

### III

## Epic Resolution

#### Prelude: the *Opere minori*

Dante's basic canon of classical poets is formed as early as the *Vita Nuova*, where he has already assembled the group that forms the nucleus of his training in Latin letters, a group that continues to appear together throughout his oeuvre until it comes, virtually unaltered, into the *Comedy*. In *Vita Nuova* XXV the five poets of this original group are presented in characteristic poses:

Che li poete abbiano così parlato come detto è, appare per VIRGILIO; lo quale dice che Iuno, cioè una dea nemica de li Troiani, parloe ad Eolo, signore de li venti, quivi nel primo de lo Eneida: *Eole, nanque tibi*, e che questo signore le rispuose, quivi: *Tuus, o regina, quid optes explorare labor; michi iussa capessere fas est*. Per questo medesimo poeta parla la cosa che non è animata a le cose animate, nel terzo de lo Eneida, quivi: *Dardanide duri*. Per LUCANO parla la cosa animata a la cosa inanimata, quivi: *Multum, Roma, tamen debes civilibus armis*. Per ORAZIO parla l'uomo a la scienza medesima sì come ad altra persona; e non solamente sono parole d'Orazio, ma dicele quasi recitando lo modo del buono OMERO, quivi ne la sua Poetria: *Dic michi, Musa, virum*. Per OVIDIO parla Amore, sì come se fosse persona umana, ne lo principio de lo libro

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c'ha nome Libro di Remedio d'Amore, quivi: *Bella michi, video, bella parantur, ait*.

That the poets have written as is said appears through VERGIL; who says that Juno, a goddess unfriendly to the Trojans, spoke to Aeolus, lord of the winds, in the first book of the *Aeneid*: *Eole, nanque tibi*, and that this lord answered her: *Tuus, o regina, quid optes explorare labor; michi iussa capessere fas est*. According to this same poet an inanimate thing speaks to animate beings, in the third book of the *Aeneid*: *Dardanide duri*. According to LUCAN the animate being speaks to the inanimate thing: *Multum, Roma, tamen debes civilibus armis*. According to HORACE a man speaks to knowledge itself as if to another person; and not only are these the words of Horace, but he gives them as though reciting in the manner of HOMER, in his *Ars Poetica*: *Dic michi, Musa, virum*. According to OVID Love speaks, as though it were a human person, in the beginning of the book called *Remedia Amoris*: *Bella michi, video, bella parantur, ait*.

(XXV, 9; capitals mine)

Vergil is in the place of honor and is the only poet to be quoted twice. He is represented by the *Aeneid*, his epic, as is Lucan by the *De Bello Civili* or *Pharsalia*, in any case his only extant work. Horace is, if not quite the "Orazio satiro" of *Inferno* IV, nonetheless the nonlyric poet of the *Ars Poetica*. Homer, quoted by way of the *Ars Poetica*, receives his requisite nod; in fact, Dante's attentiveness to his Latin authors and to their reverence for the Greek poet is such that he has anticipated the appearance of Homer, referring to him in chapter II as well. The least known of these poets is thus the only one to appear outside of chapter XXV. Ovid, for whom Dante cites the *Remedia Amoris*, is presented as the authority on Love.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a general presentation regarding Dante's use of and attitudes toward his most frequently mentioned classical poets, as well as further bibliography, see the various articles in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*: Ettore Paratore, "Giovenale," vol. III, pp. 197-202; Ettore Paratore, "Lucano," vol. III, pp. 697-702;

