

REVIEWING DANTE'S THEOLOGY

VOLUME 2



Edited by Claire E. Honess and Matthew Treherne

Peter Lang



LEEDS STUDIES ON DANTE

The two volumes of *Reviewing Dante's Theology* bring together work by a range of internationally prominent Dante scholars to assess current research on Dante's theology and to suggest future directions for research.

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Reviewing Dante's Theology

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Series Editors

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Contents

Abbreviations and Note on Translations	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Notes on Contributors	xi
CLAIRE E. HONESS AND MATTHEW TREHERNE	
Introduction	I
ALBERT R. ASCOLI	
Poetry and Theology	3
PAOLA NASTI	
Dante and Ecclesiology	43
RONALD L. MARTINEZ	
Dante and the Poem of the Liturgy	89
CLAIRE E. HONESS	
Dante and the Theology of Politics	157
GEORGE FERZOCO	
Dante and the Context of Medieval Preaching	187
RUTH CHESTER	
Virtue in Dante	211

ZYGMUNT G. BARAŃSKI

(Un)orthodox Dante 253

Index 331

Abbreviations and Note on Translations

The following editions are used throughout, unless otherwise stated.

Bible	<i>Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem</i> , 4th revised edn, ed. by B. Fischer, R. Weber, R. Gryson, et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994)
<i>Commedia</i>	<i>La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata</i> , ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 2nd edn, 4 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994)
<i>Conv.</i>	<i>Convivio</i> , ed. by Cesare Vasoli & Domenico De Robertis, vol. I. ii of Dante Alighieri, <i>Opere minori</i> , 2 vols (Milan & Naples: Ricciardi, 1979–88)
<i>DVE</i>	<i>De vulgari eloquentia</i> , ed. by Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, in <i>Opere minori</i> , II, 1–237.
<i>Eclogues</i>	<i>Egloge</i> , ed. by Enzo Cecchini, in <i>Opere minori</i> , II, 647–89
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistole</i> , ed. by Arsenio Frugoni & Giorgio Brugnoli, in <i>Opere minori</i> , II, 505–643
<i>Inf.</i>	<i>Inferno</i> , in <i>La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata</i>
<i>Mon.</i>	<i>Monarchia</i> , ed. by Bruno Nardi, in <i>Opere minori</i> II, 239–503
<i>Par.</i>	<i>Paradiso</i> , in <i>La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina</i> , ed. by J. P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris: Migne, 1844–64)
<i>Purg.</i>	<i>Purgatorio</i> , in <i>La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata</i>
<i>Rime</i>	<i>Rime</i> , ed. by Gianfranco Contini, in <i>Opere minori</i> , I. i, 249–552
<i>VN</i>	<i>Vita nuova</i> , ed. by Domenico De Robertis, in <i>Opere minori</i> , I. i, 1–247

Unless otherwise stated in individual essays, the following translations have been used:

- *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Allen Mandelbaum, 3 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980–82)
- *The Banquet*, trans. by Christopher Ryan (Saratoga, CA: Anma Libri, 1989)
- *Monarchy*, trans. by Prue Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

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We are grateful to Peter Lang for its support of this new book series in Dante studies, and in particular to Hannah Godfrey for her patience and support as we brought this project to fruition.

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CLAIRE E. HONESS AND MATTHEW TREHERNE

Introduction

Reviewing Dante's Theology, which forms the first two volumes of the book series Leeds Studies on Dante, is the product of a workshop held in April 2008 in the Leeds Humanities Research Institute at the University of Leeds, organized by the Leeds Centre for Dante Studies, and of a subsequent seminar held at the University of Cambridge in November 2008. The workshop aimed to take stock of what had become a vibrant field of study, and to suggest future directions for research. Each participant was invited to present an overview of a particular topic, to sum up the achievements of scholarship so far, and to suggest some of the future directions for research. Crucially, by bringing together researchers working on diverse aspects of Dante's theology, we aimed to avoid the danger of fragmentation which often accompanies a major topic in a vast field such as Dante studies. Collectively, we wished to test the boundaries of that field. The spirit and tone of the conversations at our workshops reflect the energy currently being devoted to these questions, a genuine willingness on the part of participants to learn from each other and to share ideas, and a common acknowledgment that the study of Dante's theology needed to be a shared, rather than an individual, endeavour.

The full introduction to the two volumes is printed in Volume 1 and can also be downloaded from the Peter Lang website: www.peterlang.com.

Poetry and Theology

Until the appearance of the invaluable edition by Enzo Cecchini of *Magnae Derivationes* of Hugutio of Pisa, the early thirteenth-century etymological dictionary to which Dante frequently recurred, was available only in manuscript form and was used by Dante scholars exclusively to clarify the meanings of individual words and concepts where Dante either drew directly on the *Derivationes* or where that encyclopedic work provided an illuminating analogue.¹ Future studies, it is to be hoped, will concern themselves more generally with the hows and whys of Dante's engagement with this text.² For present purposes, however, I would like to recall, yet again, Dante's

- 1 Uguccione da Pisa, *Derivationes*, ed. by Enzo Cecchini (Florence: SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004). The limited bibliography on Dante and Hugutio includes Paget Toynbee, *Dante Studies and Researches* (London: Methuen, 1902), pp. 97–114; Antonio Martina, 'Uguccione nel proemio della *Monarchia* di Dante', *L'Alighieri* (1972) 13: 69–74; Giancarlo Schizzerotto, 'Uguccione', in *ED*, V, pp. 800–02; Albert Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), esp. ch. 2, sec. ii, also ch. 5, nn. 20 and 46.
- 2 On Dante and medieval encyclopedism, see Cesare Vasoli, 'Dante e l'immagine enciclopedica del mondo nel *Convivio*', in *Imago Mundi: la conoscenza scientifica nel pensiero basso medioevale* (Todi: Accademia Tudertina, 1983), pp. 37–73; *The 'Divine Comedy' and the Encyclopedia of the Arts*, ed. by Giuseppe Di Scipio and Aldo Scaglione (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1988); *L'Enciclopedismo medievale*, ed. by Michelangelo Picone (Ravenna: Longo, 1994); Zygmunt G. Barański, *Dante e i segni: Saggi per una storia intellettuale di Dante Alighieri* (Naples: Liguori, 2000), pp. 77–102; and esp. Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), ch. 1. While it is important not to confuse etymological dictionaries with encyclopedias proper, such as Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Maior*, the comprehensive tendency is evident. It is worth noting the difference between Hugutio's work, which has in some respects the shape of a modern dictionary, with the best known and most often cited of the medieval

