

right wheel of Beatrice's chariot in the Earthly Paradise: "Quelle tre donne li fur per batesmo / che tu vedesti da la destra rota" ("Those three ladies stood for his baptism whom you saw by the right wheel" [*Par.* XX, 127-128]). This reference is designed to take us back mentally to the allegorical procession in the Earthly Paradise, to the place where "Tre donne in giro da la destra rota / venian danzando" ("Three ladies around the right wheel came dancing" [*Purg.* XXIX, 121-122]). At this point in *Purgatorio* XXIX, the virtues dance about the empty chariot awaiting Beatrice's arrival; somewhat earlier in the same canto, we see Vergil for the last time, as the pilgrim, awed by the marching candelabras, turns to his guide: "Io mi rivolsi d'ammirazione pieno / al buon Virgilio" ("I turned around full of amazement to the good Vergil" [55-56]). But Vergil, no longer *duca* or *maestro*, has no advice or comment to offer, since his amazement is as great as the pilgrim's: "ed esso mi rispuose / con vista carca di stupor non meno" ("and he looked back at me with a face laden with no less wonder" [56-57]). The evocation of the purgatorial procession in the heaven of justice thus establishes a last Vergilian paradox: Vergil is a sage, and Ripheus is not, but Vergil's ignorance—his *stupor*—stands in eternal contrast to Ripheus' grace-given knowledge, the knowledge that led him away from Limbo, to baptism and ultimate salvation.

Stattius: "Per te poeta fui"

There is no episode that dramatizes the tensions of Vergil's predicament more fully than that of Statius, the Silver Latin poet who appears to the travelers as a newly liberated soul at the beginning of *Purgatorio* XXI. There are, moreover, few issues that have puzzled scholars more than that of Statius' Christianity: "many wonder why our very Christian poet places Statius, a non-Christian, here," says Benvenuto, who offers the explanation that "the poet could conjecture from many signs—

ex multis indiciis—that Statius was a Christian.⁶⁸ Benvenuto's *indicia* include the fact that Statius witnessed the persecution of the martyrs, along with their miracles (and, the argument goes, if Vergil who lived before Christ sensed something about Him from the songs of the Sibyl, how much more would Statius have felt, living in the time of Domitian); he further adduces a line from the *Thebaid*, and the fact that Statius was "honestissimus et moralissimus in omnibus suis dictis." The pattern that Benvenuto establishes has prevailed into our century, with critics either pointing to the propitious climate in which Statius lived, or, more frequently, searching the *Thebaid* for passages that Dante may have construed as witnesses to his latent Christianity.⁶⁹ Some, but not all, follow Benvenuto's analysis to its

⁶⁸ Benvenuto's remarks on Statius, as cited here and below, are from Lacaita, vol. IV, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁹ The line pointed to by Benvenuto, "primus in orbe deos fecit timor" ("first created gods in the world" [III, 661]), is not particularly appropriate, not least because it is spoken by Capaneus. Scevola Mariotti, "Il cristianesimo di Stazio in Dante secondo il Poliziano," in *Letteratura e critica: Studi in onore di N. Sapegno* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1975), vol. II, pp. 149-161, surveys both the critics who have sought clues in the *Thebaid* and the passages on which they have concentrated. Mariotti himself, who begins as an elucidator of Poliziano rather than Dante, concludes that Poliziano's solution to the problem of Statius' Christianity is the best and should be reinstated: Poliziano points to the passage in Book IV in which Tiresias invokes a "triplicis mundi summum" ("the supreme being of the triple world" [516]), and finds in Tiresias' words a covert declaration of Statius' own faith. A slightly different approach is that of C. S. Lewis, "Dante's Statius," *Medium Aevum*, 25 (1956), 133-139, who claims that the *Thebaid* is spiritually more akin to the Christian Middle Ages than the *Aeneid*; he points to Jupiter's almost monotheistic power, the poem's fundamental pessimism regarding human nature, its sexual prudery, the invective against divination, and the contrast between the ethical personifications (*Virtus*, *Pietas*, *Clementia*) on the one side and the diabolical Olympians on the other. Finally, there is the argument that connects Statius' Christianity to an allegorical commentary of the *Thebaid* attributed to Fulgentius, vigorously sustained by Giorgio Padoan in "Teseo 'figura Redemptoris' e il cristianesimo di Stazio"; in the absence of any indication that Dante knew this commentary, Padoan makes much of Dante's Fulgentian reading of the *Aeneid* in the *Convivio*. My problems with this argument are twofold: (1) the allegorical reading of the classics found in the *Convivio* is replaced, in the *Comedy*, with a historical approach; (2) if an allegorical commentary were of such import in Dante's assessments, would

