The Poetry of Dante's Paradiso

Lives Almost Divine, Spirits that Matter

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Preface and a Note on the Text

I began research for this book—which as it is intended as a close reading of a text will benefit most from being read alongside a copy of *Paradiso*—when on holiday in Lodève in 2010. After publication of my book *Dante in Purgatory: States of Affect* (Brepols, 2010), which itself was started in 2003 on holiday in Pernes-les-Fontaines, I began earnest work by reading the canto-by-canto commentaries on *Paradiso* edited by Allen Mandelbaum, and following that with the Tibor Wlassics introductory readings to *Paradiso* (University of Virginia Press, 1995). Both these volumes, and their authors therein, and Robert Hollander's edition of *Paradiso* (2007), were invaluable starters. But this book is less a sequel to work on *Purgatorio* than new ideas coupled with thinking about *Paradiso* which go back to my doctorate, and my book *Dante and Difference: Writing in the Commedia* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), and to work which has appeared since in journals.

Thus, material on cantos 8 and 9 greatly revises and develops a paper: 'The Violence of Venus: Dante in Paradiso' (*Romanic Review* 90 (2000), 93–114), while a draft of material on canto 11 appeared as 'Dante and St Francis: Shaping Lives: Reshaping Allegory' in Walter S. Melion and Bart Ramakers (eds.), *Personification: Embodying Meaning and Emotion* (Leiden: Brill, 2016, 73–94). I am grateful for permission to reprint. Further, I wrote before on cantos 21 and 22 in 'Getting Above the Thunder: Dante in the Sphere of Saturn' *MLR* 90 (1995), 632–645, and incorporated some of it into my *Dante in Purgatory*. An unpublished draft of material on canto 6 was given to a Medieval and Renaissance Literature

seminar at Queen Mary University, November 2012; thanks to Adrian Armstrong for organising that. An early draft of some of canto 10 appeared in an unpublished paper for a conference on Isidore of Seville in Manchester University, 2012, and part of material which appears here on canto 33 was delivered at a conference on 'Forgotten Books' at National Taipei University of Technology, Taiwan, May 2016. An early version of the work on the Cacciaguida cantos was read to the Oxford Dante Society on 9 November 2016, and I am grateful to Nick Havely for arranging this and to the Society for hosting me. Material relevant to canto 9 was read to a seminar at King's College London in 2018 and I am grateful to Michael Silk for arranging that. Two papers given at St Andrews, on *Purgatorio* 4, and *Convivio* 3, stimulated my interest in Dante's astronomy: thanks to Robert Wilson and Claudia Rossignoli for the invitations. While writing, I turned some undergraduate lectures into a book, *Histories of the Devil* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), and much thinking for that book has gone indirectly into this.

Thanks to Peter Such, whose edition of the *Poema de mio Cid* stimulated interest in Dante and Spain. I thank him and Rich Rabone for letting me see their translation of the *Poema de Fernán González* in manuscript and for discussion of medieval Spain. During writing, I recall a good conversation with Patrick Boyde. Thanks are due to Dennis Walder for encouragement; to Spencer Pearce, Priscilla Martin, Terry Bird, Peter Crickmore, John Pickering, David Wells, and Louis Lo, for conversations and especially for doing the diagram; and to Jo Rose, for 'mastering' everything as it's called, to do with the manuscript.

I could not have written this book at all without consistent encouragement and loving support from Pauline. Any dedication must go to her. The book was finished in a week when Emil, a second grandchild, was born; he joins Kirsten and Simon, Frances, and Felix, as part of a circle which makes this writing an act of hope as much as an attempt at scholarship.

A note on Bibliographies: Dante has received so much attention that it is not possible to keep abreast. I have referenced work which I have used; Bibliographies add other work consulted, but not necessarily mentioned in the text or notes.

Jeremy Tambling

Abbreviations and References

Dante's *Commedia* comprises three *cantiche*—that is, *Inferno* (*Inf.*), *Purgatorio* (*Purg.*), and *Paradiso* (*Para.*). Quotations, by canto and line numbers (e.g. *Para.* 20.13), come from the three-volume edition of Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1999–2001).

Equally useful, and cited are:

Bosco/Reggio—the three volumes edited by Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio (Florence: Le Monnier, 1979)

Sapegno—the three volumes edited by Natalino Sapegno (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968).

It is to be assumed that reference to the name is to the relevant passage of the poem being discussed.

Dante's minor works are cited from the *Opere minori*, 2 vols, ed. Domenico de Robertis, Gianfranco Contini, and Cesare Vasoli (Milan: Ricciardi, 1979). Here appear references to *VN* (i.e. *Vita Nuova*), *Con.* (*Convivio*), *DVE* (*De Vulgari Eloquentia*), and *Mon.* (*Monarchia*)

Other editions of Dante referred to by abbreviations are as follows:

Frisnardi—*Convivio* trans. Andrew Frisnardi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Durling and Martinez—*The Divine Comedy* trans. Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez.

Inferno (1996), *Purgatorio* (2003), *Paradiso* (2011) (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Hollander—Paradiso edited and translated by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

Kay—*Monarchia* trans. Richard Kay (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1998).

Lansing—*Convivio* trans. Richard Lansing (New York: Garland, 1990).

Rime—Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde, *Dante's Lyric Poetry* 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

Pharsalia—Lucan, *Civil War* trans. Susan H. Braund (Oxford: O.U.P., 1992).

Ryan—*Dante's The Banquet* ed. Michael Ryan (Saratoga: CA: ANMA Libri, 1989).

Reynolds and Sayers—*Hell* and *Purgatory* trans. and ed. Dorothy Sayers, and *Paradise* trans.
Dorothy Sayers and Barbara Reynolds, and ed. Barbara Reynolds (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949–1962).

Shaw, *Monarchia* trans. Prue Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Toynbee—Dante, *Dantis Alagherii Epistlolae* ed. Paget Toynbee, 2nd edition ed. Colin Hardie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

Shapiro—*De Vulgari Eloquentia: Dante's Book of Exile* trans. Marianne Shapiro (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

Singleton—*Commedia* ed. and trans. Charles Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970–1975).

Translations from Italian are mine but with much dependence upon editions given above which show on every page.

Other authors and titles:

Aquinas—Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia* 9: Angels. trans. Kenelm Foster (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode 1963).

Boethius—Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* in *The Theological Tractates* trans. S.J. Tester (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973).

City—Augustine, *City of God*—trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972). Quoted by book and chapter.

Confessions—Henry Chadwick, trans. *Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

De Anima—Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).

