from inspiration (whatever or whomever that source may be), not for aesthetic pleasure but for the function of veiling and uncovering mystical (sacral, ethical, intellectual, psychological, etc) truths to its readers.

Returning to the said salvageable quality of his professed vocational conviction, Dante, as I have discerned, was a man whose mind, steeped in religious knowledge and gifted with poetic genius was able to develop a text that exhibits gleams of divine truth mystically veiled, i.e. theological *sententiae* (deeper meaning) wrapped in pagan and creative biblical *integumentum* (the encasing, a covering, which could be any signifier, be it a string of letters

constructing a word, to chords of a melody within a song, or a physical object carrying whatever cultural connotations and/or myths lending a recognised yet instituted meaning).

In this section of the dissertation, I aim to show how both truth and lies can add to the mystical quality of Dante's *Commedia.* And although I reach the conclusion that Dante's fabrications place his work as an allegory of the poets more than that of theologians, Dante's fictive self and works nonetheless create spellbinding myths that are too intriguing to ignore.

Maintaining the idea of history as being 'under the dictates of God', does the fictive history in Dante's work always stand against his proclamations of being an oracle, since in these writings historical reality is often flouted by a creative spin? It seems the historical material embedded in the poem enhances or underlines its authority, but inaccuracies and prejudices tend to undermine this again. But encouragingly, with Etienne Gilson, we understand that fiction can enhance history as opposed to undercutting it. According to J.G. Nichols, translator of the *Divine Comedy* series, Durante degli Alighieri is a man around whom myths gather (363). He explains that akin to a mythical figure, legends gather about him, as in, for instance a tale where a woman in Verona declared that Dante was the man that visited Hell, and that proof of this was evident in his "smoke-browned face" and "singed beard" (363). Nichols states this instance as factually dubious, seeing in Dante a larger-than-life pilgrim who bears the marks of his fictional reality. An interesting network of the historical – Dante in torrid conditions, walking much in the sun as a patronised and poor poet – and the ahistorical – the timeless spaceless void that Dante is encompassed by – merge to enliven another hallucinary image of Dante escaped from Hell. Just as in a night dream, Dante then must have hallucinated Hell not just visually, but auditorily, olfactorily, gustatorily and tactilely too. As Dante walks the boundaries of the here and now and the everlasting (Empyrean), the *Primum Mobile,* he describes the following vision for us:

> I saw light form a river in full spate, fire-dazzle-gilded, flowing through verges painted afresh in colours of wonderful spring. And rising from that flood, alive, were sparks that everywhere alighted on the flowers, like rubies set in gold encirclements – then all, as though the perfumes made them drunk, plunged in that swirling miracle once more. (*Par*. 30: 61 -69)

The visionary splendour is at first blinding (lines 49 – 51), but having kindled new seeing strength in himself through powers not his own (lines 57 – 58), Dante then sees a river formed of light, that dazzles gold and blazes orange, flowing through the multi-coloured brinks (in hues of spring). In these flooding waters Dante then sees embers flying out of the fiery river, which he compares to rubies in gold encirclements, again colouring our vision with difference. The flowers which look similar to stones in settings are drunk with perfume, at once setting our olfactory senses alight. Then, as though meaning for us to feel his hunger pangs, cloaking strong desire to grow his visionary abilities, Dante takes strain to circumlocute: "No baby, waking later from its nap than normally it would, so hurled itself face down to mother's milk as I did now" (*Par*. 30: 82— 84). Dante's vision is, as discussed in following chapters, a conflation of the here and now with the timeless and spaceless void of the happily ever after.

The third vocation, that of the theologian (sage) deals with concrete history either in pointing to symbolic truth through it (as with proverbs), or, uses symbolic truth to point to it (as with parables). This brings us to another term needing clarification: "theologian", which according to the OED is defined as "Noun. An expert in or student of theology; *spec*. a person who studies or makes a profession of esp. Christian theology; a divine." On theologian as a divine, according to traditional patristic exegesis, the term 'theology' was a more inclusive umbrella term which included scriptural exegesis, i.e., the transcription of revelation, as well as purely rational speculation about the nature of God as practised by the pagan philosophers of antiquity which later became known as 'natural theology'. Poets (both medieval and pagan) could have their authority bumped up through the appellation of (sacral) natural theologians by more liberal late medieval scholars like Boccaccio. This category meant traversing of a mystical landscape, drawing from literal figures and events their spiritual import. The concept of the book of nature underpins this classification, i.e., natural theologian, in that the Book of Nature points to God as the Creator of the universe, proposing that as a result, just as the mind of an artist pervades his own artwork, the mind of God can be ascertained through studying His works, i.e. the created universe, both in its separative units, down to the most minute created form, and holistically how the parts comprehend The Whole collectively.

Through his works it is apparent that Dante spent much time puzzling over religious concepts, and his education and socio-cultural context would have encouraged this. But, as Etienne Gilson points out in *Dante the Philosopher*, there is a difference between the theologically inclined individual and a theologian; individual interest and Divine purpose

seem to be differentiated. But through the heuristic method (discussed at length below) we can still suggest that Dante's personal history can be seen as a preparation process to fulfilling his spiritual vocation, or at least accounts for his conviction of divine ordination.

Besides the literal, the Bible has three mystical senses according to traditional exegesis: the tropological, allegorical and the anagogical. Pagan poetry is noted as having just one, i.e., the tropological level of mystical meaning. Grappling with the intermediate space between the symbolic and the literal, Charles Singleton in his short tract "Dante's Allegory" in the journal *Speculum* argues "the allegory of the Divine Comedy is the allegory of theologians...it is an allegory of 'this and that,'...its allegory may be seen in terms of a first meaning which is in *verbis* and of another meaning which is in *facto*" (82). What I find useful in Singleton's evaluation is how the two levels of meaning, historical fact and symbolic meaning, merge to create the dimension of allegory. But correctly put, the symbolic and the literal merge to form the mystical meanings (as it might also be anagogical or tropological). Singleton proposes that this intermediate 'space' lends to the poem's spiritual authority, generating the status of theological allegory.

Dante's *Comedy* overall appears to be a *treatise* framing theological contemplations more than a purely divinatory oracle as Dante appears to claim throughout the work. The difference between a theologian and prophet, as understood by medievalists and, broadly speaking, Judaeo-Christian believers, is the amount of intellectual force (as opposed to unadulterated spiritual illumination) and the *licence to be wrong* which the theologian had which the prophet did not (Minnis & Scott; Barolini). The prophet sees and describes figures in a vision, and a theologian expounds upon and clarifies these.

As discussed in less detail earlier, poets could attain to authorial authority as natural theologians through the Scholastic identification of two modes of procedure in literature: the mode of the human sciences, and that of sacred science – categorising poetry along with theology in the latter. The former, logical in orientation, entailed methods of procedure which are description, definition, division, formulation of argumentation, and the application of examples to further instruction. The latter, sacred science, utilised poetic and rhetorical methods such as "affective exhortation and warning, allegory, figure and metaphor, exemplification, etc." (Minnis & Scott, 4). To this latter series the Bible was often attached and so was poetry – and this is how exegetes could salvage the dignity of poetry amongst the knowledge forms – placing poets as natural theologians to elevate their authorial status

amongst the sciences. The similitude of Scripture with poetry, owing to similar modes of procedure, ushered in the notion of 'the Bible as literature' in the mid- to late- Middle Ages making the *modi* (mode of instruction) of Scripture the salvaging factor for all the mythological creatures teeming the *Inferno*: creatively Dante is through this imagery figurally exhortative as opposed to deductively, definitively and dialectically instructing as requisite for the pedagogy of the human sciences. Through Boccaccio's exegesis Dante later accrued the title of natural theologian– which again asserted his authority above pagan poets and philosophers.

On the notion of Dante as natural theologian, it ought to be specified that he does not use ready-made scriptural signs on par with biblical theologians, but weaves artificial signifiers, ignoring their signifieds – since he elusively does not and in fact does not have to deal with what his signs point to ultimately. All we know at the end of a laborious 100 cantos is that God has a human form and the Court Rose puts in a hierarchy what is experienced as an undivided non-politicised realm. Creating the impression of anagogic sense material, we are left having to trust that he is signifying Hell, Purgatory and Paradise to us in the best way possible.

Dante's authority as a seer, one sent to reveal realities otherwise veiled from human consciousness is encumbered firstly by a feigned foreshadowing as when Dante speaks of his exile as pending, and, it is also encumbered by the 'close-endedness' of some of the imagery – by close-ended I mean imagery which appears to chiefly point to nothing beyond the surface ornamentation, i.e., lyrical decorum, fanciful figures and plots, etc. such as when a pair of frenetic spirits tear into others in Canto 30 of the *Inferno*. The scene is described thus:

> but none so fury-ridden in Thebes or Troy had ever lunged with such ferocity to bite at beasts or even rip men's limbs as I saw two souls, naked, pale as death, tearing away and snapping as they ran, like the tusked swine who's set loose from the sty. One of them got Capocchio, sank his tusk into the neck, and as he dragged him off, he made him rake his gut on the hard ground. (*Inf.* 30: 22 – 30)

The "fury-ridden" souls are Gianni Schicchi and Myrrha. The former is punished for impersonating someone to draw up a will in his favour, and the second disguised herself to commit incest with her father (Nichols, 307). The use of the words "lunged", "ferocity", "bite", "rip" evokes brutish and animalistic imagery. Using extended similes Dante describes the two impersonators as "naked" and "tearing away" as beasts do, "snapping as they ran" as

though their lives depended on their spoilage. Dante here describes an almost bestial disregard from the two impersonators, ravaging fellow sufferers as they go. These are unlike the beast of St Daniel's vision which foreshadowed the ancient world dynasties: glimpses of artistry and intellect, deviating from anagogues, elevate not God as its ultimate *Auctor* but Dante himself. His enterprise, for instance, is flawed by a personal desire to see every gross act done to its sensible end as when he states one of the frenzied spirits 'sank a tusk into another's neck' and then the 'raking' of 'his gut on the hard ground'. These have nothing to do with interpretation but apply to the surface level act itself. The macabre, drawn-out and gratifying torture with which this unnamed soul is handled does not reflect any instance of avenging I have come across in Scripture. The case of infants being dashed, or pregnant woman being ripped open, we hear of such cruelty written of concerning the gentile nations opposed to Israel. Menahem, is the exception, but he, as chief of the land, was a signal of the wickedness that the northern kingdom of Israel had degenerated to. Menahem was set as a consequence of the abominations Israel committed, driven by apostasy. This king, it is also important to note attained to rank by assassinating yet another assassinator Shallum, son off Jabesh, who usurped the title from Zechariah son of Jeroboam II lawful heir to the throne.

Then again, the passing of one's child through flames alive, a ritual for the god named Molech, was noted as abhorrent to God on several accounts. Christ in the New Testament teaches Christians to love their enemies, to even give them water when thirsty, and food if hungry. Christ and Saint Stephen, I believe, at the height of such unrestricted love, even pray for their enemies whilst being inflicted with deathly blows by them. The relishing of the pain suffered by the souls in Hell is hardly pious. I do not know what Dante is seeking readers take from the grotesque imagery above, but it does seem to detract from his persuasiveness as a trumpeter of a holy God's Will.

4. Sources of Authority:

4a The Bible, The Church Fathers, Beatrice, Virgil

Biblical allusion is a strategy used by Dante to enhance his authority. The insertion of biblical *materia* such as, for starters, the liturgical hymn 'In *Exitu* Israel *de Aegypto'* (Psalm 113 in the Vulgate) in Canto 2 line 46; the inclusion of the *Miserere Mei* (Psalm 50 in the Vulgate)

in Canto 5 line 24; and lastly, the adaptation of the Lord's Prayer in the beginning of Canto 11, all in Dante's *Purgatorio,* sustains theological credence for the poem as a whole. There is the illusion of an authorial continuum from God to the poetic. The difficulty with this strategy is that a simple allusion elevates the authority of a work otherwise full of fictive material.

Albert Russel Ascoli writes "…Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Christine de Pizan – were treating Dante as a poetic model, an *auctor* comparable to ancients such as Virgil and Ovid (4)", but as a theologiser Dante hoped to be accorded authority on a par with the Fathers of the Church, and even the human authors of the Bible (4). It is telling that Dante chooses St Bernard to be the last voice of those in his *Commedia* besides himself.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1050 – 1153) clearly fulfils the role of *auctor* for Dante within the *Commedia* as he "served as the abbot of a monastery in Clairvaux, and was canonized in 1174. His numerous theological works established him as one of the most important Church leaders of the twelfth century" (Villanova University: Falvey Memorial Library). Bernard was Christian, he was a theological, he was a master at his field of learning, having the honour of being ascribed a Doctor of the Church. This justifies his assumption in place of Beatrice during the last phase of his visionary pilgrimage.

Dante has one of double authority, a Church Father and mystic, escort him in the final lap of his vision. When Dante no longer sees Beatrice, he thinks:

> "I'd looked for one thing. Something else replied. I'd see Beatrice, as I believed, and saw an elder, robed like all in glory. Around his countenance and eyes there flowed the generosity of joy, his look a gentle father's, firm and virtuous" (*Par.* 31: 58 – 63).

St Bernard shifts Dante's attention from Beatrice to St Mary. St Mary who is unparalleled in morality – in Catholic spirit second only to Christ – is the virtuous virgin who humbled herself before God, as a handmaiden fulfilling His request to carry the Christ in her womb. Bernard directs Dante to look at Mary whom he refers to as 'the height of Beauty', at the furthermost edges of the Courtly Rose, signifying her proximity, affinity and likeness to God. Bernard says: "Look through these circles to the furthest off so far that you shall see, enthroned, the queen to whom this realm is subject in its vows" (*Par.* 31: 115 – 117).

Bernard as contemplative and mystic, introducing himself to Dante, says: "The Heavenly Queen – I burn in all my soul for love of her – will bring us every grace. I am Bernardo, her most faithful one" (*Par.* 31: 100 – 102). Faith and then chaste love towards Mary seem to

designate one to a higher position in the planetary realms, and at least gives rise to a higher stature in the mentors that facilitate Dante's vision.

Entering the spaceless, timeless void of the Empyrean, Dante is not essentially even separable from Beatrice, but what he sees of her is seemingly from close contact. Guided by St Bernard, looking into the Empyrean at his succeeded *auctor* Beatrice, Dante thinks: "from that high region where the thunder rolls…her image came not blurred or lessened by the space between" (*Par.* 31: 73 – 78). This late Church Father, or less contentiously Doctor of the Church, high in the scale of authority (third only to Church Fathers and biblical authors – prophets, patriarchs and commentators), appears to Dante when his sense of vision is strengthened and purified.

Beatrice on the other hand has no clear credentials as revered persona with authority over Dante in any clear intellectual capacity. But this reinforces the notion of virtue being the force that generates spiritual (prophetic) authority. Biblically this would be accounted as God speaking through the obedient, Him answering to those that seek to do His Will (as the Bible broadly maintains). But expressed concisely the idea is as follows:

> 8. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners: and purify your hearts, ye double minded… 9, Be humbled in the sight of the Lord, and he will exalt you. (James 4:8–10)

In *Dante the Philosopher*, Etienne Gilson settled on an intermediary position where Dante can be considered a prophet in some sense, a vocation that is not on a par with biblical sages such as Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and so forth. This segment on the allegorical dimension of the poem is very important, because it aligns Dante with different modes of truth-telling. As a mystic and/or a natural theologian Dante uses figures to analogically point at theological truths. If Dante is a prophet or a mystic, he is reading both the Bible and history (also God's word, in a way), and this enables me to apply these categories to his allegorical methods. The mystical senses of the Bible – what is called the allegorical mode in patristic exegesis – consists of the tropological, the allegorical and the anagogical. Writing as a mystic, Dante mimics all these categories solidifying authorial authority for his poem. Bice Portinari for instance is the allegorical signifier for Christ in her self-sacrificial and redemptive role. The figure of Beatrice is more a real person signified than a symbol that stands for one or other theological truth/allegorical form.

Going back to the question of whether Beatrice is to be understood as a historical or fictive figure, there appears to be consensus among the critics encountered that the historical reality of Beatrice is dubious at best. And yet it would be misguided to believe that Dante only meant for us to understand Beatrice as an allegorical mode, as her presence, qualities and interactivity with Dante suggests a more direct and palpable interaction between them (Gilson, 81; Kirkpatrick, 18; Singleton 83). Merely applying the title of some or other theological form to the figure of Beatrice ends up detracting from the literal and/or historical foundation of the *Comedy*, and the *Vita Nuova* likewise. Elaborating on the *Vita Nuova* as autobiography, and how rooted in the historical this text is, Gilson writes:

> …the chief actor…we find…in a midst of a reality that can be verified in all its aspects, surrounded by friends and enemies whom he names, and whom, moreover, we know, full of political passions and desires of vengeance, but also of forgiveness, remorse and hopes the objects of which we may identify… (82)

From the sense of historical specificity and lived experience in the quote, we understand that in the *Commedia* Beatrice is a person as the *Vita Nuova* treats her. Above that Gilson also makes the intriguing argument that the self-reflexive I of the '*auto'*-biography presents Dante completed in a way that his mere spatio-temporal life does not. Gilson after the above-cited states:

> if that is not the whole truth regarding Dante (he himself did not know the whole of it and no man ever tells all that he knows of the truth about himself), it is at least, in the primary intention of the author, something of the truth about things, which he himself regards as realities (82).

In other words, Dante does not begin and end with his historical self, but has a spiritual or at least, imaginative character that unearths more about him than his spatio-temporal life ever did (82). Dealing with Dante as a man who hallucinated, the above argued by Gilson gives us a more forgiving outlook on his spiritual venture in the *Commedia*. We can see how with the fictive elements in his vision he does not attain to all four mystical senses of Scripture, and yet, the spectres that Dante imagines and hallucinates, and his sense of himself as a prophet are both substantial and true in their own right, establishing an otherworldly existence that is intriguingly and compellingly truthful in its own way.

In the late Middle Ages, the purely allegorical mode began to fall out of favour, with more conservative scholars averring that the historical was the most essential sense of Scripture, and that whatever allegorical mode exists, it is elsewhere in the Bible prefigured through the literal sense. This is a healthy way of understanding the relation between the literal and mystical senses of the Bible. Similarly, it is more helpful to treat Beatrice as first and foremost a historical person, who sometimes stands for allegorical meaning in Dante's quasi-allegorical work.

To bolster the notion that Dante intends for us to perceive her as an historical person, Gilson contrasts treatments of Beatrice with that of Donna Gentile who in his *Il Convivio* is explicitly relayed as representing a trope. Along with desiring to set time aside preparing a fitting ode in praise of Beatrice, conveying to audiences his inability to depict her glory as it appears to him, Gilson additionally remarks that in the *Convivio,* after having received a vision of Beatrice from the celestial spheres, Dante yearns to die in order to be 'reunited' with her, confirming that here we are dealing with a man that purely on an imaginative level, is a character full and complete. On the other hand, noting he is for the time being restricted from reunion with her, he began to entertain an alternative thought to love another lady whom Dante identifies as the "wisdom of the philosophers" (87), explaining that the genre of chivalric romance necessitates he [Dante] personify her as "a Lady, the *donna gentile*" (87). Beatrice in comparison was loved as a symbol of theology. A bit further on Gilson remarks of this *donna gentile*, "but this time it is no longer a question of anything but a poetic fiction, as he [Dante] himself explicitly states when he intentionally repeats that she was born of his imagination" (87).

Beatrice closely resembles a theological allegorical form in that she is meant to be understood as someone who was incarnated. She is not merely an insubstantial enigma originating from Dante's fancies however luminescent his depictions of her are. Beatrice has both historical substantiality and symbolic meaning as requisite for theological allegorical forms. Yet the historic Bice Portinari is not the blessed enigmatic Beatrice of Dante's epic poem. Owing to the fictive nature of Beatrice and all that she stands for in the *Commedia,* we can conclude that she is an abstruse figure after the allegory of pagan poets. Dante chooses figures and crafts plots at will instead of compiling a work with biblical symbols and history intact unlike with his *Vita Nuova*. Beatrice as a figure of Christ barely works as the two share no affinity in their life paths except that Beatrice goes to Hell on Dante's behalf to ultimately save him. Because her character is more idealized than historic, Dante fails to make his symbols

correspond to the biblical which exalts and respects the historical. Dante is thus seen to have written more of a tropologically (creative and intangible) mystical poem than an allegorical (historical and symbolic) or anagogical (historic and transcendent) one.

On Virgil's *Aeneid*, Anthony Esolen (2005), translator and editor of *Inferno*, writes of Aeneas' visit to the underworld intimating the "reign of peace under Christ and the establishment of the spiritual authority, the Church" (xx).

Virgil – a man it would not be amiss to call Dante's precursor (in more than one way) – was acknowledged a prophet (of some order) in the medieval era, for his fourth Eclogue. Thus, as a poet, essentially, he was nevertheless recognised for a degree of spiritual foresight which was dampened owing to his supposed lack of awareness thereby.

As an 'inspired' poet, Virgil appeals to history – though it is mythical, or more pointedly, legendary, as with the case of dealing with hazy details pertaining to the Trojan War, and more pointedly the matter of Dido and Aeneas meeting in history being a direct manipulation on the part of Virgil. Boccaccio in his general apologia for poetry as a sacral product of mythical and natural theologians of antiquity, offers four reasons rationalising the encounter (along historical timelines) of legendary figures Dido and Aeneas (Minnis and Scott,435—436). These point to the Classical poet as a shrewd contemplator who desired cogency against insurmountable restraints: the Virgil of Dante's poem was born at the wrong place at the wrong time with regards to Christian salvation; and in addition, he grappled with the loose ends and confused segments of history at his disposal surrounding the Trojan War – owing to his predecessor – Homer's – largely understood more fantastical and thus historically unreliable account of it. To those of the medieval era these tensions add their substantial weight to the tensions posed in conveying credible truth (Minnis & Scott, 434). And because the facts manipulated by Virgil were of legendary and thus non-historic substantiality, reworking the timelines for him could be an earnest (we know not to what extent successful) attempt at reaching towards the ultimate truth which he could not conclusively find out empirically. Along these lines, Virgil's contemplative outreach towards truth seems to be a reliance upon some internal well of truth guiding him to discern perhaps not definitively what is true, but what is less false. Just because his vision has overt Roman imperial incentives does not discount the possibility of Virgil having received some universal deific revelation of how his historical, socio-political milieu figures Christological truth.

In *Inferno* Canto 1 lines 124—126 Virgil speaks to Dante of his exclusion from the realms of Heaven, saying: "For that great Emperor who reigns above, because I was a rebel to his law, will not allow me entry to his realm".

For his covenant with Christ Dante gets a pass to Heaven, so on the matter of pagan integuments, Dante treats book six of the *Aeneid* as of less credibility than his own poem, lacking appropriate doctrine to permit Virgil's mind to soar, as his does in his *Paradiso* – despite the fact that he borrows authority from Virgil calling him his "*maestro e 'l mio autore*", namely his master and authority (*Inf.* 1: 85), "*famoso saggio*" a man "renowned and wise" (*Inf* 1: 89), and, his "tu duca", "tu segnore"and "tu maestro", his "guide", "teacher" and "lord", respectively (*Inf*. 2:140). Dante condescends to treat Virgil (more covertly through imagery than through outward expression) as a master not merely poetically, but as bestowing philosophical/esoteric insight. In Canto 22 of *Purgatorio* we have Statius acknowledging Virgil as something close to a preacher in that from his words Statius was moved to become a Christian. Statius explains to both Virgil and Dante that the former was the first to light the way for him to God. Statuis then says "You acted then like one who walks by night, who holds the lamp behind, which does not help him, but gives the after-comers all the light" (*Purg* 22: 67—69). Because Dante allows Virgil to reach the Elysian fields in the earthly paradise, we are reminded that Virgil's poem and vision of the afterlife is limited just as Dante is at his wit's end in Canto 30 desisting from describing Beatrice's beauty to trumpets louder than his. With Dante's *Paradiso* we have successive advantage. Because Dante has the gift of biblical revelation, and the revelation of God's image, he can communicate his more comprehensive view of the afterlife.

But Dante's assertion of superiority does not preclude his estimation of Virgil as sage. In fact, in *Inferno* 4 line 110 Dante names the five great poets of whom he is the sixth in the academy, sages. Dante gives credence to Virgil as natural theologian, which is associated with poetic *auctor* as sage (not *sacred* prophet), one endowed with above-average illumination (discernment between right versus wrong, as well as foresight) and is thereby entrusted with, in a sense, a commission to teach moral conduct.

Dante thus draws on pagan figments in order to bolster stylistic and mythical (or rather epic/legendary) authority for his 'vision'. An example of this is found in the opening canto of the first canticle where Dante writes of Aeneas, legendary founder of Rome, and the warriors in the *Aeneid:* Nisus, Euryalus and Turnus, who all died in the battles between the Trojans

and native Italic people. These instances showcase Dante as sustaining mythical lives and affirming legendary history as bona fide.

In *Paradiso* Canto 31 lines 31 to 36, Dante juxtaposes the savages of the northern shores' wonder at the Lateran (the imperial palace before Constantine removed his seat to Constantinople (Kirkpatrick 464—465)) to his wonder at the Empyrean – a nation he affirms as "sane" and "true" in comparison to his own Florence:

> If savages from northern shores…at seeing Rome and her aspiring works are stupefied to view the Lateran, soaring so high above all mortal things, then what of me – from human to divine, coming to this eternal realm from time, from Florence to a nation sane and true – what pure astonishment must I have felt? (*Par.* 31: 31, 34 – 39)

Dante utilises the conditional if…then, compelling us to read the temporal history of the Lateran and the legendary history of the constellations Ursa Minor and Ursa Major as one and the same, substantially. The transformation of the nymph Helice, into the Great Bear, and her sons Arcas and Bootes into the Lesser Bear by Jupiter (Kirkpatrick), although mythical, are here arranged as unfeigned and substantial. Comparing the northern shores' savage's astonishment to his own at the Empyrean, we are invited to see Dante's view as of greater substance than the former owing to the object of his gaze, and the subject gazing. Dante certainly places himself as the better of the two between him and the northern shore savages, the empyrean as grander and more substantial than the Lateran. Writing about the Empyrean and reimagining myths as temporal history, places Dante's *auctoritas* as higher than that of the *auctors* of antiquity who were dealing with the same but as tales of fanciful narrative.

4b. Sources of Authority: Dreams and Visions

Dante as sage is vocationally lodged as mediator between man and d/Divinity, opposed to merely employing the poetic art to arouse aesthetic pleasure as had been generally understood of pagan poets earlier in the Christian era. But on the estimation of the more rigidly conservative Dante, in his blasé way of (pagan) literary borrowing – employing the Graeco-Roman legendary persona of Charon, Minos and Cerberus to keep dwellers of the inferno in line – might be seen by a medieval orthodox scholar as a propagator of lies, an assailant of Biblical truth, a mere practitioner of the lower arts, and a (theological) liberal who can at best be salvaged as a moral instructor of cardinal virtues in line with the general view held of pagan *auctors* in comparison to their theological counterparts.

