

ABSTRACTS (in alphabetic order)

Asbjørn Bjørnes

“Del gran disio.” Hope and Orientation in the *Commedia*

Hope is an important theme and structural element in the *Commedia* – among other important themes and elements (hopelessness, salvation, politics, moral aspects, etc.). On his journey through *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* Dante the wanderer has hope of coming to Paradise, the goal of his journey. But he has not yet reached his eternal destination. Therefore he needs the Word of God for guidance and instruction. The “miglior acque” (“better waters”) in *Purgatorio* 1.1 indicate Dante’s journey towards Mount Purgatory and the hope which is connected to that mountain.

In my essay, I will give examples of hope in the *Commedia* and of how Dante’s hope is deeply rooted in the Bible – directly through citations from the Scriptures, or indirectly through biblical allusions. Here it is also interesting to look at how Dante’s hope is firmly embedded in a political context.

Dante’s journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise can be seen as a quest for “the good.” This can, in light of Charles Taylor’s book *Sources of the Self* (1989), be said to constitute a central aspect of Dante’s quest and the constitution of the wanderer’s identity.

Along with examples of hope, I want to use the Bible and Taylor’s *Sources* as a basis for describing Dante’s quest for “the good.” Taylor writes: “[I]n order to have an identity, we need an orientation to the good. ... In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going. ... My life always has this degree of narrative understanding.”

Dante’s use of biblical language is also very important here if we are to understand the protagonist’s hope, orientation, movement, and identity in the *Commedia*. I want to consider these elements in light of what Paul John Eakin calls “self-narration” (*How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, 1999). Eakin points out that there is a close connection between narration and identity. He writes that “life writing – whatever else it is or may be – certainly involves the assumption that the self and its experiences may somehow be represented in a text. ... Narrative and identity are performed simultaneously ... in a single act of self-narration.” So when Dante takes on his journey through the three realms of the afterlife, *hope* is the keyword to a deeper understanding of the wanderer’s quest, identity, orientation, experience, and narrative understanding.

Anders Cullhed

“O imaginativa!” On Dante’s Use of the Concept of Imagination

Dante made use of the concept of imagination from the very start of his literary career. In *Vita nuova* it adheres quite strictly to the common medieval *virtus imaginativa*: a source of memories, dreams and apparitions, a faculty of the soul inherited from ancient Aristotelian philosophy, sometimes (mainly in Platonic contexts) associated with poetry or fiction, generally criticized from an epistemological point of view. In the *Comedy*, however, Dante transcends the medieval understanding of this idea: he transforms it into a truly visionary capacity guiding his work. Consequently, the allegorizing strategy in Dante’s famous *Letter to Can Grande*, an important external instrument for gaining authority for the bold enterprise of the *Comedy*, finds a correspondence within the poem itself: the promotion of imaginativa or fantasia to the *apex mentis* (mental summit) of the creative poet.

Unn Falkeid

Dante's *Monarchia* and Universal Freedom

Dante's *Monarchia* was written in a period when the conception of freedom was no longer limited to the moral, individual compass. In the fourteenth century, during the Avignon papacy and the Pope's claim of *plenitudo potestatis*, freedom also became a political issue. The bull *Unam sanctam* by Boniface VIII from 1302 was followed by a storm of treatises and pamphlets from the papal curia as well as from canon lawyers or the so-called decretalists defending the idea of the Pope's fullness of power while the curia in Avignon was all the while gaining political and economic power. However, the critique was strong, and it came from different groups both within and outside the Church, with figures such as Dante, Marsilius of Padua, William of Ockham, Francesco Petrarch, Catherine of Siena, Birgitta of Sweden, and John Wycliffe.

In my paper, I will discuss how Dante's *Monarchia*, as one of the first and most original counterattacks, came to play a central role in the fourteenth century resistance to the papal curia in Avignon. As the treatise demonstrates, at the heart of the battle lay the question of power; the source of spiritual as well as terrestrial power, and more importantly: the limits of the power and the freedom of the citizens.