best known use of Hugutio, whose importance for his evolving concept of authorship I have treated extensively elsewhere.³ I speak of a series which begins with his explicit recourse to two of the Pisan's three derivations of *auctor/autor* in *Convivio* IV. vi (the philosophical author from 'autentin', so called because worthy of 'faith and obedience'; the poetic author from *avieo*, who binds together words in verse as the five vowels bind together language) – continues with his return to the poetic 'avientibus' in *De vulgari eloquentia* (II. i. 1) – and culminates in his carefully structured passage from Virgil as his poetic and philosophical 'maestro' (*Inf.*, I. 85) [master] and 'autore' [author] to God as 'verace Autore' (*Par.*, XXVI. 40) [truthful author].⁴ Like his account of allegory in *Convivio* II. i (of which more anon), and in keeping with Hugutio's etymological entry, the treatment of the 'autore' in *Convivio* IV. vi remains overtly within the parameters of human creativity and knowledge. Unlike *Convivio* II. i, no mention is made of a theological alternative doubling and superseding that of the poet whose *canzoni* bear within themselves allegorically, and even literally, a philosophical content. When the *autore* returns in the *Commedia*, however, we find a trajectory leading from poetic-rational authorship to the divine Maker, co-author as Dante-poet would have it, of a 'poema sacro' (*Par.*, XXV. 1) [holy poem]. And while, as I have claimed, the 'verace autore' is identified in *Paradiso* XXVI. 40 in such a way precisely as to recall Dante's Hugutian 'vowels of authority', this final allusive evocation of the 'autore' from 'avieo' has decidedly turned from the Hugutian/'convivial' poetic maker who

etymological works, Isidore of Seville's *magnum opus* which proceeds by topics rather than alphabetically.

3 *Dante and the Making*, esp. ch. 2.

4 Translations are from *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed. and trans. by Robert M. Durling; comm. Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996–2011). On the language of authorship and authority in the *DC*, see Robert Hollander, 'Dante's Use of *Aeneid* I in *Inferno* I and II', *Comparative Literature*, 20 (1968), 142–56 (pp. 144–45); Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the 'Comedy'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 268–69; Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 256–59 and Ascoli, *Dante and the Making*, esp. ch. 7.

unveils rational truth to the ‘theologus-poeta’ who praises the unknowable deity by naming him in multiple languages and according to his infinite attributes. The question is: does Dante’s poem simultaneously turn from an ‘allegory of poets’ to an allegory of theologians, as some have had it?

I will return to the problem of Dante’s ‘theological poetics’ in *Paradiso* XXV and XXVI at the end of this essay. For the moment, however, I would like to dwell on two features of Hugutio’s text which almost certainly conditioned Dante’s use of this entry, beyond its specific content, and in a fashion that *does* show the way to its transformation from the beginning of the *Commedia* to its ending. In the first place, Hugutio’s usual tendency, not always strictly observed, is to follow what would become the modern standard for the ordering of encyclopedias and dictionaries, namely alphabetization (not simply the division of words by the first letter, but the subdivision according to the alphabetical order of subsequent letters – ‘ab ...’ followed by ‘ac ...’ and so on). But the first entry of the entire work is an exception, namely the word ‘augere’, from whence *auctor*, one who augments or increases, and in the first instance ‘imperatores ... ab augendo rem publicam’ [Emperors ... from the augmentation of the public good]. ‘Augere’ is accompanied by two related etymologies, ‘autor’ from ‘autentin’, referring to ‘philosophers and the inventors of the arts’, and ‘autor’ from ‘avieo’, meaning ‘to bind’ and referring to poets who tie together ‘song with feet and meter.’ These last two being the definitions which Dante offers up as alternatives in *Convivio* IV. vi, with some interesting twists on the Hugutian original.

Why is this placement important in itself, and why is it relevant to Dante? Because the position of the definition, strengthened by contextual factors to which we will turn shortly, suggests it serves not only a general definitional purpose, but also raises the question of what Hugutio’s own standing as author of this text might be – the same self-reflexive question, *mutatis mutandis*, raised indirectly but powerfully by Dante’s citation of the entry in *Convivio*. What, one might then ask, does this have to do with the relationship of poetry and theology? While as just seen Dante certainly turns Hugutio’s definitional exercise in that direction – implicitly in *Convivio* IV. vi and explicitly in *Paradiso* XXVI – the entry in the

Derivationes makes no reference to the possibility that *Auctor* is one of the infinite names of God.

This brings us to the second, and heretofore unremarked, feature of the *Derivationes* which may illuminate Dante's evolving understanding of authorship. Immediately preceding the entry for *auctor*, the very first of the *Derivationes*, as we have just seen, comes the writer's prologue, describing the nature of the text to come, and identifying its author in the following way:

Si quis querat huius operis quis autor, dicendum est quia Deus; si querat huius operis quis fuerit instrumentum, respondendum est quia patria pisanus, nomine Ugutio quasi eugetio, idest bona terra non tantum presentibus sed etiam futuris, vel Ugutio quasi vegetio, idest virens terra non solum sibi sed etiam aliis. Igitur Sancti Spiritus assistente gratia, ut qui est omnium bonorum distributor nobis verborum copiam auctim suppeditare dignetur, a verbo augmenti nostre assertionis auspiciu sortiamur. (*Prologus* 8–9)

