

Dante adds a last overt quote from the *ballata*. The first verse of canto XXIX, "Cantando come donna innamorata," is a replay of Guido's "cantava come fosse 'namorata," and thus serves to cast the lyric episode of canto XXVIII into final relief before passing into the new mode signaled by the allegorical procession.

It would seem, therefore, that a measure of textual redemption is indeed accorded Cavalcanti in the *Comedy*, and that this occurs in *Purgatorio* XXVIII (having been forecasted in *Inferno* II) vis-à-vis the *ballata*, a form that Cavalcanti makes particularly his and that Dante, conversely, uses infrequently.⁷⁰ Even so, it should be noted that the most Guido can recuperate in *Purgatorio* XXVIII is what he had in *Vita Nuova* XXIV, i.e. the position of a great but transcended precursor. In the episode of the Earthly Paradise we find the ratios of the *Vita Nuova* writ large: as the *boschetto* to the *divina foresta*; as the *ballata* to the *canzone*; as Matelda/Primavera to Beatrice, who will arrive in *Purgatorio* XXX; as the early Cavalcantian *stil novo* to the "true" *stil novo* of the *Vita Nuova*—a text insistently invoked in these cantos and obliquely named in XXX, 115—so is Guido to Dante. Cavalcanti is the only love poet, or indeed lyric poet, to have his poetic history traced so extensively in the *Comedy*; his path takes in *Inferno* II, X, XIV, *Purgatorio* VII, XI, XXIV, XXVI, and XXVIII-XXIX. On the other hand, he is the only love poet to be discussed in Hell, and to be exposed to insinuations regarding heresy and atheism that have become a permanent part of the legend surrounding his name. In the light of all the above, we might go so far as to suggest that the *Comedy* offers Cavalcanti a choice, and that this is the reason that the allusions to him are so carefully balanced between the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*, and that Dante takes such precautions not to judge him absolutely, to leave the door of the future

⁷⁰ It seems not insignificant that Dante should single out a *ballata* for such an important role in the *Purgatorio*, since it is not only a form that he himself rejected, but it is Guido's great contribution to the new style, his *stil novo* par excellence. Thus, even at a formal level the lines between the two poets are sharply drawn; what pertains to the one does not pertain to the other, and vice versa.

(as Farinata calls it) open; in this sense, Cavalcanti's option is *Inferno* X or *Purgatorio* XXVIII. In the first case he is "dead," but he retains a peculiar stature by virtue of the fact that he has detoured himself from the direct line of Dante's precursors, represented by Guinizzelli; he is damned, but not quite surpassed. In the second case he is redeemed, but must pay the price by becoming *the* precursor par excellence, most valued but also most surpassed: like John the Baptist, an eternal forerunner of the greatness to come.

Finally, Guido's naturalistic paradise is associated with that of the classical poets, who are the other chief textual contributors to canto XXVIII. Their Golden Age informs Dante's Earthly Paradise, along with the Cavalcantian love lyric; their stories of profane love—embodied in the similes of Proserpina and Pluto, Venus and Adonis, Hero and Leander—stand behind the eroticism of the pilgrim's encounter with Matelda, along with the Provençal *pastorela*. Like their paradise, then, Guido's is shadowed by an attendant *forse*. Indeed, the charged ambivalence surrounding Guido throughout the *Comedy* finds its best emblem in three verses, all containing *forse*, all belonging to the sphere of poetic influence: the first two—"forse cui Guido vostro ebbe a disdegno" and "forse è nato / chi l'uno e l'altro cacerà del nido"—are answered by an even more tellingly elliptical verse at the end of canto XXVIII: "forse in Parnaso esto loco sognaro" ("maybe, in dreaming of Parnassus, they dreamed of this place" [141]). Are we to imagine Guido smiling, like Vergil and Statius when they learn that their pagan dreams adumbrated a Christian truth? Their dreams had validity, but they are nonetheless just dreams; as Dante leaves Guido's lady to meet his own, the dreams of classical and vernacular precursors alike recede into the distance.

The Poetry of Politics: Bertran and Sordello

The analogy, which I intend to propose, between the *Comedy's* two remaining lyric poets—Bertran de Born and Sor-

dello—is by no means self-evident.⁷¹ Thomas Bergin, for instance, sets up a structural pattern whereby there is a trio of Provençal poets in the *Comedy*, composed of Bertran in the *Inferno*, Arnaut Daniel in the *Purgatorio*, and Folquet in the *Paradiso*. Faced with a fourth poet who wrote in the *langue d'oc*, Bergin concludes that Dante does not mean Sordello to “‘count’ as a Provençal figure,” that “Dante sees in Sordello not the Provençal poet but the Italian-born patriot and judge of princes.”⁷² However, this interpretation violates one sense of the episode, for Sordello’s tribute to Vergil at the beginning of *Purgatorio* VII is undoubtedly the tribute of one poet to another. It would seem that we are dealing with Dante’s tendency to favor contradictory or counterbalancing structures over neat straightforward ones. In the same way that the odd asymmetrical canticle of thirty-four cantos creates a new order by bringing the total number of cantos to one hundred, so the presence of a fourth troubadour who mars the neat symmetrical triad of Provençal poets may point to two overlapping structures: the trio posited by Bergin and the duo suggested here, which, significantly, includes as its pivotal figure precisely the poet excluded by the first arrangement. The claim that Sordello should be juxtaposed with Bertran de Born, as Cacciaguada with Brunetto or Piccarda with Francesca, is based on a simple but, I believe, telling observation: of all the lyric poets in the *Comedy* only Bertran and Sordello are not primarily love poets. In other words, if we look not at the restricted group of Provençal poets, but at the larger group of all the lyric poets who appear in the *Comedy*—Bertran de Born, Sordello, Bonagiunta da Lucca, Guido Guinizzelli, Arnaut Daniel, and Folquet de Marselha—the first two stand out as poets whose primary poetic missions are different from those of the others. Indeed, Bertran and Sordello are revealed as the *Comedy*’s two “political” poets.⁷³

⁷¹ An earlier form of this section appeared in *PMLA*, 94 (1979), 395-405.