To then counter the conservative take against pagan literary borrowing is St Augustine's 'Gold out of Egypt' argument. Israel 'repossessing' God's gold from the Egyptians right before the exodus is used by St Augustine in discussing the use of pagan philosophy for Christians. God, he explains, is the Author of all Truth. Christians, those that please God the most according to the New Covenant, are thus given authority to use those pagan philosophies to further the Gospel. Dante, in his time, could plausibly hold Virgil as a conduit of divine truth, drawing from the *Aeneid* on matters pertaining the afterlife, and that whilst simultaneously holding that he Dante is doing so from a higher vantage point – able to assess the inaccuracies of the pagan *auctoritates* to provide a more accurate assessment of the matters discussed therein – as one born propitiously after the advent of Christ.

Dante as a visionary is a category that relates to his vocation as prophet. I deal mostly with the idea of Dante having visionary qualities than that he is one. A poet can have visionary qualities, a prophet and mystic too. Conversely, a visionary can have poetic and mystical qualities. Allegorizers and dreamers are types of poets that have visionary qualities.

In his article 'Power of a vision', Kris Vallotoon writes "Vision is the bridge between the present and the future" (para. 1). Again, he states that "Vision gives pain a purpose" (para.1). And significantly he also adds that "Vision is the lens that interprets the events of our life, the way we view people and our concept of God" (para. 6). These citations help delineate the general nature and function of visions which I detect as operative within Dante's *Comedy,* which are that: visions fulfil a purpose; the purpose is to process the subject's temporal experiences against their conceptualisations (i.e. process *a posteriori* against *a priori* knowledge e.g., what can be read of Deity in Florentine politics); and lastly, that dreams are a mystical network of images occupying a middle state (spatially and temporally, combining the present with the future, the concrete plane and the spiritual realm). An example of a visionary is biblical Daniel who writes symbolically of the Beast which represents the four dynasties of the ancient world from Babylon to Rome. Dante also writes symbolically in the opening cantos of his *Inferno,* and the middle of *Paradiso*. In the *Inferno,* the three beasts – the leopard, lion and she-wolf – all taken from Jeremiah's condemnation of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 5:6), check Dante on the path he treads within the dark woods. Medieval commentators kept with the tradition of seeing these beasts allegorically, as lust, pride and avarice respectively; or incontinence, bestiality and malice; or (in keeping with the three classes of temptation undergone by Christ), the flesh, the Devil and the world (Esolen, 416). In the *Paradiso,* within the cantos dealing with the cardinal virtue of justice, we have a

second instance of Dante writing as a visionary as seen with the emblematic Eagle – which is a sign of Imperial justice: the distribution of goods and honours equitably around the world (Kirkpatrick, 406).

Unlike Singleton who makes a case for Dante's credibility as poet-prophet, arguing that Dante writes the allegory of the theologians as opposed to that of mere poets (Singleton, 81), Teodolinda Barolini in her *The Undivine Comedy*: '*Detheologizing' Dante* posits that Dante is the 'god' of his created universe (42). Through Barolini we are introduced to Dante the master illusionist, an ingenious poet who intentionally compels readers into thinking his text is an extension of the biblical narrative he inserts himself into. Moreover, through Dante's virtuosity, audiences are induced to suspend disbelief without the awareness of doing so.

Barolini attempts to bridge the gap between Dante's poetic and theologian status. She reconciles the conventional dichotomy of poet and theologian, through the unified notion of the medieval waking dream. Barolini notes that the journey undertaken by Dante-pilgrim is described as 'real' but never explicitly characterised as a dream, and this she elaborates is to shroud in mystery the experience which Dante himself is confused by, an experience which Barolini rationalizes to conform more plausibly to a waking vision. What Barolini is discussing is the notion of lucid dreaming, a state of awareness accessed whilst one's spirit is yet constrained within the parameters of the unconscious.

Steven Kruger in his *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* discusses the idea of Dante as a liminal figure. On the one hand there was the belief in dreams as oracles from Divinity (which thus points to a necessary commendation of them) (8). Yet, on the other hand, there was the stance of dreams being associated with demonic activity, leading to a response of misgiving (7). Kruger cites a passage from Scripture exhorting against dream interpretation which Dante and those of the period in question would have been aware of. Deuteronomy 18:9 – 12 is the segment in context, and the passage cited by Kruger reads:"…beware lest thou have a mind to imitate the abominations of those nations. Neither let there be found among you any one that consulteth soothsayers, or observeth dreams and omens…For the Lord abhorreth all these things". Nonetheless, considering Scripture is constituted of night and even waking visions, there was understandable vacillation between interpreting dreams and leaving them as they were.

Kruger points out that a way for writers of dream books to absolve their dallying in dream interpretation was by "affiliating themselves in a variety of way with orthodox Christianity"

(9) which seems like something Barolini, if not most sceptical Dantisti, would affirm the said poet did to create and sustain his purported "master illusion". This harks back to my point about Dante enhancing the authority of his text by drawing on biblical content and mode of procedures regarding visions, to establish his allegory as that of theologians. Having assimilated largely from pagan philosophy and poetry, and a theology also influenced by pagan auctors such as the philosopher Aristotle, and Plato, Dante not only broadens the legitimacy of his own eschatological contemplations, but those of the antecedent Greco-Roman societies as well. Where would Divine Authorship then fit in here?

In a chapter titled 'The Doubleness and Middleness of Dreams', Kruger goes on to discuss how medievalists (as their late Antiquity predecessors) dithered between postulating dreams as by-products of mere psychological agitation, and marking them as divinely prompted. Kruger sets forth both Greek Philosopher Aristotle and Synesius of Cyrene (c. 370-414) as holding two diametrically opposed positions, encompassing one side of a suggested binary pertaining to the origin and function of dreams. Aristotle generally perceived dreams as psychologically motivated while the latter, to counteract this argument, posited that dreams are essentially divinely inspired.

To expound on this counter position Synesius writes:

> If dreams are prophets, and if the visions seen in dreams are riddles of their future fortunes to anxious men, they would in that case be full of wisdom, though certainly not clear. In sooth their lack of clearness is their wisdom "for the gods keep man's life concealed" (Hesoid *Works and Days*).

In the above Synesius discourses on dreams, explaining that they are rich with wisdom – able to satisfy the trembling hearts of the anxious by foreshadowing future occurrences. From this we can glean that it is the prerogative of the gods to conceal and to reveal these insights and that remaining mysterious is a factor that cannot change just as the wisdom of man cannot match the wisdom of the gods. Kruger explains that according to Synesius: "dreams do not arise primarily within the human being. Rather, they come from an elevated, divine realm, and reveal truths normally inaccessible to waking consciousness" (18—19). This spiritual outlook is mimicked in Job chapter 33 where dreams are explained as the typical divine means of guiding man towards penitence and piety.

Fourth century philosopher Calcidius – as other Neoplatonic writers – acknowledged the psychological dream, while at the same time admitting dreams beyond the mundane. Kruger elaborates on the sophisticated dream interpretative models of Macrobius and Calcidius which transcend the dichotomous delineation of dreams and accordingly make sense of dreams in light of gradations along a continuum. Diagrammatically the Macrobian model is illustrated below with each dream type described in greater detail:

Higher	*oraculum*	true (revelation by an authoritative, otherworldly figure)
	visio	true (revelation through a vision of mundane events)
	somnium	true, but couched in a fiction
	visum	false (spectral)
Lower	*insomnium*	false (mundane)



(Kruger, 23)

The dream as illustrated, is hierarchical. The more individuation imputed to the source, the lower its *auctoritas* sinks. Kruger explains the first two enlisted dream types, both prophetic as a result of their divine source. These are deemed prophetic in the sense that they were thought to embody a foreshadowing of some or other event (worldly or otherworldly). The means by which the revelation occurs is different for both. In the case of the first, the *oraculum*, a figure of authority appears who delivers instruction on a course to take regarding a revealed future condition dealing with divine realities. In the case of the *visio*, the dreamer simply views some imminent event, here about mundane reality. It occurs to him as in a motion picture, which does away with the need of the figure of authority guiding him through the visions, as in the first (20).

Moving on to the Calcidian dream theory, this schema has four classes of dreams. Calcidius like Macrobius sought to find a middle ground to the two main lines of supposition about

dreams in the Classical era. Kruger begins with the Calcidian inclination towards the stance of dreams being external to the individual, prompted by an external divine force. It reads:

> Calcidius…claims that dreams provide a kind of knowledge that human beings, left to their own devices, can never discover; like "Heraclitus" and the Stoics, he asserts that dreams allow access to [the] "future" and to the unknown (25).

Kruger then discusses Calcidius developing his position on dreams based on Platonic contemplation. Plato confirms the Aristotelian view that dreams result from mundane experience but believes it will be "more or less rational and reliable depending upon the dreamer's internal condition before going to sleep" (26).

Kruger expounds further on the psychological and divine dream notions from which the Calcidian theory borrows. Discussing the Aristotelian influence Kruger writes of the Calcidian 'passional' dream noting "On the one hand those who make no attempt to curb passions in their waking lives experience an uncontrolled, even violent release of passion in their dreams" (26). Then elaborating on the 'revelatory' dream Kruger writes "On the other hand those who are temperate and rationally govern their waking lives dream controlled, even truthful dreams" (26). Calcidius categorises dreams according to their truth and falsity and level of psychological disturbance. The entry of falsities within a dream type is directly proportional to the level of psychological equanimity of an individual. Externality of dream source is again directly proportional to the credibility of the dream, as in the case of the Macrobian designation, where divinely inspired dreams rank at the top. Of those ranking inferior due to the internality of the process engineering them, the rational dreams rank higher. And then of the divinely inspired dreams, the waking vision is above the revelatory dream. The categorisation of the dream types then seems to also be dependent upon the level of material substantiality, or maybe more accurately put the degree of corporeality for each type. With a Platonic outlook infiltrating the theology of Latin *auctors,* holding that anything material was in principle subdued in honour to that of spirit – passions (emotions) were perceived as cruder (more unrefined) than thoughts. And then with the higher sort, dreams being of a psychological import are subdued in the coupling, as a result of spiritual matters being of acute dignity in scholastics. Illustratively, the Calcidian dream theory is such:

Higher	[“Heraclitus”	transcendent dream experience]
	waking visions	from the divine
	revelatory dreams	from the divine
	“rational” dreams	from internal processes
	“passional” dreams	from internal processes
Lower	[Aristotle	mundane dream experience]

(23)

Generally during the Middle Ages, and even the Classical Era there was a takenfor-granted assumption that certain dreams come from the celestial spheres because human beings were not thought capable of generating or drawing out such (revealed) truths by themselves (27). Kruger elaborates more thoroughly on the Calcidian understanding of divinely inspired dreams, starting off on a general note before branching off from the revelatory dream to, lastly, the waking vision. “The higher “internal” dream experience…comes to those who have dedicated themselves to a pure life…these dreams…clearly come from beyond the human realm” (27-28).

The waking *spectaculum* is the last and most authoritative of the four subcategories – one step up from the dream of divine counsel, the revelatory dream. It appears that the difference between receiving divinely inspired truthful dreams and psychologically orientated deceptive dreams is in abiding morality: the one who lives a principled life is more likely to have Divinity communicate to them (and/or the moral visionary is less hindered from comprehending divinely communicated dreams owing to a spiritual purity). This is why it works that Dante hallucinates Hell first: he is initially in trouble with his Maker.

Then, Dante in professing to be a prophet is also to be assumed as asserting moral righteousness, as moral purity is suggested to lend access to divine understanding and perception of divine realities.

In his *Commedia* Dante reflects the Calcidian waking vision more apparently than the other dream classes, and this can be taken to point again towards Dante assuming authority for his text, or rather conveying an assumed authority. I say more on this in chapter 4 where I explore Dante as mystic, immersed in an illusory reality throughout the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, before he, near the end of *Paradiso*, waltzes into a waking vision beholding the truer reality of the courts of heaven and the image of God.

Notwithstanding, at second glance, the poem reveals Dante's rational uncertainties as the source driving all canticles of his *Commedia*, and ultimately the bulk of his works. A thorough examination reveals a more intricate design of dream types woven into the fabric of Dante's *Commedia*. There are shades of an internally generated sort symbolised therein which prompt a more psychological reading of the vision over spiritual which Dante appears as seeking to advocate to a greater extent. This harks back to the discussion of Dante as poet writing as a coping mechanism.

Dante's employment of the 'anagogic' sense will be explored to show how he uses it to elevate his authority to the level of scriptural status. The advantage of this mode is to weave mystical or fantastic figures into the text and associate them with the divine. The point of this section is that Dante appropriates the anagogic method of the Church Fathers to lend credence and weight to the meaning he constructs.

Here I emphasize how Dante conveys the character of this anagogic method in such a way as to make the reader conscious of his quasi-patristic *gravitas*. Thomas Aquinas, a Doctor of the Church, himself believed in the anagogic understanding of celestial entities which are realities as per the Dionysian imagination – interpreting these supernatural entities as shrouded in humble (temporal) array for the sake of condescending to the understanding of finite beings such as in the case of the Four living Creatures described by St John, full of eyes in front and behind (Revelations 4:6). The anagogic sense in patristic exegesis, which is in actual fact the tropological, would reinterpret this apparent physiological 'abnormality' as signifying spiritual qualities beyond the physical manifest. For instance, the many eyes in-front and behind these creatures as noted by John are to be taken as indicators of their (supernatural) perspicuity. Thus again, through this anagogic mode Dante stands above

scrutiny, since his creative forms as adapted from Greco-Roman legends can be interpreted as pointing to celestial realities, e.g., Charon, Geryon, Minos, Cerberus and Evilclaws as demons and devils of the sparsely illustrated Hell of the Bible.

4c. Sources of Authority: The Testimony of the Poet's Life

Like an extended Bible, during the medieval era the universe was also viewed as authored by God, so that what took place within it reflected its Author; Nature was perceived as Divine Will manifest in space and time, making history an expression of God's Will (Miller, 3). From this I mean to argue that in the medieval context, the history of an individual, in this case Dante's education, life experiences and works were to be taken as symptomatic of Divine Will, and if not that, these facts and works are then only indicative of how Divine Will is rooted within his life experiences, corroborating his belief in being a prophet, whether to his advantage or detriment.

Minnis and Scott delineate three dangers inherent in the interpretation of the mystical sense in scripture. The first is the broad exegetical error of being unbounded when dealing with the mystical senses of Scripture which is the patristic designation of the anagogical sense. The second, related to the first, is the expectancy of a mystical sense behind every literal/and historical event or figure. A third is the exegetical error of ignoring or discounting the misdeeds of *auctores* as with the case of King David and Solomon, blinding the reasoning process in favour of apologia to avoid desacralisation of the 'Word of God' (Minnis & Scott).

To expound on these exegetical oversights – the last more particularly – Minnis and Scott deal with the ways in which Uriah the Hittite (victim to David's adultery, and then his ensuing murderous scheme to cover up the former) was allegorised by theologians as symbolising the devil, essentially to exonerate King David – an epithet pointing to David's descendant, Christ the allegorical fulfilment of the former. The exculpation is tied to the perception that the authority of the psalms, the Davidic prophecies, might otherwise be compromised by the immorality signified through the literal sense of the biblical account of David's sins.

A case in point, Henry of Ghent discomforted by the inescapable misdeeds of this prophetic authority, takes recourse in the flighty interpretation which he describes as "turn[ing] on the contrast between the substance or very essence of an action and some quality or 'accident'

relating to it, in this case the way in which the action was performed" (Minnis and Scott, 208). This interpretation is explained as follows:

> Considered in terms of the way in which it was performed, no good interpretation of David's action is possible. Considered in terms of the substance of the action, one can imagine a prince having a knight put to death and taking his wife for himself: looked at from this viewpoint, a bad deed can have a good allegorical interpretation and be expounded for a good end (208).

In the explanation just laid out Richard of Saint-Victor misconstrues the facts as we are meant to read them, i.e., for their literal sense, and this is because he fails to separate that from the allegorical sense which is that the King David to follow, Christ the son of God, will not Himself be morally compromised. Since He is the Son of God too, this means that David as a conduit of His promptings, a mere man selected to figure Him cannot be taken as the yardstick to measure the incorruptibility of the authority inherent in Scripture. It is thus incumbent upon the exegete to read nothing into scripture and make no necessary connections where they are not warranted, reading narratives not as isolated events but tracing all correlated passages, preferably those of literal import so as to establish sound understanding and a sturdy basis for more mystical interpretation (where warranted).

If sensible exegetes succeeding Henry of Ghent, such as Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas of Lyre, are consulted on this matter of King David's sins and how this impinged upon the authority of Holy Writ – if at all – one gleans a response more settling, and even pleasing. Minnis and Scott explain that they deal with the problem of authorial criminality "not via allegory but via exemplification, an interpretative method which sits comfortably with literal and historical exegesis." David as an "*exemplum* of the truly penitent man", as per Aquinas' and Lyre's exegesis in their Psalter commentaries is an interpretation that opens up an opportunity for believers and unbelievers alike to make penitence for their own sins, catalysing hope in their sins (however foul) being pardoned likewise (208).

I perceive Dante fuses spiritual tropes with historical facts to navigate a mystical landscape which translates as illustrative poetry with a theological incline. In desperation for acclaim he seems to have overdone injection of biblical tropes into his essentially courtly romance, to implant *auctoritas* within this poem, and thus orchestrate an authority that his contemporaries would have at least wondered about. Dante's *Vita Nuovo* intention to leave off celebrating Beatrice by the end of his life had countless time to ponder on the modes of representation

that would purchase him acclaim amongst both the mass population and the elite. His stratagem did indeed secure him esteem and a largely uncontroversial one owing to the relaxation of Scriptural knowledge amongst the mass of civilians of his era, and then in subsequent eras across social classes owing to the progressively bleak and barren scepticism of the modern era.

In dealing with morality in terms of exemplum, the biographical deals with the personal and subjective in a way that does not suspend the authoritative from taking root because the object, God in his perfection, omniscience and judgements is interwoven therein. In the upcoming paragraphs is the converse, namely that with Dante authority is compromised by the biographical in an irreconcilable way.

Jeremy Tambling in his *Dante and* Différance*: Writing in the 'Commedia'* sees Dante's revisions to older works in order that they conform to newer ones, (done so that a prophetic insight be originated, or as I prefer 'manufactured' thereby) as indications of the heuristic process of self-unveiling, i.e., Dante gradually uncovering the prophet he is (and by that meaning the fully actualised potential of himself as Divinely informed in his formation). As a deconstructionist, Tambling ultimately believes that none can reach a point of pure actuality (full realisation) except either right before his last breath (temporally speaking), as exposited above, or, beyond death, when Dante (as a man, a pilgrim upon the earth) is no longer in the world of traces (i.e., when they are dead) and thus most alive being embraced by the 'I AM' within the Empyrean, subsumed into Beingness, no longer continuously grasping after traces of Being. But the notion of writing as Dante's heuristic tool is not a good argument to rationalise the mistakes in Dante's *Commedia*, because even in death Dante has not been able to reach the authority of credibility expected of scribes for God.

The theological symbolism of seeking salvation through pilgrimage seems to be subjected to exalting Beatrice and Dante's poetic enterprise, his thoughts, his life, his knowledge, his religious pride and his philosophical beliefs which bolsters my point about Dante's vocation reconciling his personal interests with the Deific: Dante presents himself as being on a pilgrimage and/or quest to find Beatrice, a seemingly real person now exalted to the Celestial, thus completing his purpose and destiny as a man under divine guidance. For Dante's purposes Beatrice is the consummation of a God-given vocation, but this places his authority lower than scripture where Christ is eminent.

CHAPTER TWO: SYMBOLIC MODES

In the introductory chapter I suggested that Dante's mode of symbolism lacks some of the qualities of biblical prophecy, and that as a result I would not place him securely on that rung of the ladder of authority. This chapter pursues the comparison further by analysing biblical hermeneutics in more detail, given that Dante invites us to use similar principles in reading his *Commedia*, in order (I would argue) to enhance his authorial authority. The chapter begins with a survey of critical discussion of the mystical senses of the Bible, namely tropology, allegory and anagogy, placing particular emphasis on Auerbach's essay on *figura*. After an initial discussion of Dante's approach to biblical modes, I present a table of the three senses as they appear in the Bible and in Dante. Finally, I analyse how Dante actually attains to these senses through his poetic works, as I see it. It becomes apparent how dense and inherent biblical symbols are in contrast to symbols in Dante's *Commedia*. It is open to debate just how far into the spectrum of authority Dante's texts reach.

1. Survey of Critical Applications of Biblical Symbolic Modes

1a. Auerbach: figura

In *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, Erich Auerbach's essay "*Figura* in the Phenomenal Prophecy of the Church Fathers" discusses the hermeneutical structure that prevailed in biblical interpretation during the Middle Ages, known as the 'figural approach', where the Old Testament was studied as an exhibition of a set of historically factual phenomena that simultaneously foreshadowed events and/or persons to be realised in the New Testament (Auerbach, 29).

Applying Auerbach's figural approach, I will illustrate in more detail how medievalists read texts, particularly medieval allegories, and how this was affected by the way they 'read' the universe – themselves inclined to reading the 'Book of Nature' (the Universe) as a mystical plane ready to be quarried for rich insights into the character of God and eternal divine

mysteries of the cosmos. Dante's text does not attain to Auerbach's *figura* but he mimics this sense, creating a mysticism of typological value.

In a segment of Auerbach's essay, we have an extract from Tertullian's *Adversus Marcionem* on biblical figuration, particularly how Joshua son of Nun is a prefiguration of Jesus Christ. Writing of Joshua, whom Moses (Numbers 13:16) named Jehoshua son of Nun, Tertullian, a prolific second-century theologian writes:

> For the first time he is called Jesus… This, then, we first observe, was a figure of things to come. For inasmuch as Jesus was to introduce a new people…into the promised land flowing with milk and honey… therefore that great man, who was prepared as a type of this sacrament, was even consecrated in figure with the Lord's name, and was called Jesus (28–29).

The patristic allegorical reading of scripture forms part of the biblical hermeneutic that Dante adapts and asks us to accept as applicable to his poem. The figural approach is what was conventionally named the 'allegorical mode' or 'typology' in patristic exegesis. Strict allegory is a mystical sense that is Christ-centred: the Old Testament signifiers (people, places and events) point to Christ's character, exploits, etc. This can be distinguished from allegory as it is known today where a non-material or fictitious 'type' (event or character, etc.) is thought to be emblematic of either some real/fictitious entity (event, character, etc.); those are an extended mode of anagogy and tropology respectively, which have a more creative or fictional foundation than allegory (proper) and anagogy (proper). In allegory (proper) both the signifying-type and signified-fulfilment are material, in other words tangible phenomena (see the examples in the table below). In the figural interpretation the figure or event foreshadowing is a non-fictitious event, and the fulfilment of the type is itself non-fictitious. Dante's poem borrows scriptural authority when a biblical symbol is woven, intact, into the text of his *Commedia*.

Further in the same essay, Auerbach reflects on the allegorical mode, with the same Joshua-Jesus example, as follows:

> Joshua…led the people of Israel into the promised land of Palestine, so the grace of Jesus…leads the "second people" into the land of eternal beatitude... *figura* is something real and historical, which announces something else that is also real and historical. (29)

Tertullian's example of Christ's grace ushering believers into Paradise being figured by Joshua's leadership of Israel into Palestine shows how scriptural allegory deals with historical fact. Joshua's actions were taken to be fully historical. Dante's allegory on the other hand has

a fictive veil and an intangible signified, which is probably the reason why from *Inferno* to *Paradiso* 30 Dante does not tell us what the signifieds of his poem are. His fictitious signifiers (figures and events) are poetically engineered events and characters pointing to so-called spiritual truths (incorporeal signifieds); this is not anagogy but tropology, making the *Commedia* a tropologically mystical poem. But because Dante speaks of beautiful lies veiling truth it seems truer to Dante's meaning that he expects us to take his invented signs as pointing to tangible realities, which then means that the figures and events which his poetic tale points to are of palpable reality. This mystical sense is what I term extended anagogy, because there tend to be no boundaries where the creative imagination is concerned: linking many signifiers to a pool of signifieds.

1b. Minnis and Scott; Charles Williams: accommodation and the affirmative way

The Dionysian imagination which foregrounds the referential nature of visionary (prophetic) imagery concerning God and Heaven, makes all biblical visionary imagery only of symbolic signification. The way these depictions of heavenly beings are supposedly to be understood is that they deviate from the actual celestial entities as they truly exist in that the referred is only of an abstract unquantifiable nature, such as thoughts or emotions. This aligns with the pervasive exegetical comprehension of the 'anagogical' sense, modelled after the 'Way of Affirmation'– a mode of representation that understands divine beings as essentially unrepresentable, or more accurately put, 'too marvellous to be representable' according to any of the corporeal forms known to man. The pseudo-Dionysian tradition moves away from the historical basis of theology to a poetic tropology – the use of fictional symbols to point to unquantifiable truths.

But it does not end there with Dante, who also wishes for us to understand his poetry as signifying the quantifiably tangible as when the River of Light changes to the glimmering saints in the Sempiternal Rose. This is what I categorise as an extended form of anagogy, a fictitious signifier pointing to a tangible signified. In Dante's *Commedia*, the River of Light does not point to a true body of water but disappears to usher in the glistening saints in the courts of Heaven. This is not strict anagogy which has a solid foundation in the historical, where literal and historic points to the transcendent. But it could be argued that this extended sense of anagogy is the mode that Jesus employs in his parables, as I argue below.

For now, I wish to point out that the unrepresentable, that which is intangible and unquantifiable as the Dionysian imagination would have it, would rather characterise the

portrayed bodily form of God the Father as pointing to something essentially unquantifiable in form, i.e., a non-corporeal entity such as 'Truth' or 'Love'. According to the Dionysian imagination, because God does not have hands or feet, the statements in the Bible that says he does are to be interpreted as metaphorical.

It seems the justification for this notion of God as the 'unrepresentable' is Exodus 20 verse 4 which cautions the Israelites against making graven images of the likeness of anything in Heaven or the earth, as though this censure is made because God and celestial beings have no corporeal likenesses. But this is not necessarily the case because the depictions of God the Father – which I shall discuss even further below – although not altogether complete and clear *do* reveal a Being with at least some features which are similar to the glorified Christ and thus corporeally signifiable. As Jesus says to the apostle Philip, "He that seeth me seeth the Father" (John 14:9). When we read the Bible through the strict sense of anagogy, viewing anagogic signs as iconic (identical yet in a different form, such as a mirror and the person whose image is reflected), we see that God the Father, whose appearance is in fact depicted in Daniel 7, Exodus 33 and Revelation 4 & 5, does have a bodily presence.