The poet absent from the roster of the *Vita Nuova* is Statius, whose omission is rectified in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. In the treatise Dante mentions Vergil three times, Ovid twice, Statius once, Lucan once, and Horace once.<sup>2</sup> Vergil is again preeminent in being the most quoted of the poets and the first one to be presented when they appear as a group. Horace is once more the preceptor of the *Ars Poetica*, giving advice to fledgling poets: "This is what our master Horace teaches us, when in the beginning of the *Ars Poetica* he says 'Take your subject' " (II, iv, 4). Indeed, in the context of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* all the classical poets are to be seen as teachers, models to be imitated. The replacement of Homer by Statius is therefore to be expected, since one cannot imitate what one cannot read. In the only passage in the treatise where the Latin poets are presented en masse, as a canon, Dante plainly says that they are to be studied: "And it would perhaps be most useful, in order to acquire the habit [of composing in the high style], to have studied the standard poets, that is Vergil, the Ovid of the *Metamorphoses*, Statius, and Lucan" (II, vi, 7). The expression Dante uses in this passage, "regulatos . . . poetas," may well serve as a summation of what Dante thought of these poets in this period: not only are they regularized according to established literary standards, but they are themselves *regulae* for those who come later, providing rules to be learned and followed.

In the *Convivio* the group of classical poets cited is larger, an indication of Dante's widening cultural horizons and a reflection of the work's philosophical rather than technical concerns. Whereas the *Convivio* contains many fewer vernacular poets than does the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, its tally of classical poets has lengthened to include Juvenal and to reinclude Homer. Nor does this number of seven classical poets—Vergil, Ovid, Lucan, Statius, Juvenal, Homer, Horace—do justice to the full wealth

Guido Martellotti, "Omero," vol. IV, pp. 145-148; Giorgio Brugnoli and Roberto Mercuri, "Orazio," vol. IV, pp. 173-180; Ettore Paratore, "Ovidio," vol. IV, pp. 225-236; Ettore Paratore, "Stazio," vol. V, pp. 419-425; Domenico Consoli and Alessandro Ronconi, "Virgilio," vol. V, pp. 1030-1049.

<sup>2</sup> See the Appendix for the precise locations.

of the *Convivio*'s classical erudition, which can be accurately gauged only by taking into consideration the philosophers and prose writers who also crowd its pages: especially Aristotle and Boethius (the first two authors to be mentioned), Cicero and Seneca.<sup>3</sup> The *Convivio*'s heightened awareness of antiquity seems related to a change in Dante's treatment of the classical poets, the scope of whose authority has been significantly enlarged. Whereas in the *Vita Nuova* and the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* they were brought forward as embodiments of proper rhetorical procedure, in the *Convivio* their works are pressed into service as illustrations of correct human—rather than poetic—behavior; Dante now sees these poets as providers of ethical insights as well as rhetorical precepts. This important development is most visible in the chapters of the fourth book in which the references to classical poets are particularly concentrated. Indeed, the crescendo of references to classical poets in the treatise's last book is marked enough to threaten the supremacy of Aristotle and the philosophers; in a text dominated by "il Filosofo," the prevalence of poets over philosophers in Book IV points ahead to the *Comedy*, where Vergil and not Aristotle is the pilgrim's guide, representing the most that natural man and reason can attain.<sup>4</sup>

The discussion of true nobility that dominates the *Convivio*'s

<sup>3</sup> The *Convivio*, a philosophical work, is especially rich in classical and non-classical philosophers. Roughly in order of appearance, the following philosophers and writers appear: Aristotle, Boethius, St. Augustine, Hippocrates, Galen, Seneca, Taddeo Alderotti, Cicero, Ptolemy, Plato, Alfraganus, Socrates, Dionysius, Pythagoras, Euclid, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Algazel, Avicenna, Alpetragus, Albertus Magnus, Orosius, Livy, Zeno, St. Jerome, Ugucione da Pisa, Epicurus, Zenocrates, St. Thomas, Egidio Romano, Aesop. To add to the classical congestion, there are also figures like Cato, Marcia, and Aeneas.

<sup>4</sup> In *Significato del Virgilio dantesco* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1967), Domenico Consoli discusses what Vergil represents in the *Comedy* and the question of why the Latin poet was chosen as Dante's guide over Aristotle; a similar treatment, whose exhaustive footnotes are essentially a history of critical attitudes toward these issues, is that of Aldo Vallone, "Interpretazione del Virgilio dantesco," *Alighieri*, 10 (1969), 14-40. Another summary of critical opinions on Vergil may be found in Mario Santoro, "Virgilio personaggio della Divina Commedia," *Cultura e scuola* 4, nos. 13-14 (1965), 343-355.