conclusion, in which the commentator puts his earlier arguments to one side in order to arrive at a purely textual reason for Statius' Christianity: "but whether he was a Christian, or whether he was not, I care little, since subtly and by necessity the poet feigns this because of the many issues he could not treat without a Christian poet, as will appear in canto XXV and elsewhere."⁷⁰ In this remarkable passage Benvenuto goes, as he so often does, to what I believe is the heart of the matter, which is that Dante's fiction at this point *requires* a figure just like Statius. In fact, Dante needs a foil to Vergil, a role for which the Christianized Statius is carefully tailored, as the character who can best bring out the ambivalence of Vergil's situation: whereas Statius the epic poet is Vergil's inferior, his disciple, the Statius who became Christian is Vergil's superior, his teacher.

While Vergil was chosen for the *Comedy* for himself, because of the hold he exerted over Dante's imagination, Statius was chosen for Vergil, because of his mathematical suitability for the equation Dante is establishing. If one thinks of the group

he not have saved Vergil, whom he explicitly reads in an allegorical key in the *Convivio*, rather than Statius? Padoan also discusses the tradition of Theseus as a *figura Christi* in the light of the fact that Theseus is the peacemaker at the end of the *Thebaid*; this argument, along with the others mentioned above, could in my opinion have been used by Dante to support an *a priori* decision to make Statius Christian, but would not by itself have induced him to do so. In fact, Padoan's demonstration regarding the frequency with which classical authors were Christianized in the Middle Ages, so that biographies like the one Dante ascribes to Statius became veritable topoi, seems to support my arguments in favor of a purely textual solution to the problem: the question is why did Dante choose specifically Statius, and the answer lies not in the usual texts that were available to him but not to us, but in the economy of his poem.

⁷⁰ Critics who have affirmed the arbitrary nature of Statius' Christianity include Pézard, who calls it "une invention arbitraire" in "Rencontres de Dante et de Stace," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 14 (1952), 10-28, and Renucci, *Dante, Disciple et Juge du Monde Gréco-Latin*, who writes: "ce n'est pas assez dire que le Stace du *Purgatoire* est un personnage historique retouché, interprété, refondu: il est proprement créé" (p. 334). Renucci's position is endorsed by Alessandro Ronconi, "L'incontro di Stazio e Virgilio," *Cultura e scuola* 4, nos. 13-14 (1965), 566-571, and Giorgio Brugnoli, "Stazio in Dante," *Cultura neolatina*, 29 (1969), 117-125, who considers Statius' redemption to be "attuata da Dante coscientemente contro tutta la tradizione" (p. 119).

of poets in Dante's earlier texts from whom Statius was picked for the undertaking of *Purgatorio* XXI and XXII, he seems by far the most plausible.⁷¹ He lived during the alleged religious persecutions of Domitian, which Dante has him cite as an incentive to his conversion, a conversion whose basis in fact Dante neatly avoids confronting by having Statius declare that he was a secret Christian, who outwardly practiced paganism: "ma per paura chiuso cristian fu'mi, / lungamente mostrando paganesmo" ("but for fear I was a hidden Christian, long making show of paganism" [*Purg.* XXII, 90-91]); for this Dante, but-tressing his inventions with the invented reality of his poem, has him spend four hundred years on the terrace of sloth. The prodigality that confines Statius to the fifth terrace for half a millennium is a sin that serves many Dantesque purposes: it allows Dante to revise the *Aeneid* to Christian ends, by having Statius construe a Vergilian attack on avarice as though it were an appeal to moderation; and, by inserting the Aristotelian scheme of the golden mean into the theological scheme based on the seven deadly sins, it allows him to further accentuate the thematics of the Golden Age—seen as a period of balance and due measure in all things—which he is at pains to develop in these cantos.⁷² Prodigality is, moreover, a suitable sin to

⁷¹ Brugnoli points out that no other member of the *regulati poetae* was available for Statius' role, since Lucan was a suicide and Ovid was "Venus' clerk" ("Stazio in Dante," p. 119).