⁷² “Dante’s Provençal Gallery,” *Speculum*, 40 (1965), 25. The idea of three troubadours in the *Comedy*, one for each canticle, was anticipated by E. Hoepffner in “Dante et les Troubadours,” pp. 196-197.

⁷³ Bosco, *Purgatorio*, p. 94, refers to Sordello as “un poeta politico”; Folena

The reading proposed here has the further merit of throwing light on a longstanding crux of Dante criticism. The stature Dante grants Sordello in the *Comedy* has long perplexed scholars, since it seems far out of proportion to his actual achievements. Not only does the meeting with Sordello, in the sixth canto of the *Purgatorio*, serve as the catalyst for the stirring invective against Italy that concludes the canto, but Sordello is assigned the important task of guiding Vergil and Dante to the valley of the princes and identifying its various royal inhabitants. This seems a large role for a minor poet who was, and is, chiefly known as the author of a satirical lament with political overtones, the lament for Blacatz. Thus, although there is a definite consonance between the tone of the lament and the hortatory attitude of the character in the *Comedy*, Sordello’s poetic oeuvre does not by itself convincingly account for his function in the poem; nonetheless, in the absence of other explanations, critics have traditionally agreed that we must turn to Sordello’s *planh* for an understanding of his position in the *Comedy*.⁷⁴ In this so-called lament Sordello violently satirizes the princes of Europe, whom he criticizes for their cowardice;

comments that Sordello is present to Dante “soprattutto per la sua ispirazione etico-politica” (Introduction, *Vulgares eloquentes*, p. VIII).

⁷⁴ The *planh* is proposed as the source of Dante’s inspiration by D’Ovidio in “Sordello,” *Studii sulla Divina Commedia*, pp. 1-13 (although this book was published in 1901, the study on Sordello was originally printed in the *Corriere di Napoli* in 1892, as the author explains on p. 10). De Lollis develops this insight in *Vita e poesie di Sordello di Goito* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1896), esp. “Il Sordello dantesco,” pp. 90-116. In *Sul “Sordello” di Cesare De Lollis* (Venice: Olschki, 1896), Torraca disagrees with De Lollis’ position (pp. 41-43), but fails to suggest a concrete alternative to the *planh*, thus becoming the initiator of the tradition which maintains that Dante must have known more about Sordello than we do. See also E. G. Parodi, “Rassegna di studi sordelliani,” *Bullettino della Società Dantesca Italiana*, 4 (1897), 185-197, and, more recently, Guido Favati, “Sordello,” *Cultura e scuola* 4, nos. 13-14 (1965), 551-565. In “Dante and Sordello,” *Comparative Literature*, 5 (1953), 1-15, C. M. Bowra makes a case for the importance of Sordello’s narrative poem, “Ensenhamens d’onor,” as does Ruggero M. Ruggieri, “Tradizione e originalità nel lessico cavalleresco di Dante: Dante e i trovatori,” in *L’umanesimo cavalleresco italiano: Da Dante a Pulci* (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1962), esp. pp. 67-71.

in fact, the work is more a *sirventes* than a *planh*, more a diatribe against the living than a lament for the dead. The poem begins conventionally enough, bewailing the death of Blacatz and complaining, in the usual manner, that all virtue and bravery have died with him; it soon becomes apparent, however, that his death is more a pretext than a theme. Consequently, Blacatz is not mentioned again after the first verse.⁷⁵

Planher vuelh en Blacatz en aquest leugier so,
 ab cor trist e marrit; et ai en be razo,
 qu'en luy ai mescabat senhor et amic bo,
 e quar tug l'ayp valent en sa mort perdut so;
 tant es mortals lo dans qu'ieu non ai sospesiso
 que jamais si revenha, s'en aital guiza no;
 qu'om li traga lo cor e que'n manio'l baro
 que vivon descorat, pueys auran de cor pro.

Premiers manje del cor, per so que grans ops l'es
 l'emperaire de Roma, s'elh vol los Milanés
 per forsa conquistar . . .

I want to lament Sir Blacatz in this light melody, with a sad and afflicted heart; and I have good reason, for in him I have lost a lord and a good friend, and because all that is virtuous is lost in his death. This damage is so fatal that I have no hope that it can ever be remedied, if not in this way: let his heart be taken out and the barons eat of it who live without heart—then they will have heart enough. / Let the first to eat of the heart, because he has great need of it, be the Emperor of Rome, if he wants to conquer the Milanese by force . . .

(1-11)

Using throughout the poem the alimentary motif of Blacatz' heart as a source of courage for the cowardly kings, Sordello pillories a different prince in each stanza, all for being too weak and spineless to fight for their rightful territories.

⁷⁵ Quotations are from *Sordello: Le Poesie*, ed. Marco Boni (Bologna: Libreria Antiquaria Palmaverde, 1954).