ED—Enciclopedia Dantesca ed. Umberto Bosco, 6 vols. (Roma: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 1984).

DS—Dante Studies

GL—Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Heroides—Ovid, *Heroides* trans. Grant Showerman rev. G.P. Goold (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1977).

Lansing—Richard Lansing, *Dante Encyclopaedia* (New York: Garland, 2000).

Life—Stephen Bemrose, Stephen, *A New Life of Dante* (Exeter: Exeter U.P., 2009).

Metaphysics—Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004).

Met.—Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller and G.P. Goold (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1977).

Fausti—Ovid, *Fausti* trans. J.G. Frazer, rev. J.G. Goold (London: Heinemann, 1966).

Ars Amatoria—Ovid, *The Art of Love and Other Poems* trans. J. H. Mozley (London: Heinemann, 1959).

Heroide—Ovid, *Heroides and Amores* trans., Grant Showerman (London: Heinemann, 1971)

Plotinus—Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna, introduction by John Dillon (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).

Physics—Aristotle, *Physics* trans. Robin Waterfield, Oxford: O.U.P., 1996.

Timaeus—Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: O.U.P., 2008).

Virgil, *Virgil*, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library trans. by H. Ruston Fairclough revised G.P. Goold (London: Heinemann, 1967).

Quotations from the Bible come from the King James (1611) version, sometimes corrected from the Revised (1881) version.

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Reading *Paradiso* Out of Time

> If one had to expound the doctrine of antiquity with utmost brevity … it could only be in this sentence: 'They alone shall possess the earth who live from the powers of the cosmos'. Nothing distinguishes the ancient from the modern man so much as the former's absorption of a cosmic experience scarcely known to the later periods. Its waning is marked by the flowering of astronomy at the beginning of the modern age. Kepler, Copernicus, and Tycho Brahe were certainly not driven by scientific impulses alone. All the same, the elusive emphasis on an optical connection to the universe, to which astronomy very quickly led, contained a portent of what was to come. The ancients' intercourse with the cosmos had been different: the ecstatic trance. (Benjamin 1996: 486–487)

Walter Benjamin hints at problems in approaching *Paradiso*. For the modern to know the 'cosmos' means going 'to the planetarium'. The older contact with the cosmos—including Dante's—was different. It was ecstatic: the self was taken outside the self. We remain separated from the cosmos, knowing it objectively by ocular perception. Seventeenth-century Baroque texts mark the break with the ecstatic. The planets are at a distance, known only by 'optical connection', even though:

> A man that looks on glasse,
> On it may stay his eye;
> Or if he pleaseth, through it passe,
> And then the heav'en espie. ('The Elixer', Herbert: 188)

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Paradiso imagines the ecstatic trance, but knows it is doing that, being in process of understanding the cosmos it describes as an allegory. But while it is on both sides of the ancient/modern argument, it believes that the cosmos is a finite entity, described as such by Ptolemy (c.100–170 CE), through the Latin version of the Arabic astronomer Alfraganus (ninth century), who had translated Ptolemy's *Almagest*. Ptolemy had paid tribute to Hipparchus (c.150 BCE). Further, Dante knew the universe as described in the *Timaeus*, the only document of Plato (427–347 BCE), which the Medieval world possessed.

Dante's is not our world. We are out of its time, and reading a text of the past cannot mean escaping into past certainties to be comfortable in them, taking an aesthetic refuge in a past world where we can lose sense of our own more relativist modernity. We cannot assume a privileged access to *Paradiso* claiming a shared theological understanding, or even as wishing to possess Dante's certainties. We cannot even assume entry into the same meanings as are in Dante; hermeneutics means that we cannot read across from his work to our world, save by an act of mental translation, however much, and however usefully, we equip ourselves with relevant knowledge. It may be even harder to read Dante now than during the modernism of Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Beckett; the Dantean assumptions that lay like fragments before those writers are yet more dissipated another hundred years on. Yet reading Dante's *Commedia* and, specifically, *Paradiso* remains relevant, not because it gives access to a world whose assumptions we cannot share, but because it is untimely, and the best meditations are untimely, and all thinking has to be anachronistic, as Dante is, plentifully.[1]

The difficulties affect texts prior to Shakespeare and the 'Early Modern'. Later writing is haunted by the sense of the 'nothing' (*le néant*), which comes forcefully into critical and philosophical thinking with Shakespeare and beyond, with the absence of a universe of which spiritual authority can speak affirmatively. Present writing demands 'tarrying with the negative' as Hegelian discourse puts it: accepting that there may be nothing, or nothing, out there, no grounds for saying that language affirms meaning (Hegel 1977: 19). This contrasts with the affirmativeness and joy of *Paradiso*, though there is a wager involved in arguing that earlier writing did not have such vertiginousness: it may even be an undertow within *Paradiso*. There is a bigger difficulty for readers of *Inferno*, which holds the attention, continually challenging readers' assent to, or fascinated disagreement with, judgments passed on people, concepts, and historical

moments. *Purgatorio* is also a text that can be taken with a certain immediacy; it is instantly attractive. *Paradiso*, however, seems to have an unsympathetic discarding of material human bodies in favour of the reality of a spiritual world, which threatens to make it an alienating text; moreover, there is little that is easy in it.

This book, which started by wanting to confront these issues, offers an advanced introduction to *Paradiso* to those who would like it and argues that here is one of the great European texts that should not be left to a professionalism in criticism which only disputes competing critical positions, nor assumed to be the province of theology, nor confined to a historicising which assumes that Dante's cultural contexts are knowable and definitive for reading. We cannot read outside contexts such as those given by psychoanalysis, by deconstruction, or a modernist Marxism—all three inform the reading here—to do so is to put a brake on reading, pretending to know less than we either do—or ought to do—and it assumes a too determinate knowledge of Dante. While noting the alterity of the text from our own assumptions, reading should not isolate Dante within a medieval context, but see him within a history of the creation of the modern subject, to be read as medieval, and with traces of the modern.[2]

Paradiso: The Cosmos

I start in introductory mode, by mapping the poem.

Paradiso has a narrative simplicity. Dante's editors and translators, Durling and Martinez, propose Friday, 8 April 1300, as when Dante enters Inferno: that is, around the spring equinox, when the sun was in Aries in its annual journey through the Zodiac (note to *Inf.* 1.37). As for Chaucer, beginning *The Canterbury Tales*, 'the yonge sonne / Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne' (*CT* 1.7, 8). Being at the equinox, the sun is on the celestial equator, which encircles the outermost heaven of the universe. *Paradiso* 1 sees Dante and Beatrice leaving the Earthly Paradise where they were at the end of *Purgatorio* at noonday; thereafter they are out of time.