⁷² Statius' translation of "quid non mortalia pectora cogis, / auri sacra fames!" ("To what do you not drive mortal hearts, accursed hunger for gold!" [*Aen.* III, 56-57]) as "Per che [Perché] non reggi tu, o sacra fame / de l'oro, l'appetito de' mortali?" (*Purg.* XXII, 40-41) has traditionally divided commentators into two camps: while one attempts to bring Statius' Italian into line with the original, the other accepts the changed significance of the Italian as intentional. In recent times, the first camp has been represented by Sapegno, whose suggested reading "per quali opere, a quali malvagità, non conduci tu, o esecranda fame dell'oro, l'appetito dei mortali?" (*Purgatorio*, p. 242) requires not only the shift from "Perché" to "Per che," but also that the terms "reggi" and "sacra" be assigned highly uncharacteristic meanings: *reggere* for Dante normally means "to direct" or "to govern," not "to lead," and *sacro* never means "accursed" in Italian (see the articles on *reggere* and *sacro* in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, respectively by Luigi Blasucci and Alessandro Niccoli). Singleton and Petrocchi

assign to a poet one respects: like Bertran's liberality in the *Convivio*, it has a poetic flavor, and, from a theological point of view, it is less offensive than avarice;⁷³ Dante may also have felt justified in his choice of sins by a passage describing Statius' extreme poverty in Juvenal, a poet he goes out of his way to associate with Statius in canto XXI.⁷⁴ But, finally, the best reason

both follow Sapegno (with the result that Petrocchi's edition reads "Per che" instead of "Perché") because they are reluctant to accept a deliberate misreading of Vergil's text on Dante's part. I find more critically sophisticated the oft-quoted remark written by Francesco da Buti à propos of this passage: "li Autori usano l'altrui autorità arrearle a loro sentenza quando commodamente vi si possano arrecare, non ostante che colui che l'ha ditta l'abbia posta in altra sentenza" (*La Divina Commedia nella figurazione artistica e nel secolare commento*, vol. II, p. 450). Among the moderns, this position is sustained by Renucci, *Dante, Disciple et Juge du Monde Gréco-Latin*, who claims that Vergil's "auri sacra fames" is "providentiellement prise à contresens" (p. 334); further endorsers include Ronconi, "L'incontro di Stazio e Virgilio," Esposito, "Dante traduttore di Virgilio," and Hollander, *Il Virgilio dantesco*. Conclusive arguments in favor of this reading are presented by R. A. Shoaf, "'Auri sacra fames' and the Age of Gold (*Purg.* XXII, 40-41 and 148-150)," *Dante Studies*, 96 (1978), 195-199, who places Dante's "sacred hunger for gold" within the context of the Golden Age, in which, as Dante specifies at the end of canto XXII, hunger made even acorns savory. The notion of a moderate and virtuous hunger is thus attested to by Dante within this canto; far from being the peculiarity some modern critics have suggested (the early commentators have no difficulty interpreting "sacra fame" in terms of the golden mean), "the entire setting is one of properly regulated 'hungering'" (H. D. Austin, "*Aurea Justitia*: A Note on *Purgatorio*, XXII, 40 f.," *MLN*, 48 [1933], 327-330). Indeed, the theme of the Golden Age finds its purgatorial focus in this very canto by way of the quotation of Vergil's fourth Eclogue: the souls on Mount Purgatory are engaged precisely in returning to a new "primo tempo umano" (*Purg.* XXII, 71), and thus in establishing a new Golden Age.

⁷³ In *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae. q. 119, a. 3, St. Thomas asks whether prodigality is a more serious sin than avarice, and concludes that it is less serious.

⁷⁴ In the seventh Satire, Juvenal describes Statius as so poor that he had to sell his play *Agave* to keep from starving (82-87). Although Juvenal's point is that all poets are poor, Benvenuto comments that this passage may have led Dante to believe that Statius was prodigal with his means, since he knew of Statius' popularity. Brugnoli argues for Dante's knowledge of this satire in "Stazio in Dante"; he finds especially telling Dante's use, in a nearby canto, of the verb *esurire*, "to desire to eat," "be hungry," used by Juvenal with