The Sordello of *Purgatorio* VII is also given to judging the behavior of rulers; here, too, he rebukes the princes for negligence and for failing to govern properly. His indictment includes many of the same families, and although in most cases Dante's Sordello is dealing with the next generation, there is one overlapping king.⁷⁶ The lofty Dantesque concept of the sovereign's moral obligation to his subjects has taken the place of the simple feudal attitude of the *planh*, in which loss of land is considered a stain on the personal honor of the prince, but once this inevitable shift has been taken into account the correspondences between the historical Sordello and the Sordello of the *Comedy* are clear enough. And yet they are inadequate, for neither Sordello's poetry nor his Lombard origins, which permit him to greet Vergil with the famous verse "O Mantuano, io son Sordello / de la tua terra!" ("O Mantuan, I am Sordello of your land!" [*Purg.* VI, 74-75]), justify his prominence in the *Comedy* in a more than mechanical way. It is this gap between the real and the fictional that has made Sordello the subject of so much critical debate, to the point of being labeled "l'enigma dantesco" by one scholar who believed that only the discovery of new biographical material would resolve Dante's problematic esteem for this minor poet.⁷⁷ It is my purpose to show that there are internal reasons for Sordello's role and stature, beyond those already adduced, and that Dante's underlying logic and intentions in the Sordello episode may best be clarified by means of a comparison with the *Comedy's* other political poet, Bertran de Born.

Bertran too was celebrated for laments; those traditionally attributed to him are both for Prince Henry of England, also

⁷⁶ The only ruler to appear in both lists is Henry III of England. In Sordello's *planh* we find: the Emperor Frederick II, Louis IX of France, Henry III of England, Ferdinand III of Castile and León, James I of Aragon, Thibaut I of Navarre, Raimon VII of Toulouse, Raimon Bérenger IV of Provence. Dante's negligent princes are: Emperor Rudolf I, Ottokar II of Bohemia, Philip III of France, Henry of Navarre, Peter III of Aragon, Charles I of Anjou, Henry III of England, and William Montferrat.

⁷⁷ Vincenzo De Bartholomaeis, *Primordi della lirica d'arte in Italia* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1943), p. 208.

called the Young King, with whom the poet was presumably on intimate terms.⁷⁸ They are the famous "Si tuit li dol e·lh plor e·lh marrimen" and the less well-known "Mon chan fenisc ab dol et ab maltraire."⁷⁹ Unlike Sordello's *planh* for Blacatz, these are true laments, following the customary format of both praising the dead man and mourning his loss:

Si tuit li dol e·lh plor e·lh *marrimen*
 E las dolors e·lh dan e·lh chaitivier
 Qu'om anc auzis en est segle dolen
 Fossen ensems, sembleran tot leugier
 Contra la mort del *jove rei engles*,
 Don rema pretz e jovens doloros
 E·l mons obscurs e teintz e tenebros,
 Sems de tot joi, ples de tristor e d'*ira*.

(1-8; italics mine)

⁷⁸ For the legend of Bertran de Born and the Young King, see Olin H. Moore, *The Young King: Henry Plantagenet 1155-1183*, in *History, Literature and Tradition* (Columbus: Ohio State U., 1925), and William D. Paden, Jr., "Bertran de Born in Italy," in *Italian Literature: Roots and Branches* (Essays in Honor of Thomas Goddard Bergin), ed. Giose Rimaneli and Kenneth John Atchity (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1976), pp. 39-66. Although Moore suggests that Bertran may not have been as intimate with Prince Henry as the poet claims (pp. 38-47), Dante and his contemporaries certainly believed in this intimacy.

⁷⁹ Modern scholarship has raised the question of the authenticity of "Si tuit li dol." Carl Appel, in his edition of Bertran, *Die Lieder Bertrams von Born* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1932), places "Si tuit li dol" among the poems of doubtful attribution, as does L. E. Kastner, in "Notes on the Poems of Bertran de Born," *Modern Language Review*, 32 (1937), 219. For a résumé of the critical opinion on this matter, see D'Arco Silvio Avalle, in his edition of the poet to whom some scholars assign the *planh*, *Peire Vidal: Poesie* (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1960), vol. I, p. cxvi, n. 1. The traditional attribution of "Si tuit li dol" to Bertran is so firmly ingrained that the poem has been included in anthologies under his name even by scholars who acknowledge that the authorship is questionable; see, e.g. *Anthology of the Provençal Troubadours*, ed. R. T. Hill and T. G. Bergin, 2d ed. rev. (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1973), vol. II, p. 37, and *Medieval Song: An Anthology of Hymns and Lyrics*, trans. and ed. James J. Wilhelm (New York: Dutton, 1971), p. 164. The only recent compiler to omit "Si tuit li dol" from a selection of Bertran's poems is Frederick Goldin, *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères* (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1973). Bertran is cited according to Appel's edition.

If all the sorrow, tears, anguish, pain, loss, and misery which man has heard of in this sorrowful life were heaped together, they would all seem light compared to the death of the young English king; for him worth and youth grieve, and the world is dark, covered over, and in shade, lacking all joy, full of sadness and spite.

Bertran is capable not only of the obsessive grief of "Si tuit li dol" ("marrimen," "jove rei engles," and "ira" are all repeated in the same position in each stanza), but also of the vivid delight in battle found in his *sirventes*. In these poems, Bertran constantly urges the barons on to battle, as does Sordello in his lament for Blacatz. Sordello, however, recommends war as an antidote for reprehensible cowardliness and as a means of securing lost territory, whereas Bertran's reasons for war-mongering are unabashedly mercenary and self-serving, and his chief concern is loot. Thus, even when Bertran and Sordello share similar social themes and a similar polemical bent, Bertran's verse lacks the didactic element that distinguishes the poetry of Sordello. In the lament for Blacatz and in the longer narrative poem, "Ensenhamens d'onor," Sordello dispenses instruction on the chivalric code, as the title of the latter work ("The Teachings of Honor") makes explicit. It is this aspect of Sordello's poetry and personality that must have initially appealed to Dante and provided him with the starting point for the figure of the *Comedy*.