fourth book requires a description of the spiritual attributes most suited to each of the four ages of man's life, these being *adolescenza*, *gioventute*, *senettute*, and *senio*. In order to illustrate these attributes, Dante draws on the works of four classical poets, one for each of the four ages: Statius for *adolescenza*, Vergil for *gioventute*, Ovid for *senettute*, and Lucan for *senio*. Each age receives a separate chapter devoted to it and is illustrated exclusively from the works of the poet assigned to it, so that in effect each poet has a chapter of the *Convivio* dedicated to him. Dante uses these chapters to highlight the poets and their work in an altogether new way; one has the impression that, having decided on Book IV as the *Convivio*'s "literary" book (the treatise's three vernacular poets all make their appearances here as well), Dante then earmarks four of its chapters for an in-depth treatment of his favorite classical poets. Particularly suggestive is his use of epithets; whereas in the *Convivio*'s earlier books Dante is content to call a poet by name, or with a simple periphrasis like "Stazio poeta del tebano Edipo" ("Statius poet of Oedipus the Theban" [III, viii, 10]), in these special chapters of Book IV he uses compact but highly charged phrases to articulate his feelings about a given poet.<sup>5</sup> In some cases these expressions are strikingly similar to the periphrases Dante will later use in the *Comedy*, thus showing that his sense of these poets is beginning to crystallize. Statius is called "lo dolce poeta" ("the sweet poet" [IV, xxv, 6]), a

<sup>5</sup> From these epithets, as well as from the detailed summaries of the classical texts found in these chapters, Ulrich Leo, in "The Unfinished *Convivio* and Dante's Rereading of the *Aeneid*," *Mediaeval Studies*, 13 (1951), 41-64, concludes that "before the composition of ch. XXV of Book IV of the *Convivio*, Dante has reread his Latin classics, and that with a completely new and personal reaction" (p. 59). Although I concur with Leo's general findings, I am not sure the evidence justifies his specific conclusion that Dante reread the *Aeneid* between the writing of chapters xxiv and xxv of Book IV. I prefer to think that Dante's rediscovery of the classics runs concurrently with the composition of the *Convivio* as a whole, and that he chooses these chapters to celebrate the Latin poets in particular; in support of this interpretation, I would note that although the *Convivio*'s vernacular poets are also confined to Book IV, no one has concluded that Dante had just reread "Al cor gentil."

characterization Dante echoes in *Purgatorio* XXI when Statius describes the sweetness of his voice: "Tanto fu dolce mio vocale spirito" ("So sweet was my vocal spirit" [88]). Similarly, Vergil is called "lo maggiore nostro poeta" ("our greatest poet" [IV, xxvi, 8]), an expression that brings to mind the *Comedy*'s reference to the Latin poet as "nostra maggior musa" ("our greatest Muse" [Par. XV, 26]).

Chapter xxv is given over to Statius; in order to give examples of *stupore*, *pudore*, and *verecundia* (the three constituents of *vergogna*, named as the appropriate state of mind for *adolescenza*), Dante retells much of the first book of the *Thebaid*, where Adrastus king of Argus marries his daughters Argia and Deipyle to the Thebans Polyneices and Tydeus. The narrative is interrupted only to present the next virtue and to reintroduce Statius as the chapter's resident *auctoritas*: thus, after defining *stupore*, Dante begins "E però dice Stazio, lo dolce poeta, nel primo de la Tebana Istoria, che quando Adrasto . . ." ("And therefore Statius, the sweet poet, says in the first book of the *Thebaid* that when Adrastus . . ." [IV, xxv, 6]), and then tells of the king's astonishment at seeing Polyneices in a lion skin and Tydeus in a covering made of wild boar, twin fulfillments of the prophecy which foretold that he would marry his daughters to a lion and a boar.<sup>6</sup> Proceeding to *pudore*, Dante cites the modesty of Argia and Deipyle on meeting their future mates: "Onde dice lo sopra notato poeta ne lo allegato libro primo di Tebe . . . le vergini palide e rubicunde si fecero" ("Whence the above mentioned poet in the already cited first book of Thebes says . . . the vergins became pale and blushing" [IV, xxv, 8]).