[If one were to ask who is the author [*autor*] of this work, one would have to say God; if one were to ask who was the instrument in making this work, one would have to answer that it is one whose homeland is Pisa by the name of Hugutio, as it were from 'eugetio', that is, good earth not only for the present times but also for the future, or Hugutio, as it were, from 'vegetio', a land green not only for itself but also for others. Therefore with the assisting grace of the Holy Spirit – so that He who is the distributor of all good things may deem it worthy to supply us by augmentation (*auctim*) with an abundance of words – we shall take the beginning for our treatise (*nostre assertionis*) from the word 'augmentum'.]⁵

At least four important considerations arise from a reading of this passage. First, Hugutio displays a genuine concern with identifying himself personally, through his proper name, with the text he has produced, a concern which certainly points in the direction of Dante's obsession with the problematic of personalized, individualized, authorship. Second, although the entry for *auctor* is, as just mentioned, not explicitly concerned with theological authorship, anyone who has read the preface – beginning with Dante himself – is bound to consider its significance in that light: the passage begins with the word 'autor', in the service of claiming that God,

5 Thanks to Frank Bezner for assistance with this translation.

in the person of the Holy Spirit, is the true author of the text (given the spelling [i.e. no 'c'] this must be the divine version of the author in the second or third sense of the definition that follows). Third, despite the fact that one would be hard pressed to argue that Hugutio is claiming for himself the status of one of the human authors, or scribes, of the Bible, he clearly presents a model of dual authorship, or rather of the divine Author writing through a human instrument, for the text. Finally, Hugutio explicitly connects his decision to begin the *Derivationes* with the word 'auctor' as a tribute to God as 'augmentator' (and thence, of course, 'imperator' of 'quella Roma onde Cristo è romano' (*Purg.*, XXXII. 102) [that Rome of which Christ is a Roman]), twice using of the Deity words ('auctim'; 'augmentum') derived from 'augere.' Thus in this short passage Hugutio makes God the ultimate model for human 'auctores' and 'autores', covering at least two, and possibly all three, of the forms then treated in the first entry of the text, which he explicitly states is thus positioned as a tribute to the Divine Author.

What is striking, of course, is that the configuration I have just described overlaps to a considerable extent with the scholarly assertion that in the *Commedia* Dante claims to be a 'theologus-poeta', an inspired 'scriba' or scribe (cf. *Par.*, X. 27) of the dictation of the 'verace Autore', on close, potentially blasphemous, analogy with Biblical authors such as Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, John, Paul, and so on.⁶ Were it not for this evident pertinence to a central issue, for many *the* central issue, of Dante criticism, at least in

- 6 Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's 'Commedia'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969); idem., 'Dante as Theologus-Poeta', *Dante Studies*, 94 (1976), 91–136. See also Bruno Nardi, 'Dante Profeta', in *Dante e la cultura medievale*, new edn by Paolo Mazzantini (Bari: La Terza, 1985) [1st edn 1942], pp. 265–326; Charles S. Singleton, *Dante Studies 1: Elements of Structure* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954); 'The Irreducible Dove', *Comparative Literature*, 9 (1957), 129–35; Gian Roberto Sarolli, 'Dante Scriba Dei: Storia e Simbolo', in *Prolegomena alla 'Divina Commedia'* (Florence: Olschki, 1971), pp. 189–336; cf. Niccolò Mineo, *Profetismo e apocalittica in Dante. Strutture e temi profetico-apocalittici in Dante: dalla 'Vita nuova' alla 'Divina Commedia'* (Catania: Università di Catania, Facoltà di lettere e filosofia, 1968); Lucia Battaglia Ricci, *Dante e la tradizione letteraria medievale* (Pisa: Giardini, 1983); Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing*

its anglo-american incarnation, this passage might not seem particularly fraught. Surely it is the case that any medieval Christian intellectual would have understood that, as God's creation, made in His 'image and likeness', all that he did and made was in the final instance attributable to the ultimate *Auctor* both of the Bible and of the world itself. Nonetheless, once understood both as a likely influence upon Dante's self-construction as *scriba Dei* and as possible alternative to the Nardi–Singleton–Hollander interpretation of Dante the theologian, that is, both as writer of words about God and as mediating channel for the Word of God, Hugutio's words assume what can only be described as an 'over-determined' importance – at least for the Dante scholar and, perhaps, pending further and wider study, for the late medieval discourse of authorship more generally.

The topic of 'poetry and theology' as it pertains to the works of Dante can be construed in a number of different ways, given, to begin with, the metonymical ambiguity of the word 'and,' as well as for other reasons to which I will return shortly. One way of interpreting the phrase is as referring to poetry's capacity, or lack thereof, to deliver theological content – and, more specifically, to draw upon, whether simply divulgatively or actively and transformatively, the writings of theologians from the fathers of the Church to the Scholastics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Since virtually all the essays in this collection can be said to be about 'poetry and theology' in this sense and since, to be perfectly candid, my own credentials as historian of Christian theology are not especially distinguished, certainly not in comparison with other contributors to this book, I will leave this enterprise largely to the side.⁷ A second way to understand this topic is as a provocation to the study of the relationship between two modes of dis-

Dante (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), ch. 1. For additional discussion and bibliography, see Ascoli, *Dante and the Making*, p. 121 and ch. 7, sect. v–vi.

7 I will, however, admit a partiality to a reading, for me identified primarily with Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993) of the *Commedia* as an existential, problematized meditation on the manifestations of the divine in human history. See also Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's 'Comedy'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); *Dante's*

course: Is poetry opposed to theology? Is poetry a kind of theology? Does theology sometimes work in a way that can be called 'poetic'?

