HUMAN GENERATION, MEMORY AND POETIC CREATION:
FROM THE *PURGATORIO* TO THE *PARADISO*

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Summary: Statius' scientific digression on the generation of the fetus and the formation of the fictive body in the afterlife occupies a large part of canto XXV of Dante's *Purgatorio*. This article will examine the metaphorical relevance of that technical exposition to Dante's poetics. The analogy between procreation and poetic creation appears to be consistent once the scientific lesson on embryology of canto XXV is understood as mirroring the definition of the *Dolce Stil Novo* offered by Dante in the previous canto (*Purg.* XXIV). The second part of this article stresses the importance of cantos XXIV and XXV as an authorization to investigate the presence, in Dante's *Comedy*, of a particular notion of purely rational memory derived from Augustine's speculation. The allusion to an Augustinian conception of memory in *Purgatorio* XXV opens the possibility of considering its presence in the precisely intellectual dimension of *Paradiso*.

In canto XXV of the *Purgatorio*, Statius' exposition on the generation of the fetus and the formation of the fictive body in the afterlife is evidence not only of Dante's awareness of the medical debates of his time, but also of his willingness to enter into such discussion. Less obvious, but perhaps more important is this technical exposition's metaphorical relevance to Dante's poetics. The analysis of the relation between human generation and poetic inspiration is the focus of the first part of this article. By placing that long scientific digression on embryology at the middle of the second canticle of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante seems to be making a pointed and consistent analogy between procreation and poetic creation.¹ The analogy appears within the six cantos specifically dedicated to poetry, to the definition of the "dolce stil novo" and to the crucial encounters between the pilgrim and the poets Buonagiunta da Lucca, Guido

¹ The importance of the theme of human generation is pointed out and confirmed by its presence in the *Convivio*, where Dante had already faced the same subject. See *Convivio*, IV, xxi, 752-775. This article is focused mainly on *Purgatorio* XXV, but I would like to underline that the same subject is discussed in the *Convivio* as well.

Guinizzelli and Arnaut Daniel. Giuseppe Mazzotta points out the significance of the position of canto XXV: “Canto XXV of *Purgatorio*, structurally, exerts a centripetal pull on the two adjacent cantos. [...] From our point of view, the canto subsumes the intellectual problems from the preceding canto and telescopes them toward *Purgatorio* XXVI.”²

In the second part of this article I would like to stress the importance of cantos XXIV and XXV as a point of departure and as an authorization to investigate the presence of a particular notion of purely rational memory derived from Augustine’s speculation. I will investigate this issue in relation to the Dantean idea of poetic creation and its innermost link with Statius’ speech on the generation of the embryo and the formation of the shade after death. The allusion to such Augustinian conception of memory in *Purgatory* XXV actually opens the possibility of considering its presence in the precisely intellectual dimension of *Paradiso*.

The initial impetus for Statius’ exposition raises from the pilgrim’s question about how the souls of purgatory, separated from their earthly body, are still able to lose weight: from here, through his long speech on the generation of the human fetus and the formation of the fictive body, Statius chooses to answer the pilgrim’s question with a discussion of the general relationship of body and soul, on earth as well as in the afterlife.

Given the importance of the different scientific and philosophical references recognizable in Statius’ discourse as a sign of Dante’s undeniable awareness and knowledge, the poet’s participation in that intellectual debate becomes more meaningful if read in light of the clear analogy with the generative process of poetry itself. While some critics have simply acknowledged the presence of what seemed to be a scientific digression, John Freccero has sought to underscore a correspondence, in the act of writing, between the generation of the embryo and what might be called the generation of the poetic word.³ In recent years various critics have again looked at *Purgatorio* XXV as representative of Dante’s position within the complex medieval philosophical debate on the formation of the embryo and the human soul, with particular reference to the development of the rational part of the soul.⁴ In his investigation on the role of the body in the

² Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, 211.

³ Freccero, *Manfred’s Wounds*, 195-208.

⁴ Among the studies devoted to the scientific context of Statius’ embryological lesson, see: Fraser, *Dante/“Fante”*; Gilson, “The Anatomy and Physiology of the Human Body in the *Commedia*”; Ziegler, “The Scientific Context of Dante’s Embryology”; and Iglesias Rondina, “Conceptos médicos en *Purgatorio* XXV,

eschatological dimension of Dante's *Comedy*, Manuele Gragnolati has proposed a thorough analysis of Statius' lesson on embryology as combining the different medieval theories of plurality and unicity of forms.⁵ As we shall see, in his analysis of Dante's ideological and formal definition of his own philosophical poetry, Zygmunt Barański has pointed out that *Purgatorio* XXV is of fundamental importance when proving Dante's distance and independence from the poetics of Guido Cavalcanti.⁶

The present study departs from John Freccero's intuition that Statius' scientific lesson in canto XXV is relevant to the very core of Dante's idea of poetic creation elaborated in canto XXIV. In establishing a necessary mirror reading of the critical moments of the two cantos, Freccero's analysis deepens and clarifies both. This interpretation helps to explain the ample space devoted to a preliminary scientific digression, which involves different and sometimes contrasting medieval philosophical positions: the simultaneous presence of both Aristotelian and platonic trends characterizes Statius' exposition and Dante's intellectual position on two essential phases of the analysis of the relationship between the body and the soul. This apparent ambiguity in the theoretical approach is consistent with the fact that both moments, the conception and the formation of the fictive body, express a level not completely defined and intermediate, between two ways of being, between human life, its before and its after. Statius' words analyze precisely the formative *iter* of the embryo and the generation of the fictive body, and investigate the constitutive essence of intermediate forms between soul and body. According to the importance given to the "medium," Statius' speech is divided in two mirrored parts: counting the number of verses reveals an almost perfect correspondence between the

vv. 37-38." Annalisa Andreoni offers a well documented reading of Benedetto Varchi's lessons on *Purgatorio* XXV in her article " 'Sangue perfetto che poi non si beve'." Specifically about the same verse 37 of *Purgatorio* XXV, see the recent contribution intended to show the strength of the presence of Galen's medical doctrine: Bartoli and Ureni, "La dottrina di Galeno in 'sangue perfetto' (*Purg.* XXV 37)."

⁵ Gragnolati's investigation on medieval embryology and Dante's take on it focuses specifically on the infusion of the rational soul, which, in Dante's words, absorbs and includes in its own substance the pre-existing vegetative and sensitive faculties. In this respect Gragnolati points out some similarities with the doctrine of unicity of form so as to underline how the rational soul is ontologically not separated from the other potencies of the human soul. See Gragnolati, "Embriology and Aerial Bodies in Dante's *Comedy*."