<sup>6</sup> It is not clear why Adrastus, who is described in the *Thebaid* as passing from middle age to the threshold of old age, should be the example of the adolescent virtue of *stupore*. Did Dante get so carried away with his story that he lost track of whom he was pairing with what emotion? P. Mustard, in "Dante and Statius," *MLN*, 39 (1924), 120, proposes the lines describing Adrastus' age, "medio de limite vitae / in senium vergens" ("verging toward old age from the middle part of life" [*Thebaid* I, 390-391]), as a possible source for the first line of the *Comedy*. The text is from P. Papini *Stati Thebais et Achilleis*, ed. H. W. Garrod (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906).

Finally, *verecundia* is illustrated by the suitor Polyneices' shame at revealing his tainted ancestry: "Onde dice questo medesimo poeta, in quella medesima parte, che quando Polinice . . ." ("Whence the same poet, in that same part of his book, says that when Polyneices . . ." [IV, xxv, 10]). A visual tableau from the *Thebaid* is thus enacted in the pages of the *Convivio*, each new image connected to the previous one by the insertion of the reference to the author, which is repeated three times to correspond to the three *passioni* requiring illustration.

Chapter xxvi belongs to Vergil; in it events in the life of Aeneas are used as examples of temperance, fortitude, love, courtesy, and loyalty, all virtues appropriate to *gioventute*. Dante draws his examples from the fourth, fifth, and sixth books of the *Aeneid*: Aeneas' temperance is shown when he leaves Dido; his fortitude when he goes alone with the Sibyl into the underworld; his love in his kindness toward the old Trojans and in his instruction of Ascanius; his courtesy in the part he played in the funeral rites of Misenus; and his loyalty in giving the prizes he had promised to the victors of the games. Because the examples are not all drawn from one episode, the story-line is less unified than in the Statius recital, but in compensation the narrative is infused, as Ulrich Leo points out, with greater passion and personal involvement:<sup>7</sup>

E quanto raffrenare fu quello, quando, avendo ricevuto da Dido tanto di piacere quanto di sotto nel settimo trattato si dicerà, e usando con essa tanto di dilettazone, elli si partio, per seguire onesta e laudabile via e fruttuosa, come nel quarto de l'Eneida scritto è! Quanto spronare fu quello, quando esso Enea sostenette solo con Sibilla a intrare ne lo Inferno a cercare de l'anima di suo padre Anchise, contra tanti pericoli, come nel sesto de la detta istoria si dimostra!

And how much holding back was that, when, having received from Dido as much pleasure as we will describe below in the seventh treatise, and finding with her such de-

<sup>7</sup> "The Unfinished *Convivio* and Dante's Rereading of the *Aeneid*," p. 59.

light, he departed, in order to follow an honorable and praiseworthy path and a fruitful one, as is written in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*! And how much spurring forward was that, when Aeneas dared to enter Hell alone with Sibyl to find the soul of his father Anchises, facing many dangers, as is shown in the sixth book of the aforementioned history!

(*Convivio* IV, xxvi, 8-9)

It is, moreover, a tribute to Vergil that his hero should be chosen to exemplify *gioventute*, the age which Dante considers "colmo de la nostra vita" ("the peak of our life" [IV, xxvi, 3]). Vergil himself is mentioned four times in chapter xxvi; while two of these references ("lo nomato poeta" [11] and "lo predetto poeta" [14]) are simple recalls, two describe Vergil in terms that point directly to the *Comedy*: besides being called "lo maggior nostro poeta" (8), echoed in *Paradiso* XV, he is also "questo altissimo poeta" (13), a phrase that later recurs in *Inferno* IV.