Dante's universe comprises a sphere, its core the round earth. The two pass through seven planets, whose name-associations—classical-pagan and mythological, astronomical and astrological—are exploited, and show a tendential dualism in the poem's values. And Dante's angels are vestiges of what pagans called Gods and Goddesses, to whom temples were built and about whom poets like Virgil testified (*Con.* 2.4.6–7): Pallas, or Minerva,

Vulcan, and Ceres—spirits of wisdom, fire, and grain. These planets have a chiasmic, echoing order. The Moon's nuns (in the first heaven) correspond to Saturn's monks (in no. 7). Mercury (2) corresponds to Jupiter (6) through the image of the eagle, which is first spoken of as Roman, then seen as a sign. Venus (3) corresponds with Mars (5), with the equivalent hot energies of love and war. The Sun stands central as the fourth of seven.

Within the first three heavens, examined in Chap. 2, political failure shows in every body of power. Femininity, the subject of the Moon, in the third heaven becomes an active force, giving character to violence, and creating the poetry of courtly love, rescinding nothing of the alliance of poetry and *fin' amor*, which was foregrounded with Francesca in *Inferno* 5, nor of the alliance of desire and an innovatory modern poetry within *Purgatorio* 26, where all the lustful are poets. Between, Mercury speaks of history and empire. These planets orbit within the shadow the earth casts (*Para*. 9.118, 119). Indeed, for Dante and the Medieval world darkness meant only the conical shadow cast by the earth:

> Since the sun moves and the earth is stationary, we must picture this long, black finger perpetually revolving like the hand of a clock; and called "the circling canopy / Of Night's extended shade" (*Paradise Lost* 3.556–557). Beyond Venus there is no darkness. (Lewis 1962: 111–112)

Darkness beyond the earth is a post-Copernican conception. It separates Dante as the poet of light from baroque awareness of darkness—Giottesque brightness from Caravaggio—where darkness includes the 'nothing'. Darkness means loss of a centre and an origin: *Paradiso*, however, moves from light to greater light. Souls in the shadow of the earth are closest in character to those in *Purgatorio*. Something of the earth clings to them. We hear of imperfect motivations; we see souls, as after Venus we cannot.

The Sun, in canto 10, gives a change in intensity.[3] Here, and in Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn are heavens that, answering loosely to cantos 9–26 of *Purgatorio*, adopt the four cardinal virtues of Prudence, Fortitude, Justice, and Temperance. Here appear the most intense encounters with Paradisal lives, which redefine the meaning of Paradise, not limiting it to the afterlife. They re-define the present, as souls in *Inferno* continue in fuller form the hell they lived on earth, while souls in *Purgatorio* refine

lives that on earth were singular instances of virtues and vices together and that continue to activate dualities within them. In Chap. 3, the heaven of the Sun, we see the wise and encounter four modern theologians. Aquinas the Dominican (canonised 1323) speaks of Francis of Assisi (canonised 1228), and Bonaventura the Franciscan (canonised 1482) gives the life of Dominic (canonised 1234). Francis is no less than Christ refigured, manifest as a human miracle present in urban Italy a hundred years earlier than *Paradiso* (Foster 1985: 480–496). In Mars, where imminent violence and hatred requires peaceful citizenship, and exile necessitates poetry, Dante is commissioned to write the *Commedia*. Saved lives, contrasted with excoriated contemporary rulers, appear in Jupiter, in canto 20 (37–72), and again with Saturn's contemplatives, where lives are stripped down to the utmost simplicity, being on the threshold between time and eternity. These contemplatives write the lives of others, lives as marvels, completing a pattern discernible throughout, in the spirit of such saints' lives as are recorded in *The Golden Legend*—where, amongst its 153 lives,[4] Francis, Dominic, and Bernard appear, in what Jacques Le Goff (2014) calls sacred time.

Politics throughout these heavens is pan-European, and strains at Europe's limits. Chapter 5 examines the Fixed Stars and makes concentrated reference to Rome as an imperial and Papal centre. Chapters 6 and 7 go beyond, for whereas *Timaeus* made the Fixed Stars the eighth outmost sphere, Dante adds the Primum Mobile or the Crystalline Heavens as a ninth, counting out from the earth. This makes a complete diurnal East-West revolution round the earth, moving because it is attracted by the abode of God, in the unmoving Empyrean (not, actually, a Dantean word). Dante's *Epistle* 10.26 explains why: anything moves 'because of something which it has not, and which is the terminus of its motion'. Desire and motion are inseparable. As if emboldened by the language of Neo-Platonic deification, canto 33, in the Empyrean, is the most concentrated in willing to see God, as both the utterly immaterial, who is, nonetheless, manifest in Christ, 'nostra effige', and thus material. The text tries to unite loyalties to the material and the immaterial, by seeing them tied in a single 'nodo', at the risk of language, sanity, and life. Throughout, there has been little resolution of the dualist vision that moves between desire for the spiritual, the virginal, the angelic, and the world of light, and the other world, material, and corrupt; treated with alternating anger and love.

Writing Paradiso

Dante acknowledges difficulty from the beginning. In canto 2.1–18, three *terzine* (the three-line stanzas in which the cantos are written) tell readers—who are poised like sailors in little boats—not to venture out into the ocean, that is, not to read any further. If they lost Dante, voyaging outwards, they would remain lost:

> L'acqua ch'io prendo già mai non si corse;
> Minerva spira, e conducemi Appollo,
> e nove Muse mi dimostran l'Orse. (2.7–9)

(The water which I take was not already ever crossed; Minerva [i.e. wisdom] inspires or fills the sails, and Apollo [i.e. poetry] leads me, and nine Muses point out the Bears.)

Dante's barque sounds like the ship of fools, despite these splendid guides. The Bears are Ursa Major and Ursa Minor. Ursa Major was Callisto, Ursa Minor Arcas, her son by Jupiter. These constellations indicate the pole star. Though he says he is being guided, he knows he is doing something new; hence he addresses those readers who want wisdom. They must follow his boat's wake, or furrow (*solco*) 'dinanzi a l'acqua che ritorna equale': before the water that returns evenly (15); catching each momentary epiphanic insight that the writing opens up before the sea closes over it. Dante wants fellow-travellers (2.1–18) despite pretending to dissuade people from following.

The ship and its wake return in canto 33, when Dante thinks of the shadow (*l'ombra*) of the Argo—Jason's ship, Jason the fabled first mariner—furrowing the sea. For now, we see that canto 2 makes Dante Jason:

> Que' glorïosi che passaro al Colco
> non s'ammiraron come voi farete,
> quando Iasón vider fatto bifolco. (2.16–18)

(Those glorious ones who passed to Colchis did not wonder as much as you will do, when they saw Jason become a ploughman.)

