

MIND READING IN DANTE'S *COMMEDIA*

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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February 2010

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Cornell University 2010

This dissertation investigates through the lens of epistemology the *topos* of mind reading, which is frequent in the *Commedia* when Vergil and other souls perceive Dante pilgrim's thoughts. Challenging previous scholarship, this study argues for telepathy as a sign of epistemological crisis that historicizes the poem. The crisis emerges through attention to narrative and rhetorical complications in the text and their place in popular and learned narrative and philosophical contexts from antiquity through the Middle Ages.

Chapter 1 demonstrates that rather than enact a fantasy of perfect knowledge in heaven, telepathic rhetoric reveals inconsistencies in the mind reading of Vergil and of souls in heaven. These ruptures suggest that we should not wholly accept or reject the ambiguous powers of Vergil or take for granted the telepathy of blessed souls. In this way mind reading emerges as an unstable system of knowing throughout the poem. Remaining chapters contextualize this pattern within relevant histories, emphasizing texts in cultural dialogue. Chapter 2 explores epiphany scenes, showing that telepathy in the *Commedia* partly inherits the problems of recognizing divine figures in pagan epic and Christian popular narratives. Chapter 3 investigates philosophical and narrative sources of mind reading itself, which reflect deep theoretical and practical contradictions throughout the Middle Ages, ambiguities that inform Dantean telepathy as immanent. Developing these conclusions, chapter 4 situates Dantean mind reading in the Aristotelian-Neoplatonic framework but also in an epistemological debate that was moving

beyond this traditional model. The final chapter mobilizes speech-act theory to advance the historical findings of previous chapters. It concludes that the language of mind reading, as utterances bearing the force of action, urgently performs social conventions that bring to light further historical evidence, including the subjectivity implied by Dante's experience of exile.

In powerful new ways the dissertation situates the *Commedia* in history, which has rarely been done in part due to Dante's brilliant strategies of narrative and poetic transcendence. By tracing the histories that make Dantean telepathy possible, this study challenges scholarly assumptions by showing how the poem's language anticipates epistemological concerns that became increasingly urgent throughout the humanist fourteenth century.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ashleigh Imus was born in 1967 in Glendale, California but was raised in the Midwest and on the east coast. She showed interests in music and books at an early age, playing piano and reading widely. A first-generation college student, she entered New York University in 1987, which proved to be among the most important events of her life. With the help of great teachers and mentors, she learned to cultivate a love of learning, specifically medieval languages and literature. She majored in comparative literature and graduated in 1991 *magna cum laude*. Upon graduation, she participated in the program Teach for America, teaching elementary school in North Carolina for two years. Subsequently she spent several years continuing her studies independently, reflecting on her education, and teaching English as a second language as well as outdoor education. In 2001 she began graduate school in Cornell's Medieval Studies Program, where she specialized in medieval and Renaissance Italian literature and classical and medieval Latin literature. In 2005-6 she studied in Florence, Italy, earning a Master's degree in Italian literature from Middlebury College. In 2007 she was blessed with the birth of her daughter, Lia. She enjoys music, teaching, reading, writing, spending time with her daughter, cooking and eating good food.

For my mother Harriet Cook

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the Medieval Studies Program for the opportunity to study at Cornell, and I especially thank Dianne Ferriss, whose professional competence and personal warmth truly set the program apart. Both Medieval Studies and the Cornell Graduate School have shown generosity and flexibility throughout my studies, for which I am grateful. The Cornell libraries and librarians are outstanding and make it a privilege and a pleasure to carry out research.

I have been fortunate throughout this project to work with the full support of a talented, generous and diverse committee. I am deeply grateful for my committee chair, Marilyn Migiel, who has shown extraordinary generosity and mentoring in ways both personal and professional. Besides teaching me to write sentences that readers might understand *and* appreciate, she has introduced new and valuable ways of reading, has shown admirable intellectual tolerance, and has modeled perseverance, ethical standards, and kindness in the face of daunting challenges. Bill Kennedy has been an outstanding model of graciousness and brilliance. I thank him for his unflagging support throughout my time at Cornell, his incisive comments on my writing, and for offering excellent professional advice always. I feel especially fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from Danuta Shanzer, whose talents as a teacher and scholar are rare and unforgettable. The seriousness with which she studies and teaches languages and literature is a model for all scholars of the humanities. I deeply appreciate her suggestions, comments, and her uncanny (clairvoyant?) ability to foresee the direction of parts of this project. I thank Pete Wetherbee for his excellent recent scholarship on Dante and for offering different interpretations, thereby helping me to clarify my own. Many years ago Teodolinda Barolini guided me through my first full reading of the *Commedia* in Italian in a year-long graduate seminar at New York University. Her deep and

infectious love of Dante and her brilliant scholarship have had profound and lasting effects. I am grateful for the support and generosity she has extended over the years. In my first semester of college, Fortune smiled on me when I encountered Nancy Reale, who not only introduced me to Dante and medieval literature but showed genuine kindness and interest in my life and education. She encouraged me to learn Italian and other languages, worked with me on a fellowship to read parts of the *Commedia*, and advised me throughout my undergraduate years and beyond. She made my college experience transformative and wonderful. Every student deserves to know a teacher and a person as good as she. Likewise, I will forever be indebted to Elin Wilder, without whom I might never have gone to college at all. In my youth she acted as a parent when I needed one, and she remains a friend. I am lucky to have met her 28 years ago and am blessed that she is still part of my life. Last but not least I thank my daughter Lia for her radiant joy and for teaching me the good humility of parenting.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Throughout the dissertation I quote Latin, Italian, and French texts in the original language and have provided translations in footnotes. In some cases the translations are mine when I have found no other satisfactory translation. In other cases I have used translations of other scholars but have occasionally altered passages that deviate excessively from the original. In these cases italics indicate my alterations. Greek texts are quoted in English translations only, none of which are mine.

Introduction

Mind Reading in Dante's *Commedia*:

From *Topos* to Historicizing Sign

In visions prior to Dante's telepathy is rare and unremarkable, a fact that might lead us to presume the visionary tradition's irrelevance to mind reading in the *Commedia*. Both Carol Zaleski and Alison Morgan affirm that mind reading occurs in the eighth-century *Vision of Drythelm* and in the twelfth-century *Vision of Gunthelm*, while Zaleski also cites the tenth-century *Vision of Laisrén*.¹ Drythelm's vision contains only one instance, in which the protagonist believes he is in heaven and his anonymous guide corrects his thought with "This is not the kingdom of heaven, as you imagine" (60).² The Irish *Vision of Laisrén* also contains one instance where "The man desired to know the difference of the torments. The angel answered at once, in the way that the (guardian) angel has (always) answered thoughts and reflections" (118-19).³ The twelfth-century *Vision of Gunthelm* contains four examples, all relatively simple corrections by the guide when Gunthelm marvels at the things he sees, and in the final example, when he mistakenly believes he is in hell.⁴ To this short list I add the tenth-century *St.*

¹ Thus disproving Alison Morgan's assertion that mind reading "occurs again only in the twelfth-century texts and in the *Comedy*" (103).

² According to the translation in Eileen Gardner's anthology.

³ According to Kuno Meyer's translation of the Irish. The *Vision of St. Paul and Tundale's Vision* also mention guardian angels who provide counsel and present the soul's deeds to God, which implies mind reading but does not make an explicit connection. The relationship of the guardian angel with mind reading is discussed in chapter 3.

⁴ The guide repeats the phrase "Sed quid miraris?" [but why do you marvel?] in two of the first three instances. In the fourth he responds to Gunthelm's mistaken orientation with "Non est infernus quod cernis..." [This is not hell that you perceive]. Translations of the Latin are mine. Morgan's translation of this episode adds the phrase "Reading his mind" which the original Latin does not call for: "Cui haec existimanti angelus inquit." I translate the phrase as "The angel said to him as he was thinking these things" (103). She also draws a similarity between this last episode, in which Gunthelm describes as towers what in fact turn out to be infernal chimneys, and *Inf.* 31.31 where Vergil tells the pilgrim that he does not see towers but giants. This may or may not be an instance of

Brendan's Voyage where the saint knows that a brother has hidden a silver bridle-bit in his clothes. Also in this vision a group of monks communicate in what appears to be a combination of sign language and telepathy, and a hermit knows the brothers' names without having previously met them (Gardiner 88-9, 99, 121). The twelfth-century *Vision of Charles the Fat* merely suggests telepathy when the guide sees that his soul is terrified by the sight of boiling casks (Gardiner 132). These scattered appearances seem to tell us little beyond documenting telepathy as an occasional and not especially interesting feature of visionary narratives, some of which Dante more than likely was familiar.⁵ But if the visionary tradition overall does not present a forceful context for Dantean telepathy, the relative infrequency and unremarkable quality of mind reading in these earlier visions are in fact highly relevant, for they invite what turns out to be a crucial and revealing question: why does the *Commedia* depart from earlier visions to include mind reading not only as a *topos*⁶ but, as I will show, an elaborate one raising many interpretive problems?⁷

mind reading; the poet says at line 20 that he seemed to see towers but the pilgrim explicitly asks at line 21 “«Maestro, di, che terra è questa?»” [Master, tell me, what’s this city?], which might allow Vergil to assume that his charge sees the giants as towers. All citations from the *Commedia* are from the Petrocchi edition. Translations are based on that of Mandelbaum with italics indicating my alterations.

⁵ Morgan states that it is unknown the extent to which Dante knew any of the main visions but that the vision tradition was widespread during his lifetime (4). She also notes, however, that several scholars agree that Dante had direct knowledge of the vision of Paul. Cesare Segre writes that the latter vision is the only one Dante refers to, in *Inf.* 2.13. Regarding the vision tradition generally, Segre believes that “volente or nolente, Dante non poteva ignorare tutta questa produzione visionistica” (20) [willingly or not, Dante could not ignore all of this visionary production].

⁶ I find Morgan’s list of mind-reading passages in the *Commedia* to be incomplete and in some cases questionable. She says “Dante’s thoughts are read by Virgil eight times, by Beatrice eight times, and by Bernard once” (103). She lists *Inf.* 13.25-30, 12.31-36, 17.90-96, 23.25-30. *Purg.* 4.58, 13.73-78, 15.118-38, 25.10-21. *Par.* 1.85-93, 4.1-27, 7.10-24, 7.52-57, 7.121-29, 17.1-12, 21.49-51, 27.103-105, 28.97-99, 29.10-12, 32.49-51. She leaves out many passages from the first canticle that I would include, such as 10.18, 10.125, 13.83, 16.122, 19.39, 23.25, and 26.73. From the second canticle, she omits 18.7, 19.58, 33.73, and from the *Paradiso* she omits passages such as 4.91-6 where there is no question that Beatrice reads the pilgrim’s thoughts. As I discuss in chapter 1, some of these discrepancies may be attributed to differences of interpretation, and yet Morgan leaves out *Purg.* 19.58 which I believe to be among the least questionable instances of Vergil’s mind reading. On the other hand she includes dubious passages such as *Inf.* 12.31-36, in which Vergil merely suggests what the pilgrim might be thinking (“Tu pensi / forse in questa ruina...” [You wonder, / perhaps, about that fallen mass...]). Further, since Morgan is focused on guides, she excludes all telepathic

This study attempts to answer that question by showing how the apparently superfluous *topos* of mind reading emerges as a historicizing sign of epistemological crisis in the *Commedia*. This crisis emerges through attention to narrative and rhetorical complications in the poem, and the ways in which these complications point to relevant contexts of mind reading from antiquity through the Middle Ages. As I describe in further detail below, these contexts are defined by pagan and Christian philosophical and narrative sources of telepathy specifically, but they are also related to other epistemological events that, while not sources in the traditional sense, nonetheless emerge as key forces for contextualizing telepathy in the poem. These additional contexts include new philosophical debates during Dante's lifetime as well as Dante's personal political history. From these contextualizations I arrive at two important conclusions. The first is that the *Commedia's* complicated inclusion of mind reading as a *topos*, despite suggesting the poem's alienation from histories such as that of visionary narrative, in fact invites us to historicize the text because of the epistemological histories to which mind reading points and that in fact make the *topos* possible; unearthing these histories allows us to see general patterns in which the poem exists as part of history rather than outside of it. Second, this reading gives us specific insight into what we

passages in the *Paradiso* in which characters other than Beatrice and Bernard read the pilgrim's mind, an omission that distorts the picture of the *topos* in the poem overall.

⁷ My thinking about the *Commedia's* relationship with the vision tradition regarding mind reading has been informed by *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*, where in chapter 7 Teodolinda Barolini makes the case for taking seriously the *Commedia's* visionary claims and therefore for the need to contextualize it within the visionary tradition, which *dantisti* have not done due to preoccupations with the debate on whether to view the *Commedia* primarily as poem or as vision: "While Dante scholars have been arguing among themselves as to whether the *Commedia* employs the allegory of poets or the allegory of theologians, elaborating a discourse that is not accessible even to other scholars of literature, historians of religion have gone ahead and calmly included Dante in their discussions of vision literature. In other words, while we continue to debate whether or not to consider the *Commedia* a vision, scholars in other disciplines have been working to understand the common ground that underlies all vision literature, including the *Commedia*. If we wish our more nuanced and complex sense of the *Commedia* to have any impact on such discussions, we must come to terms with the poem not only as a literary artifact but also as the record of a visionary experience" (144).

may call the poem's performance of historical subjectivity, which I define in part by its performance of language as epistemologically ambiguous. The best way to elaborate these conclusions and to lay out the reading supporting them is to begin with some of the relevant scholarship.

My reading of the *Commedia*'s language as philosophically complex is indebted to at least two groundbreaking studies of Dante's poetics, and further motivating this dissertation is my belief that scholars have yet to absorb sufficiently the ramifications of these studies. The first is by Giuseppe Mazzotta who, in his 1979 monograph *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy*, recognized that there were unexamined assumptions in readers' interpretations of the poem's rhetoric:

...it has been a commonplace in Dante scholarship, ever since Auerbach, to bracket the question of rhetoric on the implicit assumption that in Dante's text literary language gives a happy and unproblematical representation of the poet's moral vision. Accordingly, the critic's practice has been to acknowledge the correspondences and harmony that the text voices and to translate its rhetorical complexities into explicit thematic and ideological equivalents. The neglect, however, is remarkable since it is precisely Dante's own sense of the power of language which is thrown into doubt in the canto of Ulysses (71).

Mazzotta elaborates this last statement by showing how the Ulyssean episode historicizes philosophy in part by rejecting Ulysses' traditional status as philosophical exemplum. Instead Dante plunges the Greek hero into "the world of rhetoric and history, the ground where opinions are debated, where one continuously copes with the temptation of truth and falsehood" (81-82). In doing so, the poet undermines the potential for philosophical discourse in order to show that abstract philosophy in and of itself is incapable of leading to truth. Truth for

Dante, he says, is necessarily historical, “an involuntary event, part and parcel of the world of the probable and the contingent” (81-82), which is not to say that it is relative. Connecting Ulysses and his rhetoric to Dante’s understanding of the dangers of his own spiritual and poetic journey, Mazzotta concludes that Dante explores and reveals in the Ulysses episode his keen awareness of the fraudulent potential inherent in language (106).⁸

In her 1992 monograph *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*, Teodolinda Barolini, among other topics, takes up the task of systematically advancing our understanding of what the sustained link between Dante and Ulysses means for the *Commedia*’s poetics. She does so first by demonstrating that Ulysses, unlike other sinners, is indeed a sustained presence since he is the only sinner other than Nimrod to be named in all three canticles,⁹ but he is also invoked “through surrogate figures like Phaeton and Icarus; through semantic tags, like *folle*, that

⁸ One could argue that Mazzotta’s argument, which is elaborated more fully in chapter 2 of *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy*, lacks coherence as he repeatedly suggests the sustained ambiguities of both language and history in the *Commedia* but ultimately views them as final signs of God’s transcendent meaning. It seems that for Mazzotta, there is a way in which allegory prevails, finally resolving the tensions he elucidates. A subsequent study of the fraudulent possibilities of language is Richard Allen Shoaf’s attempt in 1983 to explore Dante’s anxiety from an economic perspective. Shoaf draws on the analogy between language and money as media that are essentially reductive: “as money reduces everything to arbitrary exchange values, so language reduces experience to meaning” (12). He claims that both Dante and Chaucer bore anxiety about the potential of language to signify in the face of this analogy, made ever more threatening by the rise of the money economy. But his argument does not succeed mainly because he does not adequately contextualize his theory. He mentions only Boethius’ second commentary on *Peri Hermenias* from the sixth century as a text that validates the analogy and then assumes it to be operative in the *Commedia* and the *Canterbury Tales* in the fourteenth century based on some fairly general social/historical observations about the period and some compelling links in the imagery of the respective poems. Lee Patterson points out that the money economy was not in fact new as Shoaf assumes. He says that since at least the twelfth century there was a “vigorous, monetized, and even credit-based peasant land market, a market for agricultural wage labor, and small-scale but essential rural industry and commodity production. Similarly, both lay and ecclesiastical landlords were engaged in sophisticated techniques of estate management and in the calculative pursuit of profit maximization, many members of the seignorial class were deeply involved in the world of international trade, and even the quintessentially noble activity of warfare was pervaded with the values of the cash nexus” (249). Nevertheless, Shoaf’s work is important for its recognition of epistemological urgency in Dante’s language and it also makes important connections between the images of Narcissus and Dante’s journey to heal his spiritual vision.

⁹ In *Inf.* 26, *Purg.* 19, and *Par.* 27.

Dante has taken care to associate with him; and, most encompassingly, through Ulyssean flight imagery” (51). Building on Mazzotta’s earlier work,¹⁰ she argues that the Greek hero’s continued presence becomes a theme that signifies Dante’s *conscious* awareness of his self-appointed spiritual role: “Ulysses is the lightning rod Dante places in his poem to attract and defuse his own consciousness of the presumption involved in anointing oneself God’s scribe” (52). The Ulysses theme demands that we distinguish more rigorously between the experience of the pilgrim and that of the poet; specifically it “forces us to challenge the theological grid with which we read the *Commedia* (following interpretative guidelines suggested by the text itself), whereby whatever happens in hell is “bad,” problematic, and whatever happens in heaven is “good, problem-free” (53). Thus we should not assume that Dante’s poetics follow a trajectory of moral improvement that is parallel to the pilgrim’s spiritual advancement. Indeed, Barolini argues that the very writing of the *Paradiso* is the most potent sign of Ulyssean transgression since the third canticle,

if it is to exist at all, cannot fail to be transgressive; its poet cannot fail to be a Ulysses, since only a *trapassar del segno* will be able to render the experience of *trasumanar*” (54). In a context where “significar *per verba* / non si poria” (“signifying through words cannot be done” [*Par.* 1.70-71]), and where “l’esempio / e l’esemplare non vanno d’un modo” (“the model and the copy do not match” [*Par.* 28.55-56]), a representational process that is avowedly based on the principles of mimesis, on the seamless match of “esempio” and “esemplare,” becomes ever more arduous. In such a context signs must be trespassed, since only a trespass of the sign can render an experience for which no signs are sufficient (53-4).

¹⁰ There are, however, important differences between Mazzotta’s and Barolini’s views of language in the poem overall, with the former at times emphasizing to a greater degree the potential for linguistic breakdown. The reader should consult their works for full details of their arguments.

This larger awareness opens up the way for understanding and illustrating specific moments of poetic transgression throughout the *Commedia*, which Barolini carries out in several subsequent chapters.¹¹

Yet more recent studies persist in the fundamentally problematic critical tenets broached by Mazzotta 30 years ago and overturned definitively by Barolini, now nearly 20 years ago. These newer comparative studies assign Dante a place in both literary and intellectual history by means of reductive assumptions about the epistemology of language as it is reflected in the *Commedia*'s poetics.¹² The unfortunate effect of these studies is to discourage precisely the sort of philosophical work that would greatly benefit Dante scholarship. John Fyler's 2007 monograph *Language and the Declining World in Chaucer, Dante, and Jean de Meun* drastically reduces Dante's view of language in order to demonstrate Chaucer's

¹¹ While I am aware of the large body of scholarship on the Dante-Ulysses link (see pages 49-52 of *Undivine Comedy* for a review), I focus on these two in particular because they discuss the issue specifically in terms of Dante's poetics.

¹² It is worth noting that the philosophical view of the poem's language in these studies strikingly resembles, and may be influenced by, the popular stereotype of Dante often found in non-academic settings. The media is full of allusions that tend to portray the *Commedia* as a model of epistemological certainty by fixating on the absolute condemnation of hell. A *New York Times* editorial from the October 7, 2007 edition, for example, introduces the plight of veterans seeking disability care as follows: "It's more painfully clear that wounded soldiers who seek disability care and benefits face bureaucratic chaos worthy of an infernal ring from Dante." As a strategy of *pathos*, use of the verse "Abandon all hope ye who enter here" from the gates of hell is especially popular. In the August 14, 2009 edition of the *New York Times*, an article on two deaths related to the robbery of a restaurant supply store noted that the store owner had posted a sign with the above words from the infernal gates. The journalist, Jennifer S. Altman, draws a clear connection between the sign and the fate of the thieves, who ignored the command as they entered the quiet store: "Four men broke the silence by pushing their way past the scrawled sign that states 'Abandon all hope ye who enter here.'" Likewise, in the October 18, 2007 radio broadcast of *Democracy Now* Michael Ratner of the Center for Constitutional Rights lamented confirmation hearings for the then-new attorney general by saying that, for him, the hearings invoked the utter despair of Dante's infernal gates: "Abandon all hope ye who enter here." Also common are lighter references such as a cartoon from the September 27, 2007 edition of the *New Yorker* that imagines a tenth circle of hell as a ladies' shoe department. The notion of perfect judgment (and hence seamless epistemology) behind these popular references is not surprising and does not deserve condemnation since the allusions themselves, while inevitably confined to the first canticle, in fact attest to the *Commedia*'s enduring fascination for a culture that generally marginalizes all things humanistic.

greater skepticism.¹³ The author concludes that Dante believes fallen language can be redeemed in poetry, and Fyler demonstrates this by simplistically linking hell with sinful language, purgatory with restorative language and paradise with redeemed language. He reaches this conclusion because his methodology is to read Dante's poetics (and consequently his view of language) as entirely determined by the narrative, precisely in the manner that Barolini's work on the Ulysses theme shows to be untenable. Thus he repeats the well-worn formula of Dante's moral lessons about poetic language in the *Commedia* as corresponding predictably with the progress of the pilgrim's conversion.¹⁴ With this approach, he can say that silence and invented words are signs of fallen language in hell (without accounting for their function in heaven), that Dante learns from Ulysses and adopts a humbler style in the *Purgatorio* (despite his displays of pride in *Purg.* 10 and 29) and so on.

In his study *Poesia dopo la peste: Saggio su Boccaccio*, philosopher Kurt Flasch similarly compares the linguistic philosophies of Dante and Boccaccio. With a genuine sense of delight, the philosopher chronicles his discovery of Boccaccio's deep interest in philosophy, most importantly Ockham and his challenges to thirteenth-century epistemological thought. Flasch argues powerfully for the presence of moral philosophy in the *Decameron*, and attempts to historicize it by declaring that the role of the plague therein is to affirm the great moral breakdown of society. He concludes that the plague makes possible a new type of *poesia*, one in which language is mobilized from a radically new perspective: the inability to know causes, specifically, the inability to know whether someone is truly damned or

¹³ In referring to Dante's "view of language" and his "philosophy of language" (below) I do not refer to the question of Dante's conflicting views on the greater nobility of Latin versus the vernacular, but rather his practice of the signifying potential and character of language itself.

¹⁴ In pages 53-54 of *Undivine Comedy* Barolini cites earlier scholars who make the same correspondences between the pilgrim's progress and the poet's writing.

saved, a perspective that Flasch calls the “non-verità del sapere (58).¹⁵ He rightly identifies the central moral crisis raised by the first novella of Ser Cepperello: if no one really knows who ultimately ends up in heaven or hell, then one of the most important foundations of the medieval world collapses, the idea that men of God bear divine and therefore infallible authority in distinguishing good from evil.

A major problem with the argument is the way in which Dante is used as a foil against which Boccaccio’s new *poesia* is brought to light. An understanding of Dante’s epistemological foundation is everywhere assumed but never articulated, as if Dante’s philosophy of language is so obvious that we already understand and agree upon it. The result is an astonishingly reductive view of Dante’s philosophy. Early on we read of the new writing Flasch encountered in Boccaccio as “*poesia dopo Dante e dopo la peste*,” and we hear of how the first novella would surely fail if, as in Dante, “tra il mondo terreno e quello dell’aldilà ci fosse ancora trasparenza” (6).¹⁶ But exactly what it means to be post-Dante is never defined, nor is the “trasparenza” between the earthly world and beyond. We are told that an entire generation of thinkers between 1318 and 1348 had concluded that it was no longer possible to return to the “relazione univoca tra dimensione terrena e dimensione eterna, sulla quale poggiava la poesia universale di Dante,” but these vague terms are never elaborated (90).¹⁷ What is the nature of this “relazione univoca,” and does the “dimensione terrena” include institutions such as the church or is it confined to language?

If we were to ask questions such as these, we might better contextualize important features of the *Commedia*’s epistemology that Flasch ignores when he

¹⁵ “the non-truth of knowledge.”

¹⁶ “poetry after Dante and after the plague,” and “if there were still transparency between the earthly world and that of the beyond.”

¹⁷ “univocal relationship between the earthly dimension and the eternal dimension, upon which Dante’s universal poetry is based.”

says that “Dante aveva dimostrato che la lingua umana, perfino il dialetto fiorentino, è efficace, e può parlare anche dell’inferno e del paradiso” (58).¹⁸ One is the prominence of the ineffability *topos* throughout the poem, which is not merely a rhetorical version of false modesty, but rather a key element of Dante’s moving exploration of the relationship between memory and writing, between profound spiritual vision and the recounting of it as gift to the world. Dante repeatedly claims that his language is insufficient because ultimately, he knows that it can only be so. This is why, in the *Paradiso*, he departs from the first two canticles as he declares immediately in canto 1 that what he writes does not correspond absolutely to what he experienced,¹⁹ and in canto 4 we learn that what he experienced does not correspond to the ontology of paradise, which no human can comprehend.²⁰ Once we acknowledge the *topos* as more than empty rhetoric, we can see that Dante’s language indeed speaks of these realms but not in the unproblematic way that Flasch

¹⁸ “Dante had demonstrated that human language, even the Florentine dialect, is effective, and can speak also of hell and heaven.”

¹⁹ In canto 1 the poet writes “Nel ciel che più de la sua luce prende / fu' io, e vidi cose che ridire / né sa né può chi di là sù discende; / perché appressando sé al suo disire, / nostro intelletto si profonda tanto, / che dietro la memoria non può ire. / Veramente quant' io del regno santo / ne la mia mente potei far tesoro, / sarà ora materia del mio canto.” (4-12) [I was within the heaven that receives / more of His light; 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. / Nevertheless, as much as I, within / my mind, could treasure of the holy kingdom / shall now become the matter of my song].

²⁰ This astonishing declaration by Beatrice comes in the context of answering the pilgrim’s question about the validity of the Platonic doctrine by which souls return to their stars. She says “D’i Serafin colui che più s’india, / Moïse, Samuel, e quel Giovanni / che prender vuoi, io dico, non Maria, / non hanno in altro cielo i loro scanni / che questi spirti che mo t’appararo, / né hanno a l’esser lor più o meno anni; / ma tutti fanno bello il primo giro, / e differentemente han dolce vita / per sentir più e men l’eterno spiro. / Qui si mostraro, non perché sortita / sia questa spera lor, ma per far segno de la celestial c’ha men salita. / Così parlar conviensi al vostro ingegno, / però che solo da sensato apprende / ciò che fa poscia d’intelletto degno.” (29-42) [Neither the Seraph closest unto God, / nor Moses, Samuel, nor either John - / whichever one you will – nor Mary has, / I say, their place in any other heaven / than that which houses those souls you just saw, / nor will their blessedness last any longer. / But all those souls grace the Empyrean; / and each of them has gentle life – though some / sense the Eternal Spirit more, some less. / They showed themselves to you here not because / this is their sphere, but as a sign for you / that in the Empyrean their place is lowest. / Such signs are suited to your mind, since from / the senses only can it apprehend what then becomes fit for the intellect]. See also *Par.* 30.76-78 where Beatrice describes the images that appear to the pilgrim as “umbriferi prefazi,” shadowy prefaces of the truth for Dante’s limited understanding.

assumes. We become open to the poetic consequences of Dante's declarations, as laid out by Barolini, and to their possible philosophical ramifications.

Indeed, one of Dante's philosophically-rich declarations tells us that he operated in terms of his own version of "non-verità del sapere," defined instead as "non falsi errori."²¹ The poet introduces this phrase in *Purgatorio* 15 just after the pilgrim experiences his visions of *mansuetudine*, when he describes his reawakening thus: "Quando l'anima mia tornò di fori / a le cose che son fuor di lei vere, / io riconobbi i miei non falsi errori" (115-17).²² As I argue more fully in chapter 1, "non falsi errori" does not refer only to the veracity of the pilgrim's particular vision – it does not signify only his truthful dream. Rather, the phrase appears in the context of a complex exchange between Vergil and the pilgrim that implies all truth and understanding as defined by ambiguity and occlusion. Epistemologically, "non-verità del sapere" and "non falsi errori" may seem to be opposed but in fact share key traits, for each claims belief in knowledge and each acknowledges the difficulty of accessing it. Perhaps most important is that both expressions imply the reality of interpretation, which by nature is ambiguous. For this reason the "non-verità del sapere" means more than simply "knowledge means knowing things may not be true," just as Dante's poetics go beyond a simple claim of veiled truth suggested by "errors that are not false."

By attending to details such as these, we may begin to demonstrate Dantean epistemology and consequently define a more precise historical framework for the *Commedia*'s poetics, and therefore also for the ostensible novelty of the linguistic philosophies of later fourteenth-century texts. With this goal in mind, I propose

²¹ In chapter 7 of *Undivine Comedy* Barolini elaborates the centrality of this phrase for defining Dante's visionary poetics.

²² "And when my soul returned outside itself / and met the things outside it that are real, / I then could recognize my not false errors."

mind reading as a complicating and historicizing feature of the *Commedia*'s poetic epistemology. In the pages that follow I will attempt to show that mind reading, which may be regarded as a cousin of the ineffability *topos*, raises deep questions about the epistemological potential of language in the *Commedia*. These questions were not immediately apparent but became clear to me over time, so that I begin here by laying out my initial approach of the topic as an undergraduate and how my reading evolved during graduate studies to become a worthwhile project with something to contribute to Dante scholarship.

In my initial study, limited to the *Paradiso*, I defined mind reading in the following way: In the third canticle, Dante pilgrim discovers that heavenly souls know his thoughts; since all thoughts are reflected in God and the souls are able to perceive these reflections, they “see” the pilgrim’s thoughts mirrored through God. I identified 40 such passages in the canticle and divided them into three groups according to the following criteria: the main feature of group one, which includes 27 passages, is the pilgrim’s silence. Other characters speak for him and usually read the pilgrim’s mind without referring directly to their act. We find the first example of this type in canto one when Beatrice reads the pilgrim’s mind as he enters heaven and becomes disoriented by light and sound.

La novità del suono e 'l grande lume
di lor cagion m'accesero un disio
mai non sentito di cotanto acume.
Ond' ella, che vedea me sì com' io,
a quïetarmi l'animo commosso,
pria ch'io a dimandar, la bocca aprio
e cominciò... (Par. 1.82-88).²³

²³ “The newness of the sound and the great light / incited me to learn their cause – I was / more keen than I had ever been before. / And she who *saw me as I see myself* / to quiet the commotion in my mind, / opened her lips *before I could ask* / and she began.”

As in this excerpt, most mind reading in heaven occurs in the context of the pilgrim's theological or cosmological questions that Beatrice or another soul discerns and answers. Group one episodes are most prevalent in the beginning and concluding cantos (see the list of mind-reading passages at the end of this introduction).

In the seven examples of group two passages, the pilgrim speaks and characters often refer to telepathy itself but also to the act of speaking, as well as desire for speech. The first passage of this type appears in canto 8 when the pilgrim reaches the sphere of Venus and appreciates that Charles Martel can silently discern his thanks through God, thereby praising the fact that words are unnecessary:

«Però ch'i' credo che l'alta letizia
che 'l tuo parlar m'infonde, signor mio,
là 've ogne ben si termina e s'inizia,
per te si veggia come la vegg' io,
grata m'è più; e anco quest' ho caro
perché 'l discerri rimirando in Dio. (Par. 8.85-90).²⁴

In canto 15 the first of six telepathic episodes of group three appears. In these passages, the pilgrim does not speak in the *terzine* describing telepathy; other souls explicitly characterize speech as unnecessary but nonetheless desire to hear the pilgrim's voice and usually elaborate on why this is so. The first instance, also the crowning episode of group three passages, appears when Dante meets his ancestor Cacciaguida in the sphere of Mars. The latter offers a lengthy address, acknowledging telepathy and the fact that his response is already decreed, yet commanding that Dante speak to satisfy his ancestor's desire:

Tu credi che a me tuo pensier mei
da quel ch'è primo, così come raia

²⁴ “Because I believe that the deep joy / *that* your words infuse in me is, / even as I see it, seen by you, my lord, / there where every good *begins and ends*, / it (i.e. the joy) is more welcome to me, *and I also hold this dear* / because you discern it by gazing upon God.”

da l'un, se si conosce, il cinque e 'l sei;
 e però ch'io mi sia e perch' io paia
 più gaudioso a te, non mi domandi,
 che alcun altro in questa turba gaia.
 Tu credi 'l vero; ché i minori e ' grandi
 di questa vita miran ne lo specchio
 in che, prima che pensi, il pensier pandi;
 ma perché 'l sacro amore in che io veglio
 con perpetua vista e che m'aseta
 di dolce disiar, s'adempia meglio,
 la voce tua sicura, balda e lieta
 suoni la volontà, suoni 'l disio,
 a che la mia risposta è già decreta!» (*Par.* 15.55-69).²⁵

In this passage and others from group three, Dante dramatizes to an extraordinary degree the conflict between speech as superfluous and yet intensely desirable, showing that telepathic episodes in groups two and three draw particular attention to desire for the act of speaking, whether the pilgrim actually speaks or not during the episode.

The parameters outlined above for each of the three groups were stable but not necessarily rigid, since the theme of desire for language is also present, for example, in a group-one passage from canto 7. Here, the pilgrim speaks, but only to himself because he is too overwhelmed by Beatrice (and specifically by the sound of her name) to speak to her. Some speech is so desirable that it frustrates the pilgrim's ability to voice it:

Io dubitava e dicea `Dille, dille!
 fra me, `dille' dicea, `a la mia donna
 che mi diseta con le dolci stille'.
 Ma quella reverenza che s'indonna

²⁵ “You think your thoughts flow into me from Him / who is the First – as from the number one, / the five and six derive, if one is known - / and so you do not ask me who I am / and why I seem more joyous to you than / all other spirits in this festive throng. / Your thought is true, for both the small and the great / of this life gave into that mirror where, / before you think, your thoughts have been displayed. / But that the sacred love I which I keep / my vigil with unending watchfulness, / the love that makes me thirst with sweet desire, / be better satisfied, let your voice bold, / assured, and glad – proclaim your will and longing, / to which my answer is decreed already.”

di tutto me, pur per Be e per ice,
mi richinava come l'uom ch'assonna (Par. 7.10-15).²⁶

Episodes from all three groups thus emphasize the idea of silence by suggesting that speech, and therefore language, are superfluous, and yet they glorify narrative speech and poetic language through techniques such as direct discourse and neologisms. A particularly vivid example of these techniques from the second group appears in canto 9 when the pilgrim asks Folchetto why he waits to fulfill the pilgrim's desire since the blessed soul already knows what it is. Dante insists that if he were the mind reader, he would not delay his response:

«Dio vede tutto, e tuo veder s'inluia»,
diss' io, «beato spirto, sì che nulla
voglia di sé a te puot' esser fuia.
Dunque la voce tua, che 'l ciel trastulla
sempre col canto di quei fuochi pii
che di sei ali facen la coculla,
perché non satisface a' miei disii?
Già non attendere' io tua dimanda,
s'io m'intuassi, come tu t'immii». (Par. 9.73-81).²⁷

Here the pilgrim's speech glorifies the very medium he posits as unnecessary, as the poet coins three neologisms, "s'inluia," "m'intuassi," and "t'immii," thereby trying to literally represent the silent communication of Folchetto's telepathy. This episode is key as it enacts intense poetic desire for the sound of words and the satisfaction that sound can bear in creating meaning, while simultaneously thematizing the possibility of silence toward which the poet edges ever closer. In canto 20, another group-two passage represents the act of keeping silent as suffering. This occurs in the context of Dante's outburst upon meeting the saved

²⁶ "I was perplexed, and to myself, I said: / 'Tell her! Tell her! Tell her, the lady who / can slake my thirst with her sweet drops'; and yet / the reverence that possesses all of me, / even on hearing only *Be* and *ice*, / had bowed my head – I seemed a man asleep."

²⁷ "'*God sees all*, I said, 'and, blessed spirit, / your vision *enters him*, so that / no wish can ever hide itself from you. / Your voice has always made the heavens glad, / as has the singing of the pious fires / that make themselves a cowl of their six wings: / I would not have to wait for your request / if I could enter you as you do me.'"

pagans Trajan and Ripheus – a voicing of shock that comes in spite of his knowledge that souls discern his doubt: “tempo aspettar tacendo non patio, / ma de la bocca, «Che cose son queste?»” (81-82).²⁸ Passages such as these illustrate that hearing language is intimately connected to fulfilling desire for knowledge and show how narrative speech is increasingly justified for the poetic project.

Yet the paradox of writing that posits language as superfluous is obviously limited - if taken to its logical extreme it would necessarily mean the end of the poem. Dramatizing desire for linguistic communion with the divine is therefore one way that Dante plays out the narrative implications of telepathy. He develops the paradigm into a *topos* that he manipulates in order to dramatize the dialectics of insisting on the silence implied by union with God on the one hand, and on the other the glorification of his poetics. Because this dialectical movement attempts to relay both the pilgrim’s great, extraterrestrial experience and the relative finality of great, terrestrial language, mind reading is also parallel to the *Commedia’s* theme of ineffability. As Dante’s inexpressibility *topos* operates dialectically, with the poet’s claims of ineffability contradicted by poetics that formally insist on rendering the transcendent subject, so the mind reading *topos* implies silence while it glorifies human speech and the immanence of poetic language.

Telepathy further enacts another major theme in the *Paradiso*, which is the paradox of the one and the many, sameness and difference, with silence suggesting sameness, or the one, because all thoughts are contained and reflected through one God, while the difference inherent and necessary to language classifies speech and poetry as belonging to the manifold reflections of the one. The implied silence of mind reading adumbrates the final silence of the pilgrim’s union with God to which

²⁸ “it could not wait to voice itself, but with / the thrust and weight of urgency it forced / ‘Can such things be?’ out from my lips, at which / I saw lights flash – a vast festivity.”

the poet's representation must finally capitulate, but the poetic and narrative glorification of language shows us just how hard it is for Dante poet to relinquish desire for his earthly poetic medium, which is ostensibly another *cosa terrena* to be foregone.

The categorization into three groups revealed an interesting pattern in the exclusive presence of group one passages in the first and last cantos of the *Paradiso*. In cantos 1-7 and 27-33, I identified six and seven passages, respectively, all from group one with no examples at all from groups two and three. This pattern creates the effect of an initial crescendo into groups two and three but ultimately an abrupt end to passages that refer directly to mind reading and in which the pilgrim either speaks or is requested to speak. With respect to telepathy, the pilgrim once again is silent in the concluding cantos. One way I accounted for this shift at the poem's conclusion was by relating it to the pilgrim's stage in the journey. Before canto 27, we see a gradual increase in expressions of speech and language as narratively gratuitous and yet desirable, as well as poetically crucial. These telepathic encounters especially underline the three-way correspondence between the pilgrim, the souls who read his mind, and God, through whom thoughts are said to be reflected. This trinitarian structure implies theological unity yet narrative distance among the mindreader, the pilgrim, and God. When the pilgrim reaches first the Primum Mobile and then the Empyrean, he more directly approaches the divine mind itself, creating new challenges for Dante poet, who must try to render the essence of transcendence, the one itself rather than merely its manifold immanent possibilities. The marked return to group one passages may reflect a poetic attempt to bridge the conceptual gap between the pilgrim and God by eliminating the attention paid by group two and three episodes to the threefold differential. There still remains, of course, a two-way differential relationship between the pilgrim and

God, which Dante attempts to collapse so memorably in the poem's final *terzine*. The shift may also reflect a narrative development in which Dante can no longer indulge praise of earthly language as he approaches the moment of his full conversion, a moment that he knows will finally surround him with silence.

These observations argue for telepathy as more than simply another strategy for rendering the power of an ineffable God, or another formal technique of *varietà* for contradicting the poem's determinism. The mind reading *topos* deeply implicates both pilgrim and poet through dialectics that dramatize the pilgrim's and other souls' desire for speech, Dante the poet's crisis of representation, but also his love of earthly language in the face of rendering a journey whose goal is precisely the purging of the profane will. For both poet and pilgrim, telepathy enacts insistent love of difference while increasingly signaling its loss. Both insist on speaking silence.

The study as described above worked well for an undergraduate project necessarily limited in scope, and it remains valid for how it clarifies thematic and poetic tensions expressed through a dialectical movement, and for linking telepathy in heaven with other major themes in the poem. As we will see, this initial study also laid the foundation for other important observations. For example, the simplicity in most of what I described as group one passages shows that Dante was entirely capable of making mind reading episodes straightforward and uncomplicated, not unlike his earlier visionary colleagues. There is, in fact, little difference between mind reading in the earlier visions (described at the beginning of this chapter) and simple episodes such as *Paradiso* 28.97-99 when Beatrice discerns

the pilgrim's confusion about the angelic hierarchies: "E quella che vedea i pensier dubi / ne la mia mente, disse: «I cerchi primi / t'hanno mostrato Serafi e Cherubi.»"²⁹

Upon revisiting mind reading passages as a graduate student, I encountered new questions and difficulties – complexities that are rhetorical, narrative, and philosophical in nature. Closer reading revealed that some of the mind reading in the *Paradiso* is far more rhetorically complex than I had imagined, such that it is not always clear whether mind reading occurs because of the ways that various types of language, such as body language, scholastic rhetoric, or the rhetoric of authority inform episodes that I had previously read as unequivocally telepathic. This finding is significant because it suggests ways in which the *Commedia's* language may not always control the representation of epistemological phenomena in paradise. The poetry may create epistemological problems for the reader at moments ostensibly dedicated to rendering celestial communication as pure and uncomplicated. This new discovery challenges some of the assumptions of the three-group paradigm with its pat circumscribed categories.

There is also the issue of Vergil's telepathic powers, which provokes even greater epistemological and authoritative problems when contextualized within telepathy in the poem as a whole. As I demonstrate in chapter 1, scholars have either accepted without question Vergil's abilities or have differentiated them too sharply from celestial mind reading. They have done so in part because they follow the poem's implicit instructions in interpreting Vergil only in terms of the two canticles in which he appears rather than recognizing and following mind reading as a continuous *topos* throughout the poem. In some ways Vergil's mind reading is cast in terms more immanent from the more prominent visually-oriented telepathy

²⁹ "And she who saw my mind's perplexities / said: 'The first circles have displayed to you / the Seraphim and Cherubim.'"

of paradise, but the rhetorical and philosophical complexities in the language of Vergil's telepathy are in fact quite similar to those of the *Paradiso*. There are also narrative and theological justifications for taking seriously Vergil's powers. As I will demonstrate, Vergil's telepathy reveals an unexpected path by which Dante dramatizes the theological conflict between grace and free will in terms reminiscent of the poetic dialectics of silence versus speech.

For these reasons I argue that Vergil's powers are not so conceptually distinct from those of souls in heaven. But as the guide whom Dante regarded as poet of history, Vergil invites us to contextualize the topic of mind reading precisely as a historical problem. That is, Vergil's abilities remind us that mind reading has a history not only in the poem but that it lives in many histories prior to the *Commedia* – histories in which Dante's poetic performance can and should be contextualized. With this approach, we will see that mind reading in the *Commedia* becomes far more than a generic tool for staging didactic exchange, a simplification that Carol Zaleski applies to the vision tradition overall.³⁰ These observations, thus far not investigated in the scholarship, invite a larger study of mind reading as a significant contribution to Dante studies. A contextualized approach allows us to situate Dante's representation as one medieval voice among many others grappling with telepathy as a rhetorical, narrative, and philosophical problem. Investigating

³⁰ Zaleski writes that in vision narratives "the guide often seems to be reading the mind, not of the visionary, but of his amanuensis, the author of the account. As the guide identifies the souls of various sinners and reveals the rationale for their particular torments, his voice blends with that of the narrator. The otherworld landscape is a text, and it is the guide's responsibility to gloss this text, pointing out the lessons embedded in its strange features" (53-54). Thus it may be tempting to characterize some telepathic exchanges not as characters reading the pilgrim's mind but simply as a generalized strategy for introducing questions and beliefs that most Christians would share. Yet I will show that Dante dramatizes mind-reading episodes in highly personal ways, for example by returning obsessively to the topic of predestination in telepathic encounters and by complicating the language of mind reading to create sustained epistemological tensions. These characteristics, which I have not found in other vision narratives, show that the *Commedia's* mind reading is deeply inflected by Dante's personal intellectual and spiritual history and thus should not be understood in this case as a stock feature of vision narrative.

telepathy in these ways encourages us to conceive of the *Commedia*'s poetics in terms of ancient and medieval culture more thoroughly, as Dante scholars have recently begun to do in exciting ways with topics other than mind reading.³¹

In this dissertation, then, I investigate the problem of mind reading with three methodologies: the first is primarily formal and textual, altering the approach used in the three-group paradigm outlined above, with some new results. Chapter 1 uses close reading of the text and of the commentary tradition to begin to show more fully how and why the *Commedia* goes beyond earlier visions. It does so not only by viewing telepathy as a paradox that becomes a dialectical movement linking crucial themes, but by calling into question mind reading as a stable system of knowing. The poem's rhetoric of telepathy implicates discourses in a way that highlights linguistic differences and therefore inconsistencies in characters' telepathic abilities. These differences suggest that knowing occurs on a continuum not only for Vergil but for all characters, such that in practice mind reading is neither pure and uncomplicated, nor is it a mode of knowing granted exclusively to souls in paradise. These initial findings begin to trace a history of epistemological uncertainty in the *Commedia*'s narrative and poetic practices of mind reading.

The second approach looks outside the poem in order to connect the textual history traced in chapter 1 with relevant narrative and philosophical contexts of mind reading. Chapter 2 explores epiphany scenes as an anchor for a narrative history of mind reading, with findings that suggest the problem of knowing whether mind reading occurs in the *Commedia* is in part a manifestation of the problem of recognizing divine figures both in pagan epic and in Christian narratives. Chapter 3 more specifically investigates popular and learned philosophical and narrative

³¹ See, for example, the 1993 volume *Dante for the New Millenium*, eds. Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey.

sources of mind reading itself. These sources demonstrate a history of deep theoretical and practical uncertainties throughout the Middle Ages, ambiguities that inform the *Commedia*'s performance of knowing via telepathy as immanent rather than transcendent. As with many other philosophical problems in the poem, the results of chapter 3 are relevant to the ongoing debate on the influence of Aristotelianism versus Neoplatonism in the poem. Chapter 4 characterizes these results in terms of the traditional paradigm and yet attempts to show that we may also contextualize the *Commedia*'s mind reading within other epistemological debates that do not precisely fit into the Aristotelian/Neoplatonic model. Rather, these debates point toward radical philosophical problems of the later fourteenth century. Methodologically chapter 4 is somewhat unconventional in that I do not examine another philosophical source of mind reading per se but rather what I see as a debate that is related by its raising of similar crucial questions to those in which Dante grounds the problems of mind reading. This chapter suggests that mind reading in the poem is made possible not only by philosophical and narrative histories from antiquity through the Middle Ages, but also by some previously-unknown aspects of epistemological history during Dante's lifetime.

The final chapter returns to a close reading of the text and mobilizes speech-act theory in order to deepen and expand upon the close readings of chapters 1 and 3. As I explain further in chapter 5, speech-act theory, with its insistent focus on the performative force of language rooted in social context, proves a powerful tool for further historicizing mind reading in the poem. With the benefit of the research in preceding chapters, the emphases of speech-act theory achieves several results: on the one hand by focusing on language as active performance, i.e. on the actions that language carries out, the theory demands that we distinguish forcefully between what the rhetoric of mind reading does and what it says it is doing at the narrative

level. On the other hand, the theoretical insistence on social context provides new insight into telepathic episodes that had previously remained puzzling. Even more important is that attention to social context allows us to see in new ways how mind reading insistently performs various histories and social conventions. One of the most important conventions is that of speech itself, and here we begin to understand better Dante's persistent dramatization of speech that my initial study had defined as characteristic of group-three passages. Reading telepathy as speech acts shows us that Dante goes far beyond the drama of conflicting desires in these episodes. Some of these passages in fact teach us about the social conventions driving the epistemological tensions in the episodes. Many of these conventions connect to the histories explored in previous chapters; others go further as they powerfully call forth the poet's history of exile to suggest mind reading as an urgent performance of social and historical subjectivity in the face of Dante's personal epistemological crisis.

As suggested above, these observations offer new ways to see the *Commedia* as part of history, and they help us define with greater attention the poem's linguistic practice and the place of this practice in epistemological history. This reading in turn suggests a response to the question with which I began this chapter, namely why the *Commedia* departs from the visionary tradition to include mind reading in the way that it does. Besides suggesting further poetic justifications for the mind reading *topos*, my reading offers new historical insights. Specifically, the poem's historicized performance of mind reading suggests the inclusion of telepathy for reasons precisely opposed to the poem's narrative claims. Rather than communicating physical, linguistic, and social i.e. historical transcendence, the function of mind reading is to signal an intriguing interest in and engagement with historicity that may emphasize the *Commedia's* humanist inclinations.

In arguing for the poem's engagement with historicity, I claim evidence that comes from outside the economy of Dante's poetic declarations. This sort of reading requires a bit more explanation of methodology. To situate the poem in history is to attempt a sort of historical criticism only recently getting under way in Dante studies. This is not to deny the importance of the many commentaries over the centuries supplying historical information about characters and events in the poem. Nor is it to deny the valuable work of scholars such as Charles Davis, who has helped us to understand Dante's view of history as well as thinkers who influenced Dante's work. Likewise part of Erich Auerbach's seminal achievement was to advance our understanding of how Dante's representations greatly contributed to the renewed idea of the historical individual. Yet these models approach historical criticism precisely from within the poem's carefully constructed resistance to critical attempts to place it in historical context.³² As Barolini writes, the "success of the implicit hermeneutic guidelines structured by Dante into his text" have overdetermined our interpretations, and commentaries over time have

³² Among earlier twentieth-century scholars Auerbach comes close to breaking out of this mold, especially since he posits a general link between the *Commedia*'s historicizing of the individual and subsequent artists: "The perception of history and immanent reality arrived at in the *Comedy* through an eschatological vision, flowed back into real history, filling it with the blood of authentic truth, for an awareness had been born that a man's concrete earthly life is encompassed in his ultimate fate and that the event in its authentic, concrete, complete uniqueness is important for the part it plays in God's judgment. From that center man's earthly, historical reality derived new life and value, and even the *Comedy* where, not without difficulty, the turbulent new forces were confined within an eschatological frame, gives us an intimation of how quickly and violently they would break loose. With Petrarch and Boccaccio the historical world acquired a fully immanent autonomy, and this sense of the self-sufficiency of earthly life spread like a fructifying stream to the rest of Europe – seemingly quite estranged from its eschatological origin and yet secretly linked with it through man's irrevocable bond with his concrete historical fate" (178). While Auerbach hints at the difficulty with which historical forces are contained within the poem, he never considers such forces independent of Dante's eschatological vision. Consequently he writes that the *Commedia*'s structure grounds the "confusion of earthly affairs ... in a plan which embraces it and raises it above all contingency" (133), that fantasy "the essential element of poetry ... has lost its autonomy in the *Comedy*" (160), and that "Dante's poetic genius was inseparably bound up with his doctrine" (175).

proven to be repetitive (1).³³ One result has been that “lack of historicizing has been an abiding feature of Dante exegesis, an essentializing tradition in which the entry ‘inferno’ in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca* does not even gesture toward the history of the idea of hell” (1). In his 2008 monograph, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*, which represents an important new effort to historicize Dante’s career, Albert Ascoli agrees that the vast majority of scholars have attributed a degree of authority to Dante such that “the result is the interpretive assumption, at least heuristically, of ‘total coherence’ in the *Commedia*, which *de facto* removes the poem from historicizing scrutiny, and which does not concede the legitimacy of an analysis not fully encompassed by terms and informing principles that Dante himself provides” (45). Despite the mass of Dante scholarship carried out over the centuries, in many ways the work of historicizing the poem remains.

Due to the poem’s deliberate resistance to historicizing, sanctioned by much of the scholarship, attempting to situate the poem in history requires readings that consciously work against Dante’s strategies of transcendence. As the following chapters make clear, close readings attend carefully to language but are not necessarily dedicated to the idea of authorial intention and are not limited to traditional source work. This is because many mind-reading passages demonstrate historical traces, social conventions, and patterns that sometimes appear incidental and/or challenge the poet’s textual claims. A good example of this, as I explain further in chapter 1, is the way that mind reading as a pattern of epistemological crisis challenges the linear Augustinian model of time that underlies Dante’s Christian conversion.³⁴ Likewise, as suggested above, when looking outside the

³³ Quotations from Barolini in this paragraph are from her forthcoming essay “‘Only Historicize’”: History Material Culture, and the Future of Dante Studies,” which she was kind enough to share prior to publication.

³⁴ As elucidated by John Freccero in *The Poetics of Conversion*.

poem for historical connections, I have not focused solely on locating sources in the traditional sense, i.e. those that are explicitly about mind reading and demonstrably known to Dante, but I have sought above all contexts that may be shown to historicize the *Commedia*'s unusual performance with respect to the visionary tradition.

List A - Mind Reading Passages

Listed below are the passages considered to be instances of mind reading in my initial study limited to the *Paradiso*. In parenthesis are numbers corresponding to the group assignment of each episode, i.e. 1, 2, or 3, as described above in the introduction. It should be noted that this list contains two instances (13.49 and 15.7) which I subsequently eliminated and therefore do not appear on list B (see next page).

1.85 (1)	26.4, 95, 104 (3, 2, 1)
2.27 (1)	27.103 (1)
4.16, 91 (1, 1)	28.40, 97 (1, 1)
7.19, 52, 121 (1, 1, 1)	29.11 (1)
8.85 (2)	30.70 (1)
9.17, 73, 112 (2, 2, 1)	32.49 (1)
10.61, 91 (1, 1)	
11.21 (1)	
13.37, 49, 88 (1, 1, 1)	
14.10 (1)	
15.7, 55 (3, 3)	
17.4 (3)	
18.5 (1)	
19.32, 70 (2, 1)	
20.79 (2)	
21.45 (2)	
22.7, 33 (1, 1)	
24.7, 41 (1, 3)	
25.51 (3)	

List B - Passages Suggesting Mind Reading

Listed below are passages that may suggest mind reading in all three canticles, but as I argue in chapters 1 and 5, some of these examples raise issues that challenge definitive interpretations of mind reading. Given these equivocations, any sort of list may run the risk of providing a misleading picture. While I do not regard all of the passages below as clear examples of mind reading, I list them in order to outline the context of the discussion in this study.

Inferno

10.18

10.125

13.25, 83

16.122

19.39

23.25

26.73

Purgatorio

13.76

15.127

18.7

19.58

19.86

25.17

33.73

Paradiso

1.85	27.103
2.25	28.40, 97
4.16, 91	29.11
7.19, 52, 121	30.70
8.85	32.49
9.17, 73, 112	
10.61, 91	
11.21	
13.37, 88	
14.10	
15.55	
17.4	
18.5	
19.32, 70	
20.79	
21.45	
22.7, 33	
24.7, 41	
25.51	
26.4, 95, 104	

Chapter 1

Does Vergil Read the Pilgrim's Mind?

Trouble in the Epistemological Paradise of Dante's *Commedia*

In narrative terms mind reading in the *Commedia* implies a fantasy of perfect communication, a way of knowing that is free of the contingencies of human expression which, by contrast, is rooted in the body and therefore in history. This ideal is especially strong in the *Paradiso*, where telepathy seems to be an easily discernible phenomenon that marks heaven as a privileged realm. Celestial souls know the pilgrim's thoughts because, we are told in *Par.* 8.85-90, all thoughts are reflected in God and the souls perceive these reflections mirrored through the divine.¹ Through this strategy the poet edges toward God's ultimate silence by positing speech as superfluous, thus elaborating a tense and yet predictably neat poetic *topos* – a paradox of silence versus speech. Telepathy seems to be yet another uncomplicated and impeccable sign of Dante's mimetic prowess.

Yet the issue of Vergil's telepathic ability reveals the seams in Dante's apparently flawless system. In hell and purgatory, Vergil often knows what the pilgrim is thinking as well, but because telepathy seems to belong primarily to heaven, critics have not adequately explored this oddity but have instead responded mainly in one of two ways. Many have glossed over Vergil's mind reading by acknowledging but never questioning this privilege. Others deny Vergil's mind reading as common-sense intuition rooted firmly in profane experience. One reason for these reactions is that readers desire consistency, especially in a poem that

¹ This passage, quoted previously in the introduction, is the first point at which Dante actually suggests celestial mind reading as a process of reflection, although mind reading occurs from the very first canto of the *Paradiso*. See chapter 3 for further discussion and interpretation of this delayed explanation.

appears to be crafted with such magnificent and unwavering order: either Vergil reads Dante pilgrim's mind or he does not. Careful analysis, however, shows that there is no consistency. In fact, Vergil sometimes knows Dante's thoughts, other times he does not. When he does know, sometimes he perceives as an ordinary human and other times as a saved soul. Frequently it is hard to distinguish how or even whether he knows the pilgrim's thoughts at all.²

Readers are also drawn into believing the poet's strategy of telepathy because of what Barolini defines as Dante's astonishing and enduring ability to discourage readers from distinguishing between what he says and what he does.³ What Dante does is to create the *illusion* of telepathy as a pure form of communication belonging exclusively to the celestial realm. He achieves this in part through the frequency of mind reading and its distinction as a visual phenomenon in the *Paradiso*, characteristics that appear to divide its functioning sharply against the other two canticles. In fact, telepathy in paradise cannot always be easily distinguished from Vergil's powers in the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. In part this is because it is implicated with various discourses – scholastic, mystical, body language, the rhetoric of authority – in ways that blur the boundaries among various types of rhetoric, and therefore among different epistemological systems as well. The result is that it is sometimes unclear whether mind reading versus intuition occurs in paradise but also in hell and purgatory, where the reader must consequently grapple more seriously with the extent to which Vergil possesses supernatural powers as well as the problem of why he should bear such authority in

² Marianne Shapiro very briefly mentions mind reading in her study of embodiment, asserting that Vergil's mind reading abilities are inconsistent and linking such abilities to corresponding declarations on the interpretative value of the *Aeneid* for Dante's poem. Yet she does not demonstrate this link with a comprehensible argument, and she assumes (again without even exemplifying or arguing the point) that one can distinguish unproblematically when Vergil does and does not read the pilgrim's mind (24, 93).

³ See especially chapter 3 of *The Undivine Comedy*.

the face of his damnation. Critics, then, have overlooked in all three canticles the ambiguous rhetoric that ostensibly does not seem to complicate mind reading, but nevertheless does precisely that. Once we acknowledge the ambiguous nature of Vergil's telepathy in hell and purgatory, it becomes easier to see that telepathy is also problematic in paradise.

Attention to Vergil's curious powers is thus a point of departure for this study as a whole and for this chapter, which explores and introduces telepathy as an especially intriguing sign of epistemological uncertainty, not only in the canticles in which Vergil appears but throughout the poem. The best place to begin making this case is by examining Vergil's telepathic relationship with the pilgrim and the critical reactions to it. The first thing to say is that this relationship should be not misunderstood or dismissed on the basis of its inconsistency. To do so is to miss the profoundly complex web of understanding in which the Roman poet relates to his ward and consequently the meaning of Dante's representation. With this in mind, we may note that Vergil's knowledge in the poem is flawed in a number of ways. Perhaps the most famous instance is his vulnerability to the devils' trickery in lower hell, when Malacoda claims falsely in canto 21.109-11 that the travelers will find a suitable bridge over one of the ditches.⁴ Earlier in canto 9.7-9, Vergil likewise reveals uncertainty about the journey's success when the gates of Dis are slammed in his face («Pur a noi converrà vincer la punga», / cominciò el, «se non . . . Tal ne s'offerse. / Oh quanto tarda a me ch'altri qui giunga!»).⁵ He also occasionally expresses ignorance of what Dante is thinking, as in *Inferno* 5 when the pilgrim lowers his head in thought following Francesca's moving speech: *Quand' io intesi*

⁴ Vergil discovers the lie in canto 23.139-41: "Lo duca stette un poco a testa china; / poi disse: «Mal contava la bisogna / colui che i peccator di qua uncina»" [My leader stood a while with his head bent, / then said: 'He who hooks sinners over there / gave us a false account of this affair].

