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6. Body

Dante's and Petrarch's Lyric Eschatologies

This chapter continues to investigate the intersection between lyric and eschatology that we have explored in the previous chapter, but while [Chapter 5](#) focused on lyric poems incorporating eschatological motifs, this chapter considers how a lyric fervour continues to enrich two inherently eschatological texts that one would expect to stage a 'conversion' from erotic passion to Christian values. We bring Dante's *Paradiso* and Petrarch's *Triumphus Eternitatis* (henceforth *TE*) into dialogue in order to highlight some crucial tensions around the continuing presence of a fundamentally erotic component within the imagination of Christian paradise. In our analysis, 'lyric' stands for an aspect of subjectivity bound up with the relation to the beloved and to a desire contained in the body and expressed in the longing for it. In particular, we aim to examine the different ways in which Dante and Petrarch reimagine the doctrine of the resurrection of the body as conveying a relational sense of identity bound up with the individual's memory, desires, and history that both complicates and opens up their understanding of poetry and ultimate happiness.

'DISIO D'I CORPI MORTI'

Our point of departure is the shores of Dante's Purgatory, where the pilgrim encounters a shade who has also just arrived at the realm of purgation: the shade of Casella, an old friend from the times of youth when Dante had not yet been exiled from Florence.¹ This episode rewrites the Virgilian motif of the impossible embrace between a living person and a shade: the pilgrim and his old friend try to embrace each other, but they cannot because, as Statius explains in *Purgatorio* xxv, shades in Dante's afterlife have an aerial body that gives them an appearance — 'aspetto' — but no substantiality.² As the poet laments, shades in the otherworld are 'vane', empty:

Ohi ombre vane, fuor che ne l'aspetto!
tre volte dietro a lei le mani avvinsi,
e tante mi tornai con esse al petto.

(Oh empty shades, except in seeming! | Three times
I clasped my hands behind him | only to find them
clasped to my own chest.) (*Purg.*, II, 79–81)

What is important to note is that both friends, who have just arrived in Purgatory, are still entrapped by their earthly

1 On this episode, see Gragnolati, *Amor che move*, pp. 91–103, and 'Ombre e abbracci. Riflessioni sull'inconsistenza in Dante', in *Passages, seuils, sauts: du dernier cercle de l'Enfer à la première terrasse du Purgatoire* (*Enf. xxxii – Purg. xii*), ed. by Manuele Gragnolati and Philippe Guérin (= *Chroniques italiennes web*, 35 (2020)), pp. 68–81.

2 See in particular Statius's description of the formation of the aerial body in *Purg.* xxv, 85–108, and Manuele Gragnolati's discussion of it in *Experiencing the Afterlife: Body and Soul in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 67–77. Quotations from the *Commedia* are from Petrocchi's edition. English translations come from: Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander. 3 vols (New York: Doubleday 2000–2007).

desires. Casella tells Dante that although he is now a soul deprived of his mortal body, he continues to love his friend in the same way that he did on earth: ‘Così com’io t’amai | nel *mortal corpo*, così t’amo sciolta’ (Even as I loved you in *my mortal flesh*,’ he said, | ‘so do I love you freed from it’; *Purg.* II, 89–90). Dante also shows nostalgia for the past and asks his friend to sing in the same way he used to sing in their youth. Casella performs Dante’s *canzone* ‘Amor che nella mente mi ragiona’ in such a way that everybody in Ante-Purgatory remains enchanted by its sweetness:

‘Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona’
cominciò elli allor sì dolcemente,
che la dolcezza ancor dentro mi suona.

(‘Love that converses with me in my mind,’ | he then
began, so sweetly | that the sweetness sounds within
me still.) (*Purg.* II, 112–14)³

The rest of the episode, with Cato’s harsh reprimand of the souls’ indulging in song and emotion (‘Che è ciò, spiriti lenti?’; 120), shows that the mutual affection which the two friends still feel for each other is wrong and that in Purgatory the attachment to the mortal body, the affection for friends and beloved, and the nostalgia for the past must change.⁴ Indeed, the moral structure of Dante’s Purgatory

3 ‘Amor che nella mente mi ragiona’ is one of Dante’s *Rime*, included in Book III of *Convivio*, where it heralds the transfer of Dante’s affection from Beatrice to Lady Philosophy. On the importance of this auto-citation in the *Commedia*, see Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante’s Poets: Textuality and Truth in the ‘Comedy’* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 31–40.

4 For readings of this episode, see for example, John Freccero, ‘Casella’s Song: *Purgatorio* II, 112’, in his *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 186–94; and Robert Hollander, ‘*Purgatorio* II: Cato’s Rebuke and Dante’s *Scoglio*’, *Italica*, 52.3 (Autumn 1975), pp. 348–63.

prescribes that the souls learn to detach themselves from anything transient and instead redirect all their desires towards God: according to Dante's Augustinian 'paradigm' of desire, attachments to one's earthly body and nostalgia for the earthly affections symbolized by it are considered as distractions that the purging soul must abandon if it wants to attain the complete love for God that is necessary to reach heaven.⁵ Purgatory is precisely the place that provides the experience, at once painful and productive, that allows the soul to transform personal and individual love into *caritas*, that is, the absolute and unconditional love for God which is also gratuitous love for one's neighbour and implies the possibility to free oneself from self-obsession and sin's monomania and to open oneself to others.⁶

This Augustinian paradigm of desire is made clear by Beatrice in her scolding of the pilgrim in the garden of Eden, when, pointing to her beautiful limbs now scattered on earth and reduced to ashes — her 'belle membra [...] | che so' n terra sparte' (*Purg.* xxxi, 50–51) — she explains that it is precisely when her body died that the pilgrim should have loved her most because this would have meant

5 See Chapter 5 of Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine 'Comedy': Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 99–121 (especially pp. 103–08).