Ovid and Lucan receive less attention than Statius and Vergil, in the *Convivio* as in the *Comedy*.<sup>8</sup> The next chapter of *Convivio* IV, that of *senettute*, is assigned to Ovid; after many references to Cicero's *De Senectute*, Dante ends the chapter with a story from the *Metamorphoses* about King Aeacus, in whom all the virtues appropriate to this age (prudence, justice, generosity, and affability) are gathered. Although the practice of inserting a story from the works of the assigned poet into the *Convivio* is thus continued, no handsome epithet adorns Ovid's name, to whom Dante refers twice simply as "Ovidio" (IV, xxvii, 17 and 19). Lucan fares better. The *Pharsalia*'s story of Cato and Marcia, told as an allegory of the noble soul returning to God, is a

<sup>8</sup> Paul Renucci, in *Dante, Disciple et Juge du Monde Gréco-Latin* (Clermont-Ferrand: G. de Bussac, 1954), points out that in the *Comedy* Ovid and Lucan are treated with less veneration than the others: "Présentés aux Limbes sans l'ornement d'une épithète, et derniers nommés de la 'belle école' d'Homère, ils son environnés d'un moindre respect que les *maximi*" (p. 330). In fact, Dante does not hesitate to compare himself favorably to Ovid and Lucan in *Inferno* XXV, where he tells both poets to be silent, whereas he never explicitly calls himself the superior of Vergil.

long and elaborate one which takes up much of chapter xxviii, whereas the story of King Aeacus is told rather hurriedly at the end of chapter xxvii. Moreover, although Lucan is only named once, he receives one of the epithets typical of these chapters; he is "quello grande poeta Lucano" (IV, xxviii, 13). While Lucan's position is doubtless enhanced by the importance Dante attaches to Cato, the treatment of Ovid is not atypical, for Ovid is one of the poets Dante most uses, but—with respect to other major poets—least acknowledges. Thus, although one might deduce from these chapters of the *Convivio* that the relative importance of the classical poets for Dante in this period would be reflected by the order Vergil-Statius-Lucan-Ovid, in actual practice Ovid follows Vergil as the poet who is most in evidence: in the *Convivio* Vergil is mentioned ten times, Ovid eight times, Lucan five times, Statius five times, Juvenal four times, Homer twice, and Horace twice. Interestingly, Moore verifies that this same pattern—in which Vergil is first, followed by Ovid, Lucan, and Statius in that order—operates through Dante's work as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Edward Moore, *Studies in Dante, First Series: Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante* (1896; repr. New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), calculates that Vergil is quoted or referred to in Dante's work about 200 times, Ovid about 100, Lucan about 50, and Statius between 30 and 40 (p. 4). Enrico Proto, who follows in Moore's footsteps looking for points of contact between Dante's text and those of his Latin authors, confirms Ovid's standing as the *Comedy's* principal classical source after Vergil; see "Dante e i poeti latini," *Atene e Roma*, 11 (1908), 23-48, 221-236; *Atene e Roma*, 12 (1909), 7-24, 277-290; *Atene e Roma*, 13 (1910), 79-103, 149-162. Renucci, *Dante, Disciple et Juge du Monde Gréco-Latin*, and Augustin Renaudet, *Dante Humaniste* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952), further explore Dante's relation to the classical poets, especially with respect to his borrowings from them, as does Ettore Paratore, *Tradizione e struttura in Dante* (for a general overview, see esp. "Dante e il mondo classico" [pp. 25-54] and "L'eredità classica in Dante" [pp. 55-121]). On this subject, see also: P. H. Wicksteed, "Dante and the Latin Poets," in *Dante: Essays in Commemoration*, pp. 159-187; Vito Sirago, "Dante e gli autori latini," *Lettere italiane*, 3 (1951), 99-134; Hermann Gmelin, "Dante und die römischen Dichter," *Deutsches Dante Jahrbuch*, 31-33 (1953), 42-65; Alessandro Ronconi, "Per Dante interprete dei poeti latini," *Studi danteschi*, 41 (1964), 5-44; Guido Martellotti, "Dante e i classici," *Cultura e scuola* 4,