It is toward this second possibility, notwithstanding the fact that Hugutio's text is decidedly not 'poetic',⁸ that my opening sally points us and that, indeed, will guide my reflections in the balance of this essay. That said, it is crucial to note that without one additional distinction I run the risk of perpetuating a fundamental confusion which, on the one hand, has led Dante criticism astray, time and again, and which, on the other, Dante clearly plays upon, knowingly or not, time and again, throughout his works. The problem at hand is the meaning of the word 'theologus' or 'teologo' in the later Middle Ages and in Dante's works specifically (especially the *Convivio*), and consequently what exactly we mean when we talk about Dante 'and theology.' On the one hand, a theologian is someone, say Thomas Aquinas, who practices the discipline of theology, and who writes words concerned with the nature of divinity and of the relation of men to God, and this is the way Dante uses the word in the two places it appears in his *oeuvre*,⁹ and, for that matter, it is the way Hugutio defines the word

'*Commedia*': *Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

- 8 However, as we have already seen, it does address the question of poetic authorship and leaves tantalizingly open the relationship between God as 'autor' and the poetic 'autor' from 'avieo.' And as we will see, for Dante there is an intimate relationship between the making of poetry in particular and the origins of language in general, which is in fact Hugutio's province.
- 9 In *Mon.*, III. iii. 2 we find 'theologus vero numerum angelorum ignorat' [the theologian for his part does not know how many angels there are]. The other occurrence is far more famous, and has sometimes been taken to refer to Biblical authorship, though there is every reason to doubt this (see Ascoli, *Dante and the Making*, ch. 2; idem., 'Dante and Allegory', in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. by Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 128–35), namely the much discussed passage in which Dante says that 'i teologi questo senso [the literal] prendono altrimenti che li poeti' in *Convivio* II. i, of which more below. Later in *Convivio* II, in listing the various areas of human study, Dante refers to 'la scienza divina, che è Teologia appellata' (*Conv.*, II. xiii. 8) [the divine science, which is called Theology]. In two other places in Dante's *oeuvre* forms of the word theology (one nominal, one adjectival) appear with obvious reference to

in the *Derivationes*.¹⁰ On the other, and this is the way that Dante critics, most ostentatiously Robert Hollander, and, by a *via negativa*, Teodolinda Barolini, sometimes use the term, in which case a 'theologian' is one who pronounces the Word of God, i.e. a human author of Scripture.¹¹ To put it otherwise, in Dante's discourse and, even more so, in discourse about Dante, the word 'theology' has an ambiguity not unlike that which consistently haunts a modern analogue, namely 'History' (which is both a discipline and the object studied and/or constructed by the discourse of that discipline).

It would certainly be convenient if the distinction I just made were one consistently observed by Dante, so that we could simply say that for Dante poetry is 'theological' in the sense that it has God as its subject (by which, of course, I actually mean 'object' or predicate) rather than in the sense that it is a 'subjective' utterance ultimately originating in Deity (by which, of course, I mean that it is a discourse of 'objective' truth rather than of fallible human subjectivity). Unfortunately – or rather, fortunately, since without this particular feature there would be considerably less for Dante scholars to talk about – while Dante clearly knows that there is such

human knowledge concerning the divine (*Mon.*, III. iii. 2, 9). The adjectival form of the word (teologico) appears indicating divine agency directly in two cases in the *Convivio* (IV. xxi. 11), and once in *Monarchia* he refers to the 'virtutes theologicas' (the human virtues of faith, hope, and charity which are defined by the science of theology and which mediate our relationship to the divine). None of these latter uses refer to divine scripture or the human authors thereof. Variants on 'theology' appear, by my count, only seven times in all of Dante's works, never in the *Commedia*, not even in the Heaven of the Sun where we meet Aquinas and other theologians. In *Paradiso* XXV. 73 Dante does refer to David's Psalms as 'teodia' and we will return to this instance (in any case, not strictly relevant to a discussion of 'teologia' and 'teologi') towards the end of this essay.

10 See the entry for 'Theos' (pp. 1206–07): 'Theos grece, latine dicitur deus: theos apud Grecos timor dicitur, unde Deus dicitur theos, quia timor sit omnibus colentibus eum' [Greek 'theos' in Latin is called 'deus': for the Greek, 'theos' means 'fear', because there should be fear in all things pertaining to the worship of Him]; 'Theos componitur theologus -a -um, idest de divinis tractans et loquens, unde hec theologia ... sermo de Deo ...' [from 'Theos' comes 'theologus, -a -um', that is one treating and speaking of divine things; whence 'theologia' ... speech about God]].

11 Hollander, 'Dante as Theologus Poeta'; Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*.

a distinction, and sometimes makes use of it, at other times he radically confuses the two meanings.

Before moving on to a positive assessment of some of the ways in which Dante discusses and/or dramatizes the relationship between poetry and theology, let me mention briefly two available accounts – one of which he may or may not have known – the other of which he surely did – which he does not explicitly evoke. The first is the idea, derived by Dante's contemporary, Albertino Mussato, from Aristotle, that (pagan) poets were the first theologians, in the sense that prior to the elaboration of any rational, philosophical discourse about divinity, and long before the Word itself was made flesh, (pagan) poets used a figurative language of praise to celebrate the ineffable Deity.¹² This model, which avoids any confusion between the figure of the vatic 'poet-theologian' and the authors of the Bible, would, as is very well known, be picked up by Petrarch, Boccaccio, and other

- 12 Albertino Mussato, *Écérinide; Épitres Métriques sur la Poésie; Sonje*, ed. and trans. by Jean-Frédéric Chevalier (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2000), esp. epistles 1, 4, 7, and 18, and *Il pensiero pedagogico dell'umanesimo*, ed. by Eugenio Garin (Florence: Giuntine, 1958), pp. 2–19. Cf. Aristotle *Metaphysics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1.3.983b.28–30. On Paduan 'pre-humanism' and Mussato, see Alfredo Galletti, 'la ragione poetica di Albertino Mussato e i poeti teologi', in *Scritti vari di erudizione e di critica in onore di Rodolfo Renier (con xx tavole fuori testo)* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1912), pp. 331–59; Ernst R. Curtius, *European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by W. R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 215–21; Gustavo Vinay, 'Studi sul Mussato I: Il Mussato e l'estetica medievale', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 126 (1949), 113–59; Manlio Dazzi, *Il Mussato preumanista (1261–1329): L'ambiente e l'opera* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1964); Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969); Giorgio Ronconi, *Le origini delle dispute umanistiche sulla poesia (Mussato e Petrarca)* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1976); Ronald Witt, 'Coluccio Salutati and the Conception of the *Poeta Theologus* in the Fourteenth Century', *Renaissance Quarterly* 30 (1977), 539–63; idem., *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2000); Giuseppe Billanovich, *Petrarca e il primo umanesimo* (Padua: Edizioni Antenore, 1996); Jean-Frédéric Chevalier, 'Introduction', in Albertino Mussato, *Écérinide; Épitre Métriques sur la Poésie; Sonje*, ed. and trans. by Jean-Frédéric Chevalier (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2000).