The canto in which the travelers first meet Sordello, *Purgatorio* VI, belongs, as is well known, to the *Comedy's* triad of political cantos, along with the sixth cantos of the *Inferno* and the *Paradiso*. Although the political thematics of *Purgatorio* VI become most overt in the invective beginning "Ahi serva Italia, di dolore ostello" ("Ah enslaved Italy, hostel of grief" [76]), it is signaled from the line in which Dante apostrophizes a soul, as yet unidentified, by referring to the part of Italy from which it came: "o anima lombarda" (61). This soul turns out to be Sordello, whose Lombard origins draw him to Vergil. The invective is therefore fueled by the ironic contrast between Sor-

dello's loving response to Vergil as a fellow Mantuan ("e l'un l'altro abbracciava" "and one embraced the other" [75]) and the discord characteristic of Italy, where fellow citizens "gnaw" rather than embrace each other ("e l'un l'altro si rode / di quei ch'un muro e una fossa serra" "and one gnaws at the other, of those whom one wall and one moat enclose" [83-84]). The appellation "anima lombarda" also serves to bring to mind another episode—again political—where an Italian place-name is used as a form of address, namely the one in which Farinata calls out: "O Tosco che per la città del foco / vivo ten vai" ("O Tuscan, who through the city of fire go alive" [*Inf.* X, 22]). There are numerous correspondences, heightened by verbal echoes, in the presentations of Farinata and Sordello, who both appear in episodes dealing with love of one's native land: both souls are isolated and disdainful; both are first noticed by Vergil, using the same expression.⁸⁰ The necessary password on each occasion is a sound evoking the *patria*: Farinata hears Dante's Tuscan accent, and Sordello reacts to Vergil's first word, "Mantüa."

Perhaps most striking is the structural correspondence between the two episodes; in both a conversation is suddenly interrupted, suspended without a word of explanation, and just as suddenly resumed. Farinata and Dante are interrupted by Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti; they stop conversing until he disappears and then begin again as though he had not existed. Similarly, the conversation between Sordello and Vergil is interrupted by the narrator's apostrophe to Italy, which cuts in and continues to the end of the sixth canto. So abrupt is the break that when the conversation resumes at the beginning of the seventh canto, Sordello does not yet know who Vergil is. These devices serve rhetorically to underscore Sordello as a

⁸⁰ Benedetto Croce calls Sordello the "Farinata del Purgatorio" (*La poesia di Dante* [Bari: Laterza, 1921], p. 112). In "Il canto VI del Purgatorio" (1940; repr. in *Lecture scelte sulla Divina Commedia*, ed. Giovanni Getto [Florence: Sansoni, 1970], pp. 577-593), Giovanni Gentile points to Vergil's use of the expression "Vedi là" in both episodes; most of the similarities between these two episodes have been previously noted in one commentary or another.

purgatorial corrective to Farinata. In Hell, love of one's native land is put into a context of "heresy" or divisiveness, so that Farinata is able to turn common Tuscan origins into barriers of family allegiance and party affiliation. In Purgatory, common Lombard origins become the reason for an embrace; Sordello's immediate reaction to the word "Mantüa" is part of a context that stresses unity, here the unity resulting from a shared birthplace. Sordello, then, is related in three ways to the theme of politics in the *Comedy*. First, he is intrinsically connected by virtue of his historical identity as a poet concerned about the behavior of rulers in his day. Second, he is connected by his situation in the sixth, political, canto of the *Purgatorio*, where his embrace of Vergil, exemplifying political unity, gives rise to the invective in which Dante deplores the lack of unity in Italy. Third, Sordello is the poetic refocusing of Farinata, the lens through which the theme of love of one's native land reappears on the slopes of Mount Purgatory.

The common denominator in these various aspects of the Dantesque Sordello is the concept of political unity, played against its contrary, discord and fragmentation. Within this context, but in a linguistic sphere, there is a particular feature of Sordello's career that may well have determined Dante's development of his role. Sordello was that anomaly among poets—one who wrote in a language not his own. Although an Italian from Goito near Mantua, he wrote in Provençal. That Dante was intrigued by this is clear from what he has to say about Sordello in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*: "[Sordello], being a man of great eloquence, abandoned his native vernacular not only in writing poetry, but in all forms of expression" (I, xv, 2). Thus, Dante finds it a particular sign of Sordello's eloquence that he should have abandoned his native tongue not just "in poetando," but "quomodocunque loquendo," in any form of discourse whatsoever.⁸¹ Significantly, Dante does not cite any of Sordello's poetry in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*; all that seems

⁸¹ Mengaldo discusses the various interpretations of Dante's remark in his commentary to the Ricciardi *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, p. 120.

to interest him is the concept of linguistic internationalism that Sordello here embodies. The Latin treatise is, in part, a polemic against linguistic provincialism; the *vulgare illustre* as practiced by Dante and his friend Cino da Pistoia is conceived as the Italian that would be in common use if Italy were not divided into many warring city-states but were one united nation, an Italian strained of provincial and municipal impurities.⁸² Dante singles out Sordello for praise because Sordello too reacted against the limitations of his regional dialect and, although it was not for him to discover the Italian *vulgare illustre*, he did the next best thing: he turned to a *vulgare* that was already *illustre*, namely Provençal.