⁵ "We have to win this battle," he began, / 'if not... But one so great had offered aid. / *O how slow it seems to me that someone comes.*"

quell' anime offense, / china' il viso, e tanto il tenni basso, / fin che 'l poeta mi disse:
 «Che pense?» (109-11).⁶ Remarkably, the fourteenth-century commentator
 Francesco da Buti (1385-95) as well as the sixteenth-century commentator
 Alessandro Vellutello (1544) suggest that Vergil in fact knows Dante's thoughts in
 this passage. These critics justify their belief by allegorizing Vergil's role, implying
 that as the representation of reason he knows what the pilgrim is thinking and
 questions him only to guide him away from his vain thoughts. Buti writes:

Qui può essere allegoria, che la sensualità significata
 per Dante per le cose mundane si muove et attristasi; ma
 la ragione significata per Virgilio la sveglia, a ciò che
 di quel vano pensiero esca. Dice adunque: Che ài tu
 Dante, o vero, che pensi, che stai col capo chinato,
 che è segno di pensiero?⁷

Vellutello follows suit with “Adunque Dante, inteso per la parte sensitiva, ha
 compassione di questi afflitti; ma Virgilio, cioè, la parte ragionevole, considerando
 che giustamente sono puniti, lo remove da tal consideratione.”⁸ These interpretations
 are significant, for they reflect a critical impulse to make Vergil's knowledge, and
 thus his epistemology, consistent. As we will see, it is an impulse that continues to
 this day.

⁶ “When I had listened to those injured souls, / I bent my head and held it low until / the poet asked
 of me: ‘What are you thinking?’”

⁷ “Here the allegory can be that sensuality, signified by Dante, is moved and saddened by worldly
 things; but reason, signified by Vergil, awakens it so that it departs from that vain thought. He says
 therefore: ‘What is wrong with you, Dante, or rather, what are you thinking that you stand with head
 lowered, which is a sign of pensiveness.’ Commentaries are cited from the online Dartmouth Dante
 project database online (see bibliography). Commentaries not included in the database are listed in
 the bibliography and quoted in the text with page numbers. Translations of all Latin and Italian
 commentaries are my own.

⁸ “Therefore Dante, understood as the sensual aspect, has compassion for these afflicted (souls); but
 Vergil, that is the reasonable aspect, considering that they are punished justly, removes him from
 such consideration.” Giorgio Padoan (1967) also suggests that Vergil understands the depth of
 Dante's emotion and asks in order to help him overcome it. Interestingly, several early twentieth-
 century commentators such as Luigi Pietrobono (1946) suggest that Vergil may in fact participate in
 the pilgrim's compassion.

In episodes when it is clear that Vergil does indeed know the pilgrim's thoughts, critics have also gotten caught up in the poem's narrative drama and have thus overlooked the strange mechanism of the knowledge itself. One of the most interesting cases appears in the *Commedia's* first mind reading episode, at the beginning of *Inferno* 10 in the circle of the heretics.⁹ When the pilgrim asks whether the souls in the uncovered tombs can be seen, Vergil first responds that the tombs will be sealed after the Last Judgment, and that they contain the followers of Epicurus, i.e. those who believed that the soul dies with the body. He then declares that Dante will soon know the answer to his question as well as to the one he has kept hidden: "Però a la dimanda che mi faci / quinc' entro satisfatto sarà tosto, / e al disio ancor che tu mi taci»."¹⁰ Among the late medieval commentaries up to 1400, there is no critical consensus on how and even whether Vergil knows Dante's desire in this episode. Boccaccio (1373-75) considers but rejects the idea that the pilgrim's doubt concerns why damned souls know the future but not the present, and he concludes that he does not know what the desire is:

Il quale disio taciuto dall'autore vogliono alcuni
che fosse di sapere perché l'anime dannate mostrano
di sapere le cose future, e le presenti non par che
sappiano; la qual cosa gli mostra appresso messer
Farinata. Ma io non so perché questo desiderio gli
si dovesse esser venuto, con ciò sia cosa che niun
altro vaticinio per ancora avesse udito, se non quello
che detto gli fu da Ciaccio; salvo se dir non volessimo
essergli nato da questo, che Ciaccio gli disse le cose
future e Filippo Argenti nol conobbe, essendo egli
presente: ma questa non pare assai conveniente
cagione da doverlo aver fatto dubitare, con ciò

⁹ There is a great deal to say about this episode in the context of an astonishingly rich canto. In this chapter I am concerned with critical reception, but I return to this episode in chapter 5 to address the context (i.e. why it is the first mind reading episode in the poem) and other related philosophical issues, including the problem of the other damned souls' knowledge/prophetic abilities.

¹⁰ "And so the question you have asked of me / will soon find satisfaction while we're here, / as will the desire that you do not express to me."

sia cosa che, come Ciacco il vide, il conoscesse,
come davanti apare; e però, che che altri si dica,
io non discerno assai bene qual si potesse essere
quel disio, il quale Virgilio dice qui che l'autore
gli tace.¹¹

Both Benvenuto da Imola (1373-80) and Francesco da Buti (1385-95) believe Vergil knows the pilgrim's desire is to see Farinata based on the conversation with Ciacco in canto 6.79-84. There Dante asks where Farinata, Tegghiaio, Iacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo and Mosca, as well as other souls may be found, and Ciacco responds that Dante will find them "tra l'anime più nere" (85), among the blackest souls in lower hell. As with *Inferno* 5.111, Buti again allegorizes the mechanism of Vergil's knowledge, assigning the roles of reason and sensuality to Vergil and the pilgrim, respectively.¹² The *Anonimo Fiorentino* (1400) does not see this episode as a telepathic moment, believing that Vergil could not have known Dante's desire except that when Dante asked about the souls among the graves, Vergil could understand that the pilgrim wanted to ask them something.

Nearly all the commentators after 1400 listed in the *DDP* abandon any explanation of how Vergil knows the hidden desire and instead simply affirm that

¹¹ "Some intend that the desire unexpressed by the author is to know why damned souls have knowledge of future things and they do not seem to know present things; which Farinata makes known to him presently. But I do not know why this desire should have occurred to him, since he had not yet heard any other prophecy, except what was said to him by Ciacco; except if we wanted to say that it came to him from this, that Ciacco told him future things and Filippo Argenti didn't know him (i.e. didn't know who the pilgrim was), when he was present. But this does not seem an appropriate enough reason to have caused him to doubt, since as Ciacco sees him (i.e. the pilgrim), he knows him, as appears before; and therefore despite what is said by others, I do not discern well enough what could be that desire which Vergil says that the author does not express to him."

¹² "Potrebbe si dubitare dalla gente grossa, come indovinava Virgilio lo desiderio di Dante. A che si può rispondere che la ragione sa che la sensualità cerca di sapere le cose particolari, com'ella l'universali per le particolari, e ch'ella non può comprendere l'universalità, sì che benchè Dante domandasse universalmente, quando disse: *La gente*, ec.; la intenzione sua era sapere particolarmente, se vi erano de' Fiorentini e chi erano quelli; e questa è fizione dell'autore." [Here it could be asked by dull people how Vergil guessed Dante's desire. To which we can respond that reason knows that sensuality seeks to know particular things, as it (seeks) universals through particulars, and that it cannot understand universality, so that although Dante asked universally, when he said "La gente," etc., his intention was to know particularly, if there were Florentines there and who they were, and this is the fiction of the author].

the pilgrim wants to speak with Farinata and that Vergil knows this from canto 6.¹³ However, in his 1971 translation and commentary of the poem, Mark Musa accepts the possibility rejected by Boccaccio, i.e. that Dante's desire indeed pertains to the shades' mechanism of knowledge:

...many critics believe that it was the desire to know whether Farinata is among the heretics. But surely it is preferable to assume that the silent wish is rather to know the extent of the shades' knowledge, i.e., how much of the future they can foresee and whether they know the present. This "wish," which must have begun with Ciaccio's prophecy in Canto VI, will soon be the cause of Dante's silence before Cavalcante, and will be satisfied by Farinata (163).

Subsequently in a 1977 article, Musa changed his mind to agree with most other critics that Dante really wants to know Farinata's fate, reminding us that "already in Canto VI the Pilgrim had told Ciaccio of his great desire to know the eternal fate of Farinata and other great Florentines of his time, and Virgil must have heard him" (151). Other modern commentators including Sapegno, Singleton, and Di Salvo agree that this is Dante's wish, but as will be addressed below, Musa alone interprets the passage as evidence against telepathy.

¹³ There are three exceptions: Luigi Bannassuti (1964-68) addresses not only the issue of how Vergil knows Dante's unspoken desire, but how he knows that they will meet two Florentines. Interestingly, he cites an unnamed authority (indicated by italics) regarding the knowledge of separated souls: "Ma come sa Virgilio che poco più oltre giaceano nelle tombe spiriti fiorentini, e che questi si sarebbero levati all'appressarsi di Dante? Per questa ragione che Dante attribuisce a Virgilio puro spirito la così detta introspeccienza. *E tale infatti è la proprietà degli spiriti separati, che non sono impediti nel lor vedere dal velame e dall'ingombro dei sensi. Per questa stessa ragione Virgilio vede anche nel cuor di Dante, onde dice: E al disio ancor che tu mi taci.*" [But how does Vergil know that the Florentine spirits lie in the tombs a short way beyond and that these would be raised at Dante's approach? For this reason, Dante attributes to Vergil, a pure spirit, the so-called introspection. And such in fact is the property of separated souls, which are not impeded in their vision by the veil and the obstruction of the senses. For this same reason Vergil sees also in the heart of Dante, whence he says "E al disio ancor che tu mi taci]. It is not clear whether by "introspeccienza," Bannassuti means telepathy or a sort of intuition. Giacomo Poletto (1894) also states that Vergil knows through "intuizione" without further explanation, while Giuseppe Giacalone (1968) attributes Vergil's knowledge to the "tono affettuoso" with which he believes the pilgrim had spoken with Ciaccio about the Florentines.

Musa's change of heart confirms that the hidden desire is not in fact obvious. Yet remarkably, most critics are more interested in pinning down the desire rather than recognizing the value of the uncertainty that Dante poet creates.¹⁴ Regardless of how easily Vergil may guess the pilgrim's desire based on information from canto 6, he somehow knows exactly when this thought occurs to Dante. Why does Dante poet lead us to believe that Virgil reads the pilgrim's mind, and what does he gain from keeping the desire hidden from readers? Critics have overlooked these questions in part because of the way the poet ingeniously collapses form and content in this episode. Dante seduces the reader with Vergil's mysterious knowledge by implicating us in not knowing the truth of the pilgrim's desire precisely as we encounter the heretics, those who deviated from God's truth. Vergil knows something we do not but we feel that we should because we have somehow internalized the plight of the sinners who are damned precisely for not following the truth, one consequence of which is their ignorance of the present. The critical reaction has been to define and "resolve" the problem of what the pilgrim wants to know by projecting onto the episode information that we learn only after the fact, i.e. the pilgrim does indeed speak with Farinata. In this way, Dante's poetics entangle readers into the moral drama of heresy, reflecting the power of the poem's fiction to seduce readers into interpreting it within the boundaries of its verisimilitude. The result is that content dominates the discussion and displaces questions of form.

In his gloss Boccaccio appears to have sensed this conflation of form and content, and his lack of resolution may have set in motion an analogous critical drama. It is as if his confession of not knowing defines the problem that must be

¹⁴ Di Salvo hints at the uncertainty when he says that the hidden desire is "di parlare con Farinata, se è vera l'ipotesi che deve essere in questo cerchio" (167) [to speak with Farinata, if the hypothesis is true that he must be in this circle].

solved by subsequent commentators, who consequently miss the value of the issue framed as an epistemological one. Boccaccio (and briefly Musa) interpret this problem, which is epistemological in form (i.e. how Vergil knows) as potentially epistemological in content as well: they consider that the pilgrim may desire to know how the shades know. Further, Boccaccio alone is willing to respond with epistemological uncertainty, concluding that in narrative terms there is no logical way to know what the pilgrim's desire is. He alone accepts that he cannot know it.

If we appreciate Boccaccio's unresolved reading for its epistemological focus, we can perhaps also understand the value in shifting critical attention toward the problem of Vergil's telepathy, which continues throughout hell and purgatory. Vergil claims to know his charge's thoughts in canto 16.118-23 upon Geryon's advent and again in canto 26.73 when he decides to speak for the pilgrim in addressing Ulysses and Diomedes, stating that he knows what the pilgrim wants.¹⁵ Dante pilgrim's language echoes the telepathic episode of *Inferno* 10 when he asks about a soul's writhing legs that protrude from the vessels resembling baptismal fonts in *Inferno* 19. Vergil offers to carry him down the bank so that he may speak with the sinner, and the pilgrim responds with "E io: «Tanto m'è bel, quanto a te piace: / tu se' signore, e sai ch'i' non mi parto / dal tuo volere, e sai quel che si tace» (37-9)."¹⁶ In the strongest link between Vergil's telepathy and the specular variety of heaven, the Roman poet compares himself to a mirror in canto 23 when he reassures the pilgrim as they escape from the *Malebranche*:

¹⁵ In the first episode, the Roman guide says to the pilgrim "«Tosto verrà di sopra / ciò ch'io attendo e che il tuo pensier sogna; / tosto convien ch'al tuo viso si scovra»" [Now there will soon emerge / what I await and what your thought has conjured: / it soon must be discovered to your sight." In the second he says *Lascia parlare a me, ch'i' ho concetto / ciò che tu vuoi*" [Let me address them – I have understood what you desire of them]. In chapter 5 I discuss these episodes from cantos 16 and 26 in detail, analyzing them as speech acts. In that chapter I also address an additional passage that suggests mind reading in canto 13.25.

¹⁶ "And I: 'What pleases you will please me too: / you are my lord; you know I do not swerve / from what you will; you know what is unspoken.'"

«Maestro, se non celi
te e me tostamente, i' ho pavento
d'i Malebranche. Noi li avem già dietro;
io li 'magino sì, che già li sento».
E quei: «S'i' fossi di piombato vetro,
l'immagine di fuor tua non trarrei
più tosto a me, che quella dentro 'mpetro.
Pur mo venieno i tuo' pensier tra ' miei,
con simile atto e con simile faccia,
sì che d'intrambi un sol consiglio fei” (*Inf.* 23.21-30).¹⁷

The vast majority of the early commentators and most modern commentators assume that Vergil does indeed know Dante pilgrim’s thoughts in all of these episodes, but they do not address the issue of how or why he should have these powers.¹⁸ Recent exceptions are Mark Musa and Robert Hollander. Musa denies Vergil’s mind reading as supernatural in a brief 1977 article, which is limited to the *Inferno* and is the only critical study focused on telepathy of which I am aware.¹⁹ In the cases of *Inferno* 16.118 and 19.37, he believes that Vergil uses common sense to

¹⁷ ““Master, if you don’t conceal / yourself and me at once – they terrify me, / those Malebranche; they are after us; / I so imagine them, I hear them now.’ / And he to me: ‘Were I a leaded mirror, / I could not gather in your outer image / more quickly than I have received your inner. / For even now your thoughts have joined my own; in both our acts and aspects we are kin – with both our minds I’ve come to one decision.’” For discussion of this interesting passage, see chapter 3 where I contextualize it with the other examples of specular telepathy from the *Paradiso*.

¹⁸ The following are exceptions: Regarding *Inferno* 16, Attilio Momigliano (1946-51) suggests Vergil does not know the pilgrim’s thoughts when he says “Virgilio indovina il pensiero di Dante” [Vergil guesses Dante’s thought]. Lodovico Castelvetro (1570) argues more obviously against telepathy in canto 23. Concerning canto 26, the commentaries are less uniform. In this case, Guido da Pisa (1327-8?) says that Vergil knows the pilgrim’s thoughts through external signs: “Et quia Dantes ostendit per signa extrinseca magnum desiderium loquendi cum illis, ideo Virgilius statim fuit ymaginatus quid petere vellet illis” {And because Dante shows through external signs a great desire to speak with them, for that reason Vergil immediately had imagined what he wants to ask of them}. Pisa thus supports a sort of intuition via body language, but his explanation does not account for how Vergil knows Dante’s specific desire. Castelvetro (1570) believes that Vergil knows only that Dante is curious about something and approves of his desire only because wanting to know something about great and famous men is in and of itself praiseworthy. Several twentieth-century commentators, including Francesco Torraca (1905), C.H. Grandgent (1909-13), Carlo Grabher (1934-6) and others gloss verse 73 “conpetto” as suggesting intuition but do not make the case explicitly for or against telepathy.

¹⁹ For the episodes of the *Inferno*, Hollander does not offer his own argument but refers to and supports Musa. As noted above, other scholars such as Morgan and Shapiro briefly mention mind reading as part of their studies on other topics.

guess the pilgrim's thoughts. With regard to canto 26 he insists that Vergil knows only that the pilgrim desires a memorable encounter with the Greek heroes and so selects something appropriate, finding it "completely unpoetic" (152) that Vergil might know what Dante wants to hear. Likewise, he believes that in the canto 23 episode, Vergil merely claims to know what Dante pilgrim wants to say, and he links the Roman poet's assertion of telepathic powers to his overconfidence vis-à-vis the devils' promise of assistance in canto 21, i.e. just as Vergil did not understand the devils' deception, so he does not really know Dante's thoughts but nevertheless claims to in order to bolster his authority as guide. Musa therefore concludes that all of Vergil's telepathic/intuitive episodes are strictly of an earthly variety, to be absolutely distinguished from celestial communication:

True, Virgil can read the pilgrim's mind. Sometimes his inference is one that would inevitably occur to any normal person, sometimes it is the result of true discernment and sagacity – but always within the limits of human intelligence. And this is as it should be. Virgil is the embodiment of Reason, but that means, of course, human reason. Let us restrict the gift of god-like divination to the Pilgrim's other guide (152).

Yet to explain away Vergil's telepathy is to ignore the important question of why Dante poet so conspicuously invites us to entertain the possibility, not only in the *Inferno* but in the *Purgatorio*, which Musa does not address. There the evidence supporting Vergil's power becomes stronger since Dante poet confirms it. Even more noteworthy is that a striking pattern of epistemological urgency emerges in these episodes, as we notice that Vergil's mind reading is implicated in moments of narrative and critical occlusion. This pattern is present in the *Inferno* 10 episode, where the pilgrim's question about souls hidden in tombs corresponds to Vergil's discernment of his hidden desire, and the critical search to define it. We also see it in the poet's famous verse in *Inferno* 13.25-27 (which I discuss more fully in

chapter 5), “Cred' ïo ch'ei credette ch'io credesse / che tante voci uscisser, tra quei bronchi, / da gente che per noi si nascondesse,”²⁰ which suggests that Vergil knows the pilgrim’s thought precisely regarding sounds that appear to issue from hidden souls. In *Inferno* 16 (quoted above), Vergil claims to read the pilgrim’s mind regarding the mysterious new thing that is hidden from view when Vergil throws the cord into the abyss, which turns out to be the monster Geryon. In the *Inferno* 23 episode (also cited above), Dante pilgrim begs his guide to hide them from the devils (Maestro, se non celi / te e me tostamente...) at which point Vergil claims to know his thoughts. The poet underscores Vergil’s discernment in *Purgatorio* 13.76 by enacting it in the context of the envious souls’ blindness: the pilgrim remains silent because he is disturbed at seeing the envious souls while they cannot see him. Nonetheless Vergil knows what he wants to say: “Ben sapev' ei che volea dir lo muto.”²¹

This paradox of revelation and concealment intensifies in *Purgatorio* 15 and 19 as Dante experiences visions. The first episode occurs on the terrace of the envious when the pilgrim undergoes visions of *mansuetudine*, following which Vergil asks why he appears so disoriented. The exchange is particularly fascinating for the way it dramatizes at length the issue of both Dante’s and Vergil’s knowledge:

Quando l'anima mia tornò di fori
a le cose che son fuor di lei vere,
io riconobbi i miei non falsi errori.
Lo duca mio, che mi potea vedere
far sì com' om che dal sonno si slega,
disse: «Che hai che non ti puoi tenere,
ma se' venuto più che mezza lega
velando li occhi e con le gambe avvolte,

²⁰ “I believe that he believed that I believed / that so many voices came forth among those trunks / from people who had been concealed from us.”

²¹ “He knew quite well what I, though mute, wanted to say.”

a guisa di cui vino o sonno piega?».
 «O dolce padre mio, se tu m'ascolte,
 io ti dirò», diss' io, «ciò che m'apparve
 quando le gambe mi furon sì tolte».
 Ed ei: «Se tu avessi cento larve
 sovra la faccia, non mi sarian chiuse
 le tue cogitazion, quantunque parve.
 Ciò che vedesti fu perché non scuse
 d'aprir lo core a l'acque de la pace
 che da l'eterno fonte son diffuse.
 Non dimandai ``Che hai?" per quel che face
 chi guarda pur con l'occhio che non vede,
 quando disanimato il corpo giace;
 ma dimandai per darti forza al piede:
 così frugar conviensi i pigri, lenti
 ad usar lor vigilia quando riede» (*Purg.* 15.115-38).²²

Hollander believes that this scene represents “the tensions that exist here between the protagonist and his guide,” with Vergil attempting to cover his ignorance by insincerely asserting his telepathic abilities. He argues that on the basis of Dante’s body language and his claim to have seen things not visible, Vergil is able to surmise that the pilgrim has undergone ecstatic visions that “present positive figures of the opposing virtue, precisely to ‘open your heart to the waters of peace,’ as he tells Dante.” Thus Vergil comprehends the general meaning of the exemplars without knowing their specific content.²³

²² “And when my soul returned outside itself / and met the things outside it that are real, / I then could recognize my not false errors. / My guide, on seeing me behave as if / I were a man who’s free himself from sleep, / said: ‘What is wrong with you? You can’t walk straight; / for more than half a league now you have moved / with clouded eyes and lurching legs, as if / you were a man whom wine or sleep has gripped!’ / ‘Oh, my kind father, if you hear me out, / I’ll tell you what appeared to me,’ I said, / ‘when I had lost the right use of my legs.’ / And he: ‘Although you had a hundred masks / upon your face, that still would not conceal / from me the thoughts you thought, however slight. / What you have seen was shown lest you refuse / to open up your heart unto the waters / of peace that pour from the eternal fountain. / I did not ask ‘What’s wrong with you?’ as one / who only sees with earthly eyes, which – once / the body, stripped of soul, lies dead – can’t see; / I asked so that your feet might find more force: / so must one urge the indolent, too slow / to use their waking time when it returns.” See below for discussion of the difficult lines 128-29.

²³ Here again Hollander denies absolutely Vergil’s telepathy in the whole poem, referring again to Musa’s 1977 article on the first canticle, asserting that there is “no evidence” for Vergil’s telepathy in the poem: “As Musa has pointed out (see the notes to *Inf.* XVI.115 and XXIII.25), there is no evidence in the poem, despite Virgil’s claim in *Inferno* XXIII (repeated here), that he actually can read the protagonist’s mind – a capacity reserved for Beatrice and the other saved souls who

In a 1991 article, Lauren Scancarelli Seem relates the episode to what she believes to be Vergil's boasting assertion of telepathy in *Inferno* 23, concluding that Vergil's misunderstanding of the pilgrim's vision and the realm of purgatory explains why he admonishes the pilgrim inappropriately and claims knowledge he does not have: his ignorance prompts him to shore up his ever-waning authority. Her argument seems convincing, especially since the tensions between the guide and the pilgrim are quite real; Vergil's authority indeed diminishes throughout purgatory, culminating in his sudden departure after which the pilgrim must continue without him. Therefore might Vergil's claim here (and in *Inf.* 23) represent a sort of dramatic irony that in fact broadcasts his inability to know Dante's thoughts, and hence the truth? Perhaps, but judgments confined to the narrative drama do not do justice to the philosophical richness of this passage, nor do they contextualize the episode with other relevant passages, particularly the vision in *Purg.* 19, that challenge Scancarelli Seem's conclusion. Indeed, the only way to make definitive arguments for or against Vergil's supernatural powers is to underscore certain episodes while ignoring others.

I believe there is more going on in canto 15 than simply the gap between Vergil's diminishing authority and the pilgrim's growing knowledge. The scene enacts profound epistemological complexity by insisting on truth in a context of occlusion and misunderstanding. Dante declares his access to truth, to the things that are real, through his famous revelation of "non falsi errori" (not false errors). Vergil then questions his sluggishness, leading the pilgrim to explain himself, which

interview Dante in the heavens." Earlier commentators accept Vergil's mind reading without question. Nicola Fosca (2003-6) cites Hollander but does not believe that Vergil actively pretends, only that his knowledge is necessarily limited: "Virgilio ovviamente non simula, ma la sua è una spiegazione generica, in quanto si limita a porre in contrapposizione pace al vizio di iracondia che si espia nel terzo girone, vizio che coinvolge anche il pellegrino" [Vergil obviously does not pretend, but his is a generic explanation, insofar as it is limited to opposing peace to the vice of wrath that is expiated on the third terrace, a vice that involves the pilgrim as well].

in turn prompts Vergil to clarify his penetration of Dante's thoughts. But he does so precisely in terms of his own versions of occlusion, imagining the pilgrim's concealed face as no obstacle to his discernment: "Se tu avessi cento larve / sovra la faccia, non mi sarian chiuse / le tue cogitazion, quantunque parve" (127-9). Then he corrects the pilgrim's misunderstanding of his query in a tercet whose meaning is not entirely clear: "Non dimandai ``Che hai?" per quel che face / chi guarda pur con l'occhio che non vede, / quando disanimato il corpo giace." Hollander, citing Cachey, documents three interpretive possibilities in the commentary tradition that assign the "disanimato corpo" either to Vergil or to Dante pilgrim. The first and most common is that Vergil says he is unlike those who are fooled when they see someone faint without understanding the reason why; the second is that Vergil means that he does not see merely with mortal eyes that no longer function in death, and the third is that Vergil is referring to Dante's physical state during his vision, i.e. he does not ask "what's wrong" because he fails to understand Dante's appearance but because he wishes to spur the pilgrim on.²⁴ The third possibility is attractive because, as Barolini points out, Vergil's words evoke the condition of "the pilgrim's visionary trance," a condition defined by Augustine and other visionaries as the body that "lies apparently lifeless while the soul is rapt in contemplation" (152).²⁵

Yet Vergil's puzzling shift from the second to the impersonal third person in line 133 (which creates the interpretive ambiguity) alerts us to the potential of visionary experience *in general*, i.e. as an experience that not only Dante pilgrim has but that others have as well ("Non dimandai ``Che hai?" per quel che face / *chi*

²⁴ Hollander (following Scancarelli Seem) subscribes to the third possibility but remains focused on the narrative in arguing for these lines as further evidence of Vergil's insincere justification.

²⁵ See chapter 7 of *The Undivine Comedy*, which also discusses further the implications of the phrase "non falsi errori."

guarda pur con l'occhio che non vede”). This contributes to my inclination to see Vergil’s words as part of a larger meditation on the problem of knowing itself, which we recognize only if we persist in questioning the poetic motivations for this lengthy exchange. Indeed, why does Dante poet go to such unusual lengths, over eight tercets, to dramatize this confusion between the pilgrim and Vergil, and why does he do so in a manner that implicates the reader?²⁶ These verses explore not only the question of Dante’s knowledge versus Vergil’s, but the problem of knowledge itself as one that cannot be experienced, or defined, according to absolute systems. The more profound point seems to be precisely that truth and understanding, for Dante, Vergil, but also others including the reader, occur in the context of ambiguity, of “non falsi errori,” of a range of both human and supernatural exchanges that are always determined by privilege and subject to misunderstanding. Whether Vergil’s claims are sincere or not, his knowledge is not meant to be encapsulated and dismissed but rather understood as part of a continuum in which all true knowledge reveals itself through, and perhaps only in the context of occlusion.

Supporting this reading is the second telepathic episode that occurs in the context of the pilgrim’s vision in *Purgatorio* 19, which takes place between the fourth and fifth terraces. Here we find another exchange between Vergil and the pilgrim following the latter’s vision of the “antica strega”:

«Che hai che pur inver' la terra guati?»,
 la guida mia incominciò a dirmi,
 poco amendue da l'angel sormontati.
 E io: «Con tanta sospeccion fa irmi

²⁶ Hollander confirms that “On each terrace there is poetic space reserved for some sort of reaction on the part of the poet or protagonist (and, at times, his guide) to the experience of exemplarity. Of the thirteen other passages devoted to these transitional moments...none is even nearly as lengthy as this one, twenty-four verses...It is clear that the poet wanted to direct our attention to the importance of this exchange between guide and protagonist.”

novella vision ch'a sé mi piega,
 sì ch'io non posso dal pensar partirmi».
 «Vedesti», disse, «quell'antica strega
 che sola sovr' a noi omai si piagne;
 vedesti come l'uom da lei si slega. (*Purg.* 19.52-60).²⁷

Once again Vergil questions the pilgrim's distracted affect,²⁸ and once again the latter states that he has had a vision. This time, however, the pilgrim states that the dream has beguiled him. Vergil responds by not merely claiming to know what his charge has seen, but he recounts precisely the dream's content as well as its utility. The commentary tradition supports Vergil's telepathy in this passage, with the exception of Hollander, who links this episode to the vision in canto 15, believing that in both instances Vergil's initial questions reflect his continued ignorance of what is going on. He says that in canto 15 Vergil "seems to have insisted that he knew what he did not know" while in canto 19 he "seems to have intuited correctly what his charge was dreaming." Given that there is no good narrative explanation for such intuition, Hollander turns to a possible textual variant, noting (via Scartazzini's gloss) that some texts have question marks following verses 59 and 60 (si piagne" and "si slega") that would transform Vergil's statements into questions. This altered punctuation, he believes, would prove his point that Vergil is able to

²⁷ "What makes you keep your eyes upon the ground?" / my guide began to say to me when both / of us had climbed a little, past the angel. / And I: 'What makes me move with such misgiving / is a new vision: it has so beguiled me / that I cannot relinquish thoughts of it.' / 'The one you saw,' he said, 'that ancient witch - / for her alone one must atone above; / you saw how man can free himself from her.'

²⁸ Vergil questions the pilgrim similarly at *Inferno* 10.125, not long after he claims to know Dante's hidden desire at verse 18. While the pilgrim silently ponders Farinata's disturbing words, Vergil asks "Perché se' tu sì smarrito" [Why are you so lost], knowing that the pilgrim is troubled yet not knowing why. In this case, the pilgrim's answer suggests that he truly supplies information to his guide. Interestingly, commentators do not attempt to allegorize Vergil's knowledge in this episode, but only Lodovico Castelvetro (1570), Francesco Torraca (1905), and Giovanni Fallani (1965) note that elsewhere Vergil reads the pilgrim's mind while here he does not seem to do so. Fallani attempts to smooth over the inconsistency by claiming that Vergil simply prefers that the pilgrim speak in this case so that he may relieve his inner tension.

guess the content of Dante's dream.²⁹ Hollander does not mention that Scartazzini nonetheless believes the verses to be statements, but in any case, transforming the verses into questions resolves little, for it does not explain how Vergil would know to ask about the "antica strega" in the first place. It also would disrupt the sense of the passage, since Vergil's explanation clarifies the pilgrim's beguilement ("sospeccion"). Vergil's telepathy cannot be explained away either by narrative evidence or textual editing.

Critics want to define Vergil's knowledge in absolute terms because, as mentioned above, they desire consistency, but they do so not only for narrative but also historical motives. When Musa and Hollander frame Vergil's knowledge in terms of his embodiment as human reason, they are in fact following the critical tradition of the early commentators who similarly allegorize Vergil's role. Just as Buti and Vellutello insist, on the basis of Vergil's allegorical role, that he knows Dante's thoughts even when the text suggests otherwise, so Musa and Hollander marshal the same strategy to insist on just the opposite – that Vergil does not know Dante's thoughts even when there is strong evidence that he does. Barolini, citing Nardi, frames a trend toward allegorization as a strategy to protect Dante from the charges of heresy that were leveled at him, such that from the very beginning critics quite deliberately downplayed the literal sense of the poetry precisely in order to make the *Commedia* more palatable to church authorities (*Undivine Comedy* 6). For this reason, critics may have felt the need to overemphasize Vergil's knowledge as representing reason.³⁰ The earlier commentators allegorize Vergil in order to

²⁹ Hollander states that "Scartazzini (comm. to verse 58) points out that some texts have question marks following the words 'si piagne' (verse 59) and 'si slega' (verse 60), making what Petrocchi's text records as observations into questions. Were we to know that such was indeed the punctuation used by Dante, the hypothesis outlined above would be supported, i.e., Vergil did not 'see' Dante's dream, but divined it from the situational context."

³⁰ This does not mean, of course, that allegorical interpretations in general are necessarily inappropriate or that they only served historical purposes.

support his authority within rational limits, while the later ones invoke this tradition in an effort to interpret such authority as part of a narrative drama and to distinguish it from the telepathic powers of celestial souls. Thus while not carrying out full-fledged allegorical readings, the later commentators build on the allegorizers' desire for consistency, casting Vergil in terms of sustained psychological development in ways not unlike characterizations found in the modern novel.

If we pay more attention to the literal sense of the mind reading passages, we can also begin to extricate our readings from the fictional limits that Dante creates. Interpretations that demand consistency, even where none exists, suffer from a reading of the poem that is determined by Dante's ability to convince us to think within the fictional limits he creates rather than confronting what his poetics actually do. The logical fallacy in this case suggests that because Vergil is damned, in the end he is absolutely separated from souls in heaven, and therefore so are his modes of knowing. As a result, his telepathy must be construed as, in Musa's words, "of course, human reason."³¹ With this awareness, we can begin to think

³¹ There has been a similar critical trend regarding Vergil's relationship with magic in the poem. As Domenico Comparetti and other scholars showed, there were many popular legends in the thirteenth century portraying Vergil as a magician. In *Inf.* 20, Dante alters the story (recounted by Vergil) of Mantua's founding by making Manto a virgin, whereas in the *Aeneid* she has a son who founds Mantua in her honor. This revision, as well as Vergil's criticism of the diviners, seems to be a condemnation of divination, and scholars such as Comparetti, Francesco D'Ovidio, and more recently Hollander have argued that Dante means to distance Vergil from the popular legends. Comparetti does not believe that Dante was concerned with disproving Vergil's link to magic because he thinks Dante essentially ignored such legends, but he does believe that Vergil's harsh condemnation of the diviners in *Inf.* 20 represents Dante's reaction to magicians of his day. D'Ovidio, on the other hand, believes that Vergil's portrayal is meant to reject the legends specific to him. Comparetti displays a version of the collocation fallacy (defined by Barolini as "the set of assumptions that permit a critic to argue against a given point of view with regard to a particular soul on the basis of that soul's collocation within the fictive possible world of the *Commedia*. Thus reading X is not tenable with regard to character X because, if it were operative, character X would be located elsewhere; for example, Ulysses cannot be guilty of false discourse, because then he would be with Sinon among the falsifiers of words" 15) when he says "Had Dante thought of Vergil as a magician, he would have had to put him with Guido Bonatti, Asdente and the rest, to whom Vergil shows himself by no means partial" (218). D'Ovidio displays the fallacy as well when he claims that "se gl'indovini fossero tacciati specialmente d'empietà, il loro posto sarebbe tra i violenti contro Dio, mentre sono tra i frodolenti, cioè son considerati propriamente come impostori" ("Dante e la magia" 121) [if the diviners had been accused particularly of impiety, their place would be

more critically about why Vergil's knowledge is so variable. For there are a number of instances in which Vergil's telepathy is hard to confirm, a reality that in part has fueled some of the above interpretations. In *Inferno* 12 he makes what may be an educated guess when he says to the thoughtful pilgrim as they move across the stones «Tu pensi / forse a questa ruina, ch'è guardata / da quell' ira bestial ch'i' ora spensi» (31-33).³² Likewise the pilgrim, speechless with pity for the masterfully eloquent Pier della Vigne in *Inferno* 13.82, asks Vergil to select a question that he believes will satisfy his desire, raising the possibility but offering no conclusive evidence for mind reading.

Many of these inconclusive episodes contextualize Vergil's knowledge within a fascinating epistemology of body language. These passages reveal how Dante imagined the physical interactions of his characters with a depth that is perhaps unparalleled. Sometimes the language is general, as in *Purg.* 25.13-15 when Dante describes his unspoken desire by saying that he makes a motion as one who is about to speak («tal era io con voglia accesa e spenta / di dimandar, venendo infino a l'atto / che fa colui ch'a dicer s'argomenta»),³³ to which Vergil responds by instructing him to voice his doubt. More often the imagery captures Vergil's

among the violent toward God, while they are among the fraudulent, that is they are considered precisely as imposters]. Recently, Simon Gilson has argued convincingly that Vergil's relationship to magic, magical lore, and demonic agency both in medieval Christian culture and in the *Commedia* are present in ways far more complex than had been previously understood and therefore should not be dismissed. I do not see the Vergilian legends as a strong context for his telepathic powers because, as I argue further below, I believe they are more closely linked with mind reading in heaven. Yet the issue of Vergil's link to magic as well as magical lore in the poem in general are worth further critical attention. Alison Cornish identifies another category of Vergil's mysterious knowledge in that he somehow knows the position of the stars despite the fact that they are not discernible from hell. She states that such knowledge may invoke the popular Vergilian legends but instead characterizes these powers as representing "limited, secular knowledge" (52). Here too, the mechanism of Vergil's knowledge remains an epistemological issue, and so his ability may be investigated as a cultural and philosophical problem, not only in terms of how it fits into the poem's Christian hierarchy. See chapter 3 for further discussion of the relationship between the Vergilian legends, demonic agency and mind reading in the *Commedia*.

³² "You wonder, / perhaps, about that fallen mass, watched over / by the inhuman rage I have just quenched."

³³ "so I, with my desire to question kindled / then spent, arrived as far as making ready / to speak."

response to a specific corporeal sign. One of the most interesting cases incorporates vision and appears in *Purg.* 19 just after the pilgrim's dream of the "antica strega," when the pilgrim and his guide meet the repenting avaricious souls. Vergil asks directions to the next stairway, receives an answer, and then we witness the following interactions:

Così pregò 'l poeta, e sì risposto
poco dinanzi a noi ne fu; per ch'io
nel parlare avvisai l'altro nascosto,
e volsi li occhi a li occhi al signor mio:
ond' elli m'assentì con lieto cenno
ciò che chiedea la vista del disio (*Purg.* 19.82-87)³⁴

The ambiguity of verse 84 has set off a storm of critical debate over the meaning of "l'altro nascosto." The soul who instructs Vergil and the pilgrim on the location of the next stairwell cannot be seen clearly because the avaricious lie prostrate. Thus early critics including Benvenuto da Imola (1385-95) and Johannes de Serravalle (1416-17) believe that "l'altro nascosto" refers to the identity of the speaking soul, whom the pilgrim recognizes by his voice. Vellutello (1544) considered that the phrase refers to the fact that the soul does not know whether Dante and Vergil are there to repent. P. Pompeo Venturi (1732) disagreed, claiming instead that the soul does not know that Dante pilgrim is alive. These latter two glosses in turn set off a wave of supporters and detractors. In 1868 Brunone Bianchi argued that since the soul cannot see Dante and Vergil, he must assume they too are souls, since no living person had ever before visited. Further, since Vergil asks directions to the next *girone*, the soul must also assume they will not do penance for avarice but for some other sin. He therefore concludes that the phrase refers to Dante's recognition of the soul by the sound of his voice. Subsequent to this gloss,

³⁴ "So did the poet ask, so did reply / come from a little way ahead; and I / through his speech detected *the other hidden*. / I turned my eyes to find my master's eyes; / at this, with a glad sign, he ratified / *that which the look of my desire asked*."

many commentators agreed that the phrase refers to the identity of the soul, but some believe the pilgrim recognizes him by the sound of his voice while others believe he does not. A few, such as Francesco Torraca (1905), Attilio Momigliano (1946-51), and Nicola Fosca (2003-6) maintain that it pertains to some unexpressed doubt on the part of the soul, while Manfredi Porena (1946-8) believes the soul wants to know the identities of Dante and Vergil.

It is plausible that “l’altro nascosto” refers to the pilgrim’s realization that the voice has come from a soul, whose identity he does not recognize and therefore subsequently questions in line 93. But more important is that Vergil’s corporeal understanding of the pilgrim’s desire occurs by means of vision (“volsi li occhi a li occhi al signor mio”), and once again it occurs in a narrative context of occlusion, in this case also pointedly visual: Vergil understands Dante’s wish by looking into his eyes, while neither the speaking soul nor the travelers can see each other. Yet here the concealment is not only narrative, recalling the similar episodes of *Inf.* 23, *Purg.* 13, 15, and earlier in 19, but also interpretive, since critics have focused exclusively (and without consensus), on the meaning of verse 84 but have not examined the epistemological context in which it appears. As in *Inf.* 10, Dante once again conspicuously collapses form and content, although in *Purg.* 19 the corporeal mechanism of Vergil’s knowledge is more clear.³⁵

³⁵ There are many other instances in which Vergil’s perception is contextualized in terms of body language. See also *Inf.* 13.22-30 when the pilgrim halts abruptly, overwhelmed by the haunting cries of the suicides, to which Vergil responds by instructing him to pluck a branch so that “li pensier c’hai si faran tutti monchi” [the thoughts you have will also be cut off]. Likewise, in *Inf.* 26.43-48 Vergil perceives the pilgrim’s desire for an explanation as the latter leans over a bridge to get a better look at the souls imprisoned in the flames. Via the pilgrim’s body, Vergil gains knowledge pertaining to bodies concealed in flames. Giuseppe Mazzotta in fact defines rhetoric in the canto of Ulysses as based in “concealment and disclosure” (106). *Purg.* 18.1-12 is another instance in which Vergil reads Dante’s thoughts by looking into his face, encouraging him to speak, after which the pilgrim declares that his vision has been made stronger by Vergil’s light. Here too vision is the mechanism of knowledge both formally and narratively. In *Purg.* 27.16-24 Vergil discerns and reassures the pilgrim’s fear, after he sees him bending forward anxiously over clasped hands to gaze at the fire whose flames he must undergo for his purification. See chapter 5 for additional discussion of body language in mind-reading episodes.

The spectrum outlined above shows that Vergil's telepathic powers are far from uniform. As we have seen, many of these passages also occur in narrative contexts of heightened epistemological drama, which in turn provoke analogous critical responses. Acknowledging these layered ambiguities allows us to see surprisingly similar patterns in the *Paradiso*. In fact, it is only by understanding the connections of telepathy across the three canticles that Vergil's mind reading can be interpreted appropriately. The body language of vision in *Purg.* 19.82-87 recurs in a similar episode in *Paradiso* 25 and 26. At the end of 25, the pilgrim turns to gaze at Beatrice only to realize that he has been blinded by the presence of St. John: "Ahi quanto ne la mente mi commossi, / quando mi volsi per veder Beatrice, / per non poter veder, benché io fossi / presso di lei, e nel mondo felice!" (136-39).³⁶ At the beginning of canto 26, the saint reassures him, encouraging him to use his voice to compensate for his lack of vision so that he may undergo the examination on Love:

Mentr' io dubbiava per lo viso spento,
de la fulgida fiamma che lo spense
uscì un spiro che mi fece attento,
dicendo: «Intanto che tu ti risense
de la vista che haï in me consunta,
ben è che ragionando la compense.
Comincia dunque; e dì ove s'appunta
l'anima tua, e fa ragion che sia
la vista in te smarrita e non defunta:
perché la donna che per questa dia
region ti conduce, ha ne lo sguardo
la virtù ch'ebbe la man d'Anania» (*Par.* 26.1-12).³⁷

³⁶ "Ah, how disturbed I was within my mind, / when I turned round to look at Beatrice, / on finding that I could not see, though I / was close to her, and in the world of gladness!"

³⁷ "While I, with blinded eyes, was apprehensive, / from that bright flame which had consumed my vision, / there breathed a voice that centered my attention, / saying: 'Until you have retrieved the power / of sight, which you consumed in me, it would / be best to compensate by colloquy. / Then do begin; declare the aim on which / your soul is set – and be assured of this: / your vision, though confounded, is not dead, / because the woman who conducts you through / this godly region has, within her gaze, / the force the hand of Ananias had.'"

The contextual clue at the end of canto 25 makes it unclear whether St. John discerns the pilgrim's apprehension telepathically or through clues provided by Dante's body language as he turns to look at Beatrice. As in the passages from the first two canticles, this episode is also structured through paradoxes of revelation and occlusion, in this case blindness and vision. We wonder precisely how St. John perceives the pilgrim's inner state, as the latter turns to look at his guide and finds his "viso spento" by John's light. John reassures him that he will regain his vision and asks that he demonstrate his perception of love by speaking. He further reassures the pilgrim that his blindness is only temporary, since Beatrice's gaze bears the same power as did the hand of Christ's disciple Ananias, who cured Saul of his blindness. Thus John alters the biblical story to make the healing of Dante's blindness, itself brought on by a prior act of vision, a visual rather than a manual transaction. As in the case of Vergil's perceptions in earlier episodes, the mechanism of John's knowledge is implicated with corporeal signs and occurs in a narrative moment of intense uncertainty. Nor is this the only instance of mind reading complicated by body language in the third canticle. When Dante is overcome by the souls' joyous outcry following Peter Damian's monologue at the end of *Par.* 21, he turns anxiously for help ("oppresso di stupore") to Beatrice, who comforts him like a mother at the opening of canto 22. She may well judge his state of mind from the contextual clue of his corporeal posture rather than from any telepathic power of her own.³⁸

Mind reading in paradise is implicated not only with body language but other types of rhetorical complications as well. In the opening of *Paradiso* 14 Beatrice speaks for Dante when asking Aquinas whether souls will retain their

³⁸ I have not found any commentaries that address the ambiguity of mind reading in the above passages from *Paradiso* 22 and 26, most likely because it is not an explicit part of these narrative moments.

radiance once they are united with their bodies and if so, whether such radiance will harm their vision. The first three verses of her speech are the most important for our purposes: “«A costui fa mestieri, e nol vi dice / né con la voce né pensando ancora, / d'un altro vero andare a la radice” (10-12).³⁹ Here Beatrice articulates a question that she says the pilgrim has not yet pronounced or even thought. In *Paradiso* 15.61-63 we learn from Cacciaguida that souls in heaven know human thoughts even before humans think them, so one could argue, as a few commentators do,⁴⁰ that verses 10-12 indicate such foreknowledge in which Beatrice refers to the pilgrim’s future thought, as “ancora” suggests. Yet verse 10 complicates the issue, for when Beatrice says “A costui fa mestieri,” does she mean that Dante will think this thought, as suggested by “ancora” or merely that he should, or both? If we give weight to “fa mestieri,” the passage stresses Beatrice’s authority over Dante’s because it suggests that rather than simply recognizing Dante’s future thought, she selects the next topic of discussion, guiding his reasoning as he learns to recognize what sort of questions he should prefer. This reading implies a didactic moment that privileges her own divine status and authority. Buti, in conventional allegorizing mode, argues that the thought has not occurred to Dante because his human reason is incapable of formulating it without Beatrice’s help.⁴¹ The twentieth-century commentator Ernesto Trucchi (1936) follows this tradition in

³⁹ “He does not tell you of it – not with speech / nor in his thoughts as yet – but this man needs / to reach the root of still another truth.”

⁴⁰ Including Giacomo Poletto, Francesco Torraca. Other modern commentators such as Singleton, Sapegno, and Chiavacci Leonardi gloss the passage simply by paraphrasing it.

⁴¹ “E che finga Beatrice muova lo dubbio e non l’autore, significa che questo era dubbio che non potrebbe cadere ne la mente umana per la ragione umana..” [And that it is supposed that Beatrice initiates the doubt and not the author signifies that this was a doubt that could not come to the human mind through human reason]. Vellutello argues along similar lines, saying “Ma Beat., ciò è, la theologia, ne la qual fra gli altri è contenuto questo dubbio, conoscendo ‘l bisogno di Dante, mossa da carità, induce questi sacri Theologi suoi espositori a dichiararglielo dicendo...” [But Beatrice, that is theology, in which among others this doubt is contained, knowing Dante’s need, moved by charity, induces these sacred theologians to declare their explanations to him by saying...]

arguing that Beatrice does not read Dante's mind but rather identifies something he needs to know.⁴² Di Salvo comes closest to acknowledging the authoritative tension: "Si svolge così al di sopra di Dante, ma sempre con Dante protagonista, un colloquio tra San Tommaso e Beatrice..." (254).⁴³ "A costui fa mestieri," then, makes unclear the extent to which Beatrice versus Dante directs the questioning and therefore makes it impossible to confirm the interaction as telepathic versus simply didactic. In this way Beatrice's rhetoric of authority disrupts the ideal of telepathy, which theoretically posits a pure sort of communication by which souls understand the pilgrim's thoughts in a manner free of the ambiguities of human language. Her speech creates a disjunction between theory and praxis.

A similar disjunction emerges in *Paradiso* 13 where the pilgrim is instructed by Aquinas on Solomon's excellence in relation to Adam and Christ. Aquinas begins discussion of the first question with a clear telepathic declaration of the pilgrim's belief that Adam and Christ were unmatched in excellence: "Tu credi che..." (37). He then proceeds with a lengthy philosophical explanation of creation as reflection of God's idea with perfect versus imperfect results. Once he affirms that Adam and Christ indeed represented the summit of human perfection, he anticipates Dante's objection regarding Solomon in the following way: "Or s'i' non procedesse avanti piùè, / `Dunque, come costui fu senza pare?' / comincerebber le

⁴² "Qui Beatrice non legge un dubbio nella mente di Dante, ma rivela una necessità della sua mente, con quella perfetta carità che precorre al bisogno, e lo soddisfa prima ancora che si manifesti; se dubbio vi fosse già stato in Dante, i Beati l'avrebbero letto in lui come Beatrice, nè questa avrebbe detto che **costui** ancora non pensa a ciò" [Here Beatrice does not read a doubt in Dante's mind, but reveals a necessity of his mind, with that perfect charity that anticipates need, and she satisfies it before it is manifest; if the doubt had already been in Dante, the Blessed would have read it in him as Beatrice, nor would she have said that he still doesn't think it]. Here we should note that Trucchi puts forth a rhetorical fallacy similar to the collocation fallacy, in which he imagines a narrative scenario based on the assumption of absolute poetic consistency, i.e. its mimetic power ("se dubbio vi fosse...").

⁴³ "Thus a dialogue between St. Thomas and Beatrice unfolds beyond Dante, but always with Dante as protagonist."

parole tue” (88-90).⁴⁴ These words might seem to mark yet another instance of telepathy, but the conditional use of the verb “comincerebber” resists such a reading. Does Aquinas claim to read the pilgrim’s thoughts, voicing what the pilgrim would say, or does he engage characteristically scholastic rhetoric to anticipate what he knows to be the most logical objection? The vast majority of earlier commentators gloss the passage by paraphrasing it, ignoring Aquinas’ rhetoric and its relation to mind reading. For the most part, modern commentators support anticipation rather than telepathy⁴⁵ with the only exception being Luigi Pietrobono (1946) who suggests that Aquinas does indeed read the pilgrim’s mind.⁴⁶ Were the passage to appear in a different context, anticipation might be the only and obvious choice. But mind reading in Dante’s heaven becomes a typical and therefore expected mode of interaction, and this new context puts the words of Aquinas in ambiguous light. Just as Beatrice’s authoritative language undermines

⁴⁴ “Now if I said no more beyond this point, / your words might well begin, ‘How is it, then, / with your assertion of his matchless vision?’”

⁴⁵ Singleton remains faithful to the conditional verb by translating the key phrase as “...would your words begin,” but his gloss emphasizes anticipation when he states that “Thomas Aquinas now anticipates an objection on Dante’s part. If he did not proceed in his discourse, Dante might well put the question as phrased in vs. 89, having understood Aquinas to have affirmed absolutely that Solomon was ‘without peer’ in human nature.” Mandelbaum’s translation supports anticipation even more strongly with “Now if I said no more beyond this point, / your words might well begin” (88-9), and Sapegno agrees: “se mi fermassi a questo punto, aversti ragione di chiedermi...” [if I stopped myself at this point, you would be right to ask me...]. Chiavacci Leonardi follows suit, noting that the *terzina* is “formulata in modo apertamente scolastico” [formulated in an explicitly scholastic manner]. Barolini too argues that Aquinas anticipates rather than reads the pilgrim’s mind, emphasizing the philosopher’s rhetoric as expressing particular narrative self-consciousness and an awareness of discourse as an “ongoing process,” as a “system of differences,” highly aware of its necessary existence in time (205). She also links the episode back to *Par.* 5.109-11 when Dante poet makes a reminiscent statement about how the reader would desire if he were not to go on. She concludes that Thomas imitates Dante as narrator (206).

⁴⁶ He implies this in the context of asserting his main point, which is that Aquinas deliberately prolongs and enjoys the pilgrim’s response: “Il ragionamento di Tommaso fin qui non ha che ribadito ciò che D. pensava; e il santo, che gli legge dentro come in un libro aperto, nel vederlo in quello stato di sospensione in cui lo ha condotto nascondendogli il punto a cui vuol riuscire, par che ne goda” [The reasoning of Thomas to this point has only reaffirmed what Dante was thinking; and the saint, who reads inside him as in an open book, on seeing him in that state of suspense in which he has led him by hiding from him the point at which he wants to conclude, seems to take pleasure in it.]

the ostensible purity of mind reading in canto 14, so does Aquinas' scholastic rhetoric in canto 13.⁴⁷

Aquinas' presence both as mind reader and as scholastic thinker enacts a conflation of philosophical versus mystical experience. This conflation implies a particular epistemological value, for through Aquinas' telepathic-mystical intercourse with the pilgrim, the philosopher participates in a way of knowing that differs pointedly from the earthly mode in which he so excelled. The key narrative analogue to this hybrid sort of rhetoric is the way that Aquinas validates a different way of knowing in his praise of St. Francis in *Par.* 11, while Bonaventure praises St. Dominic in canto 12. As Barolini has shown, the poet in these cantos creates a community that values equally the seraphic love of Francis and the wisdom of Dominic, thereby emphasizing unity. Both religious orders and, implicitly, their epistemological paradigms of scholasticism and mysticism serve God equally well. But the language of this praise is enacted through intense narrative and rhetorical differentiation. In this way, the poem suggests that Aquinas' and Dominic's narratives enact the theme of sameness and difference, one of the *Paradiso's* central theological and structuring principles.⁴⁸ As outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, mind reading itself also enacts this principle, implying union conceptually while dramatizing difference rhetorically. In *Paradiso* 13 Aquinas' two-fold communication with the pilgrim enacts it at yet another level, as his mind reading implies unity while his anticipation of the pilgrim's doubt implies the

⁴⁷ Another episode suggesting anticipation occurs in *Par.* 25.50, when Beatrice is said to anticipate Dante's answer to St. James during the examination on hope: "E quella pia che guidò le penne / de le mie ali a così alto volo / a la risposta così mi prevenne" (49-51) [And she, compassionate, who was the guide / who led my feathered wings to such high flight, / did thus anticipate my own reply]. Her response merely affirms that Dante indeed possesses much hope, making it unclear whether she has truly penetrated the pilgrim's thoughts and/or, as suggested by Chiavacci Leonardi and Sapegno, she speaks for the pilgrim to protect him from what might be regarded as lack of humility.

⁴⁸ See chapter 9 of *Undivine Comedy* for a rich analysis of these issues.

differentiation of scholastic discourse. In this way the complexity of Aquinas' mind reading complements the narrative issues of cantos 11 and 12. The poetry rejects, both narratively and rhetorically, any single epistemology as privileged in the pursuit of truth.

The evidence outlined above shows that telepathic episodes in all three canticles are not consistently pure and transcendent in epistemological terms. Instead, they show that acts of knowing for all characters in the poem occur on a continuum that is deeply implicated with various contingencies, with signs of the body, with the rhetoric of didactic authority and of scholasticism. Telepathic powers function ambiguously for Vergil but also for Beatrice, Aquinas, St. John, and other souls in heaven, showing that mind reading in heaven is not absolutely divine in opposition to the varieties found in the first two canticles. Consequently, there are important ways in which Vergil's telepathic abilities are not so different from those of his heavenly counterparts. How, then, are we to characterize the epistemology of all mind reading in the poem? Why does the poem persistently lead us to believe that the unsaved Vergil shares the privileges of heavenly souls?⁴⁹ The *Commedia's* final mind reading episode in *Paradiso* 32 gives us a clue because it concerns the very question that ultimately explains why Vergil is excluded from heaven. In this passage, when St. Bernard points out the unsaved babies in the celestial rose, he perceives via telepathy that once again the pilgrim is tormented by the idea of predestination: "Or dubbi tu e dubitando sili; / ma io discioglierò 'l forte legame / in che ti stringon li pensier sottili" (49-51).⁵⁰ For Dante, predestination seems to contradict reason, the very quality that defines human beings and for the

⁴⁹ By asking this question I do not wish to take up the issue of whether Vergil should or might be saved, and more importantly, why we are led to ask that question. On this see the lively critical exchange between Barolini and Mowbray Allan.

⁵⁰ "But now you doubt and, doubting, do not speak; / yet I shall loose that knot; I can release / you from the bonds of subtle reasoning."

abuse of which he reserves the most dreadful depths of hell. Bernard answers his doubt by asserting that souls are not saved without cause, “sine causa” (59), but through eternal law, “eterna legge,” (55), raising the hope that God’s election of the saved is truly rational. Yet he concludes with an astonishing about-face, saying that God bestows his grace diversely and chooses whom to save at his pleasure, indeed according to the color of one’s hair:

Lo rege per cui questo regno pausa
in tanto amore e in tanto diletto,
che nulla volontà è di più ausa,
le menti tutte nel suo lieto aspetto
creando, a suo piacer di grazia dota
diversamente; e qui basti l'effetto.
E ciò espresso e chiaro vi si nota
ne la Scrittura santa in quei gemelli
che ne la madre ebber l'ira commota.
Però, secondo il color d'i capelli,
di cotal grazia l'altissimo lume
degnamente convien che s'incappelli (*Par.* 32.61-72).⁵¹

When Dante places in heaven the pagans Trajan and Ripheus he also means to insist on and dramatize the random nature of predestination and his struggle with it. The inclusion of these pagans stands solidly against the argument that Vergil’s lack of grace and consequent damnation may be explained simply by his pre-Christian status.⁵²

But the key point is that Bernard’s telepathic perception of Dante’s anxiety is meant to recall both Vergil’s mind reading, which links him to heaven, and his lack of grace, which banishes him to hell. This poetic recollection is analogous to

⁵¹ “The King through whom this kingdom finds content / in so much love and so much joyousness / that no desire would dare to ask for more, / creating every mind in His glad sight, / bestows His grace diversely, at His pleasure - / and here the fact alone must be enough. / And this is clearly and expressly noted / for you in Holy Scripture, in those twins / who, in their mother’s womb, were moved to anger. / Thus, it is just for the celestial light / to grace their heads with a becoming crown, / according to the color of their hair.”

⁵² For discussion of this see Kenelm Foster’s *The Two Dantes and Other Studies*.

Vergil's absent presence in *Purgatorio* 30, where his poetry appears at the very moment that his character vanishes.⁵³ And so even at the end of Dante's journey, when the pilgrim is ostensibly free of earthly attachments, the reader is reminded once again of Vergil through his narrative absence and yet formal presence in the celestial rose. Vergil's telepathy is an intense sign of the dialectics woven into the problem of his authority, and for this reason, his powers should not be dismissed as extraordinarily sensitive human perception, astuteness or common sense. He cannot see into the mirror of eternal knowledge, but we are meant to associate his telepathy with blessed souls for several reasons: it heightens our emotional engagement with him and with the pilgrim's urgent struggle, even at the moment of his final vision, to accept the difficult theology of God's justice.