William Franke

**“Il Trapassar del Segno.” Language and Transcendence
in Dante’s *Paradiso***

The nodal points of greatest relief, most sharply pinpointing the theme of transgression in the *Divine Comedy*, are Ulysses’s journey beyond the Pillars of Hercules and Adam’s trespass against the commandment of God in Eden. The episodes are related in cantos 26 of the *Inferno* (“dov’Ercule *segnò* i suoi riguardi,” 108) and of the *Paradiso* (“il trapassar del *segno*,” 117). They are linked in the semantic texture of the poem by forms of the word “sign.” That transgression in these verbal formulations should figure as a trespassing of the *sign* is a linguistic hint that invites reflection. The *Paradiso* effects a transgression and even a deconstruction of the sign in a journey beyond the limits of language that calls to be interpreted in terms of semiotic theory.

Beyond the poem’s suggestive emblems (Arachne, Marsyas, Phaethon, Icarus, etc.) hinting at a fascination with transgression beneath Dante’s overt condemnation of it, there is another, prior sense in which transgression emerges as Dante’s essential gesture. His work as poet culminates in the *Paradiso* in a transcendence of language towards the mystical experience of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnate Son. Dante conveys the experience in and through language and specifically through the *transgression* of language, inasmuch as such expression requires a violation of the normal semiological statute and function of the sign. He uses language in ways that turn intensively in the direction of self-reference or direct self-manifestation. Such language transgresses against what was considered the proper function of language by standard medieval authorities. Where the sign fails – that is the point where the type of significance peculiar to the *Paradiso* is achieved.

This transcendence of the system of language models semiotically Dante’s social and political transgressiveness by appeal to transcendent authority in his conflicts with worldly powers like that of the popes. Dante not only transgresses specific spiritual and secular authorities: he subverts the very system in terms of which distinctions of law and its violation can be made. Appealing to a transcendent authority embodied immanently within the historical order is a recipe for ineluctable transgression against worldly power structures. Is authentic Christianity then bound to be transgressive? Thinking through transgression of this order is aided by theories of Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot. This offers an alternative to the vast tradition of esoteric readings of Dante as transgressively heterodox.

Christina Heldner

Symmetry Breaking in Dante's *Divine Comedy*

For anybody concerned with Dante and his *Divine Comedy* from the point of view of language and style, the theme of transgression imposed by this conference may seem a little bit out of the way, the reason being – of course – the strong religious and moral connotations connected with the term “transgression.” As a matter of fact, this very term will immediately make you think of things like trespassing and being tormented by guilt, or at least breaking taboos and being “politically incorrect,” which are all relevant for discussing structures of content in Dante's *Comedy*. But would it really make sense to approach Dante's style in terms of transgression?

The answer is that perhaps it would, after all, provided that you take a small conceptual step towards the analogous but slightly more neutral idea of symmetry breaking (inspired by last year's Nobel Prize in Physics) and use it metaphorically. Given the fact that, on the level of its compositional form, the *Divine Comedy* is a work resting upon a number of strong, rule-governed symmetries (yielding entities like canticas, cantos, stanzas, regular rhyme schemes, and lines of eleven syllables), I shall be arguing that another distinctive property of Dante's style is its use of certain specific, small-scale, non-symmetric “variation” features, whose function seems to be to “transgress” the overall symmetry patterns. A double effect is achieved by means of such stylistic devices: preventing a sensation of monotony in the reader and enhancing the poem's aesthetic qualities.

In my paper I shall briefly show how such variation features are used to reduce symmetry by introducing chance into the texture of the poem. More specifically, I will show how they introduce formal properties in a way contrary to probabilistic expectation and yet in accordance with specific principles. The variation processes acting on “the system” may then be shown to result in a less probable and more ordered state than the one initially described, which seems to me to offer an interesting parallel between the two apparently unrelated worlds of poetry and physics, and, at the same time, a kind of recognition of Dante's unique capacity for creating in a literary work of art patterns both unexpected and breathtaking.