The *De Vulgari Eloquentia* posits an identity between political and linguistic unity; thus, the story of the Tower of Babel as recounted at the beginning of the treatise shows how the fragmentation of the original shared language into many new ones made it impossible for the builders to work together and led ultimately to their political differentiation: they came to the work "with one same language," but they left it "estranged from one another by a multiplicity of tongues" (I, vii, 6). In the *Comedy* Sordello stands for the reversal of this linguistic fall, for the initiative that would ideally lead back to the same language for all, which in turn would spell political harmony. Viewed in this context, the words with which Sordello honors Vergil in *Purgatorio* VII become singularly appropriate:

⁸² Dante explains his position on the *vulgare* as a national language as follows: "But to say that [the vernacular] has been deliberated in the most excellent court of the Italians seems a jest, since we lack a court. To which it is easy to respond. For even though a court, in the sense of a unified court, like the court of the King of Germany, does not exist in Italy, nevertheless its parts are not absent; and as the parts of that court [the German court] are unified by one Prince, so the parts of this court [the Italian] are unified by the grace-given light of reason. Therefore, although we lack a Prince, it would be false to say that the Italians lack a court, since we have a court, even if it is physically dispersed" (*De Vulgari Eloquentia*, I, xviii, 5). Mengaldo links Dante's convictions on political and linguistic unity to his exile, aptly referring to him as "spvincializzato dall'esilio" (Introduction, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, p. LXXII).

"O gloria di Latin," disse, "per cui
mostrò ciò che potea la lingua nostra,
o pregio eterno del loco ond' io fui,
qual merito o qual grazia mi ti mostra?"

"O glory of the Latins," he said, "through whom our
tongue showed what it could do, o eternal honor of the
place that I was from, what merit or what grace reveals
you to me?"

(16-19)

No one has a better right than Sordello to speak of "Latins" or of "our" tongue; in his crossing of linguistic boundaries he showed himself to be a true cosmopolitan, or "Latin," aware of the common heritage that underlies all the languages of Romania and makes them interchangeable, "ours" as it were.⁸³ It is not because he is as great a poet as Vergil that Sordello is chosen to eulogize him but because he demonstrates in his own person the unity of a linguistic tradition that is rooted in Latin language and literature and that cannot be divorced from a political tradition rooted in the Roman Empire. As there is in fact one language, shared by a Roman poet and a Lombard troubadour, so should there be one Empire. And thus we come back, by a slightly different route, to Sordello as an emblem of political unity in the *Comedy*. Because he thought nothing of crossing both the linguistic and political boundaries of his day, Sordello stands in opposition to the emperor, who in the invective of canto VI is accused of *not* crossing boundaries: by remaining in Germany, the emperor allowed Italy to disintegrate into a swarm of warring factions and the inherent unity of the Holy Roman Empire to be destroyed.

⁸³ Ettore Paratore convincingly demonstrates that Dante did indeed recognize a Latin vernacular (from which the literary Latin of the classical poets was abstracted in the same way that the Italian *vulgare illustre* is abstracted from the spoken Italian language) as the root of the Romance vernaculars; see "Il latino di Dante," in *Tradizione e struttura in Dante* (Florence: Sansoni, 1968), esp. pp. 136-153.

Bertran de Born is also present in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* where, as we have seen, he is the prototype of the poet of arms in a Romance language, a martial poet for whom Dante can find no equivalent in Italian letters. His poetic credentials in the treatise are excellent: he is in the company of Arnaut Daniel, the Provençal representative of love poetry, and Giraut de Bornelh, the Provençal poet of rectitude; in the same passage Dante quotes the incipit of one of his *sirventes*, in which he rejoices in a forthcoming battle (II, ii, 8). Moreover, unlike Sordello, Bertran is one of the select group of contemporary poets (comprising also Guinizzelli and Giraut) to appear in the *Convivio*, where he is the only poet in a group of nobles being praised for their generosity (IV, xi, 14). In accomplishing the startling revision of the *Comedy*, where Bertran is instead located in the ninth *bolgia* of the eighth circle of Hell among the "seminator di scandalo e di scisma" ("sowers of discord and schism" [*Inf.* XXVIII, 35]), Dante's starting point must have been the sanguinary and bloodthirsty qualities of Bertran's verse, reproduced in the carnage of the ninth *bolgia*. But Dante's elaboration of Bertran does not rest primarily on his poetry. The key to the Dantesque character lies in the reports about Bertran that circulated in the Provençal *vidas* and *razos*. These accounts exaggerate Bertran's already inflated notion of himself as Prince Henry's counselor; we learn from them that Bertran was Henry's chief advisor, personally responsible for fanning the hostilities between the prince and his father, Henry II. Moreover, and most important, one *vida* specifies that Bertran did this "ab sos sirventes," with his poetry:⁸⁴

⁸⁴ This passage is from the first of the two biographies of Bertran de Born (*Biographies des Troubadours*, p. 65). The case for Dante's knowledge both of Bertran's poetry and of the Provençal biographies is stated by Moore, pp. 74-78. Michele Scherillo, "Dante e Bertram dal Bornio," *Nuova antologia*, 155 (1897), 82-97, considers that the excessive importance Dante assigns to Bertran's role in the Young King's rebellion is based on his belief in the "legenda provenzale" (p. 90).

Seingner era tolas ves quan se volia del rei Enric e del fill de lui, mas totz temps volia que ill aguessen guerra ensem, lo paire e'l fils e'l fraire, l'uns ab l'autre. E toz temps volc que lo reis de Fransa e'l reis d'Englaterra aguessen guerra ensems. E s'il aguen patz ni treva, ades se penet *ab sos sirventes* de desfar la patz e de mostrar com cascuns era desonratz en aquella patz.

He was lord whenever he wished of King Henry and of his son, but he always wanted them to wage war against each other, the father and the son and the brother, the one against the other. And he always wanted the King of France and the King of England to wage war. And if they made peace or a truce, he immediately strove *with his sirventes* to undo the peace and to show how each one was dishonored by that peace.