⁶ Barański. "Per similitudine di abito scientifico," 14-52.

descent of the soul toward birth (vv. 37-78) and its ascent in the afterlife (vv. 79-108).

The different traditions of thought coexisting in the Dantean text maintain that the same vital principle is responsible for the formation of both the embryo and the fictive body. Dante's use of different intellectual traditions is apparent in the part of his discourse dealing with embryology, where he picks and chooses his theories according to his ideological and poetic needs and according to the particular phase of the fetus' development that he has chosen to describe.

The first vital principle of the human being is in fact identified with the "virtute informativa" that, assimilated by the "sanguine perfetto," makes it potentially able to infuse life at the moment of conception, that is once blood is finally transformed into sperm by the genitals. This idea of an initial vital principle as a link between corporeal reality and the "other" dimension present at the moment of conception, is a legacy of ancient philosophy present in medieval thought, again precisely the intellectual heritage of Aristotelian and Platonic trends.

The Aristotelian roots are manifested in the theory of *pneuma*, which Aristotle defines in the *De Generatione animalium* as "retentum spermate" ("retained in the sperm"), its nature as analogous to the element of the stars and finalized to render sperm "conveniens generationi" ("suitable for generation").⁷ The Aristotelian theory of "pneuma" holds that the *pneuma* participates in a vital principle (it is transmitted by the act of procreation). Moreover, because of both its presence in the sperm and its link with the astral dimension, the *pneuma*, similar to the Dantean "virtute informativa," pertains to both dimensions, namely to the one strictly embryological and to another one somehow transcending earthly corporality.

Avicenna, too, in his *De animalibus* acknowledges a correspondence between a certain *virtus* and the generative potentiality of the sperm when he says: "That power is the one that gives life, and it is proportional to the power of the divine creatures [...] And in the sperm is a first substance, which is able to receive that power [...] and this power is a divine substance, and its relation to sperm corresponds to the intellect's relation to the other faculties of the soul".⁸ According to Avicenna, that *virtus* (power) which

⁷ Aristotele, *De animalibus*, liber XVI, 736b; Michael Scot's Arabic-Latin translation, 74.

⁸ "Illa virtus est que dat vitam, et est proportionale virtuti supercelestium [...] Et in spermate est substantia prima potens recipere hanc virtutem[...] et ista virtus est corpus divinum, et sua proportio ad sperma est que intellectus ad alias vir-

belongs to the soul of a being reproducing itself and transmitting life to the embryo, acts in the vegetative and sensitive souls, namely in those primordial moments of the soul's activity, common to human beings and to all animals. Avicenna's words allow us to identify that power with the *formativa*.⁹ In Michele Scotto's Latin version of Avicenna's *De animalibus* (published [s.n.] 1500), the term *formativa* expresses that power to transform physical vision into an image that can be retained by memory and is therefore entirely a power of the sensitive soul.¹⁰

The Platonic and Christian traditions enter into the Aristotelian, giving greater importance to the divine and otherworldly nature of the first generative principle or cause. The platonic perspective concurs with the Aristotelian by affirming the astral origin of pneuma and conceives of it as a vehicle (hence the denomination or definition of *ochema-pneuma*), a "subtle body" that surrounds the soul during its descent from the stars to the earth. Suggestions from Plato's *Timaeus* related the idea of the soul's descent to earth with the idea of a first vital principle which is immortal and of divine nature.¹¹

The philosophy of the Fathers of the Church identified that vital principle with the Logos, incorporeal, made of the same essence as God, therefore pre-existent to the creation of the world and a possible divine generative instrument.¹² Statius' *virtute informativa*, even though referring to the

tutes anime." Avicenna, *De animalibus*, XVI, fol. 1 cited in Nardi, "Sull'origine dell'anima umana," 209. Nardi elaborates on this correspondence in both his articles "L'origine dell'anima umana secondo Dante" (then published in his book *Studi di Filosofia Medievale*) and "Sull'origine dell'anima umana" (then published in his book *Dante e la cultura medievale*). English translation is mine.

⁹ See again Nardi who clarifies: "secondo un principio costante della *Metafisica* aristotelica, ogni cosa generata è prodotta da un agente univoco, cioè d'ugual natura; il qual principio è chiamato espressamente nel *De gener. Animal.* II, c. I. Poiché dunque il seme paterno è considerato come l'agente strumentale della generazione, gli Scolastici ne conclusero ch'esso dovesse possedere una virtù attiva derivata dall'anima dell'agente principale, il padre. A questa virtù che dà impulso e presiede allo sviluppo del nuovo organismo vivente, fu da essi riservato il nome di *virtù formativa* o *informativa*." Nardi. "Sull'origine dell'anima umana," 209.

¹⁰ Avicenna, *De animalibus*, XII in *Opera* (1961), 47.

¹¹ See Plato, *Timaeus*, 41-43d in *The Dialogues of Plato*, III, 358.

¹² On the concept of *Logos* and the philosophy of the Fathers of the Church, see the thorough study by Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*. On the

Aristotelian tradition, probably claims also the Christian need for a divine essence within the first vital principle antecedent to actual conception. This perhaps involves even Augustine's theory of *rationes seminales* derived from the ancient philosophical theory of *logoi spermatikoi*: The presence of a divine plan, but also of a "seed" that God made intrinsic to matter, potentially infusing into matter itself the possibility of future generation, birth and development.¹³ On the basis of that Augustinian trace, the suggestion of a link between the *virtute informativa* and the *rationes seminales* seems to emerge. In any case, the topic of human generation considered by Dante, already from the description of the very first phase of conception, offers undeniable references to various philosophical, scientific and medical debates of the time. It might be said in general that the poet's position is closer to Aristotelianism in the first part of the description of human generation: from the initial spermatic foaminess to the coagulation of the blood and also during the vegetative and sensitive phases. However, even in the description of this phase, Dante's verses seem sometimes to distance themselves from Aristotle in favour of a stronger affiliation with positions of other thinkers and scientists such as Galen. Verses 40–42 locate the *virtute informativa* in the heart where the "sangue perfetto" arrives at the moment of the third digestion; this implies that the blood arrives at the heart already transformed and refined. In saying so, Dante agrees with the Galenic theory (also supported by Albertus Magnus in his *Quaestiones super de animalibus*) that sees blood first produced in the liver and then refined in the heart with the third digestion. This strictly medical observation marks Dante's proximity to Galen and therefore his distance from Aristotle (who claimed that blood was produced primarily in the heart). The suggestion that Dante is closer to Galen's position than to Aristotle's is strengthened by the presence of the adjective *perfectus* in the Latin translation of the Galenic text. In Book IV, especially, of his *De usu partium*, Galen used *perfectus* to describe the perfection of the blood generated by the liver at the end of the second digestion. In that same Book IV, which is dedicated to the medical exposition of generation, Galen further clarifies his scientific account using a simile drawn from the maturation of wine,

nature of the Logos, Wolfson points out: "Of the world, Christianity still continued to believe that God is the efficient cause, having created it out of nothing. Of the Logos, it has now come to believe that God is also the material cause, as it were, having generated it out of himself." (293)