Tzortzis Ikonomou

Dante's Visionaries. The *Comedy*, Transgression and Observance in the Eighteenth Century

The great impact that the *Comedy* had on Italian literature is well known. It is also known that the poetic form of the vision inspired many writers – from the likes of Petrarca (*Triumphs*) and Boccaccio (*Amorosa Visione*) to the minor writers – in the fourteenth and the fifteenth century. There are few traces of these poetic expressions in the next two centuries, but the beginning of the eighteenth century saw a revival of the interest in Dante and the *Divine Comedy*. In 1739, Gaspare Leonarducci wrote his “La Provvidenza,” that describes a vision in Dantesque tercets, and Alfonso Varano followed with twelve visions also in tercets. This went on until the first half of the nineteenth century, but the results were often mediocre. These writers were not only trying to imitate Dante but very often tried to imitate the imitators, especially Varano. Writers such as Vincenzo Monti, Alessandro Manzoni, Ugo Foscolo, and other minor writers, wrote visions in tercets in their youth in an attempt to distinguish themselves as poets.

My objective is initially to show why this revival of Dante took place in this particular time, why it appealed to so many writers and why they eventually gave up this poetic form. No visions are recorded after 1840. My main objective is to show how the *Comedy* was being used in the eighteenth century: Do they use particular words that appear in Dante with the same meaning and significance? Is the subject matter similar? Is it a religious work or a secular one? I will be able to distinguish if, and to what extent, the imitator is transgressing or if he is obedient to the *Comedy* of Dante.

Pekka Kuusisto

**The Modes of *Stupore* and *Maraviglia* of the Lower Purgatory
as Generic Images of Dante's Poetics of Inversion**

Dante's poetics of inversion in the *Commedia* has received heightened attention especially in the North American criticism of the recent decades. In these studies, the traditional stylistic reading of the forms of syntactic dislocation has been invigorated through approaches highlighting the parallel between microcosmic and other allegorical meanings of the trope of inversion (cf. Freccero; Durling with Martinez) evident in Dante's poetic language.

This presentation discusses the generic modes and images of the lower purgatory cantos that signal – so my argument goes – the large-scale geographico-cosmological inversion of Dante's medieval, anthropomorphic universe that takes place along the pilgrim's journey. These include modalities and images that surface with the vocabulary of *maraviglia* and *stupore* – amazement and wonder. As Patrick Boyde (1981) notes, through an interesting inversion of the subject and object positions of the ghost story, this vocabulary becomes a dominant theme at this point. Whereas the *Inferno* especially strengthens the sense of reality of Dante's hereafter with its embodied existence of the condemned souls and other paradoxical features, on the lower purgatory it is the shadow casting, living body of the pilgrim that is the focus instead, drawing the attention of the souls of the dead “per maraviglia/ pur me, pur me” (*Purg.* 5.8–9), with “astonishment at me alone, at me alone.”

My main argument is that the lower purgatorial reversals of the cognitive positions of the observing, embodied consciousness on the one hand, and observed bodiless soul on the other, with their respective, obsessive recalls of amazement and wonder shading into horror, are concentrated generic images of the evolving poetics of microcosmic inversion by means of which Dante eventually turns his universe – with its semantic poles of the body and soul – inside-out during the pilgrim's passing from the physical to the transcendental reality in the final cantos of the poem. They would thus build on and reflect upon the initial moment of inversion the pilgrim undergoes while passing by the center of the earth in the *Inferno* 34. But they would also anticipate the image of the flayed body of Marsyas the satyr recalled in the beginning of the pilgrim's ascent to the planetary heavens (*Par.*1.20), which prepares for the topological inversion that modern day mathematicians have found to take place on the rim of Dante's cosmos.