(italics mine)

The sinners of the ninth *bolgia* display wounds on their bodies that correspond to the wounds they inflicted on the social fabric during their lifetimes. Hence Bertran arrives carrying his head before him like a lantern; it is severed from his body to indicate that he severed the son from the father. His account of his sin conforms closely to the *vida*:⁸⁵

"E perché tu di me novella porti,
sappi ch'i' son Bertram dal Bornio, quelli
che diedi al re giovane i ma' conforti.
Io feci il padre e 'l figlio in sé ribelli;
Achitofèl non fé più d'Absalone
e di David coi malvagi punzelli.
Perch'io parti' così giunte persone,
partito porto il mio cerebro, lasso!,

⁸⁵ There are also verbal similarities between the *vida* and the *Comedy*: "lo paire e'l fils e'l fraire, l'uns ab l'autre" is echoed in Hell by "il padre e 'l figlio in sé" (*Inf.* XXVIII, 136); "l'uns ab l'autre" may be further echoed in *Purgatorio* VI, where Dante contrasts "l'un l'altro abbracciava" with "l'un l'altro si rode."

dal suo principio ch'è in questo troncone.
Così s'osserva in me lo contrapasso."

"And so that you may carry news of me, know that I am Bertran de Born, the one who gave the evil counsels to the Young King. I made the father and the son into rebels against each other; Achithophel did no more for Absalom and David with his wicked barbs. Because I disjoined persons thus united, I carry my brain, alas!, disjoined from its root in this trunk. So in me the *contrapasso* is observed."
(*Inf.* XXVIII, 133-142)

In a canto whose theme, the sowing of discord, is fundamentally political, Bertran's sin is distinctly so; although the social unit he affected is technically the family, the family in question is a royal one, so that his actions are necessarily viewed as having social and political consequences. In fact, not only Bertran's but all the sins of *Inferno* XXVIII can be classified as social and political: Mohammed and Ali (and Fra Dolcino, mentioned by Mohammed) brought schism into the church; Pier da Medicina was a troublemaker in the courts of Romagna; Gaius Scribonius Curio indirectly started the civil wars by inciting Caesar to cross the Rubicon; Mosca de' Lamberti authorized the killing of Buondelmonte, thus giving rise to the Florentine factions and internecine fighting of Dante's own day. In that these souls are political exempla, they are not developed as characters in any way, but are permitted only depersonalized existences under the label "seminator di scandalo e di scisma." This is especially glaring in Bertran's case since such treatment is unexpected; both the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and the *Convivio* attest to Dante's interest in him as poet and personality. Yet here Bertran too is kept at a distance, expounding the nature of his sin and its exact repercussions with mathematical clarity and enunciating the law of the *contrapasso*. The clinical tone of his speech is heightened by the pathetic interpolations "Oh me!" and "lasso!" so at variance with his discourse as a whole. In a canto where all the sinners are exemplary, Bertran is served up as the last and

supreme exemplum: his sin is the worst, his punishment the most gruesome.⁸⁶

All of Dante's efforts in *Inferno* XXVIII are directed toward making a political statement. The tone of the canto is set by the opening rhetorical question, which simultaneously names the material at hand and distances it:

Chi poria mai pur con parole sciolte
dicer del sangue e de le piaghe a pieno
ch'i' ora vidi, per narrar più volte?

Who could ever fully tell of the blood and wounds that I
now saw, even if in loosened words and after numerous at-
tempts?

(1-3)

Subsequently Dante mentions Livy, who as historian of Rome attempted many such descriptions "pur con parole sciolte," i.e. in prose. This unique reference to the august political chronicler belongs to the fifteen-line comparison of lines 7 through 21, which describes five battles encompassing the political history of southern Italy from Roman times to the takeover of Charles of Anjou, and whose bewildering array of proper names has the

⁸⁶ On a textual level as well, the entire canto is a preparation for its pièce de résistance, Bertran de Born. There are echoes of Bertran's poetry throughout *Inferno* XXVIII, beginning with the structural imitation of the opening of "Si tuit li dol' in lines 7-21; see Singleton, *Commentary to the Inferno*, pp. 496, 502, 506, and Michelangelo Picone, "I trovatori di Dante: Bertran de Born," *Studi e problemi di critica testuale*, 19 (1979), 71-94. The classic studies of this episode are Michele Scherillo, "Bertram dal Bornio e il Re giovane," *Nuova antologia*, 154 (1897), 452-478, and "Dante e Bertram dal Bornio"; De Lollis' review of Scherillo in *Bullettino della Società Dantesca Italiana*, 1, nuova serie 5 (1897-1898), 69-73; and Vincenzo Crescini, "Il canto XXVIII dell'*Inferno*," *Lectura Dantis* (Florence: Sansoni, 1907), repr. in *Lecture scelte sulla Divina Commedia*, ed. Giovanni Getto, pp. 383-398. Mario Fubini discusses the deliberate depersonalizing of the sinners of this canto through the use of a distancing rhetoric in "Il canto XXVIII dell'*Inferno*," *Lectura Dantis Scaligera* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1967), pp. 999-1021. Other recent studies include Marianne Shapiro, "The Fictionalization of Bertran de Born," *Dante Studies*, 92 (1974), 107-116, and Franco Suitner, "Due trovatori nella *Commedia* (Bertran de Born e Folchetto di Marsiglia)."

effect of battering the reader with historical and political data. Furthermore, *Inferno* XXVIII contains reminiscences of other cantos in the *Inferno* where Dante airs his political beliefs, namely *Inferno* VI, where he discusses Florence with Ciaccio, and *Inferno* X, where he meets Farinata. In canto VI Dante questions Ciaccio as to the whereabouts of five well-known Florentines; one of these men, Mosca de' Lamberti, turns up in canto XXVIII among the sowers of discord. The dialogue between Dante and Mosca recalls an earlier dialogue between the pilgrim and Farinata; in both cases Dante retorts acrimoniously, saying something that— theological imprecision notwithstanding—causes the sinner even greater suffering. A last link between these cantos is the prophesying that occurs in all of them (politics being in some respects the art of successfully foretelling the future): in *Inferno* VI Ciaccio hints at Dante's exile by predicting the overthrow of his party; Farinata, in *Inferno* X, also alludes to Dante's exile, before going on to discuss the nature of foresight in Hell. It hardly seems coincidental that in *Inferno* XXVIII "l'antiveder" ("foresight" [78]) should once more be practiced, this time by Mohammed and Pier da Medicina; rather, these correspondences are signposts marking the similar thematic concerns that underlie all three cantos.