6 On the notion of productive pain in the *Purgatorio*, see Manuele Gragnolati, 'Gluttony and the Anthropology of Pain in Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*', in *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person*, ed. by Rachel Fulton and Bruce W. Holsinger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 238–50; and Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife*, pp. 89–137. On sin in hell as 'obsessive monomania', see Peter Hawkins, *Dante: A Brief History* (London: Blackwell, 2006), p. 40. On the political significance of the experience of Purgatory, which also teaches the souls to reconstruct societal bonds and rebuild a sense of community, see Joan Ferrante, *The Political Vision of Dante's 'Comedy'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 198–252.

loving her soul, the immortal part of her that will never fail him. Actually, he should love her more now that she is a shade than when she was in her fleshly body on earth: albeit beautiful, the earthly body is mortal, and one should neither love it as though it were not doomed to die nor, as the pilgrim did after Beatrice's death, replace it with some other mortal good that distracts from fully directing one's love to God:

Mai non t'appresentò natura o arte
 piacere, quanto le bella membra in ch'io
 rinchiusa fui, e che so' 'n terra sparte,
 e se 'l sommo piacer sì ti fallio
 per la mia morte, qual cosa mortale
 dovea poi trarre te nel suo disio?
 Ben ti dovevi, per lo primo strale
 de le cose fallaci, levar suso
 di retro a me che non era più tale.

(Never did art or nature set before you beauty |
 as great as in *the lovely members* that enclosed me,
 | now scattered and reduced to dust. | And if the
 highest beauty failed you | in my death, what *mortal*
thing | should then have drawn you to desire it? |
 Indeed, at the very first arrow of deceitful things,
 you should have risen up | and followed me who
 was no longer of them.) (*Purg.* xxxi, 49–57)

Beatrice's words confirm that one should not love earthly goods too much and also suggest that there is something problematic in the mortal, fleshly body that is related to an intimate desire for others that must be overcome. Flesh would not seem to be required in the eschatological panorama of the *Commedia*, where by releasing a body of air, the souls are able to acquire the corporeality that is necessary for the full experience of the afterlife and the full expression of the self. In this respect, Dante's poem is in line

with contemporary eschatological assumptions, which had shifted emphasis from the idea of a collective judgment at the end of time and the subsequent reward or punishment of resurrected humankind in either hell or heaven. They were interested instead in the full experience of the soul in the afterlife right after its separation from the body. As the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* place emphasis on the intensity of the souls' pain, so the *Paradiso* indicates that in heaven the fleshless souls have access to the beatific vision, which satisfies all their desires and grants them perfect bliss ('pace'):

Lume è là sù che visibile face
 lo creatore a quella creatura
 che solo in lui vedere ha la sua pace.

(There is a light above that makes the Creator |
 visible to every creature | that finds its only peace
 in seeing Him.) (*Par.* xxx, 100–02)⁷

Several studies have argued that the condition of bliss achieved and manifested by the souls in heaven corresponds to a state of merging with God that opens up the self and radically changes it. Thus, for instance, Lino Pertile and Steven Botterill have indicated that Beatrice, insofar as she represents attachment to the past as well as erotic and lyric desire, must also eventually leave and be replaced by St Bernard before the pilgrim can reach the ultimate union with God and the Universe.⁸ Robin Kirkpatrick has

7 On the fullness of the separated souls' experience in Dante's hell and heaven, see Gragnolati: *Experiencing the Afterlife*, pp. 77–87, and his *Amor che move*, pp. 69–90.

8 Lino Pertile, *La punta del disio: Semantica del desiderio nella 'Commedia'* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2005), especially pp. 235–46, 'Dimenticare Beatrice'; Steven Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the 'Commedia'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 64–86, where he speaks of Dante's 'process of [...] detachment from Beatrice' as realized through Bernard's replacement of her as guide (p. 85).

spoken of a 'spirit of dispossession' that characterizes the condition of being in heaven, while Christian Moevs has indicated that the redirection of desire from mortal to immortal goods can be understood as a 'spontaneous crucifixion of the self' and that 'love is selflessness, and self is lovelessness'.⁹

There is something fascinating about the loss of self that uniting with God implies in Dante's concept of heaven and in the kind of subjectivity that this loss entails.¹⁰ However, if an important component of the heavenly state that Dante imagines is constituted by this transformation and shattering of the self, nonetheless there is something about their past that the souls in heaven continue to be attached to and that cannot be tamed, disciplined, or fully relinquished — an identity, that is, that goes in the opposite direction of transformation. Central to this dimension is the celebration of the resurrection of the flesh that takes place in *Paradiso* XIV, a moment in the *Commedia* in which Dante conveys with sublime intensity the nostalgia for one's own mortal body and the intimate affections that it represents. In replying to the pilgrim's doubt about what will happen to heavenly bliss at the end of time, Solomon explains that the final resurrection of the body will allow for an increase of the souls' beatific vision and subsequent happiness:

9 See Robin Kirkpatrick, 'Polemics of Praise: Theology as Text, Narrative and Rhetoric in Dante's *Commedia*', in *Dante's 'Commedia': Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 14–35 (p. 23); and Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's 'Comedy'* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 89–90.

10 See Heather Webb, *Dante's Persons: An Ethics of the Transhuman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), and Nicolò Crisafi and Manuele Gragnolati, 'Weathering the Afterlife: The Meteorological Psychology of Dante's *Commedia*', in *Weathering: Ecologies of Exposure*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2020), pp. 63–91.

Come la carne gloriosa e santa
 fia rivestita, la nostra persona
 più grata fia *per esser tutta quanta*:
 per che *s'accrescerà ciò che ne dona*
di gratiuto lume il sommo bene
 lume ch' a lui veder ne condiziona;
 onde la vision *crescer* convene,
crescer l'ardor che di quella s'accende,
crescer lo raggio che da esso vene.