Päivi Mehtonen

Moral Immorality. Poetics, Ineffability and Obscenity

What will the Latins do? Horace, your poems are disappearing. Virgil, weep aloud! Look, a goat is driving you into exile. (*Moriuht*)

Medieval literature is often metapoetic: its main characters are writers and it likes to comment on its own rhetorical and literary devices. Famous examples are Dante's *Vita Nuova* and *Divine Comedy* but unlike Dante, many medieval lover-poets never reached paradise – or even a prominent place in literary history.

One of these others is the much earlier fictional poet and lover Moriuht, the Irish main character in the satire *Moriuht* by the Norman Warner of Rouen (*floruit* 996–1026). Like Dante the character, Moriuht searches for his lady in an eventful series of adventures. He, too, believes he is following in the footsteps of the great Roman poet Virgil. However, Moriuht is a *magnum et mirabile monstrum*, a travesty of a lover-writer. In contrast to the ethereal objects of desire of the later troubadours or Dante, we find the more carnal desires of Moriuht.

This paper will explore these fictional lover-writers in the context of medieval (narrative) quests for love in which themes of religion, sexuality and propriety were often shrouded in the guise of comedy or satire. Through a series of grotesque adventures, Warner of Rouen tackles a number of learned topics, the art of poetry in particular. Not unlike Dante's poetry centuries later, the narrative structure of *Moriuht* applies the ineffability topos; the at times immoral Moriuht is (allegedly) beyond the narrator's linguistic grasp (*indicibilis*). These comedies and "ineffable" love stories of Warner and Dante will be read here in the comparative framework of "grotesque mysticism" (Gurievich) and "double transgression" (Deleuze), as they make visible the limits of narration, poetics and desire – both in terms of language and ethics. Unlike Dante the character, Moriuht is an antihero on both levels; he is presented as *anti-ethicus*, a moral monster, and *anti-lyricus*, an atrociously bad poet.

Ülar Ploom

Some Considerations of the *Incipit* and *Explicit* in Dante's *Divine Comedy*

The aim of this paper is to study some aspects of beginning and ending in the *Divine Comedy*. Apart from the traditional problematics of research, e.g. the questions concerning the application of the protasis and dedications, the focus will be on the mythologizing and codifying aspects which according to J. Lotman are connected with the problematic of fixing the frame in a work of art which the *fabula* aspect tends to break. According to this theory it is evident that as to the *fabula* or the story, the beginning and the end of it do not coincide with those laying the setting for the *fabula* to evolve. On the other hand, it is interesting to consider and compare the mythologizing *incipit* and *explicit* as the organising principles of the text in relation to the evolvement of the story (stories) between the three Canticles and possibly in all cantos or even inside episodes as microstories within single cantos. Of special interest is the relation of the usually concrete images of canto beginnings and the emblematically allegorical “nel mezzo del cammin” and “l'Amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.”

H. K. Riikonen

Erich Auerbach – His Contribution to the Study of Dante

Although Erich Auerbach (1892–1957) studied several important European authors and thinkers (e.g. Baudelaire, Pascal and Vico), his chief interest was Dante. After his doctoral dissertation, *Zur Technik der Frührenaissancenovelle in Italien und Frankreich*, published in 1921, he wrote his first major monograph about the Italian poet, *Dante als Dichter der irdischen Welt* (1929), which was published four years after the second edition of Karl Vossler's influential monograph *Die Göttliche Komödie. Entwicklungsgeschichte und Erklärung*. In an important chapter in his best-known book, *Mimesis. Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (1946), Auerbach discussed Dante, while in his last major book, *Literatursprache und Publikum in der lateinischen Spätantike und im Mittelalter* (1958), Dante is the author most often mentioned. Moreover, Auerbach discussed Dante in several minor essays and reviews (some of them published together in *Neue Dantestudien*, 1944).

The aim of this paper is to discuss Auerbach in the tradition of Dantean scholarship (cf. Vossler's book) and the Romance philology in Germany and to point out his own contribution to the study of Dante and medieval literature in general. As Dante is also discussed in Chapter 17 of Ernst Robert Curtius's (1886–1956) famous book, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948), some comparisons will be made between Auerbach and Curtius. Special attention will be paid to their key concepts (*figura, passio, Stilmischung* and *Stiltrennung, topos, exemplum*) and to their different notions of literary history. The paper will also give some information about Auerbach's influence in the field of Dantean studies and his reception in the Nordic countries.