The prose text in which we can observe the transition from the rhetorical and figurative Vergil of the *opere minori* to the prophetic and imperial Vergil of the *Comedy* is the second book of the *Monarchia*, which, because it seeks to legitimize Roman sovereignty, draws heavily on Latin literature. The arguments of Book II are buttressed primarily by poets and historians, including Livy, Cicero, Lucan, and Orosius.<sup>10</sup> But by far the most visible classical authority in the *Monarchia* is Vergil, who is quoted or referred to seventeen times in all. Vergil's dominant presence in Book II, where Dante quotes only from the *Aeneid*, the poem of Empire, is heralded in Book I, where—as though to set the stage—Dante quotes from the fourth Eclogue, indeed from the same passage announcing the return of Astraea that he will later use in *Purgatorio* XXII.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in *Monarchia* I, xi, 1, Vergil enters the text as "Virgilius," author of the *Eclogues*, while in Book II he takes on the qualities that characterize him throughout the work: here Dante outdoes any of his earlier statements about Vergil, calling him first "divinus poeta noster" (II, iii, 6), and, shortly thereafter, "noster Vates" (II, iii, 12). Both these expressions—"our divine poet" and "our seer"—confer upon the Latin poet a new and unique status; in comparison with the *Convivio*, where the terms of praise have technical poetic overtones pointing to the Mantuan as the greatest member of a poetic fraternity ("questo altissimo poeta," for instance, reminds us of Vergil's status as a poet in the high style), the *Monarchia* adopts a terminology that sets Vergil apart from other poets, taking him out of the fraternity altogether. In this treatise's more political than poetic universe,

nos. 13-14 (1965), 125-137; Alan Robson, "Dante's Reading of the Latin Poets and the Structure of the *Commedia*," in *The World of Dante: Essays on Dante and his Times*, ed. Cecil Grayson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 81-121.

<sup>10</sup> Livy is quoted or referred to 13 times, Cicero 8, Lucan 6, and Orosius 4. Ovid, Homer, and Boethius are referred to twice each; Seneca and Juvenal once. It goes without saying that there are no vernacular poets in the *Monarchia*.

<sup>11</sup> The importance of this passage for Dante is evidenced by the fact that he also uses it in *Epistola* VII, 6, so that it appears in his work three times in all. For Dante's sense of Vergil as the poet of Empire, see Charles Till Davis, *Dante and the Idea of Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), esp. pp. 100-138.

Vergil stands out for his prophetic capacities, his divine gifts of divination. His "sight" has political implications; it can hardly be accidental that on the occasion in which Dante calls Vergil "noster Vates," he quotes a passage from *Aeneid* III detailing the Italian origins of Dardanus, the founder of Troy. Aeneas thus returns to the land of his fathers, a fact that constitutes one more sign of the providential nature of his mission. In each of the fifteen other instances in which Vergil is mentioned in the *Monarchia*, he is "Poeta noster," a periphrasis as eloquent in its simplicity and ubiquity as the more majestic "divinus" and "Vates." Thus, already in the second book of the *Monarchia*, Vergil is so familiar a figure that he is denoted with a periphrasis that the reader is expected to identify exclusively with him; as here he is *Poeta noster*, so in the *Comedy* he will be *duca* and *maestro*.

The Vergil who emerges from the *Monarchia* is an imperial and Augustan figure; he belongs in the general category of illustrious thinkers, poets and historians—"ystoriographi . . . poete illustres" (I, xvi, 2)—whom Dante calls upon to witness the general happiness of the human race during the reign of Augustus, "sub divo Augusto monarcha" (I, xvi, 1). This call is issued at the end of Book I, initiating the spate of references to Vergil that runs through Book II, and culminating in the indirect final reference to the Latin poet found in this book's last paragraph, where Dante refers to Italy by one of its Vergilian names, "Ausonia": "O felicem populum, o Ausoniam te gloriosam" ("O happy people, O glorious Ausonia" [II, xi, 8]). The *Monarchia*'s last Vergilian moment thus anticipates the *Comedy*'s first canto, where the prophecy of the *veltro* echoes Jupiter's prophecy in the first book of the *Aeneid*, where Vergil speaks of God as an Emperor, and where "umile Italia" is a Christian variant of "Ausoniam te gloriosam."<sup>12</sup> If the imperial Vergil of the *Monarchia* finds his immediate expression in *In-*

<sup>12</sup> In accordance with Ronconi, *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. V, p. 1045, I take "umile Italia" as bearing a positive moral significance, in contrast with the other Vergilian phrase from *Inferno* I, "l' superbo Ilión" (75). "Humble Italy" will be saved, whereas "proud Ilium" fell.