(When we put on again our flesh, | glorified and
 holy, then our persons | will be more pleasing for
 being all complete, | so that the light, granted to us
 freely | by the Highest Good, shall increase, | the light
 that makes us fit to see Him. | From that light, vision
 must increase | and love increase what vision kindles,
 | and radiance increase, which comes from love.)
 (Par. XIV, 43–51)

The souls react joyfully to Solomon's idea that they will be reunited with their fleshly body — that mortal body which has remained on Earth and is now a corpse:

Tanto mi parver sùbiti e accorti
 e l'uno e l'altro coro a dicer 'Amme!'
 che ben mostrar *disio d'i corpi morti*:
 forse non pur per lor, *ma per le mamme*,
per li padri e per li altri che fuor cari
 anzi che fosser sempiterne fiamme.

(So quick and eager seemed to me both choirs | to
 say their *Amen* that they clearly showed | their desire
 for their dead bodies, | not perhaps for themselves
 alone, but for their mothers, | for their fathers, and
 for others whom they loved | before they all became
 eternal flames. (Par. XIV, 61–66)

The eagerness with which the souls ratify Solomon's promise reveals the intensity of their nostalgia for their bodies

(‘disio d’i corpi morti’).¹¹ Unlike many other passages of the *Paradiso* that stress the souls’ current happiness, here Dante’s poem emphasizes that they are still longing to reunite with their bodies and that, when they do so, they will be happier. In particular, the rhyme words ‘amme’ | ‘mamme’ | ‘fiamme’ express that after the recovery of what are now dead bodies, the separated souls — which in heaven have become splendid lights, enflamed by their beatitude and love for God — will become again veritable individuals with their own singularity, made of relations and memory.

The souls’ joyful reaction at the idea of recovering their dead bodies is connected not only with the increase of their vision of God but also with their personal attachments and can be considered as the passionate ‘expression of their desire to love fully in heaven what they loved on earth.’¹² In this way, the souls’ ‘disio d’i corpi morti’ seems to contradict the Augustinian paradigm of detachment, which, as we have seen, depicts the process of Purgatory as a transformation towards selflessness and dispossession. Moreover, the relational sense expressed by the souls’ desire for their resurrected bodies was somewhat of a novelty with respect to contemporary theologians, who focused mainly on the

11 On the motif of the resurrection of the body in the *Commedia*, see Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife*, pp. 139–78, and his *Amor che move*, pp. 104–10 and pp. 149–61, both with ample bibliography. See also Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, “Le bianche stole”: il tema della resurrezione nel *Paradiso*, in *Dante e la Bibbia. Atti del Convegno Internazionale promosso da ‘Biblia’: Firenze, 26–27–28 settembre 1986*, ed. by Giovanni Barblan (Florence: Olschki, 1988), pp. 249–71; and Caroline Walker Bynum, ‘Faith Imagining the Self: Somatomorphic Soul and Resurrection Body in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*’, in *Faithful Imagining: Essays in Honor of Richard R. Neibuhr*, ed. by Sang Huyn Lee, Wayne Proudfoot, and Albert Blackwell (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), pp. 81–104.

12 Barolini, *The Undivine ‘Comedy’*, p. 138.

exclusive relation of the individual to God and were less interested in the idea that personal and individual attachments continue in heaven among the blessed.¹³ The connection Dante makes in *Paradiso* XIV between the body's materiality and fleshliness, memory, and individuality, is striking for its personal character. It reveals a tension running through the *Paradiso* between the understanding of heaven as a state of transformation of the self as dissolution into God and the blessed souls' 'disio d'i corpi morti', which for Dante arguably includes not only the desire to embrace Casella at the end of time but also to recuperate Beatrice in all her erotic and lyric depth. Indeed, as Regina Psaki, Lombardi, and Barolini have convincingly shown by analysing the ubiquitous presence of the amatory language of lyric poetry in *Paradiso*, the figure of Beatrice does not lose her lyric character in heaven, nor does the pilgrim ever tame his erotic desire for her, even when it would seem logically incompatible with the love for God.¹⁴

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- 13 See Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 90–94. For example, Bernard of Clairvaux does not permit any notion of interaction between the saints in his concept of heaven, notwithstanding his praise of friendship on earth. On Bernard in particular, see Anna Harrison, 'Community among the Saints in Heaven in Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons for the Feast of All Saints*', in *Last Things: Death and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 191–204.
- 14 See F. Regina Psaki, 'Dante's Redeemed Eroticism', *Lectura Dantis*, 18–19 (1996), pp. 12–19, her 'The Sexual Body in Dante's Celestial Paradise', in *Imagining Heaven in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Jan Swango Emerson and Hugh Feiss (New York: Garland, 2000), pp. 47–61, and her 'Love for Beatrice: Transcending Contradiction in the *Paradiso*', in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 115–30; Elena Lombardi, 'Identità lirica e piacere linguistico: una lettura di *Paradiso* xxvi', *Studi danteschi*, 82 (2017), pp. 51–80 and her *Imagining the Woman Reader*, pp. 117–53; Teodolinda Barolini, 'La poesia della teologia e la teologia della poesia dalle *Rime* di Dante

Our final point regards the last cantos of *Paradiso* and the representation of the Empyrean, a heaven of pure intellectual light (xxx, 39), a dimensionless point ('punto') equal to the mind of God, where everything is simultaneously co-present ('il punto | a cui tutti li tempi son presenti', xvii, 17–18) — a state that theologians called *totum simul*.¹⁵ In the Empyrean, something significant takes place that has to do with the resurrection. On a thematic level, the resurrection of the body is anticipated and imagined before the end of time when the pilgrim Dante enters the Empyrean: not only is he granted the privilege of seeing the blessed with the resurrected bodies that they will receive only at the Last Judgment, but his own 'living' body has acquired the characteristics of a resurrected body.¹⁶

In linguistic and formal terms, as Gary Cestaro has noticed, in the last ten cantos of *Paradiso* dedicated to the pilgrim's experience in the Empyrean, one finds the resurgence of the image of the child suckling at the mother's breast, which is central to Dante's meditation on the vernacular as a corporeal, affective, and fluid language acquired by imitating the wet nurse (*De vulgari eloquentia* I, i, 2).¹⁷ For instance, it is present when the pilgrim enters the Empyrean and observes a river of light turning into a circle:

al *Paradiso*', in 'Il mondo errante'. *Dante fra letteratura, eresia e storia; atti del convegno internazionale di studio: Bertinoro, 13–16 settembre 2010*, ed. by Marco Veglia, Lorenzo Paolini, and Riccardo Parmeggiani (Spoleto: Centro di studi italiani sull'alto medioevo, 2013), pp. 537–45.