¹³ Among the Augustinian works where the theme of the *rationes seminales* is treated, see especially *De genesi ad litteram*, XVII, and *De civitate Dei*, XII.

which requires innate heat: “Let us, then, compare the chycle to wine just pressed from the grapes and poured into casks, and still working, settling, fermenting, and bubbling with innate heat.”¹⁴

The embryo develops gradually, first in a vegetative and then in a sensitive soul. The latter will be the one that, as Dante points out, “imprende / ad organar le posse ond’è semente” (“then it proceeds to develop organs for the powers of which it is the germ”; *Purg.* XXV, 56-57)—where the verb “organar” indicates the formation and organization of the organs related to the sensitive activities already infused in the embryo. If the Dantean choices for describing the first phases of the formation of the human soul interestingly show the strong relationship with the intellectual debate of the time, at the moment of the infusion of the rational soul, as we shall see, the text clearly demands that the fundamental knot of poetic creation be included in the discourse about human generation. The moment of the development of the rational soul renders explicit the relation between canto XXV and the previous one (I am referring in particular to the verses dedicated to poetic creation and to the ones defining the poetics of the *dolce stil novo*). As we will see in the next section, the passage demands a necessary parallel reading of the infusion of the rational soul as a metaphor for poetic inspiration. Similarly, the relationship between the forming soul and the real world can be interpreted as a parallel for the relationship between writing and the real world.

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In *Purgatorio* XXV, Dante confronts and explains, through Statius’ words, the development of the rational soul. Verses 61-66, immediately preceding the actual explanation, affirm a necessary premise and clarify the essential unity and uniqueness of the human soul (even within its differentiated activities and faculties):

Ma come d’animal divegna fante,
non vedi tu ancor: quest’è tal punto,
che più savio di te fé già errante,
sì che per sua dottrina fé disgiunto

¹⁴ Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, 205. See also the Latin text: “vinum aliquod nuper quidem ex uvis expressum, sed infusum in dolia ab innataque caliditate adhuc elaboretur.” Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, IV.iii, in *Opera omnia*, 135.

da l'anima il possibile intelletto,
perché da lui non vide organo assunto. (Purg. XXV, 61-66)

(But how from animal it becomes a human being you do not see yet: this is such a point that once it made one wiser than you to err, so that in his teaching he separated the possible intellect from the soul because he saw no organ assumed by it.)

Dante distances himself from the Averroist theory according to which the intellective faculty is separated from the sensitive soul, therefore divided from and only eventually communicating with the human dimension. The poet's distance from the Averroist doctrine of the possible intellect is, as we shall see, extremely important in relation to the definition of the idea of poetry as well. In the *Convivio*, when describing the advent of the rational soul, Dante still maintained that the soul "riceve da la virtù del motore del cielo lo intelletto possibile" ("it receives the potential intellect from the power of the Mover of the Heavens" *Convivio*, 763).¹⁵ In the *Commedia*, Dante the poet refuses *in toto* that notion of the possible intellect and, on the thread of a return to theology, distances himself from his previous work and the natural philosophy which was proper to it.

Instead, the poet proceeds to explain the development of the rational soul by pointing out that God directly infuses in the embryo the intellective faculty and, in this way, completes the formation of the human soul:

lo motor primo a lui si volge lieto
 sopra tant'arte di natura, e spira
spirito novo, di virtù repleto,
che ciò che trova attivo qui, tira
 in sua sustanzia, e fassi un'alma sola,
che vive e sente e sé in sé rigira. (Purg. XXV, 70-75)

(the First Mover turns to it with joy over such art of nature, and breathes into it a new spirit replete with virtue, which absorbs that which is active there into its own substance, and makes one single soul which leaves and feels and circles on itself.)

Divine intervention is therefore fundamental to the birth of the rational soul. It is not the soul that, with autonomous movement, proceeds from the sensitive faculties and rises to the intellective dimension, but

¹⁵ *Convivio*, 763. English Translation: Dante. *The Banquet*. Trans. by Christopher Ryan. Saratoga, CA: Amma Libri, 1989.

rather the intellection itself that, with an opposite “movement,” descends into the soul because directly breathed into it by God. Evidently, then, Dante’s position on the culminating moment of the embryo’s formation seems again farther from the Aristotelian perspective and closer to the Platonic-Christian one that placed God’s act fundamentally at the origin of the intellectual completeness of the soul.¹⁶ The scientific level of the Dantean text indicates that the embryo is ready for the advent of rationality as soon as the articulation of the brain is complete: “sì tosto come al feto / l’articular del cerebro è perfetto” (*Purg.* XXV, 69), which is clearly later than the vegetative and sensitive phases. In this phase of fetal development, the proximity of Dante’s position to that of Galen becomes apparent. Unlike Aristotle, Galen posited the late appearance of the brain on the grounds that the brain is not necessary to the development of the limbs.¹⁷

The scientific precision of the Dantean text becomes even more significant once read as a metaphor and in correspondence with poetic creation. This crucial moment in the formation of the embryo as described in *Purgatorio* XXV is paralleled with the generation of writing in *Purgatorio* XXIV and just as crucial. John Freccero proposes a mirror reading of *Purgatorio* XXIV and XXV, and more specifically of the verses respectively dealing with poetic inspiration and with God’s ‘inspiration’ of the rational soul. Through a careful analysis of the texts, Freccero has shown quite clearly the correspondence between the discourse on the formation of the embryo and the discourse on poetic creation and has explained how, in verses 68-75 “as the soul is inspired in the fetus, so the inspiration of the poet comes from God.[...] the poetic corpus is sired by the poet, who provides the vehicle for God’s message.”¹⁸ Canto XXIV, crucial for the definition of the new Dantean idea of poetic creation, thus becomes a sort of clarifying anticipation of Statius’ digression. The lexical level marks the analogy with generation, starting with Buonagiunta’s words: “Ma dì s’io veggio qui colui che fore trasse le nove rime” (“But tell me if I see here him who brought forth the new rhymes”; *Purg.* XXIV, 49-50), where the

¹⁶ On the process of formation of the rational soul, Gragnolati specifies how it is not the vegetative and sensitive soul which acquire rational powers, but, on the contrary, “the rational soul created by God is the active and surviving agent, which absorbs in its substance the sensitive soul, thus acquiring vegetative and sensitive powers.” Gragnolati, “Embryology and Aerial Bodies,” 72.