humanists,¹³ as well as by some of Dante's own later commentators, notably his son Pietro (Hollander 1976: 117 and n.), eager to avoid the possible implication that the *Commedia* and its author could be assimilated to the Bible itself and its human writers. At no point does Dante explicitly articulate this argument,¹⁴ much less attribute it to Aristotle – but, as we shall see, Dante's 'stilo della loda' – the poetry of praise to which he turns in *Vita Nova* – evolves into something very like the *Commedia*, when what appears to be a constative language of reference to Deity is sublimated into the performative language of praising-by-naming.¹⁵

The second account, of course, is Thomas's pellucid and oft-cited variant on the acknowledgment of the presence of figure and fiction in the

13 For poetic theology in the fourteenth century see Curtius, *European Literature*, pp. 214–27; Giuseppe Billanovich, *Petrarca letterato. I. Lo scrittoio del Petrarca* (Rome: 1947), pp. 121–25; idem., 'Tra Dante e Petrarca', *Italia mediaevale e umanistica*, 8 (1965), 201–21; idem., 'L'altro stil nuovo: Da Dante teologo a Petrarca filologo', *Studi Petrarqueschi*, 9 (1994), 1–99; idem., *Petrarca e il primo umanesimo*; Hollander, 'Dante as Theologus Poeta'; Ronconi, *Le origini*; Witt, 'Coluccio Salutati'; idem., *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*; Charles Trinkaus, *The Poet as Philosopher: Petrarch and the Formation of Renaissance Consciousness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Concetta Carestia Greenfield, *Humanist and Scholastic Poetics, 1250–1500* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1981); Claudio Mesoni, *Poetica Theologia: la 'lucula Noctis' di Giovanni Dominici e le dispute letterarie tra '300 e '400* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984). For its use later in the Renaissance, see Daniel Pickering Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972). For additional discussion, see Ascoli, 'Blinding the Cyclops: Petrarch after Dante', in *Dante and Petrarch*, ed. by Theodore Cachey and Zygmunt G. Barański (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), pp. 114–73.

14 One might hypothesize that Dante intended to touch on some aspects of this tradition of the 'prisca theologia' in the never-written fourteenth book of the treatise, based on the following passage: 'E perché questo nascondimento fosse trovato per li savi, nel penultimo trattato si mostrerà' (*Conv.*, II. i. 3). But there is no certainty in the matter.

15 See Ascoli, *Dante and the Making*, ch. 7, esp. sec. v–vi, as well as nn.120, 122, 124 and 125 for additional bibliography. My reading owes a particular debt to Ronald L. Martinez, 'The Pilgrim's Answer to Bonagiunta and the Poetics of the Spirit', *Stanford Italian Review*, 4 (1983), 37–63.

Bible which requires him to distinguish between the Bible's use of these rhetorical devices and those of the poets, not on the basis of linguistic kind, but rather on that of ends. The ninth article of the first question of the first volume of the *Summa Theologiae* poses the question 'utrum sacra Scriptura debeat uti metaphoris vel symbolicis locutionibus' [should holy teaching [Scriptures; writings] employ metaphorical or symbolic language?] and enunciates the proposition to be refuted as

Videtur sacra Scriptura non debeat uti metaphoris. Illud enim quod est proprium infimae doctrinae non videtur competere huic scientiae, quae inter alias tenet locum supremum ... Procedere autem per similitudines varias et repraesentationes est proprium poëticae, quae est infima inter omnes doctrinas. (I.1.9.1.1)

[It seems that holy teaching [Sacred Scriptures] should not use metaphors. For what is proper to a lowly type of instruction appears ill-suited to this, which ... stands on the summit. Now to carry on with various similitudes and images is proper to poetry, the most modest of all teaching methods.]

The refutation is as follows:

Sed contra est quod dicitur *Osee* 'Ego visionem multiplicavi eis, et in manibus prophetarum assimilatus sum.' Tradere autem aliquid sub similitudine est metaphoricum. Ergo ad sacram doctrinam pertinent uti metaphoris.

[On the other hand, it is declared in *Hosea*, 'I have multiplied visions and I have used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets.' To put something across under imagery is metaphorical usage. Therefore sacred doctrine avails itself of metaphors.]

This does not mean, however, that 'sacra doctrina' or 'sacra Scriptura' and poetry are interchangeable, since

Poëtica utitur metaphoris propter repraesentationem, repraesentatio enim naturaliter homini delectabilis est. Sed sacra doctrina utitur metaphoris propter necessitatem et utilitatem [...].¹⁶

16 We should note that in this article Aquinas uses the phrases 'sacra doctrina' and 'Sacra scriptura' as apparent synonyms, but also seems to suggest that 'sacra doctrina' refers to the 'science' of theology more generally. In other words, the confusion between the

[Poetry employs metaphors for the sake of representation, in which we are born to take delight. Holy teaching, on the other hand, adopts them for their indispensable usefulness ...]

The closest Dante comes to confronting this argument in an explicit way is in Beatrice's 'accommodation' speech ('così parlar conviensi al vostro ingegno' (*Par.*, IV. 40) [to speak thus to your understanding is necessary]), where he specifically attributes to both Scripture and the Church the use of figurative, personifying language to describe the otherwise incomprehensible Deity. The point in question is why Dante experiences the blessed sequentially in time and space as distributed through the eight heavens when they are all, in fact, simultaneously present in the invisible Heaven of Heavens, the Empyrean. In re-presenting this cosmic representation, it could be argue, Dante's poem could be said to partake in a fiction – but, of course, that fiction could also be said to be the 'truth' of the vision which Dante has been given, and, since the staging of fictional encounters with the various saints (presumably by divine disposition) is analogous, *in this respect* ('così convien ...') to the Bible itself, we are no closer to deciding whether the figurative language of the *Commedia*, and its fictional narrative, is identical in ontological status to that of the Bible or just *like* it in this respect, as even Thomas, as we have just seen, would acknowledge it to be.