for using Statius as a testimonial to Vergil in the *Comedy* is provided by the historical Statius himself, who not only imitated the *Aeneid* throughout the *Thebaid*, but who (perhaps uniquely) ends his major work with a closing apostrophe to his text, in which he draws attention to the revered forerunner that will always eclipse it: "vive, precor; nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta, / sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora" ("Live, I pray, nor rival the divine *Aeneid*, but follow at a distance and always revere its footsteps" [*Thebaid* XII, 816-817]).⁷⁵ The Statius of the *Comedy* is only speaking with the same self-effacement as the original when he says that to have lived while Vergil was alive he would consent to an extra year of purgation (*Purg.* XXI, 100-102); indeed, the closing passage of the *Thebaid* almost seems to give Dante proleptic license to treat its author as a secondary figure with respect to the author of the *Aeneid*, and in this spirit to make whatever biographical or historical alterations are required to throw the character of Vergil into greater relief.

reference to Statius' potential starvation, and by Dante in his paraphrasing of the beatitude "Beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt iustitiam" ("Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice"). (We note, in passing, that Dante's rendering, "esuriendo sempre quanto è giusto" ["hungering always as much as is right" (*Purg.* XXIV, 154)], is an apt gloss on the "sacra fame / de l'oro" of *Purgatorio* XXII, since it speaks precisely of a controlled, and therefore "sacred," hunger.) Dante goes out of his way to introduce Juvenal into the problematic by having Vergil tell Statius that he first learned of his affection through the author of the *Satires*, who told him of Statius' admiration when he arrived in Limbo (*Purg.* XXII, 13-15). On Statius' prodigality and Juvenal, see also Maurizio Bettini, "Fonti letterarie e modelli semiologici in Dante: come Dante utilizzò alcuni autori latini," *Studi danteschi*, 52 (1979-1980), 189-211. In "Dante and the Latin Poets," Wicksteed notes that "Juvenal is the only contemporary author who mentions Statius, and he speaks of the *dulcedo* of his verse" (p. 177); once more, then, Dante constructs a variant of real life in his afterlife.

⁷⁵ Chaucer's imitation of the ending of the *Thebaid* in *Troilus and Criseyde* (V, 1786-1792) is mediated through the closing passages of the *Filocolo*: like Boccaccio, Chaucer refers to a general canon of classical precursors, whereas the *Thebaid* is concerned solely with its one great rival. Padoan points out that Statius' reference to the *Aeneid* as a "divina fiamma" (*Purg.* XXI, 95) echoes the *Thebaid's* "divinam Aeneida" ("Il canto XXI del *Purgatorio*," *Nuove letture dantesche* [Florence: Le Monnier, 1970], vol. IV, pp. 327-353).

If Statius, who never in the past was treated as different from any of the other *regulati poetae*, is now differentiated from his peers in so important a respect as his Christian faith, it is because he is composed, as Renucci puts it, "*ad majorem Vergilii gloriam*."⁷⁶ But, as we know, whatever works to Vergil's advantage in Dante's poem also works simultaneously to his detriment, and so it is that Statius' presence both glorifies Vergil and undercuts him. Statius quotes the *Aeneid* only in a providential mistranslation, and prefaces his more correct rendition of the fourth Eclogue with the simile of Vergil as the light-bearer, which specifies that he was unable to benefit from his own intuition: "che porta il lume dietro e sé non giova, / ma dopo sé fa le persone dotte" ("who carries the light behind him and helps not himself, but makes those who come after him wise" [*Purg.* XXII, 68-69]). Statius is both a living tribute to Vergil, and a means of putting the *maestro* into perspective; since he exists in the poem as a function of Vergil, the encounter with Statius serves retrospectively to clarify the value assigned to Vergil, not least in the original encounter with the pilgrim. The language with which Statius introduces himself is intended to echo Vergil's language of *Inferno* I; the parallels between the two encounters are exact.⁷⁷ Vergil's first words, we remember, are entirely circumscribed by human experience and endeavor: "Non omo, omo già fui" ("Not a man, a man I once was" [*Inf.* I, 67]) he begins, and continues by locating himself as an individual in time, fashioning his historical coordinates with respect to genealogy, place of origin, political setting, domicile, religion, and vocation. Statius, on the other hand, says "O frati miei, Dio vi dea pace" ("O my brothers, may God grant you peace" [*Purg.* XXI, 13]), and does not address the topic of his earthly identity until Vergil specifically requests, sixty-nine lines later, that he do so.⁷⁸ In reply, Statius identifies himself with

⁷⁶ Dante, *Disciple et Juge du Monde Gréco-Latin*, p. 333.