¹⁷ See Bartoli/Ureni, “Controversie medico-biologiche.”

¹⁸ Freccero, “Manfred’s Wounds,” 202.

expression “trarre fore,” strictly related to the idea of birth, is used by Buonagiunta in reference to Dante’s poetic innovation. The pilgrim’s famous answer is just as fundamental as Buonagiunta’s words: “I’ mi son un che, quando / Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo / Ch’e’ ditta dentro vo significando” (“I am one who, when Love inspires me, takes note, and goes setting it forth after the fashion which he dictates within me”; *Purg.* XXIV, 52-54).¹⁹ In light of the lexical correspondences between these verses, the use of the adjective “novo” in canto XXIV (v. 57) defines Dante’s “rime” as the birth of poetry and, in canto XXV (v. 72) marks precisely the divine inspiration of the rational soul. In *Paradiso* I Dante isolates the reference to the highest part of the human being, the rational soul, saying “di me quel che creasti novellamente” (“that part of me which Thou didst create last”; *Par.* I, 73) thus underlining, once again, the divine creation of the soul and reintroducing the term *novellamente*. The crucial term “spirit” is inserted at the culminating point of the infusion of the rational soul and, within medieval tradition, pertains to a rather broad and articulated (but not undetermined) semantic area which also refers to medieval pneumatology. The reference to the same vital principle marks the formation of the soul at every stage up to the completion of the rational soul. The word *Spira* is noteworthy because this is the verb that refers to the inspiration both of the poet and of the new soul. At *Purgatorio* XXV, verse 75, the faculties of the soul, which at first “vive e sente,” culminate in the “sè in sè rigira” which is the expression of intelligence. Beside the Aristotelian notion of the tripartition of the soul, the idea of circularity in relation to the one of intelligence underlines the presence of the platonic tradition at the highest moment of the development of the soul.

In canto XXIV Dante clearly expresses his new conception of the poetic word directly inspired by *Amore*. Once he has recognized “colui che fore trasse le nove rime,” Buonagiunta defines Dante’s new poetry as “il nodo / che ’l Notaro e Guittone e me ritenne / di qua dal dolce stil novo ch’i’ odo!” (“the knot which kept the Notary, and Guittone, and me, short of the sweet new style that I hear”; *Purg.* XXIV, 55-57). The interpretation of the inspiration of the rational soul as a metaphor for poetic inspiration is strengthened by the declared innovation of Dante’s position. As mentioned earlier, the poet points out as erroneous the theory of possible intellect as separate from the individual soul. Refusing the possible intellect, Dante

¹⁹ On the inner inspiration by *Amore* in relation with the role of the spirit within the poet’s rational soul, see also Martinez. “The Pilgrim’s Answer.”

declares that the presence of the rational part, which is the highest point of poetic inspiration that then becomes word, is unavoidable in the individual soul. The Averroist theory of the possible intellect would have disrupted such a correspondence between poetic inspiration and human generation. Because the intellective dimension would have been excluded from the individual or from the poet, then, according to Averroism, the unity of the soul would have been lost and poetic inspiration could have not overcome the highest boundaries of the sensitive part of the soul. The sense of this philosophical specification in opposition to the radical Aristotelianism may assume a poetic value as well in the distance that the author of the *Commedia* seeks from his “primo amico” Cavalcanti, a distance that is not only philosophical but also poetic because Cavalcanti’s poetry was limited to the sensitive dimension. While indicating a formal correspondence of words and rhymes, Zygmunt Barański connects *Purgatorio* XXV and Cavalcanti’s canzone “Donna me prega” in order to signify the ideological and poetic distance that Dante seeks from Guido, precisely in order to define his own philosophical poetry as independent and different from Cavalcanti’s philosophical poetry.²⁰

The second part of Statius’ exposition (vv. 79 -108) continues to mark the relationship between the body and the soul while also discussing the path of the soul in the afterlife and the formation of the fictive body. These verses thus focus even more directly on the pilgrim’s initial question that had led to Statius’ digression. They describe the opposite course of the soul from the earthly dimension to the otherworldly one according to a process that is analogous to the formation of the embryo, inasmuch as it shows the same unaltered type of link between the soul and the body. Both thematic and poetic bonds (as the number of lexical correspondences will confirm) link the two parts of Statius’ speech.

At this point Statius explains in detail the formation of the fictive body, which comes about through the action of the power responsible for the gen-

²⁰ Barański, “‘Per similitudine di abito scientifico’.” The scholar focuses in particular on the connections between *Purgatorio* XXV and “Donna me prega,” where he concludes his reading stating that “while Dante clarifies the intimate ties between the sensitive and intellective souls, and the implications of their union for the condition of the individual in the other world (*Purg.* XXV, 67-75, 79-99), Cavalcanti, like his mentor Averroes, stresses the complete separation between the two (ll. 21-31), a disjuncture which eliminates the possibility of individual salvation.” Barański. “‘Per similitudine di abito scientifico,’” 33.

eration of both the embryo and the real body, the *virtù informativa*. Robert Klein thus points out the identity of the *virtute formativa* in the two phases: “The virtù informativa that transforms air into a specter is the very same power which, according to Aristotle, resides within the spirit of the semen (the classical “vehicle”) and shapes the body of the unborn child.”²¹

Verses 78-84 mark the detachment of the soul from the body and underscore the intermediate nature of the new dimension in which the soul, now a shade, “porta seco e l’umano e il divino” (“carries with it, in potency, both the human and the divine”; *Purg.* XXV, 81). It is in this way that, as it gets closer to the celestial dimension, the expression of the rational powers (which, according to Augustine, are memory, intellect and will) is opposed at the highest level to the silence of the vegetative and sensitive faculties:

l’altre potenze tutte quante mute;
memoria, intelligenza e volontade
in atto molto più che prima agute. (*Purg.* XXV, 82-84)