According to the above exegetical tradition it is understood that heavenly entities are only abstract qualities, and are thus only representable symbolically. This summation is given of both Thomas Gallus' and Robert Grosseteste's renditions of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *On Celestial Hierarchies* (Minnis and Scott, 165–173). Yet an entity is by definition not abstract. Nonetheless, features deemed ignoble, e.g., such as those possessed by the four living creatures in the book of Revelation and Ezekiel, are, in this tradition, reckoned as intellectual qualities to clean the look of Heaven from any corporeal suggestiveness. The face of an eagle for instance is translated as pointing to pre-eminence, royalty, swiftness extraordinary sight, and so forth, of the heavenly intelligences (196). These interpretations, along with the elaborate designation of the ranks of angelic hierarchies capriciously wrought from scant biblical passages, show the imaginative theology of Catholic thought that fed Dante's 'vision'.

Anagogy, along with the allegorical, was generally thought to set Christian literature apart from Classical. Anagogy tends to be allusive, with some ambiguity about the literal and the figurative. With the anagogical sense, it was understood that figuration is adapted to the limits of human understanding. This is what is known as accommodation, where inventive symbols were encouraged to help facilitate an otherwise inadequate visionary sight. And so,

what this has led to with Dante, is also symptomatic of theologians of the thirteenth century, giving themselves free rein where interpretation of biblical imagery is concerned, elevating the status of the fictive, to the detriment of the literal and more pointedly the historical.

This murky understanding of the anagogic sense is captured by Minnis and Scott in their telling appellation "*Reductive* and Anagogic Imagery", which they go on to explain in the following manner (168):

> For our benefit the divine ray is enveloped in veils and figures, visible beauties being made to reflect the invisible beauties of [H]eaven, sweet sensory odours being used as emblems of the intelligible teaching, and material lights as a likeness of a gift of immaterial enlightenment (see *The Celestial Hierarchy,* Ch. i).

The idea of symbolism as a "mark of God's infinite condescension and goodness to His creatures" (168) reverberates. Thus, exegetes were not, as described earlier of Dante, distinguishing between what is scripturally symbolic and what is directly represented.

From his work titled *Benjamin Minor,* Richard of Saint-Victor is cited by Minnis and Scott to elaborate on this "imaginative" (spiritual) signification mode fashioned for finite comprehension (anagogy), asserting (168):

> …[Holy Scriptures] describe unseen things by forms of visible things... Read John's Apocalypse and you will find the heavenly Jerusalem is often described as being adorned with gold and silver, pearls, and other precious gems.

Following the above Richard of Saint-Victor argues "…that none of these things [the abovementioned gold, silver, pearls and gems] are in that place from which no good thing is absent" (168), he leaning towards the figurative nature of symbols, a recognisable and familiar signifier veiling that which cannot be seen by the naked eye, the intangibles of anagogic sense material.

1c. Paul Piehler: Figura *versus* Figmentum

Paul Piehler's *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* explores the psychological dimensions of a medieval dream vision, particularly how the reader of such visions is invited to engage the psychological landscape of a given author, vicariously participating in a psychotherapeutic process which includes phases such as "crisis, confession, comprehension and transformation" (18). Maintaining the definition of strict allegory in patristic exegesis which is clarified through the idea of *figura* (God's sacred meaning as symbolically

translated through history) as elaborated by Auerbach, this description of the allegorical landscape being connected to the psychological matrix of an individual exhibits what allegory truly means. Allegory is the manifestation of one's psyche in evident phenomena. The difference between the sacred *figura* and the sacral *figmentum* (meaning manufactured through literal sense) is that in the former we are looking at God's spirit as manifest in temporal things, and in the latter, as with myths, we have a writer's psyche manifest through symbols fictitiously engineered. Comparing *figura* (peering into God's spirit) to *figmentum* (peering into an artist's psyche) one can make the basic distinction between sacred and pseudo-sacred literature. In the former God's omnipotently creative mind is explored; in the latter it is the individual's own psychological matrix along with its dilemmas which is at the forefront.

Piehler construes medieval allegories as exhibitions of contemplative processes probing into divine realities. This line of thought supports my stance that Dante through his written work, appears not to be a seer according to the biblical standard, but rather a religiously disposed engineer – in short, an interpreter and illuminator of biblical, mythical and historic signs, displaying his theological comprehensions (of salvation) through poetic imagery – typical of the generic convention of medieval allegories. In thirteenth-century Italy, this kind of illumination would have meant a reduction of his *auctoritas* amongst theologian *auctors*, setting him up as the fallible communicator he is at times exposed to be through the scientific and doctrinal inaccuracies transcribed within *his* monumental *yet only poetically* so, work, which is inappropriately suggested as 'God-breathed'. More of how his work is so described in chapter 4.

1d. Angus Fletcher and Charles Singleton: allegory and history

In sharpening his definition of allegory, Angus Fletcher in his *The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* writes: "the whole point of allegory is that it does *not* need to be read exegetically; it often has a literal level that makes good enough sense all by itself" (7). What Fletcher is addressing is the fact that allegory was not figurative as in the sense of symbolism, but had a literal level that was inherently valuable in and of itself.

To delve further into the view about Dante's writing and the authority it carried – as expounded in this dissertation, Fletcher writes:

> Even *The Divine Comedy* which most readers would assume to be the greatest Western example of allegory, seemed to Coleridge, and has more recently been shown by Auerbach, to be a quasi-allegorical work (Fletcher, 10).

According to Fletcher a quasi-allegorical work is when the literal constitutes some level of the historical too, and this links to my recognition of Dante's *Commedia* as, tropologically mystical. And yet, it also reaches towards but does not attain to the anagogical (the historic meets the fantastical), and even less the allegorical (the more plainly historical).

But Singleton in his journal article 'Dante's Allegory' credits Dante's work as allegorical in the biblical sense. Singleton's approach to Dante's vocational saga makes unabashed steps towards Dante as theologian, not in the modern sense of one who merely teaches spiritual truths already revealed to mankind, but in the sense of a special channel of yet-unrevealed-ideas transferred to mankind, as conduit of the Divine, i.e., a natural theologian. This synthesis from Singleton is operating from the scriptural mode as postulated by St Augustine, which he explains does not merely signify through words as pagan poetry did, unable to transcend this level of signification (according to more orthodox exegetical tradition of Late Antiquity/Early Middle Ages). Augustine contended that the difference between the Bible and pagan poetry was the mystical sense lent to the former through signifying via things above mere words, where, for instance, the words of Christ "carry your cross" will not simply be isolated to the denotative level to render a directive for disciples to physically pick up a wooden crucifix. The profound signification of the Bible according to Augustine allows for a theologically figurative interpretation of the word 'crucifying', drawing out the spiritual sense of mortifying the flesh to mean the disciple is exhorted to annihilate the desires of the humanly (carnal) appetites. But signifying through things is also a mode of 'pagan' allegories as evident in Dante's work too where the demon Cerberus, with its triple head, signifies inhumane greed.

Singleton then argues that the inclusion of historical figures such as Virgil and (more contentiously) Beatrice gives the poem a level of historic substantiality comparable to Scripture. This historical substantiality he notes particularly in the case of Virgil, so that Virgil is not merely an allegorical form of Reason – he has greater complexity in character, thereby resisting reduction to mere allegory.

Singleton does not differentiate between *figura* and *figmentum*. Singleton pays little attention to the biblical foundation in palpable history as it unravels or will unravel at a future time, not piecing together anachronistic historical facts, contexts and figures as is often the case with

poetic texts. In scripture, dealing with the literal and historical is true even in the case of tropology. A case in point for tropology is the beasts seen in Daniel and Revelation. These are by-products of bestiality instead of 'the unquantifiable' proposed through pseudo-Dionysius. An entity, heavenly or otherwise, like the living creatures of Ezekiel's visions cannot be defined as abstract without a *reductio ad absurdum*. The celestial which is only immaterial not incorporeal is also quantifiable as the many eyes and many faces of the Scriptural living creatures are.

According to Singleton, the depth and intricacy of Virgil's character conveys historicity to Dante's *Commedia* moving Dante up a rung on the scale of authority. In emulating the objective truth of history in two characters, Virgil and Beatrice, Dante is evoking the same link between history and the objective truth of the Bible (for an age in which this was taken for granted). In Dante's case, for instance, points of light are beings of favour, whether angels or God Himself. Light is symbolic of illumination because seeing is a metaphor of understanding. We may then say it is natural for light-beings to illuminate making light representative of intellectual rigour. As Dante narrates the angels and God are beings of thorough and meticulous intelligence. Biblical symbols are more natural than this, and even when they deal in anagogy unlimited – which has its basis in what is invented. Christ is naturally an olive tree, as walking in the sun must have made him olive-tanned, and Christ as Christianity is a tree, representing a Body with many offshoots. Another example of anagogy unlimited and how unarbitrary the biblical signs of this sense are is Millennium Christ as a king owning estates just as Christ narrates of himself in parables (Matthew 18:23—25; 20:1—16).

Another example of symbols in general not being arbitrary in the Bible we have Christ as the Light of the world: he is the firstborn among creation (since he was with God as He created all, the One that *illumines* the cosmos, the first spirit born individual just as the first thing that is spoken into existence by God is light. Christ is a light in some pre-ordained or self-evident way. Beatrice as the Church touches on this natural symbolism as it imitates this from biblical allegory where *figura* Eve is an emblem for Church, *ecclesia* (Auerbach, *Figura* 30). But this relation is not as consistent with Beatrice because she is not from Dante as Eve comes from Adam's side or the Church coming from Christ's missionary work. However, it could be said that as a female voice inside of his works Beatrice takes her existence as a teacher from Dante's 'missionaries' too – speaking words fashioned by Dante. Dante thus approximates the allegory of theologians, but also that of poets as the Bible does too. The symbolic weight

of his historical figures, i.e., Virgil and Beatrice, are not to be expected continuously – their characters being assimilated as purely 'performing' themselves, and since no one is reasonable at all times. Virgil is not reasonable when he, shrewd as he is, trusts the devils of the fifth ditch of the eighth circle who wind up leading both he and Dante to a ditch without a bridge (*Inf*. 23:140—141). Dante is at least scared to follow, sensing something amiss from their conduct (*Inf.* 21:131—132). This appeal to inconsistency in human nature transferred to the character of Virgil thereby seals the historic substantiality of the poem, but not in their entirety (Singleton, 80 – 81).

2. Dante's Appeal to the Mystical Senses of Biblical Exegesis

This section introduces the theme of the contrast between the historical basis of scriptural symbolism and the fictional basis of Dante's symbolism, with some overlap in the peopling of *Inferno, Purgatorio,* and *Paradiso*. This general difference between the Bible and Dante's *Commedia* then generates my distinction between biblical and Dantesque tropology, allegory, and anagogy, while recognizing that the similarity between the two symbolic systems allows Dante to make some claim to approximating biblical authority.

Dante, in his *Letter to Can Grande della Scala*, views the mode of treatment of the *Paradiso* (at least) as poetic, *fictive* and transumptive (metaphorical) (para 9), meaning, he intends us to view the literal plot of his narrative as representational and as essentially *unreal*. This is why in the said letter Dante describes his poem as falling in the category of allegory, appealing to the three senses above the literal, i.e., the tropological, allegorical and anagogical (para 7). According to exegetical tradition the three modes together constitute the mystical. In this section I will attempt to show how Dante appropriates each of these modes, which he collapses into the term "allegory", in a less specialized sense.

In general, the difference between Dante's allegorical method and the mystical senses of scripture lies in the physical character of the sign in the latter case. In scriptural exegesis, the mystical senses involve interpretation of the literal, where Dante creates a simulated reality with an allegorical meaning. For instance, in Dante's case the she-wolf is allegorical for the sin of avarice (Esolen, 416); in the biblical take the wolf *embodies* this sin instead, where Christ speaks of false prophets who are wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). In the

first instance we are dealing with an imaginary emblem, pointing to an abstraction, and in the second we are dealing with the mystical properties of Nature, i.e. real wolves are a symbol of actual, living false prophets and the category as a whole. In allegorical proper (Auerbach, 29) and anagogical (proper) (Minnis and Scott, 168) both signifiers are tangible, in Dante's allegorical and anagogical the signifier is fictitious – as he writes of truths hidden behind beautiful lies (fabrications).

As explained above, in the case of the tropological, even symbols are not extrinsic in the Bible. Another example is, in Dante's *Purgatorio*, in Earthly Paradise, the ladies that signify hope faith and charity (*Purg*. 29: 121–129) exemplify arbitrary symbolism, but in the Bible the wife figures Christ's Bride because of the general differences between the masculine and the feminine (as understood then) such as activity versus passivity, leadership versus subjection (Ephesians 5:22–25). There is a universal factual justification in Nature for Bible symbolism - but this is disrupted in Dante where it is more fictive. More pointedly in Dante's *Purgatorio* we have the burning chariot of fire symbolising the degradation of the Church (Esolen, 345). A chariot symbolising a body of people or even the structure of a place of worship is a tenuous link between signifier and signified. Going back to the Bible we have Christ as the vine (John 15:1–5), which explains his sacrifice in spilling his blood which resembles wine in colour, the branches his veins for the offshoots, those that live in Christ.

For the most part, Dante's narrative as written in his *Il Convivio* claims to present "truth hidden beneath a lovely fiction" (Book II, Chapter 1, para 2), and therefore, as a dream vision might be a *somnium* (symbolic dream) rather than a *visio* (revelatory dream) – except that his symbols (later on in *Paradiso*) claim to refer to reality and that would make it a *visio,* as when Dante has drunk from the River of Light seeing the Courtly Rose and God's human form. This means God unveils for Dante where figures in his history are placed within the Paradisal hierarchy, which is indeed a grand claim to make since we would also be compelled to believe him in the peopling of *Purgatorio* and (lamentably) *Inferno*. It seems we cannot at least escape the fact that the souls in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* belong to whom they refer to in history, meaning Dante also shows us who is in God's eternal judgement. From this we also have Dante legitimising the poetic spheres of *Purgatorio*. Alternatively, we could say that the figures in Dante's history merely symbolically point to people that truly are guilty of these sins, and thus liable for the punishments because Dante would have us believe that the bulk of his *Commedia* presents fictional (inventive) signs signifying that which is true whether tangible, corporeal or metaphysical. Dante asks us to believe that the concrete elements of the

poem are not to be taken at face value but that this need not diminish the authority of its authorship because Dante's creative (fictitious) forms as adapted from Greco-Roman legends can be treated as pointing to celestial realities. Dante is given licence to shroud the *unknown* signifieds in mysterious cloaks because, after all, Heaven cannot be comprehended by the finite.

Thus, history as a standard of truth need not hamper a poem of such great loftiness as Dante's *Commedia*? It seems that it does since historicity is a critical factor in establishing spiritual authority. Because history is God's narrative, God's Spirit is in all of its (tropological, allegorical and anagogical) signs. History is also a system which showcases the fulfilment of prophecies, proving God omniscient above man, as men would not, speaking of their own accord, with their limited abilities, be able to reveal future events except through supernatural illumination. *Fabula* (a tale with a string of made-up signifiers) on the other hand showcases the poet's ingenuity.

Now, we need to ask what the issue would be if the elements in a symbolic sign were varied, and rather, more pointedly, how could it be verified that one signified is more befitted to a specific signifier than another? Tying back to the intricate, mystical conception of the universe held by Dante's contemporaries, in biblical symbols, history is the literal landscape, the spiritual truth its metaphorical counterpart, such that betraying either of these is stepping out of the Mind of God, the only True Authority in the Middle Ages. Biblical symbols are not as arbitrary and empty as they are outside of scripture. Thus, a Christian poet like Dante can only hope to mimic the Bible as closely as possible from beginning to end, keeping with the exact time structures around events in order to increase his *auctoritas.* In order not to have his *auctoritas* questioned he would have to have written in a nuanced way filling in the voids that never made the biblical narratives using biblical symbols whilst remaining true to history.

Symbols metaphorically tie signifier to signified. Symbolism is more artificial than iconic or indexical signs in that there exists no inherent (natural) connection between signifier and signified (Barbieri, para 17). But there does exist a spiritual or 'metaphorical' connection in a selective, restricted manner that requires readerly discrimination. For instance, scripturally the seven congregations in Asia are likened to seven lampstands (Revelation 1:20). The notion of 'light-bearing' is what connects the two, the symbol drawing this connection out more palpably, the signified metaphorically or spiritually. This is similar to Beatrice as a

symbol of the Church because she shares in the quality of being a believer in Christ, and she is female as a bride should be.

Through symbols Dante gradually penetrates further and further into the reality behind the veil, at last claiming to be able to represent the ultimate truth in the form of the Sempiternal Rose and then God. Going back to the exegetical tradition of the anagogical, even the biblical creatures of Heaven and Heaven itself could be classified as lies, such that one need not pay attention to the literal features of the seraphim and the four living creatures, but discern what these attributes mean in 'spirit' (in essence). The river of life is a body of healing water, and above this it also stands as a metaphor of life continuous – eternal life. Dante creates the misconception that all signs within the *Commedia* are natural and close-ended as they are in Scripture, and yet in his *Commedia* there are but manufactured associations between signifiers and signifieds. The River of Light does not have a concrete manifestation but stands for the scintillating intellect of those nearest to God. Dante's River of Light also does away with biblical symbols in that the River of *Life* (signifier) stands for an unceasing life (signified), the River of *Light* (signifier) on the other hand, intellectual power (signified).

3. Anatomy of Symbolic Modes

To codify the discussion above, and at the risk of turning a fluid and ambiguous phenomenon like symbolism into a neat system, we can consider the following tables of symbolic modes in the Bible and in Dante, based on the factual/fictional character of the signifier (that is, the literal level of the narrative):

3a. The Bible

Signifier (literal)	Signified	Symbolic mode
<u>Fictitious</u> Lamb with seven eyes	<u>Intangible</u> Christ's wisdom	<u>Tropology</u> Creative and transcendent. ● Modern sense of allegory
<u>Non-Fictitious</u>	<u>Tangible</u>	<u>Allegory</u>

Lamb of atonement	Christ crucified	Historical and symbolic
<u>Non-Fictitious</u> River of life	<u>Intangible</u> Eternal life	<u>Anagogy</u> Historical and transcendent
<u>Fictitious</u> King + vineyard	<u>Tangible</u> Kingdom of God	<u>Anagogy (Extended)</u> Creative and historical ● The parabolic mode

3b. La Commedia

Signifier (literal)	Signified	Symbolic mode
<u>Fictitious</u> Dante's three ladies in earthly paradise Cerberus: Triple-headed beast of Antiquity	<u>Intangible</u> Hope, faith and love Greed	<u>Tropology</u> Creative and transcendent ● Modern sense of allegory
<u>Non-fictitious</u> Bice Portinari	<u>Tangible</u> Christ	<u>Allegory</u> Historical and symbolic
<u>Non-fictitious</u> God	<u>Intangible</u> Truth and/or love	<u>Anagogy</u> Historical and transcendent i.e., Revelation prophecy
<u>Fictitious</u> Beatrice	<u>Tangible</u> The Church	<u>Anagogy (Extended)</u> Creative and historical ● The parabolic mode

4. Dante's Use of Mystical Senses: Troplogy, Anagogy and Allegory

4a. Tropology

In *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, the 4th edition, Chris Baldick explains that a trope is a "figure of speech, especially one that uses words in senses beyond their literal meanings". To delve deeper, from the Merriam Webster dictionary we read that tropology, the first level of figurative meaning, has to do with tropes: namely, 1a: "a figurative mode of speech or writing" (*Merriam Webster*), and more significantly, 1b: "a mode of biblical interpretation stressing a moral meaning inhering in the metaphorical character of language" (*Merriam Webster*). An example from Dante's *Commedia* is how he dresses up the three theological virtues, hope, faith and love, modelling them as women (*Purg*. 29: 121—129) or how in the third ring of Inferno he uses Cerberus, a symbol of greed, to monitor the gluttonous (*Inf*. 6:13—18, 22—33). This is what is deemed allegorical in the modern sense: a fictitious signifier veiling an intangible (psychological or otherwise spiritual) reality.

Tropology also refers to the "fate of the individual soul" (Baldick). With the tropological, we can approach the *Inferno* as a satire on vices in general, and then those individuals who Dante posits as having committed those crimes, whether these are historically verifiable or not become less of a focus for the reader. The reader is more engaged with the vices that he himself must turn from in order to avoid the kinds of ordeals alluded to by Dante. The same can be said of *Paradiso* on the opposing side – particularly that discussion of certain virtues and the characters annexed to them may encourage the reader to emulate the virtues in the hopes of obtaining comparable distinction.

Biblically we witness the tropological in the lamb with seven eyes and seven horns typifying Christ. Figuratively He is identified with a lamb because he is the atonement sacrifice. The seven eyes and horns are the seven spirits of God which one can ascertain as intelligences – as having many eyes gives panoramic view to the one who has them, which could be figurative for sagacity. Christ is often symbolised as Wisdom personified so that it is appropriate that He has the seven-fold spiritual gifts of God.

Horns are symbols of rulership (Revelation 17:12), such that Christ the lamb with seven horns is the ruler of the Sabbath (seventh day).

4b. Allegory

Allegory in the technical exegetical sense, the second layer of mystical meaning, as used by theologians, is a hermeneutical method that prevailed in biblical interpretation during the Middle Ages. It is commonly denominated 'typology', but Auerbach draws this interpretative system out as the 'figural approach', where the Old Testament was studied as an exhibition of a set of historically factual phenomena that simultaneously foreshadowed events and/or persons to be realised in the New Testament (Auerbach, 29).

Biblically, Jonah the prophet's story is a type foreshadowing the resurrection. Esolen writes that the story of Jonah was:

> …a harbinger, exactly as in a symphony a composer will subtly introduce a motif whose full flowering will be heard only at the climax of the piece. Jonah was meant to be a harbinger of the resurrected Christ. To view him as such is not felt as whimsical or arbitrary. It is to see how the particular (and Jonah always remains that particular, that recalcitrant prophet with his marine mishap) fits the whole. It is to see and love the beauty of the universe's story. (xxi)

With typology we can see how the story of Jonah's marine mishap foreshadows the impending crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, but it is quite another thing to say that the latter brings about the former such that Jonah gets swallowed by a whale for days coming out in the third because it was preordained that Christ be crucified and buried, waking from the grave the third day.

From Dante's *Commedia*, the closest we get to typology is Beatrice as the figure of Christ, a female saviour for Dante's expedition to God. There may be some doubt whether Bice Portinari is in fact a historical person (Gilson, 2), and how much the *Commedia* presents an historical account: his narrative tends to fracture chronology, as he writes of events that have happened in the past as though they are yet to occur (e.g. when Cacciaguida gives a prophecy to Dante of his current exile (*Inf.* 17:46—48; 55—75) as though it were still coming, as noted in my introduction). Dante also manipulates true history to fit his ideals of a revival of imperial power in Italy through Henry VII of Luxembourg. Cacciaguida in Paradiso 17 says of the ("great") Henry:

> The sparks of his high virtue will appear, scornful of silver and the toils of war. His proud liberality will make its mark, and even enemies in seeing that, will have no

> power to mute their tongues in praise. Await him, and the good he'll bring to you. By him a multitude will be transformed, the poor exalted and the rich brought low (*Par.* 17: 83 – 90).

This is a misleading insertion by Dante, as Henry VII's cause was not even supported by the Pope Clement V (reigned 1305–1314) and since the *Commedia* was written from 1308 to 1321 it is almost certain that Dante wrote of Henry after he died (1313) with those disappointed hopes, a year into his reign. So now, since we know Dante does not ultimately attain to allegory proper or biblical typology, we can however see cursorily how (as Robert Hollander in his *Paradiso 4.14: Dante as Nebuchadnezzar?* argues) "Dante *is* the new Nebuchadnezzar in that both of them, if far from being holy men (indeed both were sinners), were nonetheless permitted access to visionary experience of God, only to be unable to retain their visions in memory" (para 5). Beatrice in like manner to Daniel who soothes Nebuchadnezzar's rage of being puzzled by his visions soothes Dante's soul of nervous tension in not knowing why injustice exists and whether the final habitat of the human soul is the stars. Hollander also indicates a second typological equivalence in that when Dante is bedazzled by St John, as Paul was by the risen Christ, Beatrice (as Ananias) meets Dante (typological for Paul) along the way as he gains back his sense of sight (para 4).

4c. Anagogy

Anagogy is the third level of figurative meaning. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines an anagoge (noun) as "Revealing a higher spiritual meaning behind the literal meaning of a text." Baldick goes on to state, still under the headline of anagoge, that:

> Medieval Christian exegesis of the Bible (see typology) reinterpreted many episodes of Hebrew scripture according to four levels of meaning…of these, the anagogical sense was seen as the highest, relating to the ultimate destiny of humanity according to the Christian scheme of universal history.

This mystical sense was of the promises of Heaven which, owing to the magnanimity of Heaven, cannot be viewed by the finite. Lying signifiers were thought to be used in place of the real to facilitate this limited perception and theological truths were granted greater credibility than standard truth. This is what is known as accommodation and it might seem to allow Dante to flout or misrepresent history and still be thought to communicate sound theological truths. But the standard authority for the anagogical mode, pseudo-Dionysius' *On*

Celestial Hierarchies is misleading in this respect: anagogy should, strictly speaking, use literal and historical figures (Minnis and Scott, 168) – whether in the past, present or future. The signifiers lie only because they are illusory (imagined) but they showcase how things will exist at a future time such as with Ezekiel in his vision of the temple (Ezekiel 40-48) or St John's vision of the former martyrs in white robes in Heaven at the eschaton of the universe. The signifiers do not lie because the signifieds of anagogy proper attain to an incorporeal level of being that is facilitated by the lying signifier, e.g. the six wings of the seraphim standing for agility because these creatures in their biblically represented form were arguably too grotesque to exist. Discussing the angelic orders Pseudo-Dionysius in his *On Celestial Hierarchies* writes:

> we ought to be guided through those forms lest we, like the many, should impiously suppose that those Celestial and Divine Intelligences are many-footed or many-faced beings, or formed with the brutishness of oxen…or whatever else of symbolic description has been given to us in the various sacred images of the Scriptures (Pseudo-Dionysius, para 10).

As theologian Hugh of Saint-Victor (c. 1096–1141) maintains in his *Didascalion* book V, the first sense of biblical narrative is historical (120–121). The content of visions of Heaven are exact, the narratives historical (entailing past, present and/or future), but the manner in which this experience is communicated is miraculous. The spiritual is communicated via the corporeal – this is where the feigning comes in, as with night dreams – they occur in the imagination, they occur within the historical, but they are not to be taken as having occurred in reality. Differing from night dreams however, is that visions are higher up in the hierarchy of truth-telling. Dante's revelation starts from a night dream ending with a waking vision. In anagogy, a non-fictitious signifier points to an intangible signified. In Dante's *Commedia* we have God the Father appearing in his human form to Dante in the empyrean. We then read that Dante has seen God which also means that at the end of his quest, Dante has reached true knowledge or attained to true charity. In his pinning down the vision he has received of *Inferno, Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* we see that Dante has transformed from a morbid lover of strife to a humble vessel of God's great mysteries. In the Bible it is the acuity (signified) of the four living creatures which causes the many eyes (signifiers) such that there is something to the literal truth above the figurative, and keeping with the foreshadowing effect of the Bible, the figurative gives rise to the literal, giving biblical signs their density in comparison to the more hollow pagan narratives which are sustained by figments of the imagination.