This evokes Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 7.100–120), where one test imposed on Jason was to plough with wild brazen oxen. Dante re-invokes the furrow Jason created when he used the refractory and difficult oxen to open up the field, furrowing it, like the wake the ship creates. In *Inferno* 2,

Dante was afraid to start his journey. *Purgatorio* 1.1 speaks of sailing over better waters. Now he embarks on what exceeds Jason or the crazy voyage, 'il varco / folle' (*Paradiso* 27.82–83) of Ulysses, the unforgettable voyager of *Inferno* 26. In attempting something new, many literary precedents are brought in, because the poem comes out of a tradition that Dante modifies, actively.

This God-wards journey is offset by Dante's experience of exile from Florence in 1302. The text divides between growing enablement and deepening sense of loss. Politically, *Paradiso* is more urgent than *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. Needing less to speak of their condition, past or present, in self-justifying or self-adjusting, Paradisal lives speak of others and reflect on current political states. Separated from time, they are absolutely engaged with time, as eager to advise on earthly affairs as Dante is to hear them. It seems that at the same time, Dante was writing his treatise on world-government, *Monarchia*, that is, in 1316–1317 (Hollander 2001: 148–167, but for an earlier date, c.1312, see Davis 1957: 263–269).

Paradiso was concluded in Ravenna, where Dante was the guest of the Guelf-leaning Guido Novello da Polenta, and visiting Verona, Mantua, and Venice.[5] He had left Verona in 1318, and the Ghibelline Cangrande della Scala, with whom he had stayed—with intervals in Lucca—for perhaps six years. Petrocchi holds that half of *Paradiso* was in progress by 1318, including, perhaps, the tribute to Cangrande in *Paradiso* 17 (Bemrose 2009: 190). The *Epistle to Cangrande* (*Epistle 10*), which most Dante commentators accept was written either in part or fully by Dante as an official letter in Latin, dedicating the work to Cangrande, and as a self-exegesis of the first canto of the poem, accompanies the work.[6]

The *Epistle*'s Paragraph 7 declares the poem 'polysemous', having four senses derived from Biblical exegesis: literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical—these last three being allegorical: 'different (*diversi*) from the literal or historical, for the word "allegory" is so called from the Greek *alleon*, which in Latin is *alienum* (strange) or *diversum* (different)'. The work may be seen as 'allegory', however, in a less literal, or rigid (some might say reductive) sense than in *Epistle 10*, and I will try to show some rethinking about allegory below. As poetry, *Paradiso*'s statements neither reduce to discursive utterance, nor to prose paraphrase. However formally committed to distinctive points of view, the utterance discovers more conflictual significances. Arguments proving *Paradiso*'s orthodoxy, which seem increasingly fashionable, especially in America, mean that the

intention (as this is assessed, with heavy dependence on *Epistle* 10) controls how the poetry is read. Criticism may include interpretation, but is not reducible to that.

At this point, I will indicate one way into the poem.

Mary and Beatrice

Paradiso is full of a poetry deriving indirectly, perhaps not always consciously, from the place given to Mary, and the Annunciation (Luke 1.26–38), an event that was coming into a new visibility in Dante's time.[7] The Annunciation reverses order: the *angel* takes the subordinate place to the *woman*. Georges Didi-Huberman, studying Fra Angelico, notes how Aquinas had insisted on the newness 'that an angel had bowed down before an earthly woman'. He mentions Albertus Magnus (c.1200–1280), to comment on Gabriel's exalting of Mary, the angel by this making himself—superior, coming from above—appear embodied, human, *below* Mary. Didi-Huberman sees in the Annunciation-images something double, demanding a figural reading, beyond the 'literality' of the representation in art. Its presentation of the Incarnation and of the Trinity, which lie concealed in the Annunciation-image, exists in 'dissembled', concealed form within the pictorial image.

Several points emerge here, beginning with the place given to the woman, whose materiality is complex. As *Purgatorio* noted instances in Mary's life as *exempla* for Purgatorial figures, so Mary is exalted throughout *Paradiso*, implicitly in the place given to nuns' virginity in the Moon; seen as a glory in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars (canto 23); seen physically in the Empyrean (31.115–138 and canto 32); addressed and responding in canto 33.1–45. Mary was, historically, the theme of such men as Bonaventure (canto 12), Peter Damiani (canto 21), and Bernard of Clairvaux (cantos 31–33). Her distinction was to be Mother of God (*Theotokos*: declared so in Ephesus in 431 CE) and perpetual virgin, who had made a vow of virginity before the Annunciation (so Gregory of Nyssa, c.335–395), her virginity declaring her singleness and sincerity (Ambrose). She was a figure of the Church (so Isidore of Seville: canto 10). She was sister of Christ and of the angels. Franciscans said she had taken a vow of poverty. Bernard of Clairvaux said she had been bodily assumed into heaven.[8] Peter Damiani considered Mary's womb to be the house in the phrase 'wisdom hath builded her house' (Proverbs 9.1).

Dante says her womb, 'fu albergo del nostro disiro' (the hostelry of our Desire, 23.105); this idea reappears in Bernard's prayer to the Virgin (33.7–9). Her womb makes her body's materiality pure, not needing to be touched by any other spiritual force that would redeem materiality. In Peter Damiani's words, 'the all-chaste womb of the holy maid becomes heaven' (Gambero 2005: 97).

This poses complex problems for feminism. Women within patriarchy are characteristically victims of contradictory double demands: required to be objects of beauty yet chaste; subjected to different and harder codes as regards the materiality of their bodies than those given to men; having to respond to the demands of men yet needing to find a place in patriarchy which they may claim as their own even though it may have been prescribed for them. The choice of virginity has engendered endless controversy as being repressive and disabling, in disregarding the materiality of women's bodies. Yet it may have been positive in giving a separate space though one not free from male violation, as canto 3 shows. The materiality of bodies, and of women's bodies, problematic in modernity no less than in medieval Christianity, appears throughout *Paradiso*.

