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DANTE'S NATURAL AND CULTURAL SPACES

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THE NOTIONS OF SPACE AND THE OTHER WORLD: COMPARISONS BETWEEN DANTE'S *COMEDY* AND JEWISH MEDIEVAL THOUGHT

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My essay aims at discovering similarities between Dante's ideas and the medieval Jewish concept of space and the Other World. In the first part of my essay, I examine the question of two Hebrew names of God in Dante and in medieval Jewish thought. Next, in relation to the question of God's names, I identify some key features of the relationship between God and space in medieval Jewish thought, which may have influenced Dante. In the third part of my essay I examine similarities and contrasts of the Other World's representation in Dante and in Jewish authors, principally in Immanuel of Rome's *Ha-Tofet ve-ha-Eden*.

I. The two Hebrew names of God in Dante and in medieval Jewish thought

I.1. THE THEORY OF HEBREW IN THE *DE VULGARI ELOQUENTIA* AND THE PALINODE OF THIS THEORY

Aside from the numerous Biblical characters found in different places in the *Divine Comedy*, we also find a few Hebraisms which may play opposite roles. In Cantos VII and XXXI of *Hell*, the Hebrew language is the basis of *glossolalic* parody[1], while in the first

[1] "Papè satàn, papè satàn, aleppe" (*Inf.* VII, 1) and "Raphèl mai amèche zabì et almi" (*Inf.* XXXI, 67).

terzina of Canto VII of *Paradise* two sacred languages, Latin and the Hebrew, are mixed.[2]

Specific references of the Hebrew language occur in the *De vulgari eloquentia* and the XXVI[th] of *Paradise*. In the *De vulgari eloquentia* Dante explicitly writes that the first language on Earth was Hebrew: "Fuit ergo hebraicum ydioma illud quod primi loquentis labia fabricarunt" (I, vi, 7).[3] It was spoken by Adam and his descendants until the presumptuous sin of building the tower of Babel[4] (and this form of language was inherited only by Hebrews.) A few chapters earlier we read that – although in the Bible it was Eve to say the first word – for an intelligent man it isn't doubtful that the first to speak had to be Adam, and his first word (*primiloquium*) had to be *El*, the name of God.[5] And since God "had freely given so great a gift" (I, v, 2) to man, we presume that this first word was pronounced in the act of fervent thanksgiving to God. Both the consideration of Hebrew as the first and sacred language and "El" as the first word of man harmonised with contemporary medieval notions.[6]

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[2] "Osanna, sanctus Deus sabaòth, / superillustrans claritate tua / felices ignes horum malacòth!". (*Par.* VII, 1–3).

[3] The interpretation of the Dantean "forma locutionis" (*Dve* I, vi, 4–5) is disputed among scholars: some of them suggest that God created the completed Hebrew language with man, while others – Corti 1981: 48, Eco 1993: 41–59 – think that God created universal linguistic principles or structure with man which is the basis of every natural language.

[4] Vividly narrated in chapter vii.

[5] *Dve* I, iv, 2–4 "Secundum quidem quod in principio Genesis loquitur ... mulierem invenitur ante omnes fuisse locutam ... rationabilius tamen est ut hominem prius locutum fuisse credamus, et inconvenienter putatur tam egregium humani generis actum non prius a viro quam a femina profluxisse.

... Quid autem prius vox primi loquentis sonaverit, viro sane mentis in promptu esse non titubo ipsum fuisse quod "Deus" est, scilicet El..."

[6] On Hebrew as the first language: Augustine: *De civitate Dei*, xvi, 11, 1. On God's name *El*: "Primum dei nomen est hel, quod Septuaginta 'deum', ... interpretatur" (Jerome, *Epistolae* XXV, 2); "Primum apud Hebraeos Dei nomen *El* dicitur"(Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* VIII, i, 3). Also in: Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum* I, 19. See: Corrado 2010: 43.