Further, as we have seen, mind reading throughout the poem is complicated by rhetoric and other poetic strategies that emphasize not silent unity but the languages of mysticism, scholasticism, common sense perception, and the body. Telepathy insists upon the differences in these languages in a way that resists definitions of mind reading as simply a *topos* of easily-assigned privilege, and indeed in some cases, resists our defining it at all. In this way mind reading emerges as a sign system that emphasizes knowing as fragmented and immanent, as a process drawing extravagant attention to its unfolding in time. On the one hand the telepathic ideal of communication as free of human error posits a fictional world of epistemological liberation, but practically telepathy demonstrates a world in which knowing occurs on a continuum for all, and is therefore a partial act defined

⁵³ The citations are well known. As Beatrice appears, Dante poet cites the verse from Vergil's *Aeneid* in reference to Marcellus "Manibus, oh, date lilia plenis!" (*Purg.* 30.21). Later, at the moment of Vergil's disappearance, the pilgrim quotes Dido as he attempts to tell Vergil of his reaction to Beatrice's presence: 'Men che dramma / di sangue m'è rimaso che non tremi: / conosco i segni de l'antica fiamma' (*Purg* 30.46-48) ['I am left with less / than one drop of my blood that does not tremble: / I recognize the signs of the old flame'].

by ambiguities. Because mind reading cannot perform as an uncomplicated medium of pure communication - because it cannot represent communication in the transcendent isolation of its idealized form, it is not a sign of grace.

Another way to view the competing claims of mind reading is through their emergence as a history within the text. The *Commedia* historicizes as epistemological challenges the problem of Vergil's authority long after Vergil is no longer a character, and it also historicizes telepathy itself in all three canticles. Just as Vergil's memory is invoked in *Paradiso* 32, so we continually wonder how (and sometimes whether) not only Vergil, but Beatrice, Aquinas, St. John, and others know the pilgrim's thoughts. As we have seen, Vergil's memory in the *Paradiso* is further implicated with Dante's ongoing struggle with predestination, which resurfaces until the very last moment.⁵⁴ These appearances, questions, and ambiguities suggest patterns of repetition that may be described as circular; as issues they emerge repeatedly rather than arising and resolving in chronological, linear fashion. The metaphor of the circle is significant in that it recalls the models of historiography whose relevance for the *Commedia* has been explored by John Freccero. He writes that in pagan antiquity the passing of time was regarded as circular, in which "civilizations, like men, succeeded one another according to the life cycle: a coming-to-be and a passing away to which all things were forever subject. Time moved in an eternal circle, with repetition as its only rationale" (136). By contrast, for Augustine, the coming of Christ forever changed this circularity by introducing a fixed point that established a "linear progression toward that new and eternal event" (136). He continues:

⁵⁴ In *Par.* 19.70-78 Dante pilgrim questions the eagle about the divine justice of predestination, in 20.79 he expresses his shock at seeing the pagans Trajan and Ripheus in heaven, questions another soul about predestination at 21.78, and is again instructed by St. Bernard in canto 32 as discussed above.

The coming of Christ wrought a change not only in universal history, but in the history of the individual soul as well, whose story could no longer be reduced to the curve extending from birth through maturity to death, but was rather a continuous trajectory toward the target: a death that would give meaning to life. It was this new linear conception of time that some have claimed as the ancestor of our own idea of progress. (136)⁵⁵

The literary form embodying the circular model of time is the epic, while the novel embodies the linear model. Freccero suggests that the *Commedia* incorporates both models as Dante pilgrim's progress to conversion may be viewed in terms of the Augustinian linear model, while his poetic first-person voice represents the circular model, since it is that voice that begins and completes the writing of the poem.⁵⁶

If we understand as circular the unresolved patterns of telepathy described in this chapter, as well as the pattern of issues relating to Vergil's authority, and of Dante's struggle to accept predestination (and perhaps other patterns as well), we can see that their recapitulations resist the linear resolution of Augustinian time. In this sense the narrative chronology does not contain these patterns, and they obstinately align with Dante poet and the circular model of time his position in part represents. The patterns therefore historicize aspects of the poem in ways that work against the neat finality implied by the apparently fully historicized spiritual narrative. The point of this is not to claim that telepathy or any other pattern undermines Dante's claim to conversion. Rather, these patterns in tension show that in the context of a spiritual journey the *Commedia's* poetics enact histories that are more rich and complex than have been acknowledged. Specifically, the above

⁵⁵ Lee Patterson also discusses these models of historiography in his analysis of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. See chapter 2 of *Chaucer and the Subject of History*.

⁵⁶ Freccero outlines this view in the context of his chapter entitled "Dante's Ulysses: From Epic to Novel."

conclusions show how we may begin to think of mind reading as having a history within the poem that resists the historical trajectory of Christian narrative time.⁵⁷

In the chapters that follow, I connect this textual history of mind reading with relevant narrative and philosophical histories outside the poem, not merely to trace sources but to demonstrate the poem in dialogue with larger contexts. One such history is a narrative one involving the *topos* of epiphany, which evolves from a sign of faithlessness in Latin epic to a democratizing problem in Christianity, with crucial epistemological consequences. It is to this fascinating and somewhat unexpected history that we now turn.

⁵⁷ For a different treatment of this topic, see the appendix of *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, where Mazzotta argues that Dante synthesizes the circular and linear models of history through his representation of Fortune, an interpretation that is focused on reconciling historical tensions.

Chapter 2

When Gods Appear: Pagan and Christian Epiphany as a Context for Mind Reading in the *Commedia*

Through its claim of an omniscient God who also lived as a man on earth, the New Testament explicitly links mind reading and epiphany. All four Gospels record Christ's telepathy, with some differences in emphasis.¹ Jesus often reads the minds of his enemies, the lawyers and the Pharisees, such as when the lawyers accuse him of blasphemy when he tells a man that his sins are forgiven, or when after driving out devils he knows that the Pharisees believe his authority derives from Beelzebub.² He also discerns the thoughts of his disciples, correcting them in Mark 8:17 when they misinterpret his warning against the leaven of the Pharisees and at 9:34 when he knows of their debate over which of them is greatest.³ In John, among other instances, Jesus knows that his disciples are murmuring amongst themselves over his instructions to eat his flesh and blood and knows they wish to question him about his imminent departure.⁴

In this chapter I argue that pagan connections between epiphany and telepathy are implicit but evolve and flourish in Christian culture in a way that invites us to understand epiphany as a context for the *Commedia's* mind reading. The human aspect of Christian epiphany encouraged a democratized culture in

¹ Matthew and Luke emphasize mind reading in a somewhat negative way as Jesus reads the minds of his enemies, while Mark and John show Jesus using telepathy to correct his disciples.

² The first episode is recorded in Matthew 9:4, Mark 2:8, and Luke 5:22. The second is from Matthew 12:25 but also occurs at Luke 11:17 where it is the people rather than the Pharisees who believe this. In Luke 15:3 Jesus reads the minds of lawyers and Pharisees who complain amongst themselves that Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them, and in Luke 22:48 Jesus reads Judas' mind when asking him whether he would betray the Son of Man with a kiss. In John 6:43 Jesus tells the Jews to stop murmuring amongst themselves about his claim to have come down from heaven.

³ The episode of Mark 8:17 also occurs at Matthew 16:8, while that of Mark 9:34 is also found at Luke 9:47.

⁴ At 6:61 and 16:19, respectively. See below for further discussion of Jesus' mind-reading episodes.

which visionaries such as Dante could imagine spiritual events as personalized epiphanies. Yet this democratization presents crises of epistemology and of authority because recognizing and validating holy figures becomes problematic in hagiographic narratives just as it is in the Bible. These complications are in fact Christian manifestations of a parallel problem in the Latin epics of Vergil, Lucan, and Statius, where the *topos of epiphany* exposes a growing faithlessness in the pagan gods with unnerving epistemological consequences for human beings. Dante deeply internalized the epistemological advantages and problems of epiphany found in pagan Latin epic and in some of the Christian narratives that inherited and transformed these problems. In his initial creation of Beatrice as epiphanic medium in the *Vita Nuova*, Dante incorporates pagan motifs and Christian conventions that dramatize her role as a sign of sacred truth with astonishing new hopefulness, but also with ancient anxieties. In the *Commedia* generally, we also find the pagan and Christian problems of recognizing and validating divine figures. The poem itself consists of serial epiphany scenes of dead mortals, some of whose moral worth the pilgrim struggles to comprehend. This structure, as I will show, rests upon the troubled epistemology of Latin epics that conspicuously privilege dead mortals over the gods as credible epiphanic actors.

More specifically, in demonstrating epiphany as a larger theme and organizing principle in the poem, I show how it becomes a context for mind reading, such that we may also describe telepathic episodes *in terms* of epiphany; that is, we may understand mind reading episodes in the poem as specific epiphanic encounters. This is because telepathy and epiphany sometimes share key epistemological traits both functionally and historically, traits reflected powerfully in the poem. In making these connections, I have found that as *topoi*, both epiphany and telepathy have sufficiently rich individual histories to merit separate chapters in

this study. This chapter therefore focuses primarily on epiphany as an anchor for a narrative history, but this is because of its contextual relevance for the parallel philosophical and narrative histories of mind reading, which I address in chapter 3. Thus we may view this chapter as a prelude whose narrative focus complements and prepares us for the theoretical concerns addressed in the chapter that follows.

In order to understand the *Commedia*'s relationship to epiphany, we must begin with the pagan Latin epics of Vergil, Lucan, and Statius. I have chosen these authors because they are among the key pagan poets for Dante and because epiphany scenes in their epics raise important philosophical questions.⁵ In this regard Vergil's *Aeneid* is a logical starting point, but since this text responds very consciously to the Homeric model of epiphany scenes, we must first understand those patterns and motifs. In his 2003 dissertation, Daniel Turkeltaub elaborates them as a detailed series of steps. I outline them here briefly in order to understand the overall pattern to which Vergil responds.⁶

Homeric gods are not omniscient, and so they must become aware of the events leading to their appearances to mortals (19). Once aware, they prepare for the appearance, and since they are also not ubiquitous, they must travel to reach the mortal (20). The god disguises him or herself but also sends forth a hint of divinity to the mortal, so that the latter suspects a divine presence (22). The god and mortal converse, at which point the god provides a false biography (24). The mortal then offers ironic treatment of the god, either by honoring him appropriately without

⁵ Ovid's *Metamorphoses* represents epiphanies, such as in Book 6 when Athena, scorned by Arachne, disguises herself as an old woman, but the undisguised gods also frequently interact with mortals. Jove's disguises for the purpose of seducing various nymphs may suggest a mockery of the traditional Homeric epiphany (explained in the pages following), when he reveals himself through his kiss with the Arcadian nymph in Book 2 and when he disguises himself as a bull when seducing Europa. The world of the *Metamorphoses* is one that assumes ambiguous knowledge of the gods, but this ambiguity is never framed in a context that presents epiphany as philosophically significant.

⁶ There are certain steps in the pattern, such as dramatic isolation, that I have omitted in this review because they are pertinent to Turkeltaub's study but not to this one.

realizing it or by offending the god's divinity (26). The god provides instructions and inspires power so that the mortal may carry them out (27). In many Homeric scenes, there is physical contact between mortal and god, followed by a change in setting (28-9). At this point, the god reveals him or herself so that the mortal recognizes the divine presence in what Turkeltaub calls an epiphanic moment (29-30). The mortal reacts to the epiphanic moment with an intense emotional response (32). Then the mortal and god converse once again; the god now announces his/her name, insults the mortal, and affirms his/her own divine nature (33). The mortal will often express concern that encountering the god will prevent a normal life in the future (33). The god assuages the mortal's worries, utters a prophecy, and provides a second set of instructions that sometimes include a promise of a future epiphany. After these motifs have been carried out, the god departs (34).

The Homeric corpus is full of such scenes, but Turkeltaub's discussion of the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* exemplifies nicely the steps outlined above. In the hymn, Aphrodite becomes aware of Anchises when she first sees him and feels lust that has been inspired by Zeus (53). She prepares for their encounter by traveling to Cyprus to beautify herself (54). She then goes to Mt. Ida and travels on foot to Anchises' hut (56). When she arrives, she disguises herself as a young virgin who has been kidnapped by Hermes and brought to a foreign land so that he may marry her. Anchises suspects her divine nature and responds by worshipping and praying to her (59-60). She instructs, or rather begs Anchises instead to take her as his bride and inspires lust in him (61-2). Anchises announces that he will sleep with her, at which point the setting changes and the physical contact occurs (64). The epiphanic moment immediately follows their sexual encounter, when Aphrodite insults Anchises, who turns his eyes away and hides in terror under his blanket (68). When he begs her to allow him to lead a normal life in the future, she assuages his fear and

prophesies that he will have a son named Aeneas, who will continue his line eternally (69). Before departing, she instructs Anchises not to reveal the true identity of Aeneas' mother, so that she may avoid the disgrace on earth (which she cannot escape among the gods) of having coupled with a mortal.

Mind reading is not explicitly part of this scene or other Homeric epiphany scenes, but the gods' appearances are enacted through the theme of concealment, and they implicitly raise epistemological questions for the mortal. The mortal may question how the god has learned of earthly events, and may question the god's identity and how the divine inspiration should be understood. Further, the purpose of the god's disguise and of the epiphany itself are frequently unclear. Turkeltaub points out that when the god is revealed to the mortal "these forms are not necessarily the 'true forms' of the gods, simply the forms they assume to make themselves recognizable to mortals" (30). He further cites Schrade "who asserts that since gods are elemental forces, any human form they take must ipso facto be a dissimulation" (13). Thus the extent to which the gods reveal themselves in epiphanies is questionable, since it seems that they "merely appear in graduated levels of disguise" (13). Given that even at the epiphanic moment some sort of disguise appears to be necessary so that mortals may recognize the god, the god therefore does not use the initial disguise to be comprehensible to the mortal's senses.⁷

Given that there is a certain level of disguise even in the god's revelation, conceptually these epiphany scenes enact occlusion and revelation in ways that invite us to seek their justification at the philosophical and ideological level, rather

⁷ Turkeltaub notes other types of unnecessary disguises, such as in Book 13 of the *Odyssey* in Athena's epiphany to Odysseus. She disguises Ithaca by covering it with fog, which is superfluous because "the uninhabited nature of the shore already precludes external intrusion, and Odysseus' long absence already prevents him from recognizing the land" (245).

than simply at the level of narrative logic. Turkeltaub observes that in some cases, there is no clear reason for the epiphany even at the narrative level, such as in the *Hymn to Dionysus* (109).⁸ He concludes that the function of the scenes overall is to assert the gods' power over mortals. The gods are "veiled and half-hidden figures, constantly dissembling to ensure that some distance, some gap of perception, always separates them from the mortals" (237). The effect of their epiphanies, in "combination with their often licentious and 'immoral' behavior" indicates "the unpredictability and apparent capriciousness of the natural world expressed through the gods" (325). This suggests that the purpose of the disguise and the epiphany itself is to highlight the flawed epistemology of mortals versus gods, an interesting motivation in a universe of gods who are not omniscient. We might say that it is precisely the gods' limited knowledge that provokes epistemologically-charged encounters with mortals in which they continually assert their powers, if not of omniscience, then at least of dissembling and metamorphosis.

This is not to say that Homeric epiphany impugns the gods' religious status. Turkeltaub in fact believes that epiphanies validate the religious role of the gods. This belief, however, is much harder to support in the Latin epics that we will examine – texts that were central to Dante's intellectual and imaginative training. The most important of these is, of course, Vergil's *Aeneid*. This text shows that the Roman poet had thoroughly internalized the epiphany *topos* of Homeric literature, yet his poem abandons the Homeric model in a manner that casts serious doubt on the power of the gods to do anything other than deceive. Vergil does this most conspicuously by abandoning Homer's structure; there is exactly one epiphany

⁸ He states "the poem provides no reason for the epiphany; there is no divine purpose that can be detected beyond the farce generated by the sequence of events. We do not know why Dionysus subjects himself to this abuse and then exacts his revenge, unless it is because the story is amusing and corresponds to many other stories about this god" (109).

scene in the whole *Aeneid* that even approaches the full sequence of motifs elaborated by Turkeltaub. This occurs in Book 1 when Venus appears to Aeneas disguised as a huntress seeking her sisters. The event is structured in layers of revelation and occlusion, creating uncertainty not only for Aeneas but for the reader. We do not know how Venus becomes aware of the events when she appears to Aeneas.⁹ She is presented already disguised and pretending to look for her sisters, but Aeneas suspects she is a goddess and asks where he and his crew have landed. In this exchange, Vergil emphasizes the irony of the mother-son interaction, lacking in familial intimacy, with the phrase “Sic Venus, et Veneris contra sic filius orsus” (325).¹⁰ He also underlines Aeneas’ attempts to identify his mother with “namque haud tibi vultus / mortalis, nec vox hominem sonat; o, dea certe / (an Phoebi soror? an Nympharum sanguinis una?)” (327-9), resorting to the indefinite “quaecumque” in the following line.¹¹ Venus denies that she is a goddess, but then gives a true history of Dido, itself a story of secrecy and revelation. Dido’s brother Pygmalion conceals his murderous deeds that, along with the whereabouts of the buried treasure, are revealed to Dido when her dead husband Sychaeus appears to her in a dream epiphany.¹² She then leaves Tyre in secret with her company. After this bit of truth, Venus pretends not to know who Aeneas is and asks where he plans to go. Aeneas addresses her as goddess but is still unaware of her identity. He begins his story, which Venus interrupts to tell him that all is well with his ships and crew, and instructs him to go forth without worry. The epiphanic moment comes as she turns

⁹ How gods become aware of what mortals are doing is somewhat mysterious in other instances as well. Book 1 introduces Juno as lamenting while the Trojans journey over the seas. Neptune becomes aware of the storm by its noise. Zeus learns of the situation when “Libyae defixit lumina regnis” [he fixed his gaze on the kingdom of Libya] (226). All quotations from the *Aeneid* are from the text of R.D. Williams. Translations are mine.

¹⁰ “Thus Venus (spoke), and the son of Venus began to speak in reply.”

¹¹ “By no means is your face mortal, nor does the voice sound human. O certainly a goddess, the sister of Phoebus? Or one of the race of nymphs” and then “whoever you are.”

¹² Dead mortals in the context of epiphany will be discussed further below.

away, revealing her true identity through her “rosea cervice” (402),¹³ the ambrosial fragrance of her hair, her step and her flowing gown. The scene concludes with yet another act of concealment when Venus shrouds Aeneas and Achates in mist to insure their safe entry into the city.

The episode is structured in alternating moments of truth and falsity, which both Aeneas and the reader must negotiate to varying degrees, as the goddess provides her own false history, Dido’s true one, pretends not to know her son’s identity and then reports truthfully on the condition of his crew and ships, finally literally cloaking the two men in a protective gesture. Both Aeneas and the reader wonder what the purpose of Venus’ disguise might be. Aeneas’ intense emotional response suggests a history in which Venus enjoys tricking her son: “quid natum totiens, crudelis tu quoque, falsis / ludis imaginibus? cur dextrae iungere dextram / non datur ac veras audire et reddere voces?” (407-9).¹⁴ Yet this protest does not result in a change. Venus’ final cloaking of the two men suggests that Aeneas’ complaint has been ignored as she sustains a pattern in which “falsis imaginibus” are the reigning ideology. Philosophically, then, the scene dramatizes an experience in which revelation and dissembling are intertwined. This is Vergil’s version of the idea that truth is implicated in acts of occlusion, an idea that, as we have seen, Dante internalized and incorporated in the context of the *Commedia*’s telepathic episodes.

Venus’ epiphany might seem to confirm her power as goddess, as Turkeltaub believes is the case in Homer’s *Hymn to Aphrodite* and in Homeric epiphany generally.¹⁵ Yet her appearance to Aeneas in Book 1 occurs in a larger context of her behavior that undermines rather than affirms her divine status. Her

¹³ “the rosy nape of her neck.”

¹⁴ “You, cruel too! Why do you deceive your son so often with false images? Why may we not join hands and speak and hear true things?”

¹⁵ Turkeltaub acknowledges that Aphrodite seems to be mocked rather than venerated in her hymn but he ultimately concludes that the hymn affirms her power (74-8).

assertion of power over her son is a noteworthy contrast to her prior encounter with Juppiter in the same book, where she is the tearfully plaintive child begging for reassurance that Aeneas' destiny will be fulfilled. These episodes together suggest Venus' epiphany not as an affirmation but rather a denial of her knowledge and power. Further, Vergil extends and intensifies this denial toward all of the gods as the poem progresses. One way he carries this out is through direct and undisguised appearances of gods, essentially eliminating most of the Homeric epiphany structure so that the gods function more as privileged messengers than divine beings. Such appearances occur in Book 2 when Venus prevents Aeneas from killing Helen in a fit of rage,¹⁶ in Book 4 when Mercury urges Aeneas to leave Carthage, and in Book 8 when the river god Tiber appears to Aeneas in a dream, encouraging him not to give up and providing instructions on an alliance with the Arcadians and on placating Juno. Venus appears in this fashion again late in Book 8 to deliver the armor that she has persuaded Vulcan to forge for Aeneas.

In contrast to these less majestic divine appearances, Vergil exalts dead mortals, who appear in a number of non-divine epiphany scenes.¹⁷ These scenes also lack much of the structure of the *topos* (i.e. there are no disguises or false biography) but the mortals present forthright advice and/or instructions along with deeply moving words and images that prompt Aeneas' intense emotional reaction. In Book 2 Aeneas has a dream in which Hector appears, weeping, torn and bloody as on the day of his death. He tells Aeneas that the city is falling and urges him to leave, prophesying that Aeneas will establish his household gods amidst great walls after he has wandered the sea. His appearance prompts Aeneas' profound grief: *ultra flens ipse videbar / compellare virum et maestas expromere voces*" (279-80).¹⁸

¹⁶ This episode, however, is believed to be inauthentic.

¹⁷ For a discussion of mortals in Homeric epiphany scenes, see Turkeltaub beginning on page 297.

¹⁸ "I, weeping myself, seemed to call upon the man and to reveal grieving speech."

Book 2 concludes with the appearance of Creusa's ghost as Aeneas returns to the city to search for her. She urges Aeneas to contain his grief and then also prophesies that he will establish a kingdom after long exile. Her final words attempt to comfort him through the consolation that she will not become a slave to the Greeks, and she reminds him to cherish their son. Again Aeneas is moved to tears: "haec ubi dicta dedit, lacrimantem et multa volentem / dicere deseruit, tenuisque recessit in auras" (790-1).¹⁹ After the Trojan women attempt to burn the ships in Book 5, Anchises appears to Aeneas, instructing him to leave behind those who wish to end their journey and take the rest to Italy. He also instructs Aeneas to visit him in the underworld. At his departure, Aeneas protests that his father has left before he has had a chance to embrace him."²⁰

Telepathy is implicit in all of these episodes, since the interventions of both gods and dead mortals imply that they somehow know Aeneas' state of mind. The appearances of the dead mortals are thus particularly important precursors of mind reading in the *Commedia*; they are souls separated from the body who know Aeneas' thoughts and actions, while he does not know theirs. Also crucial within the context of the *Aeneid* is the sincerity of the interactions between Aeneas and the dead mortals. While the dead mortals may refer in their speech to their divinely-authorized deaths and subsequent epiphanies, their tenderness and respect for Aeneas lends them an emotional credibility that is conspicuously lacking in Venus' epiphany in Book 1 and in other appearances of the gods.

Disguised appearances of the gods emerge once again in Books 5 and 9 and increase significantly at the end of the poem in Book 12. Yet the absence of

¹⁹ "Once she had said these things, she left me weeping, an wanting to say so much, and she departed in the tenuous air."

²⁰ "Aeneas 'quo deinde ruis? Quo proripis?' inquit, / 'quem fugis? aut quis te nostris complexibus arceat' (741-2) [Aeneas said "where are you hurrying to, where are you rushing off to? Are you fleeing from someone? Who keeps you from my embraces?"].

epiphanic moments and the increasingly corrupt motivations for the appearances undermine seriously the gods' authority, provoking a different sort of uncertainty for mortal characters. Sent by Juno, Iris appears in Book 5 disguised as one of the Trojan women, inciting the others to burn the ships. She is recognized by Pyrgo as a goddess, but there is no epiphanic moment as Iris simply departs into the sky leaving the sign of her rainbow, after which the bewildered women attack the ships. She appears again at the opening of Book 9, again sent by Juno in order to incite Turnus to war. Here she is not disguised, but upon her departure Turnus questions the authority behind her words: "quis te mihi nubibus actam / detulit in terras?" (18-19)²¹ and yet promises to obey: "sequor omina tanta, / quisquis in arma vocas" (21-22).²² His words are grim evidence that mortals question their knowledge of divine messages and that despite their ignorance they are driven to obey.²³

By Book 12 the gods' appearances degenerate into disguise for the sake of stealth. The relentless Juno convinces Juturna, Turnus' immortal sister who is a nymph of ponds and streams, to disguise herself as the officer Camers and incite the Latins to resume battle. Later Venus veils her face in a dark cloud while delivering a healing poultice for her wounded son and is recognized by Iapyx only as a god who has revived Aeneas. Juturna disguises herself once again as Turnus' charioteer, Metiscus, and steers him away from the battle, but eventually her brother exposes her. As in Book 9, he asks which god has incited her disguise, but he also declares that since his defeat is inevitable, it is better to fight than flee. Again, there is no epiphanic moment in these scenes, and so the mortals are left to question and

²¹ "Who sent you to me from clouds to earth?"

²² "I will follow omens so great, whoever you are who call me to arms."

²³ Also in Book 9 beginning at line 638, from a cloud Apollo praises Ascanius after he casts his first arrow in war, but then he descends, disguises himself as Butes, the armor-bearer and door-keeper of Anchises and instructs Aeneas' son not to continue fighting. He disappears quickly, but the Dardan captains perceive his true identity.

discover the disguises, or not. In the absence of divine revelation for the sake of the gods' power and majesty, the burden is placed on humans to reveal what turns out to be the gods' desperate and ineffectual behavior. Experiencing the divine is unpredictable but also fruitless.

Amazingly, Turnus' discovery of his sister's disguise has no effect whatever, since in line 784 she disguises herself as Metiscus once again in order to return her brother's sword. The final disguise in the poem is particularly significant. After Juppiter finally puts an end to Juno's desperate attempts to alter fate, he sends as a portent one of the Dirae disguised as an owl who screeches in Turnus' face. At this, Juturna speaks to the uselessness of immortality, withdrawing in despair:

‘quid nunc te tua, Turne, potest germana iuvare?
aut quid iam durae superat mihi? qua tibi lucem
arte moror? talin possum me opponere monstro?
iam iam linquo acies. ne me terrete timentem,
obscae volucres: alarum verbera nosco
letalemque sonum, nec fallunt iussa superba
magnanimi Iovis. haec pro virginitate reponit?
quo vitam dedit aeternam? cur mortis adempta est
condicio? possem tantos finire dolores
nunc certe, et misero fratri comes ire per umbras!
immortalis ego? aut quicquam mihi dulce meorum
te sine, frater, erit? o quae satis ima dehiscat
terra mihi, manisque deam demittat ad imos?’
tantum effata caput glauco contextit amictu
multa gemens et se fluvio dea condidit alto (*Aeneid* 12.872-86).²⁴

For Juturna, immortality has brought no power or knowledge, and so she longs for death. Her parting speech presents a world in which the gods have become useless.

²⁴ “‘How can your sister help you now, Turnus? Or what prevails over me, although I am hard? By what art may I hold light for you? Can I oppose myself to this portent? Now I leave the battle. Foul birds, do not terrify me, who am afraid. I know the beating of your wings and the deadly sound, nor do the proud commands of great-hearted Jove deceive. Does he return these things for my virginity? Why did he give eternal life? Why has mortality been taken? Now certainly I could end sorrows so great, and go as companion to my wretched brother among the shades. I immortal? Or what of mine will be sweet to me without you, brother? Or what earth would gape open wide enough for me, and send me, though a goddess, down to the shades below? She uttered so much, covered her head with her blue-green cloak, groaning deeply, and the goddess hid herself in the river's depth.’”

Their interactions with mortals cannot even pretend to affirm divine power. Rather than communicating greatness and majesty, their presence simply suspends the inevitable but does so in a way that also suspends human comprehension of the divine. The point seems to be to drive home the erratic complexity of such understanding, as even divine figures themselves come to devalue their immortality but also their own divine knowledge: at times Venus, Juno, and Juturna behave so desperately that they seem to have forgotten their knowledge of fate.²⁵

Through his rejection of Homeric epiphany scenes, Vergil develops by the end of his poem an increasingly grim philosophical outlook through a denial of the gods' power and knowledge. Epistemological experience for mortal characters remains deeply unresolved but also increasingly hopeless. Humans are left to wonder what divine forces intervene in their affairs, how they do so and how to attain knowledge of the interventions. Yet if knowledge of the divine is hopeless in the *Aeneid*, the struggle with it appears to be inevitable as the gods cannot keep themselves from intervening in ways that become ever more desperate and destructive. With this outlook Vergil complicates human and divine knowledge in radically new ways.

In their epic poems, Lucan and Statius offer their own versions of Vergil's pessimistic portrayal of the gods. The gods do not figure at all in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, written between 61-5 A.D., and consequently there is not a single epiphany scene in the whole poem. The absence of the gods all but announces an unequivocal failure of faith in the importance and effectiveness of divine agency.

²⁵ Venus' tearful encounter with Jupiter in Book 1 is an example of this. In Book 12 Juno says to Juturna "accelera et fratrem, si quis modus, eripe morti" (157) [hurry and snatch your brother from death, if there is a way], despite her pronouncement in Book 7 that she cannot change Aeneas' destiny to marry Lavinia: "non dabitur regnis, esto, prohibere Latinis, / atque immota manet fatis Lavinia coniunx" (313-14) [it will not be granted – so be it – to keep (Aeneas) from Latin kingdoms, and by fate Lavinia remains unchanged, his bride].

And yet the poem raises philosophical questions for the reader through the characters' encounters with dead mortals and through Lucan's horrific portrayal of witchcraft. In Book 3, the ghost of Julia appears to Pompey in the guise of a Fury among the flames of her funeral pyre. When she promises to haunt him and prophecies his death, he responds by considering whether her appearance might be a delusion: "et 'Quid' ait 'vani tremur imagine visus? / Aut nihil est sensus animis a morte relictum / aut mors ipsa nihil'" (38-40).²⁶ More significant is the lengthy episode in Book 6 in which the son of Pompey, Sextus, seeks a prophecy about the outcome of the war. Yet he does not consult oracles, augurs, or any knowledge which "si quid tacitum, sed fas erat" (430).²⁷ Instead he is said to be familiar with the mysteries of witchcraft:

Ille supernis
detestanda deis saevorum arcana magorum
noverat et tristis sacris feralibus aras,
umbrarum Ditisque fidem, miseroque liquebat
scire parum superos (*Phars.* 6.430-34).²⁸

While the next line states that Sextus' belief is madness,²⁹ Lucan affirms witchcraft in a lengthy passage beginning at line 440 by describing the witches' power over nature, a power which the gods fearfully acknowledge. He concludes by questioning why and in what manner the gods are bound by the witches' dominance:

Quis labor hic superis cantus herbasque sequendi
spernendique timor? cuius commercia pacti

²⁶ "‘And why,’ he said, ‘should I be terrified by the image of an empty vision? Either there is no feeling left to souls in death or death itself is nothing.’" All quotations from the *Pharsalia* are from the edition of Luca Canali. Translations are mine.

²⁷ "although secret was allowed"

²⁸ "He knew the secrets of savage witches, detested by the gods, and the grim altars with funeral rites, the truth of shades and of Pluto, it was clear to the wretched man that the gods above know too little."

²⁹ "Vanum saevumque furorem / adiuvat ipse locus" (434-5) [the place itself supports this empty and cruel madness].

obstrictos habuere deos? parere necesse est
an iuvat? ignota tantum pietate merentur,
an tacitis valuere minis? hoc iuris in omnes
est illis superos, an habent haec carmina certum
imperiosa deum, qui mundum cogere, quidquid
cogitur ipse, potest? (Phars. 6.492-99)³⁰

Amazingly, he provides no answer but simply goes on to describe the witches' control of the stars. The passage thus conspicuously affirms the gods' powerlessness and is part of Lucan's extremely grim world vision. Generally this vision seems far more directed toward painting an utterly wicked picture of the universe than toward provoking philosophical inquiry. Yet Lucan's unanswered questions nonetheless emphasize the philosophical crisis that his world view necessarily provokes for the ancient reader, for whom philosophical understanding was crucial for the good life. Even if part of Lucan's point is precisely that the good life is no longer possible in imperial Rome, the problem of the witches' force over the diminished gods remains.

Following the description of the witches' powers, Lucan introduces Erichtho at length, whom Sextus consults for her prophetic abilities and whose wickedness is said to be beyond even that of the Thessalian witches. Twice she is said to possess powers of telepathic communication, in the initial description of her with "Coetus audire silentum, / nosse domos Stygias arcanaque Ditis operti / non superi, non vita vetat" (513-15),³¹ and during her spell when she revives and makes a recently dead corpse prophesy, she invokes Hecate "per quam / manibus et mihi sunt tacitae

³⁰ "Why are the gods concerned to follow these spells and herbs, and why are they afraid to scorn them? What sort of mutual agreement keeps the gods constrained? Is it necessary that they obey, or do they enjoy it? Are (these agreements) earned by some unknown piety or do they prevail by silent threats? Does this law exist for all the gods above or do these tyrannical spells hold a certain god, who is able to oppress the world with whatever he himself is oppressed?"

³¹ "The gods do not, being alive does not prevent her from hearing silent encounters, or from knowing Stygian abodes and the secrets of hidden Pluto."

commercia linguae” (700-1)).³² Thus it is precisely in the context of the frighteningly obscure hold of witchcraft over the universe that we find affirmation of telepathic exchange. Part of Erichtho’s inexplicable power is her ability to know the thoughts of the shades, an epistemologically significant contrast that is part of Lucan’s pointed response to Vergil’s portrayal of the gods.

Statius’ *Thebaid*, responding to both Vergil and Lucan, also diminishes the gods, but in a way that raises moral rather than philosophical questions. The poem contains no epiphanies of the Homeric sort, but the gods occasionally appear to mortals, sometimes in disguise, in a manner recalling their reduced role in the *Aeneid*.³³ As in Vergil’s poem, the role of dead mortals is affirmed, as in Book 2 when the ghost of Laius appears to his grandson Eteocles in a dream in order to warn him of his fate. In the epiphany he is disguised as Tiresias in order not to

³² “because of whom there are exchanges of silent language between the dead and me.” Erichtho’s words may well be a perversion of an ancient belief in the telepathic powers of the gods. In Cicero’s *De Divinatione* I, 129 there are echoes of the idea of “tacitae linguae” in a passage that notes the gods’ powers in the context of asserting the visionary experience of humans: “ut enim deorum animi sine oculis, sine auribus, sine lingua sentient inter se, quid quisque sentiat (ex quo fit, ut homines, etiam cum taciti optent quid aut voveant, non dubitent, quin di illud exaudiant), sic animi hominum, cum aut somno soluti vacent corpore aut mente permoti per se ipsi liberi incitati moventur, cernunt ea quae permixti cum corpore animi videre non possunt” (325-6) [for as the souls of the gods, without eyes, without ears, without tongue understand each other and what each one thinks (such that men, even when they silently desire or pray for something do not doubt that the gods hear it), so the souls of men, when either released in sleep they depart from the body or inspired in soul they, driven, move freely by themselves, perceive things which they cannot see when the soul is mingled with the body]. Latin text quoted from the edition of Arthur Stanley Pease. Translation is mine. See the beginning of chapter 3 for further discussion of ancient beliefs on the telepathic powers of gods.

³³ The examples are fairly unremarkable. As in the *Aeneid*, disguises function to persuade and/or deceive. Bacchus appears undisguised to Hypsipyle in Book 5.271-84, telling her to take her father away to protect him from the raging women. In Book 7.738, in a scene clearly recalling *Aeneid* 12 when Juturna disguises herself as Metiscus, Apollo disguises himself as a charioteer, Haliacmom, in order to protect Amphiaraus, who ultimately is taken into a chasm in the earth that opens up for him. Diana disguises herself as Dorceus in order to subdue Parthenopeus in Book 9.811, only to have Mars run her off the battlefield. There are personified virtues who appear in disguise, for example in Book 10 when Virtus disguises herself as Manto and approaches Menoeceus to persuade him to commit suicide (639), and when Piety disguises herself as a warrior in order to attempt to restore peace (discussed below). These disguised personifications should not be viewed as interchangeable with the gods, however; Winthrop Wetherbee argues in chapter 6 of *The Ancient Flame* that the presence of the virtues represents a “new order of values” (166) in which “virtuous action can attain a spiritual reward” (173).

seem a false night vision (94). In Book 4 in an episode that clearly recalls Book 6 of the *Pharsalia*, Laius appears again, this time revived by Tiresias in order to make him prophesy. During this episode Tiresias himself wonders whether he is possessed by Apollo or by a ghost: “Umbrisne an supero dimissus Apolline complet / spiritus?” (586-87)³⁴ Statius also portrays the gods’ weakness in other ways. In Book 3, Juppiter delivers a speech to all the gods, inciting violence and declaring the war to be fated, and threatening to destroy Thebes if any of the other gods interfere. The latter, astonished at his threats, are said to resemble mortals in their silence: *Dixit, et attoniti iussis - mortalia credas / pectora - sic cuncti vocemque animosque tenebant*” (253-4).³⁵ These episodes emphasize a world in which the divine entities have come to be seen as extremely limited in the scope of their power.

Overall, however, the *Thebaid* does not leave the issue of divine knowledge and power unresolved in the manner of Vergil’s and Lucan’s epics, since over and over fate and Tisiphone are shown to be dominant. Throughout the poem, there is a sustained recognition of the power of fate over that of the gods who (along with other characters) explicitly name its dominance as part of the world order.³⁶ The Fury Tisiphone is also prominent as she repeatedly inspires fear in the gods, and mortals turn to her rather than to traditional divine authorities. The poem begins as Oedipus prays to Tisiphone to incite hatred between his sons Eteocles and Polynices, referring to her as the one on whom he has called so often: “multumque

³⁴ “A spirit fills (me), sent by the shades or by Apollo above?” All citations of the *Thebaid* are from the edition of Roger Lesueur. Translations are mine.

³⁵ “He spoke, and they were astonished at his commands. You might have believed their hearts were mortal, as they all held back their voice and minds.”

³⁶ At every turn, fate is mentioned as responsible for events. In Book 3.242 Juppiter states the war is fated. In Book 5 the seer Amphiaraus emphasizes that the fates control events at lines 735-40. In Book 7 Juppiter says he is bound by the wheels of fate at lines 197-8, and in Book 9.653-4 when Apollo and Diana converse, he affirms their powerlessness in the face of fate.

mihi consueta vocari / adnue, Tisiphone” (58-9).³⁷ The Fury also disguises herself in the manner of the Vergilian gods with no recognition or unveiling, for example in Book 9 when she adopts the aspect of Halys on the battlefield in order to incite Hippomedon away from Tydeus’ corpse (152). In Book 11 Eteocles and Polynices decide to duel, at the instigation of Tisiphone and her sister Megaera, who disguises herself as Pherclus in order to inflame Polynices (197). Once Juppiter is aware of the sisters’ dark work, he declares it to be too much even for the gods and orders them to avert their eyes (126). Pallas and Mars, the gods of war, abandon the battle and are replaced by the sister Furies (414-15). Tisiphone then drives away Piety, who has disguised herself as a warrior in order to calm the battle lines (483). With these characterizations the text does not explicitly provoke the same sorts of epistemological issues as I have argued is the case in the *Aeneid* and the *Pharsalia*. What remains instead in the *Thebaid* is a moral quandary for humans brought about by living in a world in which dark forces seem to have overwhelmed the traditional gods. Yet as Winthrop Wetherbee argues, the poem, in part through the figure Hypsipyle and through the personified virtues, also validates virtuous action as meaningful and deserving of spiritual reward.³⁸ Consequently readers must wrestle not with the source of power but with the meaning of virtue and veiled forces of good that play no systematic roles.

Dante was keenly sensitive to the moral and epistemological problems raised in the context of epiphany in these post-Vergilian texts. Whereas Statius advances the religious faithlessness of the *Aeneid* by diminishing the powers of the gods while offering glimmers of a new order, Lucan takes godlessness to a horrible extreme, affirming the inexplicable powers of witchcraft over the universe and

³⁷ “Tisiphone, accustomed to being called so often by me.”

³⁸ See chapter 6 of *The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets*.

exalting the telepathic figure of Erichtho, by whose power Vergil mysteriously claims in *Inf.* 9.22 to have been summoned to find a spirit in lower hell.³⁹ Thus we will see that Dante's handling of epiphany incorporates and transforms epistemological aspects of Vergil's and Lucan's portrayals but also Statius' puzzling hopefulness. Yet in order to understand better these transformations, we must first examine how Christian texts interpret the tradition of epiphany scenes inherited from the pagan world.

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the New Testament brings to light through the figure of Jesus the connection between epiphany and telepathy. What is noteworthy about some of Jesus' mind reading episodes is their pedestrian nature: in addition to the passages noted earlier, we find that in Matthew 22:18 Jesus is aware of the Pharisees' malicious intention when they ask him whether they should pay tax to the Roman emperor, and Luke 6:8 shows Jesus' discernment when the lawyers and Pharisees wish to charge him for healing on the Sabbath. Also in Luke 7:40 Jesus reads the mind of a Pharisee who silently judges him for allowing Mary Magdalen to wash his feet and in 11:39 when he knows that a Pharisee is surprised that Jesus has not washed before a meal. In John 4:17 he declares that a woman tells the truth when she says her current partner is not her husband. These episodes occur in the context of Jesus' divine status and often pertain to it as well, but they also emphasize Jesus the man reading the minds of other human beings about entirely human matters.

³⁹ When the pilgrim asks whether anyone from the first circle has ever traveled through hell before, Vergil responds with "Ver è ch'altra fiata qua giù fui, / congiurato da quella Eritón cruda / che richiamava l'ombra a' corpi sui. / Di poco era di me la carne nuda, / ch'ella mi fece intrar dentr' a quel muro, / per trarne un spirto del cerchio di Giuda" (22-27) [But I, in truth, have been here once before: / that savage witch Erichtho, she who called / the shades back to their bodies, summoned me. / My flesh had not been long stripped off when she / had me descend through all the rings of Hell, / to draw a spirit back from Judas' circle].

This sort of mind reading, at once divine and profane, models a profoundly new order of religious significance that is rooted in the Christian idea of epiphany as embodied in Jesus the man. The New Testament initiates this new order as it radically democratizes the philosophy and practice of epiphany as inherited from the pagan tradition. In a fascinating study, Margaret Mitchell elaborates this democratization in the context of the Gospels and in Paul's letters. In these texts she finds an expanded notion of epiphany that she calls "epiphanic logic," with which she reveals that early Christian writers used the idea of a mediated divine presence in remarkably flexible ways as they sought to establish their "missionary cult and its place in local and world history" (186). Her first example is Paul, who did not use the term "epiphany," but instead boldly claimed not only to have experienced epiphanies in which God revealed his son to him, but he also claimed to be a sort of epiphanic medium himself – someone who reveals Christ to others (188). Paul's declaration in Gal 2:19-20 represents well his astonishing new idea of himself as such a medium: "ego enim per legem legi mortuus sum ut Deo vivam. Christo confixus sum cruci. Vivo autem iam non ego vivit vero in me Christus."⁴⁰ In Gal 3:1 Paul chastises the Galatians for not perceiving through his preaching Christ crucified on the cross right before their eyes: "O insensati Galatae quis vos fascinavit ante quorum oculos Iesus Christus proscriptus est crucifixus,"⁴¹ and in 2 Cor 2:15 he declares himself to be a sort of olfactory epiphany in saying that he is the good fragrance of Christ that belongs to God: "Christi bonus odor sumus

⁴⁰ "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ on the cross. Now I no longer live but Christ lives in me." Mitchell works with the Greek text, while citations here are from the Vulgate. Translations are mine.

⁴¹ "O foolish Galatians who have bewitched yourselves, before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been displayed."

Deo.”⁴² Mitchell demonstrates through these statements that “Paul saw himself as a one-man multi-media presentation of the gospel of Christ crucified” (189).⁴³

Mark’s achievement according to Mitchell was to further expand the idea of epiphany by locating it in a written text that consequently could be accessed by readers at will. He does this in his narrative chiefly through the use of irony, when Jesus is continually presented in epiphanic moments attended by large crowds, such as at his baptism (1:9), but only the reader recognizes him for who he really is. This sort of dramatic irony privileges the reader’s viewpoint, creating what Mitchell calls a “textual epiphany” in which the reader shares knowledge with the deity (192-4).⁴⁴ Luke renders the Holy Spirit as yet another sort of epiphanic medium that makes the divine presence available to all Christians (195). He achieves this effect by claiming that the resurrected Jesus appears in the form of the wayfaring stranger, through study of Scripture, and in the communal practice of breaking bread (24:13-49). Matthew finds epiphanic logic in practical ethics, i.e. acts of charity and good will (25:31-46), as a person in need of clothing or food “presents one with a secret epiphany of the Lord, to which one either responds with suitable action to meet their need, or risks eternal damnation for epiphanic obstinance and obstructionism” (196). In conclusion Mitchell writes that epiphanic media in early Christianity were

apostolic envoys and then texts, which they claimed were the site where one could palpably encounter the divine presence. The epiphanic evolutions we have traced in early Christian literary culture amount to a media revolution by which trans-local, trans-generational readers were placed in a privileged position for a Christ-encounter of their own. The

⁴² “I am the good fragrance of Christ that belongs to God.”

⁴³ She also discusses Gal 1:12, 15-16 and 2 Cor 2:14-7:4.

⁴⁴ Mitchell points out that demons also know that Jesus is the son of God, as in Mark 5:6, 1:24, 34, 39-45 and 3:11. In the Vulgate these are called “spiritus immundi (1:24, 3:11) and “daimonia” (1:34, 39). See chapter 3 for discussion of the role and knowledge of demons.

eventual success of missionary Christianity was ultimately dependent upon this bold move (201).

Mitchell's work shows how the Gospels radically altered the idea of epiphany to make it an experience accessible to all Christians. Yet if this democratization of epiphany allowed Christianity to flourish as a personalized religious experience, it also brought a new character to the epistemological challenges that Christians inherited from the pagan tradition. These challenges are especially vivid in hagiography, where both mind reading and epiphany become *topoi* early on.⁴⁵ In order to illustrate the character of these *topoi* I have chosen three texts, the *Life of Antony*, written between 356-62 A.D., Gregory's sixth-century *Dialogues* and the *Golden Legend*, dated about 1260. I have chosen them not because they are particularly privileged as texts but because they are notable representatives of a body of popular belief about saints' lives, and hence their theories and stories were probably known to Dante. The hagiographic conventions themselves, rather than specific texts, are of greatest importance.

What these stories show is that saints read minds in the manner of Jesus, exposing the weaknesses of their adversaries and correcting their disciples and

⁴⁵ Franca Ela Consolino confirms telepathic episodes as a common theme in hagiographic texts (242) as well as epiphanies that saints experience and in which they appear to others (245). There are other contexts for epiphany and telepathy in early Christian culture as well. Einar Thomassen finds both in the revelation discourse of Gnostic texts, such as the Greek *Corpus Hermeticum*, in which instruction materials are framed as a dramatic discourse between a disciple and a teacher/revealer in the context of epiphany. Thomassen notes in the epiphany of Poimandres that the revealer claims to know what his disciple wants (223). I find in Brian Copenhaver's translation of the text another episode in which Poimandres knows that the disciple has seen an archetypal form in his mind (2). This sort of text is another early source for the *Commedia's* didactic discourse in which the fallen pilgrim is instructed on matters of philosophy and theology by various souls, who create epiphanic moments in their revealed presence but often through their telepathic abilities as well. I do not find that telepathy is a *topos* in later medieval manifestations of this genre, such as Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. There are, however, two indications of mind reading in Bernardus Silvestris' twelfth century *Cosmographia*, when Urania is said to know by divine insight Nature and her wishes (97), and when the creation of the "genius" is described as a spirit who perceives hidden thoughts (107). Bernard's idea of the telepathic "genius" originates in pagan theories of the *daimon*, which I address in chapter 3. These scattered episodes of mind reading are significant but do not indicate a consistent *topos* and do not present epistemological issues relevant to this study.

companions. But there is also an emphasis on a mundane sort of telepathy, in which the saint knows relatively unimportant details. *The Life of Antony* emphasizes this latter sort, as the saint knows ahead of time when visitors are coming and the reason for their visit (183-91). When standing in a crowd of monks, he demonstrates his telepathic ability by approaching immediately those monks that wish to see him (201). Gregory's *Dialogues* and the *Golden Legend* generally emphasize mind reading of the saint's enemies and disciples/companions, with St. Benedict, St. Peter, and St. Francis represented as particularly gifted. In the second dialogue, Benedict knows that some monks are lying about having taken food and drink outside the monastery (166), and both the *Dialogues* and the *Golden Legend* recount the story of Benedict chastising a monk whose prideful thoughts he has discerned as the monk resentfully serves him at table (178, 316). The *Golden Legend* offers additional examples of Benedict's clairvoyance: he knows that his enemies will try to poison him, that a young monk is drowning, that a loaf is poisoned, and that a boy hides a flask of wine from him (309-16). Finally, also in the *Golden Legend*, St. Francis reads the minds of other friars in a didactic and sometimes generous manner, as he penetrates the mind of a friar who only seems upright, humbles himself at the prideful thoughts of his riding companion, and wills his cloak and a script in his handwriting to a friar who secretly desires them (1019, 1028).⁴⁶

These mind reading episodes present their own epistemological challenges, which will be explored more fully in the next chapter. What is important here is to document their presence in the context of epiphany, which inherits from the Latin

⁴⁶ The examples of knowing that a monk is drowning and that a loaf is poisoned may suggest clairvoyance, i.e. knowing the location/quality of an object or situation, rather than mind reading, which we may define as knowing the specific thoughts of another person. But the categories may also overlap, and early Christian sources do not differentiate carefully between the two, with saints frequently displaying both clairvoyance and telepathy as examples of supernatural powers. See chapter 3 for further discussion of this.

epic tradition the disguise motif and its philosophical ambiguities.⁴⁷ As in the Latin texts, hagiographic epiphanies incorporating disguise do not always involve obvious epiphanic moments and they often lay the burden of discovery on the witness. Likewise, in hagiography, both forces of good and evil, divine and human figures enact epiphanies, but here it is angels, demons, saints, and Christ himself who populate the scenes.⁴⁸ The *Golden Legend* reports in the life of St. Benedict an episode in which the devil appears disguised as a companion traveler to a virtuous layman on a journey to visit the saint.⁴⁹ Three times the devil offers food and refreshment to the layman, who is in the habit of fasting along the journey. The layman accepts the third time, only learning of the disguise after he has arrived and been enlightened by St. Benedict; he throws himself before the saint and laments his failure (315). The forces of good also appear in disguise and without obvious revelation, as when after his death St. John appears disguised as a pilgrim to St. Edmund, the king of England. He begs the king for alms, invoking his own name (as saint). The king has nothing to give but a precious ring, which the pilgrim/saint receives and then departs. It is not until some time later that an English soldier on overseas duty receives the same ring from the pilgrim and delivers it to the king with a message: “Ille, cui et pro cuius amore annulum hunc dedisti tibi remandat” (96).⁵⁰

Implicit in both these episodes is the idea that the Christian must merit the epiphanic moment, presumably by faith and/or good works. This challenge to one’s

⁴⁷ Not all epiphanies in the hagiographic literature involve disguise; there are abundant examples of both types.

⁴⁸ One notable difference is that in hagiography mortals sometimes remain alive when they appear to others as epiphanies.

⁴⁹ Consolino confirms that demons appearing in disguise in order to tempt humans is a prevalent theme in hagiography (239).

⁵⁰ “He *to whom* and for whose love you gave this ring sends it back to you” (55). Latin citations from the *Legenda Aurea* are from the Maggioni edition. Translations are from William Granger Ryan, with italics indicating my changes.

personal faith further implies a certain anxiety for saints and for ordinary Christians, and it also accounts for the theoretical passages in all three of our texts concerning how to distinguish demons from angels. Like the epiphanies themselves, these theories assign responsibility to the recipient of the epiphany, whose emotions and inner resources are said to be responsible for discerning good from evil apparitions. In a lengthy passage, the *Life of Antony* concedes that one may be fearful at visions of both demons and angels, since the latter often produce fear in the righteous. But angels may be distinguished from demons in disguise according to the emotion they sustain in the Christian:

When, therefore, you see some apparitions, you become fearful, but if the fear is immediately taken away and in its place comes unutterable joy, along with tranquility and confidence and renewed spirits and calm thoughts and all the other things I have mentioned earlier, both courage and love for God, be of good courage and pray. For the soul's joy and its orderly condition demonstrate the holiness of each person (137).⁵¹

Antony goes on to say that if the soul remains fearful, “enemies are present, for the demons do not remove fearfulness from such persons as the great archangel did for Mary and Zacharias and as the angel did who appeared to the women at the tomb” (139). The *Golden Legend* echoes this idea in the story of the birth of John the Baptist, when it says the following of good angels: “Proprium est enim bonorum angelorum, secundum quod dicit Glossa, ex sua visione territos benigna exhortatione protinus consolari; econtra mali angeli se in lucis angelos transfigurantes si quos ex sui presentia territos senserint ampliori eos horrore

⁵¹ Robin Lane Fox confirms, adding “the criterion has recurred frequently in Catholic theology, perhaps most famously in the trials of Joan of Arc” (416). Citations from the *Life of Antony* are from Tim Vivian’s and Apostolos Athanassakis’ translation of the Greek and Coptic versions.

concutiunt” (541).⁵² Gregory discusses the issue in terms of dream, which he says in the fourth dialogue must be judged critically since their sources are numerous and include physical causes, illusions, and true revelations:⁵³

Sed nimirum cum somnia tot rerum qualitatibus
alternant, tanto eis credi difficilius debet, quanto
et ex quo impulsu veniant facilius non elucet.
Sancti autem viri inter inlusiones atque revelationes
ipsas visionum voces aut imagines quodam intimo
sapore discernunt, ut sciant vel quid a bono spiritu
percipiant, vel quid ab inlusione patiantur. Nam si
erga haec mens cauta non fuerit, per deceptorum
spiritum multis se uanitibus inmergit, qui
nonnumquam solet multa vera praedicere, ut ad
extremum valeat animam ex una aliqua falsitate
laqueare (432-4).⁵⁴

Yet the hagiographic stories sometimes reveal overconfidence in these theories. Gregory’s second dialogue recounts an episode in which the devil disguises himself as a veterinarian and appears to Benedict who is on his way to the Chapel of St. John. When Benedict asks him where he is going, the devil replies that he is bringing medicine to the brothers. Benedict shows no sign of recognizing the disguise, allows the devil to proceed and continues on his way. When he returns from his prayers he drives out the devil who has since entered one of the brothers (194). Benedict is not said to have seen through the disguise and the text provides

⁵² “It is the way of the good angels, according to the *Gloss*, to reassure by kindly words those who are alarmed at seeing them, whereas the bad angels transform themselves to look like angels of light, and, if they sense that anyone is terrified by the vision of them, they terrorize him still more” (329).

⁵³ Gregory enumerates six sources of dreams: a full stomach or an empty one, illusions, thoughts mixed with illusions, revelations, and thoughts combined with revelations (432).

⁵⁴ “*But since* dreams may arise from such a variety of causes, one ought to be very reluctant to put one’s faith in them, since it is hard to tell from what source they come. The saints, however, can distinguish true revelations from the voices and images of illusions through an inner sensitivity, so that they know whether they perceive that something is from a good spirit or whether they experience something from an illusion. For if the mind is not on guard against these, it will plunge itself into many vanities through the master of deceit, who is accustomed to foretell many things that are true in order that he may finally capture the soul by but one falsehood” (262). Latin citations from the *Dialogues* are from the Calati/Stendardi edition. Translation based on Zimmerman with italics indicating my changes. Robin Lane Fox confirms the Christian wariness of dreams (391).

no indication that he does. The *Golden Legend* reports a remarkable example in the life of St. Dominic when he is confronted by a devil in disguise:

Quadam vice dum vir dei Dominicus apud Bononiam constitutus in ecclesia pernoctaret, dyabolus in specie fratris eidem apparuit. Quem sanctus Dominicus fratrem existimans ei innuebat ut cum ceteris ad quiescendum pergeret. Ille vero quasi deridendo eisdem sibi nutibus respondebat. Tunc sanctus Dominicus quisnam esset qui sic eius mandatum contempneret scire volens candelam ad lampadem accendit et in faciem ipsum respiciens quod dyabolus esset confestim cognovit (735).⁵⁵

Far from any sort of “intimo sapore,” Dominic’s means of recognizing the devil are entirely mundane, as the discovery is a simple matter of improving the lighting. Thus while Dominic recognizes the devil, the episode does nothing to affirm any sort of privileged sensitivity in the saint. These contradictions suggest that the theories function more as statements of piety rather than as proof of the saints’ extraordinary powers. Declaring that saints have special power to distinguish angels from demons may primarily be assertions of faith and devotion.

What both the stories and the theories show is that the experience of telepathy for saints becomes particularly rich and complex in the Christian world. On the model of Paul, the saints are presented as epiphanic media for experiencing Christ, but their human status means that their worth as a channel of such knowledge must constantly be tested. This is true even when they appear undisguised in epiphanies, as when the *Golden Legend* reports that Benedict appears undisguised to a monk in a dream and instructs him on how to build a certain monastery. The monks put no faith in the vision and continue to await Benedict’s

⁵⁵ “One night while Dominic, the man of God, was praying in his church in Bologna, the devil appeared to him in the guise of a friar. The saint, thinking that he was one of his brethren, nodded to him to go to his rest with the others; but the devil mocked him by making the same sign. Then the saint, wishing to learn who it was that treated his orders so lightly, lit a candle at one of the lamps and, looking into the other’s face, recognized him as the evil spirit” (53-4).

arrival, prompting the saint to chastise them: “Quare, fratres ista dicitis? Numquid non vobis apparui et loca singula designavi? Ite et sicut per visionem audistis omnia ordinate” (318).⁵⁶ Yet if the saints’ claim to privileged value is tested, their personal experience of epiphany is also tested as they struggle to distinguish between visions of angels versus demons, prompting theories that appear more devout than convincing.

Dante absorbs both pagan and Christian traditions of epiphany with their epistemological issues, but he alters them in astonishingly new ways beginning in the *Vita Nuova*, where he immediately suggests an awareness of the pagan scenes. He introduces Beatrice and describes her effect on his youthful self in terms of the pagan motif of the “hint of divinity,” when he “quotes” Homer: “onde ne la mia puerizia molte volte l’andai cercando, e vedeala di sì nobili e laudabili portamenti, che certo di lei si potea dire quella parola del poeta Omero: <<Ella non pareva figliuola d’uomo mortale, ma di deo>>” (2.8).⁵⁷ Of course, Dante had not read Homer, and De Robertis traces the Homeric reference to Albertus Magnus’ *De intellectu et intelligibili*. Thus in part Dante may wish to showcase his knowledge of contemporary authors, but he also means to signal his awareness of the pagan epiphany scenes that he had read and his intention to respond to them through his presentation of a new divine being. For in order to render faithfully the radically tense “newness” of Beatrice, Dante requires not only pagan and Christian motifs but also his own particular epiphanic forms that he has invented for her: when she appears, undisguised in 3.1, Dante marks her divinity through numerology (she

⁵⁶ “Why do you say this, brothers?” he answered. “Did I not appear to you and give you the ground plan? Go now and carry out the design as you saw it in the visions” (191).

⁵⁷ “Thus I went seeking her many times in my childhood, and I saw her in such noble and praiseworthy bearing that certainly one would say of her the words of the poet Homer: ‘She seemed to be not a child of mortal man, but of god.’” All citations from the *Vita Nuova* are from the De Robertis edition. Translations are mine.

appears nine years after her first appearance, at the ninth hour of the day, and as one in a group of three women), through her pure white clothing, through his fearful state of mind, through her “ineffabile cortesia” which he says is rewarded now in heaven, and the effect of her virtuous greeting on him, “che me parve allora vedere tutti li termini de la beatitudine” (3.2).⁵⁸ Yet this majestic appearance is immediately followed by Dante’s disturbing dream of the fearful figure who claims to be Dante’s lord. In the figure’s arms lies the nude Beatrice, sleeping and wrapped lightly in a crimson cloth. The mysterious figure awakens her, forcing her to eat Dante’s heart, which he holds in his hand. After she does so reluctantly, the lord begins weeping bitterly and with Beatrice still in his arms ascends toward heaven. This dream presents Beatrice in terms far more vulnerable and erotic than angelic, creating a marked contrast with the regal presentation that occurs just before. Her appearance in a dream vision also creates doubts in the mind of the reader since, as Gregory’s *Dialogues* assert, dreams are suspect as sources of truth. At this point in the narrative, then, the precise meaning of Beatrice in Dante’s imagination remains a mystery. Like some of the pagan epiphany scenes, Beatrice’s early appearances raise deeply puzzling questions about how one can recognize a divine apparition.