Further, another woman speaks in the *Commedia*: Beatrice, who had died in 1291, aged 23, who as an allegorical figure partially derives from Wisdom in the Jewish Bible (Proverbs 8), and from Philosophy in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. Philosophy as a woman derives from Athena, from Thetis, and from the idea of the nurse—Odysseus' nurse Eurycleia—as well as from the classical Muses (Crabbe 1981: 237–274). In *Convivio* 2.16.12, the 'donna' Dante loves after Beatrice's death is Philosophy. These women and goddesses, like Mary, supplement the woman's value in Dante's poetic tradition, the *dolce stil nuovo*. *Paradiso*'s claims for Beatrice go as far as they can; Dante in the Empyrean exalts Beatrice, seen in her appointed place, remote from him:

> Da quella regïon che più sù tona
> occhio mortale alcun tanto non dista,
> qualunque in mare più giù s'abbandona,
> quanto lì da Beatrice la mia vista;
> ma nulla mi facea, ché süa effige
> non discendëa a me per mezzo mista.
> 'O donna in cui la mia speranza vige,
> e che soffristi per la mia salute
> in inferno lasciar le tue vestige,

di tante cose quant'i' ho vedute,
dal tuo podere e da la tua bontate
riconosco la grazia e la virtute.
Tu m'hai di servo tratto a libertate
per tutte quelle vie, per tutti'i modi
che di ciò fare avei la potestate.
La tua magnificenza in me custodi,
sì che l'anima mia, che fatt'hai sana,
piacente a te dal corpo si disnodi.'
Così orai …. (31.73–91)

(From that region which thunders most high up, no mortal eye is so distant, not one that is lost deepest in the sea, as was my gaze from Beatrice, but that did not matter, for her image did not descend to me mixed with any medium. 'O lady in whom my hope is strong, and who suffered, for my salvation, to leave your footprints in hell, in all the things which I have seen, I recognise the grace and the strength, from your power and your bounty. You have drawn me from slavery to freedom by all the ways, by all the modes that you had the power to use. Keep your generosity towards me so that my soul, which you have made whole, may, pleasing to you untie itself from the body'. Thus I prayed ….).

The distance from earth to the highest part of the atmosphere is augmented, as the distance from the region of thunder to the sea's bottom, the place of silence. This intensification gives the clue, for Dante sees Beatrice's image without material interruption (*mezzo*) across the Empyrean. Perspective, which distances things from the privileged subject's viewpoint, is not involved. He sees what she is, which his prayer, which is salutation, unfolds. Praise begins with Beatrice as the image of hope that imprints itself in hell. That impress of the immaterial upon the material substance of Hell, that is, Limbo (*Inf.* 2.52–108), sums up what the following *terzine* amplify: what Beatrice has done since the *Vita Nuova* days. Her trace (*vestige*) applies to everything when, though absent, she was drawing him from slavery to freedom of the will (in that way Dante reads his life and gives a reading of the substance of *Paradiso*). The last *terzina* expounds his 'hope': he desires her 'magnificenza' to continue to his death. 'Magnificenza', which includes in it the sense of 'fortitude' as one of the cardinal virtues, is a rare word in *Paradiso*: applied only to Cangrande (17.85), and Mary (33.20). Is Beatrice a material or immaterial presence? Is her 'trace' a third thing, not material, but questioning immateriality, because something real?

Beatrice's visibility is also absence. He sees her as an 'effige': as an image and the trace of Christ in his descent to Limbo, harrowing hell, and, in ascending from earth, leaving his footprints (*GL* 1.292). 'Vestige' recalls the poet Guinizelli, purging his lust in fire, telling Dante that his words to him leave a 'trace' (*vestigio*, *Purg.* 26.106). The words of Dante affect Guinizelli's afterlife but are to Guinizelli memories from his life (giving memories *before* events). In following Guinizelli's poetry, Dante adds a trace to the earlier poet's work, deepening its meaning. The '*vestige*' means that readers must enlarge their conventional chronology of first this poet followed by that. The afterlife of poetry vivifies its chronologically earlier moment of writing. Miri Rubin (2006: 169) notes that St Clare, who followed St Francis' teaching, desired to be the 'footprint' of St Francis, by following Francis' manner of life, but she adds that Clare was historically called 'a footprint [*vestigium*] of the Mother of God' (199). Clare, the trace of another, brings Mary into further visibility as her trace. Piccarda tells Dante that Clare, who is above her in heaven, and Piccarda's model, is followed on earth by nuns, whose desire is to the Bridegroom (*Para.* 3.97–101). Clare, wanting to be the trace of Mary and Francis, gives way to the Bridegroom whom Francis followed, who existed in time as the son of Mary; the trace enlarging the significance of the other. Beatrice, who left her footprints in hell, supplements *Paradiso*'s Christianity, adding to heaven and to orthodoxy by guiding Dante, leaving her trace that makes her absent, and present, smiling, a spirit that matters.

Angels, Immateriality, and Prime Matter

The other figure in the Annunciation is the Angel. If angels enjoy a special place in *Paradiso*'s cosmos, Dante is paralleled by Modernism, for example by Benjamin, whose 'Angel of History' attempts, perhaps impossibly, communication within history. If angels are messengers, their medium language, there is an analogy between angels and the immateriality of poetry. Angels are substances without matter ('sustanze separate da materia', *Convivio*, 2.4.2), immaterial. Yet, after Beatrice has died, in the *Vita Nuova*:

> In quello giorno nel quale si compiea l'anno che questa donna era fatta de li cittadini di vita eterna, io mi sedea in parte ne la quale, ricordandomi di lei, disegnava uno angelo sopra certe tavolette … (*VN* 34.1)

(On that day in which was completed a year since this lady [Beatrice] had become a citizen of eternal life, I was sitting in a place where, remembering her, I was designing an angel on some wooden boards …)

Dante's *Trauerarbeit* takes the form of expressing, on the anniversary of Beatrice's death, another form of life, drawing an angel. That is analogous to writing poetry. The angel is not Beatrice, though it may be her trace, Beatrice here becoming even more an immaterial spirit. Drawing an angel on a wooden tablet, or panel, is *creatio ex nihilo*; bringing into visibility the invisible, as art does, since 'painting celebrates no other enigma than that of visibility' (Merleau-Ponty 1993: 127). What is visible is a riddle, as an image of what is invisible and only conceptual, questioning the difference between the visible and the invisible. What is seen is never the whole, and something permits visibility that is not visible, though it is inherent within it. Drawing an angel says that what the woman is or was cannot be brought into vision, and only what is not visible is worth seeing. Levinas calls it the *il y a*—the 'there is'—which is nothing in the sense that it is no thing (Tambling 2004: 351–372). Writing must be fascinated by it; it ensures that nothing is wholly visible. *Paradiso* finds it so potent that it sacrifices the visible for it, as the 'trace' that is, still elusively in this poem, God.