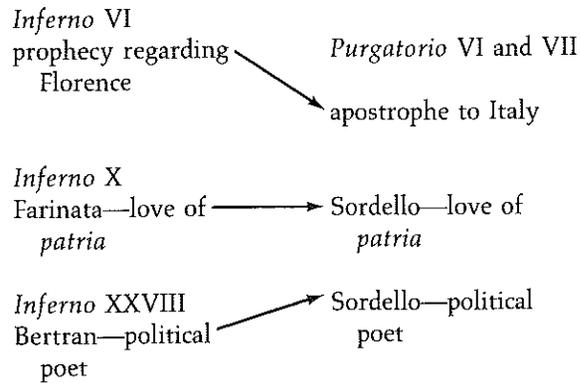
As a canto that deals with a political theme—specifically, *desfar la patz*, the "unmaking of peace," to borrow a phrase from the Provençal *vida*—*Inferno* XXVIII stands in opposition to that canto of unity and peacemaking, *Purgatorio* VI. Stylistic points of comparison support this conclusion. In his reading of *Purgatorio* VI, Aurelio Roncaglia draws attention to the recurrence of formulas denoting separation ("nave senza nocchiere" "ship without a helmsman," "sella vòta" "empty saddle," "vedova Roma" "widowed Rome") in the invective against Italy.⁸⁷ *Inferno* XXVIII also ties a motif of separation to a discourse on politics; however, the metaphoric rending of the *Pur-*

⁸⁷ See "Il canto VI del *Purgatorio*," *Rassegna della letteratura italiana*, 60 (1956), 409-426, where Roncaglia comments that "La frequenza di questa sigla avulsiva rappresenta la tormentosa fissità d'uno stato sentimentale di lacerazione" (p. 419).

gatorio is literalized in the *Inferno*, where political bereavement is expressed through physical wounds. Hence we find, to mention only two of the *bolgia's* inhabitants, Ali "fesso nel volto dal mento al ciuffetto" ("with his face cleft from his chin to his forelock" [33]) and Pier da Medicina "che forata avea la gola / e tronco 'l naso infin sotto le ciglia, / e non avea mai ch'una orecchia sola" ("who had his throat pierced and his nose cut off up to his eyebrows, and who never had more than one ear at a time" [64-66]). Another similarity between the cantos is the massive use in each of proper names, which serve to stress the historical, specific, and ephemeral nature of politics. In *Inferno* XXVIII, for instance, we find between lines 14 and 18 the names Ruberto Guiscardo, Ceperan, Pugliese, Tagliacozzo, and Alardo; in *Purgatorio* VI, in only two lines, we find Montecchi, Cappelletti, Monaldi, and Filippeschi (106-107).

Inferno XXVIII, then, stands in opposition to *Purgatorio* VI, in much the same way as does *Inferno* X. In the episodes of Farinata and Sordello the theme "division versus unity" is treated under the rubric, so to speak, of "love of one's native land." In the episodes of Bertran and Sordello, the same theme is treated under the rubric "poets who in their poetry fostered either divisiveness or unity." The Provençal *vida* specifically declares that Bertran strove to stir up trouble between father and son "with his *sirventes*"; there is perhaps an allusion to this in Dante's verse "quelli / che diedi al re giovane i ma' conforti" ("the one who gave the evil counsels to the young king" [134-135]), where the nature of the "conforti" is not specified but certainly implied. Bertran is Sordello's poetic counterpart, a fact that is confirmed and thrown into relief by their being the only lyric poets in the *Comedy* to concentrate on political concerns. Bertran's political poetry fostered disunity and schism by encouraging the Young King to disobey his father, while Sordello's, by criticizing the princes in a way that prefigures Dante's own critical stance of *Purgatorio* VI and VII, served the final goal of political unity. Bertran and Sordello are exempla of the uses to which a poet can put his poetry in the service of the state. As political poets, who address a wider audience than

do love poets, they have a proportionately greater responsibility: Bertran misused his position and mishandled his responsibility; Sordello, the counterexemplum, behaved responsibly by putting his poetry to good use. Their poetry thus becomes emblematic of everything that each comes to stand for in the *Comedy*: one for separating, disjoining, undoing, taking apart what ought to be united; the other for crossing over, bringing together, reuniting what has been torn asunder. The relationship between the two political poets is one more strand in the web of overlapping political themes that converge in the sixth and seventh cantos of the *Purgatorio* and that could be diagrammed as follows:



We can now see why Sordello is treated far more sympathetically in the *Comedy* than his poetic stature or position in life would lead us to expect. The historical Sordello has been absorbed by a Sordello whose function confers on him some signal honors and privileges not granted to any other lyric poet. For instance, although as a rule only epic poets move in the *Comedy*, Sordello moves. Since he cannot leave Ante-Purgatory, he does not move significantly upwards in the way that Vergil and Statius do; he is nonetheless the only lyric poet to move at all. (I am not referring to static motion that is part of punishment or purgation, like Guinizzelli's movement through the flames.) In that Sordello's presence spans three cantos, from