In *Paradise* XXVI[7] Adam gives a palinode of this theory which contrasts with the statements of the *De vulgari eloquentia* in three major aspects. First, in *Paradise* Adam says that the language spoken by him had already been extinct when they started to build the Tower of Babel. The second difference results from the first: while in the *De vulgari eloquentia* Dante declares that the name of God was *El* in the time of Adam in Paradise; Adam says that in his time the name of God was *I*, and only later they called him *El*. The third difference is while in the *De vulgari eloquentia* the changes of the language (i.e. the disappearance of a single language and the appearance of many others) are due to divine punishment, according to the recantation of Canto XXVI the changing nature of language[8] is a natural effect of man's rational activity.

The characterisation of a language based on God's name is a distinctive feature of Jewish tradition. For the Torah, revelation is an acoustic process and not a visual one (Deut. 4:12: "You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice."[9]) and in Cabbalistic theory the name of God is the metaphysical origin of every language. (Scholem [1970] 1998)

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7 "*La lingua ch'io parlai fu tutta spenta*
innanzi che a l'ovra inconsummabile
fosse la gente di Nembròt attenta:
ché nullo effetto mai razïonabile,
per lo piacere uman che rinovella
seguendo il cielo, sempre fu durabile.
Opera naturale è ch'uom favella;
ma così o così, natura lascia
poi fare a voi secondo che v'abbella.
Pria ch'i' scendessi a l'infernale ambascia,
I s'appellava in terra il sommo bene
onde vien la letizia che mi fascia;
e El si chiamò poi: e ciò convene,
ché l'uso d'i mortali è come fronda
in ramo, che sen va e altra vene."
(*Par.* XXVI, 124–138. Emphases mine.)

8 All post-Babelian languages are changing except Hebrew. (*Dve* I, ix, 6)

9 English Standard Version.

I.2. THE TWO NAMES OF GOD

Umberto Eco, in his *The Search for the Perfect Language*, provides a possible explanation for the change of the Dantean notion of God and language. Eco suggests that Dante may have been familiar with the ideas of Abraham Abulafia, a mystical Jewish author, who spent more than ten years in Italy after 1260. (Eco [1993] 1995 : 49-50, cf. Corti 1981)

According to Abulafia, even the elementary parts of the text, the letters have an independent meaning. Therefore, each letter of God's name, the Tetragrammaton YHWH, can function as a divine name. In fact, the only convincing interpretation that the divine name *I* mentioned by Dante is the Hebrew letter *yod*. (*Or ha-Sekhel*, cf. Eco [1993] 1995 : 48) Of course, these two letters have the same origin: from the old Phoenician *yod* developed the Hebrew *yod*, the Greek *iota* and the Latin "I".

Another argument of Abulafia may help resolve the speech of Adam in *Paradise,* where he distinguishes the language spoken in the Garden of Eden and the language spoken in the time of the confusion at Babel. A disciple of Abulafia states that originally two languages existed. One was the language of creation, first only known by Adam, who passed it on to Seth and later to Noah. The other was a consensual language of Adam, Eve and their children. The confusion of tongues at Babel only affected the second language. (Idel 1989: 17)

To understand the importance and role of the two names of God (*El* and *I*) mentioned by Dante, we should also consider other Cabalistic explanations, mostly from commentaries on *Sefer Jetzirah*, 'book of formation' or 'book of creation', or related to the circle of Abraham Abulafia. Researching God's names is the most ancient topic in Jewish philosophy as it precedes researching language itself. (Scholem [1970] 1995: 113–115) Creation was possible – from the *Book of Enoch* LXIX, 14 to Rashi Hai Gaon (XI–XII. c.) – due to one of God's secret names and Creation is sealed with and bounded

by the limits of this name. In mystical thought, a divine name is a concentration of divine power. The words of God as creator are identified as the divine name.[10] Mystical thinkers concluded that everything in the world is established from the combinations of the letters of the divine language. (Scholem [1970] 1995: 116)

El is the oldest Semitic term for God and it is probably an abbreviated form of Elohim.[11] This name of God is present in the first chapter of Genesis (Gen. 1:1–2, 3). In the original version of the second chapter (Gen. 2:4–22) God's name was Yahweh which was changed to 'Yahweh Elohim,' thus identifying the God of Genesis I with that of Genesis II, and giving the versions an appearance of uniformity. (Graves, Patai [1963] 2005: 15)