(the other faculties all of them mute, / but memory, intellect, and will/
far more acute in action than before)

Two moments from *Purgatory* V exemplify what I have just noted: namely the encounters of Dante the pilgrim with Jacopo del Cassero and Buonconte da Montefeltro. Thanks to the salvific power of one moment of repentance at the end of their respective lives, the two shades are not in Hell. Recounting their deaths, they therefore stress that last instant, between life and death. It is a moment of passage marking the separation of the soul from the body that immediately precedes the formation of the shade. In both characters’ account, the loss of the vegetative faculty appears clear: Jacopo’s wounds are less serious and the lost blood is venous (therefore it does not contain the *spiritus vitalis* which is peculiar to arterial blood), the process is then slower and allows him to see his own death. The loss of sensitive potency is instead evident in Buonconte: the verse “sanguinando il piano” (*Purg.* V, 99) and the site of the only wound (right in the *gola* where the carotid arteries are located) confirm the arterial nature of the lost blood. This means the immediate loss of the *virtus vitalis*: “quivi perdei la vista e la parola” (*Purg.* V, 100).²² Nevertheless, the memory that

²¹ Klein, “Spirito peregrino,” in *Form and Meaning*, 67.

²² For a more precise account of the death of Buonconte and Jacopo in relation to medieval medicine, see Bartoli/Ureni. “La morte cruenta.”

drives the account is *aguta* and Buonconte is thus able to continue narrating what happened to his inanimate body, completely abandoned by the soul, pointing out that the strength of the river's waters "sciolse al mio petto la croce / ch'ì fè di me quando il dolor mi vinse" (*Purg.* V, 126-127).

But let's return to canto XXV. Having defined the new dimension where the soul continues to live, Statius exposes in detail the formation of the fictive body thanks to the same *virtù formativa* responsible for the generation of the embryo. The parallelism with the lesson of embryology is explicit right from the *incipit* of the generation of the fictive body:

Tosto che loco lì la circumscrive,
la virtù formativa raggia intorno
così e quanto ne le membra vive. (*Purg.* XXV, 88-90)

(As soon as space encompasses it there, / the formative virtue radiates around, / in form and quantity as in the living members.)

The same formative power, therefore, spreads around itself the same vital principle according to the same process that determined the birth of the embryo: "raggia" anticipates the simile which, in the following verses, compares the formation of the fictive body with that of the rainbow, through the rays of the sun in the air still filled with rain. Actually, the consistency of the "aere, quand'è ben piorno" ("when it is full of moisture"; *Purg.* XXV, 91) expresses that of the fictive body so that the air surrounding the soul "si mette / in quella forma che in lui suggella / virtualmente l'alma che ristette" ("shapes itself in that form which is virtually imprinted on it by the soul that stopped there; *Purg.* XXV, 93-95). "Suggella" is a key word here, a fundamental lexical choice related to the action of the soul that imprints the surrounding air with its form and, in doing so, creates the shade and makes it visible. In the following verses (*Purg.* XXV, 97-99) the simile of "la fiammella" (which gives form to the fire) corresponds to the "spirit" which follows "sua forma novella." Besides, "organa" indicates the process of formation of the sensorial organs in the shade and it is a repetition of the same term used to express the same process related to the sensitive soul of the embryo.

Once he has explained the formation of the organs responsible for the sensitive activities of the fictive body, Statius returns to the pilgrim's initial question and explains how the souls in Purgatory have the possibility of sensation and consequently the ability to express those sensations that depend on the desires and "altri affetti" of the soul: "Secondo che ci affliggono i desiri / e li altri affetti, l'ombra si figura / e quest'è la cagion di che

tu miri” (*Purg.* XXV, 106-108). Here the lexical level becomes particularly significant, especially if we focus on the phrase “l’ombra si figura” (v. 107): the verb “figurarsi” that Statius uses to express how the shade acquires its own form recalls the semantic area related to the image. The proximity and the link between “ombra” and a verb such as “figurarsi,” which evokes the imaginative dimension, is extremely significant since it points to a relationship between imagination and formation of the fictive body, a connection that then becomes even more consistent (and interesting) precisely because it is situated in Purgatory, the “dreamlike medium,” or the realm of imagination that medieval theories considered a faculty of the sensitive soul. In Purgatory, according to medieval thought, the substance of the bodies is characterized by an intermediate nature.

In light of such correspondence, Dante’s choice of inserting here the description of the formation of the shade involves the problem of the formation of writing as well. It is as though, through direct proportion, the poets links the relationship between the poetry of *Purgatory* and the place Purgatory, between the fictive and the real body. The poetic word and the fictive body of Purgatory seem to share the same intermediate dimension, that of imagination. The poetry of *Paradiso*, on the other hand, tries to express a higher dimension, where the fictive intermediate purgatorial substance is transcended into a purely intellectual one and the imaginative activity, often insufficient for the paradisiacal experience, is overcome by a direct vision and knowledge of the Divine.

In *Purgatory* Statius explains the nature and the formation of the fictive body, generated and formed by the same power responsible for the generation of the embryo, what Dante, like Avicenna, calls *virtute formativa*. As we have seen, that first vital principle recalls the medieval Aristotelian and Platonic theories on the pneuma, or “spiritus,” a vehicle, the means of communication, for the soul between the corporeal and the astral dimensions. The presence of that “subtle body” leads the soul to a sort of return to its origin, the astral dimension which is the origin of the pneuma. According to Statius, in light of the nature of the power that shapes the embryo and the aerial body that is the “spirit,” the link between spirit and imagination becomes undeniable. Moreover, the medieval tradition related the pneuma, or spirit, to the activity of the imagination,²³ with the concept of *pneuma fantastikon*; as a result, the imaginative faculty belongs to that intermediate dimension, made of subtle substance, that in its journey after it leaves the body wraps itself around the soul. In his study

²³ See Chenu, “Spiritus, le vocabulaire de l’âme au XIIe siècle.”