Another vestige of the pagan scenes is Dante’s use of the disguise and instructions motifs, for example when Love appears in 9.3, dressed as a lowly pilgrim, and instructs Dante regarding the selection and use of his “*donna schermo*.” After Dante’s use of this new lady provokes gossip with the result that Beatrice denies Dante her greeting, Love appears to him again in 11.3, this time as a young man dressed in white, and announces that it is time to end the deception. Love begins to weep and when questioned offers the cryptic “*Ego tanquam centrum*

⁵⁸ “that I then seemed to see all the limits of beatitude.”

circuli, cui simili modo se habent circumferentie partes; tu autem non sic.”⁵⁹ When Dante asks the meaning of this, Love says that he should not ask more than is useful. Love then explains why Beatrice has denied Dante her greeting and instructs him to write a poem in which he expresses his true feelings but says that he should not speak to Beatrice directly. Remarkable in this second scene is Love’s oracle-like declaration that requires interpretation but remains obscure. Here too Dante transforms the motif in order to sustain the problem of how he may fully understand the instructions of Love.

Yet Dante also deeply internalized the epiphanic logic of the New Testament, particularly the constructions of writer and text as epiphanic media. Just as Paul becomes an epiphanic medium when he claims that Christ lives in him, Love (not merely love) is living and discernable in Dante through his eyes: “E chi avesse voluto conoscere Amore, fare lo potea mirando lo tremare de li occhi miei” (11.3).⁶⁰ The text as epiphanic medium is implied late in the canzone *Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore*, when Dante exercises the common courtly lyric convention of addressing the poem itself:

Canzone, io so che tu girai parlando
a donne assai, quand’io t’avrò avanzata.
Or t’ammonisco, perch’io t’ho allevata
per figliuola d’Amor giovane e piana,
che là ‘ve giugni tu diche pregando:
‘Insegnatemi gir, ch’io son mandata
a quella di cui laude so’ adornata.’
E se non vuoi andar sì come vana,
non restare ove sia gente villana:
ingegnati, se puoi, d’esser palese
solo con donne o con omo cortese,
che ti merranno là per via tostana.

⁵⁹ “I am like the center of a circle, to which all points of the circumference bear a similar relation; you however are not.” Danuta Shanzer observes that this is related to the idea of God as the circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus.

⁶⁰ “And whoever wanted to know Love could do so by looking at the tremor in my eyes.”

Tu troverai Amor con esso lei;
raccomandami a lui come tu dei (VN 19.13-14).⁶¹

As offspring of Love, the personified poem also becomes an epiphanic medium. It is cast as the immortal daughter of a god who is adorned with Beatrice's praises and thus corporeally bears Dante's experience of her miracle to others. It also bears the revelation of Dante's love, and is called upon to find Love himself with Beatrice. Thus Dante invokes the biblical tradition of text as epiphanic medium but in a far more dramatic and intimate way: he imagines a text that lives and acts in a community of personal relationships with the beloved and with Love himself. But this community is fraught with uncertainty, since the canzone depends on the knowledge of others in order to deliver herself ('Insegnatemi gir, ch'io son mandata / a quella di cui laude so' adornata). Further, Dante instructs the canzone to avoid the "gente villana" and to reveal its meaning only to those whom he deems capable of understanding. Just as in the gospel of Mark crowds of people do not recognize Jesus for who he really is, Dante implies that most people will not understand the true meaning of his words. In this way, Dante shows that words in their social context provoke a crisis of knowledge. Knowing how to interpret, even for the one who bears the message, is a problem inherent to the production and reception of language.⁶²

This interpretive problem also manifests itself in the dizzying array of roles that Dante assigns Love. Beatrice carries Love in her eyes, creating an epiphany within an epiphany in the sonnet *Ne li occhi porta la mia donna Amore*. The sonnet

⁶¹ "Canzone, I know that you will go around speaking / to many ladies, when I will have sent you forth. / Now I admonish you, because I have raised you / as a daughter of Love young and forthright, / that where you arrive you say beseeching: / 'Teach me where to go, for I am sent / to her with whose praise I am adorned.' / And if you do not want to go as an empty thing, / do not remain where the people are rude: / strive, if you can, to be open / only with courtly ladies and men, / who will guide you there by a quick way. / You will find Love with her; / commend me to him as you should."

⁶² See chapter 2 of *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*, where Ascoli argues for a similar crisis in *Convivio* 1.

Voi che portate la sembianza umile bears the remarkable image of Beatrice bathing Love with her face of tears, since there she carries Love in her aspect: “Vedeste voi nostra donna gentile / bagnar nel viso suo di pianto Amore?” (22.9).⁶³ In 24, Dante has another epiphany of Love, who tells Dante that he should bless the day that Love took him. Immediately following this, Beatrice and Love merge once again when Love declares that one would call Beatrice Love on account of her similarity to him.⁶⁴ Yet as discussed above, Love is present in Dante’s eyes as well, and he appears numerous times as an epiphany in and of himself. At 31.9 Love also becomes more like a human companion to Dante after Beatrice’s death in the canzone *Li occhi dolente per pietà del core* as the two are left to grieve her.⁶⁵

It is perhaps this extreme variety that leads Dante to interrupt his narrative with a theoretical justification for his representation of Love. In a long passage beginning at 25, he acknowledges that he writes of love as if it were a corporeal substance, and that this is technically false since love is an accident in a substance (“uno accidente in sustanzia”). He defends this practice by arguing that poets are granted a greater license of expression than are prose writers, so that poets may speak to inanimate things and make them speak to each other, even in cases of non-existent things, and they may treat accidents as substances and as human beings, as long as they have a valid reason that can be elaborated in prose. But he is careful to point out that originally only educated poets (i.e. those who wrote in Latin) dealt with matters of love, and that only recently have vernacular versifiers begun to do so. He then provides examples from Homer, Vergil, Lucan, Horace, and Ovid in order to defend the authority of vernacular poets using such figures as well, once

⁶³ “Have you seen our noble lady bathe Love with the tears of her face?”

⁶⁴ “E chi volesse sottilmente considerare, quella Beatrice chiamerebbe Amore per molta simiglianza che ha meco” (24.5) [And whoever wishes to consider subtly would call Beatrice Love on account of the great similarity that she bears to me].

⁶⁵ “e ha lasciato Amor meco dolente” (14) [and she left Love grieving with me].

again linking his knowledge and practice of epiphany to the pagan poets. He concludes the interlude by emphasizing that Latin poets have always had a reason for writing as they did, and so too should vernacular poets:

però che grande vergogna sarebbe a colui che rimasse
cose sotto vesta di figura o di colore rettorico, e poscia
domandato, non sapesse denudare le sue parole da
cotale vesta, in guisa che avessero verace intendimento.
E questo mio primo amico e io ne sapemo bene di
quelli che così rimano stoltamente (VN 25.10).⁶⁶

Dante in this passage does not address so much his variety of usage as he does the issue of misrepresenting the true nature of love. Nonetheless, the tone of the conclusion is remarkable for its defensiveness, as Dante feels the need to distinguish himself from those vernacular poets who rhyme “stoltamente.” Dante may have also sensed that his representations of Love threaten to lapse into meaninglessness, but rather than offer specific reasons for his renderings, he shifts into theoretical discourse in order to prove his philosophical understanding of love and his knowledge of classical poetry. This move allows him to shore up his authority by displaying other knowledge as he speaks in general terms of prescription and admonishment rather than the specifics of his own practice.⁶⁷

This is not to argue that Dante had no reasons for his various portrayals of Love. But the passage offers further evidence that how one knows, depicts, and veils the truth is an issue in the *Vita Nuova* at multiple levels. This is true for Dante as a man who loves Beatrice and is trying to understand how he should interact with

⁶⁶ “For it would be a great shame for someone to put things in rhyme under the veil of a figure or rhetorical color and then, when asked, not know how to unveil his words in such a way that would show their true meaning. And this best friend of mine and I know well some people who rhyme so stupidly.”

⁶⁷ Ascoli (2008) also refers to this passage in the context of his argument concerning Dante’s self-authorizing strategies (67-68). As Wetherbee pointed out to me, this passage is also followed by the sonnet *Tanto gentile* in which Beatrice is “vestuta” in virtue and cannot be unveiled, and it is the only poem in the *Vita Nuova* that Dante does not analyze.

her. But it is also true for all who encounter Love and Beatrice – the “gente villana” whom Dante does not trust will understand and those who are “gentile” and “cortese” whom Dante’s canzone needs to deliver her message. It is true as well for Dante poet and indeed for all poets who are called upon to justify their uses of rhetoric, personification, or allegory. And it is true, of course, for the reader. These issues, that occur in the context of epiphany, are deeply informed by the pagan and Christian scenes. Dante has sensed in the Latin epics a new pattern as they deny secure knowledge of the gods. Beatrice’s epiphanies are entirely new in that Dante presents a historical woman who, like Christ, *does* represent the divine. But since Beatrice is not a saint, her divine worth is particularly suspect. Dante assigns her status based on merely a love for her that stems from the courtly model, which he manipulates to increase the interpretative tension surrounding her. Where the pagan poets show doubt, anger, and rage at the failure of divine authority, Dante (perhaps with echoes of Statius) represents an audacious new hopefulness in Beatrice’s authority. Perhaps most important is that the questions underlying the poetic impulses of Dante and the pagan poets are strikingly similar in that both provoke urgent new questions about how one can know the gods/God. Dante also absorbs and radically transforms the ways in which saints and Christians are traditionally tested through epiphany in the hagiographic tradition. In place of the challenge of distinguishing a demon from an angel is Dante’s implicit expectation of those who will and will not comprehend his new message. But his own text shows that understanding cannot be divided so easily between the “villana” and the “cortese,” as Dante himself struggles to learn how to love, which for him includes understanding and representing both love and Love. What is new in Dante’s portrayal of loving Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova* is that she is a new sort of epiphany

whose meaning is bound to provoke more questions than answers, just as do the epiphanies of Dante's Christian and pagan predecessors.

I have discussed epiphany in the *Vita Nuova* at some length because it documents some of the crucial ways in which in his formative writing years Dante was influenced by the sources discussed above. The *Commedia* dramatically transforms the epistemological tensions as they appear in all these sources, contextualizing them with epiphany in a number of ways. Mitchell's work on epiphany in the New Testament helps to explain how the articulation of Christ's life encouraged a culture that allowed Dante to imagine and justify his experience of love as personalized epiphany, first in the *Vita Nuova*. The *Commedia* deepens and emboldens Dante's presentation of himself and his text as epiphanic media. He experiences not only a representative of the divine, but the afterlife itself and, like Paul, he makes it manifest to others through his personal experience, recorded in poetic form that functions as a textual epiphany. Beatrice's status as *donna angelicata* in the *Vita Nuova* is elevated in the *Commedia* to that of an aspect of God. Narratively, this exaltation diminishes the mystery of her meaning, since she is represented unequivocally as the divine vehicle of Dante's journey and salvation. Doctrinally, however, her status as Dante's personal and ultimate Christian epiphany is one of the poem's claims that has made it unacceptable to believers and perhaps solidified its critical reception as poem rather than sacred Christian vision. In this sense, her status as epiphanic medium has intensified the interpretive tension surrounding her and the poem.

But it is important to understand that in the *Commedia* Beatrice and Love are no longer privileged in epiphany scenes, for in a sense the appearances of all characters function as epiphanies. Epiphanic moments in fact comprise the structure

of the poem through serial presentations and recognitions of immortal characters.⁶⁸ One might doubt that epiphany in this sense raises issues in the poem since the status of all souls is so clearly demarcated by their placement in one of the three realms. In Dante's virtual reality there seems to be no doubt concerning who represents the divine and who does not. But we must remember how extensively Dante dramatizes both his and our understanding of the characters' moral standing, as well as his own worth. He dramatizes his role as epiphanic medium through his fallen state at the journey's beginning in *Inferno* 2.32 ("Io non Enea, io non Paulo sono"),⁶⁹ claiming simultaneously to be unfit and yet privileged for the task at hand. He also dramatizes his profound identification with sinners such as Francesca da Rimini and Ulysses, with the latter becoming Dante's alter ego in a way that some scholars believe he does not transcend.⁷⁰ For Dante, this dramatization is partly the legacy of all three of the pagan poets' obsession with dead mortals in scenes suggestive of epiphany. This obsession also became Dante's, for while faith in God generates much of his philosophical, and theological creativity, it is the appearance of once-human shades that propels much of the imaginative and affective power of his poem. He channels the pagan concern with the power of shades versus gods into a Christian version of the same struggle: his confusion over the moral worth of the souls he meets. In this way, he recalls the pagan texts but also advances with astonishing subtlety the hagiographic tradition's relatively banal problematic of recognizing demons versus angels: disguise in the *Commedia* becomes internalized

⁶⁸ There is partial support for viewing all souls as participating in epiphany in Steven Botterill's observation that loosely, all characters in the *Paradiso* can be called saints because they enjoy celestial beatitude as a reward and for this reason, Dante does not particularly privilege the saints in his representation of heaven (*The Dante Encyclopedia* p. 759). I would extend the status of epiphany to all characters in the poem on the basis of the pagan epiphany scenes that include once-mortal shades, explained further below.

⁶⁹ "I am not Aeneas, I am not Paul."

⁷⁰ See the introductory chapter for this discussion.

as part of the pilgrim's struggle to recognize the moral worth of himself and others, in a way that begins to resemble a complex inner life.

Mind reading in the *Commedia* occurs in the context of epiphany, which the text enacts in the numerous ways defined above. Yet Mitchell's elaboration of epiphany in the context of Jesus' telepathic moments also invites us to describe some of the *Commedia's* mind reading in terms of epiphany. Just as Christian readers experience textual epiphanies when reading Jesus' story, telepathy in the *Commedia* recalls Jesus' mind reading powers in the Bible. Further, mind reading engages God's epistemology when heavenly souls experience his knowledge, and hence an aspect of his presence, when reading Dante pilgrim's thoughts. In this way we can understand certain mind reading episodes as epiphanic moments. This is particularly evident in some of the episodes in the *Paradiso* where telepathy is presented in explicit terms of reflection, such as when Cacciaguida describes the process thus to his ancestor: "ché i minori e ' grandi / di questa vita miran ne lo specchio / in che, prima che pensi, il pensier pandi" (15.61-63).⁷¹ God's mirror is yet another epiphanic medium.

With this view, we can begin to deepen our understanding of how and why Dante problematizes telepathy throughout the poem. The pagan and Christian traditions of epiphany in the sources above offer one view of how the *Commedia* historicizes its telepathic/epiphanic moments. Dante does not diminish the divine in the manner of the pagan poets, but the *Commedia* assimilates the pagan and Christian problems of validating and recognizing divine figures in part through the motifs of revelation and occlusion that structure so many episodes of mind reading.⁷² The poem also participates in these sources and contexts through the

⁷¹ "for the great and the small of this life gaze into the mirror in which, before you think, the thought is revealed."

⁷² See chapter 1.

problem of whether mind reading occurs, ambiguities not only embodied in the figure of Vergil. Yet we can now see that Vergil's ambiguous powers in the *Commedia*, besides raising the narrative and poetic problems discussed in chapter 1, also recall the unresolved epistemological issues brought forth through epiphany in the *Aeneid*, as well as in subsequent pagan and Christian sources. We see the Christian influence at the narrative level when, for example, Dante resuscitates the vestiges of demon-versus-angel epiphany scenes from hagiography into the episode of Vergil's deception by the devils in *Inferno* 21. But perhaps most important is that the *Commedia's* recapitulation of the epistemological issues in the popular and learned stories shows that these particular challenges and complexities exist as part of a narrative history. Through its participation in this history, the *Commedia*, even while proclaiming faith in God's truth, resists an obvious resolution of the epistemological issues that it inherits and performs.

In order to better understand this resistance, we must investigate the philosophical and narrative histories of mind reading itself. For while mind reading functions within epiphany, it has a distinct history in the pagan and Christian traditions. The following chapter explores this history and the *Commedia's* rich performance of it.

Chapter 3
Angels and Demons: Philosophical Contexts
of Mind Reading in the *Commedia*

Like epiphany, mind reading in the Christian tradition becomes a problematic marker for the holy person's claim to authority. For just as distinguishing between good and evil epiphanies is a constant challenge for Christians, so is the distinction between the valid telepathy of holy beings and the worthless power of the demons. This chapter investigates theories of mind reading in late antique and early medieval popular philosophy, hagiography, and later philosophical texts in order to reveal the *Commedia's* transformation of this epistemological problem. But the context is wider than this. Examining the history of telepathy in its own right will help to gauge the relative importance of popular and learned/technical contexts, as well as the Neoplatonic versus Aristotelian roots of mind reading. This in turn will orient more precisely the epistemological tensions of the poem and will shed new light on the issue of Vergil's abilities and on Dante's uses of both visual and non-visual modes of telepathy.

Accordingly, the chapter is divided into three parts: the first section deals with popular philosophical and hagiographic sources, demonstrating the problems that Christian thinkers encountered in attempting to absorb pagan conceptions of mind reading. The second section explores how later scholastic and other theorists attempted to respond to the issues raised by the earlier sources, and it begins to elaborate both early and later medieval influences in the poem. The final segment explores the direct and visual modes of mind reading in the poem with particular attention to Dante's epistemologically unique treatment of specular imagery.

As E.R. Dodds points out, there were no ancient Greek or Latin words for

telepathy, clairvoyance or extra-sensory perception, notions that were all embraced in the general term *divinatio* (367). Thus in the pagan and early Christian texts that we will examine, notions of mind reading are not categorically distinct, so that relevant theories emerge in the context of discussions of dreams, prophecy, the human soul's clairvoyance, demonology, as well as brief informal comments about angels. Especially in early Christian texts, ideas of mind reading frequently come to light through passages on prophecy. For this reason, the following discussion of pagan antiquity through the time of Augustine focuses mainly on demonology but also includes relevant evidence from other categories mentioned above.

Ancient philosophical theories, mostly from Neoplatonists and their forerunners, locate telepathic abilities among the gods, *daimones* and humans.¹ In his *De divinatione* Cicero reports that the Greek Stoic philosopher Posidonius (135-51 B.C.) identifies three types of divinely-inspired dreams: foresight in humans due to shared ancestry with the gods, the air being "full of immortal minds in which clearly imprinted marks of truth are revealed," and the gods directly conversing with sleeping humans (Brittain 1).² Cicero also reports that Posidonius believed that the gods read each others' minds, and that humans are able to "discern things that they can't see while bound up with the body, when they are free from the body in the release of sleep or move under their own stimulus in [prophetic] states of disturbance" (Brittain 2). Plutarch (46-120 A.D.) briefly defines the *daimon*,³ suggests that its mind reading is intuitive and that the power of prophecy is universal. He says the *daimones* (translated as demi-gods) are beings thought to be

¹ Special thanks to Professor Charles Brittain for his assistance in identifying pertinent sources from the ancient world.

² Brittain argues for a non-Platonist theory for Posidonius, thus rejecting a theory of innate knowledge in which the soul recollects "information it already possesses" (2).

³ While discussing the *daimon* I also use the translated term "demon" with the understanding that I am referring to the pagan figure rather than the Christian idea of the demon, which is also discussed further below.

lower than gods but higher than mortals, and that many believe them to be in charge of the oracles (348). He may recall Posidonius' second sort of dream when he says that these demi-gods inspire the priests and priestesses by a physical mechanism in which "souls meeting souls...create in them impressions of the future, exactly as we do not convey all our information to one another through the spoken word, but by writing also, or merely by a touch or a glance, we give much information about what has come to pass and intimation of what is to come" (463). Plutarch explicitly states that it is unlikely that souls gain new powers once separated from the body; hence both souls severed from the body and souls in bodies prophesy, but souls in bodies exercise this power weakly on account of being "blinded by being combined and commingled with the mortal nature" (467).⁴

In the *De deo Socratis*, Apuleius (123-180 A.D.) elaborates this theory of the nature and role of the *daimon*, categorizing it in a way that attests to a conceptual fluidity and variety in the ancient view. He asserts the Platonic belief in an absolute division between men and gods, casting *daimones* as intermediary beings who communicate human desires and prayers and mediate activities such as prophecies, magic, and predictions (33-5). It is logical, he says, for demons to function as go-betweens because they occupy the tracts of air between earth and heaven, and because it would detract from the gods' majesty were the latter to interact directly with humans (37). Physically, the demons possess bodies of air but have some weight, much like clouds. Their intermediary position thus corresponds to their intermediary nature and role. Like gods, they are immortal, but like humans, they feel passion and can be provoked to all the range of human emotions. Thus they are animate beings, capable of reasoning, susceptible to emotions, made of air but

⁴ Quotations from texts originally in Greek written by Plutarch, Plotinus, Porphyry, and also the *Life of Antony* are from English translations listed in the bibliography.

eternal (41-9).

The philosophers, says Apuleius, have identified several classes of *daimones*. In a certain sense, humans are a sort of demon because a good desiring in the soul is a type of good god, and thus a soul perfect in virtue can be called a good demon. This demon can be called a *genius*, and although immortal, is generated within each person himself (51). Another type of demon is the human soul once it has ended the service of life and given up its body. These demons are called in the ancient Latin language *Lemures* (53). Among these *Lemures*, those who care for their descendants, live peacefully and quietly in the house are called *Lares familiares* (55). Those who are punished for weaknesses of their lives, who wander without a home, and who frighten and harm men are called *Larvae*. When it is uncertain what lot has been assigned to them and is unclear whether one is a *Lar* or *Larva*, they are called *di Manes*, with the word "god" added for the sake of honor. But only those are called gods who belong to the *Lemures*, having lived with justice and prudence. As examples of *Lemures* Apuleius cites Amphiaraus, Mopsus, Osiris, and Aesculapius. All of these types of demons once dwelled in a human soul (55).

Another class of demons, higher in rank, is not linked to a human body but has specific powers and functions akin to those of personifications. Sleep and Love belong to this class. Apuleius reports that according to Plato, from this group also come certain demons that are assigned to individual humans through the course of their life as witnesses and guardians (55). Although they are invisible, they are always present and act as judges of the individual's actions but also thoughts. At the end of life, the demon accompanies the individual to the divine judge to assist in his defense and confirm his case. Therefore, humans hold nothing secret, since the demon sees and knows all. Remarkably, Apuleius claims that if this demon is known and venerated by the mortal through a virtuous life, then it will act as

revealer of the future, protector from danger, helper, provider of useful dreams, teacher, corrector, and so on (57-59). It is no wonder, then, he asserts, that Socrates reaped such benefits from his *daimon*. He concludes with an exhortation to cultivate the soul and mind through the sacred practice of philosophy, as did Socrates. Notably, he cites examples from literature on the benefits of demons, saying that the poets mistakenly imagined some of the gods as experiencing earthly passions, which is why the gods hate and love certain men. Instead, he says, it is the demons that have these emotions and characteristics. Hence Ulysses was always accompanied by Minerva, who insured his successful endeavors (77).

In *Ennead* 3.5.6, the Neoplatonist Plotinus (204-70 A.D.) echoes Apuleius in defining the *daimones* (whom he calls celestials) as intermediary beings who experience human emotions, and in saying that they are not gods but are often equated with them. A celestial, he says, is “the representative generated by each Soul when it enters the Cosmos” (181).⁵ In *Ennead* 4.3.18, he specifies one of their functions as giving heed to human petitioners, yet he does not mention mind reading specifically when discussing the celestials (330). Instead, he comes closest to affirming the existence of telepathy when considering whether human souls separated from the body use deliberate reason:

We certainly cannot think of them, it seems to me, as employing words when, though they may occupy bodies in the heavenly region, they are essentially in the Intellectual: and very surely the deliberation of doubt and difficulty which they practise here must be unknown to them There; all their act must fall into place by sheer force of their nature; there can be no question of commanding or of talking counsel; they will know, each, what is to be communicated

⁵ He also defines in vague terms other "spirit-beings" who "are for the direct service of the All, and administer particular things to the purpose of the Universe entire. The Soul of the All must be adequate to all that is and therefore must bring into being spirit powers serviceable not merely in one function but to its entire charge" (181-82).

from another, by present consciousness. Even in our own case here, eyes often know what is not spoken; and There the whole body (the heaven) is pure, and every being is, as it were, an eye, nothing is concealed or sophisticated, there is no need of speech, everything is seen and known. As for the Celestial (the Daimones) and souls in the air, they may well use speech; for all such are simply Animate-Beings (271).

It is not entirely clear if Plotinus means to contrast the mind-reading ability of souls separated from the body with the inability of the demons, or simply to suggest that the latter may also use speech as an additional form of communication. In any case this means of telepathy may be a key concept for later philosophers' ideas about angelic communication. Dodds characterizes this telepathy as nonphysical, which he claims the Neoplatonists particularly favored (373). But as we will discuss below, Brittain points out that Platonists including Plutarch and Augustine also supported theories of demonic or psychic telepathy that were based on reading the physical traces of others' thoughts (3).

The next significant step for our history is found in a letter written around 300 A.D. The writer is the late third century Neoplatonist Porphyry, who addresses his wife Marcella. In the letter, he encourages his wife to be virtuous in part by distinguishing between good and bad demons. He speaks of God strengthening the doer of good deeds, "while a wicked daimon prepares the way for evil deeds" (61). He urges Marcella not to allow the intellect to be a "dwelling place of the wicked daimon" (63) and, "But the evil daimon must necessarily dwell wherever forgetfulness of God sneaks in, for, as you have learned, the soul is a dwelling place either of gods or daimons" (63). He also says that "everything is known in advance by God, and...divine angels and good daimons are overseers of events, and it is impossible to elude them" (63-65). This distinction between good and bad demons

certainly informed the Christian dichotomy, about which Augustine wrote extensively.

Augustine's demonology is defined by his desire to refute paganism and coincided with anti-pagan legislation that peaked during his time under the emperors Theodosius and Honorius (Fiedrowicz 198).⁶ He was in part responding to the efforts of those like Porphyry who, in his *De philosophia ex oraculis*, used pagan oracular statements to refute Christianity and the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah (198). Interestingly, however, Christians also used pagan oracles to attempt to validate their religion. In the mid to late fourth century, there were oracles in which Apollo or Artemis announced the decline of pagan cults and the impending victory of Christianity (199). Given this context it is perhaps not surprising to find a pervasive uncertainty in Augustine's writings on the demons' nature, their abilities, and how they are regarded by society. In the *De civitate dei* he targets Apuleius when declaring that demons are already considered to be bad by all, thanks to the establishment of Christianity: "Ita enim per sanam doctrinam, quae humanis rebus inluxit, omnes vel paene omnes daimonum nomen exhorrent, ut, quisquis ante disputationem Apulei, qua daemonum dignitas commendatur, titulum libri de daimone Socratis legeret, nequaquam illum hominem sanum fuisse sentiret" (231).⁷ Yet he also takes pains to argue why the demons are bad, which makes one wonder whether the demons might have been thought by some to be beneficent. Again he takes aim at Apuleius in refuting the demons' benign role

⁶ Fiedrowicz's introductory notes appear in the translated edition of *Demonic Divination* listed in the bibliography.

⁷ Book 8, chap 14. "Fortunately, our sound philosophy has so illumined the world that nearly everyone now has a horror of the name, "demon," so that anyone seeing the title, *Concerning the Demon of Socrates*, before reading Apuleius on the dignity of these spirits, would jump to the conclusion that Apuleius was insane" (165). Latin quotations of *De civitate dei* are from the Corpus Christianorum series. English translations are from the Walsh, Zema, Monahan and Honan edition with italics (except for titles) indicating my changes.

given that they experience human emotions, which he sees as proof of their malignancy; the demons' minds are tossed on a sea of passions and this makes it impossible for them to please the gods or to help men aim toward high standards. Those who are immortal and yet share the misery of men cannot offer a beatitude that they do not possess and are more likely to envy. Therefore there is no such thing as a good demon; none should be honored as protectors but all are to be avoided as deceivers (230-33).

Augustine adheres to a Christian understanding of pagan gods as demons and identifies the Platonists' demons with the fallen angels (Fiedrowicz 210), but in doing so his ideas are partly informed by Apuleius and pagan writers. In addition to accepting Apuleius' idea that demons do indeed possess human emotions, Augustine's description of their physical make-up is drawn from paganism. In the *De divinatione daemonum* (406-11 A.D.), he echoes Apuleius' description of the demons' airy bodies which he says are endowed with "acrimonia sensus et celeritate motus"⁸ allowing them to foretell the future but also to carry out many wondrous things (603-4). As for how the demons read minds, he initially claims in this text at V, 9 that they are able to read the thoughts of others by means of a sort of body language perceptible to them but not to humans:

aliquando et hominum dispositiones non solum voce
prolatas, verum etiam cogitatione conceptas, cum signa
quaedam ex animo exprimuntur in corpore, tota facilitate
perdiscunt atque hinc etiam multa futura praenuntiant,
aliis videlicet mira, qui ista disposita non nouerunt.
sicut enim adparet concitator animi motus in uultu,
ut ab hominibus quoque aliquid forinsecus agnoscat,
quod intrinsecus agitur, ita non debet esse incredibile,
si etiam leniores cogitationes dant aliqua signa per

⁸ "keen sensitivity and rapid movement."

corpus, quae obtuso sensu hominum cognosci non
possunt, acuto autem daemonum possunt (608).⁹

Augustine later retracted the physically oriented mechanism for demonic mind reading, affirming their ability but maintaining that he does not know how they do it. He states in the *Retractiones* 2.30 “Sed utrum signa quaedam dentur ex corpore cogitantium illis sensibilia, nos autem latentia, an alia vi et ea spirituali ista cognoscant, aut difficillime potest ab hominibus, aut omnino non potest inveniri.”¹⁰

Also ambiguous is the problem of demonic prophecy, which parallels the saints’ difficulty with distinguishing the origin of epiphanic figures. In the *De divinatione daemonum* Augustine is careful to distinguish the demons’ sometimes mistaken prophecies from those of God’s true angels and prophets. Incorrect prophecies result when demons try unsuccessfully to deceive or when they themselves are deceived by one of God’s true prophets who may alter the predictions of the future. Nonetheless demons may prophesy correctly because they overhear true prophecies from the more reliable sources (608-9). This fact, he says in book 12, chap 13 of *De Genesi ad litteram*, can make it difficult to discern whether a spirit possessing someone is good or evil.¹¹ Thus while Augustine

⁹ “Sometimes they also find it the easiest thing in the world to gain a thorough knowledge of people’s plans when they have only been hatched in their thoughts, and before they are stated out loud in words, because they can read the signs by which ‘body language’ gives away the mind’s intentions, and from this source of information too they forecast many future events, which amazes others who have no previous knowledge of these plans. Just as a person’s being deeply stirred in spirit will be revealed by the expression on his face, so that other people will be able to tell from the outside what is going on inside him, so in a similar way it should not be thought incredible if even calmer thoughts betray themselves through slight indications of ‘body language,’ which can be observed by the keen sensitivity of demons but not by the duller senses of human beings” (210-11). Latin quotations of *De divinatione daemonum* are from the Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum series. Translation is from Edmund Hill.

¹⁰ “Whether certain sensible signs may be given from the body of those thinking to these ones (i.e. demons), but hidden to us, or whether they may know these things by another or spiritual force, can be discovered by men either with great difficulty, or it cannot be known at all.” Translation is mine. In book 12 chap 17 of the *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine also states that it is difficult to know how demons are able to know our thoughts and to know why humans do not have this ability (403).

¹¹ “discretio sane difficillima est, cum spiritus malignus quasi tranquillius agit ac sine aliqua vexatione corporis adsumpto humano spiritu dicit quod potest. Quando etiam vera dicit et utilia praedicat, transfigurans se, sicut scriptum est: velut angelum lucis, ad hoc, ut, cum illi in manifestis

declares in the *De civitate dei* at 9.22 that angelic prophecy is never mistaken, he offers no theoretical demonstration of the assertion (268-9), and the burden is placed on humans to identify the source and truth of prophetic encounters.

Further, just as the mechanism of demonic telepathy and the source of prophetic spirits are unclear, so is the mechanism by which angels know humans' thoughts. In the *De Genesi ad litteram* Augustine begins to suggest a contrast between demonic and angelic telepathy. He does so in the context of considering human mind readers, such as a man possessed by an unclean spirit who was able to tell the whereabouts of a priest along his journey to visit him (403-4), and other people who predict events as if by chance (412-13). Yet in discussing how these things happen, Augustine simply declares angelic telepathy in a manner that raises more questions than it resolves:

Quonam modo haec visa in spiritum hominis veniant, utrum ibi primitus formentur an formata ingerantur et quadam coniunctione cernantur, ut sic hominibus angeli ostendant cogitationes suas et corporalium rerum similitudines, quas in suo spiritu futurorum cognitione praeformant, quemadmodum et ipsi nostras cogitationes non utique oculis, quia non corpore, sed spiritu vident, verum hoc intersit, quod illi nostras, etiam si nolimus, nouerunt, nos autem ipsorum, nisi ostendantur, nosse non possumus... (414).¹²

bonis creditum fuerit, seducat ad sua. Hunc discerni non arbitror nisi dono illo, de quo ait apostolus, cum de diversis dei muneribus loqueretur: alii diiudicatio spirituum" (398) [The discernment of these experiences is certainly a most difficult task when the evil spirit acts in a seemingly peaceful manner and, without tormenting the body, possesses a man's spirit and says what he is able, sometimes even speaking the truth and disclosing useful knowledge of the future. In this case he transforms himself, according to Scripture, as if into an angel of light, in order that, once having gained his victim's confidence in matters that are manifestly good, he may then lure his victim into his snares. This spirit, so far as I know, cannot be recognized except by that gift mentioned by St. Paul, where he speaks of the different gifts of God: *...to another the distinguishing of spirits*].

¹² Book 12, chap 23. "How do these things enter the spirit of man? Are they fashioned there? Or are they implanted fully formed and seen as a consequence of some sort of union, so that angels reveal to men their own thoughts and the likenesses of bodies which they fashion beforehand in their own spirit through their knowledge of future events? In such a way angels see our thoughts; not, of course, with eyes, because they see not by body but by spirit. But there is this difference: they know our thoughts whether we will it or not, whereas we cannot know theirs unless they reveal them"

Augustine's retraction notwithstanding, his writing suggests two sorts of telepathy that may be significant for philosophical theories that surfaced in the later Middle Ages. The angels are able to read minds by means of a non-physical method whereas according to the *De divinatione daemonum*, demons may literally enter the bodies of humans or pick up on a sort of body language indistinguishable to mortals. Thus we can identify a shaky outline of a mind reading *in bono* that is spiritually practiced by prophets and angels, and a mind reading *in malo* that is devalued as physically driven and belongs to the demons.

These examples reflect Augustine's theoretical weaknesses, but an important example from the *Contra academicos* illustrates the confusion in the larger context of saints' telepathy. Augustine discusses a man named Albicerius who is brought up in the dialogue in the context of the definition of wisdom. The disreputable Albicerius is thought to be most unwise and yet performs divination: he is a "finder," able to locate a missing spoon and name its owner, he knows when a certain boy has stolen coins, he is able to describe the nature of a business transaction regarding the sale of a farm, and he is able to identify the precise line of Vergil's poetry that a certain man has in mind (14). Augustine describes the latter feat as follows:

Quod autem dixit, quem verum volueret animo ille, a quo consulebatur, neque hoc puto inter res nostras esse numerandam, non quo negem honestissimas disciplinas ad possessionem quondam nostri animi pertinere, sed quia verum alienum etiam inperitissimis canere ac pronuntiare concessum est. Ideo talia cum in memoriam nostram incurrerint, non mirum, si sentiri possunt ab huius aeris animalibus quibusdam vilissimis, quos

(211). Latin quotations of *De Genesi ad litteram* are from the Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum series. Translation is from John Hammond Taylor. Taylor glosses this passage by confirming Augustine's belief that good and bad angels read humans' thoughts, but notes that fathers of the church held that angels could not read humans' secrets of the heart that pertain to our future free acts (309). See below for further discussion of this point.

daemonas vocant, a quibus nos superari acumine ac
subtilitate sensuum posse concedo, ratione autem nego,
atque id fieri nescio quo modo secretissimo atque a
nostris sensibus remotissimo (14).¹³

Albicerius' telepathy is thus distinguished qualitatively from more valuable knowledge. He is said to be ignorant of grammar, music, and geometry, and while he knows certain divine matters, they are not the important ones, i.e. those that are relevant to a happy life (22). Most significant is that Albicerius' mind reading is said to be inspired by demons, yet the sort of mundane knowledge he acquires is exactly of the order that we see among the more homely miracles of saints. As outlined in the previous chapter, St. Benedict learns telepathically of monks who take food outside the monastery, the prideful thoughts of a server, that a boy hides a flask of wine, and so on. Telepathy is not validated as holy by judging the knowledge gained but rather by evaluating the professed mind reader, whose worth has previously been established. The truth or falsity of the clairvoyant's powers functions simply to confirm what is generally believed about his or her character.¹⁴

St. Antony further demonstrates that the quality, the mechanism, but also the extent of the demons' ability is unclear. As evidence of his holiness, Antony is able to predict days or months in advance when and why people come to visit him, yet in

¹³ I, vii, 20. "Furthermore, I don't think the fact that Albicerius told the man who consulted him what line of verse he was thinking to himself about should be counted among the things that are ours. I don't mean to deny that worthwhile studies are fit to be possessed by our mind in some fashion. Yet we all admit that even ignorant people can recite and deliver other men's verses. When such things come up in our memory, then, it's no surprise if they can be sensed by some vile animals of the air that are called 'demons.' I don't know in what mysterious way, far beyond the reach of our senses, this happens. I grant that demons can outstrip us in the keenness and subtlety of their senses, but I deny that they outstrip us in reason" (20). Latin quotations from the *Contra academicos* are from the *Corpus Christianorum* series. Translation is from Peter King.

¹⁴ As in the examples of the saints mentioned above and in chapter 2, some of Albicerius' powers seem to be oriented more toward clairvoyance (e.g. locating the missing spoon) whereas his ability to identify the line of poetry suggests mind reading, but in fact the distinction is not so clear. It is possible that Albicerius knows the location of the spoon because he has read the thoughts of the person who hid or lost it, or that has a more generalized ability to know situations/objects. Augustine's explanation does not distinguish the mechanism for Albicerius' different types of knowledge.

dismissing demonic prophecy he uses precisely the example of predicting the arrival of travelers:

Why is it so remarkable if they, having bodies more subtle than humans possess, see travelers setting out on a journey and arrive ahead of them and report the event? Someone riding a horse can ‘predict’ this ahead of someone travelling on foot! So we need not be amazed at them because of this; they do not know in advance about events that have not yet happened. No, it is God alone who knows events before they happen. But the demons, seeing these things, run ahead like thieves and make their report. To how many right now are they giving signals about what we are doing, what we have gathered together and are speaking against them, before one of us goes away and reports it? But any child who can run swiftly can also do this. He will arrive before someone who takes his time! (129).

Antony reduces the idea of demonic prophecy to a simple physical advantage, invalidating the demons’ power without accounting for his own. Yet soon after he implies that demons can read minds when he says “Whenever they come, they match the condition they find us in and pattern their thoughts on our own and so fashion their apparitions accordingly. If they find us fearful and upset, then, like thieves, finding the place unguarded, they immediately set on us and do whatever we have in our thoughts – and much more! (149).¹⁵

In the *Dialogues*, Gregory too offers a complex picture of mind reading theory, stating in the second *Dialogue* that holy men are not consistently able to read minds or prophesy. He cites the Prophet Nathan (2 Kings 7) who gave but then

¹⁵ The *Golden Legend* reveals another relevant and amusing example in which St. Peter engages in a mind-reading duel with Simon Magus. To prove to Nero that Simon’s claims of divinity are false, Peter challenges the magician to say what the saint is thinking. Peter whispers to Nero to bring a loaf, which Peter blesses and hides in his sleeve. When Peter commands Simon to say what has been said and done, Simon refuses and demands that instead Peter read his mind. When Simon commands dogs to attack, Peter repels the animals with the blessed loaf, thus demonstrating his superior ability (Vol. 1, 564-65). This story suggests that Simon has no power of telepathy but does not account for Peter’s ability. As in the above examples, Peter’s mind reading serves more to confirm than prove his goodness.

had to withdraw his consent to King David's request to build a temple, and Heliseus (4 Kings 4.27) who found a woman in tears without knowing why (180). The reason for the inconsistency is that the Holy Spirit breathes when and where God pleases, thereby elevating the mind while safeguarding the prophet's humility. Holy men know the Lord's thoughts only in so far as they are one with Him ("Occulta itaque Dei iudicia, in quantum coniuncti sunt, sciunt; in quantum disiuncti sunt, nesciunt" 174).¹⁶ In *Dialogue* 4.43,2 he affirms that humans are able to see each other's thoughts minimally in this world, but in the afterlife "nostra in alterutrum corda conspicimus." (418).¹⁷ Amazingly, however, he also echoes the ideas of Plutarch when he claims in the fourth *Dialogue* that souls may also prophesy through their own powers: "vis animae aliquando subtilitate sua ea quae sunt ventura cognoscit..."¹⁸ As evidence he mentions a lawyer named Cumquodeus who predicted that his body would be laid to rest in a certain church. Upon dying, the lawyer was in fact laid there despite efforts to place the body elsewhere. Gregory concludes by asking "Et cum eundem virum curis saecularibus obligatum lucrisque terrenis inhiantem fuisse nouerimus, unde hoc praedicere potuit, nisi quia id quod futurum erat eius corpori ipsa vis animae ac subtilitas praevidebat?" (376).¹⁹ Gregory does not acknowledge his theory as a complicating factor for those

¹⁶ "In so far as they are joined (to God) they know God's hidden judgments; in so far as they are not joined, they do not know" (84).

¹⁷ "in hoc cogitationes nostras vicissim minime videmus, in illo autem nostra in alterutrum corda conspicimus..." (418) [*in this world we see each other's thoughts very little but in the world to come we will see each other's hearts*]. This phrase is part of a rhetorical question by Gregory in which he proposes a metaphor of this world as night and the next as day. Zimmerman translates this bit inadequately as "Is it not true that in this world it is impossible for us to see each other's hearts?" (251). Gregory in fact seems to be saying that we can see each other's hearts in this world to a very small degree and that we will have this ability fully in the afterlife. See below for fuller quotation of the passage.

¹⁸ "Sometimes the power of the soul by its own subtlety knows what will happen..." (219).

¹⁹ "And since we know that same man was engrossed in secular affairs and longing for earthly gain, how did he predict this unless that same power and subtlety of his soul foresaw what the future would be for his body?" (220).

attempting to distinguish the source of supernatural knowledge. He simply presents it as an alternative to prophesy inspired by divine revelation. According to Robin Lane Fox, most Christians did not believe that the soul had a natural power of divination (392). Gregory's belief can therefore be regarded as exceptional.

That the Christian Gregory incorporates this pagan belief is understandable in light of Peter Brown's different but parallel scholarship on the origin of saints. Brown argues that that the idea of the patron saint was modeled on the client/patron relationship of Roman society but also on the role of the pagan *daimon* (62-3). The patron saint fulfilled a need in newly Christian societies for friendship and protection at the human level in a "world so sternly organized around sin and justice" (65), and the client/patron relationship supplied a suitable model for conceptualizing this new form of piety. But Brown also argues that Christians conceived of the saint as an invisible companion who took on the role of the pagan *daimon*. Thus he links Paulinus of Nola's poems on St. Felix to the idea of the pagan protector or the angel: "Thus, when Paulinus writes about his relationship with Saint Felix, he pointedly and lovingly transfers to a dead human being all the sense of intimate involvement with an invisible companion that men in previous generations had looked for in a relationship with the non human figures of gods, *daimones*, or angels" (55). Brown's history invites us to relate the mind-reading ability of saints not only to imitating Christ²⁰ but to the pagan figure of the *daimon*. With this knowledge Gregory's belief in the pagan notion of the human soul's telepathic power can be seen as part of a larger pattern of origin; the Neoplatonic ideas of the soul's telepathic powers and those of the *daimon* inform Christian notions of the human soul, demons, and saints. The connection is found partly in Plutarch and Plotinus' notions of the soul, in Apuleius's definition of the soul as a

²⁰ See chapter 2 for discussion of Christ's mind reading.

type of *daimon*, but also through a more direct transfer of the *daimon*'s function onto the role of Christian figures.

This pagan ancestry accounts compellingly for the confusion and contradictions that troubled the early Christian theorists of mind reading. The advent of the new religion brought an especially urgent need for Christian intellectuals and soul-savers to differentiate the powers of demons from those of angels and saints. Holy people in particular needed to show distinctive powers in order to prove to potential converts the credibility of the new Christian god - hence the attempted theoretical distinction between the spiritual mind reading of the holy man and the physical action of demons. Yet all of the theories on how and to what extent mind reading occurs in humans, demons, and angels are striking for contradictions that betray more similarities than differences between the pagan and Christian sources. These similarities are most vivid in practice, where Christian demons read minds in the same manner as the saints. They do so in part because both demons and saints are descendants of the pagan *daimon*.

This ancestry suggests ideas about the epistemological problems of Christian mind reading that are both parallel and new in relation to the complications of Christian epiphany that were explored in the previous chapter. Christianity democratizes both epiphany and mind reading, granting to humans supernatural visions and powers that are ambiguous. Christians must struggle to distinguish good from evil apparitions, but they also struggle to understand the differences among demonic, human, and angelic telepathy. Like epiphany, mind reading is also a problematic marker for the holy person's claim to authority because just as the Christian must merit the epiphanic moment, so Gregory asserts that the holy can prophesy only insofar as they are one with God. Thus we can understand both telepathy and epiphany as encounters with unidentified supernatural forces in which

the burden of recognition is the responsibility of humans and becomes a sign of Christian worth. Human beings' participation as epiphanic media means that their credibility must be constantly tested, just as humans struggle to identify the source of personal epiphanies. But the history of mind reading shows uniquely how Christian holy figures are descended from pagan ones. The saintly human as mind reader creates the need for a conceptual distinction that is not sufficiently realized, in part because both demons and saints are descendants of the same pagan figure. In this way theories and practices of epiphany and of mind reading function as statements of Christian piety rather than as proof of differentiated abilities and encounters. It also makes sense to recall mind reading as a type of epiphany not only for the reasons discussed in the previous chapter, but because doing so implies a larger, profound, unresolved anxiety for Christians. If mind reading for the saint implies an epiphanic moment of witnessing God's knowledge (and hence an aspect of his presence), the history traced above shows that no essential difference between God and the demon vis-à-vis mind reading emerges reliably in early Christian sources.

This anxiety perhaps underlies Gregory's extraordinary claims of heightened prophecy, which he believes to be driven by the imminent end of the world. In *Dialogue 4* Peter asks Gregory to explain why revelations and visions occur with greater frequency in current times, to which Gregory responds with a lovely metaphorical elaboration of 1 Corinthians 13:12 ("videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate tunc autem facie ad faciem; nunc cognosco ex parte tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum").²¹

²¹ "Now we see through a mirror obscurely but then we will see face to face; now I know partially but then I will know as I am known." Latin quotations are from the *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*. Translations are my own.

Ita est. Nam quantum praesens saeculum propinquat ad finem, tantum futurum saeculum ipsa iam quasi propinquitate tangitur et signis manifestioribus aperitur. Quia enim in hoc cogitationes nostras vicissim minime videmus, in illo autem nostra in alterutrum corda conspiciamus, quid hoc saeculum nisi noctem, et quid venturum nisi diem dixerim? Sed quemadmodum cum nox finiri et dies incipit oriri, ante solis ortum simul aliquo modo tenebrae cum luce conmixtae sunt, quousque discedentis noctis reliquiae in luce diei subsequentis perfecte vertantur, ita huius mundi finis iam cum futuri saeculi exordio permiscetur, atque ipsae reliquiarum eius tenebrae quadam iam rerum spiritualium permixtione translucet. Et quae illius mundi sunt multa iam cernimus, sed necdum perfecte cognoscimus, quia quasi in quodam mentis crepusculo haec velut ante solem videmus (419-20).²²

Gregory elaborates the prospect of telepathy more fully than what 1 Corinthians implies, heightening the epistemological doubt generated by the biblical verse. It is not just that we see imperfectly; we are beginning to see more and more, but still not all. Every moment brings a greater degree of superhuman knowledge that yet remains incomplete. If the source and mechanism of divine revelation cannot be understood, Christians could at least believe that revelations and visions are on the increase; if nothing else, the visions' frequency served to validate them. In the context of the flawed theories examined above, this belief intensifies the philosophical urgency of prophetic/telepathic potential. The faithful are left with the expectation of ever more divine revelation, but they cannot truly know how, from

²² "That is right. For, as the present world approaches its end, the world of eternity looms nearer, manifesting itself by ever clearer signs. *In this world we see each other's thoughts very little but in the world to come we will see each other's hearts. Therefore what should I call this world if not night and the world to come if not day? But just as when night begins to end and day to begin before the sun's rising, in a certain way shadows are blended with light, until the remnants of departing night are perfectly transformed into the light of the coming day, so the end of this world merges with the beginning of eternal life, such that those very shadows of the night's remains already are luminous through the mingling of spiritual matters. And there are many things of that world that we already perceive, but we do not yet know perfectly because we see things as if in a certain twilight of the mind, as before dawn* (419-20). I thank Professor Tom Hill for initially drawing my attention to this key passage.

where, or to what extent these truths are made manifest.

With the advent of scholasticism in the later Middle Ages the philosophical sources attempt to categorize telepathy more specifically and with more precision.²³ They do so in part by narrowing the field of inquiry, rejecting the idea that angels can read humans' minds and avoiding or denying the issue of demonic communication. Nonetheless, they remain attached to the idea that angels, demons, and blessed souls can, in limited cases, know human thoughts, prayers, and actions, and many of their explanations rely on Augustine's ambiguous distinctions. As noted above, John Hammond Taylor states that most fathers of the church did not believe that angels could read humans' minds.²⁴ In the *Sentences*, Peter Lombard does not affirm powers of mind reading when discussing guardian or other types of angels.²⁵ When explaining how angels and blessed souls hear our prayers, he says in Book IV, Dist. 45, chapter 6 that angels, saints, and glorified souls hear prayers by contemplating God's light and his Word ("veri luminis illustratione" and "in Verbo Dei") and he quotes Augustine who merely confirms his opinion without explaining the mechanism.²⁶ One might well ask why, if angels hear our prayers by

²³ In the following pages I have necessarily limited the choice of philosophical sources that are most relevant to mind reading in the *Commedia*. These are Peter Lombard, who set the standard for topics in his *Sentences*, and Aquinas and Bonaventure who commented on the *Sentences* but also offered other relevant evidence on the issue, much of which was likely known to Dante.

²⁴ See footnote above regarding Augustine's affirmation of angelic telepathy in the *De Genesi ad litteram*.

²⁵ Book II, Dist. 11, chap 1.

²⁶ "Non est incredibile, animas Sanctorum, quae in abscondito faciei Dei veri luminis illustratione laetantur, in ipsius contemplatione eas quae foris aguntur, intelligere, quantum illis vel ad gaudium, vel nobis ad auxilium pertinet. Sicut enim Angelis, ita et Sanctis, qui Deo assunt, petitiones nostrae innotescunt in Verbo Dei, quod contemplantur. Unde et dicuntur Angeli orationes et vota nostra offerre Deo, non quia eum doceant, sed quia eius voluntatem super eis consulunt. Unde Augustinus: 'Angelis, qui sunt apud Deum, innotescunt petitiones nostrae, ut quodam modo eas offerant Deo et de his consultant, et quod, Deo iubente, implendum esse cognoverint, hoc nobis vel evidenter vel latenter reportent. Unde et Angelus hominibus ait: *Cum oraretis, orationem vestram obtuli Deo*'" (1009-10). [It is not incredible that souls of the Saints who in the hidden face of God rejoice in the shining of true light, by its contemplation know what happens on the outside, in so far as it pertains to their joy or assistance to us. Thus to the angels and saints who assist God, our petitions are known in the Word of God which they contemplate. Whence angels are also said to offer our prayers and

contemplating God’s light, or “in Verbo Dei,” they shouldn’t be able to see other things (i.e. thoughts) the same way. Lombard suggests a qualifying element for the kinds of things angels may know when he says their knowledge pertains to their joy or assistance to us (“quantum illis vel ad gaudium, vel nobis ad auxilium pertinet”). In his commentary on this question, Aquinas confirms that angels and blessed souls, when looking into the divine essence, are allowed to know only that which pertains to their blessedness, which includes hearing the prayers of humans.²⁷ It is noteworthy that both Lombard and Aquinas avoid specular imagery, instead naming the “Verbum” as that which angels contemplate. Bonaventure’s commentary, in the context of asking whether saints pray for us, simply says that they do so because they see our need, but he does not specify how.²⁸ All three of these authors thus appear to regard knowledge of human prayers as a category separate from knowing all thoughts.

When Peter Lombard addresses how evil angels know the truth of temporal things he quotes Augustine’s *De Genesi ad litteram* book 2.17.37 to justify the

vows to God, not in order to inform him but because they consult his will concerning these things. Whence Augustine: ‘Our petitions are known to the angels who are with God so that in some way they offer them to God and consult concerning these things and, once God has commanded, they know what should be fulfilled. They may report this to us either openly or in a hidden manner. Whence also the angel says to man: *When you prayed, I brought your prayer to God*]. Latin quotations are from the 1916 edition Collegii S. Bonaventurae. Translations from books I and II of the Sentences are from Giulio Silano while those from books III and IV are mine. One can imagine a response based on the idea of whether humans will the information to be heard.

²⁷ Book 4, Dist. 45, q.3, a.1. “Hoc autem ad eorum gloriam pertinet quod auxilium indigentibus praebeant ad salutem; sic enim Dei cooperatores efficiuntur, quo nihil est divinius, ut Dionysius dicit, 3 cap Eccles. Hierarch. (2). Unde patet quod sancti cognitionem habeant eorum quae ad hoc requiruntur; et sic manifestum est quod in Verbo cognoscunt vota et orationes et devotiones hominum qui ad eorum auxilium confugiunt” (348) [Now, it pertains to their glory to help the needy for their salvation; in so doing they become cooperators with God, than which there is nothing more divine, as Dionysus says in chapter 3 of the Ecclesiastical hierarchy (2). Thus it is clear that the saints have knowledge of those things that are required for this; and thus it is clear that in the Word they know the vows, prayers, and devotions of people who ask for their help]. Latin text of Aquinas’ Commentary on the Sentences is from the PDUL Edizioni Studio Domenicano. Translation is mine.

²⁸ Dist 45, art 3, q.2. He simply says that saints pray for us for two reasons, one of which is “quia vident nostram necessitatem” (519) [because they see our need]. He also does not address the mechanism of angels’ knowledge in q.3 in which he asks whether it is useful for us to pray to saints. Latin text from A.C. Peltier edition. Translation is mine.

demons' knowledge on the basis of their subtle senses, their experience based on long lives, what they learn from holy angels, and on their predictions as mere declarations of what they themselves are planning to do.²⁹ In his *Commentary*, in Dist. 8, Part 2. a. 1, q. 6 Bonaventure states explicitly that neither good nor bad angels can know humans' thoughts but they may guess them through clues given by the body, although he emphasizes that this knowledge is not certain and purely based on conjecture (456).³⁰ Similarly, Aquinas in the first part of the *Summa* in q.57, a. 4, again relying on Augustine, states that strictly speaking, angels cannot

²⁹ Book II, Dist. 7, chap 5. He first quotes Isidore and then says "De hoc etiam Augustinus ait: 'Spiritus mali quaedam vera de temporalibus rebus noscere permittuntur, partim subtilitate sensus, partim experientia temporum callidiores propter tam magnam longitudinem vitae, partim sanctis Angelis, quod ipsi ab omnipotenti Dio discunt, iussu eius sibi revelantibus. Aliquando autem iidem (sic) nefandi spiritus et quae ipsi acturi sunt, velut divinando, praedicunt'" (336) [Concerning this, Augustine too says: "Evil spirits are allowed to know certain things about temporal matters, in part by the refinement of their sense, in part because they are made shrewder by their experience over the ages, which is due to such great length of life, in part because the holy angels at God's command reveal to them what they have learned from God. At times too, these same evil spirits foretell what they themselves are about to do, as though pretending to divine it]. Likewise in Book II, Dist. 7, chap 6 Lombard relies on Augustine in claiming that whatever magical arts demons possess (again he does not mention mind reading) are given them by God (336-37).

³⁰ "Et ideo dico, quod nulla creatura, nec humana, nec angelica, potest conscientiae humanae nosse secreta, nisi per signa, vel conjecturas, vel nisi noverit Dei revelatione, aut hominis denuntiatione. Et quoniam pauca sint ita secreta, quin prodeant in opera exteriora, vel appareant per signa exteriora faciei, vel per signa cordis, quod movetur diversimode secundum diversitatem affectionum; hinc est quo multae cogitationes et affectiones nostrae deprehendi possunt a malignis spiritibus, nisi arceantur Dei virtute; haec autem cognitio potius est conjecturae, quam certae scientiae: et ideo concedendae sunt rationes ostendentes quod angelus malus secreta conscientiae nostrae perscrutari non potest" (456) [And therefore I say that no creature, neither human, nor angelic, can know the secrets of human conscience, except through signs, or conjecture, or unless he will have known by God's revelation, or by the denunciation of man. And since few things are thus secret, indeed they may come forth in outer deeds, or they may appear through exterior signs of the face, or through signs of the heart, which is moved in different ways according to a diversity of feelings; thence it is that many of our thoughts and feelings can be perceived by evil spirits, unless they are prevented by God's power; however this cognition is rather of conjecture than of certain knowledge: and therefore reasons showing that an evil angel cannot scrutinize the secrets of our conscience should be granted]. In Book 4, Dist. 50, part 2, a.1, q.2, Bonaventure considers whether separated souls can know of human affairs, stating that in certain cases they may be granted knowledge through revelation. He quotes Augustine's *de Cura pro mortuis agenda* which says that souls of the dead may know by God's revelation certain things which is necessary for them to know regarding earthly matters, past, present, and future. Neither Bonaventure nor Augustine specifies how they know. Again, this seems to regard events rather than specifically thoughts, but it provides further evidence of Bonaventure's desire to believe in supernatural knowledge. In the same book in Dist 43, a. 3, q.2 Bonaventure states that only upon the Last Judgement will all be able to know others' thoughts (469).

know the secret thoughts of humans, but he affirms that both humans and angels can know thoughts by their effects, such as through outward actions, but also through facial expressions and even taking one's pulse:

Et multo magis angeli, vel etiam daemones, quanto subtilius huiusmodi immutationes occultas corporales perpendunt. Unde Augustinus dicit in libro *De Divinat. Daemon.* quod 'aliquando hominum dispositiones, non solum voce prolatas, verum etiam cogitatione conceptas, cum signa quaedam in corpore exprimuntur ex animo, tota facilitate perdiscunt'; quamvis in libro *Retract.* hoc dicat non esse asserendum quomodo fiat' (348b).³¹

Retraction notwithstanding, Aquinas accepts Augustine's theory of good and bad angels' clairvoyance based on an enhanced ability to read body language.

Regarding demonic communication, Aquinas shows little interest in the matter, stating simply in q.109, a.3 that demons do not enlighten each other "sed unus alii suum conceptum per modum locutionis intimare potest" (656a).³²

These theorists from the later Middle Ages thus retain a fair bit of epistemological confusion as they attempt to make finer distinctions among categories of knowledge. Lombard, Aquinas, and Bonaventure all clearly reject the notion of angelic telepathy with humans, yet they affirm knowledge of human prayer and imply a lesser sort of clairvoyance on the basis of Augustinian theories of body language - theories that Augustine himself eventually retracted. One possible reason they do so is that the idea of full angelic knowledge of human thoughts could threaten the monotheistic, hierarchical structure of knowledge that defined medieval

³¹ "Much more than can angels, or even demons, the more deeply they penetrate those occult bodily modifications. Hence Augustine says (*De divin. daemon.*) that demons "sometimes with the greatest faculty learn man's dispositions, not only when expressed by speech, but even when conceived in thought, when the soul expresses them by certain signs in the body"; although (*Retract.* ii, 30) he says "it cannot be asserted how this is done." Latin quotations of the *Summa Theologiae* are from the *Instituti Studiorum Medievialium Ottaviensis* edition. Translations are from <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.

³² "one can make known his mental concept to another by way of speech."