The first two most important attributes of God (*middoth*) were symbolised by the letter *yod* and the letters of El: *yod* as the measure of the Creator's mercy, and El as the measure of the Judging God (Battistoni 2000: XIX–XX). These two attributes will characterise Dante's as well as Manoello's image of God. A follower of Abulafia's (the anonymous author of Sha'arey Zedek) says that the letter Yod may even represent Man, the last of the complex creatures. He argues that *yod*, as a semicircle, is the half of something greater, which Man can reconstruct. The form *yod* itself comprises two *yod*s: one symbolizing the human, the other the divine part. Each of these is represented graphically by a semicircle, the shape of the *yod* in the Hebrew alphabet. The cleaving together of these semicircles results the formation of the complete circle. Therefore, the letter *yod* in mystical Jewish thought in Dante's time does not only refer to God and the act of Creation, but also to Man, and his mystical union with God.

Devekut, Man's clinging on to God, is pointing to a complete mystical union between the human and the divine intellect. This notion is central in ecstatic Kabbalah and is represented in the writings of Abraham Abulafia.

[10] Psalms 33:6 "By the word of the LORD [JHWH] the heavens were made."

[11] *God* in: *Encyclopedia Judaica* 7, 763.

II. The relationship of God and space in medieval Jewish thought

The word *maqom* (מקום 'place', 'space') appears in the Hebrew Bible over 300 times and in the Torah, over a hundred. It is first mentioned in Genesis, chapter I, when God creates the world and collects all water in one "place" (I:9). The location of two basic elements is the subject of Dante's *Questio de Aqua et Terra*. This Dantean work has a precedent in the discussion between Moses Ibn Tibbon and Jacob ben Sheshet Gerondi on the same subject a century before (Debenedetti Stow 2004: 102–4).

The relations between God and space are discussed extensively in theological literature. In rabbinic literature we find three space-related Hebrew names of God: *shamayim* (משים 'heavens'), *shekinah* (שכינה 'presence') and *maqom* (מקום 'place'). In biblical cosmology, *shamayim* refers to the upper world; and though Solomon (speaking in praise of God), said "Heaven itself, the highest heaven cannot contain thee" (I Kings 8:27), the biblical God dwells in Heaven and makes them holy by his presence: and becomes one name of God with the natural process of metonymy. The verbal root of *shekinah* is *shakan* (שכן 'to dwell') and the noun refers variously to God's presence, dwelling, nearness and intimacy. (Copenhaver 1980)

Maqom as a name of God illustrates his omnipresence. From the works of Philo, we are well aware of the difference between God and men in this regard: "When a person comes down he must leave one place and occupy another. But God fills all things … [and is] everywhere …" (*On the Confusion of Tongues*: 82–3). The omnipresence of God is the notion the Dantean *Paradise* starts with ("La gloria di colui che tutto move / per l'universo penetra, e risplende / in una parte più e meno altrove") and is explained in detail by mostly biblical and Aristotelian citations in the Letter to Can Grande della Scala (288–411).

Jewish scholars of the Bible and Dante think alike that space and time are God's creations. God is often named Ein-Sof ('infinite')

which can refer to spatial as well as temporal infinity. Medieval thinkers (e.g. the author of the *Zohar*) tried to harmonize God's omnipresence with the creation of space, for in the Jewish notion of Creation, God first created an empty space, and then he created the whole universe in this space.

The Lurianic Kabbalah gives a possible answer to this problem. The Tsimtsum ("contraction / self-limitation") is a term of the teaching of Isaac Luria, but its direct source was a short thirteenth-century treatise (Ms. British Museum 711, F. 140 b. Scholem [1941] 1990: 295):

"How did God create the world? As a man holds his breath, and contracts into himself ..., so also God contracted to a span its light, and the world remained as darkness. In this darkness He put out stones and rocks, so to clear the streets, which are called 'the wonders of wisdom'".

According to Luria's theory, God began the process of creation by "contracting" his infinite light in order to allow for a "conceptual space" in which finite and seemingly independent realms could exist. This primordial initial contraction formed an "empty space" (Khalal Hapanoi).