“Spirito peregrino” Robert Klein partially compares Dantean shades to Neoplatonic daemons and reminds us of the fundamental role of the imagination to determine the characteristics of the aerial body; in the same way, the shades of *Purgatory* assume their own shape (“figura”) according to their desires. Klein writes:

The significant link between the specter and the subtle matter of the sperm is enough to show that Dante’s theory of the infernal body is connected with the philosophers’ demonology. Moreover, the aerial body which Dante attributes to the damned also characterizes Neoplatonic demons—so malleable, Porphyry claims, that they become what they imagine. This is exactly the teaching of Statius’s soul in *Purgatory*—“According as the desires and the other affections prick us, the shade takes its form” (*Purgatory*, XXV, 106-107)—a characteristic which, needless to say, is perfectly suited to the substance of a *spiritus phantasticus*.²⁴

The crucial importance of Statius/Dante’s choice of terminology in the use of *figura* is now evident, because of the link it expresses between the fictive body and the imagination. This is further evident if understood and included within the general metaphor of the poetic creation, in which case “figura” could allude both to the semantic area of the image and to the configuration, namely formation, of writing. In light of such possible terminological ambivalence between image and writing, the famous verses from canto XXIII of the *Paradiso* become highly relevant and ambivalent: “e così, figurando il Paradiso / convien saltar lo sacrato poema / come chi trova suo cammin reciso” (“and so, depicting Paradise, the sacred poem must needs make a leap, even as one who finds his way cut off”; *Par. XXIII*, 61-63). The verb *figurare* indicates here the act of writing that should translate the paradisiacal image into words.

The emphasis on lexical recalls within *Purgatorio* XXV reveals, and confirms, the thematic correspondence between the two parts of Statius’ exposition. This correspondence is even more valuable if seen within the general metaphor of the act of writing that involves both parts. The apparent bipolarity of Statius’ speech, that it, between his words on the generation of the embryo and those on the formation of the shade, is extended to include a third dimension in the generation of writing, whereby the three aspects are interactive and participate in a sort of reciprocal osmotic relation: through the action of the *virtute informativa*, a metaphor for the poetic creation, linking embryology and the shade, the fictive body is

²⁴ Klein, “Spirito peregrino,” 67.

included in what Freccero defines “the unitary source of spiritual inspiration, the soul of the fetus or the spirit of the text.”²⁵

* * *

The correspondence that ties together, in one knot and in the same dimension, the process generating the embryo, the substance of the fictive body, and the poetry of *Purgatorio*, underlines the fundamental nature of the imaginative power. This same intermediate nature seems to embrace the substance both of the fictive bodies and of the writing of *Purgatorio*, the realm of imagination: the imaginative power of the poet produces the text of *Purgatorio*, writing which somehow shares the substance of the fictive body. That intermediate nature participates in both the corporeal and the incorporeal, as does the activity of the imagination.

The text is what the poet is able to express, but his inspiration comes directly from God. The specularity that links *Purgatorio* XXIV and XXV identifies the moment of divine inspiration of the rational soul with the moment of poetic inspiration (also from God) and thus indicates that the dimension of poetic inspiration is precisely rational. The infusion of the rational soul is a metaphor for poetic inspiration. Consequently, the clear distance from the Averroist theory of the possible intellect assumes a central value in Dante’s conception of poetic creation. The unity and uniqueness of the human soul cannot be renounced, the rational part of the soul being the one that receives *Amore’s* inner dictation. Poetic inspiration is therefore defined as intellectual. Within these cantos, crucial to the Dantean idea of poetry and to the consequent definition of his “sweet new style,” the poet emphasizes the importance and the role of the rational part of the human soul as the highest one and, at the same time, very clearly defines it, in contraposition with the exclusively sensitive activities of the soul, as “memoria, intelligenza e volontade.” The exact quotation from Augustine²⁶ identifies the rational soul with the trinity of the Spirit, comprised of memory, intelligence, and will. The rational soul, infused by God, indicates the dimension for poetic inspiration: the Augustinian trin-

²⁵ Freccero, “Manfred’s Wounds,” 204.

²⁶ Augustine defines the highest point reached by the soul in its path towards the beatific vision, as the trinitarian interaction among the rational powers of memory, intelligence, and will. See Augustine, *De Trinitate*, X, XIV, and XV.

ity of the Spirit, and therefore memory, pertains to the same intellectual dimension. As a result, this memory, within the rational soul, participates in poetic inspiration. This correspondence becomes crucial in the *Commedia* when Dante tries to show the existence and the role of a purely intellectual memory. *Purgatorio* XXV thus becomes an authorization to investigate the presence of that Augustinian notion of intellectual memory in Dante's poem, and especially in the *Paradiso*. Moreover, the connection with *Purgatorio* XXIV suggests the participation of that inner, rational memory in the process of poetic creation at the moment of inspiration. Memory participates in the direct inspiration that the poet receives within his rational soul. As a part of the precisely intellectual trinity of the Spirit, the memorative faculty shares the same dimension of the inner word dictated (and inspired) to the poet by *Amore*. In book XV of the *De Trinitate*, Augustine asserts that there is a word, as yet unsaid and unwritten, prior to language, an inner word that is born together with consciousness. Just before that, Augustine had said that "When it [the mind] is turned to itself by thought, then arises a trinity, in which last be identified, for it is formed from thought itself, and the will which unites both."²⁷ That is, the inner verb "precedes all the signs by which it is signified, and is begotten by the knowledge which remains in the mind when this same knowledge is spoken inwardly, just as it is."²⁸

The spirit is an image of God, just as that inner word is an image of God's Word manifested by the Incarnation. Just as the human inner word becomes voice, so does the Word of God become flesh. The formation of the "external" word is an analogue of the incarnation of the Word of God. Augustine explains it as follows:

For just as our word in some way becomes a bodily sound by assuming that in which it may be manifested to the senses of men, so the Word of God was made flesh by assuming that in which He might also be manifested to the senses of men. And just as our word becomes a sound and is not changed into a sound, so the Word of God indeed becomes flesh,

²⁷ "Ad per hoc quando ad se ipsam cogitatione convertitur, fit trinitas, in qua jam et verbum posit intelligi: formatur quipped ex ipsa cogitatione, voluntate utrumque jungente." Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV, 10.13. English ed. by Gareth Matthews, 152-153.

²⁸ "[...] omnia quibus significantur signa praecedit, et gignitur de scientia quae manet in animo, quando eadem scientia intus dicitur, sicuti est." Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV, 11.20. English ed. by Gareth Matthews, 188.

but far be it from us that it should be changed into flesh.²⁹

Quoting Augustine, Dante defines the rational soul as formed by memory, intellect and will: the correspondence between the divine infusion of the rational part of the soul, and the divine inspiration of the poetic word within that rational soul, connects also the process of the formation of the word to the intellectual dimension where memory exists together with intelligence and will.