Christianity, in which only God is omniscient. What remains lacking in these theories is a fuller account of the mechanism of angels' knowledge of prayer and the extent of their abilities to know thoughts based on body language, as well as the role of human will in these processes.

The category in which later medieval philosophy more clearly affirms angelic telepathy concerns how angels communicate with each other. Regarding such communication we have another Dantean text to consult in the *De vulgari eloquentia*. Therefore the best way to trace the idea of angelic telepathy in the *Commedia*'s mind reading is to begin with what Dante writes in the *DVE*. After first declaring that angels have no need to speak ("Non angelis, non inferioribus animalibus necessarium fuit loqui, sed nequicquam datum fuisset eis: quod nempe facere natura aborret."³³) Dante suggests at 1.2.3 a key distinction in the manner in which angels communicate:

Si etenim perspicaciter consideramus quid cum
loquimur intendamus, patet quod nichil aliud quam
nostre mentis enucleare aliis conceptum. Cum igitur
angeli ad pandendas gloriosas eorum conceptiones
habeant promptissimam atque ineffabilem sufficientiam
intellectus, qua vel alter alteri totaliter innotescit
per se, vel saltim per illud fulgentissimum Speculum
in quo cuncti representantur pulcherrimi atque avidissimi
speculantur, nullo signo locutionis indiguisse videntur
(*DVE* 1.2.3).³⁴

That Dante writes of two different modes of angelic communication is clear enough

³³ "It was not necessary that either angels or the lower animals should be able to speak; rather, this power would have been wasted on them, and nature, of course, hates to do anything superfluous" (5). Text and translation are from Steven Botterill with italics indicating my changes.

³⁴ "Now, if we wish to define with precision what our intention is when we speak, it is clearly nothing other than to expound to others the concepts formed in our minds. Therefore, since the angels possess, in order to communicate their own glorious conceptions, a ready and ineffable sufficiency of intellect – through which either *one becomes fully known to the other through themselves, or at least through that most resplendent Mirror in which all are reflected as most beautiful and in which all most eagerly gaze*, they seem not to have needed signs to represent speech" (5). Botterill interprets "cuncti...pulcherrimi atque avidissimi" as ablatives but it is more accurate to read them as nominative forms.

from the “vel...vel” structure; one mode involves an angel’s thoughts becoming “fully known to the other through themselves” (“alter alteri totaliter innotescit”) while the other mode names the “most resplendent Mirror” (“fulgentissimum Speculum”) in which the angels gaze. Less clear, as Vincenzo Mengaldo points out, is the meaning of “saltim,” which could be interpreted to suggest uncertainty regarding which mode is dominant (195). Later, in the context of discussing the human limitations in speech, Dante refers to the specular mode: “Nec per spiritualem speculationem, ut angelum, alterum alterum introire contingit, cum grossitie atque opacitate mortalis corporis humanus spiritus sit obiectus” (1.3.1).³⁵ However, this does not mean that he necessarily intends to emphasize this method as the dominant one for angels because the passage is focused more on human limitations than on the specifics of angelic practice. Mengaldo concedes that “saltim” in the *DVE* normally means “at least” but nonetheless suggests in this case (albeit without explanation) a more likely meaning of “perhaps” (195).

The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* clarifies that “saltem” means “At least, at all events, anyhow (passing from a wider to a narrower or more practicable idea, with the alternative either expressed or implicit),” with the second definition listing “even, so much as” for “negative or quasi-negative sentences” (1682). What follows Dante’s “vel saltim” is the specular mode of communication, which is precisely regarded as the more narrow category of angelic mind reading according to thirteenth-century philosophical sources. According to Mengaldo, numerous philosophers made the distinction between a direct mind reading practiced by all angels, and a more privileged specular mode practiced only by certain good angels.

³⁵ “Nor it is given to us to enter into each other’s minds by means of spiritual reflection, as the angels do, because the human spirit is so weighed down by the heaviness and density of the mortal body.” Botterill chooses Marigo’s reading of “speculationem” over Mengaldo’s 1968 reading of “locutionem,” which the latter silently corrected in his 1979 edition (xxix).

Mengaldo identifies a key source in Vincent of Beauvais' four-part encyclopedia *Speculum maius* (169-71). Vincent discusses angelic mind reading in both the *Speculum Naturale* and the *Speculum Historiale* with the latter containing the following explanation:

Angelorum autem locutio spiritualis, qua sibi invicem ostendunt affectus suos; & intellectus, de his rebus quarum cognitio non era in eis a principio duplex est. Una secundum naturam suam, in qua communicant boni, & mali Angeli, scilicet cogitatio directa per voluntatem ostendendi alteri ipsum cogitatum vel intentum, non enim in Angelo loqui est cogitare tantum vel intelligere, sed cogitatum vel intentum aliqua luminositate irradiante, alii voluntarie exprimere, & quod uni exprimitur, non semper ab aliis intelligitur, nisi ille velit qui loquitur. Alia vero per gratiam scilicet secundum virtutem speculi sive motoris supremi, in qua communicant Angeli boni tantum & animae sanctorum. Unicuique enim innotescit intellectus vel voluntas alterius secundum speculi representationem, & ipsius motoris supreme voluntatem, qui ostendit cui vult, & quantum vult. Non enim omnes Angeli omnia vident in speculo, sed haec plena revelatio referuatur plenitudini gloriae, qua consummabitur eorum praemium in futuro (6-7).³⁶

It is reasonable that Vincent's "cogitatio directa" corresponds to Dante's "alter alteri totaliter innotescit per se" while Dante's "fulgentissimum Speculum" refers to the encyclopedist's "speculi representationem." Given that Vincent explicitly states that

³⁶ From Cap. XV, Liber I. "However the speech of angels is twofold: spiritual, by which they reveal their dispositions of mind to each other, and of the intellect, concerning those things of which there was no cognition in them from the beginning. One (type), according to its nature, by which good and bad Angels communicate, is namely direct thought through the will of revealing to another that same thought or intention, for in the angel to speak is not so much to think or to understand, but to express willingly to another a thought or intention by means of some radiating luminosity, and what is expressed to one is not always understood by all unless the one speaking wishes. But there is another (type), through grace, namely according to the power of the mirror or of the supreme mover, in which only good angels and the souls of the divine communicate. For the intellect or will of one is made known to another according to a representation of a mirror and according to the will of the supreme mover himself, who shows to whom he wishes and how much he wishes. For not all angels see all things in the mirror, but this full revelation will be represented in the plenitude of glory in which their reward will be perfected in the future." Translation is mine. The *Speculum Naturale* contains the same information as the passage quoted above.

this mode occurs “per gratiam,” it is also reasonable in light of the *OLD*’s distinction to interpret Dante’s use of “saltim” not as indicating preference or uncertainty but as introducing the narrower specular category. Thus in place of the mind reading *in bono* versus *in malo* suggested by earlier medieval sources, Vincent addresses the narrower category of angelic communication through a paradigm of common versus privileged ability. The idea that direct mind reading is common to all angels affirms its practice among demons, while the mechanism of the mirror attempts to distinguish the powers of a privileged class of good angels.

This distinction leaves unanswered the question of what sorts of things angels know according to one mode versus the other, and in what sorts of situations they communicate directly versus through the divine *speculum*. Yet Vincent’s description is nonetheless important for several reasons: besides helping to clarify the passage in the *DVE*, his two modes of mind reading may correspond to similar categories in the *Commedia*.³⁷ In addition, two other characteristics of Vincent’s theory are especially salient. The first is his claim that the privileged class of mind readers includes not only angels but the “animae sanctorum,” the souls of the saints. The second is his suggestion of a continuum of knowledge for both categories of communication; in the direct mode, the communicating angel determines whether all angels or only the recipient receive the message, whereas in the specular mode, the grace of God determines to whom and how much knowledge the mirror’s representation grants. As will be discussed further below, Dante transforms and incorporates into the poem these features as well. But the question remains whether the *Speculum maius* was Dante’s precise source. Given the encyclopedic nature of this text, it is likely that Vincent reports rather than generates the theory. Mengaldo

³⁷ Alessandro Raffi confirms that angelic mind reading corresponds to Dante’s representation in the *Paradiso* (133). See below and the next chapter for further discussion of Raffi’s illuminating study of Dante’s angelology.

cites numerous twelfth and thirteenth century authors who write of the direct or specular mode of angelic communication, or both, including William of Auxerre (d. 1231) in the *Summa Aurea*,³⁸ Alexander of Hales (d. 1245) in his Commentary on the *Libri Sententiarum* and in his *Summa*,³⁹ Albertus Magnus (d. 1280) in his *Summa de creaturis* and his Commentary on the *Libri Sententiarum*,⁴⁰ as well as Hugh Ripelin of Strasburg (d. 1270) in his *Compendium theologiae veritatis*⁴¹ (175-182). All of these texts (except that of William of Auxerre) offer the basic idea of superior and inferior angels who possess corresponding modes of telepathic communication. There may be others as well since Mengaldo admits that his investigation is not exhaustive (183). Thus while declining to argue for Vincent's encyclopedia as a direct and exclusive source of Dante's passage in the *DVE*,⁴² Mengaldo nonetheless believes that Dante probably knew of the passages on the basis of lexical similarities and the way both authors simplify the argument relative to the philosophers.⁴³

Yet Mengaldo also argues on the basis of lexical similarities for Aquinas' influence on Dante despite the fact that Aquinas' theory of angelic communication differs in fundamental ways (194). The key difference is that Aquinas emphasizes

³⁸ According to the passage I. II, tr. V cited by Mengaldo, William does not precisely discuss two methods of angelic communication but does interchange the terms "verbum" and "speculum" (175).

³⁹ Mengaldo cites Alexander's most direct statement of two methods of angelic communication in chapter 5 of his *Summa* (177).

⁴⁰ Mengaldo locates the most direct statement in book I of the Commentary, Dist. 9, a. 15 (181).

⁴¹ At II 19. This text is dated around 1265; thus Mengaldo believes it is not likely one of Vincent's sources but was probably directly influenced by Albertus Magnus.

⁴² Mengaldo declines even to privilege Vincent's two parallel passages in the *Speculum Naturale* and in the *Speculum Historiale*.

⁴³ For example Vincent's use of "secundum representationem speculi" and Dante's "per...speculum" in quo "representantur" (185). Simon Gilson, in *Medieval Optics and Theories of Light in the Works of Dante*, mentions the *Speculum maius* as an important source that contains "a considerable body of optical lore," and "Although it is extremely difficult to establish whether Dante knew these works, it is well worth making reference to them, since they indicate what was known and available in more general sources after 1250" (31). Gilson also states in a footnote that "Dante's own intellectual formation has often been related to medieval encyclopedias and *specula*" and provides bibliographical support (31).

the importance of the angel's will, whereas Dante stresses the divine *speculum* which reflects all independent of the angel's will (163). In the *ST* q.107, a.1 Aquinas indeed affirms that angels speak to each other, not as humans do but in a way moved by the angel's will,⁴⁴ and in *ST* q.57, a.5 in the context of discussing whether angels know all mysteries of grace, Aquinas says angels cannot simply read each other's minds because this depends on an act of will.⁴⁵ Likewise in the *De Veritate* q.9, a.4 he argues that angels do not require speech to know each other's natures but they do need it to discern specific thoughts because such specific knowledge depends upon an act of the will.⁴⁶ It is in the objections to this latter *quaestio* that Mengaldo traces Dante's claim concerning the lack of angelic speech.

⁴⁴ “Quando autem mens convertit se ad actu considerandum quod habet in habitu, loquitur aliquis sibi ipsi; nam ipse conceptus mentis interius verbum vocatur. Ex hoc vero quod conceptus mentis angelicae ordinatur ad manifestandum alteri per voluntatem ipsius angeli, conceptus mentis unius angeli innotescit alteri; et sic loquitur unus angelus alteri. Nihil est enim aliud loqui ad alterum quam conceptum mentis alteri manifestare (639b) [Now when a mind turns itself to the actual consideration of any habitual knowledge, then a person speaks to himself; for the concept of the mind is called ‘the interior word.’ And by the fact that the concept of the angelic mind is ordered to be made known to another by the will of the angel himself, the concept of one angel is made known to another; and in this way one angel speaks to another; for to speak to another only means to make known the mental concept to another]. Aquinas also says in article 5 of the same question that one angel may speak to another without other angels knowing what is communicated because something can be ordered by the will toward one thing and not another (642a).

⁴⁵ “Haec enim mysteria ex pura Dei voluntate dependent; si enim unus angelus non potest cognoscere cogitationes alterius ex voluntate eius dependentes, multo minus potest cognoscere ea quae ex sola Dei voluntate dependent “ (349b) [For these mysteries depend upon the pure will of God: and if an angel cannot learn the thoughts of another angel, which depend upon the will of such angel, much less can he ascertain what depends entirely upon God's will].

⁴⁶ In reply to objection 11 Aquinas says “Ad undecimum dicendum, quod unus angelus cognitionem alterius cognoscit per speciem innatam per quam alium angelum cognoscit, quia per eandem cognoscit omne quod cognoscit in alio angelo. Unde quam cito angelus se ordinat ad alium angelum secundum actum alicuius formae, ille angelus dependent ex voluntate angeli. Sed cognoscibilitas naturae angelicae non dependet ex voluntate angeli: et ideo non requiritur locutio in angelis ad cognoscendum naturam, sed ad cognoscendum cogitationem tantum” (1867) [One angel knows the thought of another through the innate species by which he knows that other angel, because through this same species he knows all that he knows about the other angel. Consequently, as soon as one angel relates himself to another angel according to an act of some form, the other angel knows his thought; and this depends on the will of the first angel. But the knowability of the angelic nature does not depend on the will of the angel. Therefore, angels do not need speech to know the nature of other angels but only to know their thoughts] (427). Latin text of the *DV* is from the Spiazzi edition. Translation is from McGlynn. I had previously independently discussed most of the above citations from Aquinas in an early draft of this paper. Mengaldo addresses most of the same passages.

Mengaldo thus concludes that Aquinas is a source in letter rather than in spirit (191-2). Additional sources may well remain to be identified, but most significant for this study is that Mengaldo shows that the idea of two modes of angelic communication was widespread enough to appear in Vincent's encyclopedia, demonstrating a philosophical context likely to have been known to Dante, either through Vincent himself or through one of the encyclopedist's numerous sources.

This context is likely to have provided Dante with the two primary modes of mind reading in the *Commedia*. But we should note Dante's transference of these modes onto a very different situation; mind reading is practiced not by angels communicating but by souls separated from the body who read Dante pilgrim's mind, while he cannot reciprocate.⁴⁷ Vincent's claim that the "animae sanctorum" also gaze into the divine *speculum* appears not to be an unusual belief. Aquinas says in *DV* q.19, a.1 that disembodied souls know in the same way as angels do.⁴⁸ Thus the idea of souls able to communicate with one another via mind reading is consistent with major philosophical sources, while the souls' ability to read a living human's thoughts contradicts those sources.

I believe the specifics of the *Commedia's* mind reading are drawn from both the later technical philosophical theories and the earlier medieval sources, including

⁴⁷ Alessandro Raffi states that Dante pilgrim's inability to read minds is consistent with Aquinas' emphasis on the separation between man and angels (36), but denying telepathic powers to Dante pilgrim may have been a choice driven more by the narrative exigencies of the poem than by philosophy; it would not make sense for Dante pilgrim to read souls' minds. Perhaps more importantly it would diminish the tension of silence vs. speech that Dante poet manipulates so enthusiastically.

⁴⁸ "Sed quando habebit esse a corpore absolutum, tunc recipient influentiam intellectualis cognitionis hoc modo quo angeli recipiunt sine aliquo ordine ad corpus, ut scilicet species rerum ab ipso Deo recipiat, ne oporteat ad intelligendum in actu per has species, vel per eas quas prius acquisivit, ad aliqua phantasmata converti" (359) [But, when it will have its being free of the body, then it will receive the influx of intellectual knowledge in the way in which angels receive it, without any ordination to the body. Thus it will receive species of things from God himself, in order not to have to turn to any phantasms actually to know through these species or through those which it acquired previously] (390). In *ST* q.89, a.2

the popular theories of demonic mind reading and the saints' telepathy in hagiographic legends. Taken together, both the technical and popular sources provide compelling evidence for better understanding some of the puzzling features in the *Commedia's* representation of mind reading. One of these is the issue of Vergil's abilities. The technical sources affirm a direct mode of telepathy practiced by angels both good and bad, which proves that not only the specular mode is valid and suggests one possible category for Vergil's mind reading given that his telepathic episodes are described as occurring directly. Yet it is in the popular theories and hagiographic legends that we find not only a more definitive model for both people and angels/demons knowing the thoughts of human beings but also the origin of the epistemological uncertainty that Dante incorporated into his poem. As guide, Vergil's role descends not only from other guides in the vision tradition,⁴⁹ but from the idea of the pagan *daimon*, whose telepathic abilities emerge in early Christian notions of the demon, but also the angel and the saint.⁵⁰ While some might doubt a relationship between Vergil's abilities and these contexts, there are two strong reasons to argue for it. One involves precedent: Dante's unique practices of including pagan figures and ideas. The other involves the specifics of Vergil's mind reading in the poem, which incorporates details and strikingly similar patterns of ambiguity from the early theories.

Stephen Bemrose speaks to Dante's use of pagan figures in his study of angelic intelligences. Bemrose is primarily concerned to explore Dante's particular

⁴⁹ See the introduction for discussion of mind-reading guides in earlier visions.

⁵⁰ Zaleski confirms a general link between the guide and the *daimon*: "As protector and guardian angel, the guide figure is related to Greek and Roman ideas of the personal *daimon* or tutelary *genius*" (54). See also Simon Gilson's excellent article "Medieval Magical Lore and Dante's *Commedia*: Divination and Demonic Agency," in which the author demonstrates convincingly the way in which Dante believed in a reality of demonic agency as part of the natural order and the astonishingly eclectic way in which the poet incorporates elements from popular and intellectual sources.

treatment of the way in which Aristotle's separated motor substances became associated with angels in the Christian west.⁵¹ But he also demonstrates as original Dante's treatment of the pagan gods, associating them in some cases with God's justice and in other cases with angels. Readers of the *Commedia* may be aware that Dante includes pagan figures in a manner that does not conform to medieval tradition.⁵² Bemrose, however, shows the remarkable extent of Dante's respect for the meaning of pagan myths on their own terms, such as in *Inf.* 14.51-60 when the blasphemous pagan Capaneus recounts how Jove struck him dead (127). Capaneus mentions Jove's name as the one whom he has offended in line 52: "Se Giove stanchi 'l suo fabbro da cui / crucciato prese la folgore aguta / onde l'ultimo di percosso fui..." (52-54)⁵³ While many medieval Christian writers would celebrate blasphemy against a pagan deity, Dante instead makes Jove's authority embody that of the Christian God (128).⁵⁴ Likewise in *Inf.* 31 the pilgrim and Vergil meet biblical giants as well as pagan ones. Ephialtes rebelled against "il sommo Giove" (92), and in *Purg.* 12 the pagan giant Briareus is represented as struck by Jupiter's thunderbolt as the second exemplum of pride, while the third represents the victorious Olympians (Pallas and Mars "intorno al padre loro") gazing down at the defeated Titans (129). These classical examples gain religious significance by the fact that they are framed in parallel fashion with biblical ones: *Inf.* 31 shows Nimrod with Ephialtes and the *Purg.* 12 passage displays Lucifer cast out of heaven as the first

⁵¹ He mentions without comment Dante's *DVE* passage regarding angelic communication (73).

⁵² For example Bemrose claims that whereas in the Middle Ages, there was a tendency to demonize classical myth, Dante demonizes only the pagans' *inferi* and associates Apollo, Venus, and Minerva with angelic intelligences (151).

⁵³ "Though Jove wear out the smith from whom he took, / in wrath, the keen-edged thunderbolt with which / on my last day I was to be transfixed..."

⁵⁴ Dante, of course, includes many pagans in hell because they have transgressed against what Bemrose calls "universal human standards." Thus Alexander is damned for being a tyrant and Cassius for being a traitor. The example of Capaneus and others cited above are exceptional because their offenses regard the supernatural order, and it is the pagan aspect of this realm that Dante preserves to a remarkable degree by including them in the manner that he does (127-28).

exemplum.⁵⁵ Bemrose concludes that Dante intends to present the Titans as analogous to the rebel angels and Jupiter and other Olympians as analogous to God and the good angels (129). The poet's purpose in doing so is to "expose the spiritual realities which the myths disguise, and this concern is a significant illustration of the seriousness with which he regarded what we may call the 'doctrinal content' of classical literature" (155). Specifically, for Dante the origin of Graeco-Roman polytheism could be "found in the Intelligences' operations in our world (and not in some mendacious fable whispered by evil spirits to, say, the priests of Delphi)" (156).

Whereas Dante more frequently interprets pagan figures in terms of Christian angelology, Bemrose claims that he does the reverse in the case of the mysterious *nesso celeste* in *Inf.* 9.64-103, the celestial messenger who arrives to admit the travelers into Dis after the demons bar their entry. The identity of this figure has received much attention from scholars, who have noted similarities to the pagan winged Mercury, especially the little wand ("verghetta") of line 89 carried by the *nesso*.⁵⁶ Here Bemrose believes that Dante "has deliberately chosen to endow with the characteristics of a pagan god an angelic being entirely of his own invention, an invention occasioned by the narrative exigencies of the poem" (142). This reversal also reinforces the notion of a shared identity between the Christian God's angels and pagan deities.

These examples show Dante's originality in including (not merely allegorizing) pagan figures and characteristics in a Christian universe. This pattern supports the idea of Vergil's telepathy as rooted in popular pagan notions of the *daimon* as filtered through Christianity. We have seen how Gregory followed

⁵⁵ See Bemrose pages 130 and following for additional examples of Dante's representation of pagan gods in the role of angels.

⁵⁶ See S. Pasquazi's entry 'Messo celeste' in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*.

Plutarch in professing the human soul's telepathic ability, and how Brown links the role of the patron saint to that of the pagan *daimon*. However, I do not intend on this basis to argue that Vergil should be defined wholly in terms of the *daimon*, the saint, or guardian angel. But it is in these early popular figures, in clear contrast to later medieval philosophy, that we find the particular characteristic of a guardian figure knowing a human being's thoughts. The *Commedia* incorporates this feature in its portrayal of mind reading, including in Vergil's case.⁵⁷

Lending even greater weight to this theory is that the poem also incorporates features of the shaky epistemological ground on which early Christian theories of mind reading rest. Just as the early stories and theories reveal inconsistencies about how, when, and whether humans, demons, and angels read minds, the *Commedia* reflects strikingly similar problems. As discussed in chapter 1, one of these involves knowledge intuited through body language versus true mind reading. Augustine

⁵⁷ The issue of Vergil's supernatural knowledge in the medieval Vergilian legends should here be mentioned. Domenico Comparetti, when speaking of Vergil's omniscience in the *Commedia*, does not include or even mention mind reading as part of Vergil's knowledge, perhaps because the author's principal goal is to distance Dante from the popular legends, insisting "The purely popular reputation of a literary man could not be of any account to one who held art so high as Dante did and had so lofty a conception of the ancient poets. In matters of art and intellect Dante is an intense aristocrat" (219). He attributes Vergil's omniscience to Dante's participation in the medieval belief in the ancient poets as scholars and philosophers with encyclopedic knowledge (224). The legends mostly present Vergil as having magic powers, such as when he is said to construct a bronze horse that protects horses from breaking their backs, or a bronze fly that keeps flies out of the city of Naples, or a butcher's block that keeps meat fresh for six weeks, or baths that cure myriad illnesses, and so on (259). The one legend in which Vergil appears to have mind reading abilities is the so-called "bocca della verità" (mouth of truth) in which Vergil is said to have built at Rome a marble head with the mouth open. Women whose chastity was in doubt were required to swear with their hands in the mouth of the marble head; if they swore falsely, the mouth shut, cutting off or injuring the hand. A particular woman outsmarts the head by having her lover disguise himself as a madman and embrace her before her husband's eyes. She then swears that the only men whom she has embraced include her husband and the madman and thus she withdraws her hand unharmed: "Thereupon Vergil, who in his omniscience was aware of the deception, was forced to confess that even he was no match for a woman" (337). While I have no interest in distancing the *Commedia* from the Vergilian legends, the legends mostly emphasize magical powers and not telepathy per se, and so I do not here address them as a context for Vergil's telepathy in the poem. Further, as argued in chapter 1, Dante represents Vergil's knowledge in terms of epistemological ambiguity, not omniscience. A possible link between the Vergilian legends and the pagan figure of the *daimon* merits further attention but is, obviously, beyond the scope of this study,

asserted demonic knowledge on the basis of enhanced power to read body language only to retract this theory and confess ignorance, nonetheless maintaining his belief in demonic and angelic powers. Antony both reduced the demons' abilities to a simple physical advantage only to turn around and affirm their supernatural power. This is not to say that Dante deliberately imported these contradictions, but chapter 1 demonstrates the poem's brilliant epistemology of body language, making it hard to know whether Vergil but also Beatrice and other blessed souls know Dante's thoughts via mind reading or a natural sort of perception. That both the theories and Dante fail to offer definitive answers is part of the point. Consciously or not, Dante internalized an uncertain epistemological history vis-à-vis supernatural knowledge – a history that his poem reenacts in its treatment of telepathy.

Another characteristic of this history is the notion of partial knowledge. As discussed in chapter 1, the *Commedia* repeatedly elaborates thematically the revelation of truth in the context of occlusion during telepathic exchanges. This pattern of intensification echoes Gregory's declaration in *Dialogue 4* of heightened prophecy due to the world's imminent end; the *Commedia's* mind reading problematizes the promise of pure knowledge, analogous to the promise of ever-greater prophesy in an imperfect world. Further, the poem's theme of a continuum of knowledge recalls even more clearly Gregory's statement in the second *Dialogue* concerning the prophets' inconsistent abilities, which are based on the extent to which they are one with God. The idea of the continuum suggests another layer of epistemological complexity in the *Commedia* that has to do with the distinction between the direct and specular modes of mind reading, bringing us back to the technical philosophical sources of the later Middle Ages. As noted above, these sources distinguish the two modes in the context of angelic communication, suggesting a continuum with the specular mode as a special privilege granted to

angels through the grace of God.

Understanding why the mirror image became such an appealing metaphor throughout the Middle Ages will frame our discussion of specular mind reading in the poem. The metaphor of specular knowledge in particular was extremely widespread.⁵⁸ Anna Torti explains lucidly how the function of the mirror made it especially suitable as a metaphor that would fascinate medieval thinkers. The process of reflection is based on an analogical relationship between the original image and its reflection, producing a likeness. This replication entails two key properties. The first is the transitory and ahistorical nature of the fleeting image. Yet is it precisely this transitoriness that creates the second property: the atemporal and metaphysical potential of the image, which refers back to an ideal (i.e. real) image. These qualities generate a paradox in meaning of the reflected image, as transitory and local versus eternal and ideal (14). Maurizio Calvesi further states that these atemporal and metaphysical characteristics make the mirror an ideal instrument for representing what transcends the limits of space and time. Thus it is easy to understand the mirror's potential as a symbol of human imagination, the mind, and the soul, as well as an instrument/symbol of knowledge and of the truth. Knowledge resides in the mind as a sort of reflection in a mirror – hence the metaphor that knowledge is realized through a process of speculation and reflection.

A fundamental ontological reality of the Middle Ages is its specular self definition through the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm. The metaphor of the mirror was perfect for illuminating the way in which these

⁵⁸ The following review of the mirror metaphor in the Middle Ages and Dante's use of it in the *Commedia* is partly drawn from my thesis "L'immagine dello specchio nella *Commedia* e nel pensiero medievale," [Mirror Imagery in the *Commedia* and in Medieval Thought] presented for the M.A. degree in Italian literature at Middlebury College in 2006.

dimensions (like space and time) intersected and reflected each other (33).⁵⁹ Based on the mirror's transitory and yet atemporal and ideal characteristics, numerous scholars⁶⁰ define a dichotomy in the tradition of specular symbology in which the mirror can play a positive or negative role. It becomes a symbol of prudence but also of vanity, of knowledge of the truth but also ignorance and falsity, of virtues and of vices.⁶¹ Hence the Christian tradition deploys the metaphor to represent both divine knowledge and lack thereof, as in 1 Cor. 13:12: "videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate tunc autem facie ad faciem; nunc cognosco ex parte tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum."⁶²

Dante's use of mirror imagery with respect to mind reading in the *Paradiso* conforms neither to the simplistic moral opposition of *speculum in bono/in malo* nor to the philosophical dichotomy of knowledge obtained directly or through the *speculum*, with the latter indicating holy privilege. The visual mode of telepathy is

⁵⁹ Montanari comments that in medieval Latin the word "speculum" gained a level of prestige equal to other words such as "Imago, potestas, ordo, expositio, commentarium, breviarium, repertorium, summa, rationale, exemplum, contemplatio, quodlibetum, quaestio, tabula, scriptorium" and others (85-86).

⁶⁰ Including Torti, Calvesi, Cardini, Baltrusaitis, and Gabriele.

⁶¹ As Gabriele states "è proprio la medesima inafferrabilità dell'immagine riflessa" (37) that paradoxically underlies both the "speculum stultitiae and the speculum sapientiae" [it is precisely the same elusiveness of the reflected image mirror of ignorance and the mirror of wisdom]. According to Baltrusaitis (64) and Cacciari ("Narciso o della pittura" in *Fallit imago*) this binary opposition is rooted in Greek myths of Dionysius and Narcissus.

⁶² "Now we see through a mirror obscurely but then we will see face to face; now I know partially but then I will know as I am known." The verse is famous for interpretive problems, due to the prepositions "per" and "in" which raise the question of what it means to see "per speculum in enigmate." Peter Nolan rejects the possibility of conclusive interpretation, while other scholars taking a more philological approach, including Barret, Hugedé and Jónsson, affirm that Paul expresses humans' inadequate knowledge of God. Hugedé gives particular attention to "videmus in enigmate" given that an enigma is normally found in a verbal rather than visual metaphor: traditionally one speaks in enigma, but one does not see in enigma. He specifies that in Greek, however, "enigma" can signify an image or illustration, thus concluding that seeing in the *speculum* is synonymous with seeing in enigma: "sont pratiquement equivalents, en ce qu'elles désignent l'une et l'autre une réalité indirectement saisie" (148) [they are practically equivalent since one and the other designate a reality known indirectly]. See also his discussion of mirror imagery in 2 Cor. 3:18 which he likewise interprets as indicating indirect knowledge of the divine. See also Baltrusaitis and Massimo Cacciari for the origins in Greek mythology of the *speculum in bono/in malo*, rooted in the figures of Dionysius and Narcissus.

not even dominant in the third canticle.⁶³ Of the 38 episodes of mind reading in that canticle, 18, or slightly less than half, occur in the visual mode, while 20 occur directly.⁶⁴ One common way in which direct episodes unfold is when souls simply declare what Dante pilgrim wishes to know, as in 9.112 when Folchetto di Marsiglia says “Tu vuo’ saper chi è in questa lumera / che qui appresso me così scintilla / come raggio di sole in acqua mera” (112-14).⁶⁵ At other times the soul answers Dante in a way indicating knowledge of his thoughts, as in 18.5, when Dante silently considers the bittersweet implications of Cacciaguida’s prophesy, to which Beatrice responds with “Muta pensier; pensa ch’i’ sono / presso a colui ch’ogne torto disgrava.”⁶⁶ This is the mode seen in many of Vergil’s mind reading episodes, as in *Purg.* 13.76 when he perceives that Dante wishes to speak to the envious souls and thus immediately instructs him to speak (“Ben sapev’ ei che volea dir lo muto; / e però non attese mia dimanda, / ma disse: ‘Parla, e sie breve e arguto.’”), or in *Purg.* 19.58 when Vergil reports what Dante has seen in his vision of the *antica*

⁶³ In the first version of this chapter I stated that the visual mode is dominant in the third canticle but have since found this not to be the case. The direct and visual modes each comprise roughly half of the episodes in the *Paradiso*.

⁶⁴ I am including in this calculation any and all episodes that suggest knowledge based on silent communication, including some instances that I discuss in chapter 1 as possible examples of communication via body language, episodes complicated by various sorts of rhetoric, etc. Direct episodes include cantos 2.25, 4.91, 7.121, 9.112, 10.58, 10.91, 13.37, 13.88, 14.10, 17.4, 18.4, 19.31, 19.69, 22.1, 22.25, 24.7, 25.50, 26.4, 30.70, 32.49. Visually-oriented episodes include cantos 1.82, 4.7, 7.10, 7.52, 8.85, 9.16, 9.73, 11.19, 15.55, 20.79, 21.45, 24.40, 26.94, 26.103, 27.103, 28.40, 28.97, 29.10.

⁶⁵ “You wish to know *who* is within / the light that here beside me sparkles so, / as a ray of sun in limpid water.”

⁶⁶ “Shift your thoughts: remember – I am close / to Him who lightens every unjust hurt.” A slightly more ambiguous example appears at 10.59-61, when Dante ascends to the heaven of the sun and becomes so rapt in God’s love as to eclipse Beatrice: “e sì tutto ‘l mio amore in lui si mise, / che Beatrice eclissò ne l’oblio. / Non le dispiacque, ma sì se ne rise, . . .” [and all my love / was so intent on Him that Beatrice / was then eclipsed within forgetfulness. / But not displeased by this, she smiled. . .]. In this instance Dante assumes that Beatrice’s smile is in reaction to her eclipse in his memory, which may be read as parallel to episodes in which Dante pilgrim assumes or states that Vergil knows his thoughts, without other confirmation, as in *Inf.* 19.39 when Dante declares his will to be one with Vergil’s adding “e sai quel che si tace” [you know what is unsoken].

strega (“‘Vedesti,’ disse, ‘quell’antica strega ...”).⁶⁷

The first example of mind reading in the *Paradiso* occurs in the visual mode but is not especially marked as a new or privileged form of communication. It is found at 1.82 when Dante feels intense desire to know the origin of the light and sound he experiences, to which Beatrice responds: “Ond' ella, che vedea me sì com' io, / a quìetarmi l'animo commosso, / pria ch'io a dimandar, la bocca aprio / e cominciò:” (84-8).⁶⁸ Mandelbaum translates the first verse as “And she who read me as I read myself,” presumably to emphasize Beatrice’s act of telepathy, which might otherwise go unnoticed. Perhaps Dante does not introduce this event as unusual or limited to heaven because it is not the first example of visually-oriented mind reading in the poem. Vergil’s mind reading is represented in visual terms in *Inf.* 23.25 and in *Purg.* 15.127.⁶⁹ Further, in a manner that goes beyond the scolding of Dante for his lack of comprehension,⁷⁰ Beatrice in *Purg.* 33.73 claims to see into Dante’s confused intellect as she delivers her allegorical lecture:

Ma perch' io veggio te ne lo 'ntelletto
fatto di pietra e, impetrato, tinto,
sì che t'abbaglia il lume del mio detto,
voglio anco, e se non scritto, almen dipinto,
che 'l te ne porti dentro a te per quello
che si reca il bordon di palma cinto» (*Purg.* 33.73-78).⁷¹

This pattern of souls telling Dante that they see his thoughts is often how the

⁶⁷ Canto 13.76: [He knew quite well what I, though mute, had meant; / and thus he did not wait for my request, / but said: ‘Speak, and be brief and to the point.’] Canto 19.58: [*You saw, he said, that ancient witch...*]. Chapter 1 mentions canto 13 and discusses in depth the episode in canto 19.

⁶⁸ “*And she who saw me as I see myself, / to quiet the commotion in my mind, / opened her lips before I could ask / and she began.*”

⁶⁹ The episode in *Purg.* 15.127 is discussed in chapter 1. See below for discussion of *Inf.* 23.25. An episode that suggests intuition based on body language (and thus may or may not be an example of mind reading) in *Purg.* 19.86 is also visually oriented.

⁷⁰ For examples lines 33, and 64, 67-70.

⁷¹ “But since I see your intellect is made / of stone and, petrified, grown so opaque - / the light of what I saw has left you dazed - / I’d also have you bear my words within you - / if not inscribed, at least outlined – just as / the pilgrim’s staff is brought back wreathed with palm.”

visually oriented episodes occur in the *Paradiso*. Beatrice tells Dante in 4.16 that she sees that he is torn between two thoughts,⁷² and in 7.52 that she sees his mind entangled⁷³, and so on.

There are two important points to note about episodes in the visual mode. First is that they do not signal a privileged form of communication among souls in heaven. That is, while the visual mode occurs more often in the third canticle than in the first two canticles, I find no pattern of differentiation between heavenly souls who use the direct mode versus those who carry out the visual mode in general. I also find no spiritual differentiation by topic in the use of the two modes: souls reading Dante's mind in the visual mode do not discuss matters that especially imply God's grace. The second point is that the visually oriented episodes imply looking into God's mirror but rarely refer to this mechanism and only mention the mirror explicitly in two instances. Yet there *is* an interesting differential pattern when the mirror is either suggested or named. The more closely Dante hints at the *speculum* of God or actually names it, the more he celebrates language, poetry, and human relationships. In cantos 8 and 9, the poet encounters three souls in the sphere of Venus, all of secular origin, and he suggests in each meeting the act of mind reading by means of reflection. Yet each episode in different ways emphasizes not transcendent knowledge but transient joy. The first, at canto 8.85, is Dante's affectionate response to Charles Martel's history of his brief reign on earth.

«Però ch'i' credo che l'alta letizia
che 'l tuo parlar m'infonde, signor mio,
là 've ogne ben si termina e s'inizia,

⁷² “Io veggio ben come ti tira / uno e altro disio, sì che tua cura / sé stessa lega sì che fuor non spira” (16-18) [I see *well* how both desires draw you, / so that your anxiousness to know is self- / entangled and cannot express itself].

⁷³ “Ma io veggi' or la tua mente ristretta / di pensiero in pensier dentro ad un nodo, / del qual con gran disio solver s'aspetta” (52-4) [But I now see your understanding tangled / by thought on thought into a knot, from which / with much desire, your mind awaits release].

per te si veggia come la vegg' io,
grata m'è più; e anco quest' ho caro
perché 'l discerni rimirando in Dio (*Par.* 8.85-90).⁷⁴

The source of Dante's joy is Martel's "parlar," a joy that is increased perhaps mainly by the fact that Martel and Dante share the experience of perceiving it ("per te si veggia come la vegg'io) rather than the mechanism. The subsequent statement in lines 89-90 appears subordinate in comparison: Dante is also glad that Martel discerns it by gazing at God, but this is the additional "caro" reason for his joy, not the primary one of "alta letizia." Dante thus conspicuously celebrates human speech that is pointedly about human history, in a manner that values human connection and diminishes by comparison the divine mechanism of knowing by gazing into God's mirror, or in this case God himself.

The next two instances are both in canto 9, with the first at line 19 after Dante receives permission from Beatrice to address the soul that has brightened before him: "Deh, metti al mio voler tosto compenso, / beato spirto," dissi, "e fammi prova / ch'I' possa in te refletter quell ch'io penso!" (19-21).⁷⁵ Here Dante represents mind reading as something of a delightful game, as he asks Cunizza to prove that she can discern his thoughts. Yet he places emphasis on his agency, by asking her to provide proof not that she can perceive, but that he can reflect in her his thoughts (ch'I' possa in te refletter). Mind reading affords an opportunity for playful social interaction with a soul who on earth was a notoriously amorous lady.⁷⁶ Upon seeing the light of Folchetto di Marsiglia, Dante intensifies his focus on love

⁷⁴ In this case I follow Singleton's more accurate translation with a few alterations. "Because I believe that the deep joy / that your words infuse in me is, / even as I see it, seen by you, my lord, / there where every good *begins and ends*, / it (i.e. the joy) is more welcome to me, and I also hold *this dear* / because you discern it by gazing upon God."

⁷⁵ "'Pray, blessed spirit, may you remedy - / quickly - my wish to know,' I said, 'give me / proof that *what I think I can reflect in you*.'"

⁷⁶ According to the commentaries of both Singleton (164) and Sapegno (115) who cite numerous other commentators as well.

of spiritual and physical union but also love of language, both spoken and poetic.

«Dio vede tutto, e tuo veder s'inluia»,
diss' io, «beato spirto, sì che nulla
voglia di sé a te puot' esser fuia.
Dunque la voce tua, che 'l ciel trastulla
sempre col canto di quei fuochi pii
che di sei ali facen la coculla,
perché non satisface a' miei disii?
Già non attendere' io tua dimanda,
s'io m'intuassi, come tu t'inmii» (*Par.* 9.73-81).⁷⁷

It is Folchetto's voice that gladdens the heavens, and the lush neologisms "inluia," "m'intuassi" and "t'inmii" convey to the reader an extravagant desire for the temporal. Dante's love of the new comes out most forcefully in these made-up words, de-emphasizing the notion of silent union they attempt to express. Contributing to this effect is the words' intensely physical, and perhaps even erotic suggestiveness; in line 73 Dante describes Folchetto's vision as entering God. Mandelbaum softens the corporeal nuance of "s'inluia" with the translation "your vision is contained in him," presumably to avoid the potentially disturbing notion that one's vision can penetrate on equal terms God himself. But that is Mandelbaum's interpretation of an invented word that does not obviously indicate such a hierarchy. In line 81 the physical implication is unavoidable as Dante pointedly does not convey reflection through the divine but implies direct penetration, further suggesting his wish to participate by declaring how he would respond to Folchetto. The point is not to reduce or deny Dante's spiritual intention but to engage the effect of his words – words that convey most prominently love of speech, poetry, and social connection.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ "God sees all, I said, 'and, blessed spirit, / your vision enters him, so that / no wish can ever hide itself from you. / Your voice has always made the heavens glad, / as has the singing of the pious fires / that make themselves a cowl of their six wings: / I would not have to wait for your request / if I could enter you as you do me.'"

⁷⁸ There is one mind reading passage that also emphasizes love of language but does not hint at or name the mirror, which is 7.10-16 when Dante's desire for language is so intense that it prevents him

The expression of these values reaches its summit in canto 15 when Dante first names the mirror in a mind reading encounter with his ancestor Cacciaguida. In Dante's stunning description of the cross formed by luminous souls, Cacciaguida emerges as a shooting star, drawn to his progeny as Anchises to Aeneas (25), and likening Dante to Saint Paul when he says "«O sanguis meus, o superinfusa / gratia Deī, sicut tibi cui / bis unquam celi ianua reclusa?»".⁷⁹ At this Dante is stupefied, ("stupefatto" 33), turning to Beatrice for reassurance, and when Cacciaguida continues speaking the profundity of his words makes them initially incomprehensible to Dante. His speech eventually descends to the realm of mortal sense, at which point

la prima cosa che per me s'intese,
«Benedetto sia tu», fu, «trino e uno,
che nel mio seme se' tanto cortese!».

E seguì: «Grato e lontano digiuno,
tratto leggendo del magno volume
du' non si muta mai bianco né bruno,
solvuto hai, figlio, dentro a questo lume
in ch'io ti parlo, mercè di colei
ch'a l'alto volo ti vesti le piume.

Tu credi che a me tuo pensier mei
da quel ch'è primo, così come raia
da l'un, se si conosce, il cinque e 'l sei;
e però ch'io mi sia e perch' io paia
più gaudioso a te, non mi domandi,
che alcun altro in questa turba gaia.

'Tu credi 'l vero; ché i minori e ' grandi
di questa vita miran ne lo specchio
in che, prima che pensi, il pensier pandi;
ma perché 'l sacro amore in che io veglio

from voicing it: "Io dubitava e dicea 'Dille, dille!' / fra me, 'dille' dicea, 'a la mia donna / che mi diseta con le dolci stille'. / Ma quella reverenza che s'indonna / di tutto me, pur per Be e per ice, mi richinava come l'uom ch'assonna [I was perplexed, and to myself, I said: / 'Tell her! Tell her! Tell her, the lady who / can slake my thirst with her sweet drops'; and yet / the reverence that possesses all of me, / even on hearing only *Be* and *ice*, / had bowed my head – I seemed a man asleep.] See chapter 5 for further discussion of this passage.

⁷⁹ "O blood of mine – o the celestial grace / bestowed beyond all measure – unto whom / as unto you was Heaven's gate twice opened?"

con perpetua vista e che m'assetta
di dolce disiar, s'adempia meglio,
la voce tua sicura, balda e lieta
suoni la volontà, suoni 'l disio,
a che la mia risposta è già decreta!» (*Par.* 15.46-69).⁸⁰

The speech is framed with corporeal metaphors of hunger and thirst: Dante's appearance has broken the "grato e lontano digiuno" (49) of his ancestor, whose desire to hear the pilgrim's voice still fuels the love that makes him thirst ("e che m'assetta / di dolce disiar" 67). Further, the desire that Cacciaguida wishes to hear Dante express concerns the former's identity and the reason for his remarkable joy – in other words their historical lineage on earth. This history is figured with nearly overwhelming richness, through the chronology implied by numbers in lines 47 ("trino e uno") and 57 ("così come raia / da l'un, se si conosce, il cinque e 'l sei), through the adjective "cortese" in line 48 which indicates God's generosity but also recalls the nobility of family, and through textual imagery and allusions. In addition to the references to Aeneas and St. Paul in the lines just preceding the speech, Dante figures universal history as contained in the "magno volume," only to recall in "l'alto volo" of line 54 both Icarus and the "folle volo" (mad flight) of Ulysses in *Inf.* 26.125. All of the values in the mind reading passages discussed above are crystallized here: physical longing, family and social relationship and identity, literary and biblical history, love of speech and poetry. In this context, the "specchio"

⁸⁰ "these were the first words where I caught the sense: / 'Blessed be you, both Three and One, who show / such favor to my seed.' And he continued: / 'The long and happy hungering I drew / from reading that great volume where both black / and white are never changed, you – son – have now / appeased within this light in which I speak / to you; for this, I owe my gratitude / to her who gave you wings for your high flight. / You think your thoughts flow into me from Him / who is the First – as from the number one, / the five and six derive, if one is known - / and so you do not ask me who I am / and why I seem more joyous to you than / all other spirits in this festive throng. / Your thought is true, for both the small and great / of this life gaze into that mirror where, / before you think, your thoughts have been displayed. / But that the sacred love in which I keep / my vigil with unending watchfulness, / the love that makes me thirst with sweet desire, / be better satisfied, let your voice bold, / assured, and glad – proclaim your will and longing, / to which my answer is decreed already.'" Readers should consult this translation for the words and phrases from this passage that are repeated below.

named in line 62 as Cacciaguida explains the mechanism of telepathy signifies more than simply a transcendent privilege for knowing Dante's thoughts. Dante enacts it for the first time in the *Paradiso* as an elaborate reflection of his own history at its most deeply personal and profound.

What these passages show is that Dante entirely ignores the binary continuum of knowledge that philosophical sources assign to the mirror. For him, the mirror signals history that privileges the temporal and personal. The second mind reading passage in which the mirror is named appears at canto 26 when Dante meets another earthly "padre antico" (92)⁸¹. I refer, of course, to Adam who declares that he knows the pilgrim's thoughts "perch' io la veggio nel verace specchio / che fa di sé pareglio a l'altre cose, / e nulla face lui di sé pareglio" (106-8).⁸² All of Dante's thoughts that Adam perceives pertain to the first man's existence on earth. He wishes to know how much time has passed since Adam was placed in the earthly paradise, how long he was there, the true cause of his expulsion, and last but not least, the language that he spoke. In both cantos 15 and 26 Dante presents the *specchio* in terms of his earthly family, contextualizing the usage of the mirror in metaphors of knowledge that are pointedly temporal.

This fact might tempt one to conclude that Dante manipulates the mirror in a narcissistic way and therefore erroneously falls into engaging the *speculum in malo*.⁸³ Yet I believe that his use of the mirror is better described as polyvalent. In

⁸¹ "ancient father."

⁸² "for I can see it in the Truthful Mirror / that perfectly reflects all else, while no / thing can reflect that Mirror perfectly."

⁸³ The poem contains the following references and allusions to Narcissus in the context of mirrors. The first is at *Inf.* 30.128 when Master Adam insults Sinon by referring to water as "lo specchio di Narciso." In *Purg.* 26.69 Dante sees himself in the water of the earthly paradise, perhaps foreshadowing Beatrice's reproach. In *Par.* 3.17-18 Dante sees real figures and believes them to be images, contrasting his mistake to that of Narcissus, who believed his image to be a real person. R.A. Shoaf interprets these passages to argue that Dante eventually overcomes the danger of using language in a self-referential, narcissistic way. As I discuss in my master's thesis, I find Dante's use of the Narcissus myth to be less clearly progressive. The myth is a point of reference for ideas that

fact, mirror imagery abounds throughout Dante's encounter with Cacciaguida in a way that resists reductive meaning. In the *Commedia*, the mirror appears as an image or idea 33 times, with five instances concentrated in Dante's encounter with Cacciaguida.⁸⁴ Also in canto 15 when Cacciaguida nostalgically recounts better ages gone by, he refers to the virtuous wife who "venir da lo specchio" with unpainted face (113), and in canto 17.41 he uses the verb "specchiare" in a simile explaining how God knows all yet does not direct free will: God knowing the course of events does not imply their necessity any more than the reflection of a ship's course in one's eyes determines that course (*necessità però quindi non prende / se non come dal viso in che si specchia / nave che per torrente giù discende*).⁸⁵ In the final two instances, Cacciaguida himself is figured as a mirror, first at the end of canto 17 in response to Dante's fear regarding his poetic mission affirmed by his ancestor: "La luce in che rideva il mio tesoro / ch'io trovai lì, si fé prima corusca, / quale a raggio di sole specchio d'oro" (121-23).⁸⁶ Immediately after at the beginning of canto 18, the poet reflects on his ancestor's words: "Già si godeva solo del suo verbo / quello specchio beato, e io gustava / lo mio, temprando col dolce l'acerbo;" (1-3).⁸⁷

These examples offer a useful representative sampling of Dante's remarkably varied use of the mirror in the poem as a whole.⁸⁸ In order to understand

are sometimes positive, sometimes negative, or ambivalent. Likewise I believe Dante's continued focus on himself in the context of specular mind reading passages in the third canticle resists the idea of a transcendent path to spiritual understanding.

⁸⁴ According to Wilkins' and Bergin's *A Concordance to the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Data was also confirmed in the ARTFL database.

⁸⁵ "but this does not imply necessity, / just as a ship that sails downstream is not / determined by the eye in which it is reflected."

⁸⁶ "The light in which there smiled the treasure I / had found within it, first began to dazzle, / as would a golden mirror in the sun,"

⁸⁷ "By now that blessed mirror was delighting / in its own inner words; I, tasting mine, / was tempering the bitter with the sweet."

⁸⁸ Indeed in the Dantean corpus we find the image used to figure characters, angels, water, the sun, Rome, human conscience, divine knowledge but also lack of knowledge, the eyes of Beatrice but also Dante's eyes, and it appears as a scientific instrument independent of primarily moral

how this variety intersects with Dante's use of imagery in telepathic episodes, we must turn to Einar Már Jónsson's excellent study *Le miroir: naissance d'un genre littéraire*.⁸⁹ Jónsson declares as incomplete the simple dichotomy of the *speculum in bono/in malo*, noting medieval titles that go beyond it, such as *Le miroir des temps futures* (10).⁹⁰ There was, in fact, a more complex understanding and use of mirror imagery in the Middle Ages – a complexity that Dante perceived and nurtured in his poem. He did so in part by incorporating and developing many of the specular *topoi* that had developed throughout the centuries. One of the most common is the idea of the mirror of creation. This *topos* has two sub-categories, in which writers conceive of all creation as a mirror of the creator, or of God himself as a mirror in which all creation is reflected (140). The mirror of creation is of Neoplatonic origin, found in Plutarch's idea of the sun as mirror of God, and later developed by Macrobius, and Pseudo-Dionysius, who introduced the idea of the angel as mirror reflecting divine light (142).⁹¹ The visual mode of telepathy in the *Commedia* engages both

significance. I discussed this in detail in my master's thesis. My comments here are necessarily limited to the scope of this project.

⁸⁹ I offer a partial review of this thorough study for its points relevant to our purposes. Simon Gilson discusses medieval optics and theories of light more specifically in reference to Dante, but his study is mostly not relevant to mind reading. One of Gilson's main objectives is to show that Dante relied on general medieval sources and was not "at the forefront of thirteenth-century thought on optics and light" (2). His chapter on "Light Reflection, Mirrors, and Meteorological Optics in the Comedy" is primarily concerned with Dante's assimilation of laws of optical doctrine. In a footnote, he categorizes images drawn from reflected light mainly as "souls as light reflectors, ... planets and stars, ... angels, ... Dante's eye-mirrors, ... and Beatrice reflecting divine light" (120), which represents part but not all of the complexity of Dante's engagement of the image.

⁹⁰ Franco Cardini notes the myth of Perseus who defeats Medusa by means of a magical mirror, which may also be seen as evidence of a mirror signifying outside of the binary structure.

⁹¹ Alessandro Raffi confirms this (15). I do not find other relevant information on telepathy in Pseudo-Dionysius' *De caelesti hierarchia* as it is not an epistemological text. The author is primarily concerned not with how angels know or how they communicate but rather with their names, ordering, and grouping, and generally with the manner in which their powers emanate hierarchically. See also Bemrose for further discussion of Dante's angelology. James L. Miller discusses the mirror of creation, arguing that Dante in the third canticle journeys from the mirror of creation to the mirror of God, but that his poetics also reflect this spiritual improvement (272). I find this thesis to be lacking in that it does not account for the variety or the tension that Dante incorporates into his use of the mirror image. Monica Rutledge asserts an idea of "unease" in the elaboration of Dantean mirror imagery but never defines this unease or explains why it occurs.

categories of this *topos*, as it figures souls looking into the mirror of God, or in some cases God himself, and souls as reflections of God. When Cacciaguida explains how he knows his ancestor's thoughts in *Par.* 15.62 and when he is himself called a mirror at canto 18.2, Dante is engaging both sides of the mirror of creation. When Adam explains how he knows the pilgrim's thoughts at 26.106 (quoted above), he explains the relationship between creation as mirror of God and God as mirror of creation precisely in terms of a continuum: God as mirror reflects all perfectly but every creature reflects God imperfectly. Dante is intensely interested in exploring this continuum elsewhere in the poem, as in canto 29.136-45 when he represents angels as "speculi" in the context of Beatrice's explanation of why they reflect God's greatness in varying degrees.⁹² In canto 21.16, Beatrice instructs Dante to make eyes of his mirrors in order to reflect his understanding of another mirror,⁹³ while in canto 30.85 the pilgrim gazes into the celestial rose, desiring to make his eyes better mirrors to reflect better his comprehension.⁹⁴

Alessandro Raffi links his discussion of Dante's philosophical views on humans in relation to beasts and angels in *Convivio* III, vii, 6-7 to Dante's

⁹² "La prima luce, che tutta la raia, / per tanti modi in essa si recepe, / quanti son li splendori a chi s'appaia. / Onde, però che a l'atto che concepe / segue l'affetto, d'amar la dolcezza / diversamente in essa ferve e tepe. / Vedi l'eccelso omai e la larghezza / de l'eterno valor, poscia che tanti / speculi fatti s'ha in che si spezza, / uno manendo in sé come davanti» [The First Light reaches them in ways as many / as are the angels to which It conjoins / Itself, as It illumines all of them; / and this is why (because affection follows / the act of knowledge) the intensity / of love's sweetness appears unequally. / By now you see the height, you see the breadth, / of the Eternal Goodness; It has made / so many mirrors, which divide Its light, / but, as before, Its own Self still is One]. See also canto 9.61-3 in which Cunizza affirms her prophesy by referring to the celestial intelligences as mirror and canto 13.59 in which Aquinas explains the wisdom of Adam and Christ by referring to the idea of God's light that is distributed in mirrored fashion in 9 substances.

⁹³ "Ficca di retro a li occhi tuoi la mente, / e fa di quelli specchi a la figura / che 'n questo specchio ti sarà parvente» [Let your mind follow where your eyes have led, / and let your eyes be mirrors for the figure / that will appear to you within this mirror] (16-18).

⁹⁴ "Non è fantin che sì subito rua / col volto verso il latte, se si svegli / molto tardato da l'usanza sua, / come fec' io, per far migliori spegli / ancor de li occhi, chinandomi a l'onda / che si deriva perché vi s'immegli;" [No infant who awakes long after his / usual hour would turn his face toward milk / as quickly as I hurried toward that stream; / to make still finer mirrors of my eyes, / I bent down toward the waters which flow there / that we, in them, may find our betterment] (82-7).

conception of souls in the *Commedia*, describing the latter precisely in terms of a continuum of mirrors. According to Raffi, human beings are more or less receptive to God's light, such that

alla possibilità di nobilitarsi verso l'utopia dell'angelo, specchio della Sapienza infinita, corrisponde la possibile degradazione verso la distopia della bestia, specchio oscuro della materia. L'intero impianto della *Commedia* può essere considerato a partire da questa concezione: se l'*Inferno*, dominio della gente grossa e bestiale, dispiega la fenomenologia della degradazione umana, il *Paradiso* percorre la scala opposta mostrando tutti i gradi del <<trasumanar>> verso beatitudini sempre maggiori" (52).⁹⁵

The idea of souls on a continuum is nothing new, but the specular link is key. For Dante, the mirror's capacity varies just as does the capacity of souls to reflect God's light. Yet this variety operates far more widely than simple capacity to reflect divine light. In the example quoted above at *Par.* 15.113 when Cacciaguida describes the virtuous wife who leaves her mirror with unpainted face, Dante contradicts the negative medieval stereotype of the vain lady at her mirror,⁹⁶ but in this case the "specchio" does not really signify spiritual knowledge as much as it does an everyday object whose use here displays virtue rather than vanity.⁹⁷ Likewise, when Cacciaguida explains God's omniscience in relation to free will in canto 17, the

⁹⁵ "The possible degradation toward the dystopia of the beast, obscure mirror of matter, corresponds to the possibility of ennobling oneself toward the utopia of the angel, mirror of infinite Wisdom. The entire structure of the *Commedia* can be considered to begin from this concept: if the *Inferno*, domain of uncomprehending and bestial people, manifests the phenomenology of human degradation, the *Paradiso* traverses the opposite scale, showing all the levels of 'going beyond the human' toward ever greater blessedness." Translation is mine.

⁹⁶ Jónsson discusses the medieval *topos* that signals the vain female preoccupied with her mirror, while tracing the development of this image into a positive genre in the later Middle Ages (196).

⁹⁷ The idea of gazing at oneself in a mirror involved another common medieval *topos* that Jónsson identifies as the mirror of the soul (146). The mirror of the soul signifies the reflection of God or of the Trinity at the bottom of the human soul, which allows knowledge of divine reality through introspection. This *topos* is Neoplatonic and Augustinian in origin and develops a positive as well as negative line; spiritual knowledge is countered by the allegorized understanding of Narcissus, whose gaze brings only delusion (146). A clear example of this *topos* is found in *Purg.* 27.100 when Leah describes her and Rachel's active and contemplative lives vis-à-vis the mirror.

mirror (indicated through the verb “specchiare” in line 41) appears in terms entirely technical and without moral import. As part of a simile, it serves to define precisely the relationship between a ship and the eye that reflects its course, in order to understand better the analogous theological point.⁹⁸

These examples show that the mirror’s continuum throughout the poem operates not only quantitatively but qualitatively. It signifies the degree to which one reflects divine light, but poetically it also reflects other values and functions. The nuances of the mirror’s capacity depend on the context. It is with this knowledge that we can perhaps approach the single specular episode of Vergil’s mind reading that occurs at *Inf.* 23.25, when Vergil reassures the pilgrim as the two escape from the *Malebranche*:⁹⁹

E quei: “S’i’ fossi di piombato vetro,
l’image di fuor tua non trarrei
più tosto a me, che quella dentro ‘mpetro.
Pur mo venieno i tuo pensier tra miei,
con simile atto e con simile faccia,
sì che d’intrambi un sol consiglio fei” (*Inf.* 23.21-30)¹⁰⁰

The “piombato vetro” is strikingly, and deliberately, different from the “specchio” found in the third canticle. Vergil does not say that he sees Dante’s thoughts in a mirror but rather that he knows his inner thoughts as quickly as he would if, as a mirror, he were to reflect Dante’s outer image. His self-comparison to the mirror is meant to confirm his ability to know Dante pilgrim’s thoughts precisely in a direct manner. In this way the “piombato vetro” functions as an ordinary object used to

⁹⁸ There are other passages in the poem in which Dante refers to mirrors in entirely technical terms, most notably *Par.* 2.97 when Beatrice describes the experiment using mirrors to clarify the problem of the moon spots, and *Purg.* 15.16-24 when the poet uses the mirror image to describe the pilgrim’s disorientation at seeing reflected light.

⁹⁹ See chapter 1 for discussion of the interpretive history of this passage.