In what follows, I will pass in rapid review a number of Dante's texts which have (for the most part), been central to discussions about the relations between poetry and theology – *Convivio* II. i; the *Epistle to Cangrande*, *Purgatorio* II and XXIV; *Paradiso* XXV and XXVI – and in each case I will suggest both how Dante indeed foregrounds the status of poetry and the question of its relationship to 'theology' in the strong sense, i.e. as Biblical words by and about God, in each case arguing that the innumerable attempts to decide the undecideable (whether Dante, in his heart of heart, truly believed himself to be the prophetic instrument of divine

two senses of the word mentioned above seems to be present in the *Summa Theologiae* itself. Note that at the end of the first article Aquinas distinguishes between theology as a part of philosophy and theology as a 'sacra doctrina', theology in the former sense being that employed by Mussato et alii when they refer to 'poetic theology.'

revelations) have more often than not kept us from understanding the textual dynamics of the passages in question, in themselves and in relation to one another, not to mention their hypothetical relationship to the historical poet Dante, author *in proprio* or instrument of the Divine Author as may have been. In so doing I will engage minimally with the vast critical literature that has addressed these texts in particular and this issue (or complex of issues) in general. To the extent that I would wish to describe the historical unfolding of the debate in the criticism I have done so elsewhere, and to the extent that rehearsing that description or even adding to it would give my assertions here more authority, and a clearer claim to originality, I simply renounce both authority and originality in the name of a speculative meditation whose veracity (I aver) cannot be either confirmed or denied, and whose usefulness will be determined on a case by case basis by its readers.¹⁷

We have just seen that a 'theologian' can either be a reader, an interpreter, of the doctrine revealed in 'sacra Scriptura' or a (human) author of scripture – although it would of course also be correct to call a human author of the Bible an 'interpreter' or intermediary of God's word, and it would also be correct to say that a reader of Scripture becomes a 'theologian' when he writes about his reading, as does Aquinas.¹⁸ I stress this point because it is precisely upon the slippery slope between reading and writing that Dante consistently places his most explicit and his most famous meditations on the relationship between poetry and theology.¹⁹

The first of these, the most explicit, and a, even the, key point of reference for interpretations of the *Commedia* as being written as if it were to be treated by its readers as a book of Scripture, is of course the first chapter

17 See my 'Access to Authority'; *Dante and the Making*; and 'Blinding the Cyclops'.

18 See Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 33, 88–92.

19 For my general views on the writer-reader dialectic in Dante's works, with bibliography, see Ascoli, *Dante and the Making*, esp. ch. 4. See also Susan Noakes, *Timely Reading: Between Exegesis and Interpretation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), and Claudio Giunta, *Versi a un destinatario: Saggio sulla poesia italiana del Medioevo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002).

of the second book of *Convivio*. There, in the view of some, Dante makes a distinction between two modes of writing, an 'allegory of the poets' and an 'allegory of the theologians', in order to specify that the philosophical *canzoni* glossed in the treatise are to be read as the former in clear opposition to the latter. In this same view, this distinction is then deliberately, palindromically reversed in the *Commedia*, specifically in the meta-poetic dyad of *Purgatorio* II and XXIV, a reversal then confirmed in Dante's explanation of the *modus significandi* of the *Commedia* in the Epistle to Cangrande.²⁰

- 20 In the past I have scrupulously avoided giving a definitive judgment on the authorship of the Epistle to Can Grande, largely in order not to wander endlessly in the labyrinthine *querelle* surrounding its authenticity, and, in particular, not to give the impression that I support the principal interpretations of the *Commedia* grounded in an application of the model expounded in paragraph 7 (again, Singleton *Dante Studies* 1; Hollander *Allegory*, 'Dante as Theologus-Poeta', *Dante's 'Epistole to Cangrande'* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 'The *Epistle to Cangrande* and Albert Ascoli's Recent Book on Dante', *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America [EBDSA]* <<http://www.princeton.edu/~dante/ebdsa/>> accessed 12 August 2008. Having said this, it does seem to me quite probable that the entire text (and not just the first four paragraphs, as claimed by Bruno Nardi in *Il punto sull'Epistola* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1960), and then by others) was written by Dante. If Dante is not the author, I argue, it had to have been composed by someone who had an extraordinarily intimate understanding of his way of thinking and working, especially of his unique propensity for self-commentary (see my 'Access to Authority: Dante in the *Epistle to Cangrande*', in Zygmunt G. Barański (ed.), *Seminario Dantesco Internazionale/International Dante Seminar I* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1997), pp. 309–52; for Dantean self-commentary see also n. 35 below). After lying relatively dormant since the early to mid-1990s, the *querelle* has recently broken out again after the publication of Luca Azzetta, 'Le chiose alla *Commedia* di Andrea Lancia, *L'Epistola a Cangrande* e altre questioni dantesche', *L'Alighieri*, 44 (2003), 5–73, which tends to strengthen the case for authenticity (cf. Barański, 'The *Epistle to Cangrande*', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism; Vol. 2: The Middle Ages*, ed by Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 583–89, followed by renewed attacks on Dantean authorship (Carlo Ginzburg, 'Dante's 'Epistle to Cangrande and its Two Authors', in *Proceedings of the British Academy: 2005 Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 195–216; Alberto Casadei, 'Il titolo della *Commedia* e l'Epistola a Cangrande', *Allegoria*, 60 (2010), 167–81).

The situation, however, is more complicated, as has been repeatedly demonstrated over the last half century.²¹ Four questions in particular pertain to the present topic: 1) what is the difference that Dante posits between writing or reading as a theologian and writing or reading as a poet? 2) is Dante speaking about a way of writing or a way of reading? 3) what does it mean that Dante says his 'sposizione' of his own *canzoni* has to account for 'quattro sensi', an interpretative model associated with Biblical exegesis rather than with the glossing of poetry? And 4) what do the specific examples he gives illustrating these four senses tell us about his relation to Biblical writing and exegesis?