Purgatorio XXIV and XXV authorize the investigation of the presence of a peculiar notion of intellectual memory in the *Commedia* and, at the same time, allow us to relate it to the formation of the word and the inspiration of writing. That concept of memory as separated and independent from the sensitive activities of the soul is consistent with the intellectual dimension that marks the pilgrim's path through the *Paradiso*. In the fictive world of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, memory seems linked to the sensitive soul. In the *Paradiso*, however, where the subject is the transcending of the human (*trasumanare*) what is represented is the constant presence of purely intellectual time. If such a memory can be found in the *Commedia*, it will have its most appropriate place in the *Paradiso*, where an Augustinian idea of intellectual memory seems to be associated with the pilgrim's ascent (in light of the same purely intellectual dimension). That ascent aims for a direct intellectual vision and for a direct and unmediated knowledge of the divine essence, as the pure angelic intelligences are capable of doing.

The same *iter* of the soul toward an unmediated knowledge of God at the moment of the beatific vision is also investigated by Augustine (especially in the *De Trinitate*). The Augustinian speculation, articulated as it is in many works, always places memory inside the rational soul. The Augustinian memory, an essential part of the "inner" man, contains in its magnitude everything known to the soul and, by an act of will, enables the soul to recuperate truths that are not directly perceived by thought. The act of recollection is a completely intellectual act that can have an image as its object, but need not. Unlike Aristotelian memory, which is necessarily linked to imaginative activity, Augustinian memory can contribute to direct knowledge because it functions wholly within a rational dimension.

²⁹ "Ita enim verbum nostrum vox quodam modo corporis fit, assumendo eam in qua manifestaretur sensibus hominum; sicut Verbum Dei caro factum est, assumendo eam in qua et ipsum manifestaretur sensibus hominum. Et sicuti verbum nostrum fit vox, nec mutatur in vocem; ita Verbum Dei caro quidam factum est, sed absit ut mutaretur in carnem." Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV, 11.20. English ed. by Gareth Matthews, 187.

In the *Confessions* Augustine already shows the presence of knowledge “not imbibed through the senses as images, but without the intervention of images” (“quorum non per sensus haurimus imagines, sed sine imaginibus”),³⁰

In the *De Trinitate*, Augustine investigates the human soul and its epistemological path toward the Beatific Vision. That *iter* reflects at every stage the model of the divine Trinity, from its initial moment, marked by sense experience, to the final stage, the contemplation of God. The soul’s journey conveyed by Augustine in his *De Trinitate* shares the same gradual ascent of the paradisiacal climb as Dante’s *Comedy*.

Starting from Book XI of the *De Trinitate*, memory is part of the inner trinities: at first as a faculty intended to keep the images of what is known, but afterwards as an exclusively rational power, freed from imagination, and indissoluble from intelligence and will in the trinity of the Spirit. The trinity of the spirit—the only one that is capable of receiving God (*capax Dei*)—mirrors the Trinity: the human spirit, potentially able to reach God, will one day see Him directly, “face to face,” in the final vision. At the moment of the divine vision, the human spirit, comprised of memory, intellect and will, can achieve direct knowledge of God. The “rational memory” (which, in terms of Aristotelian theory, would be a contradiction) can aspire to the contemplation of the Divine.

In order to underline the exclusively rational/intellectual dimension of the human spirit’s trinity, Augustine insists upon the independence of the spirit’s activity from both space and time. Thus, in Book XIV of the *De Trinitate*, Augustine speaks of the spirit that turns inwardly not through spatial movement, but rather through what he refers to as “incorporeal conversion.”³¹ All temporal sequence is excluded from the dimension of the spirit: in the lower trinitarian dimensions of the soul, there is a distance between the formation of the memory and the deliberate act of recollection that has the effect of linking memory to human time and hence to human frailty. The human spirit is, however, aware of itself through the simultaneous and constant activity of all its three elements in a continuous presence. Augustine’s words are precise:

³⁰ Augustine, *Confessionum*, X, 11.

³¹ “Proinde restat ut aliquid pertinens ad ejus naturam sit conspectus ejus, et in eam, quando se cogitate, non quasi per loci spatium, sed incorporeal conversion revocetur.” Augustine, *De Trinitate* XIV, 6. See English translation: “It remains, therefore, that its sight is something belonging to its nature, and the mind is recalled to it when it thinks of itself, not as it were by movement in space, but by an incorporeal conversion.” English ed. by Gareth Matthews, 145.

We made the following discovery about the nature of the mind through its own memory, understanding, and will: just as it always knows and always wills itself, so at the same time it always remembers itself, always understands itself, and always loves itself, even though it does not always think itself to be different from those things which are not that which it itself is. Therefore it is always difficult to distinguish in it the memory of itself from the understanding of itself. For it would almost seem as if they were not two things, but two different names for one and the same thing, since they are so closely united together in the mind, that the one does not precede the other in time.³²

In Book XIV then, Augustine writes: “wherefore, as in past things, that is called memory which makes it possible for them to be recalled and remembered, so in a present thing, which the mind is to itself, that is not unreasonably to be called memory, by which the mind is present to itself, so that it can be understood by its own thought, and both can be joined together by the love of itself.”³³ As an element of the spirit, memory overcomes the limitations of human temporality. Temporal sequence is transcended by a constant present, a purely intellectual time.

In the *Commedia* the pilgrim’s mind, through its paradisiacal ascent, aspires to overcome its human limits and to reach perfect beatitude and ultimate knowledge in the contemplation of the Divine. The ascent of the mind is thus marked by the strengthening of its human faculties, necessary in order to be able to sustain the paradisiacal experience. Such a strengthening, as purely intellectual, comprises the rational memory derived from the Augustinian speculation. The following examples will elucidate the presence of this specific concept of memory in Dante’s *Paradiso*.

³² “Mentem quippe ipsam in memoria et intelligentia et voluntate suimetipsius talem reperiēbamus, ut quoniam semper se nosse semperque se ipsam velle comprehendebatur, simul etiam semper sui meminisse, semperque se ipsam intelligere et amare comprehenderetur; quamvis non semper se cogitare discretam ab eis quae non sunt, quod ipsa est: ac per hoc difficile in ea dignoscitur memoria sui, et intelligentia sui. Quasi non sint haec duo, sed unum duobus vocalibus appelletur, sic apparet in ea re ubi valde ista conjuncta sunt, et aliud alio nullo praeceditur tempore.” Augustine, *De Trinitate*, X, 12. English ed. by Gareth Matthews, 59.