⁷⁷ Paratore speaks in general terms of parallelisms between *Inferno* I and *Purgatorio* XXI; see *Tradizione e struttura in Dante*, p. 72.

⁷⁸ On the importance of Statius' initial greeting, see Denise Heilbronn, "The Prophetic Role of Statius in Dante's Purgatory," *Dante Studies*, 95 (1977), 53-67.

the time of Titus, who, he says, with God's help avenged the death of Christ; "l buon Tito" (*Purg.* XXI, 82) echoes "l buono Augusto" (*Inf.* I, 71). But whereas the conquests of Titus are presented within a providential context, Vergil places the reign of Augustus "nel tempo de li dèi falsi e bugiardi" ("in the time of the false and lying gods" [72]). The presentation of the two Emperors thus forecasts the essential difference between the two poets, a difference further reflected in the sharp contrast between the only two occurrences of the adjective *famoso* in the poem: on the one hand is Vergil, "famoso saggio" (*Inf.* I, 89); on the other is Statius, "famoso assai, ma non con fede ancora" ("famous enough, but not yet with faith" [*Purg.* XXI, 87]). With its strong caesura and adversative, this line retrospectively qualifies and limits the value of Vergil's earthly fame.

Purgatorio XXI is for Statius what *Inferno* I is for Vergil: a debut canto, containing the drama of first presentation and recognition. Its sequel, *Purgatorio* XXII, is a more technical canto, in that the dramatic impact is muted and the emphasis is placed instead on making relations more precise and tightening the focus. In this sense, *Purgatorio* XXII corresponds to *Inferno* IV, where Vergil's identity is clarified with respect to his peers; it should not surprise us, therefore, to find that canto XXII bears all the hallmarks of a second Limbo. Thus, when Vergil tells Statius that he has loved him ever since Juvenal arrived in Limbo with the news of his affection ("da l'ora che tra noi discese / nel limbo de lo 'nferno Giovenale" "from the hour in which Juvenal descended among us in the Limbo of Hell" [*Purg.* XXII, 13-14]), he is not only naming the first new classical poet to be introduced into the poem since canto IV, but also using the word *limbo*, which occurs only here and in the fourth canto of the *Inferno*. A few lines later, Vergil questions Statius about his presumed avarice, asking how such a sin could reside in Statius' breast, "tra cotanto senno" ("amid such wisdom" [23]); his use of the expression "tra cotanto senno" echoes its only other appearance in the poem, in the celebrated verse of *Inferno* IV in which Dante marks his inclusion by the great poets of antiquity: "sì ch'io fui sesto tra cotanto senno" ("so that I was

sixth amid such wisdom" [102]). As the canto progresses, its characteristics as a purgatorial Limbo become more marked. In line 97 Statius begins questioning Vergil as to the whereabouts of their fellow poets, and the result is the only long list of classical poets and personages from their poems outside of *Inferno* IV, a catalogue that comprises both Latin and Greek dramatists and poets.⁷⁹ In his reply, Vergil specifies that those whom Statius has mentioned are to be found in the first circle of Hell, "con quel Greco / che le Muse lattar più ch'altri mai" ("with that Greek whom the Muses suckled more than any other" [101-102]); this reference to Homer is another signpost linking this canto to Limbo, where Homer is first described. Finally, we should note that in both these cantos poetry is discussed as a craft by its practitioners: in *Inferno* IV, the *bella scola* discusses matters that Dante prefers not to relate, but which were appropriate to the place and the company, while in *Purgatorio* XXII he walks behind his guides, listening to the discourses "ch'a poetar mi davano intelletto" ("which gave me understanding in the making of poetry" [129]).

If *Inferno* IV defines Vergil as *l'altissimo poeta*, *Purgatorio* XXII defines Statius as a poet who is less high, but more Christian. In fact, one of the functions of this purgatorial Limbo is to present Statius as the one classical poet in the poem who does not belong to the real Limbo; his uniqueness in this regard becomes more striking as the canto proceeds and we realize that all his peers are in the first circle of Hell. Dante stresses the contrast between this re-created Limbo and the original: when Vergil asks Statius by what means Christianity was revealed to him, he asks "qual sole o quai candeletti / ti stenebraron" ("what sun or what candles took you from the shadows" [*Purg.* XXII, 61-62]); the use of the verb *stenebraron* reminds us of Limbo, where the *tenebre* are barely kept at bay by a light "ch'emisperio di tenebre vincia" ("that conquered a hemisphere of shadows"

⁷⁹ Paratore refers to this section of the dialogue between Vergil and Statius as "un'appendice del c. IV dell'*Inferno*" (*Tradizione e struttura in Dante*, p. 38); on this aspect of *Purgatorio* XXII, see Roberto Mercuri, "Terenzio nostro antico," *Cultura neolatina*, 29 (1969), 84-116.