God fully withdrew from the empty space he created and contracted within himself. But the *yod* of the divine name stayed in this empty space, and Creation started from the power concentrated in this pointwise *yod*. This also shows the importance of *yod* in Jewish thought. In my opinion, this tradition is relevant to the interpretation of I as the first divine name in Dante.

II.1. VISIONS BEFORE DANTE: THE THREE ANIMALS, THE WALL OF FIRE, THE SEVEN *CANDELABRA*

Medieval visionary writings, including the Comedy, have three important precedents in classical Jewish literature. The central topic of the Torah is a journey that only God's grace and power allowed to have happened; the Exodus and the conquest of the homeland. Since

the Jews escaped miraculously from the miserable state of slavery by God's help and revelation, this is a *metamorphosis supernaturalis*.[12] The theophany, revealed after an ascent, to one selected man, who has to return to the people with God's message, will be a recurrent element of the visions of the Otherworld. It is not by chance that this episode becomes the example of the four-level interpretation[13] in the *Convivio*.

The second biblical model is Ezekiel's visions, which greatly influenced the *Merkava* (*merkava* means Chariot) literature which mostly consists of hymns heard during ascends to Heaven.[14] Ezekiel's chariot is explicitly one of the key models for the *Carro* of the Dantean procession in the Earthly Paradise. Another model is the Legend of Enoch from the apocryphal writings of the Second Temple period,[15] the mythological motifs of which endured in oral tradition and significantly influenced Jewish medieval legends and mystical literature.

The most important medieval Jewish visionary author before Dante was Abraham ibn Ezra, who lived in the first half of the twelfth century and spent some of his life in Italy, at Verona[16]. Ibn Ezra plays two important roles from our point of view. The first is his intermediary role, spreading Arabic scientific knowledge among European Jewry. The second is his intermediary role between the Spanish and Italian Jewish cultures. Ibn Ezra was either a friend or a relative of several major Spanish Jewish authors, like Abraham Ibn Daud, predecessor of Maimonides; Mose ibn Ezra, the Neo-Platonist

[12] For the four types of *metamorphoses* see Guido da Pisa's commentary on *Inf.* XXIV, 95–99.

[13] N. B. Between the Christian and the Jewish exegesis has been interaction during the Middle Ages. See: Caplan 1929.

[14] The Ma'aseh Merkabah ("Work of the Chariot" מרכבה מעשה) is a Hebrew-language Jewish mystical text dating from the Gaonic period (VIth–XIth Century) which comprises a collection of hymns recited by the "descenders" and heard during their ascent. It is part of the tradition of Merkava mysticism and the Hekhalot literature.

[15] *Encyclopedia Judaica* 6, 441–442.

[16] and in Lucca, Mantova and Rome.

poet; and Yehuda ha-Levi, author of the *Sefer ha-Kuzari.* (Battistoni 2000: 15–20)

Ibn Ezra's allegorical-visionary tale, the *Chay ben Mekitz* is an adaptation of Avicenna's *Hayy ibn Yakzan* ("the living one, son of the wakeful one"), but Ibn Ezra introduced a few changes which has striking parallels with Dante's *Comedy* as it is declared by Gotthard Strohmaier.

In the introductory vision of the *Chay ben Mekitz*, the narrator journeys with three companions. The first is a liar who mixes truth with falsehood, although the narrator depends on information from him. The second, often compared to a lion, is angry. The third is always greedy. In the field, the four travellers meet an elderly man with a shining face who greets them kindly: he is the personification of the Active Intellect. While in Avicenna's version Hay ibn Yakzan refuses the wish of the narrator to take him into the regions of the invisible world; in Abraham Ibn Ezra the narrator is allowed to join the active intellect to begin a journey on his side. The three companions bear analogous characteristics to Dante's wild beasts in Canto I of the *Inferno*: after the *lonza*, appears the lion, interpreted traditionally as the symbol of *ira*, and the she-wolf as the symbol of greed. And Dante, on his journey, will be guided by the wise Virgil and Beatrice, who was already identified as the symbol of the active/heavenly intellect. (Strohmayer 1996: 467–470)