Angels by their understanding move the heavenly spheres, to quote the *incipit* to Dante's *canzone*, 'Voi che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete': commented on in *Convivio* Book 2, cited in *Paradiso* 8.37. *Convivio* Book 2, fascinated with angelic intelligences, and their spheres is *Paradiso*'s seedplot. Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde find that this *canzone* shows Dante turning to allegory (*Convivio* 2.1; see *Rime* 2.161). Angels and allegory connect, and if the language describing/evoking angels is allegorical, allegory becomes a dualistic mode, the literal describes the immaterial, or spiritual. Angels contemplate God, and have no unrealised 'potential' in their knowledge. They need no language, though they may speak (see *Para*. 14.35, 36). Their immateriality puts them outside sexuality; angels being, psychoanalytically, 'the most ambitious attempt in our civilization to establish a world in which identity is not based on sex' (Schneiderman 1988: 17). They are opposite from the problem of 'prime matter', something ghosting *Paradiso*. What 'prima materia' is was a critical crux for Dante (*Convivio* 3.15.6, 4.18), not soluble by his dual allegiance to the philosophies of the Dominicans or the Franciscans. It will be discussed in Chap. 6. Here we can say that Aristotle held that the universe had not been created; it was eternal, as is matter. In what, then, lay the work of

creation, which, being 'in the beginning', inaugurates time (according to Augustine)? Did creation work on existent prime matter, or had God created *ex nihilo*? If so, what is the status of unused prime matter?—which is also *il y a*.

The tensions in this debate, lasting through disputes and condemnations in the University of Paris in 1370 and 1377, took various forms onto which were mapped a problematic dualism between spirit and matter. The Neo-Platonic tradition from Proclus held that prime matter was not created by God, matter being eternal; but this made matter antagonistic to God. Followers of Aristotle's Arab commentator, Averroes (1126–1178) believed that matter's elements were created by the heavens, not by God, a view Bishop Tempier condemned in Paris in 1277. According to Bruno Nardi (1884–1968), Siger of Brabant, seen in the heaven of the Sun, accepted this.[9] Boethius of Dacia, teaching at Paris, believed that philosophy could prove that creation could never have had a beginning, even though faith taught the opposite. This compelled belief in something like a 'double truth'—that something could be true and false together, depending on the system of thought used—and meant that there was always something slipping away from proof, resisting the firmness of faith (Boethius of Dacia 1987: 36–37, Introduction, 9–19). Whether there was matter that God created which lacked form, or whether matter was always there, haunting the primacy of God's creation had been a crisis-point for Augustine with the Manichees, whose dualism made matter and God's purity irreconcilable. This, questioning whether everything can be brought into God's system, haunts, perhaps troubles *Paradiso*. Angels symbolise a desire for a pure knowing uncontaminated by matter, but the Annunciation implies the value of a virginal, pure-womb-like materiality.

Here we must address allegory as the medium for expressing 'immateriality'.

Allegory

Paradiso gives converse with jewel—or flame—or flower-like lights within light, supplementing light by reflecting light, as human eyes do, but disembodied, which the spirits feel as a loss (see canto 14.37–66). The only body visible is Beatrice's, who escorts Dante. In the Moon, she explains the non-literality of the heavens they are passing through. None of the beings encountered in the Moon are there, they only appear there. The staging-posts of the different heavens are only apparent: hence 'chiaro mi

fu allor come ogne dove / in cielo è paradiso' (3.89–90: it was clear to me then how everywhere in heaven is Paradise). The souls in the Moon are actually in the Empyrean. They are like the highest Seraphim who most 's'india' (4.28)—most sinks himself in God.[10] Beatrice names Moses and Samuel, Jewish prophets, and writers of sacred texts (see Jeremiah 15.1). She then names two Johns, saying Dante can choose either the Baptist, 'a man sent from God whose name was John' (John 1.6), or the Gospel writer, the beloved disciple John (13.23), who stood by Mary at the foot of the cross (John 19.26). John was a virgin, and Peter Damiani said he, like Mary, was assumed bodily into heaven, though Dante's John denies that in canto 25 (Gambero 2005: 87). All, says Beatrice, are equally within the Empyrean, whatever their capacity to feel, 'più e men', the eternal breath.[11] But they appear for Dante's benefit, in these other, lower, heavens:

> Qui si mostraro, non perché sortita
> sia questa spera lor, ma per far segno
> de la spiritüal c'ha men salita.
> Così parlar conviensi al vostro ingegno,
> però che solo da sensato apprende
> ciò che fa poscia d'intelletto degno.
> Per questo la Scrittura condescende
> a vostra facultate, e piedi e mano
> attribuisce a Dio, e altro intende;
> e Santa Chiesa con aspetto umano
> Gabrïel e Michel vi rappresenta,
> e l'altro che Tobia rifece sano. (4.37–48)

(They have shown themselves, not because this sphere is assigned to them, but to make a sign of the spiritual sphere, which has the less ascent [the Moon]. It suits that they speak thus to your intellect, which only from the senses apprehends what it then makes worthy of the intellect. For this reason, Scripture condescends to your capacity, and attributes feet and hands to God, and means something else, and Holy Church represents to you Gabriel and Michael with human aspect, and that other [Raphael] who made Tobias whole.)

The souls in the Moon have descended, appearing as if in a masquerade. They make the Moon a sign, of weakness of the will. David Gibbons finds more metaphor in *Paradiso* than in *Inferno* or *Purgatorio*.[12] Perhaps this indicates that presentations in *Paradiso* move towards the intellect by

way of something visible. In reaching the non-sensual through the sensual, Dante is akin to the Gothic mentality of the Cistercian Suger (1081–1151), Bernard of Clairvaux's contemporary. Bernard refused church ornamentation, but Suger justified the Gothic ethos of his new Abbey buildings at St-Denis, proclaiming the 'anagogical' nature of Gothic images: all art within it figures divine reality, because *Mens hebes ad verum per materialia surgit*—'the dull mind rises to truth through that which is material' (Panofsky 1970: 164).