Dante extends the mode of anagogy, replacing the historical ground and the intangible signified with a fictitious veil and tangible kernel. For instance, with the biblical mystical senses we have Christ's parable of Abraham's bosom, where Lazarus is cuddled to Abraham's bosom and they are above the 'chasm of great chaos' as Christ terms it, between the rich man's locale and Lazarus and Abraham's. This parable narrates a fictitious story about how when Lazarus the poor beggar dies, he is chauffeured by an angel into Heaven, and the rich man goes beneath to Hell. The meaning of this story, as with all parables, is moral: the poor and innocent go to Heaven, the rich and oppressive wind up in Hell.

An example from Dante's *Commedia* seems to be everything that happens from *Inferno* to *Paradiso* till right before the scales fall off and he views the courts of Heaven and God in human form. Looking at his *Convivio* Dante lets us know that what we have been seen since the beginning of the *Commedia* are 'beautiful lies concealing truth', but unlike with the Court Rose and God's form we do not have an indication of what the truth beneath the surface ornamentation is. In *Paradiso* the 'lies' project how luminescent the subjects of *Paradiso* look before the uncovering. The difference between *Paradiso* before the River of Light and past is the glimmering: as it is written in *Paradiso* Canto 30 lines 94 to 96, "these flowers and flecks of light/ altered, to join and celebrate still more./ And I saw, now made known, both heavenly courts." Now in *Inferno* we do not have the problem of blinding splendour, so it must be that in this book we deal with actual shadows, disembodied spirits of former persons. Just as in Plato's Cave we see only a semblance of true reality here. But where do the '*beautiful* lies' fit in? It must be that Dante takes pains in adorning *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* before the river as something more wondrous than what lies beneath. This would be substantiated by *Paradiso* before and after the river of life, as everything is more humble than the vortex of lights that ornament *Paradiso* before Dante sees things plainly for what they are. The implications of this are that Dante's Hell is worse than he described it. Is it worse in intensity or magnitude? Perhaps both, it is not clear, but anagogy forces us to look at the signifieds which are for the most part (except what changes to the courts of Heaven and God's human form) left obscure in Dante's narration. Or is it just simply that the fiction he details is true? From the *Inferno* we have Muhammad in the circle of heretics, and then in the last circle of Hell we have the Judas Iscariot traitor to the Christ, believably receiving the worst punishment of all the souls in the vision. Dante, to be sure, used historical figures and addressed their characters according to details, for the most part, true to either mythological, historical or biblical tradition in which these persons are represented. This makes it hard to

avoid the fact that he does believe these figures deserving of the ends they are allotted to herein, again reinforcing Dante's desire to be ratified an *auctor* of complete credibility, exhibiting a text with divine sanction. The lies then might be the fictitious nature of some of the characters such as Aeneas of the *Aeneid.* Another alternative is the probable illusory nature of the hallucinations Dante suffers within this vision. This seems most probable, but it turns us to the great claims that he is making through this: that God allowed Dante a gaze into His entire post-mortem realms. But then where is the foreshadowing of saints unborn? Is this again Dante's way of concealing his lack of prophetic abilities behind the mysterious and miraculous fourth biblical sense?

On a related note, we might misinterpret extended anagogy for tropology, but the difference is that the first points to something tangible, while the tropological signified is intangible. So, in the tropological sense we have God's hands and feet standing for God's dealings in the world, and his vehicle to do them; in the anagogical sense we would have to say that those hands and feet point to real hands and feet that God is thought or imagined to have which transport him from one place to another and facilitate his dealings with the world, which seems absurd, since God has no corporeal likeness (Exodus 20:4). Important to note is that in his *Paradiso* Canto 4 lines 43 to 45 Beatrice tells Dante that "Scripture condescends to your capacities, and says that God has hands and feet – though meaning otherwise." From this we might conclude that the final image of *Paradiso*, God's human form, is not to be interpreted literally but stands for some incorporeal quality such as Love or Knowledge, and then the congregation of the saints as some imperceptible union of souls. This makes Dante's *Commedia* of tropological – not anagogical – significance. Since we may have ruled out the fourth mystical sense of scripture from Dante's *Commedia*, it remains to be seen how closely he mimics it.

CHAPTER 3: TRACES OF THE PROPHETIC AND *AUCTORITAS*

In this chapter I discuss the medieval idea of authority, based on Ascoli and Minnis and Scott. Analysis of the "little boats" 'address to readers' passage in Dante's *Paradiso* indicates the level of claim that Dante makes. I then note that Dante *derives* authority by association seeking authentication of his high claims through *indirect means* including: (a) the claim to authority based on divine authority, as the poet is a co-creator with God; (b) The claim to authority derived from Virgil, and how Dante stands on Virgil's shoulders; (c) The claim to authority derived from the Bible, because of Dante's invocation of patristic and scholastic methods of biblical exegesis: allegory, anagoge and trope.

I then discuss Dante's more direct sources of authority to his high claims, which are: (a) the prophetic voice of satire where we look at Dante's satirical treatment of current affairs, based on his own experience. Esolen's commentary on justice features here; (b) the democratization of the vision, where we tackle the paradox that Dante, by using the vernacular, reaches for greater heights.

1. Introduction: defining '*Auctor'*

In *Chaucer Sources and Backgrounds,* Robert Miller discusses the idea of the medieval conceptualisation of the world – the idea of *auctoritas* being a highly significant one in such a worldview. Miller gives the etymology for the root noun *auctor*, a Latin term "which gives us *auctoritas"* (3). Miller notes further that this term *auctor* derives from the verb *augere* ("to increase") (3). An author in that time period was one looked upon as "an increaser of knowledge who set down their findings in memorable form for the benefit of future generations" (3). Authors were not thought of as mere individuals that express opinions on paper. Their rank was then of a greater superiority amongst mere scribes as they were considered in addition to this, disseminators of eternal truths.

Albert Russel Ascoli in his book *Dante and the Making of the Modern Author* writes extensively on the medieval perception of authorship. I will be discussing a few extracts I found relevant for the study at hand.

Ascoli notes "the alternate Latin spellings of *autor*, *auctor*, *actor*. In the vernacular, in Italian, however, these distinctions disappear, and a single word, capable of bearing any one of the alternate meanings and even of fusing them conceptually, takes their place: 'autore'" (Ascoli, 18 – 19). Dante's shift to the vernacular entails some simplification of the idea of authority. From *Convivio* to the *Commedia* Dante is afforded greater credibility as a poetic instead of a scientific auctor. Firstly, although philosophical the *Commedia* is a poem. Dante is noted to have immediately taken an interest in and excelled at the *trivium* arts, which makes sense since poetry entails the knowledge of grammar, rhetoric and logic to induce suspension of disbelief without the reader's cognisance thereof.

Ascoli draws attention to Robert Hollander's analysis of references to *auctoritas* in the *Commedia*, showing how Dante traverses the gradations of his *auctoritas*, gradually progressing from each *auctor* to a higher. In the beginning he invokes the Muses, and then in *Paradiso* he transcends them to the pagan god Apollo from whom Dante borrows holy power in writing the final canticle. Beatrice, as symbol of theology chauffeurs Dante from the inception of his ascendance to paradise from the sphere of the moon, explaining scientifically why the moon has dark spots, until the *Primum Mobile* where Dante is chauffeured by the Doctor of the Church and, more tellingly, mystic, St Bernard.

The *auctors* and persona leading Dante throughout the text are of relatively weak authority. Dante does not have his vision dictated to him by an angelic figure, and neither Christ nor God speak within the covers of his visionary experience. This is a noteworthy point as these voices would help to establish authorial authority.

Before St Bernard joins Dante we have the Christian philosophers of the sphere of the Sun, no longer under the shade of the earth, of whom Thomas Aquinas is one. Midway into *Paradiso* Dante encounters the human biblical scribes, Peter, James and John, the three disciples particularly close to Christ. These three examine him on matters doctrinal: of the theological virtues of faith (Saint Peter), hope (James) and charity (Saint John). Dante's satisfactory response bestows 'authority' to move further up in the hierarchies of *Paradiso* from St Peter, to James and then John. It is telling that the author of Revelation and writer of a gospel and letters (according to tradition) is higher up in the hierarchy of truth-telling than

the two Peter and James. James transcends Peter the prototypical Church Father because first he was the brother of Christ and secondly Dante backs the empire against the papacy.

Following St Bernard's guidance Dante 'ascends' to pray to St Mary, the most blessed of persons, who was in the closest possible union with the Holy Spirit conceiving Christ the Son of God and Saviour. Dante as mystic, in ecstatic union with God and all the saints of Heaven, penetrates through to the empyrean, beholding the Author of all Authors before his vision is brought to a climactic end (Ascoli, 13–14). Moses, it is worth mentioning, as the great prophet of the Old Testament, and Christ, the great prophet of the New Testament, have both seen God face to face. This is nothing short of mystical. In Exodus Moses is taken into the cloud of YHWH; and Christ, in St John's gospel, speaks of himself and the Father in communion, as One.

Although he is not taken into a cloud Dante also sees God the Father. But again it is not noted that he sees him face to face. Yet adjoined to his mystical union with God, Dante loses his pagan *auctor* Virgil. Based on these progressions, the reader can be expected to shift his/her ideas about the levels of authority to which Dante attains. Although Dante's pagan *auctores* influence him, they are not his ultimate masters, because he transcends them, ascending from sphere to sphere till he is under the tutelage of God alone. According to this interpretation Dante assumes the highest authority below God Himself.

Hollander's point elaborated by Ascoli may seem to overstate the case, implying degrees of aggrandizement too high even for Dante to claim. But as Hollander points out to us (407), in *Purgatorio* 29 lines 103–105, describing the appearance of the living creatures he witnesses in earthly paradise, Dante writes of Ezekiel: "As you find them in his pages they were here as I describe, but for the wings where St. John differs and agrees with me." By juxtaposing and comparing the descriptions of the living creatures from prophet to apostle, Dante places himself in a higher position in the hierarchy of truth-telling than Ezekiel of the Old Testament, at once approximating to and even superseding the apocalyptic writer St. John in stating that St John 'agrees with me' and not that Dante agrees with St. John. By doing this, placing the testament of Ezekiel in question, Dante diminishes the Bible he seeks to write himself into.

Of the medieval notion of *auctoritas*, Ascoli further notes:

> If authority was . . . a quality mediating between impersonal sources of power/knowledge and historical persons who put them into play, the stress . . . lay heavily on subordinating the individual to the transhistorical and impersonal. (6–7)

Authority is an umbrella categorisation including the Roman idea of rulership and the idea of disseminating truth. Both these involve a divinely bestowed right to stand as a figurehead either to rule or to teach. Acting in accord with one's own self seems to be in opposition to this authority, and in my judgement Dante's focus on his own persona does much to damage his aspirations to authority, as opposed to Virgil who understatedly, with steadfast focus wrote a charming, traditional ode in celebration of, Augustus, his civil lord whom Virgil was much indebted to owing to his reign ushering an era of political peace in Roman society (*Retrospect Journal*, para 1). This deference to authority, a spontaneous piety, makes him docile enough to be receptive to supra-human inspiration in writing the fourth Eclogue which was seen as prophesying Christ and the Golden Age to come. Dante's work has no equivalent prophetic credentials except what he fabricates from retrospection and what has not yet been revealed of the Otherworld. This brings Virgil more apparently closer to the allegory of the theologians than Dante, one might say – given the criteria discussed in my previous chapter.

2. Dante's high claim

Dante in *Paradiso*, Canto 2, lines i–xiv writes: "You in that little boat, who, listening hard,/ have followed, from desire to hear me through/ behind my bowsprit singing on its way,/ now turn. Look back and mark your native shores./ Do not set upon these open seas/ lest losing me you end confused and lost./ The waves I ride have never yet been crossed./ Minerva breathes. Apollo leads me on./The nine bright Muses point the Ursa-stars./ You other few who have already stretched,/ straight-necked, through time to reach for *angel-bread*/ may to good purposes set your vessel out/ across the deep salt swell, and plough my wake/ before the waters level once again.

In the passage above Dante indexes the distinction between those with pure motivations, and those of pure intellectual thrust. Here it seems Dante would have us believe he is discouraging shallow understanding which he foregrounds as emanating from a lack of spirit; it is these, as opposed to the unlearned who are in danger of failing to 'plough his wake', that

is, navigate through his illustrations. Dante may have been the first late Medieval or early Renaissance epic poet to set himself such high goals and assert his right to do so. In writing "The waves I ride have never yet been crossed", Dante anticipates Milton who said he was going to write "Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (Book I, line 16). Here we see just how bold Dante is in this address.

Dante warns the ones in the "little boats", which seems to symbolise humble station, by extension generally those of ignoble instruction, to carefully consider beforehand whether they should follow the vision further lest they become confused and then lost. But Dante does not write "Be careful" upon these open seas but "Do not" set upon them. There is a communicated incline in difficulty with reading this canticle and interestingly here Dante is conveying that (at least some) people should not even attempt reading further. It is intimated that "listening hard" is not the key to promoting understanding as it was with the first two canticles. The suggestion is that only those that are accustomed to divine matters – philosophical and spiritual – will be adept at endeavouring through Dante's *Paradiso,* namely those who have already stretched straight-necked, through time, for angel-bread. Dante in the passage above is thus delineating a class of people that have had an extended interest in divine mysteries: their following onto the third canticle receives an encouraging push as opposed to cautionary discouragement as for the former class. To reinforce this line of thought one needs to remember that Dante sets out to persuade audiences that he has received a divinely sanctioned vision. He wants people to understand from his poem that he has undergone some literal spiritual pilgrimage, even though the visionary-poet (Dante-author himself) was only able to receive fragments of such an experience. So in this sense those accustomed to angel-bread, namely those who have pious wisdom, may be illuminated enough by God to interpret clearly – through, not by the reading process of the carnal eyes, but the illumination of the Holy Spirit – what it is that Dante underwent. Dante himself again reinforces this interpretation in Canto 14 where he, in discussing Christ (lines 103–108), seen primarily as two beams of light in the form of a cross, and at a loss for words, resigns himself to the mercy of those whom he avows with charity ought to condone his inability to merge memory with genius (poetic inventiveness/illumination beyond the rational intellect). Here the reasoning harks back to pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas' assent, informing predominant medieval thought, that the divine cannot be fully apprehended by the senses, as these are corporeal and thus inherently inhibited in mediating beings of divine essence in their true form (Minnis and Scott, 165).

Maintaining Dante's prophetic claims, he through the *Comedy* situates himself as mediator between average mankind and God, navigating through the sea of knowledge presented by the maiden sciences, and Scripture, in order to lead those in the "little boats", increasing their knowledge of God ultimately. Dante presents himself as the conduit through which his audience (microcosmically, and macrocosmically the rest of humanity) may derive Divine Truth – as Dante depicts himself as a rare guide, as it is assumed most are without this unusual privilege to journey through the afterlife realms directly in the way he describes, as cited above in *Paradiso* Canto 2 (line vi): "The waves I ride have never yet been crossed". The rest of humanity then, are given opportunity to *vicariously* experience the same – which on the mystical level is, as most medieval dream allegories, the experience of knowing God, or more loosely approaching greater levels of acquaintance with Him. The pinnacle, when the 'visionary' arrives at the end of their pilgrimage, in Dante's epic depicted as literally seeing God's form, through the scope of a medieval allegory, can be tropologically interpreted to mean the completion of a spiritual revival/regeneration, the visionary waking to a life more spiritually acute where the visionary is afterward to expresses this (or at least is expected to let this transformation of character and reorientation of habits play out) in their normal day-to-day lives. In the case of Dante's *Commedia*, it is not only merely suggested he needs to live a life more moral than represented at the outset of the first canticle. But owing to his tacit and overt evocations of being a prophet, it is suggested throughout the canticles that Dante is also expected to publish this vision, and in doing so lead others through a similar process of spiritual renewal. Now, some find it debatable whether Dante's own experience was both literal (entering the afterlife realms through a spectral vision) or figuratively (as it generically is with all people who are in need of psychological catharsis following traumatic events in their material lives, Hell, Purgatory and Paradise evincing separate stages towards that ultimate psychical renewal). In this chapter, I argue that it seems more sensible to interpret the *Commedia* in this figurative tropological sense: that Dante employs figurative language to convey a state of mind. The figurative lends meaning to the poem that touches on the core function of biblical visions themselves, which is to lead people towards spiritual regeneration – transforming their minds and hearts to yield to God's Will. In that sense Dante mimics a prophet through analogous functions.

3. Indirect Authority

3a. The author as co-creator with God

God is not only Author of the Universe, but also the Word. In the latter case, we touch again on the notion of the spirit of the text which the letter of Scripture shrouds. In the former case just as an artist's mind can be unravelled from analysing his artwork, the Book of Nature was thought of as the Author's artefact in which could be unveiled the deep mind of its Author (Miller, 3).

To put it in more modern terms, this is similar to a psychoanalytical analysis conducted on any artwork, where creative output can be used to understand the psychology of its artist: the man's thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs, and affectations of a similar nature that constitute his character. So, close attention to the signifier – the natural world or the universe – will reveal the nature of God. On the other hand, paying close attention to Dante's text, we learn more, not about God but about Dante. The latter point underscores the reservations one might have in attributing prophetic *auctoritas* to Dante's text, especially if its signifiers formulate a *fabula* (see "*Figura* versus *Figmentum"* in Chapter 2), thus removed from God's authoritative unadulterated signs of History in Nature.

Miller explains the complex system of beliefs that spurred the convictions that writers were co-creators with God:

> A favorite medieval metaphor describing the relationship between man the creature and his Creator pictured God as an Author whose Word had been published in two great Books. The first of these Books was called the "Book of Nature…The second was the Bible (3-4).

In the Middle Ages God's Will was thought of as having brought about all that is in existence, as is captured in the biblical creation account in the opening couple of chapters. The act of God expressing things into existence is thus, more technically expressed: the translation of His Will into solid tangible reality, a translation into an entire cosmos.

Miller continues to expound on how God was perceived in relation to man during the era in question. This perception is included as a way of developing understanding on the view educated people in the Middle Ages had of literary artists. Associated with this objective is

tackling the idea of Dante as an author who exhibits a conviction of being a writer of a peculiar kind, namely, a writer with a prophetic vocation.

Miller in discussing the theocentric God/man relationship dynamic of the High Middle Ages writes: "In the Book of Nature… God could be discovered through close observation and informed analysis" as with the pagans Pliny and Aristotle, highly respected *auctors* who are a paradigm for what man unaided by revelation can unearth of their God.

Going further to illustrate how truth can be immanent throughout creation Miller gives the example of the "genetic code of any living creature [being] entirely contained in each of its cells… (4)." The notion of truth "being immanent in all details of creation" is the overriding premise of the Argument from Design. Overall, this argument advances that the existence of God can be known through observance of phenomena in the created universe – a universe which appears necessary as opposed to contingent, pointing ultimately to some Cause which, to avoid recursive reasoning, must Itself be uncreated (self-existent and self-sufficient).

Scripturally we see such an argument presenting itself in Romans 1:20. In context it reads:

> **18** For the wrath of God is revealed from [H]eaven against all ungodliness and injustice of those men that detain the truth of God in injustice:**19** Because that which is known of God is manifest in them. For God hath manifested it unto them.**20** For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; his eternal power also, and divinity: so that they are inexcusable. (Romans 1:20)

Verse 20 expresses the contention that God is Creator of all and that His invisible nature, His nonmaterial attributes, are made manifest through the temporal creations He has made – an idea also reflected in Hebrews 11:3 which reads, "**3** By faith we understand that the world was framed by the word of God; that from invisible things visible things might be made."

The idea of astrological determinism, which Dante and most medieval thinkers appear to have accepted, reinforces how God is an Author of human history. God is not merely the author of temporal entities such as people, nature, etc., but through speech He is also the creator of structural phenomena including time itself. God as Author of history, *determining* events that shape time and drive ages into and out of being, is characterized by 'the world being framed by the Word', suggesting structural arrangement:

> [2]The [H]eavens shew forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of his hands.[3]Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night knowledge [4]There are no speeches nor languages, where their voices are not heard. [5]Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth: and their words unto the ends of the world. (Psalm 18:2–5)

The constellations are arranged in the sky picturesquely. The language they speak is symbolism, and this reverberates throughout the universe. In stating "the firmament declareth the work of his hands" and "night to night sheweth knowledge", this verses touch on how the 'constellation of the stars' were thought to communicate divine plans and purposes over human history through visual symbolism. Even though it was categorised as a *quadrivium* art, conflating what we now know as astronomy and astrology, this does not, in the medieval scheme of things, entail a loss of empiricism so much as point to a theistically driven empiricism.

According to a theological astrophysical conception of the universe, mankind owes not only its existence to the Breath of God as respired into the first man as described in Genesis 2. But man additionally depends on God for the *maintenance* of his existence, including aptitudes, values, destinies, and so forth – the proportion and designation of which depends on the degree that each created element is expected to reflect its Life Giver (the central figure of the astrological narrative), Christ:

> But revelation in the Bible added a dimension of understanding which offered meaning within observed phenomena, for the original Author had there used aspects of His Creation in figurative contexts. (Ascoli, 4)

Augustine in his 'On Christian Doctrine' explains how the density of the Bible has a figurative meaning above the literal accounts (1.1). The lion of Judah for instance is the pride of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the glory of God, Christ Jesus (25.36). This figurative reading also allowed the reading of futuristic occurrences to be prefigured by historical occurrences from the Old Testament, as in for instance, the reign of David and Solomon as a precursor to the impending Millennium Reign of Christ.

Christ, of Whom it is written, through Him all things were made, is also the Word of God. He is uniquely able and willing to fully yield Himself to God the Father, doing His Will (John 6:38) It is no coincidence that this Being is the chosen vessel to fulfil God's Word. Christ's creative power is greater than any other being besides God the Father, not only as a man, but as the eternal Son of God Who, as an irresistible conduit of God the Father's omnipotence created all that is in existence from the beginning of time. Scripturally, therefore, a yielding

(humble, subservient) heart is directly proportional to creative power – calling things into existence that were not. And because all have fallen short of the Glory of God, believers can only be lesser than Christ their master, in both faith and power, so that the creative outputs of any human being can only be at best mimetic of Christ's. Hence medieval thinkers acknowledged the supremacy of theology amongst other 'sciences' (Aquinas, 10 – 11), and assumed that to gain the greatest credibility as an author one would have to imitate the Bible as close as possible, or discuss matters related to it, with little invention on one's part (Ascoli, 7).

If Christ is the Word of God, of Whom it is spoken that He is alive, and the Co-Creator through Whom all things were made (John 1:1–3), He can be regarded as the very words, the pneumatic expression that proceeded out of God's mouth in creating the universe, bringing life into the universe, creating particular conditions that materialised into the creation of light, then the separation of light from darkness, the separation of the heavens from the Earth, the creation of the luminaries in the sky, and so forth.

Now turning to Dante as a writer, biblically man is made in the image of God. In the medieval theocentric understanding, creative power is invested in man too. Man, similar to God is then perceived as capable of willing things into existence. God as *Verace Autore* however, always manifested the most perfect capacities in creating, which man could only mimic being created images of Him, for the disciple is not greater than his master. He can only reach perfection in so far as He mimics his Creator. This is the foundation upon which medieval scholars determined the hierarchy of the arts and sciences. Theology follows the Word and the Book of Nature as the means through which His Will could be elucidated. Below that, every human is set up to be designated an *auctor*, and his status is determined by the degree of success in producing works of approaching truth through mimicry of God (directly or unwittingly). Poets and their fictions can be regarded as having a low level of *auctoritas*, in so far as they not only use figurative language which stands at a remove from the literal (Minnis and Scott, 209 – 211), but because they also, in creating fictions, distort the history of which God is the Author (Miller, 3).

Boccaccio and Petrarch formed part of a campaign to affirm the worth of poetry by turning to their advantage the very factor contributing most to its depreciation: the figurative mode, comprising both allegorical and connotative language. The reason for the devaluation was the suggestion of 'lies' over truth and reality operative in the relative modes. But because

Scripture indeed shared this mode of procedure, its parables even noted as being literally fictive, albeit with a mystical end, this manner of thinking worked to the effect of altering estimation to a point where poetry came to be seen as sacral science (Minnis and Scott, 390). It was Boccaccio's contention that Scripture and poetry ought to be considered of parallel authority, sustaining only the distinction between the sacral and the sacred. Boccaccio also argued that poetry is comparable to philosophy, in that both use fiction, philosophy in the form of syllogisms, poetry in the form of integuments (or otherwise, fictive signifiers). Archaically both philosophy and poetry had the same object, or rather they shared a final cause, in that those myth-lovers of old, according to Aristotle, were intrigued with uncovering realities beyond the known. And so in this manner Dante writes his poem and has his work trumped up in the hierarchy of knowledge forms – in tandem with philosophy, theology and even Scripture.

Miller in giving account of the medieval conceptualisation of the universe offers an interpretation of Dante's vision and vocation which is linked to the medieval view of God as Creator of all Who has concurrently left traces of differing degrees of Himself throughout His creations. Miller captures this succinctly in the two following passages:

> God had, it was held, tested unredeemed mankind by speaking in a language which could be interpreted either literally or spiritually, so that both Nature and the Old Testament contained His true meaning but in an allegorical form unavailable to the unregenerate. (Miller, 6)
>
> …Although deprived by history of the benefits of revelation, they were yet thought to have perceived Truth in a limited way. Classical poets provided useful examples which could, as Augustine said, be converted to Christian purposes... (Miller, 6)

The first passage in particular permits allegorical interpretation, namely, in the appropriate sense of Christocentric figuration even for pagan poets, in that Nature is likened to the Old Testament as a Great Text of Divine Authority rife with symbols pointing to the God that created them. This includes time to involve History as a Great Text filled with symbols pointing to its creator. Therefore, more than just biblical patriarchs can prefigure Christ (notwithstanding the varying extents) as is evident in not merely the poetic signification of Augustus Caesar by Virgil in his *Aeneid*, but objectively, Augustus as a historic figure, eventual sole ruler of Roman Empire (World Superpower), with unrivalled sovereignty over not just one nation but many provinces ranging from Asia, Africa and Europe. Augustus was ordained for this position based on military feats of his youthful years, pointing to natural ability, and, secondly, his biological heritage as grandnephew to former Consul, later Roman

ruler of the First Triumvirate who in his will inscribed this transference of *auctoritas* to Octavian (Colin Ricketts, para 3—5). Similarly David, first approved king of Israel conquered several nations such as the Philistines, Moabites, Edomites and Amalekites, having proselyte foreign army warriors under his reign (2 Samuel 23; 1 Chronicles 11). In 1 Chronicles 14:17 stands "And the fame of David went out into all those lands, and the LORD put the fear of him upon all the Gentiles."