A more ancient description, which presents three negative figures recalled by the Dantean three animals of *Canto* I of the *Inferno*, is the *Testament of Solomon* (dated First to Third Century A.D.), where a demon changes into three forms:

"I am changed into three forms. Whenever men come to be enamoured of women, I metamorphose myself into a *comely female; and I take hold of the men in their sleep, and play with them.* And after a while I again take to my wings, and hie me to the heavenly regions. I also appear as a *lion*, and I am commanded by all the demons." (Conybeare 1898: 17; emphases mine)

The "comely female" who teases men recalls the Dantean *lonza*, symbol of luxury, and the she-wolf, "which with every lust / seemed in her leanness laden"[17], and with whom "many are the animals with which she mates."[18] Furthermore, the trasformation of the demon into a lion clearly evokes the Dantean lion "with head erect and with such raging hunger, / that even the air seemed terrified thereby".[19]

A topographical motif, the walls of fire of the Earthly Paradise – described in the *Purg.* XXVII, 7–60 – is one of the few elements of the *Comedy* to have Jewish antecedents. The Garden of Eden was imagined on the top of a mountain in the Jewish tradition as well (Graves, Patai [1963] 2005: 63). According to a *midrash* the Paradise is surrounded by three walls of fire of different colours.[20]

The Book of Enoch (XIV, 9) briefly describes the hero's fear before a wall of fire, and his passing through it, evoked by the Dantean scene:

"And I went in till I drew nigh to a wall which is built of crystals and surrounded by tongues of fire: and it began to affright me. And I went into the tongues of fire." (trans. by Charles 1917: 42)

In Ibn Ezra – and it is not in the tale of Avicenna – we find exactly the same setting: the narrator and his guide ascend through the realm of the four elements towards the sphere of the moon. After crossing the air, they stand before a wall of fire. The narrator, who speaks in the first person, is full of fear, but his guide steps forward and says to him, "Come, oh ye blessed of the Lord" (Gen. 24:31) and so they pass through unharmed. (Strohmayer 1996: 467)

The seven candelabra may be interpreted as a hidden Jewish element in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise (*Purg.* XXIX, 37–60). This

[17] "che di tutte brame / sembiava carca ne la sua magrezza", *Inf.* I, 49–50. English trans. by Courtney Langdon.

[18] "Molti son li animali a cui s'ammoglia", *Inf.* I, 100.

[19] "con la test'alta e con rabbiosa fame, / sì che parea che l'aere ne tremesse", *Inf.* I, 47–48.

[20] http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11900-paradise

imagery recalls the seven planetary deities, borrowed from Babylon and Egypt, who are commemorated in the seven branches of the Menorah.[21]

II.2. MANOELLO'S VISION

The first to imitate Dante's *Comedy* was Immanuel of Rome (1261–1328), Italian-Jewish scholar and poet. His *Maḥberet ha-Tofet ve-ha-Eden* (*Poem of Hell and Paradise*) is the 28th and final section of his *Maḥberot*, a collection of his poems. The *Mahberet* describes a journey to the next world, in which the traveller is guided by Daniel who, according to some scholars, is Dante himself. The *Hell and Paradise* is a fusion of Hebrew tradition, Biblical language and Dantean imitation, with the moral background of the *The Duties of the Heart* (*Chovot HaLevavot*) by Bahya ibn Paquda (XIth century).

In terms of space, the key difference here compared to Dante's underworld is the absence of Purgatory which, in itself, is not an evident characteristic of Jewish philosophy. A purgatory of some kind – a *Gehinnom* – does exist in some branches of the rabbinical literature. Namely, the Bet Sammai and Rabbi Akiva, held that the Gehinnom is a spiritual realm in which the souls are cleansed from the blemishes before entering the *gan eden* (Garden of Eden). Others argued that the sinful atone for their sins in the Gehinnom only for 12 months before perishing, as eternal suffering is the punishment of only those who rejected the Jewish religion (Benke 2000: 47).