15 On the concept of *totum simul*, originally in Boethius, see Barolini, *The Undivine 'Comedy'*, pp. 168–69.

16 See Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife*, pp. 161–78.

17 Gary Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), pp. 154–56.

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
 ancora de li occhi, chinandomi a l'onda
 che si deriva perché vi s'immegli;
 e sì come di lei bevve la gronda
 da le palpebre mie, così mi parve
 di sua lunghezza divenuta tonda.

(No infant, waking up too late | for his accustomed
 feeding, will thrust his face | up to his milk with
 greater urgency, | than I, to make still better mirrors
 of my eyes, | inclined my head down toward the
 water | that flows there for our betterment, | and no
 sooner had the eaves of my eyelids | drunk deep of
 that water than to me it seemed | it had made its
 length into a circle.) (*Par.* xxx, 82–90)

The image of the child craving his mother's milk expresses here the intensity of the pilgrim's desire to see God and is deployed at the crucial moment in which the pilgrim, now close to attaining the ultimate vision, is about to abandon a linear dimension of temporality (like that on Earth or in Purgatory) and enter instead the circular and extra-temporal dimension of Eternity.

Our hypothesis, which draws on Cestaro's reading but pushes it further through Bersani's concept of 'aesthetics' with which we have often engaged in this book, is that the complex and multivalent desire informing the eschatological imagination of the *Commedia* is also replicated in the movement of its textuality. It is indeed quite significant that the image of suckling at the mother's breast appears in precisely the three cantos of the *Paradiso* (xxiii, xxx and xxxiii) in which, as Barolini has shown, the *Commedia* deploys a different kind of textuality — a textuality that is no longer rational, logical, or linear but 'jumping': a tex-

tuality that transgresses the common mode, which is discursive, logical, linear, 'chronologized', and intellective, by being instead 'lyric', by which Barolini means 'nondiscursive, nonlinear or circular, dechronologized and affective'.¹⁸ This jumping mode is inaugurated with the attempt to capture the ineffable experience of Beatrice's smile in canto XXIII, 55–60, so overwhelming that the sacred poem is forced to jump ('qui convien saltare lo sacrato poema', 60). This form of textuality is 'resistant to subdivision and hence to logical exposition, and is characterized by apostrophes, exclamations, heavily metaphoric language, and intensely affective similes', subverting linearity and conveying the circular and extra-temporal dimension of Eternity, where everything is simultaneously co-present.¹⁹

Ultimately, our point is that the final cantos of the poem not only represent the resurrection of the body (for both the blessed and the pilgrim) before the end of time but also perform it. As we have seen, the heavenly state can be interpreted as the paradoxical condition of combining the dissolution of too rigid an identity into the movement of God's cosmic order and his love ('l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle', *Par.* XXXIII, 145) with a strong sense of individuality which is accepted in its singularity and relationality and persists in the body and in the desire

18 See Barolini, *The Undivine 'Comedy'*, pp. 218–56 (p. 221). Her notion of a 'jumping' textuality as fundamentally lyric rather than narrative in nature derives from her analysis of the *terzina* from *Paradiso* XXIII, 61–63, in which Dante acknowledges that he must leap over the moment of ecstatic, lyric, mystical vision he cannot describe and rejoin his path further up: 'e così, figurando il paradiso, | convien saltar lo sacrato poema | come chi trova suo cammin reciso'. On the poetic language of the high *Paradiso* as incorporating a Kristevan dimension of semiotic affect which recuperates the fluid and maternal component of the vernacular, see Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar*, especially pp. 135–66; and Gragnolati, *Amor che move*, pp. 149–61.

19 Again see Barolini, *The Undivine 'Comedy'*, p. 221.

for it ('disio d'i corpi morti', *Par.* XIV, 63). One could say that the subject which is not a subject anymore, re-found and replicated in the poem's textuality and rhythm, not only opens itself up to a state of cosmic dissolution but also maintains a corporeal depth that is connected with its affective history, including, in the case of Dante, Beatrice and the lyric past associated with her. One could therefore say that, together with the sense of progression typical of Dante's poem and its epic form, the pyrotechnic, ardent, 'resurrected' character of the lyric textuality of the *Paradiso's* last cantos replicates the paradoxical pleasure not only of losing but also of continuing to find oneself again.

DESIRING LAURA'S BODY

Bearing in mind Dante's enactment and embrace of paradox as the essence of desire in the *Paradiso*, we can turn to Petrarch's *Triumphs* and consider the eschatology and textuality they embody, particularly the final *TE*. The *Triumphs*, likely composed between 1352 and 1374, are written in the form of a vision and in *terza rima* — the meter Dante invented for his *Commedia*, and as such, they explicitly invite a comparison with Dante's magnum opus. They narrate a triumphal procession of six allegorical figures, each of which is defeated in turn by a greater victor — Love, Chastity (represented by Laura, Petrarch's beloved), Death, Fame, and Time — until Eternity triumphs over them all. As in the *Commedia* with respect to the *Vita Nova*, in the *Triumphs* the lyric poetry composing Petrarch's *Rvf* gives way to a more universal, didactic, and narrative dimension that culminates with a vision of paradise and supposedly supplants eros. In turn, the epic framework of the *Triumphs* (modelled on the classical epic as much as on

Dante's vernacular one) and the forward movement generated by the *terza rima* itself instigate a 'vertical' drive largely absent from the *rime sparse*.²⁰