Purgatorio VI to VIII (he is last mentioned in *Purgatorio* IX, 58: "Sordel rimase e l'altre genti forme" "Sordello remained and the other noble souls"), he holds the stage longer than any of his peers, who suffer narrative as well as geographical confinements and are thus limited to one canto appearances. Sordello greets Vergil in a manner that foreshadows Statius' greeting of Vergil later on, and—most important—he serves as guide to the travelers, even saying "a guida mi t'accosto" ("I will take your side as guide" [*Purg.* VII, 42]), thus implicitly aligning himself with the other two poet-guides, Vergil and Statius. All in all, Sordello's preeminence among the lyric poets in the *Comedy* is such as to suggest that he enjoys quasi-epic status, a status underscored by the similarity between the valley of the princes and Limbo, the home of the classical poets. Moreover, the word *onesto*, etymologically related to *onore*, which with its various derivatives occurs eight times in *Inferno* IV and is Limbo's verbal talisman, is twice used in connection with Sordello, both times strategically: first in the initial presentation of canto VI ("e nel mover de li occhi onesta e tarda" "and in the slow dignified movement of your eyes" [63]), and then in the re-presentation at the beginning of canto VII ("Poscia che l'accoglienze oneste e liete" "After the dignified and joyful greetings" [1]). These efforts to link Sordello to the *Comedy's* epic and classical poets also serve to separate and distinguish him from the *Comedy's* lyric love poets.

By the time Dante came to write the sacred poem, he was incapable of—or uninterested in—unalloyed aesthetic judgments; hence Sordello, owing to his role as a moral and political poet in the service of political unity, is given marks of distinction not accorded to other lyric poets, even though this group includes some whom we would consider poetically greater than he. For that matter, Bertran is a greater poet than Sordello, objectively speaking, and we have seen how little this fact counts in the final judgment. Sordello's position depends entirely on the importance Dante attaches to political unity and peace as the basis, the *sine qua non*, of mankind's temporal well-being. Sordello's poetry does not aspire to the educational value of

epic poetry, nor does it speak to all humanity; Dante's point, however, is that it comes closer to embodying these ideals than does any other form of lyric poetry. Consequently, Dante deliberately links Sordello to the epic poets. He also takes care to show that, in this respect as well, Bertran is the exact opposite of Sordello. The description of Bertran in *Inferno* XXVIII as a trunk who carries its head like a lantern ("e 'l capo tronco tenea per le chiome, / pesol con mano a guisa di lanterna" "and it held the truncated head by the hair, dangling in its hand like a lantern" [121-122]), and lights the way for itself by itself ("Di sé faceva a sé stesso lucerna" "Of itself it made for itself a lamp" [124]), cannot but call to mind Statius' tribute to Vergil in *Purgatorio* XXII:

Facesti come quei che va di notte,
che porta il lume dietro e sé non giova,
ma dopo sé fa le persone dotte

You did as one who goes by night, who carries the light
behind him and helps not himself, but makes those who
come after him wise

(67-69)

Bertran is a grotesque inversion of Vergil: in one there is total severance, a self-sufficiency that is not strength but meaninglessness, whereas in the other there is a sharing, a passing on, and an illumination of others at the expense of oneself.

In his presentation of Bertran and Sordello as polar opposites, Dante definitively alters the historical record, and in such a way as to affect the poetic record as well: Bertran's poetic reputation was not enhanced by the *Comedy*, and Sordello's certainly was. Sordello, who wrote a biting and savage poem (which, had it been acted on, would have resulted in fighting in every corner of Europe), is reincarnated as an emblem of unity; whereas Bertran, whose poems in fact had little political impact, becomes an emblem of schism. The point is that neither of these recreations, although justifiable, is without its arbitrary features. Dante was not interested in finding for each character in his

poem a niche to correspond exactly to the merits of that person as a historical figure; rather, he begins with ideal categories that will illuminate the structure of reality as he sees it, and into these he fits his characters. So it is for souls in general, and so it is for poets. If Dante has two political poets, they must perforce have more than gossip value; they must illustrate more than the fate that each found on dying. The ideal categories would naturally have to do with the use or misuse of their poetry, and Dante would look for figures whose biographies and poetic output worked well within these categories, even if not slavishly corresponding in all details. Accordingly, Dante's treatment of Bertran de Born and Sordello presents us with a deliberate revision of history for didactic purposes; in this instance the objective is to impart a moral lesson concerning the ways the poet uses his gifts vis-à-vis society, and specifically to illustrate—within the relation of the poet to the body politic—his indivisible responsibility to the state.

The Lyric Picture: Patterns of Revision

In concluding this chapter on Dante's treatment of his lyric peers, I would like to turn briefly to the historiographical perspective of his contemporaries, as embodied in the anonymous sonnet "Infra gli altri difetti del libello."⁸⁸ As the first line

⁸⁸ The attribution of this sonnet to Cino is based on the identification of the lady in the sextet as Selvaggia, Cino's lady; I think it more probable that the poem was written by someone else annoyed at Cino's exclusion from the *Comedy*. Although Gerolamo Biscaro, "Cino da Pistoia e Dante," *Studi medievali*, nuova serie, 1 (1928), 492-499, supports Cino's paternity of this sonnet and two others that attack Dante, Cino's authorship is denied by Zingarelli in his review of Biscaro, *Studi danteschi*, 14 (1930), 184-185, as well as by Sapegno, *Il Trecento* (Milan: Vallardi, 1934), p. 45. Marti places this sonnet among Cino's "Rime dubbie" in his edition *Poeti del Dolce stil nuovo* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1969); this is the edition I have used. The sonnet also rebukes Dante for failing to give Onesto degli Onesti his due; for a general discussion of Onesto's position vis-à-vis the *stilnovisti*, see Marti, "Onesto da Bologna, lo Stil nuovo e Dante," in *Con Dante fra i poeti del suo tempo*, pp. 45-68.