Suger—and Gothic art—worked from the Syrian pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (c.525 CE), the Neo-Platonist influenced by Proclus (412–488) whom Plotinus (c.204–270) influenced, and the saint whom Suger's Abbey church honoured. Pseudo-Dionysius stylised himself after the Pauline convert, the Athenian Dionysius who lived in the atmosphere of the worship of 'the Unknown God' (Acts 17.16–34). He appears in canto 10.112–114, and canto 28.130 evokes him as instructed by Paul, who had been in Heaven. *The Celestial Hierarchy* was translated into Latin by John Scotus Eriugena (c.860), the Irish poet at the Carolingian court of Charles the Bald (823–877).[13] He believed in a 'hierarchy'—his neologism; it appears in *Para.* 28.121—of knowledge, ascending towards the hidden, though God also descends to matter hierarchically (Rorem 1993: 30). 'Anagogical', Panofsky's word in discussing Suger, means 'mystical, spiritual, having a secondary spiritual sense' (*OED*), being one of the fourfold senses of Scripture discussed in Dante's *Epistle to Can Grande*, deriving from such patristic sources as Origen, Cassian, St Jerome, and Eucharis of Lyons (d. c.449).[14] Fourfold interpretation gives the Bible literal, allegorical, topological (or moral), and anagogical meanings. In anagogy, pseudo-Dionysius reads symbols as a way of returning towards God. It implies an uplifting: moving from the perceptible to the intelligible, towards contemplation or *theoria*, as angels contemplate (Rorem 1984: 55, 114).[15]

The necessity for metaphorical/allegorical terms expands in canto 4. Scripture anthropomorphises the immaterial God, giving him a foot, or hand, for allegorical speech 'altro intende' (4.45). It means something else. The Church permits visual representations of Gabriel, or Michael, or Raphael as humans though they are immaterial spirits. Such humanising individuates, as art does. The angel who made Tobias whole comes from the Apocryphal Book of Tobit, 3.17: Raphael 'scaled away the whiteness of Tobit's eyes', an action allegorical of healing spiritual blindness (a refusal to read spiritually/allegorically). The material angel (a contradiction)

allegorises a spiritual work, but Dionysius had spoken of 'dissimilar similarities' within Biblical symbols for angels, or God (Rorem 1993: 54–56). 'Dissemblance' disallows reading images for their apparent sense: the visible dissembles the invisible. This resembles *Paradiso*, whose literal heavens have allegorical features, their spheres not housing their spirits.

This presentational mode, comprising dissimilar similarities and non-reality, was *not* Dante's mode in *Inferno* or *Purgatorio*. There, souls were literal, within literal spaces. With *Paradiso*, the cosmos becomes allegorical. Beatrice in canto 4 explains the poem's method: finding sensuous equivalents to the cosmic spheres. Philo of Alexandria (15 BCE–45 CE) saw the cosmos as embellishing the divine idea, as allegories. The *cosmos* means 'the universe' and 'ornamentation, embellishment': for example, the stars as ornaments (Fletcher: 70–145, Radice: 131–135). Hence the cosmos is not intelligible 'scientifically' but allegorically: ornamental jewels flash back within it, adding to it. The *Convivio* compared the planets' sequence to that of the Trivium and the Quadrivium.[16] With that 'scientific' order ghosting *Paradiso*'s sequence, Dante creates the heavens in poetic terms. In canto 4.43–48, the Scriptures, and Church practices, justify *Paradiso*, according with Dante's mode of creation. The later text makes earlier ones, declared divine, accord with it. The poet works with his own absolute creation, though he presents this as an order vouchsafed to him; for, returning to canto 2.7–9, the waters his boat crosses were uncrossed before, but Minerva, Apollo, and *nine* Muses—Dante's essential number—show him the Bears. These constellations are co-ordinates for him, as the only nameable entities with a reality or a shape outside these uncrossed seas. As, historically speaking, mythic realities produced an ancient impulse to find them imaged as cosmic patterns, which, though fictional designs, gave viable indications for navigators, so with the fictional realities created in each heavenly sphere. Fictionally charged pagan constellations point out the way for writing *Paradiso*. Dante's inspiration within looks for pagan-classical and allegorical-fictional inspiration without which points him on; and his heavens generate new constellations.

Origin, Dissemination, and Hierarchy

Dante's heaven shows increasing light without shadow, harmony without disharmony. The stress on returning to God as the origin divides him from present modern critical theory. Teodolinda Barolini, I think rightly, shows disquiet with the implications of the statement that Dante has 'unease and

suspicion in the presence of multiplicity'. She is quoting Patrick Boyde, who locates the source of that 'unease' in Dante's keen relationship to Neo-Platonism, this being marked in *Monarchia* 1.15.1–3, wherein Dante opposes plurality to a unity that seems closer to the origin: 'the best is that which is one as much as possible'. What falls short, 'falls short of being one, and therefore good' (Barolini 1992: 173, 181). Boyde writes that, with this Neo-Platonism, Dante 'seems to have entertained misgivings about the goodness of a universe which could not be perfect because it was neither "simple" nor "one"- as it should be' (Boyde 1981: 219). But Dante's thought shows doubleness. It desires and seeks throughout *Paradiso* an original, and immaterial, unity, but is attracted to materiality, which includes multiplicity, and fascination with numbers, and is inherently dualist, while 'sinning is nothing else than scorning unity and moving away from it towards multiplicity'.[17]

Pseudo-Dionysius made creation a precession from God; creation stands still before him, and returns to him. There may be plural possible cycles of creation. This view, though the Christian framework does not affirm it, haunts the thought that external reality is layered hierarchically, as if it could be taken away (Schäfwe 2006: 65). In pseudo-Dionysius' follower, Maximus the Confessor (580–662), who influenced John Scotus Eriugena's *Periphyseon* (c.864), this return to God is to Christ, for Maximus identifies creation with Christ himself, speaking of the Incarnation as threefold: in the cosmos, that is, in creation, in the Scriptures, and in Christ. The soul returns to God. Maximus calls 'deification' the destiny of the human, invoking 2 Peter 1.4, where Christians are 'partakers of the divine nature', and I John 3.2, 'now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be'. Lives will be more than almost divine, for God's intention—his divine love—was to be creator *and* saviour of the cosmos.[18]

Dante is akin to Maximus, drawing on Neo-Platonism in making everything return to a 'proprio sito' (*Para* 1. 91–93), making diverse elements 'accline' towards their common 'principio' (1.109–111). Everything must be spoken of in allegory, whether the allegory of poets, or of theologians, since language is always, necessarily, 'other'.[19] In Philo of Alexandria's tendential Neo-Platonism, allegory draws its power from inability to speak of divine mysteries literally, and from the idea of transmuting material into spiritual reality. The outer, literal meaning of Scripture was the body, the inner, allegorical meaning, the soul: reality is veiled behind the empirically seen (Whitman 1987: 62, 65). If writing allegory in *Paradiso* means

rejecting the material (as with angels) and the literal—it bears repeating that it is not *Inferno*'s mode—that necessitates accepting multiplicity, because speech as 'other', plural, exfoliates within material images.