In particular, we would like to focus on the notion of desire that the *Triumph's* finale conveys. As we shall see, it offers a depiction of heaven that goes against the development of some key theological assumptions about the afterlife in the late Middle Ages, specifically regarding the beatific vision and Dante's own eschatology in the *Commedia*. As hinted earlier, the eschatological focus had shifted during this period from a concern with the event of the Last Judgment and the resurrection of the body at the end of time towards the experience of the separated soul in the time between death and the resurrection. This development concluded with the 1336 promulgation of the papal bull *Benedictus Deus*, which officially declared that in heaven a separated soul enjoys ultimate beatitude and does not need its body in order to have access to full vision of God. This edict was passed in Avignon, the place where Petrarch lived and worked in and around the papal curia, and it is not surprising that, as Maria Cecilia Bertolani has shown, he knew well contemporary theological debates on the beatific vision.²¹ In c.1336, Petrarch even wrote a letter

20 On the poetics of the *Triumph* and the nature of Petrarch's vernacular project in that work, see at least, Zygmunt G. Barański: 'The *Triumph*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Petrarch*, ed. by Albert R. Ascoli and Unn Falkeid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 74–84; Fabio Finotti, 'The Poem of Memory: Petrarch's *Triumph*', in *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. by Victoria Kirkham and Armando Maggi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 63–83; Marco Ariani, 'I *Triumph*', in his *Petrarca* (Rome: Salerno, 1999), pp. 286–310; and Marguerite Waller, 'Negative Stylistics: A Reading of Petrarch's *Trionfi*', in her *Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), pp. 107–32. On the notion of a 'vertical' drive in the *Triumph*, see Finotti, 'The Poem of Memory', p. 63.

21 For example, see those put forward by Robert of Anjou, Benedict XII, and Durand of St Pourçain. See the first two chapters of Maria

to Benedict XII in which he acknowledged the Pontiff's view that the resurrection of the body is not necessary for the blessed souls' glory and that they are granted the beatific vision straight after physical death.²²

Yet the *TE* imagines quite a different eschatology, not only focussing on the resurrection of the body but imbuing this theological doctrine with a courtly tenor. Instead of redirecting desire from a mortal lady to an immortal God, the vision of eternity in the last Triumph seems to justify the poet-lover's desire for his lady by imagining that the resurrection of her body will cure it of the imperfections that had made it so problematic. As such, the beatific experience of the *TE* is not located in the gratuitous giving of the self to God or to others (or vice versa) but in a carefully choreographed vision of the triumph of the beloved, which eschews any known eschatological parameters in the strictest sense.

The *TE* opens by staging a poetic subject still shaken and dispersed by the vicissitudes of desire, time, and history depicted in the earlier Triumphs, particularly in the *Triumphus Temporis*. Acknowledging the instability and volubility of the world and recognizing his own responsibility in his predicament, the Petrarchan subject is presented as being on the point of conversion, preparing to move into the infallible God:

Da poi che sotto 'l ciel cosa non vidi
stabile e ferma, tutto sbigottito
mi volsi a me, e dissi: 'In che ti fidi?'

Cecilia Bertolani, *Petrarca e la visione dell'eterno* (Bologna: Il Mulino 2005), pp. 1–126; and Bynum's discussion of the controversy over the beatific vision in *The Resurrection of the Body*, pp. 283–91.

22 The letter in question is *Epistola* 1, 5, analysed by Bertolani, *Petrarca e la visione*, pp. 99–126.

Risposi: 'Nel Signor, che mai fallito
 non à promessa a chi si fida in lui.
 ma ben veggio che 'l mondo m'ha schernito,
 e sento quel ch'i' sono e quel ch'i' fui,
 e veggio andar, anzi volare il tempo,
 e doler mi vorrei, né so di cui;
 ché la colpa è pur mia, che più per tempo
 deve' aprir gli occhi, e non tardar al fine,
 ch'à dir il vero omai troppo m'attempo.
 Ma tarde non fur mai gratie divine;
 in quelle spero che 'n me anchor faranno
 alte operationi e pellegrine.'

(Since I saw nothing beneath heaven that was stable or firm, all dismayed, I turned to myself and said 'What do you trust in?'. || I replied 'In the Lord, who has never broken a promise made to one who trusts in him. But I see well that the world has mocked me, || and I perceive that which I am and what I was, and I see Time moving on, indeed flying, and I would like to complain but I don't know about whom; || because the fault is entirely my own: for I should have opened my eyes sooner, not waiting until the end, since to tell the truth I've already let too much time pass by. || But divine grace has never come too late and I put my hope in it that it will still produce high and wondrous things in me.') (*TE*, 1–15)

While absorbed in these meditations, which recall the typically Petrarchan situation that we analysed in [Chapter 1](#) in relation to *Rvf* 70 (and that is most emblematically expressed in *Rvf* 264 and in the *Secretum*), the 'I's thoughts take an explicitly eschatological turn, shifting towards a question about the end of time: 'Or, se non stanno | queste cose che 'l ciel volge e governa, | dopo molto voltar, che fine avranno?' (And now, if these things that the heavens move and govern never stand still, after so much turning, what will become of them?; 13–15). There is no interest for the eschatological period between physical death and

the Last Judgment; instead the 'I' has a sudden vision that transports him directly to the final transfiguration of the world and to the stopping of time and variation:

Questo pensava; e mentre più s'interna
 la mente mia, veder mi parve un mondo
 novo, in etate immobile ed eterna,
 e 'l sole e tutto 'l ciel disfar a tondo
 con le sue stelle, anchor la terra e 'l mare,
 e rifarne un più bello e più giocondo.

Qual meraviglia ebb'io, quando ristare
 vidi in un punto quel che mai non stette,
 ma discorrendo suol tutto cangiare!

E le tre parti sue vidi ristrecte
 ad una sola, e quella una esser ferma
 sì che, come solea, più non s'affrette;
 e quasi in terra d'erbe ignuda ed herma,
 né 'fia', né 'fu', né 'mai', né 'inanzi' o "indietro",
 ch'umana vita fanno varia e 'nferma!