¹⁰⁰ “And he to me: ‘Were I a leaded mirror, / I could not gather in your outer image / more quickly than I have received your inner. / For even now your thoughts have joined my own; in both our acts and aspects we are kin – with both our minds I’ve come to one decision.’”

indicate extraordinary knowledge. The episode thus appears to be specular in rhetorical terms only, but reading the comparison literally, we see that Dante poet gains something more from figuring Vergil as a mirror. It is quite simply that in seeing Vergil as a mirror, Dante sees Vergil as part of himself. The suggestion of telepathy here performs a social function through its claim of unity and agreement. It is entirely appropriate that we find the mirror in this telepathic episode because it links Dante with his third beloved “padre antico,” the ancient father and pagan poet who, for Dante, signifies history perhaps most poignantly.

Suggesting or naming the mirror in telepathic episodes enacts Dante’s profound need to record, indeed to voice his personal loves and personal history at moments that most ingeniously imply silence. These mind reading encounters overflow with such values in part because the *Commedia* as a whole is explicitly ambitious in its self-definition as mirror of Dante’s personal history, but also universal history. This definition of poem as mirror participates in another major specular *topos* of the Middle Ages, which Jónsson calls the mirror of Scripture (149). Rooted in Augustine, the mirror of Scripture presents the Bible as an instrument for knowledge of the self and one’s personal situation (153). It is partly in the tradition of the mirror of Scripture that Dante presents himself as *scriba dei* and his *Commedia* as *poema sacro* (*Par.* 25.1-3); his journey of self knowledge becomes a mirror claiming to reflect divine truth for all. This idea recapitulates the notion of the *Commedia* as epiphanic medium (introduced in chapter 2). But the characterization of specular telepathy in this chapter begins to shift the idea of mind reading as a specific epiphanic moment toward a new kind of experience rooted in human rather than divine presence; specular telepathy in the *Commedia* suggests that personal history is not merely a necessary aspect of universal history but a privileged narrative in and of itself. As I argue further in chapter 5, this privileging

of personal history goes far beyond the idea of representing the afterlife as mere fulfillment of the individual's earthly history.¹⁰¹ This is because Dante dramatizes his personal history not merely to reflect but as a way of responding to and altering certain narratives of earthly history, and his dramatizations imply important social and historical details of his experience on earth. This wider context will allow us to understand better why it is that with respect to mirror imagery, Dante's epistemology of mind reading in the *Paradiso* does not simply point, in Raffi's words, "verso beatitudini sempre maggiori."¹⁰²

On the continuum of knowledge, the *Commedia*'s telepathic mirror is epistemologically significant qualitatively rather than quantitatively. It can indicate how much or little one knows, as when Adam declares God's perfect vs. humans' imperfect reflections. Yet more prominently the mirror shows that the most privileged spiritual act of knowing is implicated with and privileges other kinds of knowledge. It is in this sense that specular mind reading in the poem represents knowing as complex, ambivalent, varied, and inconsistent. The attempt to know is not transcendent. Finally it is immanent – a conclusion that brings us now to the issue of the influence of Aristotelianism versus Neoplatonism on the *Commedia*'s mind reading. The following chapter explores this question, but it does so in part to introduce a different philosophical context of Dantean mind reading. For I believe that the most salient epistemological issue for telepathy may be less tied up with Dante's purported debt to Neoplatonic versus Aristotelian models and more related to the extent to which mind reading becomes a sign of the *Commedia*'s historical awareness and engagement in epistemological crisis, past and present. The next chapter will therefore explore a philosophical context from Dante's lifetime that,

¹⁰¹ See Erich Auerbach's *Dante: Poet of the Secular World* for the idea of the afterlife as fulfillment of the individual's earthly history.

¹⁰² "toward ever-greater blessedness."

like mind reading in the *Commedia*, reflects a sensibility moving beyond traditional debates and into later fourteenth-century frameworks that provoked radical epistemological doubts.

Chapter 4

New Epistemology in Dante's Time: Beyond the Aristotelian-Neoplatonic Model

The *Commedia*'s performance of mind reading raises the question of its debt to Aristotelian versus Neoplatonic ideas, yet it also exists as part of another epistemological debate that was shifting the philosophical climate of Dante's time away from the Aristotelian-Neoplatonic paradigm. These, very generally, are the two points of investigation in this chapter. I begin by suggesting some of the different ways in which scholars have argued the Aristotelian-Neoplatonic problem as a way of framing my assessment of how mind reading participates in this binary model. Then I suggest not a source but rather a context for the *Commedia*'s mind reading in theories of cognition proposed by Peter John Olivi, a philosopher who was Dante's contemporary and whose thinking is known to have shaped the *Commedia*'s apocalyptic pronouncements. Olivi was one of the first philosophers to challenge theories of cognition that had been espoused by Roger Bacon, Aquinas, and others. These challenges inaugurated what became a crucial problem in philosophy that remained unresolved throughout Dante's life and after his death. As I discuss below, it is not yet clear whether Dante's representations of cognition actively incorporate Olivi's specific challenges. Yet Olivi's work presents an epistemological context that, albeit concerned with a topic entirely different from mind reading, elaborates strikingly similar doubts: just as Dante's poem dramatizes epistemological crisis through its presentation of mind reading, Olivi's challenge to the role of species in conventional theories of cognition reflects urgent concern with how human beings know, not merely in theoretical but practical terms. Within this framework, we can view telepathy, with its complicated attention to mechanisms of

knowledge and its resulting ambiguities, as part of the cultural soil that Olivi's work on cognition helped to create. In this way I regard mind reading as a poetic sign linked to a cultural-philosophical issue through a shared sense of epistemological urgency. Exploring this link helps us see that the philosophical climate in which Dante lived was not simply defined by a binary structure of Aristotelian thinkers and those defending a more traditional biblical-symbolic exegesis. Further, it helps us to historicize the philosophical and cultural milieu in which the *Commedia's* mind reading lives.

Use of the words "Aristotelianism" and "Neoplatonism" in Dante studies varies and therefore requires some explanation of how some of the most important studies have mobilized these terms. The relatively scant philosophical scholarship on the *Commedia* has often focused on the extent to which Dante's handling of particular issues derives from Aristotelian versus Neoplatonic sources. On the basis of such findings about particular issues, some scholars have gone further to generalize about Dante's philosophical orientation as being fundamentally one or the other. Thus earlier in the twentieth century, Bruno Nardi argued that Dante incorporated Neoplatonic ideas more than had been previously thought in key issues, for example Beatrice's explanation of the moon spots in *Par. 2*.¹ Nardi, while not positing Dante as consistently Neoplatonic in orientation, thus refuted scholars such as Busnelli, who had emphasized Dante as an Aristotelian in general.²

As Kenelm Foster explains lucidly in his 1977 monograph *The Two Dantes and Other Studies*, the desire to generalize about Dante's philosophical allegiance

¹ See "La dottrina delle macchie lunari nel secondo canto del *Paradiso*" in *Saggi di filosofia dantesca*.

² See "Il tomismo di Dante e il P. Busnelli" in *Saggi di filosofia dantesca*. In other articles, such as "Il linguaggio" in *Dante e la cultura medievale* Nardi, argues for the Aristotelian source (and against Neoplatonism) of Dante's phrase "nomina sunt consequentia rerum" [names are the consequences of things] in the *Vita Nuova* 13.4.

stems in part from the Dantean corpus itself, which dramatically reflects the radically transformative discoveries of Aristotelian texts that occurred in the west during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Consequently in Dante's thought we sometimes find two lines of intellectual influence in tension. Especially in the *Convivio*, Dante does not integrate the notion of intellect as participation in the "divine" with the Aristotelian idea of the moral life on earth as achievable through philosophical reason alone (159-60). Thus Foster writes that in the *Convivio* there is

a certain indifference to theological considerations; one of its more striking differences from the *Comedy*. Certainly the writer is a Catholic Christian, but he is evidently far more concerned to draw out certain cherished philosophical insights than to anticipate possible objections from the side of the theologians (some of whom were no mean philosophers). Thus we see Dante in the *Convivio* coming out with ideas about the perfectibility of man in this life, and of the soul in the next, without its apparently crossing his mind that he was begging the question (from the standpoint of Orthodox Christianity) as to whether man *could* reach perfection, here or hereafter, unassisted by divine grace. In the *Convivio* the Christian doctrine of grace – and so of man's *de facto* inherent sinfulness and natural incapacity to bring himself, by his own effort, to union with God – is virtually ignored (159).

The *Commedia*'s obvious recognition of the need for grace, in Foster's words "its stress on the soul's need for help and guidance, through life and death, from higher powers" (162) nonetheless heightens philosophical tension due to the poem's astonishingly complex incorporation both of theological (sometimes called too generally "Neoplatonic") and philosophical (i.e. "Aristotelian") elements. Foster

himself supports Nardi's refutation of Dante as primarily Thomist, arguing for "a rather uneasy synthesis of Neoplatonist and Aristotelian elements" (57).³

While some recent scholars continue to define the *Commedia* primarily in terms of one tradition or the other,⁴ others have followed Foster in arguing for a synthesis, showing the complexity and variety with which Dante incorporates both traditions. In her 1994 dissertation, Rosine Vance Turner argues that Dante dramatizes in *Inferno* 14-26 a crisis regarding his experimentation with Aristotelianism, concluding that he resolves this crisis in such a way as to incorporate rather than reject Aristotelian rationalism.⁵ Manuele Gragnolati, in exploring Dante's handling of the thirteenth-century debate on the body and soul in Statius' theory of embryology in *Purgatorio* 25, concludes that it incorporates both Aquinas' and Bonaventure's thinking and does not fully endorse Thomism as a number of scholars had claimed. He shows impressively just how subtly one must read to pick up on Dante's complex blending of philosophical threads.⁶

"Aristotelian" and "Neoplatonic" as descriptors are also found in reference to the *Commedia*'s poetics. Foster helps us to understand this wider usage by

³ Foster cites specific differences between Aquinas and Dante: "differences in cosmogony – regarding, especially, the creation of matter, and the role of the angels in the formation of the sublunary world and their relation to the heavenly bodies; and differences in anthropology touching the soul-body relationship, and the process of human generation, and the 'end' of human life considered as mortal and terrestrial" (57).

⁴ Both Patrick Boyde and Zygmunt Baranski have argued for the *Commedia* as primarily oriented toward Neoplatonism.

⁵ Turner also finds epistemological significance in the physical landscape of all three canticles. Her argument contributes relevant new ideas but is somewhat hard to follow because it is not contextualized well enough within the scholarship, nor does she lay out her reading and methodology optimally in order to follow the line of argument.

⁶ Gragnolati addresses the issue in his article "From Plurality to (Near) Unicity of Forms: Embryology in *Purgatory* 25" in *Dante for the New Millennium*, eds. Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey, and contextualizes it more fully in his 2005 monograph *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture*. The latter also explores the body-soul issue by contextualizing the *Commedia*'s treatment within the poetry of Ugucione da Lodi, Giacomino da Verona, and Bonvesin de la Riva. He gives particular attention to Bonvesin's *Book of the Three Scriptures*, showing how the author's use of the passion in his poem shapes Dante's portrayal of purgatory, whereas previous scholars had emphasized the differences between the two texts.

stating that Dante in fact associated Aristotle and Aquinas with the idea of difference because he had studied Aristotle “with and through the commentaries – or, better, ‘expositions’ – of Aquinas” (61) and in the *Convivio* associated the latter “in a special way with *discrimination*, conceived as a quality both intellectual and moral though rooted specifically in the human reason whose task it is to ‘discern the relations between things’” (63). Thus in *Undivine Comedy*, Barolini, in addition to using the terms “Aristotelian” and “Neoplatonic” in reference to specific philosophical issues in the *Commedia*,⁷ employs them to describe larger thematic and stylistic movements of the *Paradiso*. When discussing the problem Dante faces in attempting to represent heaven, a realm that is beyond time, through the necessarily temporal medium of narrative, she frames the problem in part as a paradox of unity and difference: “If time is difference, and if language is a function of time, then language is a differential medium, unable to express simultaneity” (167). Dante’s solution, Barolini argues, is to embrace the paradox and alternately privilege sameness and difference, and with rich analysis she shows how profoundly the poet executes the paradox lexically, thematically, and structurally throughout the third canticle.⁸ She incorporates the key terms when she writes of the *Paradiso*’s “paradox and tension deriving from Dante’s double allegiance: his desire to synthesize Aristotelian sympathy for difference with the Neoplatonic One” (173).⁹ A good example of this in practice regards cantos 11 and 12, which I touched upon in chapter 1. Briefly, Barolini demonstrates that in these cantos Dante emphasizes unity through his appreciation of Dominic’s scholasticism and Francis’ mysticism,

⁷ For example in writing that in *Par.* 4.40-42 “Dante follows Aristotle and Aquinas in his belief that all knowledge comes through the senses, that images are based on empirical reality...” (153).

⁸ See chapters 8, 9, and 10 of *Undivine Comedy: Dethologizing Dante*.

⁹ Later in the same chapter she writes of Dante’s program in the third canticle “whereby he alternately privileges unity and privileges difference, in his quest to encompass both horns of his dilemma, both the Neoplatonic/Augustinian One and the Aristotelian/Thomistic Many” (192).

but that he does so with language enacting intense narrative and rhetorical differentiation. When Dante claims at 11.40-41 that in praising one saint he speaks of both (“De l’un dirò, però che d’amendue / si dice l’un pregiando”),¹⁰ Barolini argues that here the poet suggests the saints’ oneness and equality, that the verses are “not simply...courteous hyperbole but...a bold attempt to deny the Aristotelian precept that ‘to be diverse necessarily means to be unequal’” (195). Yet Dante then goes on to dramatize the differences between the saints by insisting on telling both their stories (195). In this way, such wider usages of “Aristotelian” and “Neoplatonic” may be valid descriptors of Dante’s poetic attempts to represent fundamental philosophical concepts underlying his vision.

The different uses of these terms help to orient the *Commedia*’s mind reading, which I characterize as conceptually Neoplatonic and yet deeply Aristotelian in its poetic articulation. As chapter 3 demonstrates, the late antique and early medieval roots of mind reading theory are found in Neoplatonic authors, as is the notion of angels and souls as mirrors reflecting the divine.¹¹ Yet I would not argue on this basis that Dante’s inclusion of mind reading implies a tendency toward Neoplatonic epistemology in the poem as a whole. Indeed, Aquinas also incorporates the Neoplatonic mirror into his epistemological theory in *ST* q.56, a.3 when he defines the angels’ knowledge of God insofar as they are a kind of mirror representing the image of God, but they cannot see God’s essence directly.¹² Similarly, in the *DV* q.12, a.6 he considers whether prophets see in the mirror of eternity, explaining that the divine mind is described metaphorically as the mirror of

¹⁰ “I shall devote my tale to one, because / in praising either prince one praises both.”

¹¹ This is not to say, however, that all the theories represent Platonic thought. As discussed in chapter 3, some of the theories concerning demonic mind reading are based on materialist or naturalistic ideas, i.e. the demons run faster or have enhanced capacity to read body language.

¹² “ipsa natura angelica est quoddam speculum divinam similitudinem repraesentans” (343b) [the angelic nature is itself a kind of mirror representing the Divine image].

eternity because it is eternal and through it, “omnes rerum rationes relucent” (248) [all the intelligible characters of things shine forth] (135). Use of a Neoplatonic image or idea does not define a text or author as such.

This is especially true of mind reading given what I have argued in chapters 1 through 3 and what I will argue perhaps most forcefully of all in chapter 5: mind reading in the *Commedia* enacts, dramatizes, draws attention to, insists relentlessly upon acts of differentiation. It promises unity but performs multiplicity. We see this in chapter 1 in the notion of mind reading as reflecting a continuum of knowledge and as implicated with rhetorical contingencies, and in chapters 2 and 3 in the deeply ambiguous histories of narrative epiphany and mind reading theory, histories that dramatize sustained problems of differentiation. In this sense mind reading synthesizes Aristotelian difference with Neoplatonism, an analysis that supports other recent studies that have argued for different versions of synthesis. It could be argued that in stressing the ideas of history and difference in the poem, my thesis in fact claims, or at least implies an Aristotelian orientation of the *Commedia* in general. But again, mind reading as one historicizing characteristic cannot and should not translate into a way of defining the epistemology of the poem as a whole.

This is particularly the case given the indications during Dante’s lifetime that epistemological debate was beginning to move away from the traditional binary Aristotelian-Neoplatonic framework. I will now explore one such debate concerning cognition and the extent to which mind reading in the *Commedia* may participate in it through shared philosophical concerns. The key figure in this debate is the Franciscan philosopher Peter John Olivi and his pioneering work on theories of cognition, the value of which has only recently been brought to light. I begin with a short biography of Olivi and what scholars have established concerning his other influences on the *Commedia*.

Olivi was a Spiritual Franciscan whose work was at the forefront of epistemological change that was beginning to flower in late thirteenth century thought. He had entered the Franciscan order in 1259 or 1260 and studied in Paris with the Bonaventurians Guglielmo de la Mare, Giovanni Peckham and Matteo d'Acquasparta, from whom he developed a deep devotion to Bonaventure.¹³ His writings on poverty and the apocalypse were seminal in forming the agenda for the Spiritual Franciscans during Dante's time. These texts included *Quaestiones de perfectione evangelica*, *Tractatus de usu paupere*, and his Apocalypse commentary, *Lectura super apocalypsim*.¹⁴ In 1282, seven masters accused Olivi of unorthodoxy in a wide range of his doctrines, and in 1283 he was censured by a Franciscan commission. Given that intense debates between Thomists and Bonaventurians provided common topics for discussion among theologians, it is believed that Olivi's persecution was motivated at least in part by his strict interpretation of the rule of living for the brothers. In 1287, Olivi was rehabilitated and assigned a teaching post at the Franciscan school of Santa Croce in Florence until 1289, when he was transferred to Montpellier. Despite the confiscation of Olivi's work, Santa Croce remained from the late thirteenth into the fifteenth centuries an important center of transmission for his texts, which were transcribed and passed on despite threats and warnings from the Franciscan order.

As Charles Davis points out, Dante, Olivi, and his pupil Ubertino da Casale were all in Florence from 1287-89, where it is likely that Dante became acquainted with their teachings (241).¹⁵ Dante knew of the Franciscan school because he mentions two of its known figures, Ubertino da Casale and Pietro Pettinaio. He

¹³ The following history is found in the *Enciclopedia dantesca*, Vol. 4, pp. 135-36 as well as the English *Dante Encyclopedia* pp. 659-60.

¹⁴ Unfortunately there is no dating and thus no chronology for the texts of Olivi, who died in 1298.

¹⁵ From *Dante and the Idea of Rome*.

never mentions Olivi, possibly because of the latter's controversial standing. Despite his rehabilitation, the philosopher's memory was defamed in the early 1300s when his writings were condemned and destroyed, and his followers in Southern France dispersed. Yet as Davis points out, ideas from Olivi's commentary on the Apocalypse have been clearly identified in the *Commedia's* apocalyptic representations, especially its conception of church history. In particular, the image of the *meretrix magna*, the great prostitute, applied specifically to Christian Rome (not merely pagan Rome as in the *Apocalypse*), is likely a direct link between Olivi's and Dante's thinking (227).¹⁶ We see this image in passages such as *Inf.* 19 in the context of Dante's invective against simoniacal popes and again in *Purg.* 32 in the allegorical drama of the chariot, which transforms into a beast upon which the *magna meretrix* sits.¹⁷ Other similarities include several of Dante's antipapal pronouncements, the ideas that the office of Peter had been abandoned, and that soon the church would be liberated from the adulterer, all of which were developed by Olivi.¹⁸

¹⁶ According to the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, San Bernardino of Siena also adopted the works of Olivi in his preachings but never mentioned him (136).

¹⁷ The *Inf.* 19 passage reads "Di voi pastor s'accorse il Vangelista, / quando colei che siede sopra l'acque / puttaneggiar coi regi a lui fu vista; / quella che con le sette teste nacque, / e da le dieci corna ebbe argomento, / fin che virtute al suo marito piacque" (106-111) [You, shepherds, the Evangelist had noticed / when he saw her who sits upon the waters, / and realized she fornicates with kings, / she who was born with seven heads and had / the power and support of the ten horns, / as long as virtue was her husband's pleasure]. In *Purg.* 32 we find "Sicura, quasi rocca in alto monte, / seder sovrasso una puttana sciolta / m'apparve con le ciglia intorno pronte; / e come perché non li fosse tolta, / vidi di costa a lei dritto un gigante; / e basciavansi insieme alcuna volta" (148-53) [Just like a fortress set on a steep slope, / securely seated there, ungirt, a whore, / whose eyes were quick to rove, appeared to me; / and I saw at her side, erect, a giant, / who seemed to serve as her custodian; / and they – again, again – embraced each other].

¹⁸ Regarding the Spiritual Franciscans' possible influence on the poem's prophecies, Davis writes "Less demonstrable, although very possible, is the hypothesis that the various prophecies in the *Commedia* are coloured by the Spiritual Franciscan hopes of a new era, to be ushered in by the victory of a poor and dedicated monasticism. The Veltro whom Virgil prophesies in the first canto of *Inferno* will pay no regard to land or money, but to *sapienza, amore e virtute*, which are precisely the attributes of Deity, and which Francis, in his emulation of Christ, was supposed to have embodied so successfully" (229-30).

Twentieth-century scholarship on the Olivi-Dante connection has focused on whether the former may be viewed as a reliable source. Thus Davis refutes the view of Michele Barbi, who had rejected Dante's familiarity with Olivi and Ubertino because Dante says in *Convivio* 2.12 that he began to frequent schools of philosophy only after Beatrice's death in 1290, after these men had left Florence. Yet Davis notes that Dante could still have known of their teachings since Ubertino's sermons were directed to a wider audience, stating that Dante may in fact have known Olivi personally (242).¹⁹ In his 1972 dissertation, Warren Lewis is more skeptical about a link between Olivi and Dante in the absence of "some historical text to support the likelihood indicated by the similarities in the Dantean and Olivi concept of Rome" (p. 352 n. 138). Yet, as Nardi suggested in the mid twentieth century, the key point is not pinning down Olivi as a source but rather recognizing the confluences between Dante's representations and those of the Spiritual Franciscans:

Conoscesse o no Dante gli scritti dell'Olivi e di Ubertino, è comunque evidente che dagli ambienti gioachimiti francescani deriva al poeta l'idea che, dopo la donazione di Costantino, la chiesa, dominata dall'ingordigia di beni terreni e dalla simonia, s'è trasformata nel mostro dell'*Apocalisse*, sul quale siede la grande meretrice che puttaneggia coi re della terra (346).²⁰

The *Commedia's* textual echoes are themselves adequate evidence of a cultural dialogue.

¹⁹ The *Enciclopedia Dantesca* also says that it is "impossible pensare che D. abbia potuto trascurare o addirittura ignorare la presenza dell'O nella sua Firenze" (136) [it is impossible to think that Dante could have neglected or even ignored Olivi's presence in his Florence]. Translation is mine.

²⁰ From "Dante Profeta" in *Dante e la cultura medievale*. "Whether Dante knew the writings of Olivi and Ubertino or not, it is nevertheless evident that the poet derives from the Joachimite-Franciscan scene the idea that, after Constantine's gift, the church, overwhelmed by greed for earthly goods and by simony, was transformed into the monster of the Apocalypse, upon which sits the great prostitute who fornicates with lords of the earth." Translation is mine.

Dantean epistemology may be contextualized similarly within Olivi's most polished philosophical treatise, his commentary on the *Sentences*. The significance of this text has only recently been explored and much work remains to be done, in part because it is only partially edited.²¹ In Book II Olivi addresses at length questions of cognition, and according to philosophers Katherine Tachau and Robert Pasnau, Olivi's chief contribution is that he was the first to challenge systematically the role of species in the Aristotelian theory of cognition that was set forth by Roger Bacon and supported by Aquinas.²² The notion of the role of species in cognition originates in Aristotle's *De Anima* in Book I where he says "An alternative to 'forms' is 'species,' which signifies the sensible or knowable objects as existing in the soul and not in the things themselves" (180). As an example: "The stone is a composite of matter and form, and it is certainly not in the soul. Further, it is not the stone's form as such which is in the soul, but a likeness of it" (180). The late medieval Aristotelian theory of species thus held that humans may only cognize something by taking in the form, or species of the thing to be cognized. As Gyula Klima outlines, this act of taking in the form became one of many steps in an extremely complex chain.²³ Further, as Pasnau discusses, it was not exactly clear

²¹ Olivi does not address mind reading or angelic communication in any of the edited texts that we have, including Jansen's edition of Book II, Emmen's and Stadter's edition of Book III, and the bits of Book IV edited by Maranesi. Parts of Olivi's Book IV remain unedited but could be relevant since, as discussed in chapter 3, Lombard addresses the possibility of angels reading humans' minds in his Book IV. In the fragments of Book IV that are edited, Olivi's interest in separated souls regards whether such souls may perceive corporeal sensations (q.7 and 8, and whether they may move (q.9) or reoccupy (q.10) bodies. Also of interest is q.11 where he wonders whether souls in purgatory could doubt whether they are saved or damned.

²² Thus Katherine Tachau corrects a common misconception by stating that Aquinas had inherited rather than originated the account of cognition that was critiqued by Ockham. She states "Among the 'perspectivists,' as they were known to their late medieval readers, Roger Bacon (ca. 1220-1292) was most responsible for elaborating the doctrine of the 'multiplication of species' that was at the core of what became the standard explanation of perception and cognition based on perception" (4).

²³ In his article "The Medieval Problem of Universals," posted online in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP)*, Klima explains, with a helpful diagram, the function of species in cognition and their relation to universals according to this theory as follows: "In the first place, the sensory information collected by the single senses is distinguished, synthesized, and collated by the higher

how to define the species, which was supposed to be some sort of representation of the thing cognized, but philosophers resisted such a literal interpretation. Aquinas denied that species were literal likenesses of the things they represented in part because he did not believe that any natural resemblance was required for cognition. Yet Pasnau argues that at times Aquinas' arguments in fact implied such a resemblance (196). Thus the nature of species was a problem much debated and remained unresolved. Later Scholastics were unconvinced that Aquinas could support his account of species without resorting to representationalism, according to which species are a sort of internal object that we apprehend in order to have knowledge of the external world. (220).

This ambiguous nature of species implies a troubling role in cognition, provoking a more significant objection. For it seemed to Olivi, and later Ockham, that species were superfluous because they effected an unnecessary and indeed

sensory faculties of the common sense [*sensus communis*] and the so-called cogitative power [*vis cogitativa*], to be stored in sensory memory as *phantasms*, the sensory representations of singulars in their singularity. The active intellect [*intellectus agens*] uses this sensory information to extract its intelligible content and produce the intelligible species [*species intelligibiles*], the universal representations of several individuals in their various degrees of formal unity, disregarding their distinctive features and individuating conditions in the process of abstraction. The intelligible species are stored in the intellectual memory of the potential intellect [*intellectus possibilis*], which can then use them to form the corresponding concept in an act of thought, for example, in forming a judgment. The intelligible species and the concepts themselves, being formed by individual human minds, are individual in their being, insofar as they pertain to this or that human mind. However, since they are the result of abstraction, in their information content they are universal. Now insofar as this universal information content is common to all minds that form these concepts at all, and therefore it is a common intelligible content gained by these minds from their objects insofar as they are conceived by these minds in a universal manner, later scholastic thinkers refer to it as the objective concept [*conceptus obiectivus*], distinguishing it from the formal or subjective concepts [*conceptus formales seu subiectivi*], which are the individual acts of individual minds carrying this information (just as the individual copies of a book carry the information content of the book). It is this objective concept that is identified as the universal of the human mind (distinguished from the universals of the divine mind), namely, a species, a genus, a difference, a property, or an accident. (Note that these are only the simple concepts. Complex concepts, such as those corresponding to complex terms and propositions are the products of the potential intellect using these concepts in its further operations)". Klima also confirms that it is this account of the role of species that Olivi disputed.

troubling distance between the percipient and the thing cognized. Tachau states the problem (again in terms of Bacon's account that Aquinas inherited) as follows:

...if species are representations, and if a chain of species is generated between the sensible object and the sense, then the final species in this chain when received in the sense would first, most strongly, and most properly represent to the eye the species from which it had been multiplied, rather than the object. In other words, although the Baconian account purports to provide real and direct contact with extramental objects, in fact the direct contact is *only* with the final mediator in a chain of mediators (44).

Olivi objected that species, as the first objects of cognition, could easily be mistaken for the objects themselves, with the result that species would become objects of cognition rather than intermediary forms. Further, Olivi argued that if it is true that we perceive internal species, then we cannot also perceive the external world but only images of it.²⁴ With these concerns, Olivi and other philosophers believed that the Aristotelian theory of species cast doubt on whether one can have knowledge at all. For if we do not actually cognize anything but only as our species represent it to us, in Pasnau's words "We seem to have lost touch with the world outside us" (220-21). Aristotelian theories of cognition that incorporated the traditional account of species, then, appeared to encourage skepticism. Olivi was the first to initiate these criticisms in the late thirteenth century, and by the early fourteenth century, they were common epistemological worries (220).

According to Pasnau, Olivi did not conclude that skepticism was inevitable but instead was the first to propose a serious alternative theory in which cognition is both more direct and more active. The conventional view held that a cognitive power passively receives sensible or intelligible species from the world. In *quaestio*

²⁴ This point is found in Pasnau's article "Peter John Olivi" posted online in the *SEP*.

74 Olivi claims that a species cannot represent an object to a percipient unless the percipient attends to the species, and that this attending to signifies an active focus on the cognitive object (273). He calls this active focus “virtual attention.”

Percipients obtain information about the external world not by receiving physical impressions through the sense organs but by virtually extending the soul’s cognitive attention to particular features of the external environment (169):

Tertio, quia non exigitur ad repraesentandum obiectum, et tamen hoc est illud pro quo magis videbatur exigi. Quod autem ad hoc non exigatur probatur. Primo, quia obiectum praesens aspectui in ipsum converso et intento sufficienter se praesentat ei per semetipsum, immo et melius, quam per aliquam speciem creatam ab eius solida entitate et propria veritate deficientem, obiectum vero absens sufficienter repraesentatur aspectui per speciem memorialem. Secundo, quia frustra ponitur species repraesentans obiectum aspectui, nisi aspectus intendat in ipsam, intendere autem in ipsam est idem quod aspicere eam tanquam obiectum primum. Quod respectu actus cognitivum potius habet rationem termini seu terminativi quam principii effectivi (122-23).²⁵

One consequence of this argument is that the object itself does not function as a cause; the agency resides entirely in the cognitive power. Further, Olivi (and later Ockham) also deny that there are species in the senses or intellect that could be likenesses, but instead claims that the act of cognition is itself a likeness of external

²⁵ Citations from Olivi’s text are from the Jansen edition, where Olivi’s *quaestiones* are simply numbered with no further subdivisions according to article or paragraph. Translation is from paragraph 68 of *quaestio* 74 in Pasnau’s online translation at <http://spot.colorado.edu/~pasnau/research/>. Pasnau thus assigns paragraph numbers whereas the Latin text does not. “Third, because a species is not needed to represent an object, even though this is what it seemed most needed for. But that it is not needed for this is proved: First, because when an object is present to an attention that is turned toward it and intent on it, then that object sufficiently presents itself to that attention through its very self – and indeed presents itself even better than through any species created by its solid being and lacking proper truth. An absent object, on the other hand, is sufficiently represented to the attention through a memory species. Second, because it is pointless to postulate a species representing the object to the attention, unless the attention tends toward the species. To tend toward it, however, is the same as to attend to it as a first object, which (with respect to a cognitive act) is characteristic of a terminus or terminative principle rather than an effective one.”

objects. Thus he identifies the very act of cognition with mental representations themselves. This is to say, for instance, that “tasting an apple is like an apple,” a conclusion whose obvious problems Pasnau explores (122). Pasnau also notes that Olivi’s theory of direct cognition (which he calls direct realism) runs into trouble when we consider abstract thinking: “what are we directly in touch with when our intellect thinks abstractly or propositionally? One answer to this question is Platonism: universals and/or propositions have some kind of abstract mode of existence, independently of the human mind.”²⁶ And yet like most scholastics, Olivi rejected this solution without offering any other.²⁷

It is important to understand that, while Olivi is arguing against the Aristotelian theory of species, he is not rejecting it entirely, nor is he supporting anything that could be regarded as a Platonic solution. As seen in the above citation from *quaestio* 74, for example, Olivi does not reject memory species; he simply denies that species are the effective cause of cognition.²⁸ Thus in his theory he does not reject the Aristotelian concept or existence of species but rather its specific role. Nor, as Pasnau notes, is Olivi interested in a Platonic solution; he rejects the role of species whether it is understood as existing in the human mind or outside of it.

²⁶ From Pasnau’s online entry on Olivi at *SEP*. In his entry “The Medieval Problem of Universals,” Klima quotes Boethius to distinguish between the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of species: “Plato thinks that genera and species and the rest are not only understood as universals, but also exist and subsist apart from bodies. Aristotle, however, thinks that they are understood as incorporeal and universal, but subsist in sensibles.”

²⁷ Tachau notes that the role of species provided an advantage precisely as a referent in the absence of objects: “Yet if the ability of the species in the soul (*in anima*) to endure in the absence of their causative objects is potentially problematic in epistemology, that very capacity is an advantage in semantics, for by serving as a referent, on the species of objects no longer extant can be constructed an account of the meaning (and truth condition) of statements concerning objects once cognized, but no longer existing. By the end of the thirteenth century, this consideration was among those buttressing efforts to resolve the epistemological concerns raised by the presence of species in cognition, and standing against their rejection” (24).

²⁸ Both Tachau (49) and Pasnau (169) confirm that Olivi accepts memory species and species *in medio*, (defined by Pasnau in his Stanford Encyclopedia entry above as “sensible qualities that fill the air between the senses and their objects”).

Because his argument is focused to a remarkable degree on human cognition as active, it does not fit neatly into Aristotelian or Neoplatonic categories. Instead, it suggests an entirely new direction that in part anticipates Ockham, who radically simplified his theory of cognition in part by eliminating the role of species as it had been understood and formulated a new understanding of universals. While Pasnau concludes that neither Olivi nor Ockham were able to account sufficiently for the difficulties in their theories of cognition, he believes that their proposals both reflect considerable insight into the development of alternatives.²⁹ Olivi in particular had not been previously recognized for his role in initiating such a theory and therefore for raising crucial epistemological concerns in the later thirteenth century that many have assumed only began in the later fourteenth century with Ockham.³⁰

In the remainder of this chapter I will relate Olivi's achievements with Dante's work in two ways. First, I will evaluate the claims of Stan Scott, who argues that passages from the *Convivio*, *Monarchia*, and the *Commedia* show that Dante had in fact begun to absorb some of the challenges to theories of cognition that were going on during his lifetime. Second, I will link the practical epistemological concerns that Olivi reflects in his theories to what I see as broadly similar issues in the *Commedia*'s mind reading.

With regards to the first goal, Dante elaborates no theory of cognition systematically in his texts but does offer significant representations. When he uses

²⁹ Pasnau in fact concludes that species do not exist independently and that one cannot really talk about eliminating species from cognition, just as one cannot talk about eliminating shapes or sizes from objects (192). I leave aside further discussion of this point for now.

³⁰ Pasnau reminds us that while the similarities between the work of Olivi and Ockham are striking, Olivi's work was confiscated and therefore it is not known to what extent Ockham had access (25). Pasnau also believes that neither Olivi's nor Ockham's theories have been sufficiently recognized as challenging act-object doctrine and representationalism, which he says are still considered mistakes that philosophy of mind is trying to overcome. Because Ockham's work was also censored, few philosophers followed either thinker's ideas but also may not have understood what was important in the rejection of species (290).

the term “species,” he usually does so in the sense of “real” species that exist objectively in the external world, writing of the human species, plant and animal species, or species as a more abstract “kind” of something.³¹ He expresses awareness of the link between species and universals in *Convivio* 2.4.4-5 in the context of defining what philosophers have posited about the Angelic Intelligences. After writing that Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* states that there are as many Intelligences as there are circular movements in heaven, Dante states that others such as Plato, by contrast, posited as many Intelligences as there are species of things. He goes on to link these species with the Platonic notion of universal forms and ideas: “E volsero che, sì come le Intelligenze delli cieli sono generatrici di quelli, ciascuna del suo, così queste fossero generatrici dell'altre cose ed esempli, ciascuna della sua spezie; e chiamale Plato "idee", che tanto è a dire quanto forme e nature universali.”³² The second passage is from *Monarchia* 1.3.9 where Dante more directly addresses the role of intelligible species in cognition when he asserts the intellectual potentiality of man as not merely concerned with universal forms or species, but singulars: “Potentia etiam intellectiva, de qua loquor, non solum est ad formas universales aut speties, sed etiam per quendam extensionem ad particulares: unde solet dici quod intellectus speculativus extensione fit practicus, cuius finis est

³¹ I find the term “species” with its variations in *Convivio* 2.4.4; 2.4.5; 3.7.7; 3.11.11; 4.4.6; 4.14.9; 4.15.6; 4.16.9; *Monarchia* 1.3.5; 1.3.7; 1.3.9; 1.15.2; 1.15.7; 3.12.1; 3.12.3; 3.12.5; 3.12.7; 3.12.8; 3.12.9; *De Vulgari Eloquentia* 1.2.5; 1.3.1; 1.16.3; 2.1.6; *Epistole* 3.2; *Questio de aqua et terra* 4; *Commedia* in *Par.* 7.28-30, 13.70-72, 32.121-23.

³² “They held that just as the Intelligences of the heavens brought them into being, each its own, so other Intelligences brought into being all other things and exemplars, each its own species; and Plato called them ‘ideas,’ which is as much to say universal forms and natures.” See Bemrose’s *Dante’s Angelic Intelligences: Their Importance in the Cosmos and in Pre-Christian Religion*, chapter 5 for his interesting argument on Dante’s association of the pagan idea of Intelligences with Christian angels. See also chapter 3 for my discussion of Bemrose’s arguments on pagan figures in the *Commedia*. Citations from the *Convivio* are from the Società Dantesca Italiana edition (edited by Ageno) posted on the Princeton Dante Project website. Translation is from Richard Lansing.

agere atque facere.”³³ The significance of this statement about singulars will be further explored below.

Dante was thus clearly aware of the role of species in cognition, but Scott claims that Dante’s *representations* of cognition suggest a somewhat inconsistent picture of this role (440). In a passage from *Convivio* 3.9, Dante affirms the role of species in the context of glossing the final part of *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona*. Here, the poet concedes that he calls his lady humble whereas a previous canzone had criticized her as proud, explaining the prior “mistake” by means of a simile: even though the sky is always clear, our eyes sometimes see a star as shadowed.³⁴ This prompts an explanation of the visual process, which, as Simon Gilson points out, was linked in Aristotelian thought with the process of intellection (16).³⁵ Thus in 3.9.7 we find the sensible species when Dante describes how visible things enter the eye: “Queste cose visibili, sì le proprie come le comuni in quanto sono visibili, vengono dentro all’occhio - non dico le cose, ma le forme loro - per lo mezzo diafano, non realmente ma intenzionalmente, sì quasi come in vetro trasparente.”³⁶ Yet, after further describing the course of the visible things toward the eye’s pupil,

³³ “Now the intellectual potentiality of which I am speaking is not only concerned with universal ideas or *species*, but also *by a certain extension* with particulars; and so it is often said that the theoretical intellect by extension becomes practical, its goal then being doing and making.” Citations from the *Monarchia* are from the Società Dantesca Italiana edition on the Princeton Dante Project website. Translation is from Prue Shaw.

³⁴ “Tu sai che ‘I ciel sempre’è lucente e chiaro, / e quanto in sé, non si turba già mai; / ma li nostri occhi, per cagioni assai, / chiaman la stella talor tenebrosa” [You know the sky is always bright and clear, / and of itself is never clouded. / And yet our eyes, for many reasons, / Sometimes say a star is dim].

³⁵ All documentation of Gilson in this chapter refers to his 2000 monograph *Medieval Optics and Theories of Light in the Works of Dante*.

³⁶ “These visible things, the proper as well as the common, insofar as they are visible, enter into the eye--I do not mean the things themselves but their forms--through the diaphanous medium, not as matter but as an image, just as through transparent glass.” Gilson confirms that Dante is referring to species when he writes of “le forme loro” but argues that Dante relies indirectly on Arabic sources for his use of “intenzionalmente” (62). Gilson, as well as commentators such as Charles Singleton and Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi further link this passage in their commentaries to one in *Purg.* 18, discussed below.

he goes on to say in 3.9.9 that the visual spirit immediately reproduces the form, without any lapse of time: “Di questa pupilla lo spirito visivo, che si continua da essa alla parte del cerebro dinanzi dov'è la sensibile vertude sì come in principio frontale, [quivi] subitamente senza tempo la ripresenta, e così vedemo.”³⁷ He then stipulates that the medium through which the form enters the eye must be colorless if we are to see the thing exactly as it is: “Per che, acciò che la visione sia verace, cioè cotale qual è la cosa visibile in sé, conviene che lo mezzo per lo quale all'occhio viene la forma sia senza ogni colore, e l'acqua della pupilla similmente; altrimenti si macolerebbe la forma visibile del color del mezzo e di quello della pupilla.”³⁸

Scott claims that the ideas of immediate reproduction of forms, and of seeing something exactly as it is emphasize a directness and immediacy of sense perception that presumably would undermine the role of species:

Dante elsewhere stresses the immediacy and accuracy of sense perceptions, transmitted as through a diaphanous medium with no time lapse, “subito senza tempo,” reaching the anterior brain “cotale qual'è la cosa visibile in sé”, and apparently subject only to the occasional rectifications of the “estimativa” or discernment (440-41).³⁹

Yet there are alternative possibilities for the ideas of representation “*sanza tempo*” and the vision of something as precisely “*verace*.” Dante introduces his discussion of vision in this section (in 3.9.6) by stating that only color and light are properly visible, as Aristotle states in the second book of *De Anima*.⁴⁰ This means that

³⁷ “The visual spirit, which passes from the pupil to the front part of the brain where the principal source of the sensitive power resides, instantaneously reproduces the form, without any lapse of time, and thus we see.”

³⁸ “And so for vision to be true (that is to say, to be able to see a thing precisely as it is in itself), the medium through which the form reaches the eye must be colorless, and so too the water of the eye; otherwise the visible form would be tinged with the color of the medium as well as that of the pupil.”

³⁹ The “*estimativa*” refers to *Par.* 26.75, on which more below.

⁴⁰ Gilson states that in fact Aristotle “argues that it is only colour which sets the transparent medium in motion and become the direct object of vision,” and that Dante had absorbed Averroës’ idea of

characteristics of an image other than light and color (such as shape, size, number, movement, etc.) are perceived not through vision but through the other senses. Patrick Boyde notes the Aristotelian idea that light has no contrary – darkness is simply an absence of light, which means “there is therefore nothing to resist the communication of light” (64). For this reason, illumination is immediate, whereas other processes of perception are not. Gilson further states in a footnote that “In contrast to the ‘perspectivists,’ Dante does not include details of the optical transmission of images after sensation” (69), which may also account for the sense of immediacy noticed by Scott.⁴¹ As for the stipulation on seeing a thing precisely as it is when the medium through which the form reaches the eye is colorless, Franca Brambilla Agno, in her edition of the *Convivio*, traces this idea as originating again in Aristotle’s second book of *De Anima*, as well as the commentary of Albertus Magnus (208). Thus Dante’s representation of the immediacy and precision of visual perception may in fact be attributed to his beliefs in Aristotelian properties of light and color.

Scott finds a similar contrast between the role of species and a direct sort of cognition in representations of *Purgatorio* 18 and *Paradiso* 26. We find the former passage in the context of the pilgrim’s request for Vergil to define love. Vergil begins by saying that the soul is created ready to love and to move toward whatever pleases it, and then explains how the soul recognizes the pleasing thing: “Vostra apprensiva da esser verace / tragge intenzione, e dentro a voi la spiega, / sì che

light as inherently visible through the commentaries of Albert and Aquinas who followed Averroës on this point (59-61).

⁴¹ On the perspectivists, Tachau states “The ‘perspectivists’ or practitioners of *perspectiva* (the science of optics) included in the thirteenth century Roger Bacon, John Pecham, and Witelo, all of whom were indebted to Alhazen” (3). Gilson writes that the perspectivists formulated theories of optics “using the geometric principles of *perspectiva* to analyse all physical phenomena” and they conceived of optics as the primary natural science, in opposition to the Aristotelian commentaries of Avveroes, Albert, and Aquinas where one finds “optics as a *scientia media*, a composite science which is more concerned with the physical than the mathematical” (47-48).

l'animo ad essa volger face" (22-24).⁴² Scott argues, correctly, that Vergil implies the role of species in cognition when he names the apprehensive power of the soul as drawing an "intenzione" from a real object. According to Pasnau, Aquinas believed that species had intentional existence (65), which accounts for Dante's use of the term.⁴³ Mandelbaum's translation of "intenzione" as "image" suggests a species but also reflects the ambiguity in philosophy about what such an "intenzione" might be. In contrast, Scott believes that Dante once again implies cognitive immediacy in *Paradiso* 26. Here Dante pilgrim, upon responding successfully in his examination on love, regains his eyesight. The poet describes this restoration by means of a simile representing the confusion of being awakened by a bright light:

E come a lume acuto si disonna
per lo spirto visivo che ricorre
a lo splendor che va di gonna in gonna,
e lo svegliato ciò che vede aborre,
sì nescia è la sùbita vigilia
fin che la stimativa non soccorre;
così de li occhi miei ogne quisquilia

⁴² "Your apprehension draws an image from / a real object and expands upon / that object until the soul has turned toward it."

⁴³ The commentary tradition overwhelmingly confirms that Dante's use of "intenzione" does indeed refer to species. Benvenuto da Imola (1375-80) first implies the process of cognition, with numerous others following with explanations. Singleton and Chiavacci Leonardi link this passage to the one discussed above in *Convivio* 3.9.7. Nicola Fosca (2003-2006), however, distinguishes between "intenzioni" and sensible forms, i.e. species: "Le 'intenzioni' dell'oggetto (cfr. Conv. III.ix.7), recepite dall'esterno, non coincidono a rigore con le "immagini" (o forme sensibili) depositate nella "fantasia", poiché consistono sì in quelle immagini, ma in quanto stimate o "buone" o "cattive" ed in tale veste conservate (in modo più accurato) nella memoria" [The "intentions" of the object, received from the outside, do not coincide exactly with the "images," (or sensible forms) deposited in the "fantasy," since they consist in those images but insofar as they are judged "good" or "bad" and in such guise conserved (in a more accurate way) in the memory]. Gilson states that "the word *intentio*, which Arabo-Latin translators used to render the Arabic *ma'na*, is one of the most problematic in scholastic vocabulary. Both the Arabic and Latin terms have a number of meanings which vary according to specific usage in technical contexts" (62). He goes on to exemplify various meanings, acknowledging in the work of Avicenna the meaning to which Fosca refers, but claiming that in the case of *Purg.* 18.22-24 we find a different sense, i.e. "the notion of a 'first intention' as a replica of a sense object, which, as a potential *species cognoscibilis*, permits one to know this object" (63).

fugò Beatrice col raggio d'i suoi,
che rifulgea da più di mille milia (70-78).⁴⁴

As in *Convivio* 3.9.9, we find the “spirito visivo,” here a personified visual spirit that runs to meet the light’s brightness. Sapegno (as well as other commentators) notes that Dante uses the verb “correre” in *Convivio* 2.9.5 where he refers to the “nerve along which the visual spirit runs” (“1 nervo per lo quale corre lo spirito visivo”). The immediacy and directness of the visual process in *Par.* 26 may therefore be accounted for as it is in the *Convivio*.

Instead, Boyde finds remarkable in these passages Dante’s emphasis on the active role of the percipient in the visual process (72). We note that in the *Convivio*, the active subject in 3.9.7 is the “cose visibili” the visible things whose forms enter the eye, while in 3.9.9, the active agent is “lo spirito visivo,” the visual spirit that reproduces the form. Boyde remarks that it is significant that Dante “shifts the emphasis away from the role of the external agent to that of the percipient” (72). Likewise, Boyde points out that in *Par.* 26 Dante attributes the act of waking to the “spirito visivo” rather than the light, emphasizing once again the active percipient in this cognitive process.⁴⁵ Might Dante’s emphasis reflect the growing interest in the active role of the percipient in Olivi’s theory (and later theories) of cognition? Unfortunately Boyde provides no philosophical context for his comments. Rather,

⁴⁴ “And just as a sharp light will startle us / from sleep because the spirit of eyesight / races to meet the brightness that proceeds / from layer to layer in the eye, and he / who wakens is confused by what he sees, / awaking suddenly, and knows no thing / until his judgment helps him; even so / did Beatrice dispel, with her eyes’ rays, / which shone more than a thousand miles, the chaff / from my eyes.”

⁴⁵ Boyde states “Even in this internal phase, and even with regard to the events that take place between the eye and the brain, Dante gives due prominence to the external cause. But the simile is so worded that the action of waking is attributed to the ‘spirito visivo’ rather than to the light; and the following *terzina* serves to underline the importance of the percipient himself and of the internal organs” (75). Also of interest is Boyde’s statement that while Dante was interested in what and how we see, “he was even more keenly interested in why we sometimes fail to see, or why the apprehended image does not correspond in colour, shape or size to the *corpus coloratum* from which it derives” (75).

he suggests that Dante poet wishes to link the percipient's active role in the representation of forms to the artist's process of representing nature (72).⁴⁶

In his more philosophically rigorous study, Simon Gilson traces the notion of "visual spirits" to a medical tradition of optics established by Galen (c. 130-201 A.D.), who believed that "the nerves that led from the brain were filled with a luminous and highly active spirit (*pneuma psychikon*) which flowed into the crystalline humour of each eye"(19). This idea reached Dante through the Arabic optician and physicist Alhazen (965-1039), who synthesized geometrical, physical, and medical traditions into a coherent theory of vision (26).⁴⁷ Gilson acknowledges Dante's use of the Galenic notion of visual spirits but never indicates that such use represents particular affirmation or departure from standard optical theories (51, 68), nor does he comment at all on Boyde's earlier characterizations. Therefore more precise philosophical implications of Dante's emphasis on the active percipient by means of the "spirito visivo" await further research.

The final passage regarding species that Scott finds relevant is the one quoted above from *Monarchia* 1.3.9. First, it should be stated that this passage immediately follows one whose meaning has provoked enormous debate and controversy. The context is Dante's definition of the highest human power as the ability to understand by means of the possible intellect, which he calls the "potentia intellectiva." Dante asserts in 1.3.8, the necessity of a multitude in order for this potentiality to be actualized, just as a multitude of things that may be generated is necessary for prime matter to be fully actualized. Without this, one would claim

⁴⁶ "Dante here implies that the representative or mimetic skills of the painter – or of the poet as painter in words – are instances of the truth that 'art imitates nature' not only in the objects depicted, but in the very process of 're-presentation' itself" (72).

⁴⁷ Alhazen's principal text, according to Gilson, is the *Kitab al-manazir* and was translated into Latin around the end of the twelfth century. The Latin titles were *De aspectibus*, *Optica*, and *Perspectiva* (28).

incorrectly that potentiality exists separately from actualization. Dante then states that Averroës in his commentary on *De anima* agrees with this position. These statements have been understood by some as Dante's claim that the possible intellect can only be actualized by the entire human race, therefore positing a single intellect for all humankind. I think it has been sufficiently proven that Dante is not in fact making this claim, but I leave aside further details of this controversy, which are not immediately relevant.⁴⁸

As stated above, Dante then states that the intellectual potentiality of man is concerned with, or directs itself toward not only universal forms or species but also particular things: "Potentia etiam intellectiva, de qua loquor, non solum est ad formas universales aut species, sed etiam per quam extensionem ad particulares: unde solet dici quod intellectus speculativus extensione fit practicus, cuius finis est agere atque facere."⁴⁹ Boyde explains that Dante believed in a hierarchical relationship between the speculative and practical intellect: the practical intellect "takes ... 'universal forms' as its *principia* – its 'points of departure' – and it returns step by step towards the concrete world with the intention of working on particular bodies in a particular place and time, either by 'making' or by 'doing' (*faciendo vel agendo*)" (183).⁵⁰ This hierarchy is based on traditional Thomistic thinking,

⁴⁸ For details of this controversy, readers should consult the commentaries of Nardi, pp. 298-303, Richard Kay, pp. 18-23, and Anthony Cassell's *The Monarchia Controversy*, pp. 55-58.

⁴⁹ "Now the intellectual potentiality of which I am speaking is not only concerned with universal ideas or *species*, but also *by a certain extension* with particulars; and so it is often said that the theoretical intellect by extension becomes practical, its goal then being doing and making."

⁵⁰ Dante states the relationship between practical and speculative intellect later in 1.14.7 where Shaw writes that he states the "relationship of the monarch to lesser princes is analogous to that of theoretical intellect to practical intellect, inasmuch as each supplies the general (universal) principle which is applied to particular circumstances and then acted on": Dante writes "...intellectus practicus ad conclusionem operativam recipit maiorem propositionem ab intellectu speculativo, et sub illa particularem, que proprie sua est, assumit et particulariter ad operationem concludit" [the practical intellect, in order to proceed to action, receives the minor premises from the theoretical intellect, and then derives the minor premises appropriate to its own particular case, and then proceeds to the action in question] (38-39).

according to which the intellect could know particulars only indirectly, by apprehending a universal form, which it could know directly.⁵¹

Scott takes issue with Dante's use of "per quendam extensionem," arguing that it suggests a direct knowledge of particulars:

The possible intellect is thus directed not only towards the universals but also *by a certain extension* to particulars and singulars. Is the vague "per quendam extensionem" – where one might have expected "per reflexionem" – intended to sum up the Thomistic view according to which the intellect in its "conversion" to the phantasms obtains an indirect, reflexive knowledge of the particular? Since no such corroboration can be found in Dante's works, it seems more likely that, whether consciously or not, he is reflecting the changed climate of contemporary thought. He passes almost unwittingly from the speculative to the pragmatic intellect, from its subjective to its objective operations, from the universal to the particular, with a precipitancy observable in other thinkers of his time.

Regarding Dante's use of "extensionem," Nardi, in the context of glossing 1.4.1, where Dante appears to reaffirm the hierarchy,⁵² states that there was indeed debate about the meaning of this word. For Aristotelians, the word signified the speculative and practical intellects as being two distinct moments of a single intellectual potentiality, which is directed in the first moment to the discovery of what is true (speculative intellect) and in the second moment to the desired goal by means of action (practical intellect). However, Nardi reports that others, such as John of Jandun, claimed that the speculative and practical were in fact two different

⁵¹ According to both Richard Kay (22) and Nardi (301), however, Dante's statement that the speculative intellect is made practical ("unde solet dici quod intellectus speculativus extensione fit practicus") is based on a mistranslation of Aristotle.

⁵² "Satis igitur declaratum est quod proprium opus humani generis totaliter accepti est actuare semper totam potentiam intellectus possibilis, per prius ad speculandum et secundario propter hoc ad operandum per suam extensionem" [Now it has been sufficiently explained that the activity proper to mankind considered as a whole is constantly to actualise the full intellectual potential of humanity, primarily through thought and secondarily through action (as a function and extension of thought)].

potentialities.⁵³ This latter meaning may be what Scott has in mind when he suggests that Dante, while not necessarily aware of changes that philosophers proposed in their theories of cognition (Scott wrote in 1969 before Olivi's contribution had been recognized), "appears nevertheless to share their view, adumbrating even that of the Ockhamists, that the intellect somehow knows intuitively what is sensibly apprehended, and that, in short, the individual is intelligible" (443).⁵⁴

In analyzing this evidence, it is clear that more work remains in order to determine the extent to which Dante's representations may indeed adumbrate new theories of cognition.⁵⁵ My sense of the passages above from Dante's texts is that on the one hand, they do support the Aristotelian role of species in cognition as well as the hierarchical relationship between the speculative and practical intellects, and Gilson signals nothing unusual in Dante's use of the "spirito visivo." On the other hand, I have tried to show that other scholars confirm in these passages problems that warrant further investigation. This is especially true given that Gilson, in arguing that Dante did not follow the "perspectivists" but rather more general sources (i.e. commentaries on Aristotle and possibly encyclopedias), never

⁵³ Nardi's full gloss: "L'espressione è usata con particolare significato dagli aristotelici che dell'intelletto speculativo e di quello pratico fanno due momenti di una sola potenza conoscitiva rivolta, nel primo momento, alla scoperta del vero, e nel secondo momento al fine che si vuol raggiungere con l'operare, cioè l'utile e l'onesto. Ma l'averroista Giovanni di Jandun (*De anima*, III, q.35) pretendeva di farne due potenze diverse" (303) [The expression is used with particular significance by Aristotelians who make of the speculative intellect and the practical intellect two moments of a single intellectual potentiality that is directed, in the first moment, to the discovery of what is true, and in the second moment to the goal that one desires to reach through action, that is what is useful and honest. But the Averroist John of Jandun...claimed to make two distinct potentialities of it]. Nardi also cites, in a footnote on page 301, Duns Scotus as having discussed the meaning of "extensionem" in Scotus' *Opera Omnia*, Città del Vaticano, I, 1950, pp. 153, 159-70; XVI, 1960, pp. 46-51.

⁵⁴ Pasnau confirms that Olivi's critique of the species theory indeed concerns what Ockham called intuitive cognition (169).

⁵⁵ In *Perception and Passion in Dante's Comedy*, Boyde does not in fact argue philosophically that Dante's representations of the active role of the "spirito visivo" contradict specific theories. Further, Scott's observations, while perceptive and relevant, are not thoroughly contextualized within Dante's work or within the philosophical tradition upon which Dante drew.

considers whether Dante's representations incorporate ideas of thinkers, such as Olivi, who argued *against* fundamental concepts supported *both* by the "perspectivists" and the more general sources.⁵⁶ We should also note, however, that Scott does not claim that Dante consciously did or attempt to incorporate avant-garde theories. Rather, Scott suggests that certain key passages in the Dantean corpus foreshadow later fourteenth-century philosophical thought, but that they do so perhaps unconsciously, and that they are always expressed "in the categories of traditional philosophy." (444). For these reasons the passages explored above merit further attention that is beyond the scope of this present chapter. At this juncture, however, we can say that these preliminary observations invite further investigations on the possible connections between the theories of Olivi and the representations of Dante.

It remains now to explore the epistemological link between Olivi's concerns and the *Commedia's* performance of mind reading, a connection that I locate most strongly in a deeply shared engagement of practical philosophy with a focus on human agency.⁵⁷ Particularly intriguing is the way in which Olivi found urgent epistemological issues at stake in his rejection of the species theory – issues that were especially practical for a Christian's life. I offer a few brief examples. In *quaestio* 74 he argues against species because he worries that one's intellect could

⁵⁶ Thus when Gilson states that Dante, unlike the "perspectivists," omits details of optical transmission of images after sensation (see above), we do not really know whether such an omission represents lack of awareness or a more active rejection of perspectivist theory, or whether it represents incorporation of new ideas. Even if Dante did not incorporate perspectivist theory, he may follow ideas that opposed such theories, or he may simply be working with more general Aristotelian sources, as Gilson argues. Until Olivi's work on cognition is fully investigated as a possible context for Dante's representations of vision and cognition, this question awaits definitive resolution.

⁵⁷ I do not find a strict conceptual relationship between direct vs. visual/specular modes of mind reading and Olivi's idea of direct cognition vs. the more traditional role of species, since mind reading regards abstract knowledge that is obtained supernaturally. Thus while mind reading implies a process of cognition, its complications concern access to non-sensible thoughts, whereas the problems of ordinary human cognition concern how one perceives sensible objects.

not unite with God without first producing a species of God, which he believes to be absurd.⁵⁸ He also believed that if the cognitive powers were proved to be passive, then so too could the human will, which would therefore destroy the idea of free will. Indeed Tachau claims that Olivi was not interested in “natural cognition for its own sake” but for this particular issue. She says “above all else he considered it crucial to support the active nature of the cognitive powers because if they were shown to be passive, so too by extension the will could be demonstrated to be passive in operation: a position Olivi eschewed as endangering the will” (40).⁵⁹ Finally, Pasnau reports that Olivi argued that the species account would allow God to deceive humans, because God might present a species to a human when the object itself does not exist or is absent, but the human would be unaware of this and mistake the species for the thing itself. Pasnau easily rejects this, pointing out that an omnipotent God would be able to deceive humans in the case of any theory of cognition (292). On the one hand, Olivi’s error seems curiously elementary: we would expect a competent philosopher to account in his theories for the fundamental nature of God as commonly understood. Yet the mistake is historically revealing. Olivi’s doubts about the security of human-divine interactions are indeed

⁵⁸ “Quarto, quia secundum hoc intellectus per habitum gloriae Deo unius generaret primo in se quondam speciem Dei, ut postmodum per eam produceret actum videndi. Quod est valde absurdum” (120) [Fourth, because according to this an intellect united to God through a habit of glory would first generate in itself a certain species of God, so that afterwards through that it would produce the act of seeing. This is completely absurd].