Dante knew the Neo-Platonism emanating from Plotinus' *Enneads* (*Ennead* means 'nine'—for the six divisions of the text include nine books each). Plotinus' disciple Porphyry, incidentally, recorded in his biography that he 'seemed ashamed of being in the body' (quoted Plotinus: cii). Plotinus indeed considered matter to be evil (*Ennead* 1.8.3). His influence reached Boethius (480–524). A follower of the Plotinian Proclus wrote the ninth-century *Liber de Causis*, which Aquinas commented on, and which Dante quotes, in *Convivio* 3.4, and in *Epistle 10*, paragraph 21.[20] God is known within a hierarchy, emanating downwards in light, and in and through angels, and, since an angel is a messenger, in language. Such emanations, pluralising themselves, are interrupted by materiality, a point *Convivio* 3.7 emphasises. The brightness of the cosmos and scriptural language unite. The association of light's rays with language is implicit in Dante's chilling phrase 'the sun was silent' (*Inf.* 1.60). No light means no language, no poetry: death. Knowledge returns upwards, with the anagogical power of the symbolic: ideas from the senses convey higher, non-sensuous realities. For Plotinus, the Divinity inheres within three hypostases: the One, the Divine Mind, and the All-Soul. Emanations processing from the One are revealed in what the Divine Mind displays: Real-Beings, Intelligences, and Powers, all nameable as the spiritual universe. They are 'closely like Dante's conception of the circle of angels and blessed spirits gathered in contemplation and service round the throne of God', while the All-Soul is 'the eternal cause of the existence, eternal existence, of the cosmos' (MacKenna in Plotinus 1991: xxxiii, xxxiv). We can hardly distinguish between God and the hierarchy of being; just as Maximus the Confessor deified Christ, the cosmos, and redeemed creation. Such thinking virtually de-centres God by overthrowing separate categories of thought. The distinction between spirit and matter comes into question. The dissemination, and the downward fragmentation of light and language, weakens the possibility of distinguishing literality and allegory in the *Commedia*—but it should be axiomatic that reading language 'literally' *already* requires interpretation. Language is figural, and allegorical, and literality is a sense derived from language's several significations. The literal is only that in being part of the 'letter' of 'literature'.

Dionysius' 'mystical theology', from Philo, Gregory of Nyssa, and Proclus, contends that knowing God means entering 'the darkness of

unknowing', a phrase from Exodus 24.15, where God appears in the cloud and Moses goes into it. Thus in 'Midnight' by Henry Vaughan (1975: 290): 'There is in God (some say), / A deep, but dazzling darkness'. True language about 'the unknown God' must deny qualities of God, using such negating words as 'invisible', 'infinite', and 'ineffable' (Routh 1989: 45; Rorem 1993: 47–90, 183–236). God must be defined in negatives (apophatically). The Bible's symbols for God are those that are unlike him; they exist in the realm of 'dissemblance' (Didi-Huberman 1995: 45–60). This theology makes knowing less a loving than an intellectual principle, though description of what the soul knows or sees must be in the realm of the unlike—and multiple, neither singly spiritual, nor material.

On one side, everything speaks, as with *Purgatorio*'s annunciating angel (10.34–40), so realistically carved that he seems to be saying *Ave*. He is messenger and message. Aquinas thought that when immaterial angels assumed a body this 'had a symbolic character: it signified the future assumption of a human body by the Word of God' (Aquinas 1968–1969: 1a.50–64, p. 37). Gabriel is allegorical, like his visibility, where his mien embodies his immaterial word; he is a speaking work of art. Mary, responding, 'avea in atto impressa esta favella / *Ecce ancilla Dei*' (had in her bearing stamped this speech, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*, 10.43–44). Language, its Latin foregrounding it, is *stamped* into Mary's carved posture, her body, as if she needed not to speak.

On the other side, language fails. *Paradiso* notes gaps in memory, creating discontinuities within the self, the loss of a reference-point within the subject. One example, discussed in Chap. 5, comes in canto 23, when Dante cannot describe Beatrice's smile. Memory fails, and the writing self, which would think in single continuous terms, loses itself. Commentators often divide Dante the pilgrim from the poet writing, separating the partial insight the traveller possesses from the knowledge possessed by the writing subject (a random instance: Murtaugh 1975: 277–284, note 8). If this was possible it would allow autobiographical writing, where finality, centredness, and completion characterises the writing self, beyond the earlier self, which has partial knowledge. But the distinction is unsustainable. The Dante who travels with partial knowledge is a textual creation of his present writing which cannot distinguish the two. Nor can there be a return to a past original experience, for present writing cannot guarantee the purity of a past event, because it writes within its own present. Not only may memory not have registered experience, as happens in *Paradiso*,

so that it cannot know what it did not know; in saying 'I', there cannot be a self with full presence to itself. The present self has not self-presence. It cannot distinguish itself from the past save by assertion, nor can it claim a separate time for narration putting itself outside the past. These points complicate thought of an origin, of a determinate single knowledge that the subject is acquiring.

Lives Almost Divine, Spirits That Matter

Paradiso may be a desire for pure speech, unstained by anything of materiality, as with Mallarmé, where speech moves beyond immediate sensuous auras as if wanting to be analogous to the angelic state, pure language that removes from it the conventional associations borne in poetic language. But Dante's poetry is driven by the referentiality of what it has left behind, as with its politics, voiced by those within the paradisal and contemplative state, but excited by earthly sensuous reality. Even angels have a desire: contemplation being for them desire of God (Pertile 1997: 148–166). Mary, Beatrice, angels, and the absence of bodies in ever-brightening light witness to a desire for the immaterial, just as resurrection-bodies will not be sexed (Matthew 22.30), yet this is not a single drive. Hence the subtitle: *Spirits That Matter*. This plays on the book-title to Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (1993), where 'matter' means 'that which materialises' or 'which become matter' or simply 'which is important'. In how it 'matters', spirit contrasts with any theoretical discourse of the body. And spirit-lives are individual, rich, and complex, and that, in *Paradiso* questions distinctions between the material and the non-material, and the visible and invisible. Paradisal lives are no less vivid than those of *Inferno* or *Purgatorio*; one prompting to start this study was noticing how many lives—whether offstage, and alluded to (outstandingly, Francis), or whether visibly, onstage—come before Dante in *Paradiso*, with histories that matter.

The full subtitle, *Lives Almost Divine, Spirits That Matter* explores what it means that *Paradiso* works by allegory, by figural language, however much affirming the reality of what has happened. Dante writes:

> Nel ciel che più de la sua luce prende
> fu' io' (1.4, 5)

(I have been in the heaven that receives most of his light.)