Passa il penser sì come sole in vetro,
 anzi più assai, però che nulla il tene.
 O, qual gratia mi fia, se mai l'impetro,
 ch'i' veggia ivi presente il sommo bene,
 non alcun mal, che solo il tempo mesce
 e con lui si diparte e con lui vène.

(I was thinking this, and while my mind was turning ever further in on itself, I seemed to see a new world appear, in an immobile and eternal time, || and the sun and all of heaven and its stars around disappear, and the earth and the sea too, and to see another world remade more beautiful and more pleasing. || What wonder I felt when I saw motionless in one point that which has never stopped moving, but racing on changes everything! || And I saw its three parts contained in one alone, and that one staying still, not hurrying on as it used to do; || and, like in a grassless and remote stretch of land, neither 'will be', nor 'was', nor 'ever', neither 'before' nor 'after', that make human life so unstable and infirm. || Thought passes on like sun through glass, indeed

even more so, since nothing holds it back. O what grace it will be, if I should obtain it, || that I should see there present the supreme good, and no evil that time alone furnishes, and that with it comes and goes.) (*TE*, 19–39)

We have now moved from the personal reflection on God as the infallible endpoint of every promise to an Apocalyptic perspective of the ‘new heaven and new earth’ (Apoc. 21). The focus is almost exclusively on vision and the visionary (‘veder mi parve’; ‘vidi’; ‘vidi’; ‘veggia’), yet Petrarch’s reading and appropriation of Apocalypse turns out to be partial and restrictive: while he emphasizes the importance of revelation and the unprecedented power of the vision of the ‘new world’ (mondo novo) to subsume the old, he underplays the theocentric, sustaining, and titanic presence of God as ‘Alpha and Omega’ (Apoc. 1, 8) as well as the final victory of the Lamb (Apoc. 5, 6), which one might otherwise expect from engaging with the Book of Revelation.

Petrarch’s appropriation of Dante is arguably even more radical. The phrase ‘mentre più s’interna | la mente mia’ (19–20) recalls *Par.* xxxiii, 85, where the verb ‘s’interna’ refers to Dante’s vision of the mystery of how the universe, in all its multiplicity, is actually unified in the Godhead — a mystical meaning that Petrarch picks up in *Rvf* 327, 10–11: ‘fra li spiriti electi, | ove nel suo factor l’alma s’interna’ (among the blessed spirits, where the soul immerses itself in contemplation of its maker). The *TE* thereby creates the expectation that the Petrarchan subject will have a transcendent vision of God. However, as Moevs has shown, the verb ‘s’interna’, together with the recasting of the equally Dantean ‘punto’ mentioned in our analysis of the *Paradiso*, indicates Petrarch’s resistance to metaphysics, as well as his doubt about the ontological

foundations of the soul and its relationship to its maker. Able to join with God only through a superhuman effort of the will that would quell all other desires, the Petrarchan subject does not possess that innate desire propelling it to reunite with its source and the ground of all being. Rather, it has to strive even just to seek God among the things of the world.²³

As a consequence, in the *TE*, Petrarch's eternity results in:

a strange affair: it is not a transcendence of time and flux, but rather it is time and flux frozen, fixed, stopped. It is not a beatific vision of the divine light, of pure being or consciousness as the ontological foundation of the world; it is rather a dream that the fleeting world itself could be made a 'cosa... stabile e ferma' [...]: in short, a spatiotemporal world that is non-contingent, stable, unchanging, permanently new, whole, dependable and gathered together.²⁴

In other words, for both Dante and Petrarch, eternity is without end and, insofar as time is suspended, timeless too. But whereas for Dante the 'punto' has a metaphysical valence and coincides with the 'transcendent God' that gives meaning to creation and is the source and end of all desire (see for example its manifold presence in *Par.* xxviii), Petrarch's 'punto' merely corresponds to a perfected version of earth, cured of its instability and subjection to time.²⁵ It is definitively not the *totum simul* of Dante's *Paradiso*, where, as we have seen above, the poet actually aims to recreate textually the experience of 'ontological

23 See Moevs, 'Subjectivity and Conversion', p. 242 and p. 246.

24 Ibid, p. 234.

25 Ibid, p. 237.

simultaneity': eternity not as mere duration but as God's 'plenitude of presence in a never-fading instant.'²⁶

As Moevs also has suggested, the insistence on thinking (*TE*, 19; 34) indicates that the Petrarchan subject remains bound to a finite mode of understanding and ultimately never transcends himself or his earthly desires. Unlike the progression that informs the *Commedia*, where in a paradoxical way the self keeps its memory and affective identity but also changes and opens up to fusing with God, in the *TE*, we find at most a pseudo-progression: a simulated movement toward what we think might be the beatific vision of God but which is merely a prelude of (or even a pretext for) Laura's final return in all her perfection.

Instead of reflecting on the beatific vision that the blessed enjoy as soon as they get to heaven and that will increase at the resurrection, the remainder of the *TE* insists on eternity as the freezing of time, first as a way to imagine that a never-ending fame will be possible and then as a possibility for the body — especially Laura's glorified body — to resurrect in a changeless manner. In this conception, having a taste of beatitude is not about opening up or turning oneself inside out to merge with God but instead involves focusing exclusively on one individual in all her (lyric and erotic) specificity. In the passage quoted above, the 'sommo bene' (37) is usually read as referring to God. Indeed, as Vinicio Pacca has pointed out in his commentary, it is a common phrase for God in both Dante's and Petrarch's other works (see e.g. *Rvf* 13, 10; 99, 3). At the same time, given how the *TE* evolves, it could equally be a symbol of Laura in her fully corporeal glory and per-

26 Barolini, *The Undivine 'Comedy'*, p. 168.

fection at the resurrection, her body no longer fragmented or scattered as it is represented in the *Rvf*.²⁷

Indeed, Petrarch's eschatology fully unfolds in the moment when Laura herself appears in the text of the *TE*:

O felici quelle anime che 'n via
sono o seranno di venire al fine
di ch'io ragiono, quandunque e' si sia.