Hanne Roer

Transgressing Dante. Fascist Dante Criticism

The fascist regime was celebrated as the revival of ancient Rome, and Mussolini posed as the second Augustus. Dante did not easily fit into this overall picture of the fascist regime, although fascist intellectuals such as Mazzini and Bottai praised his heroic nationalism. After all, Dante was medieval and a profound catholic. The political theatre staged by Italian fascists celebrated masculine, Roman virtues and the blood of the fallen heroes.

The historian Emilio Gentile has shown that Italian fascism was a coherent system of myths and rituals. Gentile thus opposes the traditional view of Italian fascism as an eclectic jumble of ideas and claims that it should be understood as a civic religion. Gentile points, among other things, to the fascist imitation of Catholic symbols such as the bell tower adorning the fascist headquarters in Italian cities. For example, in the fascist colony Sabaudia, there is a “Torre di Dante” in the central square. The fascists thus paid reverence to the legendary poet and at the same time assimilated him, as well as the image of the church tower, into the fascist aesthetics of the ideal, heroic city.

In this paper, I am not arguing that Dante played a crucial role in the official fascist propaganda. Dante was indeed invoked in fascist songs, and Mussolini was identified with the *veltro* of *Inferno* I, but here I should like to look at some examples of Dante criticism. What I want to exemplify is the way Dante criticism, or rather marginal examples of Dante criticism, turned Dante into a fascist hero, thus reinforcing the fascist construction of a civic religion. My example is a work long forgotten: *A Buon Cantor, Buon Citarista* from 1932 by an otologist from Pisa, Guglielmo Bilancioni, who in an almost humble style displays his deep reverence for Dante’s lyric genius while also offering scientific explanations for the word magic of the great poet. The otologist transforms Dante into a fascist hero and dedicates his work to Benito Mussolini. I have found the book in the *Fondo Barbi* at Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa. Michele Barbi’s library offers a cross section of Dante literature from the fascist era in Italy. Although most of the scholars we still read today did not succumb to the fascist reinterpretation of Dante as a Roman hero, many popular editions certainly did.

Torsten Rönnerstrand

Blasphemy in Lars Norén – Reading Dante’s *Inferno* as an Inter-text of *A Playwright’s Diary*

In Lars Norén’s *A Playwright’s Diary* (2008), abundant allusions may be found to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, which suggests a parallel between Dante’s way through the nine circles of Hell and the self-examination undertaken in this diary. How, then, does Norén look at himself in relation to the hierarchy of sinners recognizable in the structure of Dante’s *Inferno*? In my paper, I shall argue that a probable answer to this question is that he identifies with the Blasphemers, a category of sinners residing in the Seventh Circle. If this assumption proves correct, new light may be shed on some of the more sensational features of Norén’s diary.

Blasphemy was originally defined as repudiation of God or disrespectful use of God’s name. In Norén’s diary there are quite a few examples of this kind of blasphemy. However, the concept of blasphemy may also be used to refer to irreverence toward God in general or to phenomena and people considered sacred or holy – such as saints – or otherwise held in high regard. This kind of blasphemy is very frequently used by Norén in the diary – for instance when attacking celebrities like Goethe, Astrid Lindgren, or Ingmar Bergman while explicitly motivating the attack by the fact that these people are being looked upon as some kind of “saints.”

What, then, could Norén’s purpose have been in indulging in blasphemy the way he does in the diary? In my paper I will claim that his doing so is mainly a strategy for underlining the parallel between the diary and Dante’s *Inferno*. Should this hypothesis be confirmed, we may no longer read *A Playwright’s Diary* as an authentic report of the author’s life and opinions. Instead, Norén’s book should be read as an inter-textual work of art engaged in a more or less open dialogue with his forerunner, Dante.