The above difference reinforces the unique spatial structure based upon oppositions – a feature of Jewish tradition going back to the Old Testament.[22] The 'under', the 'Sheol' is set against the

[21] Graves, Patai [1963] 2005: Introduction I, 6.

[22] For the fundamental antithetical structure of the Bible see its very first verses. The process of creation in Genesis is based on distinctions and oppositions: the creation of heaven and earth is the first divine action (1:1), and this first division becomes the symbol of the duality of the profane and the sacred; it is followed by the separation of light and darkness (1:2–3); then the division of land and water. The creation of the

'above' or the heavens and thus clearly separated from the space in which Yahweh is actually present (Amos 9:2; Prov. 15:24; Job 11:8; Isa. 7:11). The contrast between the two worlds – this world and the other world – occurs even more vividly in the use of words such as 'ascend' or 'descend' in connection with Sheol.

Contrasting expressions related to the Other world and salvation are also frequent in the Bible. In a metaphorical sense: "I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God" (Jon. 2:6; Podella 1987: 171–172). The *Sefer Jetzirah* (VI–VIIth centuries) extends the antithesis-based spatial system describing the dimensions as five pairs of contrasting directions (e.g. North-South, East-West; *Sefer Jetzirah* 15–16). This binary perception of space is not only remarkably present in all medieval visionary literature including Dante, but also in contemporary Western philosophy as well (see: Bachelard [1958]: *The Dialectics of Outside and Inside* in *The Poetics of Space*).

Now back to our original train of thought. Immanuel's poem, just like Dante's, begins with the protagonist's age: he is already sixty, wearing the premonitory marks of death. In a prophetic vision, Daniel visits the poet and reveals that his journey is a result of divine grace. Immanuel, understanding Daniel's angelic nature, falls to the ground, just like Dante did after the Francesca episode. Then Daniel addresses Immanuel with the words, "Why are you sleeping?" which recalls Matelda's words (*Surgi che fai? Purg.* XXXII, 72) to the sleeping Dante in the Earthly Paradise.

Similar to other Jewish descriptions of the afterlife, we do not find a detailed topographical structure, neither a systematic

luminaires separated the day and night. Even the creation of man follows the binary model: God made man and woman in his image, after his likeness (here the analogy also appears as another fundamental principle in the connective thought) (1:27). It is therefore not surprising that the Bible begins with the letter *bet*, with the numerical value of two (*Bereshit* – in principle), i.e. with the letter that best expresses the duality of the created world.

emplacement, for the souls. The Hell of Immanuel – similar to Dante's – is found in the bowels of Earth. At the beginning of the journey, the travellers descend on a dark, rough road and reach a ruined bridge (similar to the bridges of the Malebolge, but also a *topos* in the literature of the other world) through which the lost souls are guided to the gate of Hell (another regular topographical motif of the medieval descriptions, present in Dante as well).

The evil angels drag the first group of the damned, whose sins are written on their forehead, to a great pyre (v. 55). According to the Kabbalah, the evil leaves its marks on the sinners' forehead, so one's list of sins becomes visible (see also Ex. 28:38). This concept is present in Dante's start for the passing through the Purgatory with seven P letters on the forehead:

> "Sette P ne la fronte mi descrisse
> col punton de la spada, e "Fa che lavi,
> quando se' dentro, queste piaghe" disse."
> (*Purg.* IX, 112–114)

In Hell, the travellers meet about twenty groups of sinners, but they often have more than one particular sin, and their punishment is often cumulated. Similar to Dante, Manoello places the ancient philosophers and lustful women in one of the first parts of Hell. And the lustful women lament with voices of the doves, and moan like ostriches of the oasis (vv. 100–105): "all groaned as the ostriches of the oasis" and "were complaining in voices of doves." The simile of the doves and the repeated images of birds in relation with lustful women resemble Dante's description in the V[th] of the *Inferno*: "E come li *stornei* ne portan l'ali", 40; "come i *gru* van cantando lor lai", v. 46, and:

> "Quali *colombe* dal disio chiamate
> con l'ali alzate e ferme al dolce nido
> vegnon per l'aere dal voler portate"
> (*Inf.* V, 82–84)

The punishment of dice players, bitten by scorpions, lions and panthers in a hole (v. 110) evokes the thieves' curses and punishment in the form of bites in the Dantean *Inferno* (Cantos XXIV and XXV). This imagery, however, is more evidently related to a punishment in *Liber Scalae Machometi* (Alhurba, cap. LVII, 143) where scorpions and snakes torment the sinners.