E tra l'altre leggiadre e pellegrine
beatissima lei, che morte occise
assai di qua dal natural confine!

Parranno allor l'angeliche divise
e l'oneste parole e i penser casti
che nel cor giovenil natura mise.

Tanti volti, che Morte e 'l Tempo à guasti,
torneranno al suo più fiorito stato;
e vedrassi ove, Amor, tu mi legasti,

ond'io a dito ne sarò mostrato:
'Ecco chi pianse sempre, e nel suo pianto
sovra 'l riso d'ogni altro fu beato!'

E quella di ch'anchor piangendo canto
avrà gran meraviglia di se stessa,
vedendosi fra tutte dar il vanto.

(O happy those souls who are, or will be, on their way to reaching the end of which I speak, whenever it may be! || And among the other graceful and peregrine souls, most blessed she whom Death extinguished much before the natural time! || Then will appear the angelic looks and honest words and chaste thoughts that Nature placed in her young heart. || So many faces, which Death and Time have ravaged, will return in fullest flower and it will be seen where you, Love, bound me, || so that I will

27 On the synecdochic representation of Laura in the *Rvf*, see for example, Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, pp. 9–10 and pp. 78–79; Cesare Segre, 'Les Isotopies de Laure', in *Exigences et perspectives de la sémiotique: recueil d'hommages pour Algirdas Julien Greimas*, ed. by Herman Perret and Hans-George Ruprecht, 2 vols (Amsterdam: J Benjamins, 1985), II, pp. 811–26; and Freccero, 'The Fig Tree and the Laurel', pp. 34–40.

be singled out: 'Here's one who wept always and, in his tears, was more blessed than anyone in their laughter!'. || And she for whom I still weep and sing will marvel greatly at herself seeing how she is praised above all the others.) (*TE*, 82–99)

Once more, Petrarch's text takes on a clear eschatological perspective, emphatically looking forward to the end of time ('fine'). There is no doubt that the resurrection of the body will take place ('sono o seranno', 'paranno allor', 'torneranno', 'vedrassi'), and the beginning of this passage looks like it might be a celebration of that ultimate happiness or *gaudium*, which, theologically, should coincide with a perfect enjoyment of the *visio Dei*. Instead, Petrarch takes this as an opportunity to recapitulate his entire erotic history and its inextricable links to poetry. As the poet interpolates the god of Love (here *Amor* is the lyric figure representing eros and not the Christian God) and even himself into that vision as a kind of celebrity (*TE*, 93–96), Petrarch's eschatological vision takes a decisive turn back towards earthly desires. There is a resurgence of the lyric past in all its specificity and — in Petrarch's case — exclusivity as the poet imagines that when the resurrection of the body takes place, it will be Laura who will be most beautiful and blessed, her face standing out among all the rest, the same face to which *Amor* first bound him and continues to do so.

There is no sense of dispossession or transformation of the self in Petrarch's vision of eternity here. Instead, what keeps it together is the persistence and indissolubility of identity, which is a fundamentally lyric entity that carries an unwavering and erotic attachment to the corporeal dimension of an individual and their personal history. To speak of 'lyric' in relation to the *Paradiso* and the *TE* is precisely to emphasize the corporeal, intersubjective, and

relational aspect of their poetic eschatologies. In Dante's case, we have called 'lyric' that undisciplinable, affective component bound up with the body as the site of desire, memory, and relationality, and ultimately with Beatrice.²⁸ In Dante, as we have seen, this lyric dimension resists being fully subsumed into the more mystical, self-dissolving union with God that propels the narrative of the *Commedia*, remaining instead in paradoxical tension right to the end of the poem. In Petrarch's *TE* by contrast, the lyric and erotic dimension is the one that takes over, becoming the only element that matters, to the exclusion of everything else, including God. We find neither the experience of *caritas*, nor the radical openness of the self to the Other that is implied by ecstatic union and the *visio Dei*, nor is there any other interest beyond that for Laura herself, with whom the poem exclusively concludes:

Ne l'età più fiorita e verde avranno
 con immortal bellezza eterna fama.
 Ma innanzi a tutte ch'a rifarsi vanno
 è quella che piangendo il mondo chiama
 con la mia lingua e con la stanca penna:
 ma 'l ciel pur di vederla intera brama.
 A riva un fiume che nasce in Gebenna,
 Amor mi die' per lei sì lunga guerra,
 che la memoria ancora il cor accenna.
 Felice sasso che 'l bel viso serra!
 Che, poi che avrà preso il suo bel velo,
 se fu beato chi la vide in terra,
 or che fia dunque a rivederla in cielo?

28 For this understanding of lyric in Dante, see Manuele Gagnolati and Elena Lombardi, 'Volgarizzazione lirica e piacere linguistico in Dante', in *Toscana bilingue (1260-1430). Per una storia sociale del tradurre medievale*, ed. by Sara Bischetti and others (Berlin: de Gruyter, forthcoming); and Francesca Southerden, 'The Lyric Mode', in *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*, ed. by Manuele Gagnolati, Elena Lombardi, and Francesca Southerden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

(In the most blossoming and greenest age they will have immortal beauty and eternal fame. But supreme among all those who will be remade || is she for whom the world cries out, weeping, with my tongue and my weary pen, while heaven's only desire is to see her whole again. || Along a riverbank that rises in Gebenna, Love gave me so long a war for her, that my heart still preserves the memory. || Happy the gravestone that encloses that face! For when she will have put on again her mortal veil, if it was bliss to see her on earth, || what will it be to see her again in heaven?) (*TE*, 133–45)