Let us begin with the part of the *Convivio* chapter that has attracted the most scholarly concern:²²

- 21 See my discussions with bibliography in 'Access to Authority'; *Dante and the Making*, esp. pp. 109–20 and nn.; 'Dante and Allegory'; 'Tradurre l'allegoria: *Convivio* 2.1', in a special issue of *Critica del Testo* (2011), ed. by Roberto Antonelli and Piero Boitani.
- 22 Among the key critics of the chapter in question are Singleton, *Dante Studies I*, pp. 84–98; Richard H. Green, 'Dante's "Allegory of Poets" and the Medieval Theory of Poetic Fiction', *Comparative Literature*, 9 (1957), 118–28; Henri De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, 2 vols (Paris: Aubier, 1959–65), vol. 2, pp. 319–26; Hollander, *Allegory*, pp. 29–40; Jean Pépin, *Dante e la tradizione de l'allegorie* (Paris: Vrin, 1970), pp. 53–57, 60–73; 'La théorie dantesque de l'allégorie, entre le *Convivio* et la *Lettera a Cangrande*', in *Dante, mito e poesia: atti del secondo Seminario dantesco internazionale, Monte Verità, Ascona, 23–27 giugno 1997*, ed. by Michelangelo Picone and Tatiana Crivelli (Florence: Cesati, 1999), pp. 51–68; John A. Scott, 'Dante's Allegory', *Romance Philology*, 26 (1973), 558–91, and 'Dante's Allegory of the Theologians', in *The Shared Horizon*, ed. by Tom O'Neill (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990), pp. 27–40; Marguerite Mills Chiarenza, 'Falsity and Fiction in the "Allegory of the Poets"', in *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, 1 (1980), 80–86; Maria Corti, *La felicità mentale: nuove prospettive per Cavalcanti e Dante* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), pp. 80–82; Antonio D'Andrea, 'L'"allegoria dei poeti"': Nota a *Convivio* II. i', in *Dante e le forme dell'allegoresi*, ed. by Michelangelo Picone (Ravenna: Longo, 1987), pp. 71–78; Ascoli, 'Access to Authority', pp. 315–16, 'Tradurre l'allegoria'; Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Notes on Dante and the Myth of Orpheus' in *Dante, mito e poesia*, ed. by Picone and Crivelli, pp. 133–54; Enrico Fenzi, 'L'esperienza di sé come esperienza dell'allegoria (a proposito di Dante, *Convivio* II i 2)', *Studi danteschi*, 67 (2002), 161–200; Franco Ferrucci, 'Allegoria come auto-investitura: osservazioni sul

Ma però che più profitabile sia questo mio cibo, prima che 'econ la prima vivanda voglio mostrare come mangiare si dee. Dico che ... questa sposizione conviene essere litterale e allegorica. E a ciò dare a intendere, *si vuol sapere che le scritture si possono intendere e deonsi esponere massimamente per 'econd' sensi. L'uno si chiama litterale, [e questo è quello che non si stende più oltre che la lettera de le parole fittizie, sì come sono le favole de li poeti. L'altro si chiama 'econd'ic,] e questo è quello che si nasconde sotto 'l manto di queste favole, ed è una veritade ascosa sotto bella menzogna ... Veramenti li teologi questo senso prendono altrimenti che li poeti; ma però che mia intenzione è qui lo modo de li poeti seguitare, prendo lo senso allegorico secondo che per li poeti è usato.* (*Conv.*, II. i. 1–4; emphasis added)

[But so that my food may prove more profitable, I wish to demonstrate (before the first course arrives) how one should eat. I say ... that this exposition ought to be literal and allegorical. And so that this may be understood, *it is necessary to know that writings may be understood and must be expounded primarily according to four senses. The first is called the literal [and this is that sense which does not go beyond the letter of the fictitious words, as in the fables of the poets. The next is called allegorical]*²³ *and this that which is hidden beneath the mantle of such fables and is a truth hidden beneath a beautiful falsehood ... Truly speaking, the theologians take this sense otherwise than the poets, but because it is my intention here to follow the manner of the poets, I take the allegorical sense in the way that it is used by those poets.]*

The first point to establish is that, while the most common references to this passage suggest that it can tell us how Dante's poetry signifies, or how Dante wishes us to believe his poetry signifies, it is in fact concerned with explaining how Dante as prose commentator intends to explicate his *canzoni*: in other words, as I earlier anticipated, it begins as a discussion not of 'allegory' but of 'allegoresis', as evidenced immediately by the metaphor of textual consumption (I want to show how it should be eaten, i.e. interpreted), as by the fact that in the second paragraph he twice uses the

Convivio di Dante', in *Sylva: Studi in onore di Nino Borsellino*, ed. by Giorgio Patrizi (Rome: Bulzoni, 2002), pp. 81–96.

- 23 Brackets indicate editorial interpolations in the notoriously corrupt manuscript tradition. My arguments do not rely on the interpolations. For a useful discussion of the history of the text, see Cesare Vasoli, 'Introduzione', in Dante Alighieri, *Opere minori*, vol. 1, part 2, ed. by Cesare Vasoli and Domenico De Robertis (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1988), pp. lxxx–lxxxix.

word 'intendere' in the sense of readerly comprehension and twice uses 'esponere'/'esposizione' in the sense of interpretive glossing.²⁴

It is not, however, simply a matter of insisting that the chapter is concerned with allegorical reading (allegoresis) rather than allegorical writing (allegory).²⁵ The confusion between allegory and allegoresis is generated by the text itself. As we have seen, when Dante says he does not 'take' the allegorical sense(s) as 'theologians' do, he is most probably referring to those who study the 'queen of sciences', theology. But when he says he *does* take that sense as the 'poets' do, he is clearly referring to writers of poetry, not to its interpreters. In other words, he presents the distinction between allegory and allegoresis, only to elide it. What allows this? The fact, already put forward, that in *Convivio*, as against typical medieval examples of allegorical commentary, Dante is both the glosser of poetry and its author. In other words, the 'confusion' is underpinned by an (unstated) assumption that in glossing the text Dante is simply making known his own earlier intentions.