*ferno* I, *Inferno* IV articulates the epic Vergil; it is here that Vergil is again called "l'altissimo poeta," as he was in the *Convivio*. The fact that *altissimo* is used twice in *Inferno* IV (in line 95 Homer is "quel signor de l'altissimo canto") stresses the canto's role within the text: *Inferno* IV constitutes the *Comedy*'s first direct statement on the poetry of classical antiquity, i.e. poetry written in the high style.<sup>13</sup> Vergil is the *altissimo poeta*, the ultimate exponent of that style, as he was in the *Vita Nuova*. Indeed, *Inferno* IV presents a remarkably similar picture to that of the *libello*: again the salute to Homer is upstaged by Dante's patent admiration for the known quantity, Vergil. The distribution of the key word *onore* and its derivatives furnishes a clue in this regard. It is used eight times in all: three times for the poets of Limbo as a group; once for Dante himself, who receives "more honor" when he is allowed to join the charmed circle of poets as its sixth member; and once for Aristotle. The remaining three uses are all references to Vergil, the only individual to be so treated; thus, were we to take *Inferno* IV out of context, as a set piece to compare with the earlier works, we would find that Vergil is still supreme, as he was throughout the *opere minori*.

<sup>13</sup> E. G. Parodi, in his review of the seventh Scartazzini edition of the *Comedy*, *Bullettino della Società Dantesca Italiana*, 23 (1916), points out that Dante repeats *altissimo* in *Inferno* IV because the word has a technical significance which precludes its substitution by another (p. 13). On Vergil's return to Limbo and *Inferno* IV in general, see: Francesco D'Ovidio, "Il saluto dei poeti del Limbo al reduce Virgilio," in *Studii sulla Divina Commedia*, pp. 520-531; G. Troccoli, "Onorate l'altissimo poeta," in *Saggi danteschi*, new ed. rev. (Florence: Le Monnier, 1948), pp. 11-32; Augustin Renaudet and Siro A. Chimenz, "Il canto IV dell'*Inferno*," *Nuova 'Lectura Dantis'* (Rome: Signorelli, 1954); Francesco Mazzoni, "Saggio di un nuovo commento alla *Commedia*: il canto IV dell'*Inferno*," *Studi danteschi*, 42 (1965), 29-204; Giorgio Brugnoli, "Omero sire," *Cultura neolatina*, 27 (1967), 120-136; Giorgio Padoan, "Il Limbo dantesco," orig. 1969, repr. in *Il pio Enea, l'empio Ulisse* (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), pp. 103-124; Gioacchino Paparelli, "Virgilio e le anime del Limbo," orig. 1951, repr. in *Ideologia e poesia in Dante*, pp. 139-169; Fiorenzo Forti, "Il limbo e i megalopsicoi della Nicomachea," orig. 1961, repr. in *Magnanimitate: studi su un tema dantesco* (Bologna: Patron, 1977), pp. 9-48; Amilcare A. Iannucci, "Limbo: The Emptiness of Time," *Studi danteschi*, 52 (1979-1980), 69-128.

Putting *Inferno* IV back into context, we find that Vergil is indeed supreme—in the first circle of Hell. This is to state baldly the problematic that will now engage us, namely the paradox of Vergil's situation. In terms of *Inferno* IV, we remember that *onore* bears not only positive but also negative connotations, since it functions as both the sign of Limbo's difference from the rest of Hell, and the sign of its difference from Heaven, whose currency is not "honor" but "joy" and "ineffable gladness" (*Par.* XXVII, 7). Vergil resides within this limbo of perpetual tension, of simultaneously positive and negative significance; to emphasize either one of these two poles of meaning is to distort Dante's creation, which depends on the simultaneous conjunction of opposites, of being and nonbeing. It is therefore not so much theologically vain as poetically unrealistic to speculate about Vergil's possible salvation, since it is an essential condition of his existence in the poem that he shall also cease to exist: his presence is predicated on his talent for absence. Because of his function as a paradox at the heart of the poem, there is a potential adversative at the end of any statement about Vergil, an insistent *tamen* that this eschatological world has imposed on the Latin poet's own, more humanly scaled, *for-san*.<sup>14</sup> Vergil embodies the most that natural man can attain, yet he is not saved; he is the greatest of poets, yet the lesser Statius can replace him. In the following pages, I will attempt to show how the Vergilian paradox operates at the level of narrative, resulting in two distinct but tightly coordinated storylines: as one maps the progressive undermining of Vergil's