The suicides' presentation (their souls are and will be separated from their bodies) is based on the Dantean description in Canto XIII: even in its rhetorical figures (e.g. repetitions, antitheses) and dialectics of the representation, as well as the behaviour of the protagonist (vv. 344–350). The brief summary of the suicides' reasoning is very similar in the two poems: "with their poor mind *[they] had thought that dying would be saved from every disgrace* and insult: they did not know, these wretches, that they would move from one suffering to another suffering" – explains Daniele to Manoello. And Pier della Vigna to Dante:

> "L'animo mio, per disdegnoso gusto,
> *credendo col morir fuggir disdegno,*
> ingiusto fece me contra me giusto."
> (*Inf.* XIII, 70–72; emphases mine)

We find the most striking similarities between Dante's and Manoello's works in the protagonists' attitudes. They always ask the souls or their guide to understand who these souls are and why they are punished in the way they are, and the dialogues of Manoello recall those of Dante. The protagonists often react with compassion: sometimes they almost faint because of the intensity of the pity. "In front of the severity of their misfortune, I almost became mad: I writhed hearing and I was shocked to see and I almost fainted" – declares Manoello watching the suicides' souls, as Dante faints after hearing Francesca's episode and struggling with pity hearing Pier della Vigna's story.

The *Paradise* of Manoello is significantly shorter than Dante's *Paradiso*. In this part of the poem we find fewer similarities between

the two works. One of them is the long ladder that leads from Hell to Paradise in Manoello: "as soon as we departed from Hell, right away, we came to a ladder planted in the ground with its top reaching to heaven" ... "There was the *full light* that the wise call the light seven times the light of the Seven Days [of the Creation]" (660) – which resembles the golden staircase of Cantos XXI–XXII of *Paradiso*:

> "di color d'oro in che raggio traluce
> vid'io uno *scaleo eretto in suso*
> tanto, che nol seguiva la mia luce.
> Vidi anche per li gradi scender giuso
> *tanti splendor, ch'io pensai ch'ogne lume*
> *che par nel ciel, quindi fosse diffuso.*"
> (*Par.* XXI, 28–33; emphases mine)

This element has antecedents in the biblical story of Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28:12–13) and various visionary descriptions, e.g. in the *Liber Scalae Machometi* (capp. V–VI). The golden ladder of the seventh heaven in Dante, however, is different from other mystical ladders in two aspects. First, it is used by contemplative souls not to ascend but to descend to greet the poet. Second, Beatrice and the poet do not need to climb to ascend; instead, they are lifted upward:

> "La dolce donna dietro a lor mi pinse
> con un sol cenno su per quella scala,
> sì sua virtù la mia natura vinse;
> né mai qua giù dove si monta e cala
> naturalmente, fu sì ratto moto
> ch'agguagliar si potesse a la mia ala."
> (*Par.* XXII, 100–105)

This immaterial ascension on the golden ladder is preceded by two climbs on "ladders" in the *Comedy*. The infernal one is parodistic: Dante and Virgil have to climb up onto Lucifer's monstrous body, gripping the Devil's frozen tufts of hair (and the text designates the

evil body as a "ladder": "ne fé scala col pelo" *Inf.* XXXIV, 119). The climbing from one terrace to another on the mountain of Purgatory is a physical climbing, but not on a physical ladder. It is already a spiritual and metaphorical one that leads the soul back to God (Morgan 1990: 41): "quella scala / u' sanza risalir nessun discende" (*Par.* X, 86–87)

In Manoello's Paradise, after he has spoken to important religious writers, and watched the faithful on canopies, and spoken to Moses whose face is so shining that it cannot be seen, Daniel commands him to write down everything he saw for the good of mankind: "remember all the things you have seen, for memory you will write a book" (v. 1010) – in other words, Manoello received the same task as Dante.

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