But primarily as the Son of God, Christ is naturally anointed Sole Ruler of the eminent Kingdom of Heaven (until all of course this is placed under His Only *Auctor*, God the Father). Christ is through God's Will, the New and Old Testaments ratified as the ordained Ruler of the Spiritual Superpower, with headquarters in Jerusalem in the Millennium Age – an epoch prefigured through the end of civil war and rivalling the authority of Augustinian rule. So, in the historical human drama Divinely transcribed events pivoting around impending Divine rule in times to come are scattered as fragments throughout history, a text divinely sanctioned by God Himself.

The afore-cited passages from Miller also link back to Romans 1:20 and Psalm 19:1–3 which confer the idea of the biblical Design Argument. From these two biblical passages and the two from Miller, we glean that the world is a landscape full of signs that point to God as their Creator, so that every creature brought to existence can be perceived as a signifier of God's invisible nature. Thus, a poet like Virgil, who might have otherwise been taken as being born at the wrong place at the wrong time can be afforded spiritual redemption for himself and his audience, for knowing and making known God and Christ in whatever form they were made known to him. Dante capitalises on this view by making Virgil his guide through *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, a mentor who receives his commission from above.

3b. Overgoing Virgil and the other pagans

Ascoli describes Dante's claim to the status of an *auctor* – one endowed with authority – as not merely a writer but one who publishes works deemed significant, owing to their degree of credibility. To be declared an *auctor* within his own less contestable occupational field of poetry, it was customarily expected that Dante incorporate other *auctors* within the poetic branch, as this would be a foundational body of truth which the successive author would build on, thus necessarily developing their own *auctoritas*. Ironically then in the case of Dante, he sought to be an *auctor* in two, maybe not divergent fields, but competing ones as they are at least not without difficulty in concord. Dante, it is evident, not only sought to

become a poetic *auctor* borrowing from classical epics, but a philosophical, theological and prophetic one. It is arguable that Dante learned the other 'sciences' not out of love of them in and of themselves, but in so far as these were necessary to build the needed *auctoritas* that would elevate his poem above the customary strict designation of poetry as the lowest in the hierarchy of *auctoritas*.

Dante's utilisation of the Italian vernacular amalgamation *"autore"* which includes the Latin *autor* (the author), *auctor* (the authority) and *actor* (the actor) (Ascoli, 18–19) allowed him to manoeuvre around terms associated with authorship and authority, to ultimately suggest Virgil as not merely *autor* – one who produces a work of individual creative effort, but because of his elaborated concept of *auctoritas*, which applies as much to sovereignty and medium of expression as it does to knowledge in the arts and sciences, Dante magnifies Virgil as *maestro* and *auctor*: one who transcribes and also provides a foundation of insight for future practitioners within his field of proficiency. So, following the example of Virgil, Dante would be noted as a poetic authority for his style and composition being material to build upon in order to establish one's self as a poet of note, hence the plagiarism amongst medieval poets, along with their antecedents, the Classical poets. At that time this was of course not an offence as the modern terminology of plagiarism suggests, but rather to be understood as borrowings to venerate the predecessor's imaginings, whilst as progeny annotating these to reflect the unavoidable assimilation of later ideologies, values and customs, postdating and thus distinguished from the *auctor*'s exemplar.

Dante's Italian fusion of the concepts of authorship and authority, creating the sense of writers who conform themselves to the impersonal and transhistorical thus rendering them a conduit of eternal divine truths, allowed Dante to regard a classical poet like Virgil as an *auctor,* and, he could do this even though Virgil himself could not see the light of Christian salvation he was able to point others like first century AD poet Statius towards.

What Dante did in the poetic creative arena – the generation of a hybridity of authority, both pagan and biblical (the evocation of the Judaeo-Christian God Himself as Author of his pilgrimage) – was no doubt influenced by the more liberal approach of exegetical analyses in the thirteenth and fourteenth century, where techniques for glossing pagan literature also began to be used on scripture, where there was freedom to analyse biblical authors, their biographies and poetic techniques, etc. which nonetheless was not taken to depart from the idea of God as the Supreme and Sovereign Author (Minnis and Scott, 4). The Aristotelian

influence permitted the use of human comprehension, drawing on historically acquired experiences, educational and otherwise, in the development of theological understanding. This is an extension of the notion that the Bible could not be interpreted without secular education.

There had been an older tradition of pagan literature being "read allegorically or 'moralized'" in the fourth century AD (Minnis and Scott, 4), and this is the line of scholastics that leads to writers like Virgil being approved as *auctors*. Virgil's writings were interpreted typologically or anagogically in a way that is in tune with the figural or typographical synthesizing of the Old and New Testament from apostolic times onwards, with the former being a landscape of symbols for fulfilment in the latter. For example, as said before, Virgil's fourth eclogue was interpreted as presaging/foreshadowing Christ and the Golden Age to come.

Dante's fusion of Scripture and pagan literature in his *Commedia* follows from the aforementioned commentary traditions. He is a part of the inception of the medieval learned community that ingeniously laboured towards reinventing the hierarchy of knowledge forms making poetry comparable to Scripture in authority. His own support (in reverse chronological order) derived from Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Pietro Alighieri his own son. While the last of these enlisted was subdued in his appraisals of Dante and his poetry, making clear the fictionality of Dante's literal sense in the *Commedia*, the other two, as poets themselves, were invested in raising Dante's honour, which coincided with their objective to elevate the dignity of poetry to the level of a science comparable to the Bible itself. Boccaccio's efforts seem to be more robust and prolific than Petrarch, in the vigorous probing of his *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*, his lectures on Dante, and his 'Short Treatise in Praise of Dante'.

3c. The Mystical Authority of the Bible

Another point on Dante's more formal claim to the status of *auctor* being more accurately designated to poetry, is that in his endeavour to be theological *auctor*, he draws upon the contested anagogic sense, which allows him to, keeping with more liberal medieval exegesis, posit spiritual/mystical readings for any content not properly understood.

As elaborated in the previous chapter allegory is the mystical veiling whereby the New Testament was seen as a text rife with phenomena that are foreshadowed in the Old Testament. Anagogy on the other hand is the figurative sense of the literal, everlasting life of

the believer. Dante's allegory is writerly in that he wants to convey some notion, say of justice, but does so by creating an allegorical emblem such as the eagle in Paradiso 18 and 19. This means that he has cast a veil over justice, inviting the reader to draw the veil aside and see the reality behind it. Dante's anagogy on the other hand is readerly because of the biblical borrowings: the reader engages with an object or event, say, such as the exodus from Egypt of the children of Israel. S/he then takes a step up from the event to a moral, psychological or spiritual level noting the leaving behind of carnality and moral purification through the crossing of the Red Sea. This is done almost subconsciously, making the reader a pawn for the intentions of the writer.

In his *Letter to Can Grande della Scala* Dante writes of his employment of the three allegorical senses, albeit meaning tropology, allegory and anagogy, the three mystical senses of the Bible. Using anagogy allows him to utilise his inventiveness with regards to what certain imagery in his poem should mean. This liberty points to the unrestrained permission to keep the true meaning intended by our *auctor* Dante hidden behind imagery such that, should readers have opposing interpretations of Scripture, Dante can keep the pervasive view of the poem's sacredness intact. His subject-matter of the conditions of life after death again, safely numinous, places him in an inaccessible stratum to his fellow beings, whereby his authority, cannot even be questioned for fear this in some sense, as in biblical literature, taints God's very Authority.

In line with my contention concerning Dante's authority as strictly not that of a prophet but instead that of a poet of mystical insight, Tertullian (Auerbach, 30) eschewed spiritualizing scripture, namely the tendency to argue away the literal reality behind biblical narrative. Dante does not altogether avoid such a tendency. Collins stresses that while Dante has particular interest in the hidden meaning behind certain figures (symbols), such as Beatrice, it is not to bereave them of their historical realism. It is only that Dante views events and people through a spiritualising lens (27). But like the Psalmist King David, Dante's views about Nature might be linked to divine Authority. In the exegetical tradition of psalter commentaries, King David was noted as a prophet par excellence because in the Psalms of his noted (subordinate) authorship, without actual comprehension of the scope of his allusions, David penned down considerable prefiguration concerning the Messiah to come. From a modern perspective, Dr Ralph F. Wilson's article 'Psalms: Looking Forward to the Messiah (Psalms 2, 110, and 22)', it becomes rivetingly apparent in isolated Psalms 22

verses, that the Psalmist is speaking of personal persecution he has suffered at the hand of his adversaries (Wilson), whilst unawares to him, his very experiences were to historically prefigure the crucifixion of the Messiah, down to particular congruent bodily afflictions which would be undergone by Christ too (possibly to greater extent in the latter's case). The prefigured material includes details such as the casting for lots for His garments (verse 17 – 18); His hands and feet being pierced (verse 16); His tongue sticking to the roof of His mouth indicating dire thirst (verse 15). This prophetic sense, through scholastic comprehension, is explicated through the above elaborated notion of God as *Auctor* of the Universe and History scattering fragments of Himself throughout Nature, to varying degrees and to varying followers. If one would accept a more modern parallel, this historical determination is comparable to the physiological determination lent through genetic material from parent to child. But to somewhat exaggerated or transcendent extents in the case of Christ and David, it also includes historical determination from ancestor to distant progeny. Or more palpably one might think of this in the sense of pathologies being hereditary. To then link back to Dante, through the fictitious literal meaning of his *Commedia*, Dante does read Nature, with not only the principles based on inheritance, as with himself and activist Cacciaguida, but the principle of 'contrapasso' (see discussion on page 72—73) seeking to impart prophetic traces to his work which for the most part (apart from the fame imputed by Cacciaguida), is left undetermined. But the mysticism of this act of interpreting – using indexical signs – already credits Dante with some quantity of biblical *auctoritas*, since he uses the mystical sense of extended anagogy to do so, creating a fictional tale with palpable signification.

4. Dante as prophet and poet in his own right

4a. Justice and the Prophetic Vocation

Here I am gesturing towards an analysis of the satirical material in the *Commedia* as having high authority because of implied notions of justice.

Esolen writing on Dante's preoccupation with justice conveys the following:

> …it is one thing to analyze what justice is: the giving of each his due…it is another thing to hunger and thirst for justice, and to put the expression of one's hunger and thirst under such severe artistic restraints that their well-directed force causes one's readers to hunger and thirst for justice too (xiv).

From the above we see how Dante sublimates his creative energies to the effect of upholding justice for all, about which he is sternly passionate. Dante's Ptolemaically inspired division of the universe – with nine concentric spheres within all realms in the *Comedy* (the Empyrean is not a sphere but a realm of immaterial essence that encompasses the nine other material spheres of celestial paradise) – lends the idea of gradations to penalties and merits and harmonises with the retribution scheme set out in Scripture, which is by no means doled out in such a way as might please equalitarian sensibilities (Rom 2:6; 1 Peter 1:17; Rev 20:12). True justice is giving according to just deserts depending on ways of life adapted in the material realm. So, Dante and Divinity on the matter align, except of course nowhere do you find the notion of concentric spheres partitioning either the biblical concept of Heaven or Hell, only the broad division of Heaven to Hell in the parable of Abraham's Bosom. However, in any case, the tropologically mystical sense in Dante's poem is manifest, and one need not be invested to the literal meaning of his poem, if of course one is of religious circumspection.

Regarding Dante's views on justice, I would add that Dante additionally, and of necessity owing to his desires to be proscribed as spiritual *auctor,* sets himself up as the conveyor of *unequivocal* Justice. By dint of Dante's unique usage of the terms denoting authority and authorship, merging them to bestow *auctor* status on poets such as himself and Virgil who would not have easily received such sacralised acclaim through more traditional scholastic exegetes like say Aquinas who categorises poetry as the lowest branch of logic (Minnis and Scott, 10), Dante compels readers to let their guard down, suspending disbelief to ignore the mechanic in Dante as intellectual engineer of the *Comedy*, to embrace the notion of Dante as inspired human instrument diligently transcribing according to divine dictates.

Dante, unlike an historian, enlivens the political climate of his day and represents it in such a way that an audience is influenced to additionally engage the poem at an emotive level: we are meant to almost

> … feel the hanks of the Guelph traitor Bocca degli Abati as Danti pulls the hair out of his scalp, and to relish it, with zeal; as we are meant to hear, with admiration and gratitude, the words of the noble enemy Farinata, who alone stood up to defend Florence when his Ghibelline allies were determined to destroy once and forever. (Esolen, xiv–xv)

Not only does Dante then make scenarios within the poem an issue of importance for his immediate audience his national contemporaries, but because of his stance of being a prophet, he makes Italian politics of universal significance. Dante's own historical involvement in his country's political affairs again strains the distinctions between Dante the author, Dante thepilgrim and Dante the historical man, as all three merge to create an invigorated presence of the faith captured in Dante's propounded vision – of his being a harbinger of light to illuminate the Divine to 'the universal masses'.

The image of the Guelph *traitor* Abati having the above-cited grossly visceral and tauntingly traumatic action done to him – by none other than Dante himself, who historically, was a prominent member of the Guelphs – puts into imagery a significant feature of Dante's treatment of history and current events, which is that Dante's own subjectivity is objectivised. His psychological dramas of seeking vengeance or absolution according to his conscience dictates foregrounds occurrences within the *Comedy*, particularly which individuals (all opportunely known by Dante) end up in which realm of the afterlife. But does this mean that Dante's psychological inclination does not accord with Divine Will and Law? Here is where I draw the line in making further inferences, as they will be constrained to mere surmises. But the overarching point I wish to address with regards to the justice system laid forth in the *Comedy* is that there lies an indissoluble connection between Dante the historical man's private and public life – filled with friends, rivals, *auctors* and his beloved Beatrice – and the purported justice principle laid out in his *Comedy*, the nature of that connection particularly being that the former (which is subjective) appears to inform the latter (objective). This has the appearance of humanising and psychologising the Divine, subverting again, in customary Dantean style, hierarchies of authoritative order, whether consciously or unconsciously on his part. As *auctor* he, Dante is moulding the transhistorical and impersonal, making it conform to his own manoeuvrings. I would like to further suggest that this connection seems to mar the belief of an impersonal execution of justice within the pages of the *Comedy.* Yet contrarily one might say that through the poem, with its apparatus of mentor figures is designed to bring Dante's personal subjective responses (even vindictiveness) into line with objective divine justice. Here we may assert that Dante is seeking to conform himself to the Eternal and Absolute.

We can understand the justice system of the *Inferno* according to the laws of Nature when we familiarise ourselves with the Latin term 'contrapasso'. Etymologically *(Encyclopedia Dantesca*): Latin 'contra' and 'patior' mean "suffer the opposite". According to Mark Musa

(37 – 38), contrapasso is the punishment of souls "by a process either resembling or contrasting with the sin itself". This is a theory by Aristotle which declares that a soul suffering in hell contrasts its sin in its life on earth (*phdessay*), accounting for the sins they committed when they experience circumstances directly contrasting and, in some ways, resembling their sins. This is so that the punishment of the sin is not arbitrary.

We see examples of contrapasso in Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. In the *Inferno*, we see the principle of contrapasso playing itself out when in the fourth ditch of Malebolge Dante and Virgil see the diviners with their heads wrenched backwards on their shoulders. Because they were perversely 'forward looking', this was inverted so that these seers forever glance backward as they walk. In *Purgatorio* we have those repenting of the sin of envy with their eyes sewn shut with wires so that they do not have the opportunity to look at others askew.

In dealing with the subjective and the psychological and knowing how the mind influences and directs the body, we see how the laws of nature coincide with Dante's justice system, making the grand claim of clandestine Dante seeing the illusion of the damned through the eyes of God Himself, albeit mediated through his humanly finite eyes.

And to once again balance the more pessimistic view of a subverted dynamic between the impersonal and personal within the pages of the *Commedia*, there are instances from Scripture where an enemy of God's servant is identical to a party (individual/tribe or nation) condemned by God, which then, if accepted, could exonerate Dante from making the Divine 'work for him', and instead be seen as a servant of the Divine while serving self, such as in the case of Samson and his opponents. The philistines being both an enemy to God and Samson (Judge to Israel), Samson as avenger is divinely exonerated from any blame in executing them, and indeed as indicated in Judges 14:4, is led of God to have a personal hostility towards them. The destruction of the temple of Dagon, which results in the demise of three thousand philistines is in a subjective sense Samson's 'earthly' (carnal) incentive to carry out vengeance on the Philistines for putting out his eyes (Judges 16). Similarly, the thirty men Samson kills to pay off the men he lost a gamble to, or the fields he burned by tying 150 pairs of foxes together by the tails with a flaming torch between each pair (Judges 15), in both these incidences, Samson had a personal score to settle, getting back at the Philistines for marrying off his wife to another man in his absence, in the first instance, or getting back at the men that deceitfully won a gamble over him in the second. But over and above Samson's personal vendetta, which in a conservatively theological outlook as the

medievalists held too, the Will of God controls his actions such that both the personal and objective are fulfilled without contradiction.

What I record here suggests that a subjective slant to executing justice for that godly man does not necessarily lead to a morally skewed feud which detracts from Divine execution of Justice as might be suggested in Dante's *Inferno*. God can logically be viewed as precipitating a personal vendetta in order to carry out His grand overarching schemes such that Dante even in writing from a strictly personal vengeful, patriotic and enamoured experience, could still be imagined as a conduit of divine forces.

Whatever conclusion one comes to from the arguments propagated concerning Dante's representation of justice in the *Comedy,* I belief an overriding point is how history may intersect with Divine Will, and in broader terms how the subjective intermingles with the objective. This line of reasoning brings me to the fulcrum upon which my central argument pivots, which is that Dante as a poet appears to draw out the Divine from the mundane, which gives rise to a mystical component within his work. It appears Dante the historical man cannot but see a Divine Hand at work in his personal experiences, his biography and beyond himself, within the history of the entire universe from the garden of Eden (which he as a medieval creationist would hold to be more than allegorical) to Greco-Roman pagan antiquity up to his own spatio-temporal context, and beyond, to the eschaton of the universe.

Herein lies the power, persuasive appeal and majesty of Dante's writing. Dante perceives the world, with the people inhabiting it as an image of God, all to varying degrees of grace where the most blessed become the ones more generously bestowed with positive qualities such as moral virtue, beauty and wisdom more than all else. History becomes a reflection of God's mind, creating a more deterministic worldview than most living in the postmodern era are comfortable with. Nonetheless it concurs with medieval sentiments of God as the Author of both the Word and Nature, both of which were believed to express aspects of Himself palpably to us, leading to unavoidable belief in the Truth written in the stars of the universe, a belief that Dante like his contemporaries subscribed to. Dante is a man perceptive of the monotheistic Judaeo-Christianity God's traces in every created thing, every event of history, and in that sense is a conduit of divine forces, but, as I keep mentioning, Dante does not appear to have a vocation similar in stature to biblical seers, his vocation of a humbler and less direct (or rather less potent) influence from divine manoeuvring.

4b. The Paradoxical Authority of the Vernacular

In this section, I deal with Dante's decision to write in the vernacular, and I link this with his literary and rhetorical skills as evidence of his being a poet rather than a prophet. I go on to argue that his residual tendency to spiritualize Scripture gives more scope for Virgil to be employed in support of Dante's authority.

Ascoli explains that literary works' "validity was closely dependent upon the language in which they were encountered (even if they were originally written in Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic), namely Latin," because it had "a *grammatike"* a grammar "shaped to resist the individual personalities and historical circumstances of its users", meaning, unlike the vernacular it did not yield to culture (7). Dante himself recognized this in his *De Vulgari Eloqentia,* a treatise about the weight and splendour of the Italian vernacular ironically written in Latin. And although Dante sought for and created an illustrious vernacular, this was not, according to John A. Scott in his *Understanding Dante*, before admitting to the nobility of Latin in comparison to the vernacular. In his *Convivio*, instead of writing a commentary in Latin for his Italian poems Dante writes them in Italian, justifying that the nobler Latin cannot serve the vernacular (Scott, 35). In the medieval era Latin was a grammatical structure of long-standing repute which could bestow cultural clout on prospective *auctoritates*, and by extension, *auctors*. Departing from it could threaten one's authority, which explains Dante's decision to write on the eloquence of the vernacular in Latin. Ultimately, he sought to receive credentials from learned circles (35).

Notwithstanding the above, Dante in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* esteemed the vernacular, an assessment informed by his view that all languages were acquired from the prototypical language of Eden, a God-given gift that required no learning. And yet, according to Dante a secondary language, Grammar (which was tellingly a synonym for Latin in medieval Europe), was an antidote for the defect of language after The Tower of Babel's confusion of tongues – namely, its mutability in both space and time (35). Thus, Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia*: the pinpointing of an "illustrious" vernacular to "enlighten" the greatest possible number of people despite class and gender distinctions, to include those overlooked by the elitist Latin culture of Dante's time (34).

In *Dante: The Divine Comedy* Robin Kirkpatrick explains that in Dante's time the Italian language was in its "infancy" (28). Kirkpatrick continues to state that in comparison to classical and scholastic Latin Dante's Italian vernacular "lacked the technical terminology

and argumentative equipment necessary for dealing with complex philosophical subjects" (28). It also lacked finesse to deal with "the imagination" and "emotions of an audience" (28). On the other hand, Latin had a dominating influence, or perhaps a magnificence which individual writers drew upon to validate their works, as a conduit of transcendent authority. In addition, if God was designated the source of textual content, this would credit the human author with the status of *auctor*, as the transcriber of God's Word and work. And one who silences their own thoughts to uphold those of God thus acted as a conduit of eternal Truth, the highest level of credibility a human being could hope to achieve. In the domain of linguistics, it seems that Latin was thought an all-encompassing medium that transcended (cultural and intellectual) confines to convey intended meaning without obscurity. Latin was the orthodox language for educational and ecclesiastical (broadly 'religious') activity from the Classical era onwards, while the vernacular of European romantic languages was relegated to utilitarian ends and mundane conversation rather than academic and abstract discourse. Latin's broader referential scope accommodated varying nuances better than the vernacular. Even Dante in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* confesses to this inadequacy. Harland notes that "Dante envisaged a high form of the vernacular which should be 'illustrious, cardinal, courtly, and curial', but was forced to conclude that no existing dialect measured up to his requirements" (31). But as with all things Dante compensates for the lack of the medium through the faculty of sheer inventiveness. The silver lining in this case may be the elevation of Italian through the Florentine Tuscan dialect as to make it suitable for not only his prerogatives, i.e., literary purposes, but more generally broadening its future referentiality. So, Dante is regarded as one of the founders of modern Italian, based on the Tuscan dialect.

Given the apologia for the status of poetry and the dignity of Virgil as poet during the High Middle Ages, it seems that the vernacular's association with the everyday would threaten staining any poetic work which failed to adhere to the linguistic medium standard of Western European: Latin. Minnis and Scott (439) speak of Dante's choice of the vernacular in writing the *Commedia* as "a source of acute embarrassment for Italian humanists", and even though the convention with orderly scholastics was to have the lower serve the superior, commentators on his *Comedy* used Latin glosses to, in a sense, 'sacralise' his, they thought, needlessly 'accessible' (profane) spectacle (vision) (439).

In his *Letter to Can Grande della Scala* Dante writes "the tragedy is elevated and sublime, the comedy loose and humble" (para 9). The latter is easy and humble because it is in the vulgar tongue (para 9 and 10). Drawing on the Hebrew pun on accessibility being profanity,

it seems it would have behoved Dante to write at least his Paradiso, which has highbrow *materia*, in Latin, just as it might appear imperative that he should have written a tragedy rather than a comedy, lending more solemnity to his imaginative conjectures. And yet Dante explains that a comedy begins how a tragedy ends, "smelly and horrible" (para 9), and ends how a tragedy begins: "admirable and quiet" (para 9), showing that Dante ultimately decides what is most suitable, a "*komos oda*" (country song), a praise tract that begins harshly but ends in a good way.

On the linguistics of Dante's poem, in accordance with his reputation as the "father of the Italian language", Dante's creativity had him coining many words to compensate for the inherent limits to the vernacular, which paved the way for subsequent Italian poets like his apologists Petrarch and Boccaccio to adopting the same non-traditional route for creative works of high seriousness.

Herein lies Dante's simultaneous abdication and validation of authority within his *Comedy*; he imputes it by (as shown above) suggesting God as *Verace Autore* of his work, but at the same time contradicts this (at least in the eyes of many of his contemporaries) by writing in vernacular Italian, just as he risks compromising it with the incorporation of pagan literature. But just as pagan literature was incorporated to raise the *auctoritas* of the poem by imitating his dignified poetic antecedent Virgil, the use of 'modest' Italian can also be a legitimating strategy, as the Bible itself contains both an erudite style and a colloquial manner that lends itself to being interpreted by its immediate audience, particularly the lay people rather than the learned.

Very importantly for Dante's case on this point, as one who sought authorial status as prophet, the Bible is often interiorly framed as having been written for those meek in spirit rather than those sharp in intellect. Similarly, the Bible seems to favour those of humble class over the rich, as is evident in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Now to be clear this is not a matter of worldly success or triumph of one over another, as prosperity descends from God Himself. This apparent bias is rather an objective judgement against the hoarding of wealth, which mitigates against the fraternal regard Christians are exhorted to display towards one another. Further instances of this – more appropriately stated – apathy to the material interests and honour of those with superior temporal rank, Christ often teaches subversion of temporal hierarchy often, where the first will be last and the last first. Again, the firstborn of patriarchal households is often superseded by the second (as in Jacob and Esau; Ishmael and

Isaac, etc.). Also, Christ sets children up as the archetype of true faith (Mark 10:15). In Luke 10:21 the Bible reads:

> In that same hour, he rejoiced in the Holy Ghost, and said: I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of [H]eaven and earth, because thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones. Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in thy sight.

The first being last and the last being first is also seen with the vituperations against the Pharisees and Scribes with their ostentatious apparel but relatively shallow virtue (piety). These are just a few generalised examples to emphasize the point that God is no respecter of status. These elements in the scripture are available for justifying Dante's use of the vernacular, although there is no evidence that he used such an argument in his own defence.

Any who have read just the *Inferno* of Dante's *Commedia* will be aware of Dante's fevered fondness for his heritage, his native language and Florentine politics, an arena in which he was formally and deeply involved. His exile from his cherished Florence is one of the major factors, in a sense, opening the gateways of *Paradiso* and the *Inferno*: the former as a eulogistic yearning for – what one would not be remiss to name – his own Promised Land; the latter (particularly the opening couple of cantos) as a disheartened elegiac expression of dispossession.

In this chapter I have dealt with Dante's claims to authority. I discuss the medieval perception of authorial authority, particularly Dante's authority as co-creator with God. A look at the 'little boats' passage gives scope to discuss Dante's claims of authority. Looking at the linguistics, genre and stylistics of the poem we see how Dante falls in the scale of authority, and also, how seeing God as *Verace Autore* he rises, by ironically using the same devices Dante vanquished 'distinction' (pun intended) in many ways, elevating low standards and modest range, necessarily diluting much that is of longstanding value, but he also reinvents structures, giving the impression of elevating his authority once again.