⁵⁹ Olivi considers this point when he says “Sextum autem, quod scilicet actus cognitivus efficiatur ab ipsa potentia tanquam a vi activa, probatur. Primo, eisdem rationibus quibus probatur quod voluntas est potentia activa. Nam et principales rationes, quibus philosophantes conantur probare potentias cognitivas non esse activas sed passivas, non minus probant hoc de voluntate. Et tamen ex hoc sequitur destructio libertatis ac per consequens et omnis boni moralis, sicut satis in sua materia est probatum” (124) [The sixth thesis – namely that a cognitive act is brought about by the power itself as by an active force – is proved: First, through the same arguments by which it is proved that the will is an active power. For the principal arguments by which philosophers try to prove that cognitive powers are passive and not active prove this no less in the case of the will. But from this follows the destruction of freedom and consequently also of every moral good, as has been proved enough in its proper context].

remarkable evidence of the metaphysical and practical urgency that he attached to theories of cognition and to his own understanding therein. To qualify God's omnipotence suggests a changing conception of human and divine nature, in which the possibility of human agency is elevated while God's potential powers to deceive are considered to be *dependent* upon a particular human theory. Such an account implies that God's powers are not absolute, but contingent upon human understanding and agency.

Scott likewise emphasizes Dante's interest in practical philosophy when he speaks of Dante's "habit of cultivating philosophy less for itself than for its contributions to the cause of temporal human happiness," by which he "marks an important transition to the practical ethics and politics of the late Middle Ages" (443-44).⁶⁰ Dante indeed shares Olivi's practical concerns as well as emphasis on human agency when, in *Paradiso* 4, the pilgrim perceives a contradiction in Piccarda's words about Costanza's will. In canto 3, Piccarda had said that although Costanza was forced to leave the convent against her will, she remained inwardly steadfast: "non fu dal vel del cor già mai disciolta" (117).⁶¹ Yet Beatrice, at 4.73-84, says that if one gives into force, as did Piccarda and Costanza (rather than return to the convent), merit is diminished and results in a lower degree of blessedness. Consequently Dante questions Piccarda's assertion and, implicitly, Beatrice's promise at 3.32 on the truthfulness of heavenly souls.⁶² Beatrice introduces the pilgrim's question as follows:

⁶⁰ Scott, writing in 1969, also anticipated Mazzotta's point in 1979 regarding Dante's rejection of abstract philosophy for its own sake. See the Introduction for discussion of Mazzotta.

⁶¹ "she never betrayed her heart's veil."

⁶² At 3.31-33 Beatrice encourages the pilgrim to speak with the blessed souls, whose word can be trusted: "Però parla con esse e odi e credi; / ché la verace luce che le appaga / da sé non lascia lor torcer li piedi»" [Thus, speak and listen; trust what they will say: / the truthful light in which they find their peace / will not allow their steps to turn astray].

Ma or ti s'attraversa un altro passo
 dinanzi a li occhi, tal che per te stesso
 non usciresti: pria saresti lasso.
 Io t'ho per certo ne la mente messo
 ch'alma beata non poria mentire,
 però ch'è sempre al primo vero appresso;
 e poi potesti da Piccarda udire
 che l'affezion del vel Costanza tenne;
 sì ch'ella par qui meco contradire (*Par.* 4.91-99).⁶³

That Beatrice discerns this doubt telepathically enacts yet another moment of ostensibly perfect knowledge implicated in anxiety that is markedly epistemological: Beatrice's reference to the honesty of souls implies that Dante questions not simply the logic of God's justice but how we understand and practice justice within human communities.

This intense focus on the practical agency of the individual underlies both Olivi's doubts in his theories of cognition and the uncertainties of mind reading in the *Commedia*. This focus, I believe, demonstrates a shifting of the philosophical and historical climate in which Dante wrote and helps to orient the complexity of the telepathy *topos*. For attention to Olivi's work allows us to see that mind reading participates not only in prior philosophical and narrative histories; the *Commedia*'s telepathy shares and perhaps anticipates epistemological concerns that were at the forefront of fourteenth-century philosophy.⁶⁴

⁶³ “But now another obstacle obstructs / your sight; you cannot overcome it by / yourself – it is too wearying to try. / I've set it in your mind as something certain / that souls in blessedness can never lie, / since they are always near the Primal Truth. / But from Piccarda you were also able / to hear how Constance kept her love of the veil: / and here Piccarda seems to contradict me.”

⁶⁴ Scott states “...there is impropriety in the historian's habit of casting Dante's thought into the ideological moulds of the mid-thirteenth century. His theory of knowledge and his artistic practice alike rather illustrate that critical phase in the transformation of late medieval sensibility, when, especially during the first decades of the fourteenth, individuality – of created things or reflecting minds – is acknowledged to be immediately intelligible and expressible. If, as in the final cantos of the *Commedia*, the individual intellect still surrenders wholly to the mysteries of divine grace, and comes to rest in the ultimate Wisdom like some wild thing in its den, its apotheosis is at least incipient, and its indestructibility as an artistic value assured” (446). See also the very engaging work on Dante's angelology by Alessandro Raffi, who argues that Dante's thesis in *Convivio* 4 for the superiority of man over angels in certain respects defines what Raffi calls a radical anthropological humanism (121).

The concern with human agency and practical epistemology in *Paradiso* 4 is necessarily social; Dante's doubt stems from and is partially about speech exchanged in a community. This social context suggests another contemporary historical lens through which we may view the poem's mind reading. Telepathy, while pretending to transcend the social conventions driving the norms of human speech, in fact performs profound anxiety concerning many such conventions and histories, including aspects of Dante's personal history. The next chapter demonstrates how we may reveal these astonishing performances, and the histories they imply, by thinking of mind reading as a speech act.

Chapter 5

Mind Reading as Speech Act:

Social Context as History in the *Commedia*

The *Commedia* quietly yet insistently declares the historicity of signs as the crux of their ungovernable power to make reality. We can see this in *Purgatorio* 21 when the pilgrim, Vergil, and Statius communicate primarily through signs of the body. Statius initiates a corporeal lexicon in declaring Vergil's *Aeneid* to be his poetic mother: "de l'Eneida dico, la qual mamma / fummi, e fummi nutrice, poetando: / sanz'essa non fermai peso di dramma" (97-99).¹ Allen Mandelbaum disrupts the corporeal metaphor by changing the grammatical subject of "fermai" to "my work," rendering line 99 as "my work, without it, would not weigh an ounce." But the nuance of the first-person "fermai" shows that Statius figures his writing as the necessary connection between a mother's nourishment and the substantiality of her child's body. His physical emphasis thus creates a fascinating paradox of verbal inspiration figured in terms of a pre-verbal relationship.

The ensuing conversation evolves the logic of the maternal metaphor precisely through an exchange of verbal and non-verbal signs. Statius says he would gladly purge his sins for another year if he could have lived in the time of Vergil, prompting the latter's response:

Volser Virgilio a me queste parole
con viso che, tacendo, disse 'Taci';
ma non può tutto la virtù che vuole;
ché riso e pianto son tanto seguaci
a la passion di che ciascun si spicca,
che men seguon voler ne' più veraci.
Io pur sorrisi come l'uom ch'ammicca;

¹ "I speak of the *Aeneid*; when I wrote / verse, it was mother to me, it was nurse; / without it I would not weigh an ounce."

per che l'ombra si tacque, e riguardommi
 ne li occhi ove 'l semblante più si ficca;
 e «Se tanto labore in bene assommi»,
 disse, «perché la tua faccia testeso
 un lampeggiar di riso dimostrommi?».
 Or son io d'una parte e d'altra preso:
 l'una mi fa tacer, l'altra scongiura
 ch'io dica; ond' io sospiro, e sono inteso
 dal mio maestro, e «Non aver paura»,
 mi dice, «di parlar; ma parla e digli
 quel ch'e' dimanda con cotanta cura» (*Purg.* 21.103-20).²

Here Dante elaborates with great intensity the body's potential to signify. Through the repetition of "tacendo...Taci" in line 104, the poet cleverly collapses Vergil's linguistic form and content to privilege a nonverbal sign; Vergil's face silently commands Dante's silence. The poet conflates facial signs in line 106 as Dante pilgrim smiles like a man "ch'ammicca," which indicates signaling not with the lips but with the eyes. In response Statius falls silent and gazes into the pilgrim's eyes, ove 'l semblante più si ficca," finally questioning the pilgrim's "riso." The pilgrim is torn between Vergil's command to refrain and his own desire to speak, prompting his sigh, which his guide interprets correctly, finally granting permission for words. When the pilgrim finally names his guide, Statius responds in line 130 by trying to embrace the bodiless Vergil. These dynamic physical exchanges infuse the entire episode with a riveting narrative force that makes the spoken dialogue pale in comparison.

² "These words made Virgil turn to me, / with a face that, through silence, said "Be silent' / but the power that wills cannot do all / for smiles and tears are such close followers / on the emotion from which each springs / that in the most truthful they least follow the will. / I only smiled like a man whose eyes signal; / at this the shade was silent, and he stared / where sentiment is clearest – at my eyes - / and said: 'So may your trying labor end / successfully, do tell me why – just now – your face showed me the flashing of a smile.' / Now I am held by one side and the other: / one keeps me *silent*, the other conjures me / to speak; therefore I sigh, and I am understood / by my master, and he tells me 'Do not be afraid / to speak, but speak and answer what he has / asked you to tell him with such earnestness.'" I have adopted Singleton's more literal translation of lines 106-8, with italics indicating my changes.

Part of this force comes from the poet's comment in lines 105-8 that signs can slip out of one's control: the power that wills cannot do all, and in fact the tears and smiles that follow passion so faithfully are even more likely to disobey the will and burst forth in those who are honest. Dante's involuntary smile refuses Vergil's command, and his own will, to remain silent. Through his smile, he insists on communicating, and what he communicates is his awareness of irony: the Vergil for whom Statius still longs is in fact present. But in signaling Vergil's presence, Dante's smile also indicates various histories – the shared history of Dante's and Vergil's journey through hell and purgatory and the shared love and knowledge of Vergil as prophetic sign and indeed, as poet of history. Refusing Vergil's command, the smile summons Vergil's history in a way that Dante knows is beyond his control.

Even more, the force of body language in this wonderful passage illustrates vividly the social extent of signs. Because the gestures of body language are easily discernible as actions, they allow us to see what I believe Dante knew to be true of all signs – that both verbal and non-verbal signs not only describe but perform actions. Vergil's silent face commands Dante's silence, Dante's smile prompts Statius' silence and invites his question, which leads to Dante's sigh declaring his dilemma, and so on.

Purg. 21 thus shows that signs as originating in the body are inextricably historical, potentially involuntary, and capable of effecting social change. As such, the episode encapsulates what I will argue in this concluding chapter: like the rich exchange of signs among the three poets, mind reading episodes may be read as speech acts that invoke conventions and histories, sometimes in ways that may be involuntary on the part of Dante poet. The benefits of this critical approach are several: by thinking of telepathic episodes as speech acts we can deepen the

conclusions of previous chapters by showing more forcefully and more fully what the language of mind reading does, which is often at odds with what it says it is doing at the narrative level. Speech-act theory will further allow us to unravel Dante's masterful poetics in certain episodes that have otherwise remained puzzling. In other cases this approach affords a great deal of insight into the social and historical contexts to which mind reading episodes point, in particular the social conventions and historical contingencies of speech. I begin with the necessary theoretical background on speech-act theory itself.

Speech-act theory was first defined by J.L. Austin in a series of lectures in the early 1960s, in the first of which he distinguishes "constatives," i.e. statements that merely describe or report, from "utterances" that carry out an action. Calling these utterances "performatives," he offered examples that include stating "I do" in a marriage ceremony, the naming of a ship, a verbal bet, and the written act of bequeathing property (5). Although the title "speech-act theory" implies words, gestures and other nonverbal signs may also function as speech acts.³ Austin categorized speech acts threefold, as "locution," which refers to the sense and reference of an utterance, "roughly equivalent to 'meaning' in the traditional sense," "illocution," as an utterance bearing conventional force, such as "informing, ordering, warning, undertaking," and "perlocution," defined as "what we bring about or achieve *by* saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading" (108). Most of the lectures focus on the social context of illocution as essential for constructing performative utterances.

In his 1990 monograph *Speech Acts and Literary Theory*, Sandy Petrey advances the work that Austin began, drawing out and in some cases challenging the

³ Mitchell Green confirms this as well in his article "Speech Acts" posted online in the *SEP*. The website contains a wealth of useful information on speech-act theory.

implications of Austinian definitions. Especially important is Petrey's claim that the emphasis on social context is what differentiates speech-act theory from other linguistic schools. Whereas other philosophies focus on the formal structure of language, i.e. the locution itself, speech-act theory focuses on the illocution, which is "rather language's productive force, which depends entirely on where and when it's used. Other linguistic schools address the structure of language in itself; speech-act theory examines the power of language in communities" (2).⁴ To understand what words do, one must necessarily look at both the words and their users. Social context entirely determines meaning: "Insults, suggestions, threats, demands, and other performatives are defined by the community in which the action is accomplished, not by some universal and eternal idea of what the action is" (15). Hence proclaiming in public three times "I divorce you" has a different meaning and effect depending on the time and place in which it is uttered (10). In the example of the will, the successful act of bequeathing property depends on the legal and social context in which the written will is executed, not the one in which it is written (78).

The emphasis on contextual rather than universal meaning leads Petrey to argue that distinguishing constative from performative utterances is far more

⁴ Petrey focuses in chapters 8 and 9 on the similarities and differences between speech-act theory and deconstruction: "The encounter between speech-act theory and deconstruction is of such interest because their disagreements over *how* language performs take off from the same constant awareness *that* it performs" (133). In explaining the differences in performance, he writes "The two interpretive methods share the determination to erase the boundary lines between literary and non-literary utterance, but the erasures have different motivations. Deconstruction foregrounds the *locutionary perplexities* common to literary and non-literary utterances, speech-act theory their common *illocutionary activity*. One method concentrates on the things language does by virtue of its nature, the other on the things it does by virtue of its conventional context (164). And "For Austin, the conventions that matter – those that allow speech to act – are always socially specific and historically constituted. For Derrida, the conventions that matter apply to the units of every signifying form and thus inhere in the nature of the mark. Since conventions inherent in the mark are obviously trans-historical and universal, Derrida's conventions are independent of context whereas Austin's are coterminous with it" (138-39). This is why "Derrida attributes language's transformation to its triumphant *transcendence of context* whereas Austin attributes them to its inevitable *articulation with context*" (132).

difficult than Austin claims in his first lecture, though Petrey also believes that Austin came to recognize this problem in the course of subsequent lectures (26). An utterance that appears to be merely descriptive “has in many cases overpowering impact on the situation in which it’s made” (27). One of Petrey’s many examples is the seemingly innocuous “the cat is on the mat” exemplified variously by Austin throughout the lectures. The meaning of this statement depends on the location of the cat but more importantly on the relationship between speaker and listener. The statement can warn someone who is about to step on the cat, or it can reassure someone who has lost sight of the cat, or it can delight a child who is learning to rhyme. In any case, it possesses performative force by nature of the context in which it is uttered, and according to the Austinian perspective of language, context is always present (30). Petrey goes beyond simply emphasizing context to make the deeper point that communal performance of language determines what is perceived to be true even in the face of contradictory facts. As evidence he enlists the fable of the emperor’s new clothes. In this story “the straight facts aren’t operative” because the emperor’s referential status remains the same throughout: he lacks clothing both before the child declares his nakedness as well as after (38). It is the child’s (apparently constative) utterance that performs communal understanding of the emperor.

So long as his subjects refuse to say that the Emperor is naked for fear of appearing to lack the virtue required to see his clothes, the referential fact of his nudity is collectively non-existent. Life goes on as if the Emperor were majestically attired; all the conventions of his reign are observed and respected. His clothes are *performed* by a community willing to speak and act as if he were actually wearing them. Moreover, when the little child says “But he has nothing on!” and the citizenry uproariously concurs, the fable doesn’t simply represent a population’s progress from illusion to reality.

It shows the Emperor's nudity being *performed* just like his clothes, by utterance of a statement communally affirmed as the truth (37-38).

This fictional example leads us to Petrey's crucial advancement of speech-act theory in literary criticism, a use of the theory that Austin had unfortunately rejected. The latter excluded literary and artistic contexts as valid environments in which speech acts operate, calling language in such contexts "*parasitic* upon its normal use" (22). He somehow did not consider literary language to belong to what he called the ordinary use of language. On the one hand, the wrongness of this view seems too obvious to merit correction. Yet Austin's proscription has been taken seriously in criticism,⁵ and Petrey's argument for the status of literary language is eloquent and important not least for how he shows the extent to which Austin himself relies on literary examples and techniques throughout the lectures.⁶ Petrey agrees with Austin on the illegitimacy of trying to separate language from its users, rightly concluding that the only way to oppose speech acts and texts is to separate texts from readers, an action that consistent Austinian theory would reject (51). In this way Petrey ignores the letter but respects the spirit of Austin's writing (53). That spirit, he claims, "highlights the multiple interactions between language and society, interactions that contest formalist concepts of the literary text as strongly as formalist concepts of the linguistic utterance" (53). Just as social processes of non-

⁵ In his 1993 study of Romanesque portal inscriptions, Calvin Kendall argues for reading the inscriptions as performative utterances, but he takes seriously Austin's proscription of literary language as speech acts and therefore gets bogged down in looking for ways that inscriptions might have performative power rather than exploring more fully the nature of the performances the portals imply as communal artifact bearing deeply conventional force. Because of this limitation, he is able to conclude only that the messages of the portals might have been "successfully effected" if personal transformation took place in the worshipers passing through (124). Given that the Latin messages of portals, albeit difficult to see and read, were likely known to communities through guides and translators, we can imagine all sorts of other ways that communities performed their messages, but we can only do so if we fully accept their status as speech acts. Kendall mentions the *Commedia*'s gates of hell to make the point that Dante had thoroughly absorbed the architectural convention of portal inscriptions, but again, Kendall does not and cannot interpret the performative force of the gates because he adheres to Austin's theoretical limitations.

⁶ I leave aside this engaging but (for our purposes) not essential point covered by Petrey in chapter 3.

literary language lead us to enact certain performatives, literature operates in the context of different social conventions that invite us to interpret. Literature bears illocutionary force even if that force is dramatically different from that of other speech acts. We see collective enactment of a text in the especially dramatic case of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, in which the novel as speech act was directly connected to the Ayatollah Khomeini's horrific interpretation of it – his call for Rushdie's death had sufficient collective success to require the author to go into hiding under heavy protection (54). The performative differences between Iranian communities and Western readers show incontestably the force of convention: freedom of expression is in fact a convention of the West, not an essential, universal view of literature: "like all utterances, the literary text becomes what collectivities make of it" (55).

Unlike the example of Rushdie, however, most texts do not enact such dramatic or clearly discernible collective performances. How might we define the social conventions of literary speech acts, specifically in Dante's *Commedia*? I answer this question first by making the case for the appropriateness of speech-act theory for medieval culture, given that according to many (conventional) accounts, its most important linguistic convention rejects categorically the idea of social performance of meaning. The Christian Middle Ages located its origins and significance through the monotheistically-generated Word, which is represented as entirely asocial. An utterance such as "let there be light" is presented as effected by a single God who is by definition outside of community. For this reason, Petrey believes speech-act theory to be irrelevant in the case of divine utterances: "God stands outside those (i.e. human) communities, conventions are radically inapplicable to Him or Her, the norms of social interaction fail to reach heaven. 'Let there be light' and a human sentence that also does what it says have nothing

else in common” (63) and later in chapter 6 he proclaims “Where God is, speech-act theory has nothing to say” (100). This is a curious move for a number of reasons.⁷ First, Petrey argues in chapter 5 for the complete irrelevance of the speaker. It is not the speaker’s presence or intention that matter, but the conventions that enact his or her speech. If God’s pronouncements lack the normal social conventions among human beings necessary for recognizing His words as a valid speech act, one could argue that his words are nonetheless received and enacted entirely according to social convention. “Let there be light” enacts communal performance of belief by millions of Christians and Jews around the world about the origin of the universe and the spiritual significance of light. Yet it is also important to understand that the supposed lack of social context of divine utterances is itself a kind of communally enacted performance. Speech-act theory has much to say about God’s language if we adhere to the Austinian principle that social context is omnipresent.

With this in mind, speech-act theory is in fact highly relevant for medieval Christian texts precisely because of a spiritually-based communal belief in language as contingent. On the one hand, Christians believed that because of original sin, language was corrupted and therefore subject to the processes of human social convention. On the other hand Christians defined their salvation through the Word made flesh. God alone effected the Word made flesh, but it is precisely through the story of Christ’s life that Christians came to understand their communal power to effect the divine meaning of that life. The point of Christ’s presence on earth was precisely to grant humans the freedom to decide the identity and meaning of Christ the man. The compelling drama of Christ’s life is his defeat in death that came to be communally performed as the triumph of his salvation, which in turn performs the

⁷ My argument for the relevance of speech-act theory in Christian conventions of the Word represents a late scholastic perspective based in philosophical categories rather than in philosophical theories on the Word of Scripture.

salvation of all who choose to believe. The Word made flesh refers to the presence of Christ as a social, historical being, and to the idea that the Word's meaning is, in fact, effected communally, through Christ's life, death, and identity as divine that was performed by enough people to eventually establish a conventional belief system. Medieval Christians understood that Christ can only signify socially. It is this understanding that also informed their belief in the power of communities to effect the Eucharist, to proclaim the wafer as the body of Christ and wine as his blood in the act of communion. Indeed, the very word "communion" reflects understanding of the social nature of the word's performance as speech act. Medieval Christians thus possessed a keen sense of communal power to perform the meaning of language. This suggests, however, neither a relativized nor a deeply historicized understanding. Rather, it implies an awareness of the historical contingency of language within the economy of Christian history.

Some of the cultural assumptions about language under which Dante wrote were therefore highly amenable to the socially-driven principles of speech-act theory. Yet the *Commedia* resists mightily any discernible signs of vulnerability to social convention at all. Part of this has to do with the conventions of poetry itself and the way in which Dante manipulates them masterfully. Petrey defines one of the social conventions of poetic texts as a deliberate separation from nonliterary language: "Because the devices traditionally enshrined as poetic are always already social as well, no student of poetry should ignore the conventions that make them work even when part of the work they do is remove themselves from the conventions applying elsewhere" (111). Part of what constitutes the modern "convention of poetic separateness" is the use of language that seems to exist in isolation. Metaphor in particular appears to be autonomous and cut off from reality, but it too is a speech act "very much like stating or commanding...we can no more

see metaphor as autonomous because it cuts itself off from a referent than we can see a command as magic because it moves an army. In both cases, the force is conventionally not internally generated” (111). The *Commedia* projects separateness through its poetic form, but also in the narrative, which represents a journey through the afterlife – a place that, even as it represents the fulfillment of earthly history, is also presented as external to human social conventions. Further, we have given attention to how Dante’s rhetoric expertly persuades readers to disengage the meaning of his words from their action: whereas speech-act theory asks that we always distinguish between what language states and what it does, the *Commedia* is especially adept at commanding readers to do exactly the opposite, to believe what it says and ignore what it does. In all these ways the *Commedia* ingeniously capitalizes on the social convention of separateness operative in poetry itself.

As a narrative *topos* and a poetic strategy, mind reading emerges as one of Dante’s specific techniques of social resistance: it represents communication as silent and thus appears to resist the conventions of language. As a communicative feature of an otherworldly setting, it claims to exist outside of the social conventions operative in earthly history. Speech-act theory therefore offers incisive tools for historicizing this feature in a poem that works hard to resist such critical attempts. These tools ask that we take account of the operative conventions, including assumptions, historical background, social norms, and so on, that make possible a particular utterance. For if we emphasize language and texts as social instruments by nature, we must also consider the societies from which they come and in which they circulate. These requirements present a particular challenge for scholars of pre-modern texts, given the massive cultural and temporal gaps between the productive environments of authors and the performative environments of readers.

In previous chapters I have approached this task by locating narrative and philosophical contexts and conventions in order to construct some of the histories that make possible the *Commedia's* epistemologically fraught performance of mind reading. These findings provide a foundation for the methodology of this chapter, where I return to Dante's text with the added perspective of speech-act theory to read telepathic episodes through a sharper historical lens. This method may work in something of a reverse pattern from what one might expect; rather than trace further histories outside of the poem in order to identify the social conventions and assumptions under which Dante wrote, I use the tools of reading language as performative utterance to discover internally historical evidence that Dante's performance of mind reading implies. Reading the episodes as speech acts, as language that carries out action, in fact brings to light important clues from telepathic vocabulary and narrative contexts – clues that deepen the findings in previous chapters but also suggest surprising new points of contact.

If we ask in terms of speech-act theory what mind reading does, we can see in new ways that it performs urgent concern with histories and social conventions of all sorts. It does so by directing readers how to read, by declaring the historical contingencies of various discourses, by privileging the body's power to authorize language, by revealing the conventional role of Christian and political belief in Dante's relationship with Vergil, by pronouncing over and over the myriad social conventions of speech itself, and by suggesting the psychosocial consequences of Dante's exile from his native city. As this list suggests, one of the new and unexpected findings in this chapter is Dante's obsession with the social norms of speech, an obsession that I trace partly to his personal history of social and political exile. It is important to include Dante's personal history in order to understand the depth of the *Commedia's* performance of epistemological uncertainty because the

personal crisis that Dante lived also makes possible the poem's philosophical and linguistic acts in ways that have not been explored. Along with the histories explored in previous chapters, the events of Dante's life help us both to historicize his poetic performance and to grasp the depth of that history. For I believe that in the episode of *Purg.* 21 with which I began this chapter, as well as in mind reading passages, we see an epistemological focus on the historicity of language that is far richer and more complex than what either Christian history or the Aristotelian/Neoplatonic framework circumscribe.

As explained in the introduction, in attempting to historicize aspects of the poem in this way, I offer readings that resist Dante's specific strategies of historical transcendence. This chapter thus aims to contribute to the efforts begun by Barolini and others such as Albert Ascoli. In his 1997 study of Dante's use of palinode, Ascoli notes that many scholars have described palinodic moments in Dante's work precisely in the terms that those works construct as ideal to the author's self-construction (25). Ascoli, however, sees Dante's use of palinode as a rhetorical device rather than as a "true expression of Dante's experience," and he examines "the question of how an unfolding set of historical events and circumstances made Dante and his representations possible in the first place – how history implies, subsumes, and as it were, transcends the Dantean oeuvre, just as much as the other way around" (26). I cannot here do full justice to Ascoli's argument, but among his many compelling points is that Dante changes the definition of nobility from the *Convivio* to *Monarchia* based on the conceptual exigencies of each treatise, in other words, for "strategic, that is, for contingent, rhetorical, and historical, reasons" (32). Further, he argues that Dante fails to mention Frederick II in the *Monarchia* because (if we accept a later dating of the text) Frederick's corruption, warfare, faithlessness, i.e. his "historical existence, his empirical occupancy of the imperial throne,

constitutes a virtual point-by-point refutation of Dante's logical arguments in *Monarchia*" (35). By contrast, Dante poet is able to confront Frederick's corruption in the *Commedia* precisely because the poet presents his perspective as above history, directly informed by the divine will (38).

Similarly, I interpret mind reading episodes not only in terms of which historical contexts the episodes invoke and transform but in terms of how those histories make possible the poem, in particular how they, as socially-driven forces, compete with the astonishingly successful social resistance enacted by the poem in general and mind reading in particular. Therefore my reading, while attempting to respect the poem's cultural context, is by necessity not exclusively concerned with what Dante poet may have intended; I am interested not only in passages like *Purg* 21 where Dante acknowledges that signs indicate history and can slip out of one's control, but also in passages that demonstrate this although the poet may not have intended to do so. By attempting to historicize from outside the economy of the poem's parameters, I hope to model a use of speech-act theory in literary criticism for texts whose cultures (and social conventions enacting language) seem to be hopelessly lost to our understanding.

In returning to the *Commedia*, I begin by reevaluating some of the passages examined previously in order to show first that when we think of mind-reading episodes as speech acts, we can see the extent to which they draw attention to social context. These first few examples will show the general relevance of this theory to the *Commedia*'s telepathic performances: while sometimes hinting at specific histories, the passages mostly point to the importance of social and historical context. That is, they aim to show *that* mind-reading episodes emphasize social context without yet highlighting specific conventions and histories therein. Thus

while they function as something of a meta-commentary, they also provide a basis for understanding subsequent more specific examples.

In chapter 1 I presented as an example of rhetorical ambiguity the episode of *Paradiso* 13 in which Aquinas anticipates Dante's objection regarding Solomon's excellence in relation to Adam and Christ.⁸ Once Aquinas affirms that Adam and Christ indeed represented the summit of human perfection, he introduces Dante's question as follows: "Or s'i' non procedesse avanti piùe, / `Dunque, come costui fu senza pare?' / comincerebber le parole tue." (88-90).⁹ Does Aquinas claim to read the pilgrim's thoughts, voicing what the pilgrim would say, or does he engage characteristically scholastic rhetoric to anticipate what he easily guesses to be the pilgrim's most logical objection? As I argue in chapter 1, the context of telepathy as a conventional mode of celestial communication in which Aquinas participates elsewhere (e.g. at line 37 of the same canto) here complicates his use of the conditional "comincerebber," a word that would otherwise clearly signal the scholastic strategy of anticipation. In this way Aquinas' presence both as mind reader and as scholastic thinker enacts a conflation of philosophical and mystical experience. This conflation implies a particular epistemological value, for through Aquinas' telepathic-mystical intercourse with the pilgrim, the philosopher implicitly values a way of knowing that differs pointedly from the earthly mode in which he so excelled.¹⁰ But as speech act, Aquinas' words go beyond invoking the different discourses of telepathy and scholastic argument in order to imply their epistemological value. His words, which as a potential instance of mind reading

⁸ In this example and the next from *Paradiso* 14 I repeat some of what appears in chapter 1 in order to reorient the reader.

⁹ "Now if I said no more beyond this point, / your words might well begin, 'How is it, then, / with your assertion of his matchless vision?'"

¹⁰ As I explore more fully in chapter one, the key narrative analogue to this hybrid sort of rhetoric is the way that Aquinas validates a different way of knowing in his praise of St. Francis in *Par.* 11 while Bonaventure praises St. Dominic in canto 12.

would strategically resist historicity, are in fact made possible by the collision of two discourses whose identifiable characteristics are necessarily conventional and historical. As speech act, Aquinas' words broadcast the historical contingency of languages.

Also presented as a rhetorical complication in chapter 1 is the opening of *Paradiso* 14 when Beatrice voices Dante's doubt for him, asking Aquinas whether souls will retain their radiance once they are united with their bodies and if so, whether such radiance will harm their vision. The first three verses of her speech are key: "«A costui fa mestieri, e nol vi dice / né con la voce né pensando ancora, / d'un altro vero andare a la radice» (10-12).¹¹ Here Beatrice articulates a question that she says the pilgrim has not yet pronounced or even thought. In *Par.* 15.61-63 we learn from Cacciaguida that souls in heaven know human thoughts even before humans think them, so one could argue that verses 10-12 exemplify foreknowledge in which Beatrice refers to the pilgrim's future thought, as "ancora" implies. Yet verse 10 complicates the issue, for when Beatrice says "A costui fa mestieri," ("this man needs") does she mean that Dante will think this thought, as suggested by "pensando ancora" or that he should, or both?¹² If we give weight to "fa mestieri," the passage privileges Beatrice's authority over Dante's. By selecting his future thought as the next topic of discussion, she guides his reasoning as he learns to recognize what sort of questions he should prefer. If we focus on "pensando ancora" we stress Dante pilgrim's agency in directing the discussion. The tension between these phrases forces the reader to confront the issue of whose thinking directs the questioning at least as much as it represents the unity of shared thought in heaven. But as a speech act, this ambiguous passage insists on a simple but

¹¹ "He does not tell you of it – not with speech / nor in his thoughts as yet – but this man needs / to reach the root of still another truth."

¹² See chapter 1 for discussion of critical responses to this passage.

crucial fact: all communication entails transactions that occur among people, not disembodied souls, an observation that might certainly remain banal in another context but that here emerges as significant because it shows resistance to mind reading as a strategy of transcendence. The episode declares all communication as social and therefore necessarily imperfect, which is to say that Beatrice's words intimate telepathy yet resist telepathic ideals of purity and transcendence of the body.

Indeed, speech-act theory highlights the body's prominence in mind-reading episodes. In chapter 1 we saw how body language makes it difficult to define certain episodes as telepathic. Yet even instances easily recognized as mind reading draw attention to the speaking body. A simple example is the *Paradiso*'s first telepathic reference; after Beatrice discerns Dante's inner commotion we find a physical emphasis on her act of speech: "Ond' ella, che vedea me sì com' io, / a quïetarmi l'animo commosso, / pria ch'io a dimandar, la bocca aprio / e cominciò" (85-88).¹³ More interesting is the opening of *Paradiso* 4 where despite the fact that Beatrice apparently has no need of earthly signs in order to know the pilgrim's doubt, Dante goes out of his way to set up a hierarchy of such signs: he privileges the corporeal sign of his desire and his question as more "caldo assai" than speech: "Io mi tacea, ma 'l mio disir dipinto / m'era nel viso, e 'l dimandar con ello, / più caldo assai che per parlar distinto" (10-12).¹⁴ Some of these episodes go further and actually assert the body's authority to verify mind reading. In *Paradiso* 10 after Beatrice tells Dante to give thanks to God, she is eclipsed by God's light in the pilgrim's mind, and she is said to know this in the following way:

¹³ "And she who saw me as I see myself / to quiet the commotion in my mind, / opened her lips before I could ask / and she began."

¹⁴ "I did not speak, but in my face were seen / longing and questioning, more ardent than / if spoken words had made them evident."

Cor di mortal non fu mai sì digesto
 a divozione e a rendersi a Dio
 con tutto 'l suo gradir cotanto presto,
 come a quelle parole mi fec' io;
 e sì tutto 'l mio amore in lui si mise,
 che Bēatrice eclissò ne l'oblio.
 Non le dispiacque; ma sì se ne rise,
 che lo splendor de li occhi suoi ridenti
 mia mente unita in più cose divise. (*Par.* 10.55-63).¹⁵

Like some of the episodes in the first two canticles, this one also exemplifies questionable signs underlying Dante's belief that mind reading has occurred. For Dante concludes solely from Beatrice's smile her awareness of the displacement. As a speech act, then, this telepathic performance posits body language as proof that mind reading has taken place: it declares that signs of the body possess the constative power to verify a supernatural transaction of knowledge. In this case mind reading points to the historicity of communication by privileging corporeal power.¹⁶

I now turn to passages comprising histories that are more specific, beginning with the *Commedia's* first instance of mind reading in *Inferno* 10 when Vergil answers the pilgrim's questions concerning whether souls in the tombs may be seen: "Però a la dimanda che mi faci / quinc' entro satisfatto sarà tosto, / e al disio ancor

¹⁵ "No mortal heart was ever so disposed / to worship, or so quick to yield itself / to God with all its gratefulness, as I / was when I heard those words, and all my love / was so intent on Him that Beatrice / was then eclipsed within forgetfulness. / But not displeased by this, she smiled *such / that the splendor of her smiling eyes / divided upon many things my mind that had been united.*" Mandelbaum's translation of lines 61-63 depart from the original: "my / rapt mind was split: I watched the sun – and I / watched, too, the splendor of her smiling eyes."

¹⁶ We see this also in *Paradiso* 15 after Cacciaguida describes at length his ability to see Dante pilgrim's thoughts reflected in the divine "specchio" and commands his descendent to voice his question. The pilgrim responds by waiting for Beatrice's permission: "Io mi volsi a Beatrice, e quell' udio / pria ch'io parlassi, e arrisemi un cenno / che fece crescer l'ali al voler mio" (70-72) [I turned to Beatrice, and she heard me / before I spoke; and she smiled to me a sign / that made the wings of my desire grow]. I follow Singleton's more literal translation of line 71. The implication in this passage is that Beatrice's smile indicates her knowledge and approval of Dante's thought. Her body language evidences a telepathic act and authorizes the pilgrim's speech.

che tu mi taci»” (15-18).¹⁷ In chapter 1 I addressed this passage primarily in terms of the history of its critical reception. I emphasized how Dante poet collapses form and content, leading commentators to read in reactionary ways to what I call the moral drama of heresy. Rather than asking why the poet invites us to believe that Vergil knows the pilgrim’s thoughts at a precise moment – not adequately explained by Ciaccio’s prophecy in canto 6 – critics focus on identifying the pilgrim’s thought itself. They do so because Dante poet implicates us in not knowing the truth of the pilgrim’s desire precisely as we encounter the heretics, those who deviated from God’s truth, one consequence of which is their ignorance of the present. As demonstrated in chapter 1, critics thus respond reactively by focusing on the narrative present, “discovering” the pilgrim’s wish by projecting onto the episode information that we learn only after the fact - that the pilgrim does speak with Farinata.

Thinking about this episode as a speech act means there is more to say about it, particularly what Dante poet gains but also what may be unintentional consequences of the language. The critical reception shows well what Vergil’s statement does. His words claim knowledge without demonstrating it, deeply implicating the reader into that claim, making us want to distinguish ourselves desperately from Cavalcanti and Farinata who, like us in this context, lack knowledge of the present. As a speech act, Vergil’s words direct us to read in terms of the episode’s emotional and intellectual provocations rather than in terms of logic. For Dante poet’s self-presentation as *scriba dei*, this represents an enormous gain. Yet epistemologically, this canto is marked as particularly unstable. For *Inferno* 10 introduces supernatural knowledge that is not a sign of grace, in the form

¹⁷ “And so the question you have asked of me / will soon find satisfaction while we’re here, / as will the desire that you do not express to me.”

of Vergil's mind reading but also in the inconsistent knowledge of the damned. For parallel to the problem of Vergil's knowledge, which many scholars attribute to Ciaccio's prophecy, is the fact that Ciaccio himself also knows the present when according to Farinata's reasoning, he should not. When Dante pilgrim hears Cavalcanti's ignorance of the present and Farinata's prophecy, he asks about the souls' inconsistent knowledge:

El par che voi veggiate, se ben odo,
dinanzi quel che 'l tempo seco adduce,
e nel presente tenete altro modo».

«Noi veggiam, come quei c'ha mala luce,
le cose», disse, «che ne son lontano;
cotanto ancor ne splende il sommo duce.
Quando s'appressano o son, tutto è vano
nostro intelletto; e s'altri non ci apporta,
nulla sapem di vostro stato umano.
Però comprender puoi che tutta morta
fia nostra conoscenza da quel punto
che del futuro fia chiusa la porta» (*Inf.* 10.97-108).¹⁸

Yet in canto 6, Ciaccio's prophecy includes statements about the present in line 73 when he says there are two just Florentines to whom nobody listens ("Giusti son due, e non vi sono intesi")¹⁹ and in line 69 when he indicates that the Black Guelphs will return to power "con la forza di tal che testé piaggia." I offer an unpoetic translation of this phrase, with its hard-to-translate word "piaggia," as "with the power of one who now appears to be neutral."²⁰ The crucial "testé" (left out of

¹⁸ "It seems, if I hear right, that you can see / beforehand that which time is carrying, / but *you have a differet way in the present.* / 'We see, like one who has dim light, / those things' he said, 'that are remote from us; / the Highest Lord *still shines on us that much.* / But when events draw near or are, our minds / are useless; were we not informed by others, / we should know nothing of your human state. / So you can understand *that our knowledge* / will die completely at the moment when / the portal of the future has been shut."

¹⁹ "Two men are just, but no one listens to them."

²⁰ In defining this interesting word, Boccaccio stresses the meaning as one who dissembles: "Dicesi appo i fiorentini colui *piaggiare*, il quale mostra di voler quello che egli non vuole, o di che egli non si cura che avvenga" [The Florentines say locally that one *piaggiare* who pretends to want something that he does not want, or that he does not care what happens]. Other scholars such as Francesco Mazzoni (1965-85) define it as simply to remain neutral: "vale 'tenersi in bilico,' destreggiarsi,"

Mandelbaum's translation of "using the power of one who tacks his sails") implies that this individual, who is generally believed to be Boniface VIII, dissembles currently, which means that Ciaccio knows what is happening in the present. In the commentary tradition, the few who mention this inconsistency claim that Ciaccio has learned of present affairs from another soul recently arrived, a possibility allowed for in Farinata's qualifying phrase "e s'altri non ci apporta."²¹ While Farinata's words theoretically allow this, we should note that critics apply it in the absence of any other evidence in the narrative, i.e. there is nothing in the story beyond Farinata's words to suggest that any other soul has reported this information to Ciaccio. The episode is thus another example of critics resolving a narrative problem by treating Dante's fictional terms as if they were operative in a nonfictional story.

The issue with Ciaccio concerns knowledge of the present, but as Sapegno points out there are other passages in the *Inferno* that raise questions about the

insomma 'non prender posizione,' in una manifesta riassunzione dell'immagine dei due piatti di bilancia ('questa caggia...l'altra sormonti) contenuta nella terzina" [it means 'to hold in balance,' 'proceed carefully,' in sum 'to not take a position,' in a clear invocation of the image of two plates of the balance contained in the terzina ("this one falls...the other prevails)].

²¹ According to the DDP database, it is only beginning in the twentieth century that commentators even mention Ciaccio as an example of inconsistency. The first example there is by Enrico Mestica (1921). Ernesto Trucchi (1936) sums up the opinion that Farinata's words explain all cases: "Così intesa la legge è amplissima, e serve a spiegare tutti i passi del Poema, anche le apparenti contraddizioni, come vedemmo a proposito della profezia di Ciaccio; se i dannati non conoscono il presente, come il Cavalcanti, soggiacciono alla legge generale; se lo conoscono, come Ciaccio, Maometto ecc. qualcuno l'avrà loro rivelato" [Thus understood the rule is very broad, and serves to explain all passages in the poem, even the apparent contradictions, as we saw in the prophecy of Ciaccio; if the damned don't know the present, like Cavalcanti, they are subject to the general rule; if they know it, as Ciaccio, Mohammed, etc. someone will have revealed it to them]. Others including Giuseppe Giacalone (1968) and Singleton (1970-5) agree. Nicola Fosca (2003-6) notes this as a possibility but also suggests that Dante may have originally intended ignorance of the present only for the Epicureans and then subsequently extended the condition to all souls in hell. Fosca also suggests that by excluding Ciaccio from this ignorance, the poet may have wanted to separate upper from lower hell. Siro Chimenz (1962) notes that Ciaccio knows the present and sees this as an unresolvable contradiction, describing it simply: "È questo uno dei casi in cui si può avvertire un momento del processo formativo della struttura del poema" [This is one of the cases in which we can perceive a moment of the creative process of the poem's structure]. See below for discussion of the philosophical underpinnings of damned souls' knowledge, as well as of Trucchi's claim that Mohammed knows the present.

souls' prophetic abilities. The narrative function of the damned souls' prophetic power is to dramatize ever-diminishing knowledge such that it becomes part of their punishment. Epistemologically the prospect of shrinking knowledge is terrifying because it is not merely potential but personal: things the sinners actually know and indeed foretell will eventually vanish from their minds. Poetically, prophecy functions as another authenticating strategy by which Dante dramatizes what he presents as future political strife. Most commentators, beginning with Pietro di Dante's (1359-64) lengthy gloss, address the issue mainly by locating philosophical sources that explain and justify the infernal souls' knowledge, showing that the rule laid out by Farinata is within the range of what was theoretically possible according to church fathers.²² Yet in some cases souls express doubts about their abilities, as in canto 19 when Pope Nicholas III mistakes Dante pilgrim for Boniface with the outburst "Ed el gridò: «Se' tu già costì ritto, / se' tu già costì ritto, Bonifazio? / Di parecchi anni mi mentì lo scritto" (52-54)²³ and in canto 28 when Pier da Medicina offers a prophesy concerning Guido del Cassero and Angiolello di Carignano, commenting parenthetically "se l'antiveder qui non è vano" (78).²⁴ While it makes a certain sense for these souls to doubt powers bestowed by a God in whom they have no faith, their words nonetheless perform epistemological uncertainty.

²² As Pietro and subsequent commentators including Jacopo della Lana (1324-28), Ernesto Trucchi (1936), Singleton (1970-5), and Nicola Fosca (2003-6) make clear, the idea that damned souls can only know present affairs of the world if they are informed by other newly-arrived souls or demons is supported by Aquinas, Augustine, and Gregory. As for their knowledge of the future, the same philosophers are cited as saying that damned souls can prophesy only by divine revelation or by knowing things according to their causes. Pietro, however, also mentions Augustine's ambiguous ideas (discussed in chapter 3) about the demons' power to foretell the future based on their greater experience, greater cognitive power due to their physiology, what they overhear from true prophets, and their enhanced ability to read body language.

²³ "Are you already standing, / already standing there, o Boniface? / The book has lied to me by several years."

²⁴ "if the foresight we have here's not vain."

Also in canto 28 is the very interesting case of Mohammed who, as noted above, is named by Trucchi as an example of another sinner knowing the present. This is because Mohammed offers what should be a prophecy in the form of advice when he tells Dante to report back to Dolcino Tornielli, leader of the heretical sect the Apostoli, to provision himself when in hiding with enough food if he wishes to avoid defeat:

«Or dì a fra Dolcin dunque che s'armi,
tu che forse vedra' il sole in breve,
s'ello non vuol qui tosto seguirarmi,
sì di vivanda, che stretta di neve
non rechi la vittoria al Noarese,
ch'altrimenti acquistar non saria leve» (*Inf.* 28.55-60).²⁵

Fra Dolcino's capture by church authorities in fact occurred in 1307 when he was burned alive. Since Mohammed presumably knows this outcome, why does he suggest the friar do something to prevent it? One answer, supported by Singleton, is that he speaks ironically, taking malicious pleasure in the pretense of offering advice and in the knowledge of Dolcino's true fate. Yet I agree with Sapegno that Mohammed's tone, rather than ironic, is "serio e angosciato, senz'ombra di malizia".²⁶ Another possibility is that knowledge notwithstanding, Mohammed, as a sower of scandal and schism, indeed speaks sincerely because he wishes to support a comrade in divisive efforts. In any case, Mohammed in this episode clearly knows something about the future, but his words strongly imply that he offers advice for the present in order to potentially change the future.²⁷ Like some of the ambiguous

²⁵ "Then you, who will perhaps soon see the sun, / tell Fra Dolcino to provide himself / with food, if he has no desire to join me / here quickly, lest when snow besieges him, / it bring the Novarese the victory / that otherwise they would not find too easy."

²⁶ "serious and anguished, without a hint of malice."

²⁷ According to Singleton's commentary, fra Dolcino became leader of the sect in 1300, the fictional date of the pilgrim's journey, but attacks on him and his followers began in 1305.

language in mind-reading passages examined in chapter 1, Mohammed's rhetoric blurs the nature and limits of his knowledge.²⁸

Keeping in mind the parallelisms between telepathy and the damned souls' knowledge, I suggest that we view the issue of Ciaccio in a wider epistemological frame that allows us to see it as part of a more comprehensive question.²⁹ Why does *Inferno* 10 introduce both Vergil's mysterious mind reading and Farinata's account that forces us to notice epistemological inconsistency on the extent of the damned souls' knowledge? The idea of ever-lessening prophetic powers is an infernal inversion of Gregory's declaration of ever-greater prophecy as the end of time approaches (see chapter 3). But the inconsistency of the sinners' knowledge in practice also invokes Gregory's theories on the unpredictability of prophecy for the holy, and it recapitulates the instabilities of mind reading throughout the poem. Given that canto 10 invokes and indeed, is made possible by these histories, I believe that we find both Vergil's claim of mind reading and the question of the sinners' knowledge there because, on the one hand, it distinguishes Vergil from other infernal souls. As Charles Davis has made clear, Dante followed medieval

²⁸ This may be especially significant given Mohammed's identity as prophet of Islam, whose culture bore great significance for Dante's in so many ways.

²⁹ There is evidence elsewhere in the poem for viewing mind reading and prophecy as overlapping phenomena. In *Paradiso* 4.10, mentioned above in the discussion of body language, Dante poet strongly suggests a conceptual link between the two when he describes Beatrice's telepathic act in terms of the prophet Daniel: "Fé si Beatrice qual fé Daniello, / Nabuccodonosor levando d'ira, / che l'avea fatto ingiustamente fello" (13-15) ["Then Beatrice did just as Daniel did, / when he appeased Nebuchadnezzar's anger, / the rage that made the king unjustly fierce."]. Leaving aside the question of Dante's puzzling association of himself with the wrathful Nebuchadnezzar (see Hollander for a convincing explanation) we should note that here the poet figures mind reading not in terms of saints or of Christ but of Daniel's prophetic understanding of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, recounted in the book of Daniel 2.1-46. In that story, Daniel is not strictly represented as a mind reader. He is said to ask King Nebuchadnezzar for time to discover the king's dream and its meaning. Daniel then urges his companions to pray to God so that he might be granted the knowledge, and finally the dream is revealed through a night vision: "tunc Daniheli per visionem nocte mysterium revelatum est" (1344) [then the mystery was revealed through a vision at night to Daniel]. For this Daniel thanks God. Just as I argue in chapter 3 that mind reading is not categorically distinct from prophecy, dreams, etc. in pagan and early Christian texts, Dante's simile invites us to believe that he conceives of telepathy and prophecy as somehow similar, which further supports treating them as philosophically related.

tradition in believing that Vergil in the fourth *Eclogue* had prophesied the coming of Christ, and Dante was also convinced by reading the *Aeneid* that Aeneas “came back to the land of his forefathers as the elect of God, chosen to found a race that would conquer the earth” (245).³⁰ Because of this, Dante believed that Vergil, as bearer of this history, was also divinely inspired and possessed supernatural knowledge (246). In the *Commedia*, then, Vergil’s knowledge is shown to surpass the punitive sort applied to the other damned. His knowledge of the present, sometimes including Dante’s thoughts, differentiates him. In this way Vergil’s words at 10.15-18 mark his separation from other souls. Likewise, in canto 19, quoted above, just before Pope Nicholas III doubts his own telepathic power in line 54, Dante pilgrim affirms Vergil’s mind-reading ability in line 39 when he says “sai quel che si tace.”³¹ As speech acts, these statements perform Vergil’s epistemological privilege.

On the other hand, the epistemology of Vergil’s knowledge is as mysterious as it is for the other denizens of hell, and as discussed in chapter 1 its enactment is likewise inconsistent. In this sense, Dante aligns his guide with the other doomed souls. This alignment makes further sense in the context of heresy itself, its odd placement in the structure of hell and Dante poet’s use of this particular transgression as part of his poetic strategies. Canto 10 is the first to treat a sin that is not one of incontinence. Rather, heresy deals with knowledge insofar as it is a rejection of established doctrine. The circle of the heretics is a setting for souls whose spiritual relationship between knowledge and belief is unstable, ambiguous, and ultimately fatal. But as demonstrated above, canto 10 also enacts this instability thematically, as it becomes a stage for the epistemological drama of how, why, and

³⁰ From “Dante’s Vision of History.”

³¹ “you know what is unspoken.”

what characters know, and structurally, since Dante's placement of heresy does not fit neatly in the *Inferno*'s scheme. The canto further alerts us to the question of knowledge in Dante poet himself, given his heretical claims later in canto 13 regarding the failure of suicides to reunite with their bodies at the end of time and in canto 33 when frate Alberigo claims that a devil currently inhabits his body on earth.³² In all these ways canto 10 becomes fertile ground for the emergence of what can be called the poem's epistemological resistance to stable systems of knowledge. It is perhaps for these reasons that Vergil's first claim of telepathy appears here and not earlier. As speech acts, Vergil's and Farinata's words provoke epistemological resistance. For Dante poet this resistance is not an advantage because instead of preserving the illusion of coherent systems of knowledge and justice, it encourages us to find epistemological discrepancies in God's ostensibly rational order. We can therefore define this resistance, which emerges from a reading attentive to conventions both rhetorical and historical, as a consequence both of and for Dante's explicit poetic strategies.

The issue of what Dante believes about Vergil figures centrally in the line from the encounter with Pier della Vigna where Dante adopts rhetoric whose value has become the focus of commentators. I refer to the confusion the pilgrim faces in *Inferno* 13 upon hearing voices without seeing anyone, which prompts the poet to state his belief that Vergil knows what he thinks, a belief that Vergil confirms:

Cred' ò ch'ei credette ch'io credesse
 che tante voci uscisser, tra quei bronchi,
 da gente che per noi si nascondesse.
 Però disse 'l maestro: «Se tu tronchi

³² On *Inferno* 13 see Nicola Fosca (2003-6) who confirms that the poem's representation departs from church doctrine and provides a useful review specifically of early commentators' attempts to deal with the problem. Likewise regarding *Inferno* 33 Fosca mentions that Dante's invention provoked critical reactions from the beginning given that Christian doctrine allows the possibility of salvation up until the moment of death.

qualche fraschetta d'una d'este piante,
li pensier c'hai si faran tutti monchi» (*Inf.* 13.25-30).³³

Commentators through the seventeenth century generally explain the literal sense of line 25, and it is only from the eighteenth century on that critics such as P. Pompeo Venturi disapprove of what they deem excessive rhetorical artifice.³⁴ Commentaries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are thus entirely occupied with debating the aesthetics of the line, whereas in the twentieth century critics begin to suggest a link with Pier della Vigna's rhetoric.³⁵ Initially scholars argued that Dante adopts such rhetoric as a strategy of historical characterization for the suicide, but in 1946 Leo Spitzer sought to explain why Dante uses this language also for the second suicide and for himself. Spitzer refers to Dante pilgrim in calling line 25 "the 'onomatopoeic' rendering of his mental state of estrangement and confusion," indicated by the pilgrim's *smarrimento* in the previous line, that brings about "the disruption of his mental communication with his master" (98). Yet Gianfranco Contini argues, regarding Pier della Vigna's rhetoric generally, that it is in fact not specific to the suicide because it is "la retorica generica d'ogni parlare ufficiale e festivo" (40),³⁶ concluding that it is therefore the rhetoric of Dante poet. Nicola Fosca (2003-6) directly refutes Spitzer, pointing out that Dante uses comparable rhetoric in situations in the *Paradiso* that are anything but disharmonious.³⁷

³³ "I believe that he believed that I believed / that so many voices came forth among those trunks / from people who had been concealed from us. / Therefore my master said: 'If you would tear / a little twig from any of these plants, / the thoughts you have will also be cut off.'"

³⁴ Venturi describes line 25 as a "scherzo poco degno d'imitazione" [silly expression unworthy of imitation]. Likewise Raffaello Andreoli (1856) comments "Così fatti giuochi di parole distraggono lo spirito e raffreddano il sentimento" [Plays on words carried out in this way diminish the spirit and dampen the sentiment].

³⁵ For example Tommaso Casini and S. A. Barbi (1921), Carlo Steiner (1921), Luigi Pietrobono (1946), Daniele Mattalia (1960), Giovanni Fallani (1965), Giuseppe Giacalone (1968), Singleton (1970-75), Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (1991-97), and others.

³⁶ "the generic rhetoric of all official and festive speech."

³⁷ Fosca writes that Spitzer "ha sostenuto che il linguaggio involuto è dovuto all'intenzione di rendere col suono l'idea di scissione, sdoppiamento, confusione morale che, come attesta l'intrico stesso della selva, domina il canto. Solo che artifici del medesimo tenore sono utilizzati da Dante in situazioni non certo disarmoniche, ad es. nel corpo del Paradiso. È necessario quindi distinguere la

Giuseppe Giacalone (1968) advises us to distinguish between the poet's rhetoric and that of his characters given the present tense "Cred'io" that begins line 25, which precisely underscores the difference between the narrative and poetic time frames and thus has the effect of diminishing the force of the narrative setting.³⁸

Given that Dante indeed foregrounds his presence as poet in line 25, "Cred'io ch'ei credette ch'io credesse," I interpret the verse as a speech act whose power lies in the repetition of "credere," echoed thematically throughout the canto, as a restless meditation on the problem of belief. On the one hand, canto 13 is saturated with words that attest to mistaken belief and failure of faith. Pier della Vigna insists twice on his "fede," boasting of having brought so much of it to his office that it weakened him, "fede portai al glorioso offizio, / tanto ch'i' ne perde' li sonni e 'polsi," (62-3).³⁹ He then justifies his suicide precisely as his belief that it would bring escape and swears that he never broke faith with his lord, echoing line 25 with "credendo" in line 71:

L'animo mio, per disdegnoso gusto,
credendo col morir fuggir disdegno,
ingiusto fece me contra me giusto.
Per le nove radici d'esto legno

"retorica" del personaggio da quella dell'Autore" [has asserted that the intricate language is owed to the intention to render with sound the idea of fragmentation, division, moral confusion that, as the very tangle of the wood attests, dominates the canto. Except that Dante uses artifices of the same tone in situations certainly not disharmonic, for example in the body of the *Paradiso*. It is therefore necessary to distinguish the 'rhetoric' of the character from that of the author.]

³⁸ Giacalone writes that "D. nel credo mette in risalto il momento in cui scrive, e nel credesse mette in risalto il momento in cui Virg. era allora nel bosco con D., il tempo narrativo del poeta è differenziato dal tempo del personaggio D., e così anche dalla dimensione dell'eternità in cui si trova incarcerato Pier della Vigna" [Dante in "credo" emphasizes the moment in which he writes, and in "credesse" he emphasizes the moment in which Vergil was in the wood with Dante; the narrative time of the poet is differentiated from the time of Dante pilgrim, and thus also from the dimension of eternity in which we find the imprisoned Pier della Vigna].

³⁹ "and I was faithful to my splendid office, / so faithful that I lost both sleep and strength."

vi giuro che già mai non ruppi fede
al mio signor, che fu d'onor sì degno” (*Inf.* 13.70-5).⁴⁰

Parallel to these pronouncements is what Vergil says about the pilgrim’s disbelief. We see this first at line 21 when Vergil tells his charge that he will see things that will make his guide’s words seem incredible (“sì vederai /cose che torrien fede al mio sermone») ⁴¹ and again with the well-known verses beginning at line 46 when Vergil justifies his harm to the suicide as necessary precisely due to Dante’s disbelief of Vergil’s “rima.” (“«S'elli avesse potuto creder prima» ... etc.).⁴² This latter example is, of course, one of the poet’s authenticating strategies, by which he makes his own poetry appear more credible at the expense of Vergil’s.⁴³ Here Vergil’s status as prophet extends only so far as is necessary to authorize Dante’s status as *scriba dei*.

It is precisely because Dante poet harnesses the lexicon of failed belief as a strategy to bolster his prophetic claims that we should *not* ignore the moments when he affirms belief in Vergil. We see this not only at line 25 but again at line 83 when, overcome with pity, he asks his guide to speak further, assuming that Vergil knows what will satisfy his curiosity: “Ond' ïo a lui: «Domandal tu ancora / di quel

⁴⁰ “My mind, because of its disdainful temper, / believing it could flee disdain through death, / made me unjust against my own just self. / I swear to you by the peculiar roots / of this thornbush, I never broke faith / with him who was so worthy – with my lord.”

⁴¹ “you’ll see such things / as would deprive my speech of all belief.”

⁴² “«S'elli avesse potuto creder prima», / rispuose 'l savio mio, «anima lesa, / ciò c'ha veduto pur con la mia rima, / non averebbe in te la man distesa; / ma la cosa incredibile mi fece / indurlo ad ovra ch'a me stesso pesa” (46-51) [My sage said: “wounded soul, if, earlier, / he had been able to believe what he / had only glimpsed within my poetry, / then he would not have set his hand against you; / but its incredibility made me / urge him to do a deed that grieves me deeply.” Dante pilgrim and Vergil are also joined in believing that Pier della Vigna wishes to say more at line 110 “Noi eravamo ancora al tronco attesi, / credendo ch’altro ne volesse dire, / quando noi fummo d’un romor sorpresi” [And we were still intent upon the trunk - / believing it had wanted to say more - / when we were overtaken by a roar]. This is not so much mistaken or failed belief as it is a belief that does not come to fruition because new characters arrive on the scene.