<sup>14</sup> In his Introduction to *Virgil: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), Steele Commager discusses the *Aeneid*'s deep ambivalence, remarking that "A perpetual *for-san*, 'perhaps,' hovers over the *Aeneid*," and reminding us that "Virgil added the word [*for-san*] to Homer in his famous imitation: *for-san et haec olim meminisse iuvabit*, 'perhaps, some day, it will be a pleasure to remember these things' " (p. 13). Dorothy Sayers' remark on paradox in the *Comedy*, that because of it "problems and ambiguities in the interpretation of [its] allegorical symbolism can seldom be settled by an 'either-or,' but on the contrary usually demand an answer involving 'both-and' (from "The Paradoxes of the *Comedy*," in *Introductory Papers on Dante* [London: Methuen, 1954], p. 182), is a critical principle that applies eminently to Vergil, himself one of the *Comedy*'s chief paradoxes.

authority, i.e. of his appeal to the intellect, the other records the simultaneous growth in the pilgrim's love for him, i.e. in his appeal to the will. Given these complementary and contradictory lines of development, it will be apparent that Dante has used the figure of Vergil to structure an inescapable dialectic into his text.

## Vergil: "Poeta fui"

It is no secret that Dante's imitation of the *Aeneid* decreases as the *Comedy* progresses. Whitfield points out that of the two hundred uses of Vergil claimed by Moore, "90 of these passages concern the *Inferno*, 34 the *Purgatorio*, and 13 the *Paradiso*, while the rest are scattered in Dante's other writings."<sup>15</sup> Petrocchi establishes a pattern of inverse relation between Dante's use of translations from the *Aeneid* and his use of translations from the Bible: while translations from the Roman text occur seven times in the *Inferno*, five times in the *Purgatorio*, and only once in the *Paradiso*, translations from the Christian text occur twelve times in the *Paradiso*, eight times in the *Purgatorio*, and only twice in the *Inferno*.<sup>16</sup> The *Inferno* is thus Ver-

<sup>15</sup> J. H. Whitfield, *Dante and Virgil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1949), pp. 73-74.

<sup>16</sup> Giorgio Petrocchi, "Itinerari nella *Commedia*," *Studi danteschi*, 41 (1964), 68. As we would expect, Vergil is by far the most translated poet in the *Comedy*; indeed, his only rival is not another poet, but the Bible. According to the statistics compiled by Felicina Groppi, *Dante traduttore*, 2d ed. rev. (Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1962), Vergil's verse is translated in the *Comedy* thirteen times (this figure does not include Vergilian reminiscences, like Casella's attempt to embrace the pilgrim, or the episodes of Vergilian inspiration, like that of Pier della Vigna), while the text contains only three other translations of classical authors: one from Cicero's *De Amicitia* (the probable source for Thaïs' dialogue in *Inferno* XVIII, 133-135), and two from Lucan's *Pharsalia* (neither of the passages adduced by Groppi strike me as direct translations, however). There are twenty-two translations from the Bible. On this subject, see also: Alessandro Ronconi, "Parole di Dante: per una semantica dei virgilianismi," *Lingua nostra*, 11 (1950), 81-85; Enzo Esposito, "Dante traduttore di Virgilio," *L'Italia che scrive*, 48 (1965), 335-336; and, on Dante as translator in the *Convivio*, Mario Marti, "Aspetti stilistici di Dante traduttore," in *Realismo dantesco e altri studi*, pp. 108-125.