To follow, in chapters 4 and 5, I will be looking more closely at Dante's claim to authority through mysticism and his use of the dream vision.

CHAPTER 4: DANTE AS MYSTIC

1. God's Book of Nature and Dante's Imagined World

In this chapter I intend to discuss how Dante's authority can be enhanced by the element of mysticism in the poem, i.e., how he navigates apprehension of truths which are beyond the intellect, through contemplation and mystical union. I will be discussing five key passages from the *Commedia* which relate to the limitations of human reasoning and the gradation of mystical faculties – simulation of experiential and aspirational voyaging – that brings Dante to the beatific vision he claims.

In *Paradiso* Canto 33 we read "This knotting-up of universal form/ I saw, I'm sure of that" (lines 91–92). This Dante writes claiming to have seen God, describing Him as "an inter-circulation" (line 127), Which (or Who) "deep in itself (or Himself), it seemed – as painted now,/ in those same hues – to show our human form" (lines 130–131). This description firstly resembles the mystical notion of the Son of God as the firstborn amongst creation – He Who is the Light of the World (John 8:12). Although Dante does not depend entirely on biblical teachings for his vision, he does show how God can propel an entire universe into existence through His illumination – particularly here the notion of the Word of God as Wisdom who through the Father brings the universe into being.

The first quotation from *Paradiso* 33 is to introduce the idea of the created order as a book, replete with symbols of the divine. The universe, branded as the 'Book of Nature', was understood as an allegorical (picturesque) expression of God's Mind. It was perceived (or theologically discerned) as a landscape filled with many phenomenal signs, clothing God's Spirit in a comparable way as with a symbol. To explain in an orderly fashion, the symbol/sign's signifier encases the signified within itself such that the form of the symbol is open for examination, the signified gives substance to the form of the signifier remaining concealed from view owing to the signifier's veil. Breaking down of the signifier, as in the process of interpretation, unveils the constituents of the encased.

The signifier can *appear pluralistic* according to varying gazes, necessarily differentiated by the individual onlookers' level of sagacity – yes, even with the same onlooker at differing times. This is what we are to interpret of Dante's pilgrimage from *Inferno* to *Paradiso*. The first two books and parts of the third are of a scribe that is out of sync with reality – namely, one experiencing an illusion, until Dante drinks his fill of the River of Light in canto 30. In Canto 28, Dante writes, lines 2 to 3: "she – the in-paradizer of my mind – had thus laid open Truth to me". Here Dante is speaking of Heaven as an illusion of the mind more than a concrete place, and Beatrice, his intermediary, captured in his mind is the one that has caused this imaginative journey – up till the point where Beatrice is seen also falling into place in the Court of Heaven, surrendering her role to St Bernard, before God Himself takes over the vision.

It is to be noted that despite Dante's pilgrimage being of an illusory nature Dante nonetheless says of this illusion, that "she – the in-paradizer of my mind – had thus laid open Truth to me". This is nothing short of the 'Truth' laid out in scripture, the most authoritative source of Truth in existence during the said epoch. Heaven, as John Freccerro in his *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* puts it, what Dante sees in *Paradiso*, is conditional on his own conceptual landscape. Beatrice in Canto 4 in fact tells Dante (and as it is 'revealed' in Canto 30 following his drinking from the River of Life), that what he sees displayed in the luminary and planetary realms are but imagery which his own mind could grasp of the true reality of Heaven. Because God, the epitome of Beauty personified, cannot be revealed in full to Dante's grasping mind, Dante's mind finds a substitute in the lovely form of Beatrice, a model of not what is wholly Pure and Beautiful, but humbly what is most beautiful to Dante.

But in Canto 29 lines 40–42 Dante writes "The truth is written, though, in many parts – by writers listening to the Holy Ghost – as you, if you look carefully, will see." Here Dante is making a very grand claim, namely, that at least from *Paradiso* Canto 29 line 44 onward his book is breathed by the Holy Spirit, meaning the *Commedia* from this section at least is guided by God towards Truth. Again, here, we have indications of Dante's posture as being an oracle of God.

Returning to the mystical and intricate dynamic between the Book of Nature and the Word of God, this notably uncanny relation further reinforces the reverence Dante's contemporaries had for the Bible as being the Book of the highest authority. More notably, this veneration also translated into veneration of authors since a text could be thought of as a powerful

symbol of signs pointing to life beyond itself, and even more strongly, could bring reality into existence in the same way that biblical *figurae* ultimately receive (and in some cases are yet to receive) temporal realisation. In Canto 33, Dante discourses on the idea of the Book of Nature and the Word of God (Scripture) – the two most revered sources of Truth in the Middle Ages – mutually generating one another, in the sense that Creation (human beings) gave birth to (transcribed) the Bible, and the Bible (the Word of God which is both Christ and the Bible) vice versa gave rise to Creation (through creation, prophecy and the Incarnation): "Within in its depths, this light, I saw, contained,/ bound up and gathered in a single book,/ the leaves that scatter through the universe/ – beings and accidents and modes of life,/ as though blown all together in a way/ that what I say is just a simple light." (*Par.* 33: 85—90)

The light contained, bound up and gathered in a single book which transfers life to beings and accidents of nature, as well as modes of life, is not God the Father, but Christ the co-creator of the Universe. Christ is the corporeal manifestation of God without Whom nothing in the world would have been created that has been created (John 1:3). As the Word of God, the Bible is another referent to Christ, it is telling that in Dante's mind it is a book that bounds all life within itself. But what Dante actually means is that the book of Nature, the second book of authority, binds up creation as God is a point of life that bounds all existence in his essence. On the first idea of Christ as this book, Christ is also known as the Light of the world – the light is also the first entity made in the Genesis account of creation. It seems to then follow from the description that atoms forming light divide and reformulate until there is a difference between light and darkness, and then Heaven and Earth, the luminaries and the stars, land and water, etc. (Genesis 1).

Writing "gathered in a single book, the leaves that scatter through the universe" (lines 86—87), Dante expands on the notion of Divinity as a single point of Creative Potential that sheds differing intensities/degrees of itself, effectuating the creative process generating Nature. God (Christ the Son of God, the palpable expression of the godhead) is the light contained in the book which constitutes in itself the life of "the leaves that scatter through the universe – beings and accidents and modes of life" (lines 87—88).

To go further, this book is the overarching drama of Christ as Redeemer of the Universe, astrophysically transcribed upon Nature, emulated in fragments through His images, mankind, such that each reflection (individual history) contributes to the whole. To put it more vividly, each person ever born, situated in various spatio-temporal contexts, performs

an individual role in the overriding drama set forth in biblical texts, such that history and every individual within it is determined by God – namely inspired/compelled to fulfil particular actions that providentially fall in alignment with history as marked out in biblical prophecies. Thus here we have an illustration of the way that Dante reflects his theological understanding in a picturesque way. Here Dante writes as one who has comprehensive biblical knowledge, and knows how to use images, figurative illustrations, to convey this thoughtful knowledge.

2. Imagination, Intellect and Memory: re-presentation

Here I am dealing with *Paradiso* 33 in greater depth, showing how the poem can be seen at multiple removes from reality: representation rather than presentation. This final statement, Canto 33, is an extended apologia to the reader of the levels of presentation that Dante cannot attain to.

Dante-pilgrim finally gazes into the Empyrean. After describing this vision of God, he writes:

> How short mere speaking falls, how faint against my own idea. And this idea, compared to what I saw…well, 'little' hardly squares. Eternal light, you sojourn in yourself alone. Alone you know yourself. Known to Yourself, you, knowing, love and smile on your own being. (*Par.* 33: 121–126)

At three removes from the truth Dante laments how his speech on the vision of God is more imperfect than his memory, a memory which is also not the vision that he saw. Writing presents another remove from the truth of his speech. There are, then, various filters that leave the poem, even *Paradiso*, at several removes from the divine reality: first there is God, then there is the understanding of God represented by Beatrice and Bernard, then there is the image of God Dante has been able to access through their guidance and intercession, then there is his memory of that image, and finally there is his attempt to put that memory into words. At each stage there is a loss, and yet the final product points us to each of the preceding levels in turn.

When he notes "[h]ow short mere speaking falls" in line 121, and the subsequent "idea" which "hardly squares" against what he saw, Dante in the passage above signifies a dual

slippage, firstly from presentation to representation as expressed through memory – the sphere where direct experiences are monolithically expressed – and then secondarily, falling further away from the experience through writing there is the double representation, where the memory of the event (which cannot be replicated) is signified in, not even pictorial form, but symbolic characters (alphabets).

Dante enlists these representational forms (or hierarchy of similitude) to justify inadequacies in the vision he portrays. Dante alerts readers to the double degree of incongruences they necessarily subscribe to when perusing his record of the alleged vision, such that there can be no dispute to the *Commedia* being a representation as opposed to a presentation of the afterlife realms. This apologia is also reinforced in line 125 of the above, Dante capitalising on the Omniscience of God, stating "Alone you know yourself."

Returning to Canto 33, where Dante recalls his attempts at recollecting his experience of the Empyrean, 'seeing' God, he writes "I willed myself to see what fit there was, image to circle, and how it all in-where'd. But mine were wings that could not rise to that, save that, with this, my mind was stricken through… All powers of high imagining here failed (lines 137–142)." His solace is in that "now [his] will and [his] desire were turned, as wheels that move in equilibrium, by love that moves the sun and other stars" (lines 143—145). In this ending Dante harks back to that idea of Intellect – just as the Form of Beauty taken as a property of God Himself, and additionally an aspect of Himself which only He fully embodies – as a saturation of Light too brilliant for the fragile human mind to comprehend fully. This Intellect is inaccessible in a way that wisdom is not, which seems marked by the second shorter extract, the ending lines of the *Commedia*, where Dante seems to acknowledge that his mind might not remember the transcendental experience, but fundamentally the incident has made an impression on him that sets him to motion according to God's order. The experience has set his heart aright, and will cause him to live a life in subservience to God's will; this is wisdom. A distinction should be made here between divine intelligence as the object and the medium of knowledge. Wisdom, the medium of knowledge, like Boethius' Lady Philosophy, is engendered by Beatrice. And yet being the mouthpiece for Dante's most erudite knowledge, she is hard to access. This may suggest that Dante subscribes to a classical belief in the role of having to belong to an elite intellectual class in order to gain wisdom.

In Canto 33, Dante laments the enterprise of man striving to fathom the Infinite Divine mentally, to know Him in a more palpable way, empirically. Dante then ultimately, and even

occasionally throughout the poem, resorts to apophaticism as a means of escape. But before, and throughout most of the poem he necessarily follows the cataphatic, but more, symbolic theology, trying to outline some comprehensive view of God and the afterlife realms pictorially, i.e., through images. Still, the apophatic is necessary, given that he is incapable of mentally perceiving God in His fullness. The imaging of symbolic theology then gives him an illustrative way of exploring what he believes God to be *like*, not descriptively (literally) but symbolically, in a picturesque way.

And this trend of oscillating from the apophatic to the affirmative way in the poem continues even in the extract below, where Dante writes:

> An inter-circulation, thus conceived, appears in you like mirrored brilliancy. But when a while my eyes had looked this round, deep in itself, it seemed – as painted now, in those same hues – to show our human form. At which, my sight was set entirely there. As some geometer may fix his mind to find a circle-area, yet lack, in thought, the principle his thoughts require, likewise with me at this sight seen so new. I willed myself to see what fit there was, image to circle, and how this all-where'd. But mine were wings that could not rise to that, save that, with this, my mind, was stricken through by sudden lightning bringing what it wished. All powers of high imagining here failed. But now my will and my desire were turned, As wheels that move in equilibrium, By love that moves the sun and other stars. (*Par*, 33: 121–145).

Here Dante registers, affirmatively, that God has a human form. He then goes into detail about the deficiency of mere memory: how the physics of the human mind is in want such that it cannot in its substance *replicate* to itself things of a divine nature *following* the incident; here he relegates himself to the apophatic. To this effect, he writes of his frustration in having retained in some obscure manner the reality of the image, but with a mental landscape plodding and insipid relative to the intellectual brilliance required to draw out once more, the image dormant in his mind, we have in lines 127 to 129 "As some geometer may fix his mind to find a circle-area, yet lack, in thought, the principle his thoughts require."

Touching further on the inability for the finite mind to present even the image as it stands in view of the human observer within the moment of the said experience, it being of the alleged numinous (visionary) essence, Dante writes in lines 123—124 that "deep in itself, it seemed – as painted now, in those same hues – to show our human form" – the emphasis being on "it seemed", and the words "deep in itself", suggesting difficulty in scrutinising the view

presented. “As painted now, in those same hues” points rather to memory, Dante teasing out his discourse on the reliability of his own powers of recollection before us, his readers and adjudicators. Dante lets us know that this painted image as it appears before himself as he writes, may not be as it was at the point of reception (i.e. when Dante received this purported revelation of God). To emphasise this, he in lines 139 writes, “But mine were wings that could not rise to that”, and moreover line 142 reads “All powers of high imagining here failed.”

The above can thus be taken as Dante’s caution to those slow to suspend disbelief, the sceptics/critics in particular, to read the poem with certain provisos in mind. Unlike the address to readers in Canto 2 of *Paradiso,* this does come rather late in the poem; notwithstanding this disclaimer comes timeously, as a caution before reading about the Object of *Paradiso* rather than the realm itself, knowing God being the primary factor in making it to Heaven. This caveat appears necessary nevertheless, in that the revelation of God – as the pivot of not only Heaven, the subject of his third canticle, along with the pervasive universal luminosity, the point of light depicted in the final cantos of *Paradiso*, driving the entire afterlife (and by extension the entire universe), requires appropriate apprehension.

We are invited to simply accept his hampered vision as nonetheless stemming from a spiritual source, albeit imperfectly realised due to no fault of his own, as exemplified in the closing lines of the highlighted passage which states “But now my will and my desire were turned,/ As wheels that move in equilibrium,/ By love that moves the sun and other stars.” Here Dante is pointing to his will becoming one with God’s. Astronomical determination is God’s Will through symbols. Dante can be taken as explaining his lapse as irrevocable, due to astronomical determination. But there is also the idea of love as soaring above intellect – giving him greater potency than the stars would in his endeavour of representing. ‘God is love’, and speaking of Gregory of Nyssa’s formulation of mysticism Andrew Louth, in his *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition,* terms it, an ecstatic union between God and mystic where “the soul in ecstasy meets God’s ecstatic love for herself”, and “the soul is rapt in God” in a “mystical experience in which the soul is drawn on more and more to deeper and deeper experience” (93). It is no wonder that Dante uses Beatrice, then, as the symbol of theology seeing as mystical language could often be erotic.

Going into greater detail Dante expands on his vision of the triune God and each Being's role within this dynamic, writing: Within the being – lucid, bright and deep –/of that high brilliance, there appeared to me/ three circling spheres, three-coloured, one in span./ And one, it seemed, was mirrored by the next/ twin rainbows, arc to arc. The third seemed fire,/ and breathed to first and second equally" (*Par.* 33: 115–120).

Dante writes of a universal form that is knotted-up, and that is in unison with the imagery of the hierarchically positioned afterlife realms and spheres within the realms, maintaining Dante's view of God, Who is truly immaterial residing within the Empyrean, but reductively evinced in the Heaven through a concentrated Point of burning light which expanded constitutes three circling spheres indexing God. Then he describes the positioning of the circulating realms surrounding this point which reflects the preceding sphere, with less potency and virtue as they descend towards and beyond the terrestrial plane. Dante appears to be elaborately conveying the Biblical notion of things visible being made of those invisible (Hebrews 11:3), i.e., that man and the entire cosmos is generated by Deity. In-visible implies within the visible which has the suggestion of what is inside of the seen, which definitively points to God's mind as an invisible network of antimatter.

Looking more particularly at the passage cited, the three circling spans illustrate each member of the godhead, the One in span – the Father – setting the two others in motion, and altogether these Beings setting the entire cosmos in motion. The twin arcs would be the Father and the Son, pointing to the hereditary resemblance between the two as indicated in the visions of Heaven recorded by Daniel and John, alongside Christ's own avowals that whoever has seen Him has seen the Father, He being His glory. Such resemblance is not noted of the third member of the godhead, the Holy Spirit, although it does partake of the God nature in equal degree to the pair. Of this Third Dante writes He "seemed fire, and breathed to first and second equally." Here Dante is reinforcing the similitude again between the Father and the Son, that both partake of the God nature in equal proportions, and that the Spirit has much to do with effectuating this. So, the mind rises from the visible to the invisible, and grasps a little of the relations among the Godhead.

3. Beatrice as Mystical Intermediary

Here I deal with two key passages, one from *Paradiso* 29 and one from *Paradiso* 30. My point is that Beatrice's beauty draws Dante to contemplate God but that his understanding is partial (and so he will have to leave even her behind). In *Paradiso* 29 Beatrice gives a kind of lecture on the idea of God as light, and in *Paradiso* 30 (unlike Canto 33 where we have one actual image of God) Dante deals in superlatives, praising and exalting God without any content. In this section very little content is communicated: most of it is enthusiasm, ardour, etc. Beatrice's role as intermediary here is chiefly to uplift and energize Dante's 'desirous intent'. It also becomes apparent, as we consider these passages, that although (as noted above) the poem itself is at several removes from reality, mystical union allows him to experience that reality. However, we become increasingly aware that this reality is incommunicable.

When speaking of Beatrice, Dante – in a similar fashion to how he compels us to believe he ultimately adopts the apophatic mode of expressing – seems at a loss on how to convey the reality of his experience of her. In his treatment of Deity, he makes his illustrative attempts whilst alerting readers not to expect he has re-presented the reality of this experience. In the case of Beatrice, Dante barely attempts to state anything descriptive: he merely speaks around a non-existent point instead of making one. By this Dante is able to create an impression of something larger than life, something beyond expression, where the reader is free to let his magination drive their fancies towards whatever sublime image it is capable of generating: I turned my eyes towards Beatrice./ If all that has, till this, been said of her/ were now enclosed to form one word of praise,/ it would not, even so, fulfil my need./ The beauty I saw, transcending every kind,/ is far beyond us here – nor only us./ Its maker, I think, alone could know its joy./ From now on, I'll admit, I'm overwhelmed,/ defeated worse than all before – in comic/ or in tragic genre – by what my theme demands./ As sunlight trembles in enfeebled eyes,/ calling to mind how sweet to me her smile was,/ itself deprives my mind of memory./ Not since the day that I, in our first life,/ first saw her face until this living sight,/ has song in me been cut so cleanly short./ It is, however, right that I stand down –/ as every artist, at the utmost, does –/ and no more trace her beauty, forming verse./ And so what then she was I now leave/ to clarions far greater than my trumpet sounds,/ and draw my vaunting line towards its end." (*Par.* 30: 16–36)

Beatrice's smile, to Dante, is so exalted above his comprehension that he is impelled to write "The beauty I saw, transcending every kind, is far beyond us here". Dante does not stop there in his adulation, but suggests that none but God Himself can fully fathom her beauty: "nor only us. Its [M]aker, I think, alone could know its joy". Thus here even the (hypothesised) brilliant contemplative intelligence of the angels that register God's face alone is impeded when it comes to Dante's beloved. Moreover, of even her comparatively 'humble' natural self, we read she was (in modern parlance) stunning to the point that he was compelled to write "Not since the day that I, in our first life, first saw her face until this living sight, has song in me been cut so cleanly short." A similar spellbinding effect, powerful enough to overwhelm his mental capacities, is shown through stating her smile "itself deprives my mind of memory".

Exalting her even higher, he vows to *trace* her beauty no more, "draw[ing] his vaunting line towards its end". In stating that he will be leaving the mimetic enterprise to others, "And so what then she was I now leave to clarions far greater than my trumpet sounds", Dante raises Beatrice in an unprecedented way, making her not only worthy of the artistic efforts and reverie of himself as a man, but a symbol of everlasting beauty to be memorialised indefinitely.

Then, he builds on the idea of not meaning to exclude or alienate any from reading his vision. Noting that God alone knows Himself and Beatrice fully, Dante insists that perception (knowing) is not an individual trait that one can boast over, but rather a feature and subsequent gift of Deity bestowed by means of grace. This works to create the impression that Dante, according to that same grace, has been given to experience (understand) things of a supernatural nature which others in merely partaking vicariously, will only see glimmers of. In this sense Dante is presenting himself as a rare seer, teaching as Jesus does when expounding parables – not as a mere expositor, but a custodian of eternal mysteries (Matthew 13:11), leaving the outcome of the reading process and the 'subsequent' fate of the individual reader to God ultimately.

The greater Dante's expressions of humility and gratitude, the more he affirms the privilege of his vision. In Canto 33 he writes: "As I believe, the sharp light I sustained/ in that live ray was such that, if I'd turned/ away, eyes blurring, I'd have lost my track./ And therefore (I remember this) I grew/ braver as I bore that light, and joined/ the look I had to that unending

might./ Grace, in all plenitude, you dared me set/ my seeing eyes on that eternal light/ so that all seeing there achieved its end" (*Par*. 33: 76–84)

In contrast to Dante's timidity in sustaining Beatrice's gaze (his *Purgatorio* included), Dante argues that looking aside from "that live ray", the "eternal light", is the cause of his losing his way. By way of contrast, now, He views the sight of God as the fullness of knowledge in some sense – as according to him "all seeing there achieved its end". This then lends an intentness to Dante's gaze on the Final Image, he growing braver as he "bore that light, and joined the look…to that unending might." Through this extract we are pointed towards how much God does and how dependent the individual is, relatively. As a microcosm to the salvation process this image sheds light on the grace-versus-works dynamic of salvation, where Dante-pilgrim through grace is permitted to look upon Deity, and then has his look sustained. Comparable then is how the individual is through grace invited, i.e., given the will to yearn and work for their salvation.

One could argue that his traversing through the eternal realms, as well as ascending spontaneously to paradise, is a reflection of the transformation that has already taken place within Dante-pilgrim, before reaching this transcendent concluding chapter. He had always laboured with desirous intent of reaching the finale of his vision. Then again, speaking to faith engineering works, we are meant to understand that the work – the pilgrimage from the infernal regions – was ultimately catalysed by the One Who propels the entire universe into motion. Nonetheless, as I have tried to demonstrate, it is only Dante's unchecked psychical turmoil that appears to propel this vision – bearing in mind the intricate matrix between the subjective individual inner life and the external settings, which in Dante's framework would have been brought about by none other than God Himself – for every individual, not just Dante.

Dante writes further of God in Canto 29 lines 11 to 36, the first few lines of the extract dedicated to drawing out Beatrice as the entrancing mouthpiece for Dante's theologizing. This extract in its entirety, I contend, further reinforces the source of Dante's poem as his own subjectivity pivoting around his fixation with the deceased Beatrice, undermining the authority of his theological discourse, which might be said to be more 'charming' than credible, "…her laughter brushed across her face, / fixed on the point that first defeated me./ Then she began: I'll say – though ask, I won't – / what you now want to hear. I've seen it there/ where every "when" and "where" attains its point. / Not seeking any good that He had

not – / there can be none – but so his shining out/ could in return shine back and say: “I am”, / in his eternity beyond all time, / beyond our understanding, as He pleased, / to new loves Love Eternal opened out. / Nor had he lain in torpor till that time, / for neither “then” nor “now” could come before / the flowing-forth of God above these waves. / Real form and matter (both conjoined and pure), / issued in being where there was no flaw, / as from a three-string bow three arrows fly. / Light rays that enter amber, crystal, glass, / display such luminescence that, from when / they reach, then *are* there wholly, there’s no pause. / Likewise, the three-fold action of light’s lord / shone brightly through all being, all as one, / without distinction in that opening word. / Rank and relationship were co-created / with these true beings who, within the world / (pure act produced in them), are the very height / where, at the lowest, there’s pure potency, / between these two an intertwining binds / pure potency to act – and never disentwines." (*Paradiso* 29: 8–36)

Here we have Beatrice staring right at God “where every “when” and “where” “attains its point” (line 12), the triune Authors of pure actions at their height (lines 32–36), without flinching, before she then expounds on God’s nature, implicitly claiming through illustration the authority attached to divine inspiration, rather as Dante does. Dante then invests his authoritative ideal in this figure, depicting her as a conduit of luminescent and untainted divination. As readers we are thus confronted with Dante’s indirect and coy treatment of his prophetic status and role. Nonetheless, it can also be held that as it is with the *oraculum* dream vision, we are meant to understand Beatrice as some *auctor* in her own right who is sealed with the purpose of revealing divine illuminations to the human oracle, as it is with biblical seers who often have a guiding angel to assist them in making sense of the message they are then sent to communicate to their fellow beings once the vision ends.

Tropologically, we are meant to see Beatrice as a symbol of theology. But again, her lack of credentials is troubling. In biblical prophecy, no woman is involved (as much as the idea is repugnant today, the gender differentiation is evident in the Bible), much less a dead one communicating prophecies to an oracle of God. As discussed above, our sense of Dante's authority is impaired by his selecting this peculiar guide, as opposed to having (at the other end of the spectrum) an angel, or the Son of God Himself as chaperone. Dante however ingeniously circumvents this prohibition and gives Beatrice transcendent authority by turning her into a symbol of theology, Wisdom and even Christ Himself. Tropologically we are meant to see Beatrice as a faculty of the visionary mind, and as one who signifies the role of

love in drawing us closer to God – experiencing the change of scenery that comes with each escalating ascent.

4. Limitations of Intellect

Using material from Paradiso 28, 29 and 30, I intend to show that as the beatific vision engenders virtue (rather than content knowledge itself) we enter further into reality, following the mystical path from ardour to virtue.

In Canto 28 lines 13 to 18, Dante writes of God again, here describing Him from a first-person perspective – God here appearing to Dante as a point of blazing fire. Here too we can sense Dante's limited sense of *auctoritas*:

> And once I'd turned – and once my eyes were touched by what appears within that scroll to those who look aright within its turning sphere – a point I saw, that shot out rays so sharp the eye on which it fixes fire, is bound to close against that needle-strength... …fire in a circle whirled at such great speed its motion would surpass all clasped round the earth (*Par.* 28: 13–18, 26–27)

In Canto 33, Dante is now closer to the Eternal Light, when God gazes at him. The passage reads: My sight, becoming pure and wholly free,/ entered still more, then more, along the ray/ of that one light which, of itself, is true./ Seeing, henceforward, was far more than speech –/ yielding before the sight I saw – can show./ Mind's memory yields, outraged at that beyond./ Like those who see so clearly while they dream/ that marks of feeling, when their dreaming ends,/ remain, though nothing returns to mind,/ so I am now. For nearly all I saw/ has gone, even if, still, within my heart,/ there drops the sweetness that was born from that." (*Par.* 33: 52–63)

At a greater altitude, Dante's eyes now free of scales encumbering sight have a pure and wholly free view of a ray of light which of itself is true, revisiting the idea of God being both Light and Truth. Here again, we have the tropological suggestion of the quest to finding truth, veiled as a pilgrimage to finding or seeing God. To be more specific, and put in Dante's own words in his letter to Cangrande, the tropological sense of *La Commedia* "is to remove those living in this life from the state of misery and to lead them to the state of bliss" (para 15). In writing "Mind's memory yields, outraged at that beyond. Like those who see so clearly while

they dream that marks of feeling, when their dreaming ends, remain, though nothing returns to mind, so I am now", Dante alludes more than twice to a "dream" or "dreaming", bolstering the idea of his visionary experience as more a night dream as opposed to a waking vision – as suggested in *Inferno* Canto 1. Of course, we cannot ignore that Dante is only *likening* the vision to a dream and not stating it as such. This ambivalence is something that he retains throughout the *Commedia*, from the first canticle's opening lines where he wakes to find himself in a dark wood, where a midlife moral crisis is suggested rather than a man literally lost within a forest.