This ambiguity is then intensified by the complex example which Dante uses to illustrate the relationship between the literal sense and the first of the three allegorical senses, as 'poets', as against 'theologians', would take it.

Dice Ovidio che Orfeo faceva con la cetera mansuete le fiere, e li arbori e le pietre a sé muovere; che vuol dire che lo savio uomo con lo strumento de la sua voce fa[r]ia mansuescere e umiliare li crudeli cuori, e fa[r]ia muovere a la sua voluntade coloro che non hanno vita di scienza e d'arte: e coloro che non hanno vita ragionevole alcuna sono quasi come pietre. (*Conv.*, II. i. 3)²⁶

- 24 Pépin, 'La théorie', p. 52 and n. 2, notes the frequency with which Dante calls his commentary a 'sposizione' in *Convivio*, observing that *expositio* is the typical word used of theological commentaries on the books of the Bible (p. 67).
- 25 On this issue see Pépin, *Dante*: esp. p. 11; Scott, 'Dante's Allegory', esp. p. 34; as well as Ascoli, *Dante and the Making*: esp. ch. 2, sec. v, and ch. 4, and 'Tradurre l'allegoria'. For the allegory/allegoresis distinction, see Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Rita Copeland and Stephen Melville, 'Allegory and Allegoresis, Rhetoric and Hermeneutics' *Exemplaria*, 3.1 (1991), 157–87.
- 26 Dante's primary sources are Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XI. i–ii; Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 391–96. Recent important treatments of the passage are in Barański, 'Notes on Dante

[Ovid says that Orpheus tamed the beasts with his lyre and made trees and stones move towards him, which means that the wise man makes cruel hearts grow tame and humble with the instrument of his voice, and how he makes those that have no life in science or in art move according to his will: and they who have no rational life are little better than stones.]

At first glance, Dante's example seems to be a perfect illustration of the typical allegorization of poetic texts, which largely confines itself to uncovering a single hidden sense, usually 'moral' in its applicability to the behaviour of the reader. But there are two major complications. The first of these has to do with the nature of the example itself. The second concerns the problem of how to understand the relation of these two senses to the other two allegorical senses, given that there relatively little precedent for interpreting poetic texts according to a fourfold, 'theological' scheme.²⁷

As to the first issue, we should recognize that the tale of Orpheus is not so much an example as a 'meta-example' of poetic allegory, a characteristically Dantean 'allegory of allegory' in Ron Martinez's felicitous phrase: what we are presented with is *not* a lesson for the reader, but rather an illustration of how the poet-philosopher or poet-theologian goes about instilling such lessons through the power of his language.²⁸ In other words, Orpheus allegorizes Dante as the poet whose beautiful verses will 'delight, instruct, and move', in the Ciceronian formulation (e.g. *Brutus* xlix. 185).²⁹ Such an emphasis is in keeping with the argument I have made elsewhere that the supposed pedagogical mission of the treatise, aimed at instructing the relatively unlearned reader, is consistently deflected into an account and/or justification of the author's claims of authority for himself and his poetry.

and the Myth of Orpheus', and Fenzi, 'L'esperienza di sé'. Other useful readings are in André Pézard, *Le 'Convivio' de Dante: Sa lettre, son esprit* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1940), pp. 15–26; Giorgio Padoan, 'Orfeo', in *ED*, IV, 192; Hollander, 'Dante as Theologus-Poeta', pp. 119–20.

27 See Ascoli, *Dante and the Making*, sec. v., esp. n. 68 for bibliography; also Ascoli, 'Tradurre l'allegoria'.

28 Ronald L. Martinez, 'Allegory', in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. by Richard Lansing (New York: Garland, 2000), pp. 24–34.

29 See Fenzi, *L'esperienza di sé*, pp. 77–78.

Thus, even before we get to the problem of applying the ‘four senses’ model of Biblical exegesis to a poetic text, we find that Dante has already gone well beyond the established parameters of poetic allegorization. Turning now to the larger poetry/theology issue, we can note that the typical poetic allegory could be said to correspond not to the first but to the *second* of the three allegorical senses posited by Biblical exegesis – the moral-tropological (‘quod agas’: what *you*, the Christian everyperson, should do) – rather than the first, whose emphasis is epistemological (‘quod credas’: what you believe to be true, what you know), and whose content usually pertains either to Christ or his Church.³⁰ And although Dante does not specify how a theologian would interpret the literal sense differently than a poet does – or even attempt to explain why a theologian would be trying to interpret this particular ‘bella menzogna’ at all – one is tempted to infer that the difference *in mode of reading* would consist precisely in finding a Christological sense rather than a moral one. But what, then, would the next two allegorical senses be if one is ‘reading like a poet’?

Before we get to that question, however, we need to probe the example of Orpheus a little further. Once we have recognized the departure from a typical ‘allegory of poets’, we might also acknowledge an implicit assimilation to the Christological sense of Biblical exegesis, notwithstanding Dante’s disclaimer. In fact, as is well known, Orpheus, because of his descent into and return from Hell, was often treated as a *figura Christi* in medieval allegorizations. In the present context this means that the poet himself, in this case Dante, is the allegorical referent, where in the usual fourfold scheme it would be Christ. This does not mean, of course, that Dante is equating himself with divinity incarnate: it does mean that the separation between ‘allegory of poets’ and ‘allegory of theologians’ is breached in the

30 I follow the traditional phrase: ‘littera gesta docet, quod credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia’, often attributed to Augustine of Dacia, and also found in Nicholas of Lira. See Ceslas Spicq, *Esquisse d’une histoire de l’exégèse latine au moyen âge* (Paris: Vrin, 1944), p. 340; De Lubac, *Exegèse* I. ii. 23; Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988 [first edn 1984]), p. 34.