⁴³ As Barolini argues in *Dante’s Poets: Textuality and Truth in the Comedy*, p. 212.

che credi ch'a me satisfaccia; / ch'i' non potrei, tanta pietà m'accora» (82-4).⁴⁴

“Credere” and “fede” thus signal deep ambivalence in Dante’s relationship with Vergil. The repeated use of these words suggest layers of history for the knowledge implied precisely because Dante marks his statements about Vergil’s knowledge as belief. As shown in chapter 3, rational exposition does not uphold mind reading theory from the early Middle Ages on: Augustine, Gregory and others attempt to understand how mind reading works through rational argument, in the failure of which their theories ultimately stand on faith. Dante pilgrim’s belief that Vergil knows his thoughts also invokes the medieval history of belief in Vergil as having prophesied the coming of Christ and Dante’s belief in Vergil as divinely-sanctioned poet of Roman history. Through this connection with Italian origins, “credere” and “fede” vis-à-vis Vergil also recapitulate the political history called forth by the faith upon which Pier della Vigna insists. By linking the language of his belief with that of the suicide he encounters, Dante recognizes the danger of believing in the powers of a pagan poet to the extent that he does; he risks believing in Vergil too much and in the wrong ways, just as Pier did with Frederick II. Excessive faith can lead to loss of authority and loss of identity, spiritual, political, and poetic. This in part accounts for Dante’s aggressive denial of Vergil’s poetry, the very poetry whose message he nonetheless regarded as divinely sanctioned history. In this canto Dante negotiates faith and belief in Vergil for his own spiritual and poetic survival in a way that the egocentric and narcissistic Pier could not with Frederick. In all these ways line 25 as speech act performs the ambivalences of Dante’s belief in Vergil,

⁴⁴ “And I to him: “Do you continue; ask of him / whatever you believe *will satisfy me*: / I cannot, so much pity takes my heart.” This verb also occurs in other mind-reading episodes, such as in the *Paradiso* in cantos 8.85 when the pilgrim encounters Charles Martel and in the Cacciaguida episode of 15.55.

performances that are implicated with specific political, philosophical, and poetic histories.

As in canto 13, *Inferno* 16 presents another mind-reading episode amidst an authenticating device that is also anchored in the problem of belief. I refer to the moment when the travelers await the arrival of Geryon. Just before the monster appears, Vergil throws a cord into the abyss, prompting Dante to “speak” to himself in excited anticipation of what will appear. The poet then interrupts the narrative to advise caution with those who not only see actions but perceive thoughts as well. Vergil suggests that he indeed knows something about Dante’s thoughts as he promises the arrival of that which “il tuo pensier sogna” (your thought conjures). Following this is Dante poet’s authenticating device of swearing by his poem on its truth:

E' pur convien che novità risponda',
dicea fra me medesmo, `al novo cenno
che 'l maestro con l'occhio sì seconda'.
Ahi quanto cauti li uomini esser dienno
presso a color che non veggion pur l'ovra,
ma per entro i pensier miran col senno!
El disse a me: «Tosto verrà di sopra
ciò ch'io attendo e che il tuo pensier sogna;
tosto convien ch'al tuo viso si scovra».
Sempre a quel ver c'ha faccia di menzogna
de' l'uom chiuder le labbra fin ch'el puote,
però che senza colpa fa vergogna;
ma qui tacer nol posso; e per le note
di questa comedia, lettor, ti giuro,
s'elle non sien di lunga grazia vòte,
ch'i' vidi per quell' aere grosso e scuro
venir notando una figura in suso,
maravigliosa ad ogne cor sicuro, (*Inf.* 16.115-32)⁴⁵

⁴⁵ “‘And surely something strange must *answer*,’ / I said *to* myself, ‘to this strange sign / *that* my master follows with his eye.’ / Ah, *how cautious men should be* / with those whose penetrating intellect / can see our thoughts – not just our outer act! / He said to me: ‘Now there will soon emerge / what I await and what your thought has conjured: / it soon must be discovered to your sight.’ / Faced with that truth which seems a lie, a man / should always close his lips as long as he can - / to

Barolini has shown that this authenticating device, which she calls “outrageously paradoxical,” enacts a central moment in the poem (59).⁴⁶ Beginning at line 124 Dante interrupts the narrative with an assertion of poetic restraint and prudence: he claims that he knows that some things are so unbelievable that they are better left unsaid if one wishes to avoid shame. In this way he preempts our disbelief by pretending to share it and sets up the reader to view the monster Geryon as somehow particularly incredible with respect to his other inventions, which is itself an illusion.⁴⁷ Further, in line 124 he calls the especially incredible thing that he cannot resist speaking about a “ver c'ha faccia di menzogna,” a truth that has the face of a lie. What he is about to describe may seem like a “menzogna,” but he insists that his words are nonetheless true, and here Dante participates in a pattern of insisting most vehemently on his poem’s truth at narrative moments he asserts as least credible. Further, Barolini notes that Dante in this phrase is referring to the false nature of all fiction: “By explicitly confronting the inauthenticity inherent in all narrative, Dante attempts to neutralize it with respect to his own narrative truth claims” (59). In this way line 124 is emblematic for the *Commedia* as a whole. Dante stages the encounter with Geryon, who is himself an “image of representational fraud,” (61) while simultaneously insisting on his own status as prophet, as “one who transcends the mendacity of language” (67). Thus “the

tell it shames him, even though he’s blameless; / but here I can’t be *silent*; and by the *notes* / of this my Comedy, reader, I swear - / *so may they not be empty of long grace* / that through the dense and darkened air I saw / a figure *come swimming upward* / *wondrous to the most secure heart.*”

⁴⁶ In *Undivine Comedy*, chapter 3, pages 58-73. I necessarily sketch the outlines of Barolini’s rich argument, which readers should consult for full details.

⁴⁷ Barolini states “By urging us to identify heightened drama with decreased verisimilitude and credibility, Dante is subtly encouraging us to accept his text’s basic fictions and assumptions: sodomites dancing in a circle under a pouring rain of fire or usurers sitting on the edge of an abyss with purses around their necks (to mention just the groups of sinners who bracket Geryon’s arrival) are acceptable, but flying monsters are not and therefore require the author’s direct intervention. In this way the poet becomes the arbiter of our skepticism, allowing it to blossom forth only in authorially-sanctioned moments of high drama” (61).

encounter with Geryon dramatizes the text's confrontation with its own necessary representational fraud, and as such is the moment of maximum peril, when the text gambles all on being accepted as a 'ver c'ha faccia di menzogna,' a *comedia*' (67).

Understanding the centrality of this moment for Dante's poetics, I will now ask us to read as a speech act the second tercet, lines 118-20, where the poet advises caution in the face of those who know thoughts as well as deeds: "Ahi quanto cauti li uomini esser dienno /presso a color che non veggion pur l'ovra, / ma per entro i pensier miran col senno!"⁴⁸ My initial comments will build upon Barolini's reading, and then I will argue for the issue of speech itself as central to this and other telepathic encounters.

The commentary tradition shows that scholars have read variously these somewhat puzzling lines, with interpretations ranging from a generalized admonition to be wise, to a focus on the social dynamics of the pilgrim's questioning, to a link of the warning with the travelers' proximity to the realm of fraud, to questions about the validity of Vergil's telepathic abilities.⁴⁹ I am most interested in the commentaries that focus on the social conventions implied by Dante's words. The more general and least interesting of these argue that Dante is urging caution against asking questions about things the wise already know since

⁴⁸ "Ah, *how cautious men should be* / with those whose penetrating intellect / can see our thoughts – not just our outer act!"

⁴⁹ Several early commentators, including L'Ottimo Commento (1333), Boccaccio (1373-5), Chiose Vernon (1390?), and the Anonimo Fiorentino (1400?), interpret the lines simply as a general warning for men to be wise, to understand not only actions but the intentions behind them, while Benvenuto da Imola (1375-80) more precisely links the statement to Vergil's knowledge of the pilgrim's thoughts. Twentieth century scholars such as Luigi Pietrobono (1946) and Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (1991-7) link the admonition with the travelers' proximity to the realm of fraud. Dante warns caution in the face of those who know our thoughts precisely because, in Chiavacci Leonardi's words, "La frode è possibile infatti proprio perché in genere gli uomini vedono l'ovra, e non i pensieri degli altri" [Fraud is possible precisely because in general people see actions, and not the thoughts, of others]. Hollander (2000-7) and Nicola Fosca (2003-6) focus on whether Vergil is indeed telepathic, with both supporting Mark Musa's 1977 article (for discussion of which see chapter 1).

they can read thoughts.⁵⁰ Enrico Mestica (1921-22) and Dino Provenzal (1938) offer more specific variations on this, with the latter believing that Dante feels a bit of shame because he fears that his impatience to know the outcome would displease Vergil, and the former asserting that Dante reproves himself for not knowing from the beginning how to hold back appropriately in his questioning, as shown by Vergil's reproof in canto 3 and the pilgrim's defensiveness in canto 10 (on which more below). Daniele Mattalia (1960) suggests that Dante feels he has been caught amidst some reservation or doubt about Vergil's abilities based on the memory of the travelers' obstacle at the city of Dis.

While there is no textual evidence that Dante pilgrim feels shame, reproves himself, or doubts Vergil's ability at this point, I believe these critics are nonetheless right to sense a moment of self-awareness. Yet I assign this moment not to the pilgrim but to the poet. Why indeed should Dante poet feel the need to advise caution in the face of Vergil's mind reading here, and why does he do so using the impersonal "uomini"? Keeping in mind Barolini's contribution, I propose reading this tercet as a prelude to line 124 where Dante introduces the "ver c'ha faccia di menzogna" that sets up the illusion of restraint. Likewise, lines 118-20 as a speech act perform Dante poet's caution, but they refer instead to Vergil's knowledge of Dante's thoughts and desires. The pilgrim signals his desire in the repetition of "novità" and "novo": "E' pur conven che novità risponda', / dicea fra me medesmo, `al novo cenno / che 'l maestro con l'occhio sì seconda'" (115-17).⁵¹ In the "novo cenno" ("strange/new signal") Dante is referring to the cord that he has handed to Vergil who has thrown it into the abyss to summon Geryon. On

⁵⁰ Including the commentaries of Lodovico Castelvetro (1570), Giacomo Poletto (1894), and Tommaso Casini/S.A. Barbi (1921).

⁵¹ "And surely something strange must *answer*, / I said *to myself*, 'to this strange sign / *that my master follows with his eye.*'"

Barolini's reading, the cord symbolizes the "deceit of language," language as a medium used to "capture – eros" in the tradition of love poetry in which Dante began his poetic career (63). When Dante hands the cord to Vergil, he enlarges his discourse from lyric to epic mode, which is necessary to bring forth his new poetics. The "novo cenno" represents a new language: "The use of a *novo cenno* to elicit a *novità* is thus a paradigm for the writing of a new kind of poetry, a poetry founded on the poetics of the new" (63). Especially significant for lines 115-17 is that Dante in canto 16 demonstrates a love-hate relationship with the new. On the one hand, the excitement of this tercet hints at Dante's insatiable desire for new things, which the poet also confirms elsewhere, such as in *Purg.* 10 on the terrace of pride when he declares that his eyes desire to see new things.⁵² On the other hand, this love of the new is in marked contrast to Dante's condemnation earlier in *Inferno* 16 of the "gente nuova" who have infected Florence with greed, pride, and excess.⁵³ Thus when Dante "speaks" excitedly to himself in anticipation of the new creature that his new writing summons, followed by a warning of caution in the face of those who can perceive such thoughts, the warning has a twofold function. As a speech act, it instructs us to view the poet as cautious and yet suggests his awareness of the illicit and complicated desire for the new that in part fuels his poetic transgression, of speaking of that which he should not, but does.

⁵² As I discuss in a previous article on the adjective *vago*, "the pilgrim feasts his eyes on bas-relief carvings, the exempla of pride and humility represented as God's work of art. Here the *imperfetto* and the *passato remoto* render the pilgrim's eyes drawn away from the exempla and toward new sights, but the poet veers into the present tense with a startling judgment of his *occhi vaghi*: 'Li occhi miei ch'a mirare eran contenti / per veder novitadi ond'e' son vaghi, / volgendosi ver' lui non furon lenti' (103-5). These lines momentarily and quite significantly collapse the requisite temporal distinctions that must be maintained in order to acknowledge successful conversion. We learn that Dante *was* and *still is* desirous of seeing new things, such as God's bas-reliefs, famously rendered by the poet as 'visibile parlare' (95)."

⁵³ When asked whether courtesy and valor still dwell in Florence, Dante rails that "«La gente nuova e i subiti guadagni / orgoglio e dismisura han generata, / Fiorenza, in te, sì che tu già ten piagni»" [*New people* and quick gains / have brought excess and arrogance to you, / o Florence, and you weep for it already!]

Yet these same lines may also be directed to the reader, as early commentators believed, and as the impersonal “uomini” encourages. But I believe they may function not as moralistic advice, but as a subliminal warning targeting the reader’s critical impulses. The poet advises caution in the face of those who know our thoughts; following this he preempts our disbelief by staging it as his own, which as a strategy entails precisely anticipating and subverting the reader’s thoughts in the form of possible reactions and objections. As speech act, Dante’s advice subtly warns the reader lest we question his strategic moves.

Contributing to this interpretation is that Dante figures this episode so heavily in terms of speech, despite the intensely self-conscious textuality of the passage as indicated by the poet’s repeated interruptions and his naming of the poem, and referring to the reader as such: “per le note / di questa comedia, lettor, ti giuro” (127-8).⁵⁴ Yet Dante also speaks in various ways throughout the episode in a way that privileges and finally directly addresses the reader. He first “speaks” to himself when he says in lines 115-17 “E’ pur convien che novità risponda’, / dicea fra me medesmo, `al novo cenno / che `l maestro con l’occhio sì seconda.” One effect of this apparently self-directed speech is to make the reader feel like a privileged party in Dante’s thought, since the delay in Vergil’s response, which comes only at line 121, makes it appear as if the pilgrim speaks to us before his guide is aware of his thoughts. The repeated offering of advice using the impersonal “uomini” at line 118 and “l’uom” at line 125, leading to the more personal address of “lettor, ti giuro” all contribute to a growing sense of authorial concern, that Dante “speaks” with our interest in mind and finally to us directly. In

⁵⁴ Barolini discusses the significance of this moment as Dante’s first naming of his poem as “comedia” in chapter 3, pages 59 and following of *Undivine Comedy*.

context, the advice of lines 118-20 is a speech act that both elevates the reader's status and yet subtly circumscribes the reader's critical field.

Beyond targeting the reader in this way, Dante figures his unspoken thought in terms of speech and signs when he says in lines 115-16 that something new must respond ("risponda") to the new sign ("cenno"), and when he admonishes against broadcasting incredible things he does so with a labial image, advising man to close his lips: "de' l'uom chiuder le labbra." He follows this with the aural "tacer" of line 127 in his confession that he cannot remain silent. Along with a deeply self-conscious textuality, then, this passage reflects an intense orientation toward speech and desire not just for language, but social interaction through language. Hence commentators interpret the words of caution as concerned with the social conventions of speech between the pilgrim and Vergil. As noted above, Mestica (1921-22) names cantos 3 and 10 as other examples of this; in canto 3 when the travelers reach the river Acheron, the pilgrim asks who the souls are that wait to cross, to which Vergil responds "Ed elli a me: «Le cose ti fier conte / quando noi fermerem li nostri passi / su la trista riviera d'Acheronte»" (76-78)." Although Vergil gives no sign of disapproval here, the pilgrim fears that he has offended his guide: *Allor con li occhi vergognosi e bassi, / temendo no 'l mio dir li fosse grave, / infino al fiume del parlar mi trassi*" (79-81).⁵⁵ In the mind-reading episode of canto 10, discussed above at length, Vergil's announcement of mind reading prompts the pilgrim to justify his silence defensively: "E io: «Buon duca, non tegno riposto / a te mio cuor se non per dicer poco, / e tu m'hai non pur mo a ciò disposto»" (19-21).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ "And he to me: 'When we have stopped along / the melancholy shore of Acheron, / then all these matters will be plain to you.' / At that, with eyes ashamed, downcast, and fearing / that what I said had given him offense, / I did not speak until we reached the river" (76-81).

⁵⁶ "And I: ' Good guide, the only reason I / have hid my heart was that I might speak briefly, / and you, long since, encouraged me in this.'"

Yet the episode of canto 16 shows that Dante's interest in the social conventions of speech go beyond the narrative relationship between the pilgrim and Vergil. There, Dante as pilgrim *and poet* wants to speak, indeed feels compelled to speak to himself, to Vergil, and to the reader in the context of acknowledging speech as transgressive. Nor is this urgency limited to *Inferno* 16. Mind-reading episodes throughout the poem in fact reflect patterns of deep and conflicting interests in the social conventions of speech in ways that I believe reflect powerfully on the poem's philosophy of language.

The remainder of this chapter will explore what these patterns suggest with the goal of defining histories that make possible the *Commedia*'s mind reading encounters as epistemologically fraught. The first thing to notice is Dante's tendency to describe telepathic episodes as thoughts either spoken or kept silent. The verb "tacere" creates the latter effect in *Inferno* 10 when Vergil describes Dante's hidden thought (Però a la dimanda che mi faci / quinc' entro soddisfatto sarà tosto, / e al disio ancor che tu mi taci»), and in *Inferno* 19.39 when the pilgrim tells his guide "sai quel che si tace."⁵⁷ Similarly, in *Paradiso* 32 St. Bernard says that Dante keeps silent regarding his doubt: "Or dubbi tu e dubitando sili; / ma io discioglierò 'l forte legame / in che ti stringon li pensier sottili" (49-51).⁵⁸ Yet characters also describe the pilgrim's silent thoughts as things that he says, as in *Paradiso* 7 when Beatrice twice signals her mind reading by introducing his doubt with "tu dici" at lines 55 and 124.⁵⁹ In *Paradiso* 19 the eagle likewise engages a

⁵⁷ "And so the question you have asked of me / will soon find satisfaction while we're here, / as will the *desire that you do not express to me*" and "you know what is unspoken."

⁵⁸ "But now you doubt and, doubting, do not speak; / yet I shall loose that knot / *in which subtle thoughts bind you.*"

⁵⁹ At line 55 she says "Tu dici: ``Ben discerno ciò ch'i' odo; / ma perché Dio volesse, m'è occulto, / a nostra redenzion pur questo modo" [You say: 'What I have heard is clear to me; / but this is hidden from – why God willed / precisely this pathway for our redemption]. At line 124 she says Tu dici: ``Io veggio l'acqua, io veggio il foco, / l'aere e la terra e tutte lor misture..." [You say: 'I see that water, see that fire / and air and earth and all that they compose...].

metaphor of speech when reading the pilgrim's thought that itself deals with social conventions that would challenge the validity of predestination, i.e. the eagle voices the pilgrim's question on the justice of condemning a man who has never *heard of* Christ: "ché tu dicevi: ``Un uom nasce a la riva / de l'Indo, e quivi non è chi ragioni / di Cristo né chi legga né chi scriva..." (70-72).⁶⁰ Here the poet's metaphor of speech to render unspoken thoughts presents a social impulse that is parallel to the pilgrim's social interest in those who have never heard of Christ.

These metaphors of speaking versus not speaking take on greater meaning given that so many mind-reading episodes are rooted in conventions of speech that reflect a great complexity of social motivations, ranging from fulfilling obligation to outright transgression. I begin with the very interesting passage at the beginning of *Paradiso* 4, mentioned twice above in connection with body language and with the link between telepathy and prophecy. In reference to the former, I noted the hierarchy of signs in which Dante privileges signs of the body when he calls the "disir dipinto" on his face as "più caldo assai" than speech (10-12). Yet he does so in order to explain the reason for his silence. Before the hierarchy of signs, Dante first describes through a series of revealing similes how he was unable to decide which of two equally important questions he should voice first:

Intra due cibi, distanti e moventi
d'un modo, prima si morria di fame,
che liber' omo l'un recasse ai denti;
sì si starebbe un agno intra due brame
di fieri lupi, igualmente temendo;
sì si starebbe un cane intra due dame:
per che, s'i' mi tacea, me non riprendo,

⁶⁰ "For you would say: 'A man is born along / the shoreline of the Indus River; none / is there to speak or teach or write of Christ...'"

da li miei dubbi d'un modo sospinto,
poi ch'era necessario, né commendo (*Par.* 4.1-9).⁶¹

In the first tercet we find the metaphor of eating - the pilgrim's doubts are two foods that he desires equally such that a "liber'omo" would die sooner than be able to choose one over the other. The second tercet figures the doubts as hungry wolves, whereas the pilgrim is the lamb that fears each wolf equally, but then Dante reverses the pattern of aggression by suggesting the pilgrim as a dog presumably unable to decide which deer to attack first. The metaphors serve to justify Dante's silence; the pilgrim neither blames nor praises himself for not speaking because he is caught, just as the "liber'omo," and the "agno" and the "cane" are caught between two objects. As commentators have pointed out, Dante's choice of the "liber'omo" in the first simile is significant given that both his questions regard free will, how someone whose good will endures can deserve less because of another's violence, and second, given that the pilgrim has just encountered saved souls in the sphere of the moon, he wonders whether the Platonic doctrine stating that souls eventually return to the star to which they are assigned is true. As Hollander's useful review shows, commentators traced to Aquinas, and later Aristotle the hypothetical that a person with free will faced with two equal choices would be unable to decide, but Aquinas in fact refutes it as an objection when discussing the question of whether humans choose by necessity or free will.⁶² In this canto, Dante affirms the power of

⁶¹ "Before a man bit into one of two / foods equally removed and tempting, he / would die of hunger if his choice were free; / so would a lamb stand motionless between / the cravings of two savage wolves, in fear / of both; so would a dog between two deer; / thus, I need neither blame nor praise myself / when both my doubts compelled me equally: / what kept me silent was necessity."

⁶² Hollander points out how some commentators also erred in tracing it to Buridan's paradox which was posterior to the *Commedia*: "Bruno Nardi (*Nel mondo di Dante* [Rome: Edizioni di "Storia e Letteratura"], 1944, pp. 301-3), has argued that the widespread notion that these lines are a recasting of Buridan's famed paradox (starving donkey between two equally distant piles of straw) should be rejected. As Nardi and others have shown, the more certain source lies in the *Summa theologica* (I-II, q. 13, a. 6): "If any two things are absolutely equal, a man is not moved to the one more than to the other; just as a starving man, if he has food equally appetizing in different directions and at an equal distance, is not moved to the one more than to the other" (English text as found in Carroll's commentary to vv. 1-9). Further, and as Fallani (in his comm. to these verses) points out, Buridan's

the absolute will, so as Giuseppe Giacalone (1968) asks, why does Dante open the canto in which he affirms the force of the absolute will with a simile hypothetically exemplifying its limitations?⁶³ Some scholars, such as Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio (1979), focus solely on the philosophical orientation of the simile without explaining the competing claim that it articulates. Citing Nardi, Bosco and Reggio argue that the simile in fact follows Averroes, by representing free will as free judgment of reason, not influenced by appetite,⁶⁴ an opinion refuted by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi who, I think rightly, sees the function of the simile as indicating a psychological condition.⁶⁵

ass was posterior to Dante's *Paradiso*. A rare early commentator who finds a source for this material locates it in Thomas's usual source, Aristotle (*De caelo* II.xiii.28); see Francesco da Buti (comm. to vv. 1-12). Beginning with Lombardi (comm. to this tercet) and continuing into the twentieth century, one finds insistence on Thomas as source, neglecting Aristotle (Tommaseo, Andreoli, Scartazzini, Poletto, and Carroll, among others. The first commentators to put the two together, as is in our day fairly commonplace (e.g., Mattalia, Singleton) were apparently Tozer in 1901 and Torraca in 1905, both in response to this tercet. However, if one reads further in Thomas's passage, it is striking, as Sapegno points out (comm. to vv. 1-9), citing Nardi (pp. 297-303), that Thomas has proposed this paradox only to refute its relationship to practical reality -- as might any sensible person. Zeno's arrow and Buridan's ass (and Thomas's starving man, as Thomas himself insists) are the sort of logically developed paradoxes that "philosophers" enjoy creating and that poets generally enjoy mocking. Here Thomas, Dante's "philosopher," rejects philosophical nonsense while Dante, our poet, seems to sponsor it."

⁶³ Giacalone, citing Cosmo, writes "Ma ne vien fuori subito una «stridente contraddizione, che il canto il quale deve affermare la forza del volere si apre con una ipotetica limitazione di essa: limitazione che, quando fosse vera, proverebbe contro ogni ragion del poeta la pochezza della nostra energia volitiva. Per fortuna, più forte del Dante scolastico e rettorico era il Dante vissuto fra le tempeste della vita» (Cosmo, l.c. 44-45 {*L'ultima ascesa*, Firenze, 1965})" [Immediately there emerges a 'glaring contradiction, because the canto that should affirm the force of the will opens with a hypothetical limitation of it, a limitation that if true would prove against all the poet's arguments the paucity of our energy regarding the will. Fortunately, stronger than the scholastic or rhetorical Dante was the Dante who had lived through the tempests of life'].

⁶⁴ Bosco and Reggio write "ma qui Dante è più vicino agli averroisti, come spiegò il Nardi, perché è evidente che tale esempio vale proprio se si intende il libero arbitrio come «il libero giudizio della ragione, non prevenuta dall'appetito, intorno all'operare», cioè in altre parole se «l'azione umana è determinata unicamente dal libero giudizio della ragione»" [but here Dante is closer to the Averroists, as Nardi explained, because it is evident that such an example is valid precisely if one means free will as 'the free judgment of reason, not informed by the appetite in its functioning,' that is in other words if 'human action is determined only by the free judgment of reason.'"]

⁶⁵ Chiavacci Leonardi argues that Dante in fact follows Aquinas in his thinking on the will, a question that I leave aside. Regarding the function of the simile she writes "è questa la classica similitudine dantesca che mira a ritrarre un atteggiamento psicologico dell'uomo (cfr. *Inf.* I 55-60 e nota), usata in questo caso per introdurre le due diverse questioni trattate nel canto..." [this is the

Following her indication, I propose a closer reading of the specific emotions that Dante invokes in relation to the conventional activities described in the three similes.⁶⁶ As speech act, this episode in fact reveals much about social attitudes toward speech. The pilgrim presents his justification as self-evaluation; he takes responsibility by acknowledging that he deserves no praise but he also defends himself from potential blame. The need for justification is especially important because it attests to a convention, which is that speaking one's doubt is a social obligation. Yet it is an obligation impeded by visceral desires and fears that are themselves driven by the fundamental social conventions of eating and of hunting. The metaphor of pursuing knowledge as eating is, of course, nothing new for Dante, but here his desire for the two foods is destructive because it would prolong fatally rather than fulfill the hunger driving it. The lamb between two wolves implies the pilgrim's paralyzing fear in the face of his doubts, while the dog between two deer reverses the second simile's pattern of aggression by making the pilgrim the attacker instead of his doubts. In this context, mind reading as a speech act proclaims the voicing of one's doubt as a social obligation that is blocked by dark emotions driven by equally essential social conventions. This message becomes primary when we see the extent to which it overwhelms the narrative convention of mind reading itself. Lines 1-9 all serve to introduce and explain why Beatrice reads the pilgrim's mind, an explanation that is technically superfluous given telepathy as a

classic Dantesque simile that aims to represent man's psychological state ...used in this case to introduce the two different questions dealt with in the canto].

⁶⁶ Commentators have not significantly differentiated the three similes. As Daniele Mattalia (1960) writes "Il triforme «exemplum» serve a Dante solo per chiarire analogicamente quanto accade nella sua mente la quale, avendo prodotto due quesiti che essa, per insufficiente riflessione, ritiene di uguale importanza, e non potendo fare appello ad altro-da-sé, resta in bilancia e incapace, sul momento, di muovere la volontà (di parlare)" [The threefold 'exemplum' serves Dante only to clarify analogically how it happens in his mind that, having produced two questions that it (i.e. the mind), through insufficient reflection, considers equally important and not being able to consult another, remains undecided and incapable at that moment of moving the will to speak].

communicative norm in heaven. There is no need to explain Beatrice's mind reading as anything other than her telepathic ability, i.e. the way that heavenly souls interact with Dante and know his doubts. Yet instead the narrative presents her mind reading as mobilized by the pilgrim's struggle against the dynamics of social conventions and relationships, consequently foregrounding the struggle and the concerns they imply. In this way, the prominent opening simile indeed resists the validation of free will that emerges later in the canto.

Emotions getting in the way of speech emerge as a persistent motive for acts of telepathy, as in *Paradiso 7* when the pilgrim speaks to himself and to readers in a failed command to tell Beatrice of his doubt:

Io dubitava e dicea `Dille, dille!
 fra me, `dille' dicea, `a la mia donna
 che mi diseta con le dolci stille'.
 Ma quella reverenza che s'indonna
 di tutto me, pur per Be e per ice,
 mi richinava come l'uom ch'assonna (*Par.* 7.10-15).⁶⁷

More than showcasing poetic fireworks, with the neologisms “s’indonna” and also “s’addua” earlier in line 6, this passage dramatizes the pilgrim’s desire *as speech* through direct discourse to himself. More important is that like canto 4, it is not Beatrice’s ability but the pilgrim’s emotional reaction that prompts her mind reading – a reaction driven precisely by the sound of her name. Desire to know elicits speech, while emotions surrounding the social conventions of speech restrain it and thus lead to mind reading. In this context telepathy emerges as a compensation for the failed privilege of social interaction through speech. In Dante’s encounter with Adam in *Paradiso 26* (also discussed in chapter 3), desire to hear the speech of another trumps desire for knowledge when the pilgrim says that he does *not* voice

⁶⁷ “I was perplexed, and to myself, I said: / ‘Tell her! Tell her! Tell her, the lady who / can slake my thirst with her sweet drops’; and yet / the reverence that possesses all of me, / even on hearing only *Be* and *ice*, / had bowed my head – I seemed a man asleep.”

his questions precisely because he wants to hear Adam's speech sooner than he otherwise would: "tu vedi mia voglia, / e per udirti tosto non la dico" (95-6).⁶⁸ Here Dante refrains from speech not because he wants to hear the *answers* to his questions, but rather because he is anxious to hear the *person speaking* ("per udirti tosto"). Again, mind reading as speech act directs lack of speech toward a social function, dramatizing desire for social intercourse and subtly privileging it over desire for knowledge.

Some episodes demonstrate the pilgrim's misunderstanding of protocol, as in *Paradiso* 22 where his unfounded fear of asking too much likewise keeps him from questioning St. Benedict, who assures that Dante would speak if he could see the souls' great charity.⁶⁹ Similarly in *Purgatorio* 13 the pilgrim remains silent because he feels it is outrageous that he can see the envious while they cannot see him. Here the focus is on vision but also speech as Dante says that Vergil knew what the pilgrim wanted to say: "Ben sapev' ei che volea dir lo muto; / e però non attese mia dimanda, / ma disse: «Parla, e sie breve e arguto»" (76-78).⁷⁰ In these cases telepathy performs social misapprehension as Dante does not speak although it is acceptable to do so. The reverse occurs in the interesting case of *Inferno* 26 when the travelers discover Ulysses and Diomedes, with whom Dante wishes to speak but is discouraged by Vergil. The latter, saying that he knows what Dante wants,

⁶⁸ "You see/ my wish; to hear you sooner, I do not / declare it."

⁶⁹ "Io stava come quei che 'n sé repreme / la punta del disio, e non s'attenta / di domandar, sì del troppo si teme; / e la maggiore e la più luculenta / di quelle margherite innanzi fessi, / per far di sé la mia voglia contenta. / Poi dentro a lei udi': «Se tu vedessi / com' io la carità che tra noi arde, / li tuoi concetti sarebbero espressi. / Ma perché tu, aspettando, non tarde / a l'alto fine, io ti farò risposta / pur al pensier, da che sì ti riguarde" (25-36) [I stood as one who curbs within himself / the goad of longing and, in fear of being / too forward, does not dare to ask a question. / At this, the largest and most radiant / among those pearls moved forward that he might / appease my need to hear who he might be. / Then, in that light, I heard: 'Were you to see, / even as I do see, the charity / that burns in us, your thoughts would have been uttered. / But lest, by waiting, you be slow to reach / the high goal of your seeking, I shall answer / what you were thinking when you curbed your speech'].

⁷⁰ "He knew quite well what I, though mute, *wanted to say*, / and thus he did not wait for my request, / but said: 'Speak, and be brief and to the point.'"

assigns himself as speaker because as Greeks, Ulysses and Diomedes would be disdainful of the pilgrim's "detto":

Ed elli a me: «La tua preghiera è degna
di molta loda, e io però l'accetto;
ma fa che la tua lingua si sostegna.
Lascia parlare a me, ch'i' ho concetto
ciò che tu vuoi; ch'ei sarebbero schivi,
perch' e' fuor greci, forse del tuo detto» (*Inf.* 26.70-75).⁷¹

Before turning to the commentary tradition, we should note that in this case knowing thoughts without the need for speech is presented precisely in the context of emphasizing differences of "lingua." The sameness implied by telepathy is put in service of highlighting potential conflict in social interaction brought about by differences of language and culture. As speech act, mind reading here privileges the social consequences of different languages as it aligns Vergil and Dante in contrast with Ulysses and Diomedes, in the sense that Vergil is clearly not disdainful of Dante's "detto" while the two heroes might be. Thus at some level it also suggests respect for historical and cultural differentiation as the origin of social boundaries. Encouraging this interpretation are Vergil's words to the pilgrim in the next canto after Guido da Montefeltro has finished speaking, when Vergil allows the pilgrim to respond, citing linguistic commonality: "«Parla tu; questi è latino»" (27.33).⁷²

Yet as Lodovico Castelvetro (1570) and other commentators subsequently pointed out, earlier in canto 27 Guido refers presumably to Vergil as having spoken Lombard dialect to the Greeks when he addresses the travelers: "«O tu a cu' io drizzo / la voce e che parlavi mo lombardo, / dicendo ``Istra ten va, più non

⁷¹ "And he to me: 'Your request is worthy / of much praise, and therefore I accept it; / but hold back your speech. / Let me address them – I have understood / what you desire; Since they were Greek, / perhaps they'd be disdainful of your speech.'"

⁷² "You speak; he is Italian."

t'adizzo" (19-21).⁷³ Interestingly, we never directly witness the words in line 21 spoken by anyone; Guido's "repetition" is in fact the first appearance of these words in the narrative, and so we are led to imagine that Vergil utters them to Ulysses at the conclusion of the latter's tale, since Dante pilgrim never speaks during that encounter. As such, Guido's words (that bear no trace of irony) contradict Vergil's insistence on linguistic protocol with the two Greek heroes. In addition, the pilgrim elsewhere does not hesitate to accost speakers of different languages, such as Adam in heaven, even acknowledging the first man's different tongue by asking about it. Given these problems, it would seem that reading concern for history into this and other mind-reading episodes is at best inconsistent and possibly a mistake. Why then does Vergil draw attention to differences of language?

The commentary tradition offers some especially creative solutions. Among early commentators, the most popular explanations are that Dante did not know Greek while Vergil did and that Greeks disdained other languages,⁷⁴ but some also say that because Vergil wrote of (and lionized) Ulysses and Diomedes he is more suited to speak with them.⁷⁵ Later scholars such as Bernardino Daniello (1547-68) hypothesized that the Greeks would disdain Dante's Tuscan dialect. Francesco da

⁷³ "'O you to whom I turn my voice, / who only now were talking Lombard, saying, / 'Now you may leave – I'll not provoke more speech,'" Castelvetro wrote that Vergil "quantunque sapesse il linguaggio greco, non dimeno non parlò loro greco, anzi Lombardo, dicendo il Conte Guido da Montefeltro {*Inf.*, XXVII, 19-21}: O tu, che parlavi mo Lombardo, Dicendo: ista ten va, più non t'aizzo?" [although he knew the Greek language, nonetheless he did not speak Greek to them, but rather Lombard, as Count Guido da Montefeltro says in *Inf.* 27.19-21]; see above for translation of the passage. Later commentators including Niccolò Tommaseo (1837), Giuseppe Campi (1888-93), Giacomo Poletto (1894), Hollander (2000-7), and Nicola Fosca (2003-6) also note this contradiction.

⁷⁴ Many commentators offer more than one explanation for this problem. Those asserting one or both of these reasons include Guido da Pisa (1327-28), L'Ottimo Commento (1338), Benvenuto da Imola (1375-80), Anonimo Fiorentino (1400), Alessandro Vellutello (1544), Hermann Oelsner (1899). Nicola Fosca (2003-6) cites Augustine and the Bible to emphasize a link between Greek pride and language.

⁷⁵ Other supporters of this idea include Guglielmo Maramauro (1369-73) and Johannis de Serravalle (1416-17),

Buti (1385-95) and P. Gioachino Berthier (1892-97) unhelpfully de-emphasize language by arguing that Dante would be disdained because he is not Greek himself, with Benvenuto da Imola (1375-80), the Anonimo Fiorentino (1400), Johannis de Serravalle (1416-17) and others pointing out that Vergil is also not Greek. The Chiose cagliaritane (1370) and later John S. Carroll (1904) argue that Dante is ultimately descended from the Trojans, who were enemies of the Greeks, while Vergil's Mantua was founded by a Theban, i.e. not Greek enemies, therefore making Vergil less inimical than Dante. Many scholars support some version of the idea that Vergil is a necessary mediator between the ancient and medieval worlds.⁷⁶ Giacomo Poletto (1894) argues that Vergil is here attempting to bolster his own fame as one who had depicted famous heroes, while Isidore del Lungo (1926) simply says that Vergil attempts to conquer the pride of the Greeks by asserting his own merits. Finally, the wildest proposal, concocted by Tasso and supported to some degree by Giovanni Fallani (1965), is that Vergil, appropriating the cunning strategies of the Greek heroes, deceives them by impersonating Homer.⁷⁷

Nearly all the commentaries focus on the potential for social conflict, but the inventive impulse of more than a few is striking. We see this not only among those, such as Poletto, whose gloss is directed toward resolving the problem created by Guido da Montefeltro's comment in canto 27, but by commentators such as Fallani who were evidently unaware of the contradiction. I submit that commentators fixate on social elements precisely because the passage performs *possibility* rather than

⁷⁶ Including Lodovico Castelvetro (1570), Francesco Torraca (1905), Enrico Mestica (1921-22), Manfredi Porena (1946-8), Daniele Mattalia (1960), Charles Singleton (1970-5).

⁷⁷ Fallani's primary explanation is of Vergil as mediator between the ancient Greek world and that of Dante, but he does offer support for Tasso's thesis as well when he says "Suggestiva, comunque, la sentenza del Tasso, ripresa ampiamente con nuovi argomenti dal Toffanin (*Sette interpretazioni dantesche*, Napoli 1947, pp. 5-18): «Virgilio adopera le stesse armi dei suoi avversari e, per tirare in discorso Ulisse, si camuffa da Omero» [Striking, however, is Tasso's judgment, taken up fully with new arguments by Toffanin (*Seven Dantesque Interpretations*, ...) 'Vergil adopts the same weapons of his adversaries, and in order to draw Ulysses into discourse, masquerades as Homer'].

specificity. As a speech act, Vergil's words perform the potential for social problems implicated in speech rather than concern for the Greekness per se of Ulysses and Diomedes. This reading allows for the narrative inconsistency brought forth by Guido's comment and lends weight to my sense that these concerns are philosophical rather than strictly historical in nature. In this way, mind reading as speech act in canto 26 carries out the social manifestations of a purported difference rather than cultural specificity.

While emotions and conventions implicate the pilgrim's lack of speech, we also see the opposite, as in *Paradiso* 20 when the pilgrim's shock at finding the pagans Trajan and Ripheus in heaven provokes an outburst. Here, although his doubt is as discernible as color seen through glass, the pilgrim cannot remain silent.

E avvegna ch'io fossi al dubbiar mio
 lì quasi vetro a lo color ch'el veste,
 tempo aspettar tacendo non patio,
 ma de la bocca, «Che cose son queste?»,
 mi pinse con la forza del suo peso:
 per ch'io di coruscar vidi gran feste. (*Par.* 20.79-84)⁷⁸

Here speech overpowers the revelation implied by telepathy. The pilgrim's outburst declares speech as an emotional and physically-based reaction (“ma de la bocca...”) that is involuntary (“tempo aspettar tacendo non patio”) and demands presence (“mi pinse con la forza del suo peso”). Like the exchange of signs among Dante, Vergil, and Statius in *Purgatorio* 21 with which I opened this chapter, here the voicing of speech is physical, contingent, ultimately uncontrollable, and necessary, all of which is to say historical. This is especially important given that, as in the episode of

⁷⁸ “And though the doubt within me was as plain / as any colored surface cloaked by glass, / it could not wait to voice itself, but with / the thrust and weight of urgency it forced / ‘Can such things be?’ out from my lips, at which / I saw lights flash – a vast festivity.”

Paradiso 19 with the eagle, the pilgrim's speech regards his reaction to what he sees as a contradiction between history and divine justice.

Related to emotional outbursts is speech as an act of transgression that effectively privileges speaking over knowledge. We have already discussed the crucial moment in *Inferno* 16 where Dante links transgressive speech to the larger context of his poetic transgression. In *Paradiso* 21 the pilgrim, prompted by the brightness of Peter Damian's light, takes advantage of the latter's ability to read his mind in order to "speak" to him before Beatrice grants permission:

E quel che presso più ci si ritenne,
si fé sì chiaro, ch'io dicea pensando:
'Io veggio ben l'amor che tu m'accenne.
Ma quella ond' io aspetto il come e 'l quando
del dire e del tacer, si sta; ond' io,
contra 'l disio, fo ben ch'io non dimando' (*Par.* 21.43-48).⁷⁹

Here Dante represents telepathy literally as speech with direct discourse, signaling in line 44 his conflation of thinking and speaking with "dicea pensando." His message to Peter makes explicit a social protocol that can only concern speech; the pilgrim claims that although he would like to, he does not voice his doubt because he awaits Beatrice's permission. The implicit protocol is that Peter does not know Dante's doubt until he speaks it. This, of course, violates the *Paradiso's* narrative terms and the logic of this particular interaction. As a celestial soul, Peter, like Beatrice, ostensibly already knows the pilgrim's desire, a fact to which the pilgrim's faith that Peter understands his preface through "dicea pensando" attests, i.e. if Peter understands the pilgrim's unspoken direct discourse of lines 45-48, then he also knows the pilgrim's specific question.

⁷⁹ "The flame that halted nearest us became / so bright that *I said, thinking*: 'I see / you clearly signaling to me your love. / But she from whom I wait *the how and the when / of speaking and being silent, pauses; / thus against my desire* I do well not to ask.'"

This fact forces us to notice that the protocol regards not the desire itself but the voicing of it. The pilgrim in fact awaits Beatrice's permission not to introduce his question, but to speak it, a pattern that occurs in other episodes in the *Paradiso* with other souls who also presumably know Dante's thoughts.⁸⁰ Thus the pilgrim's act of "dicea pensando," in which he claims to wait for Beatrice's permission, is in a performative sense transgressive. By asserting Beatrice's authority, these episodes actually undermine the ideology of telepathy in order to privilege the necessity and social constraints of speech over knowledge. It might be tempting to dismiss the granting of permission to speak as an insignificant pattern or as meaningless rhetoric. But this narrative inconsistency is valuable precisely because it exposes the insistent presence of social convention in the poetics of mind reading, a strategy that, we must remember, would resist such convention. It shows us that mind reading as a speech act performs the value of knowledge as dependent on the limitations and privileges of speech. In the *Commedia* not merely language, but speech is potentially transgressive precisely because it is essential for knowledge to have value.

From the passages explored above some astonishing patterns come to light. Mind-reading episodes rehearse the pilgrim's desire to speak as an emotional and social obligation that is privileged and yet caught up in the complications of other social conventions. Sometimes the pilgrim's desire to speak is frustrated by emotions or misapprehensions of social protocol as in *Purgatorio* 13, *Paradiso* 4, 7, and 22, but *Paradiso* 21 and 26 show that desire for social intercourse through speech is more important than knowledge itself, which in part explains the pilgrim's outburst of *Paradiso* 20, the social concerns of *Inferno* 26, and the fascination with speech as transgression in *Inferno* 16 and *Paradiso* 21. These conflicting forces are

⁸⁰ See for example episodes at 9.16-21 and 15.70.

especially discernible in *Paradiso* 4, where they show us that fundamental social conventions may work against each other to render an individual powerless. By positing the absence of speech, telepathy more than anything asks us to imagine the possibility of social and epistemological crisis.

The episode that most explicitly links social loss, indeed social trauma, with speech, for Dante poet is found in *Paradiso* 17, where Cacciaguida prophesies his descendant's fate.⁸¹ Before turning directly to this canto, we should note that in the third canticle, Dante is often told to speak his doubt despite the fact that others already know it, in order to glorify the sound of speech itself, as in canto 15, or for spiritual reasons, as in canto 24 when Beatrice says that Dante should speak his faith to St. Peter in order to glorify it, or in canto 25 where she justifies the pilgrim's speech about hope as an unnecessary but nonetheless rhetorically useful report to St. James on how much hope pleases the saint.⁸² By contrast, in canto 17, Beatrice tells

⁸¹ The poem rehearses a different version of this theme in *Inferno* 13, as Leo Spitzer showed, where the poet repeatedly and graphically makes the act of speech an act of wounding, since the suicides can only speak when their tree-bodies are broken. Spitzer points out Dante's repeated linking of vocalizing and wounding in lines 43-44 with the singular "usciva" as verb for the dual subject of "parole e sangue": "sì de la scheggia rotta usciva insieme / parole e sangue" [so from that broken stump issued together / both words and blood], at lines 100-2 when Pier della Vigna describes how the Harpies rend their bodies eternally but in doing so provide a vocal release for the pain: "Surge in vermena e in pianta silvestra: / l'Arpie, pascendo poi de le sue foglie, / fanno dolore, e al dolor fenestra" [It rises as a sapling, a wild plant; / and then the Harpies, feeding on its leaves, / cause pain and for that pain provide a vent], at lines 130-33 when Vergil takes the pilgrim to the Florentine suicide, described as a "cespuglio che piangea / per le rotture sanguinenti in vano." [lacerated thorn / that wept in vain where it was bleeding], the guide says "«Chi fosti, che per tante punte / soffi con sangue doloroso sermo?»" [Who were you, who through many wounds / must breathe with blood your melancholy words?]. Spitzer interprets the linking of speech with wounds as the poet's attempt to represent the suicides' speech as a "purely physical process" (89), a "semi-human plant-like speech for his hybrid plant-souls" (91) as a gruesome part of their contrappasso.

⁸² In the episode of *Paradiso* 15 (discussed at length in chapter 3) Cacciaguida expresses desire to hear the sound of Dante's voice: "ma perché 'l sacro amore in che io veglio / con perpetua vista e che m'assetta / di dolce disiar, s'adempia meglio, / la voce tua sicura, balda e lieta / suoni la volontà, suoni 'l disio, / a che la mia risposta è già decreta!" (64-9) [But that the sacred love in which I keep / my vigil with unending watchfulness, / the love that makes me thirst with sweet desire, / be better satisfied, let your voice – bold, / assured, and glad – proclaim your will and longing, / to which my answer it decreed already"]. Beatrice says in *Paradiso* 24 "S'elli ama bene e bene spera e crede, / non t'è occulto, perché 'l viso hai quivi / dov' ogni cosa dipinta si vede; / ma perché questo regno ha fatto civi / per la verace fede, a gloriarla, / di lei parlare è ben ch'a lui arrivi" (40-5) [That he loves well and hopes well and has faith / is not concealed from you: you see that Place / where everything

Dante to speak his desire for a different reason. Dante first compares himself to Phaeton who went to his mother Clymene to verify that he was indeed Apollo's son, which led to Apollo's disastrous decision to allow Phaeton drive the chariot of the sun:

Qual venne a Climenè, per accertarsi
di ciò ch'avèa incontro a sé udito,
quei ch'ancor fa li padri ai figli scarsi;
tal era io, e tal era sentito
e da Beatrice e da la santa lampa
che pria per me avea mutato sito (*Par.* 17.1-6).⁸³

Like Phaeton, Dante approaches a father-figure, Cacciaguida, who confirms the pilgrim's disastrous exile, but as Barolini has pointed out, Phaeton is also a "surrogate" for Ulysses, representing Dante's awareness of the potentially fatal danger in his act of poetic transgression (48). In these ways the Ovidian allusion of the first two tercets immediately foreshadows the social consequences of speech that become explicit later in the canto.

Then, Beatrice tells Dante to voice his question not because she and Cacciaguida need to know it, but rather for reasons that point outside the fictive realm of heaven:

Per che mia donna «Manda fuor la vampa
del tuo disio», mi disse, «sì ch'ella esca
segnata bene de la interna stampa:
non perché nostra conoscenza cresca
per tuo parlare, ma perché t'ausi
a dir la sete, sì che l'uom ti mesca» (*Par.* 17.7-12).⁸⁴

that happens is displayed. / But since this realm has gained its citizens / through the true faith, it rightly falls to him / to speak of faith, that he may glorify it"]. In *Paradiso* 25 she says "Li altri due punti, che non per sapere / son dimandati, ma perch' ei rapporti / quanto questa virtù t'è in piacere, / a lui lasc' io..." (58-61) [The other two points of your question, which / were not asked so that you may know, but that / he may report how much you prize this virtue, / I leave to him...].

⁸³ "Like the one who came to Clymene, to assure himself / of what he had heard about himself / the one who still makes fathers wary of sons; / such was I and such was I perceived to be / by Beatrice and by the holy lamp / that – earlier – had shifted place for me."

⁸⁴ "Therefore my lady said to me: "Display / the flame of your desire, that it may / be seen well-stamped with your internal seal, / not because our knowledge grows / by your speech, but so that you learn / to speak your thirst, so that man pours for you."

Again we see the convivial metaphor in service of the pursuit of knowledge in line 12, but Beatrice invokes not supernatural or mystical communion but human exchange when she says that Dante should learn to “speak his thirst” so that “l’uom ti mesca,” so that “man may pour for you.” She has already explicitly eliminated the present company from this “l’uom” such that she can only mean that Dante should speak in order to satisfy his desire not at that moment but later among humans. As a speech act, this mind-reading episode commands that Dante speak so that he may habituate himself to a mode of discourse entirely rooted in the social contexts and conventions of mortals. It therefore points explicitly away from the narrative and beyond the poem to the life Dante leads – a life that is inseparable from history. That this moment privileges that history makes sense given that it is precisely Dante’s earthly history – “le cose contingenti” – that his question to Cacciaguida concerns in lines 13-27. There, he asks his ancestor to explain the “parole gravi” (23) that other souls have suggested about his future. Beatrice’s command to speak not only privileges human history but does so in the context of Dante’s particular political fate. Her speech act therefore points very specifically to that history as well, asking us to understand Dante’s obligation to speak as part of his historical and political life.

In that life Dante suffered social trauma caused by the dislocation of exile, which meant loss of social familiarity and exchange in his native environment. This, of course, partly means losing the privilege of speech. The rest of canto 17 suggests the priority of these specific losses. Cacciaguida tells Dante that he will have to leave the things most dear to him (“Tu lascerai ogne cosa diletta / più caramente”)⁸⁵, but worse than tasting the salt of foreign bread or ascending and descending the stairs of another (loss of native food and of property, respectively)

⁸⁵ “You shall leave everything you love most dearly.”

will be precisely Dante's social circle, the "malvagia e scempia" and "ingrata...matta ed empia" company that he will have to keep:

E quel che più ti graverà le spalle,
sarà la compagnia malvagia e scempia
con la qual tu cadrai in questa valle;
che tutta ingrata, tutta matta ed empia
si farà contr' a te; ma, poco appresso,
ella, non tu, n'avrà rossa la tempia.
Di sua bestialitate il suo processo
farà la prova; sì ch'a te fia bello
averti fatta parte per te stesso (*Par.* 17.61-9).⁸⁶

Because their "bestialitate" will cause this company to suffer bloodshed, Cacciaguida advises Dante to isolate himself. Here Dante's need to speak indeed collides with the historical fate that makes him a party of one, "parte per te stesso," a social condition denying speech. In this context, Beatrice's command broadcasts desire for speech as implied by social connection, but it also declares mourning for the loss of speech implied by a party of one.

The connection between language and exile was a theme in Dante's imagination, since in the *De vulgari eloquentia* at 1.18.3 he personifies the ideal vernacular as one who lacks a court and therefore must wander like a homeless stranger.⁸⁷ This persistent link further supports the value and urgency of speech in the *Commedia* but also invites us to view the poem as Dante's response and consolation, a testament that while suffering social isolation, he is not vanquished by silence. Fascinating throughout the rest of *Paradiso* 17 is how insistently Dante renders his fears about writing the poem through words that imply speaking. He

⁸⁶ "And what will be most hard for you to bear / will be the scheming, senseless company / that is to share your fall into this valley; / against you they will be insane, completely / ungrateful and profane; and yet, soon after, / not you but they will have their brows bloodred. / Of their insensate acts, the proof will be / in the effects; and thus, your honor will / be best kept if your party is your self."

⁸⁷ "Hinc etiam est quod nostrum illustre velut acola peregrinatur et in humilibus hospitatur asilis, cum aula vacemus" [it is also why our illustrious vernacular wanders around like a homeless stranger, finding hospitality in more humble homes – because we have no court].

juxtaposes his social loss with what he might save through his “carmi,” a word indicating poetry but etymologically rooted in the vocal “cantare” (“se loco m’è tolto più caro, / io non perdessi li altri per miei carmi”).⁸⁸ In line 116 he worries that if he retells (“s’io ridico”) what he has seen in the afterlife, his words will be too bitter for many. Cacciaguida says that consciences dark with shame will indeed find Dante’s “parola brusca” in line 26, but says that if Dante’s voice will at first be difficult, “se la voce tua sarà molesta / nel primo gusto...” (130-1),⁸⁹ it will eventually nourish those who hear. Finally, Cacciaguida says in line 133 that Dante’s “grido” will be as wind that strikes hardest at the highest peaks. The emphasis on writing the poem as speaking is another historical signpost of desire for speech in part as a consequence of social isolation.

Bringing these patterns to light contributes to answering the question with which I began this dissertation, namely why Dante, unlike his visionary counterparts, makes mind reading in his vision a *topos* of epistemological crisis. By approaching mind reading as speech acts, this chapter suggests some of the conventions that Dante creates in order to direct our readings, as well as the epistemological consequences of such creations. It also suggests conventions that imply Dante himself as subject, both as pilgrim and poet, conventions partly informed by the social struggles of his personal history of exile. With this understanding, we can say more about the specular mind-reading episodes explored in chapter 3. As demonstrated, the specular episodes that most explicitly dramatize imminent silence are also those that perform Dante’s personal history. We find this link because part of Dante’s social obligation is to restore an identity that had been deeply and humiliatingly defamed through exile. While the silence of union with

⁸⁸ “If I lose the place most dear, I may / not lose the rest through *my songs (poems)*.”

⁸⁹ “If your words upset / in the first taste...”

God ostensibly comes at the poem's final tercet, Dante the man had long been silenced through social and political dislocation. Dante would not have used the terminology of speech acts, but by calling forth the histories that it does his poem reflects deep awareness of how he himself had been performed as a speech act. The poet's exile radically transformed the constative meaning of "Dante" through a communal performance of his guilt by the victorious opposition. This social reality of Dante's history made him acutely (if not consciously) aware of the power of speech acts and hints at a personal epistemological crisis of identity.

How does the community identify a person in the face of such performance? This, Dante surely knew, could easily lead to profound questions about how one knows oneself. Specular mind-reading episodes in particular work to recapitulate and recreate Dante's temporal identity and history, but in doing so they also mark the personal epistemological crisis in which their insistent temporality is rooted. With this understanding, we can say more about the relationship between telepathy and the histories it invokes; mind reading as an epistemologically fraught *topos* in the *Commedia* is not only made possible by the poetic and philosophical histories explored in previous chapters; I would argue that in light of Dante's personal history, all of the evidence shows that as it is carried out, mind reading in the *Commedia* becomes a necessary performance of social and historical subjectivity.

To say that these histories make the *Commedia's* mind reading possible and even necessary implies valuable critical insights. First, tracing the histories of mind reading in and out of the poem reveals new specific evidence of how the *Commedia*, despite its explicit narrative and poetic claims, does not transcend but rather exists in history. Dante's departure from other visionaries in making telepathy a *topos* illustrates not historical isolation but rather that mind reading is very much a product of the epistemological histories we have examined: the narrative history of

epiphany, the philosophical and narrative histories of mind reading, Olivi's debate concerning cognition in Dante's time, and social conventions that dramatize what we may call Dante's personal epistemological history. These relationships, in turn, suggest in the poem not only awareness but an intriguing engagement with historicity that goes far beyond the Dante who obsessively and merely refers to and appropriates histories, far beyond the idea of Dante as theologian of history as informed primarily by the Augustinian model of Christian interpretation (and conversion). While not explicitly participating in the deliberate historicizing methodology of Renaissance thinkers, the *topos* of mind reading shows how the *Commedia* necessarily and sometimes involuntarily historicizes in part because of the poem's insistence on social, historical, cultural, and linguistic differentiation.⁹⁰

Through the lens of epistemology, the focus on mind reading also helps to define the poem's place in intellectual history by inviting us to re-evaluate our historical understanding of the poem's philosophy of language, the topic that I addressed in the introduction as one of the primary motivations for the dissertation. For the *topos* of mind reading reveals a performance of language that seriously challenges Kurt Flasch and other scholars who assume the poem's linguistic

⁹⁰ In *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*, which I encountered after I had reached my own conclusions, Ascoli makes a similar claim about Dante's relationship to authority, specifically through his understanding and use of the word "autore": "The word *does* have philologically derivable roots in a medieval etymological tradition. But the tradition is plural, and, as Dante approaches it, hardly stable: he is, ...drawing on all of the available meanings of the word, and is openly conditioning concepts of secular human authorship with the ideas of human authorship of the Bible and a divine Author of authors behind all of these. When these multiple meanings are brought together *sub specie aeternitatis*, from the perspective of the Otherworld, they are, paradoxically, historicized, in the sense that their meaning begins to change – an author who both "binds words with musical art" and is "worthy of faith and obedience" is different from one who does or is either of these things separately. From this perspective, the perceived anachronism of discussing Dante and his works in terms of a modern idea of originating authorship may not be as captious as it first seemed. In the push of one medieval and Dantean meaning of *autore* against another, a new meaning, or meanings, begins to emerge, which anticipates, without being identical to, those current today." (17).

transparency and efficacy.⁹¹ If, as Flasch and others assume, Dante claims to know who is damned or saved and therefore at some level positions language as unproblematically transparent, close attention to the *Commedia's* linguistic practice reveals different and disquieting messages. These tell us that language is contingent, that how and whether one understands cannot be taken for granted because signs have a life of their own, that interpretation is therefore risky and subject to misunderstanding. Knowing is necessarily partial and immanent, not because it is an earthly compensation for divine truth, but because language and speech in particular are privileged social processes that are subject to specific histories. If these findings are valid, then the *Commedia's* epistemology of language does not remain in the static categories of easy accessibility and transparency, in stark contrast to later fourteenth-century writers, such as Chaucer and Boccaccio who are said to interrogate more discernibly the power of language to signify. Instead, the poem points toward those later epistemological concerns by dramatizing its own versions of them. Discovering these signposts in the *Commedia* requires new ways of reading, one of which I have tried to model in this chapter, because like some of its more complex historicizing impulses, the poem's ambiguous epistemology of language is veiled in part by the poet's strategies precisely targeted to obscure our view.

This implicit presentation recalls Gregory's metaphor of the approaching dawn to figure the epistemological condition of the world as it nears the end of time. As discussed in chapter 3, in the fourth *Dialogue* Gregory explains that the ever-greater frequency of visions correlates to the end of time looming ever more near. Consequently spiritual visions increasingly enlighten human understanding that nonetheless remains flawed by the illusions of this world, just as before dawn

⁹¹ See the introduction for a review of the arguments of Flasch, et al.

shadows mingle with growing light. Dante surely was familiar with this metaphor because he incorporates a stunning version of it in the final stages of his vision in *Paradiso* 30.76-78. There Beatrice tells the pilgrim that the astonishingly beautiful images he sees, the river of light with gem-like souls that spark forth to flowers and back again to the light, are “umbriferi prefazi,” shadowy prefaces of the truth for Dante’s limited but ever-growing comprehension: “«Il fiume e li topazi / ch'entrano ed escono e 'l rider de l'erbe / son di lor vero umbriferi prefazi.»”⁹² We may understand performances of mind reading as philosophical “umbriferi prefazi” marking the *Commedia*’s ambiguous place in epistemological history as the poem foreshadows questions about language that would become increasingly urgent throughout the *trecento*.

⁹² “The river and the gems / of topaz entering and leaving, and / the grasses’ laughter – these are shadowy / prefaces of their truth.”

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