³³ “Quapropter sicut in rebus praeteritis ea memoria dicitur, qua fit ut valeant recoli et recordari: sic in re praesenti quod sibi est mens, memoria sine absurditate dicenda est, qua sibi praesto est ut sua cogitatione posit intelligi, et utrumque sui amore conjungi.” Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV, 11. English ed. by Gareth Matthews, 153.

Dante's work presents a double conception of memory: imagination and fantasy, on the one hand, and pure intelligence, that is, direct knowledge, on the other. The explicit textual references in the poem to memory emphasize the limits of the poet's memory, which cannot recuperate the ultimate intellectual experience lived by the pilgrim in *Paradiso*. The experience is said to be ineffable. *Paradiso* I, 5-6 is emblematic on this point:

[...] e vidi cose che ridire
nè sa nè può chi di là sù discende;
 perchè appressando sè al suo disire,
nostro intelletto sì profonda tanto,
che dietro la memoria non può ire. (*Par.* I, 5-9)

("and I saw things that he / who from that height descends / forgets or can / not speak; for nearing its desired end, / our intellect sinks into an abyss / so deep that memory fails to follow it.)

In his article "Perchè 'dietro la memoria non può ire'," Bruno Nardi analyses these verses in order to prove that memory is a faculty separated from intellect: incapable of the deepest intellectual experience, memory lags behind the intellect. According to Nardi, the limits of memory, as declared in verse 9, refer to the Aristotelian localization of memory in the sensitive part of the soul, and thus allow us to ascribe Dante's conception of memory to the Aristotelian theory. In claiming this, however, Nardi mistakes the poet for the pilgrim, referring both memory and intellect to Dante the pilgrim in the poem. While the inadequacy of memory is certainly expressed in this passage, it is important to note that it is not attributed to the pilgrim, but rather to the poet who, as a human being, cannot remember and express the plenitude of the experience he has undergone.

In *Paradiso* XXIII the pilgrim cannot remember the vision of Christ. Dante the poet expresses this with a simile: "Io era come quei che si risente / di visione obliterata e che s'ingegna / indarno di ridurlasi alla mente" ("I was as one that wakes / from a forgotten dream, and who strives / in vain to bring it back to mind" *Par.* XXIII, 49-51). The dream dimension introduces and underlines the presence of the imaginative activity associated with memory. In the course of the poem memory, understood as a faculty separated from the intellect, is represented as linked to the imagination and thus not as part of the highest of intellectual activities.

On the other hand, as this article has shown so far, there emerges the possible, parallel presence of a precisely intellectual memory, elevated from the sensitive dimension of the soul until it coincides with the faculty of

intelligence. A link is formed between memory and intellect, in an act of knowledge that is independent of imaginative activity. Such identification between memory and mind/intellect,³⁴ that is also evidenced by *Purgatorio* XXV, leads through the cantos of the *Paradiso* and hints at one intellectual knot, including rational memory, expressed by the semantic field related to mind, intellect or vision (intended obviously as intellectual vision) rather than the more explicit references to the term “memory” or to the action of remembering. The language of imagination distinguishes and alludes to a memory that is marked by the same limits as *fantasia*; on the other hand the language of intellectual vision may show such memory to be so linked to intelligence as to become indistinguishable from it.

In this way the repetition of the verb “vidi” which introduces paradisiacal visions implies such an idea of intellectual ascent toward complete knowledge. Besides the failures of the mind’s potencies, there are the passages expressing the higher degree of purely intellectual power reached by the pilgrim and manifested in his higher ability of sustaining and understanding the paradisiacal visions. In *Paradiso* XIV the intellectual strengthening of the pilgrim’s faculties is expressed by the strengthened ability to see with his eyes, where the intellectual ascent corresponds to the pilgrim’s cosmological ascent into a higher heaven. It is an ascent that is also a transformation and that Dante describes with the word “translato”: “Quindi ripreser li occhi miei virtute / a rilevarsi; e vidimi translato / sol con mia donna in più alta salute” (“Therefrom my eyes regained power to raise themselves again, and I saw myself, alone with my lady, translated to a more exalted blessedness” *Par.* XIV, 82-84). The passages from *Paradiso* XXX where Dante first describes the disorientation of his sight and then those where he points out the strengthening of his faculties as he comes closer to experiencing the Divine are also of central importance:

³⁴ Such intimate correspondence between memory and mind characterizes various moments of the medieval speculation: some of the passages from Augustine’s *De Trinitate* quoted above already mark this. On the thread of Augustinian theories, also the speculation of other authors such as Saint Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, or Albertus Magnus, underscores the presence of a kind of memory which is independent from the Aristotelian notion of a sensitive faculty and which, on the contrary, belongs to the same purely rational dimension of the mind. See, for instance, the third book of Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* which constantly refers to the Augustinian trinity of the spirit; see also: Thomas Aquinas. In *Quaestiones disputatae*, Quaestio X; Albertus Magnus, *De Homine*, Isidore, *Etym.*, XI I 11-13.

Come subito lampo che discetti
li spiriti visivi, sì che priva
da l'atto l'occhio di più forti obietti,
così mi circumfulse luce viva,
e lasciommi fasciato di tal velo
del suo fulgor, che nulla m'appariva. (*Par.* XXX, 46-51)

(As a sudden flash of lightning which scatters / the visual spirits so that
it robs / the eye of the sight of the clearest objects, / so round about me
there shone a vivid light / and left me so swathed in the veil / of its efful-
gence that nothing was visible to me.)

Non fur più tosto dentro a me venute
queste parole brevi, ch'io compresi
me sormontar di sopr'a mia virtute;
e di novella vista mi raccesi
tale, che nulla luce è tanto mera,
che li occhi miei non si fosser difesi. (*Par.* XXX, 55-60).

(No sooner had these brief words come within me / than I comprehend-
ed / that I was surmounting beyond my own power, / and such new
vision was kindled in me / that there is no light so bright/ that my eyes
could not have withstood it.)

The increasing proximity to the Divine means the increasing proxim-
ity to a perfect knowledge that transcends human limits and becomes
immediate understanding and beatitude in the direct vision of God. Such
a knot of intellectual relations comprehends the peculiar notion of a ratio-
nal memory and allows the equivalence between such memory and
unmediated knowledge of the paradisiacal dimension.

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