The first three lines of the above quotation express the medieval idea of God as *Verace Autore*, the only Truth existent. Dante, "enter[ing] still more…along the ray of that one light which, of itself, is true", is then enabled to perceive pure Light and Truth more accurately than in waking life – his spirit magnified beyond his corporeality. Like his contemporaries, Dante believed that truth could nonetheless be found in the palpable creation, but, that this would be superseded by the spiritual realm, and that sensible creations received flickers of the true Light and Truth to the varying degrees in which these natural aspects of creation were 'in-Godded'. For instance, in the case of epistemology, theology (the field discussing the essence of God) would be of the highest credibility as opposed to history, dealing with the natural realm, and then less authoritative traditionally, poetry, which was thought to generally thwart even the secondary truth laced in the temporal realm through history.

This section recapitulates the graded reality I have outlined in a previous note: the things Dante portrays to us as his having seen them are not to be taken wholly as he 'recalls' them to us, for he writes that his mind fails to recollect them, and more concisely put, he records, "…my mind, was stricken through/ by sudden lightning bringing what it wished./ All powers of imagination here failed" (*Par.* 33: 140—142). And then finally, as a further remove from reality for us, what is read is not how Dante imagines from his memory, the representational system of transcription bringing about its own problems. Consequently, the idea that we are essentially dealing with traces of reality in Dante's vision would not have been an idea repugnant even to himself, as, in the Bible it is through the idea of us 'seeing through a glass dimly' (1 Corinthians 13:12) that we are mentally hampered from perceiving God's reality.

Dante suggests that if a robust unwavering will is turned to God, virtue can be cultivated from a life stimulated through the intellect as opposed to passions. This is suggested in Canto 29 when he discusses his (typically medieval) conception of angels in comparison to man,

Adam below as emblematic of mankind. He writes: “The first cause of the fall was that cursed flounce/ of arrogance, in one whom you have seen/ gripped tight below the weight of all the world./ The angels you see here restrainedly/ acknowledged of themselves the utmost good/ who made them quick to understand all this./ Their intellectual sight was, therefore, raised/ through merit and illuminating grace/ so high that they in will are full and firm” (*Par*. 29: 55—62).

Matthew 18 verse 10 notes that at least some angels are always in the presence of God, and this seems to be a verse Dante builds on in discussing angels as the highest in intellect owing to their gaze being absorbed by God alone.

In Canto 33, in a passage from which we have already quoted, Dante continues to air his frustration on the limited capacities of the human intellect: “You raise yourself so far, O highest light,/ above our dying thoughts! Now lend me once more/ some little *part* of what it seemed you were,/ and make my tongue sufficient in its powers/ that it may leave at least one telling spark/ of *all your glory* to a future race/ Returning somewhat to my memory,/ re-echoing a little in my verse,/ your triumph over all will be more known./ As I believe, the sharp light I sustained/ in that live ray was such that, if I’d turned/ away, eyes blurring, I’d have lost my track/. And therefore, (I remember this) I grew/ the braver as I bore that light, and joined/ the look I had to that unending might./ Grace, in all plenitude, you dared me set/ my seeing eyes on that eternal light/ so that all seeing there achieved its end./ Within in its depths, this light, I saw, contained,/ bound up and gathered in a single book,/ the leaves that scatter through the universe –/ beings and accidents and modes of life,/ as though blown all together in a way/ that what I say is just a simple light./ This knotting of universal form/ I saw, I’m sure of that. For *now I feel*,/ in saying this, a gift of greater joy. (*Par,* 33: 67–93)

Looking first at the last two lines “I saw, I’m sure of that. For now I feel,/ in saying this, a gift of greater joy”, Dante frames the idea of man’s emblematic comprehension of matters divine. Man according to this medieval outlook gains certain knowledge of God not through mental impressions (intellect or memory), but more through intuitive impressions manifested to the heart as joy (line 93). This affective as opposed to cognitive impression of God Dante can possess, savour and cling to with the most amount of empirical certainty accessible to unregenerate (flesh and blood) man. The first couple lines also present this belief concisely, Dante writing “You raise yourself so far, O highest light, above our dying thoughts!”

Despite lamenting the human limitations that hinder the full expression of an Infinite God to man in the present, Dante remains hopeful that something can be said about Him: "Now lend me once more some little *part* of what it seemed you were, and make my tongue sufficient in its powers that it may leave at least one telling spark of *all your glory* to a future race." Here he is beseeching God Himself to give him the power needed, *not* to present Him as He *is* to mankind – which by dint of the mode of writing is rendered impossible – but to introduce his much-anticipated description of God which is always growing and developing, glimpse upon glimpse: "And so my mind, held high above itself,/ looked on, intent and still, in wondering awe/ and, lit by wonder, always flared anew"/(*Paradiso*, 33: 97–99). In these instances, Dante is reinforcing the idea that the human mind does not spontaneously have the capacity to perceive Divinity. It has to be in an unnatural state, namely being "above itself" to embrace the Transcendent. Consequently he pleads with God, that enough power be given that he may at least express *a glimmer* of what he experienced of God, expressing "*one telling spark* of all [His] glory", so that the future races may know Him better. The glimmer Dante implores in this way may not be qualified so quantitatively but qualitatively, in that his experience, while exemplifying reality more closely, nevertheless is a trace of reality itself that must undergo further veiling through signification. It is rendered to the mental landscape in recollection, the medium of language through transcription, and again ultimately through the mental plane during the reading process.

Using the affirmative way, Dante has presented image after image to relay to his audience something of the great vision he depicts himself as having received. After ninety-nine cantos Dante is still doubtful of his ability to accurately represent this vision to us, with its culmination in the 'face of God' Whom Dante expresses as (vaguely having seen) possessing a human form. From this we see that Dante does not subscribe to the Way of Negation alone, for then there would not be any *Comedy* to speak of. He makes an attempt at transcribing the 'inexpressible'. But then we are meant to note that he also inevitably possesses enough sense to understand that an infinite chain of traces cannot reconstruct the Transcendent 'real' which he seeks to make known. Dante thus conveys much without firmly asserting anything, but some appreciate his efforts because at the end of all hundred cantos they walk away *feeling* differently. Knowledge of God extends to an emotional response; knowledge leads to love, according to St Thomas, as embodied in the two rings of sages in the second part of *Paradiso*, where broadly speaking the Dominicans knowing God as Truth and the Franciscans knowing God as Love (Brookes, para 1) meet in the Empyrean to find Love as

Truth when Dante-pilgrim sees God and says "But now my will and my desire were turned,/ as wheels that move in equilibrium,/ by love that moves the sun and other stars/ (*Par*.33: 143—145)." Also, Dante-pilgrim, and I would think by necessary extension, having undergone catharsis through writing, Dante-author concludes the poem feeling renewed, particularly inspired to fulfil a purpose, hopeful in the existence and the magnificence of God.

4. Tropological Vision as the Goal of a Spiritual Journey

We continue on the mystical journey, to Paradiso 31, and the theme is that of the regeneration of the will as the vision intensifies.

Dante's vision, considering the beginning and end, figuratively points to the road towards salvation, or redemption from backsliding, the individual soul subordinating its will to God. More particularly we can see through the pilgrimage depicted by the *Commedia*, the idea of a previously unsaved sinner, but more particularly a backslider, being cleansed of the consciousness of their sins, who sees things with spiritual eyes progressively, experiencing God more intimately; then, through *Paradiso* in particular, we have the depiction of a person awakening to a different level of awareness generally, resurrected to a life spiritually enhanced – as one no longer engrossed in carnal pleasures, but developed as a flare in the fire of God's creative pool, reflecting His spiritual (moral) image to a greater degree. Thus Canto 31 presents Dante-pilgrim beside St Bernard, looking upon Beatrice elevated within the rose-shaped Court of Heaven. Words of instruction from St Bernard to himself then follow: ''…So you may perfectly/ attain the summit of the path you take/ (for that I'm sent, by prayer and holy love),/ fly through this garden with the wings of sight,/ for seeing this will make your gaze more fit/ to climb towards the radiance of God"/ (*Par.* 31: 93—98).

We could argue that *Paradiso* is a reflection of a soul as living to its Creator, envisioned after its blessed resurrection to co-rule with Christ and inherit the promised land, etc. aligning Dante's *Commedia* more closely with scripture. Tropologically, one could say that Dante's project of portraying his vision is itself a preparation for encountering the True God of the Bible beyond the mere letter. By this I mean not to view him through the senses, but, worshipping Him in 'spirit and truth', being located in a realm of fictional symbols so as to ascertain what God is like, not what He truly is. Through a supra-intellectual apprehension, or genius, as an author, Dante seeks to generate this experience for others as well. His syncretism, drawing on both pagan and sacred literature, acts as 'medium' (or intercessor),

bridging the long-standing divide between the sacral and secular so that those still 'of the world' can start reaching for something beyond. So, as a purported mystic instead of a prophet, Dante is a man who seeks out the Divine in all he encounters, and has a transformative experience, which he then shares for the edification of whoever comes across it, to whatever degree they were able to engage him. A prophet, on the other hand, would enjoy direct divine sanctioning – often verified by other prophets – to utter a particular divine admonition to a specified group of persons. An example would be the prophetic warnings to the Israelites, time and again, punishment (such as the Babylonian exile) for straying from God's Law. Another example is of prophets ordaining a specific king (1 Samuel 16:1—13), or even another prophet in their stead (1 Kings 19), according to a revelation bestowed from 'on high'. In Scripture Heaven alone is dealt with in bits and pieces through distinct persons and epochs. Dante on the other hand is one man whose individual work goes unverified. His poem embraces vast subject matter obscurely, giving us a watered-down Bible in three canticles which ultimately circulates around himself and his chief concerns.

Nonetheless, as readers feel as though we have gained in heart (will and desire) what may be lacking in certain knowledge, because again it seems as though instead of seeking to provide an accurate account of life after death Dante simply wants to instil will and desire towards that something beyond, since at the end of the *Commedia* it would be unreasonable for most to assume now they know *for sure* the vision relayed is of Paradise, Hell and Purgatory as they stand (and notwithstanding the latter whose sources are no longer considered apart of biblical material – now fallen into circles of apocryphal material meaning principally no longer considered sacred).

After reading the *Commedia* we still do not 'know' (hold sound beliefs about): what God and his angels in fullness of comprehension should look like; much less if Beatrice were a 'real' person; nor do we unambiguously bear insight of where the blessed and accursed throughout human existence are located following death, it being unclear in what manner we are supposed to understand their existence; what the relationship dynamic is of blessed 'souls' to God within the celestial spheres; what Christ in His glory looks like; what 'souls' in Heaven or Hell actually do in these timeless realms if they truly exist. The reason for these uncertainties rests in Dante's mode of writing, which to me points to its value in so far as it is read symbolically rather than as an account true to history – or true to literal veracity more broadly. Uncertainty persists amongst us reasonable sceptical readers and we thus often relegate the vision to a parable rather than a divine vision. Dante himself often suggests a

figurative veiling in the material he has emitted, reinforcing the many points of ambivalence in his text thus inclining us towards ascertaining the content relayed as dressed with a symbolic veil.

6. Getting Closer to the 'Real'

My focus on a passage from *Paradiso* 30 leads me to discuss the idea that the vision has to be adjusted to the capacity of the seer. The mystic is inspired to make themselves ready for the vision. Beatrice puts it in a nutshell: "The love that gives this Heaven its quietness will always make its saving welcome thus, to form a candle ready for its flame." That's what the mystic must become: a candle ready to receive the flame.

Now, I wish to concentrate on how the passage below illustrates that whatever else Dante saw before Canto 30 was in a way a figment of his own imagination, and moreover whatever follows a more lucid closer-to-'reality' *representation* still – a representation in so far as it is transcribed, not as Dante sees things. The passage begins with words from Beatrice, then Dante takes over narrating his experience, Beatrice briefly interposing: "… Here you will see the two heavenly ranks,/ angels and saints – the saints in countenance/ as you, on Judgement Day, will see them stand'/ As lights, when flashing suddenly, disperse/ the spirits of the retina, and rob/ the eye of seeing even strong, bright things,/ so, bright around me, shone a living light/ that left me, baby-like, in swaddling weaves/ of brilliance, so that nothing showed to me./ 'The love that gives this Heaven its quietness/ will always make its saving welcome thus/, to form a candle ready for its flame./ ' No sooner had these brief words entered me/ than I rose up – as truly I could tell –/ above the summit of my natural powers./ New seeing-strength I kindled in *myself,/* so that no light, however crystalline,/ could cause my eyes to close in self-defence/. (*Par.* 30: 43—60)

The key passage in the extract above, for this stage of the argument, is line 58 which reads "New seeing-strength I kindled in myself": this is yet another signal of Dante's channelling imaginative powers and it betrays a subconscious awareness of the subject as agent rather than the Infinite as 'Object' driving this vision. But then the words "bright things, so, bright around me, shone a living light that left me, baby-like, in swaddling weaves of brilliance, so that nothing showed to me" (lines 48–51), create the impression that whatever follows, i.e.

the Final Image, shows the subject as blinded by an external brilliance which eclipses the vision thus far. Following his blindness, we have Beatrice's words "'The love that gives this Heaven its quietness will always make its saving welcome thus, to form a candle ready for its flame'". Dante then notes, of himself, 'an ascension beyond his natural powers' before he kindles the new seeing-strength in himself. Some might read in Beatrice's words, and the subsequent sight which impels forms from within, a vague sense of Dante in-Godded, as it were. But this in-Godding to me appears to be in a similar sense to the genius that he asks for from Apollo the Greek sun god, the chief of the Muses. The Heaven that "always make[s] its saving welcome thus, to form a candle ready for its flame" is ambiguous, it does seem that an objective, externally sustained Heaven by a Being omnipotent is the eternal flame, and the candle the vessel of the light that must run out, which is Dante and his genius. But in the words "The love that gives this Heaven its quietness", maintaining his blindness before, his ascension beyond natural powers following Beatrice's words, the self-generated seeing following that, it could be contended that "this [H]eaven" is a by-product of the love that gives his Heaven peace. Reverting to the psychological dramas actuating his vision, Dante here unconsciously reveals the (contended) true source of his vision, which is the unrequited love that has given birth to many larger-than-life poems throughout time. The love that needed a Heaven, an idyllic set up where the object of its longing can be reunited to him that he may be appeased, finally.

What Dante desires and claims to have observed is no mundane sight, however. He is in the extract above in the *Primum Mobile*, the last sphere before the Empyrean where all souls in Paradise are said to truly reside. Accordingly, every display before this extract where Dante's sight is self-strengthened, we are to imagine he was simply seeing images presented of Heaven to match his then lower capacity to take in things of a truly divine nature. And so here the irony is highlighted, the truly divine is self-induced. On the surface, Dante ascends into the realm of God's presence, and we are meant to understand that this is made possible by an indwelling of God in Him. This is concretised in the way that Dante's ascensions from the earthly paradise to the *Primum Mobile* and beyond are explained, as movements external to Dante himself, he as a patient and not the agent of the momentum propelling him upward. But then what is it that distinguishes the ascension of the extract cited above from the ones prior? This is God's Power we are meant to understand, and as all capacities theologically, they are given according to God's favour, according to his grace, and so we are possibly meant to understand that although in the beginning Dante-author/pilgrim prays to the Muses

and to Apollo, growing in piety throughout the writing process, he is made more pious, receiving grace from God in establishing a *genuine* vision? This is a messy interpretation that does not ring of truth. But either that or a genuine 'vision' is experienced by Dante-pilgrim, which is initiated by the Muses and Apollo, then concluded by the monotheistic God. Literary criticism of course has no business with deciding how true or false the vision is, but here I register the various ways in which related questions are raised.

Dante goes on to describe an image filled with glimmering light, "colours of wonderful spring", "sparks" of fire lighting up flowers which appear as "rubies set in gold encirclements". Thereafter Beatrice addresses the following to him: 'The fine desire that fires and urges you/ to gain still fuller news of all you see,/ delights me more, the more the longing swells./ And yet before your thirst is satisfied,/ you'll need to drink these waters to the full.'/ Those words were hers, the sunlight of my eyes./ Then following: 'The river and the glint/ of topaz, in and out, the smile of grass – these all are/ shadowed prefaces that hint at their own truth./ That does not mean that any is, itself,/ unripe, acid or green. The lack is yours./ Your sight as yet cannot move proudly on.'/ No baby, waking later from its nap/ than normally it would, so hurled itself/ face down to mother's milk as I did now./ To make my eyes, as mirrors, better still,/ I bent towards the wave that, flowing there,/ will sweep us always onward to in-bettering./ I drank to the arching eaves of my brow,/ and then saw all new, as though that length/ of light had now, in form, become a round./ If masquerades, hidden in their veils,/ undress those features (not their own) in which/ they'd vanished once, their look seems somehow changed./ So now, it seemed, these flowers and flecks of light/ altered, to join and celebrate still more./ And I saw, now made known, both heavenly courts./ Splendour of God! Through you I came to see/ triumph exalting in the realm of truth/ Grant me true strength to say what then I saw" (*Par.* 30: 70–99).

Now Dante reveals to us – through the spirit form of Beatrice – that all we had been exposed to thus far was but the "masquerades, hidden in their veils," or the "shadowed prefaces that hint at their own truth". The first phrase's terminology points to symbolism in that the covering disguises the 'real' desired. The second phrase suggests that, since humans cannot see Heaven as it exists, figures are put in place, indexing and possessing the 'fulfilment' through a feigning veil. The figure exemplifies certain characteristics to a lesser degree than its prefigured fulfilment. But here unlike with allegory proper where type and fulfilment are historical, with the shadowy prefaces that hint at their own truth the type does not possess historicity as its 'fulfilment' counterpart, but like a symbol the former (type) only *points* to

the latter (‘manifestation’/ ‘fulfilment’) metaphorically. This is the confused notion of anagogy upheld by exegetes including Aquinas. Now Dante would have us believe the *Commedia* ought to be read figuratively except in the last three or four cantos, where what we see is at least experienced by Dante-pilgrim, as his memory has strained to relay. Figures are replaced by reality, or at least a more direct representation of it.

Dante would then be forced to commit to everything transcribed beyond the extract cited in Canto 30, meaning the Celestial Rose and the final image amongst other things. These matters go beyond what is sanctioned by scripture: for instance, the idea of the Empyrean, i.e., that the Heaven of God’s dwelling is a timeless spaceless void. This is presented to us about God’s Spirit which was hovering over the waters before the universe was created, and is presented to us exegetically in Hebrews 11:3 which reads “By faith we understand that the world was framed by the word of God; that from invisible things visible things might be made.” From these we may conclude that the Spirit of God, the third person of the trinity inhabits a timeless, spaceless void because it is antimatter that creates everything in existence. The Heaven of God the Father’s dwelling, however, is an intelligible locale which is different to earth only in that within the former there exist forms of differing matter, matter of a less tangible kind. Biblical accounts of the afterlife are not without references to space and time. Here is one such vision of Heaven, which has time represented of it and also spatial relations to the Object of Heaven, God Himself. It reads:

> And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in [H]eaven, as it were for half an hour. [2] And I saw seven angels standing in the presence of God; and there were given to them seven trumpets.

Similarly, although Jesus was resurrected as a spirit (or glorified) body, he nonetheless bore the marks of his former incarnation, so that he could dine with his disciples (Luke 24:43), and could be touched by Thomas ‘the doubting disciple’. And when Jesus returns it is noted He will still bear the marks of his crucifixion, showing temporal continuation in the celestial realms (Zechariah 12:10; John 19:37; Revelation 1:7). In the book of Revelation, even trumpets speak and they are understood by John. Space and time are presupposed in a realm with traversing and intelligible speech (i.e., language). There would be no point to a vision if the one experiencing it does not hear what is being said.

And then, Dante drinks of the ‘River of Light’, and his sight becomes less dulled to view Heaven as it is, or rather, he views Heaven closer to its true appearance. But even so, there is

never a point where we can be absolutely sure that Dante indeed sees all as it truly exists, apart from his gaze, as the waters make his “eyes, as mirrors, better still”, which grants certitude that his eyes pierced through the veil and saw into the Real as a mirror projection is visible to all men. This puts Dante’s vision, at the crux of things, at an iconic level of representation. But we are supposed to believe that Dante eventually sees God as He is: without mediating form, but from afar off, as he puts it in Canto 33, lines 129—139: “But when a while my eyes had looked this round,/ deep in itself, it seemed – as painted now,/ in those same hues – to show our human form./ At which, my sight was entirely set there./ As some geometer may fix his mind/ to find a circle-area, yet lack,/ in thought, the principle his thoughts require,/ likewise with me at this sight seen so new./ I willed myself to see what fit there was,/ image to circle, and how this all in-where’d/. but mine were wings that could not rise to that”.

Dante does not drink from the biblical River of Life in the book of Revelation, because that would give him immortality. After all, in *Purgatory,* in the sphere of the envious, we are told that Dante is to return there after his demise. Thus, instead of the River of Life we have Dante mimicking it by introducing his rendition, the ‘River of Light’ which does not seem to be a real body of water. After drinking of it, Dante sees “all anew”; the shadowed prefaces hinting at their own truth are changed; “If masqueraders, hidden in their veils,/ undress those features (not their own) in which/ they’d vanished once, their look seemed somewhat changed”/ (*Par.* 30: 99—93), revealing “flowers and flecks of light” altering to “both heavenly courts” and God, a circular band of light. Tellingly Beatrice says “…the river and the glint/ of topaz, in and out, the smile of grass – these all are shadowed prefaces that hint at their own truth" (*Par.* 30: 76—78). The river of light for Dante is not factual. It merely means greater perspicacity of the saints and should be read tropologically: the biblical entity, the ‘River of Life’ differs from the imaginary body of water, the 'River of Light’. Dante’s symbol means acuteness, where God’s symbol, read anagogically, is a body of water that embodies life eternal.

Dante writes of Paradise as the realm of truth, and in doing so he necessarily lowers the degree of reality of the other realms. Hell and Purgatory can then be taken as symbolic landscapes as opposed to true planes of existence. This leaves room for figurative interpretation of the realms concerned, which could still be in alignment with biblical conceptions of Sheol – the graveyard of mankind where bodies decompose on Earth, and the pertaining departed spirits dream up all kinds of illusory sights, both good and bad depending on whether they are to be blessed after some passage of time (Purgatory), or whether they are

damned at the *eschaton* of the universe. But, for Dante Heaven seems to be real in a way that Hell and Purgatory are not; it could be said, therefore, that his Paradise is as close as he can get to Heaven as a real place, as opposed to an illusion of the mind.

7. The Postmodern Challenge to Dante's Vision

In the conclusion I argue that Dante's vision is aspirational and experiential rather than representational. I bring in Freccero and Moevs with a post-modern view to the effect that subjectivity erases reality entirely, whereas Dante contends that ultimate reality although inaccessible is real all the same: the deeper into one's subjectivity one goes, the more tangible the union between God and mystic becomes (Louth, 81). However, this may be in the mystical tradition, Dante's narrative, I argue, is more accurately read if taken to point to a metaphorical connection between signifier and signifieds: as he points out himself, his poem consists mostly of 'literal lies' veiling truths. By literal lies Dante does not mean for us to conclude that signifier and signified alike are false, but that signifiers are, in a sense, inadequate to their signified counterparts. Dante's *Commedia* is then, not iconic, for the most part, but indexical, or at least this is what he would have us believe through statements where he informs us, through Beatrice, what Heaven *is* regardless of his limited perception – and implies that his view is gradually fine-tuned to receive Heaven as it is. But Dante's semiotics are problematic, in that instead of one signifier veiling a known signified, Dante's signifiers point instead to things that only he can imagine, and, he incorrectly matches signifiers to sacred signifieds such as with Beatrice representing Christ instead of the Church only. But this, Dante lets us know is all in the shadowy prefaces which become clearer as the poem progresses.

Dante writes "Grace, in all plenitude, you dared me set my seeing eyes on that eternal light, so that all seeing there achieved its end" (Canto 33: 82–85). Taking the poem as a whole, the presence of the Empyrean and its lack of spatiotemporality, Christian Moevs in *The Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy* argues that there persists no absurdity in the fact that these (spiritual) material forms being visible are necessarily (in whatever sense) divisible and yet contained in the indivisible – they can be reconciled in that the realm somehow constitutes ideational forms that impregnate Dante's psyche with his paradisal experience. Although Moevs explains that any intelligence (including the God of Judeao-Christianity, seeing as He is revealed through Christ for instance as Someone beyond the 'unrepresentable' I AM) can

only at the outermost extremity be said to ‘locate’ the *Primum Mobile*. It is in this sphere where essential Beingness can coincide with (ideational) properties giving qualities to spiritual beings such as positioning/situation, etc. The Empyrean has inherent in itself only the principle of Beingness which is further realised (becomes more intelligible and thus material the further down in the heavenly spheres one traverses) into not only forms but sensory matter of all kinds. It is for instance in the realm of the fixed stars where according to Moevs matter now eludes mere potentiality, the stars and luminaries thus functioning to emanate potential form into actualised essentially phenomenal matter to the luminary and planetary spheres, all the way down to the ‘sublunary realm’ of ‘indisputable’ corporeal matter.

For Moevs, then, Dante's imagined world is characterized by being in an existential sense, not reducible to logical formulae. For the reader of Dante’s *Paradiso*, Heaven exists as a product of Dante’s transcription: *Paradiso* is for them a vicarious pilgrimage co-existent with the words of the canticle. In *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, Freccero ultimately posits a nothingness beyond the letter, thus classifying Dante’s *Paradiso* as inescapably a “non-representational poetic world” (210). The basis for this conclusion is in the taken-for-granted belief that Heaven cannot be literally fathomed for finite beings. The Church Fathers also believed in the non-representationality of Paradise, in that in the anagogic mode the signifiers of Heaven in the Bible are but “shadowy prefaces” of what is signified. But the difference with the Church Fathers is that there is a world beyond the letter, where the signifiers tap into a “non-representational spiritual world”. Freccero, on the other hand, assumes that non-representationality implies non-existence. To Freccero there ultimately exists nothing beyond the letter to the *Inferno*, to *Purgatorio* and even *Paradiso*: he not only undercuts, but elides, the spiritual entities Dante has in mind to represent.