While we do remain within the Christian framework of heavenly eternity, there is no reference to Christ, the Trinity, or God, but only to the never-ending fame and beauty that the blessed will enjoy, Laura above all. It is in equal parts an eschatological and lyric fantasy, which culminates with intense yearning for a vision of Laura's body alone. The poet even states without irony that all of heaven desires, with almost cupidinous force (the word Petrarch uses is 'brama'), to look upon Laura's body in its restored corporeal wholeness and to celebrate her exceptional and enduring beauty and fame ('dar il vanto'). In other words, the experience of heaven has a place only to validate the supremacy of Laura's image in relation to Petrarch's gaze and to the resurrected landscape of his heart. As the memory of the lyric past floods back, the prospect of entering a celestial Jerusalem (if it ever existed) is completely supplanted by the vision of a new and timeless Vaucluse transposed into this paradise at the end of time (139–41). The reader is led back all the way to the 'loco chiuso' (enclosed place) with which the *Triumphus* began (*Triumphus Cupidinis* 1, 8), i.e., to the scene of both the writing subject's dream and his subjection to Love, here both redeemed and valourized in light of the final, imagined vision of Laura's resurrec-

ted body.²⁹ In this vision of eternity, God cannot but be absent: within the confines of Petrarch's redeemed lyric universe of the *Triumph*, when Laura will be restored to presence, if she takes God's place, He will be relegated below, in a stunning reversal of the substitution of the beloved by the Virgin Mary in *Rvf* 366.³⁰

Being 'beato' (144) in this fantasy does not mean fusing with God but re-experiencing in heaven, in an even more wondrous manner, the pleasure of gazing on Laura on earth. Yet notwithstanding its vertical drive and final burst of lyric energy, the *TE* ends not with a sense of fullness but rather with a kind of suspension, conveyed both in the still-unrealized status of wish and in the hypothetical and interrogative mode of the closing lines. We are reminded of the 'almost mode' that marked the poet's vision of heaven in *Rvf* 302, which, as analysed in [Chapter 5](#), similarly resisted certainty, closure, and perfection. In the sonnet, the lyric fantasy is one of interaction with the beloved, which brings pleasure but appears tenuous from the start and doesn't last; in the *TE*, the ultimate pleasure is projected towards the timeless future and therefore envisaged as lasting, but it hasn't happened yet and also lacks intimacy and reciprocation. Laura remains an object of beauty to be contemplated at a distance, rather than the subject of an interaction that would truly allow for an inter-subjective experience of affective union.

29 Cf. *Triumphus Cupidinis* I, 8, and Marco Ariani's intertextual reading of the two moments of the work in Francesco Petrarca, *Triumph*, ed. by Marco Ariani (Milan: Mursia, 1988): 'è dunque il corpo glorioso di Madonna che fa rifiorire la landa desolata del tempo annientato: il topos del plazer primaverile, corrosivo all'inizio del poema, ritorna, alla fine, in un cerchio perfettamente concluso, radicalmente riavvalorato' (p. 384).

30 See Southerden, *Dante and Petrarch in the Garden of Language*.

As outlined above in the final cantos of Dante's *Paradiso*, with the collapse of eschatology into poetry there is a resurrection of lyric textuality, whereby the pilgrim actually experiences the resurrection, and the poem replicates its fullness in the text. Everything is simultaneously present in a form of openness that paradoxically preserves and extends desire and memory into the eschatological present of the resurrection itself. By contrast, Petrarch's language is less dazzling, and what seems to be missing is precisely the fullness that feels so present in the *Paradiso's* 'jumping' textuality. One could say that the *TE* is therefore lyric in a different way. For Petrarch, the moment of ultimate reunion with Laura can be imagined, and the subject can gain satisfaction from the fantasy, but it cannot be experienced or expressed except between the lines and, as the final — open — question testifies, at the very margins of the text. In other words, with the textual 'fireworks' Dante stages at the end of the *Paradiso*, the pilgrim's own desire and will ('disio' and 'velle') are brought into a perfect cosmological circulation with 'l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle' (*Par.* xxxiii, 142–45); but at the end of the *TE*, the fulfilment of desire is deferred with a quintessentially Petrarchan sense of non-closure.³¹ Dante's *Paradiso* is sustained by presence, to the extent that even when, as in *Paradiso* xiv, the body is felt as absent, the lack of it can still be celebrated as joyous. In Petrarch, by contrast, a sense of virtuality, even spectrality, remains, and what is absent really *isn't* there: in the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* Laura dissolves even when she comes back (see, for example, *Rvf* 359), and in the *TE*, the lack of her *mortal corpo* remains irreducible even in the face of its promised return at the end of time as indicated by the reference to the 'happy gravestone' (felice

31 Cf. Heyworth, *Desiring Bodies*, pp. 179–227 (p. 218).

sasso, 143) that the poet still covets.³² As Jennifer Rushworth has noted, the poet and the world continue to mourn for Laura ('quella che *piangendo* il mondo chiama | con la mia lingua', 136–37), and 'in the rhyme of "chiama" and "brama", Laura emerges as an unlocatable absence, a denizen of neither heaven nor earth.'³³

Rather than encounter the extraordinary fullness and realization of the *Paradiso*, we find here another, equally extraordinary, form of intensity, this time based on distance, incompleteness, and deferral: the delay in desire's ultimate fulfilment and the quite radical gesture of supplanting God with Laura while still contemplating her from a distance are still forms of pleasure for Petrarch. As we have seen throughout this book, in this paradoxical form of desire, fore-pleasure counts as much as end-pleasure, and the subject seeks to remain in that state as long as possible since it too can be — paradoxically — satisfying.³⁴

32 A similar fantasy of the resurrection of Laura's body is found in poems such as *Rvf* 302, 313, 319, and 362.

33 Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning*, p. 84.

34 See especially the discussion of Bersani's concept of masochistic pleasure in [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#) of this book.

Manuele Gragnolati and Francesca Southerden, 'Body: Dante's and Petrarch's Lyric Eschatologies', in Manuele Gragnolati and Francesca Southerden, *Possibilities of Lyric: Reading Petrarch in Dialogue. With an Epilogue by Antonella Anedda Angioy*, Cultural Inquiry, 18 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2020), pp. 135–62 <https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-18_06>

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