With Moevs and Frecerro we understand that Dante’s *Commedia* imagery is open-ended because the signified is hard to, if not ultimately in fact, impossible, to pin down. However, with Dante, although the signifiers may be false, or otherwise ‘unlike’ their signified counterparts, the signified bears some relation to Heaven as it is, or could be. Freccero’s ‘wiping out’ or ‘silencing’ of Paradise, and by extension every post-mortem realm visited in the *Commedia*, shows an unconscious regression to old historicist critiquing, where he mismatches the assumptions of a theocentric era to a post-theological one. A narrow outlook regarding the mechanisms of language and the extent to which it satisfies its function (referentiality) is imposed upon Dante without taking into account the tropological

approximation I have analysed above, and the extended anagogic mode as reviewed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Moevs does not wipe out Heaven but treats it as being of one kind only: first a sleep-induced illusion from *Inferno* to *Purgatorio*, then in the closing section of *Paradiso* as Dante moves from the illusory to the visionary, an existential encounter with 'The Real' that only the Empyrean and God is. Moevs creates a reading of the *Commedia* that dissolves all physicality to the point of mere illusion in the sense used in oriental metaphysics. This is plausible, since Dante would have had access to and read the ancient script of Islamic philosopher Averroes' reinterpretation of Aristotle. The degree to which Dante accepted matter as potentiality is foregrounded in that his entire *Commedia* save everything after he drinks of the River of Light, is dissolved into an illusion, just as the world beyond the Empyrean is in descending levels of non-beingness (insubstantiality).

The conclusion for Freccero is that Dante's paradise points to nothing substantial. The same is the case for Moevs, apart from when he argues that Dante sees 'The Real' after drinking of the River of Light. The difficulty here is ontological ambiguity: reality, illusion and insubstantiality mean different things to different readers, especially at different times in history. Dante as a thinker whose philosophy was shaped in the Realist tradition of St Thomas Aquinas would not have accepted that his poetic constructs bore no relation to ultimate reality. Consequently, he expects us to respond to the climactic vision of his poem as if to a physical reality. We have Beatrice still appearing to Dante after drinking of the River of Light, as though to insist to both Frecerro and Moevs, that nothing of what Dante was seeing was purely fabricated or invented. In *Inferno* Canto 2 lines 102–103 Virgil speaks of Beatrice communicating her position in the Sempiternal Rose beside Rachel of the "ancient days". One might ask why this does not pose a conundrum for Moevs and even Dante: Dante experiences 'The Real' within the fictitious; he hears of it in solid speech. This poses a similar problem to Beatrice appearing as she was from the Earthly Paradise to *Paradiso* Canto 30 before Dante in the Courtly Rose.

What does this mean for Dante's claims of being an oracle? Dante tells us his poem is a corpus of lies covering truth, at least till the drinking of the 'River of Light' where truth is revealed by 'The Real'. The short of it is that Dante's lies are illusions – optical and aural (in fact, they engage all five of his senses). So, waking up at the end of the poem for Dante is to see real forms as they exist in reality, drinking of the river of Light allows Him to envisage God and the Sempiternal Rose. It is therefore not incongruous to have Dante's 'sleep not affect him' before seeing the believers as they exist in the courts of Heaven, and it is not

inconsistent seeing God in human form, without it being waking up *per se*. The spiritual is engaged through the imagination which is stirred up in sleep. Dante does experience a night vision – in a comatose state, asleep, throughout the *Commmedia,* save the waking vision, at the end of the poem, where he becomes progressively more lucid. And this is how the anagogical for exegetes is seen as having a lying signifier, it not being fictitious per say but paranormal; the signifiers are not fictitious but are at a step away from unmediated reality.

Moevs argues that there is nothing real from *Inferno* to the closing passages of *Paradiso*, concluding that Dante hallucinates his pilgrimage until he drinks of the River of Light, seeing the heavenly court and God Himself as firstly a circular belt of light, and then again as a human form. Moevs' position rests in the assumption that the poem was intended to be interpreted Platonically, considering sensory objects as mere delusions, matter emanating from higher up forms. Dante's signifiers need not be superficial as Freccero tends to treat them. Like Plato's Cave, Dante is throughout the *Commedia* at a few removes from reality, getting ever closer to the real, admitting to seeing reflections instead of true forms before glimpsing God, where in Canto 33 it is noted, Dante sees Him as He is (yet this is still an approximation of course since the real forms are in the reality beyond the *Commedia*). In that same sense, Dante's literal content is not fictional *per se* but fantastic; the illusions are for the hallucinator, Dante-pilgrim, so vivid that they simulate reality. Then the closer one gets to 'The Real' the more the scales fall from the eyes, and God at the pinnacle of the vision is met with a very close to unadulterated mind.

Moevs emphasises that it is not in the literal content but rather in the poem taken as a whole, where Dante manages to attain to the exposition of theologically sound metaphysical truths. Dante, according to Moevs, is through his (he admits) undeniable fiction, holistically pointing to principles of biological and ideational generation such that the individual signifiers of his poem point not to a corresponding substantial individual signified (they could not anyway since sensory objects are in essence illusory) but the unity of them expound upon, and in doing so, 'perform' (or play out) the metaphysical principles generating the cosmos: that emanation from higher up forms, God included, is what gives life to not only forms but material existence, and then ultimately, for our purposes, 'fictions' like Dante's *Commedia*.

Moevs rightly emphasises that what Dante sees throughout the *Commedia* is a captivating illusion which ends in a resounding slap in the waking-visionary encounter with God: his final image, the pinnacle of all visionary truth, and Truth plain and simple. Dante's poem is,

although not quite a fiction, a semblance of reality. Even the segments with the courts of Heaven and God the Final image are as Dante would say it ‘truths hidden under beautiful lies’. The lies are impressions of the mind. As readers and Dante-pilgrim our minds are altered, introduced to the fantastic to receive the miraculous. The (real) forms of reality are hidden from us from the beginning to the end of the *Commedia*; they are signalled as appearing to readers and Dante-pilgrim alike right before the dark woods in the *Inferno* and beyond the conclusion of *Paradiso*.

In preparation of seeing into the Empyrean, bordering the thin line between non-being and being, Dante drinks the illusion of the entire pilgrimage thus far, away. From *Inferno* 1, through to *Purgatory*, and last of all, the 29 cantos of the *Paradiso*, we can argue, Dante has been navigating through the illusory impressions of what his own mind could contrive of the post-mortem realms. According to Moevs, from this point on, having drunk from the River of Light, everything that Dante-pilgrim sees is ‘The Real’. This would include, the Sempiternal Rose – where a number of Christians and Israelite men and women (Eve, Rachel Mary, John Peter, and Moses, amongst others) are captured in courtly hierarchical display – and, the human form of God Himself! Thus, this event of drinking from the waters of the River of Light raises Dante’s authority to an unfalsifiable level rendering even apologia superfluous.

CHAPTER 5: DANTE AS SAGE

This chapter of the dissertation grapples with the levels of realism within Dante's *Comedy*, in order to facilitate closing comments on the value of Dante's vision. Within the 'prophet-poet dichotomy', where does Dante feature? And how does that alter one's approach to the contents of the text?

1. The Visionary Experience and Rest

St John in Revelations conveys that he was transported *in spirit*, on the day of the Lord. This means his body was still on Earth, more particularly on the Isle of Patmos as he himself states in Revelations 1:9. To reinforce this kind of visionary experience, Daniel has visions of the four winds of heaven striving upon the great sea, but it is written he was upon his bed as he saw these, making biblical visions spectral hallucinations as occurs with night time dreams. It is written in Daniel 7:1–2,"[1]In the first year of Baltasar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream: and the vision of his head was upon his bed: and writing the dream, he comprehended it in few words: and relating the sum of it in short, he said: [2]I saw in my vision by night, and behold the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea." Daniel quite clearly has what is captured within the medieval spirit as the generic 'dream vision', as discussed below. 'Vision' is the very word Dante uses to describe his experience of the afterlife. Dante seems to seek that we accept his pilgrimage as activated through a drawn-out narcoleptic episode with his many references to falling asleep – with his dreams inside of dreams.

Biblically however, it appears that in all cases the celestial is beheld with literal veracity, albeit in the imaginative (spiritual and not palpable) form, i.e., in visions. The relegation to a world of symbols as opposed to verisimilitude regarding theological matters was typical for Dante and contemporaries, because penetrating through to God's essence, as well as knowing all matters celestial as they stand, were feats thought necessarily beyond mankind's capacities – at least not till before the Second Coming of Christ and their subsequent resurrection, where the righteous are promised they will perceive God as He is (1 John 3:2). Then perhaps it is,

with Moses seeing God's back, that God does not want his face in particular seen more than that man is incapable of viewing it, as Christ puts it in 1 John 4 verse 12: "No one has seen God". The more appropriate take is *possibly*, I speculate, inclusive of both, i.e. God does not want to be seen by man, because of their inherent weakened capacity to see Him wholly as He is. The higher up Dante ascends the less he has to say, too. The person who sees Him is threatened with death, because they might then propagate the essentially distorted view of God witnessed. Dante claims to see God but he, too, like biblical precursors, does not detail His appearance, Dante reaching for the mystical aspect of attaining to Truth instead of seeing God palpably.

There might be evidence to point to the seers of the Divine meeting with God and his consorts through the imagination, as it is with Daniel in chapter 10, after his 21-day fast. Daniel is the only one who sees the Angel of the Lord – experiencing the celestial penetrate the temporal realm, but importantly, this is happening through the imagination. Ezekiel also has a waking vision; he says the heavens opened to him while he was amongst the Babylonian captives by the river of Chobar (Ezekiel 1:2); the visions displayed only being seen by him. Other seers have night visions ensuring it is they alone and their imagination at play. Paul is uncertain whether the divine experience was in the body or outside of it because just as in a dream it is hard to outline.

2. 'Caught Up'

In 2 Corinthians 12, St Paul writes of a man "caught up in paradise", stating that he, Paul, will glory in such a one, but not in himself. Some argue that this man was Paul himself, and that he uses the third person in referring to himself to remain humble, so that he will "glory nothing, but in [his] infirmities" (verse 5). To reinforce this intent to check pride he then goes on to say "For though I should have a mind to glory, I shall not be foolish; for I will say the truth. But I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth in me, or any thing he heareth from me" (verse 6). The passage reads:

> [1] If I must glory (it is not expedient indeed): but I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. [2] 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. [3] And I know such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I know not: God knoweth): [4] That he was caught up into paradise, and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter. [5] For such an one I will glory; but for myself I will glory nothing, but in my infirmities. [6] For though I should have a mind to glory, I shall not be foolish; for I will say the truth. But I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth in me, or any thing he heareth from me. [7] And lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me, there was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me. [8] For which thing thrice I besought the Lord, that it might depart from me. [9] And he said to me: My grace is sufficient for thee; for power is made perfect in infirmity. Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Cor. 12:1–9)

In verse 1 the words ‘visions’ and ‘revelations’ are written so as to suggest that the two are separate. Strong’s Concordance has the first listed as 3701[e]: ‘optasias’, meaning an appearing or a vision (*Interlinear Bible*). The second is 602[e]: ‘apokalypseis’ which means an unveiling (*Interlinear Bible*). So St John writes about both the appearances of God and the cloaking of future events in symbolic fashion, because if we take his vision as wholly literal truth we would be forced to believe absurdities within his account like (to name a few): that the bride of Christ is merely a heavenly city and not also the saints resurrected and cleansed from past sins and their earthly capacity to sin; that a human harlot called Babylon fornicated with many countries; and that Satan is a red dragon.

St Paul also uses the interesting phrase of being “caught up” in the third heaven, the third heaven being the sphere of God’s throne – His very residence, unlike other heavens (the first biblical heaven being the sky, and the second, the universe hosted by the planets and the stars) which He also dwells in but in a less concentrated and definitive manner – after all, the Earth itself is described as God’s footstool but we do not identify Earth as God’s abode. In fact, with a more comprehensive view of God’s ‘locale’, we grasp that God’s spirit is pervasive, and this is how He is omnipresent, and thus omniscient. In Psalm 139: 7–12, where amongst other things David writes “Where shall I go from thy [S]pirit? [O]r where shall I flee from [T]hy [P]resence? [8]If I ascend to the heavens, thou art there: if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there” (Psalm 139:7–8). There is God, the third Person of the Trinity Who is a metaphysical principle of existence not seen by the naked eye, which Dante

describes as a point of intense light. This might be the Spirit of God that was hovering over the waters at Creation. Then there is God the Father, the epitome of godlike attributes. God is thus both a man and not a man at all.

The phrase, being "caught up" seems to suggest something more than merely being a witness to likenesses of God and His throne. Being caught up gives the impression that a more concrete relation to reality exists between this realm and the one he is caught up to. The wording of being "caught up" used by Paul also conveys restraint of the human agent's mobility. The upward motion alluded to in the *Commedia* appears to relay the notion of traversing the cosmos palpably from Earth to Heaven, as Dante seems to be doing from the Earthly Paradise to the *Primum Mobile.* Yet the Empyrean is a non-place, and the illusions of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* are ephemeral as well. The fact that the scenes in Revelations for instance shift regularly is because St John is not the one traversing this realm, like a sightseeing tourist; it is more like St John is standing, and being presented with images within a highlight reel as he does. He does not watch the occurrences of Heaven as it stands, like a fly on the wall. This seems to be the case with Daniel too, as with a night vision in general, where one witnesses shifts from one scene to another – where a dreamer is sensing the semblances being presented before him, as opposed to palpably walking through one solid scene to another at his own pace and volition. The point being relayed here is that there is a sense of constraint in a person's mobility with night visions, and in the case of St Paul, and even Dante, in waking visions too. The general principle I am contending is that the person loses, to varying extents, his capacity to be in full control of his mental landscape when he dreams, and is thus left dealing with the archives of his subliminal mind.

3. The Imagination and Spectres

What follows is the contention that Dante entered the afterlife 'out of the body', as through a spectral vision in the night, imparted through the imagination, as often depicted in Scripture of its prophetic *auctors*. Dante mimics this mode, and so adds the impression conveyed to the reader that his vision is grounded in the authority of the *Verace Autore*.

What happens when man enters the post-mortem realms while still alive, then, is an imaginative shift into a hallucinatory world of semblances of reality, as is the case with night

dreams – which is essentially what I argue happens when the prophets of the Bible were caught up to God. To look further into this and into what Dante would have us believe of his vision, let us peruse the opening lines of the *Comedy*. The first scene reads: "Midway upon the journey of our life,/ I found myself in a dark wilderness,/ For I had wandered from the straight and true./ How hard a thing it is to tell about,/ that wilderness so savage, dense, and harsh,/ even to think of it renews my fear!/ It is so bitter, death is hardly more –/ but to reveal the good that came to me,/ I shall relate the other things I saw./ How I had entered I cannot bring to mind,/ I was so full of sleep just at that point/ when I first left the way of truth behind" (*Inferno* 1:1–12).

By stating "how I entered I cannot bring to mind," Dante captures Psalm 88 verse 12 which speaks of Sheol (the land of the dead) as the land of forgetfulness. The expression "I was so full of sleep just at that point when I first left the way of truth behind" leaves readers uncertain about the nature of the experience narrated: whether it be real merely on a symbolic level, or just as true historically. On one level it could be taken to mean he was "full of sleep" in the same sense used in the Bible: that he has 'lost touch' with God and has fallen into the path of unrighteousness. This is Dante's dream as tropologically significant. This could be intriguingly ironic if taken to its logical conclusion, meaning Dante, in entering this visionary experience, meaning writing the *Commedia*, was so spiritually corrupted, that he left the way of truth and followed that of falsity instead, thus unconsciously unveiling the untruthfulness of his fanciful experience. But this is just one way of reading the situation as presented at the outset of the poem, as it could rather be specifying another area of his life in which he had dipped below acceptable standards, and thus need not compromise the authority of his vision.

On the other hand, on a more, but not entirely 'literal' level, it could be that Dante means for us to grasp that he slept his way to his experience of the afterlife, in other words meaning that what follows is a dream vision. This second sense does not conflict with the former, in that as a third option, Dante could be signalling both an ethical/moral and literal sleep, with the latter indexing the former, for the very purpose of revealing his moral imperfection to him, and providing a means of escape, namely, drawing near to, cleansing his self of moral decay, and experiencing God – the apex of all Truth.

4. Dream Types

The Macrobian categorization of dreams lists five types, in a hierarchical order of 'realness', measuring the authority of the dream based on the source being either personal or divine, and then the level of symbolism within the dream, with the purely symbolic holding less authority than the directly conveyed (see page 29 of this dissertation). In terms of the Macrobius' scheme, Dante would have us believe that what he experiences is the most authoritative, direct and true of the types, which is known as the *oraculum*, owing to the presence of a guide throughout, and by dint of the contents appertaining to transcendental, or rather metaphysical subject-matter. But then there is evidence to suggest the third type, which is a dream that can be given from a deity but is essentially conveyed in symbols. This hybridity which is ambiguously conveyed in the *Commedia* as a whole, broadly points to either one of the following: Dante writes as at least St John does, where symbolism is interwoven in with literal truth, exhibiting both direct and indirect imagery appertaining to Divinity; or from a more psychological perspective, one who essentially doubts that Dante's prophetic vision is of a divine source could argue that the hybridity points to Dante's anxieties at play. On one hand he seeks to convey that his dream is of the highest authority, namely the *oraculum*. On the other hand, he might be doubtful or outright duplicitous, and as such noticing the Biblical trend of symbolism within visions being biblically authoritative too, and so being essentially motivated to convey his vision as being on par with that of biblical prophets, he borrows from those conventions too.

Regarding the Calcidian theory (see page 30—32 of this dissertation), and setting aside the argument above of the psychological ("passional" and "rational") origins to be detected in his dream, Dante again, in setting up his *auctoritas* oscillates between the waking vision and night dream. The former is of the highest authority, but one detects – contrary to Dante's suggestions – signs pointing to the latter as well. Again, one who doubts the origins of Dante's poem could point to his painstaking, but ultimately incompletely successful attempt at making his readers suspend disbelief and take him at his word of being an oracle of God.

Biblically, is a visionary conveyed as full of slumber when they receive revelation? In finding that they are not accompanied by sleep, one can merely argue away the suggestion of slumber from Dante's opening scene and maintain he only refers to slumber in the moral sense discussed above. And in that case, the ambiguity of the description should make us cautious

about the visionary status of Dante's *Commedia*. If we take it that Dante did not sleep himself to his experience of the afterlife, we would be left to argue that Hell is entered into literally, through dark woods to be more specific, which is something most would hold as an erroneous way of reading (at least) Dante's intention. But if one wanted to follow this trail, he would also have to hold that at least the whole of Purgatory is also literal. If both spaces, Purgatory, and the infernal regions are then literal, how is the rest of humanity barred from simply walking into them?

5. 'Gold out of Egypt'

Greco-Roman mythologies do ironically reveal insight into the afterlife, as predicated through Scripture, but more so in a (modernly) allegorical fashion. On that point, some hold that even Jesus borrowed from Greco-Roman mythology to communicate his parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. My contention has been that it does not injure His *auctoritas* to have done this, for, as St Augustine contends in his extract 'Gold out of Egypt' (Miller, 54), God's possessions are dispersed among all His creatures, and it is His business to do with His possessions as He wishes. So, when God is delighted with one nation (or 'people') above another, as He is shown to have with the Israelites, allowing these to dispossess the Egyptians of (essentially 'His') gold, to put to better use, which they believed belonged to them is no more wrong than if He had reversed this and had the Egyptians dispossess the Israelites if the former were better favoured. St Augustine, however, also warns that in this 'appropriation' or restoration, Christians must be especially careful to cleanse the gold of the Egyptian dung, the filth which does not add any value to the Gospel. For reformers, Catholicism with its purportedly tainted Manichæan/Catharism leanings irreconcilable to more 'dualistic' orthodox Christianity leading to gnostic repudiation of all things material over the immaterial, would, to the reformer, be supposed *exemplum* of the dung still clinging to the ornamental gold hung around Israeli necks. Dante, fortunately or not, does not fall into this alleged snare – seeing everything as being birthed from primal matter, and matter and form being in varying measures and modes of potentiality and actuality to create diverse life.

6. The Parabolic Mode

In biblical terms, this contention of Augustine's would be put in the following manner: Christ in His Infinite Wisdom is in fact the Word Itself. He is thus the Author of the highest truth according to Dante's contemporaries. He, more than anyone else, would know which philosophies of the Greeks and Romans is true and how to use them to further the Gospel, because He is in fact embodied (incarnated) Wisdom Himself. Maintaining that Dante adapts his mystical sense more closely to anagogy unlimited, Christ's discussion of Dives and Lazarus in what is known as the parable of Abraham's Bosom, like Dante's *Commedia,* is a vision of the esoteric life of the righteous and the heathen signified through a fictitious narrative. It is also a figural illustration of the life Lazarus and the Rich Man will awaken to *once* Christ returns at the eschaton of the universe. Auerbach argues that Dante's vision is a figural manifestation of the life of the dead which has found its fulfilment in Dante's literal sense (64). The personae of his poem in their historic or fictional lives are the foreshadowing signifiers, and the characters as they appear in the actual plot of Dante's *Commedia* are the foreshadowed signified (65—66). But as I have argued, the fictitiousness of Dante's literal sense can be excused as accommodation but he cannot be regarded as a prophet on par with scriptural sages since the mechanical manufacturing of prophecies and the inclusion of fictitious personae as real makes us doubt his authenticity and might reveal that, at best, Dante is gifted in creating the phantastic. Dante attests several times in his *Commedia* that he sees the phantastic, but that just might be his own genius at work, so we reserve judgement. As it is with fictional writers, they see the things they write about in their imagination first. They conjure them at will and from that one action can follow another until the imagining finds its closure. Dante mimics the theological senses, weaving them in a matrix of fictional and historical signifiers which add profundity to his text in a way not far from the parables of the kingdom of heaven such, even, as those the Christ narrated in his incarnation.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation starts off with a literature review on the stances critics have on whether Dante is a poet or prophet. The consensus was that while Dante cannot be considered a prophet of the biblical stratum, his poem still resonates in a philosophical, mystical, and even visionary manner. Key vocational definitions are then examined according to gradations of authorial authority seeing where Dante's *Commedia* fits in the *scala auctoritatis.* I then looked at the categories on their own isolated terms, seeing how Dante attains to a prophetic, mystical, theological and poetic vocation through his *Commedia*. I then explored the sources of authority that Dante's vision borrows from, i.e., the Bible, the Church Fathers, *auctors* including Virgil, Beatrice (controversially) and St Bernard. I moreover looked at the modes of authority towards which Dante's poem reaches, i.e., dreams and visions, such as seeing how through the dream type known as the *oraculum* Dante professes the highest authority. And lastly, I examined how the testimony of the poet's life can both enhance and diminish the authority of the vision. Here I looked at the morality of the poet and how the spiritual is reinforced through the spatio-temporal life of the poet, in the sense of coming-to-beingness of his vocation, gradually crystalised as his life progresses.

Chapter 2 sees the symbolic modes adapted by Dante to reinforce his spiritual authority. At first I surveyed critical applications of biblical symbolic modes starting with Auerbach's *Figura* which lays the foundation for the theoretical matrix categorising the allegorical mode. Through Minnis and Scott I looked at the theory of accommodation, relating this to the affirmative way and how anagogy of the Dionysian imagination is begotten. I then examined the nuances between the allegorical mode and the literal sense through Paul Piehler's differentiation between *figura* and *figmentum,* and then through Angus Fletcher and Charles Singleton's probing of the historicity in the allegorical mode. These surveys were then used to demarcate the mystical biblical senses in tabular form – delineating allegory, anagogy and tropology from each other by the categorisation of tangible versus intangible, the fictive and the non-fictional. For the sake of evaluation, I look at the scriptural mystical senses as they appear in both the Bible and *the Commedia,* seeing how Dante mimics but does not replicate the original mystical senses.

In chapter 3 we broke away from the theoretical and engaged the linguistical through the initial definition of the auctor, the mediation of the impersonal and transhistorical to produce

a work that increases the world of knowledge already existent. Form this meaning we then engaged Dante's high claim in the form of the address to readers in *Paradiso* Canto 2, that he is essentially a conduit of the holy spirit in stating, amongst other things, "The waves I ride have never yet been crossed". We then saw that through the invocation of being an *auctor* Dante lends authority through indirect and direct means. Indirectly, Dante borrows authority from God as being co-creator with the Author of the Book of Nature, through his mimicry of the Word of God, and subsequently making his own Book of Nature. Indirectly, he attains authority by using but also invalidating Virgil and the other pagans. Dante also borrows authority indirectly through the use of the biblical mystical senses. Dante as a prophet and poet in his own right deals with the principle of justice as an overseer of God's justice, and, the evocation of the paradoxical authority of the vernacular.

Chapter 4 pivots around Dante's grasp of truths beyond the intellect through mystical union. At first we looked at God's Book of Nature, and, relatively, Dante's imagined world concluding that the second takes from the first in the same way that symbols take their essence from nature. Dealing with the imagination, intellect and memory we navigated the instances of re-presentation and how far we are as readers from grasping the vision that Dante was witness to. Through the idea of God as love and knowledge we grappled with Beatrice, not beauty epitomised but the most beautiful person to Dante, as mystical intermediary and Beatrice as the bridge to mystical knowledge: through love of her Dante gains revelation of truths outside of the limits of learned knowledge, Beatrice, the 'in-paradizer of his mind'. I then made the argument that it might be best to read Dante's vision for its tropological import owing to the regenerative and uncomplicated resolutions that find us through this. In 'Getting closer to the real' I contended that Dante's signs are indexical, meaning natural, the signifier is caused by the signified, as smoke is caused by fire which makes the intriguing argument posed by Beatrice that heaven truly *is* despite the way that it appears to Dante. In closing, I examined the postmodern challenge to Dante's poem which is that because it looks at a non-representational poetic world it is tangible or significant. I attested to the non-representational spiritual world which is palpable but elusive, maintaining the undeniable reality of the mystical union the more introspective one is, which gives shape and form to the uncanny in a way that normal learning cannot.

In the concluding chapter I looked at Dante as sage, finding resonances with prophetic *auctors* where there were. There were three major ways that the two vocations seemed interconnected: firstly, looking at the visionary experience as a direct output of sleep, whether metaphorical sleep as in death or just normal rest; secondly, the vagueness or confusion of being caught up, whether visionary experiences are had in the body or out of the body; and thirdly, seeing the imagination as the fertile landscape that breeds such visionary experiences – even making them possible. I then analysed dream types seeing the *oraculum* and waking vision, the highest in the hierarchy of authority of dream visions, as constituting most of Dante's vision. This places him nearer to the prophetic *auctors* of the Bible. St Augustine's Gold out of Egypt argument helped us see how Dante can use *fiction* as an authority nonetheless for the vision he retells, ignoring its implication of error or what is wrong. The parabolic mode is such a system, and a biblical one nevertheless, that Dante does use to whatever extent, that uses fiction to convey deep or metaphysical truths making Dante ultimately a visionary not unlike the Christ Himself.

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