[*Inf.* IV, 69]). Statius has come out of the shadows, and out of Limbo, as he says in his reply, because of that luciferous text, the fourth Eclogue, whose apposite passage regarding earthly renewal at the hands of a celestial progeny he now cites, concluding with the great declaration of his indebtedness to Vergil: "Per te poeta fui, per te cristiano" ("Through you I was a poet, through you a Christian" [73]). In these words, Statius not only defines himself in relation to Vergil, but also becomes the first character in the poem after Vergil to appropriate the noun *poeta*, which heretofore has referred almost exclusively to the author of the *Aeneid*. In fact, the word makes its first appearance in the poem in *Inferno* I, when Vergil says "Poeta fui" (73); after that, it is applied once to Homer, "poeta sovrano" (*Inf.* IV, 88), and once, in lower Hell, to classical poets in general.⁸⁰ Otherwise, it is used only for Vergil; indeed, *poeta* gives the appearance of being little more than an alternate for *duca* or *maestro*, rather than a term whose use Dante is so carefully monitoring. In *Purgatorio* XXII, however, this Vergilian tag is adopted by Statius, to whom it will continue to refer in the succeeding cantos, and Vergil is—if not quite displaced—certainly joined. Where there had been one *poeta* guiding the pilgrim, suddenly there are two, a fact that is duly registered by some simple but telling phrases that appear toward the end of canto XXII: "Tacevansi ambedue già li poeti" ("Already both the poets were silent" [115]), and "Li due poeti a l'alber s'appressaro" ("The two poets approached the tree" [139]). *Poeta*, the term used to refer to Vergil for fifty-five cantos, is now replaced by *li due poeti* as part of a textual design intended to reflect the historical realities of poetic influence and appropri-

⁸⁰ The reference, "secondo che i poeti hanno per fermo" (*Inf.* XXIX, 63), although generic, regards Ovid in particular, since it is in the context of the legend of the Myrmidons. Interestingly, the *Inferno's* one use of *poetare*, which functions according to the same rules as the noun, also applies to Ovid ("converte poetando" [XXV, 99]). If *poeta* is a badge of honor in the *Comedy*, Dante has accorded it to Ovid in a backhanded way that typifies his treatment of this poet; he singles out Ovid only under the generic cover of "i poeti."

ation: Vergil, a supreme but non-Christian poet, is replaced by Statius, a lesser poet but a Christian.

Poeta is not the only Vergilian term from *Inferno* I that Dante now assigns to Statius in order to mark the watershed in Vergil's status brought about by the advent of Christianity. *Saggio* and *savio*, used as both nouns and adjectives, observe a similar pattern within the *Comedy*: both forms are associated with Vergil from the beginning of the poem, where Vergil is called a *saggio* in canto I, and *savio* in canto II. In *Inferno* IV the term is shared with the other classical poets, who as a group are called "questi savi" (110). The term is then applied only to Vergil throughout the *Inferno* until canto XXIV, where there is a general reference to poets and authorities of antiquity as "li gran savi" (106).⁸¹ In the *Purgatorio* there are two indeterminate references ("scorta saggia" [IV, 39], "fatene saggi" [V, 30]), and two references to non-poets who are singled out for displays not of wisdom but of its contrary; otherwise, *saggio* and *savio* pertain only to Vergil, until the arrival of Statius.⁸² At that point, Dante uses the terms to suggest a subtle counterpoint in emotional and intellectual allegiances: for instance, he chooses the moment immediately after Statius' speech on the weather, his first bravura performance as wise man and potential guide, to remind us of the wisdom of the guide who has served so well until now; thus, we find not a commendation of Statius at the end of his speech, but an emphatic return to Vergil: "E 'l savio duca . . ." (*Purg.* XXI, 76). This bow to Vergil is only a temporary

⁸¹ Again the generic reference "li gran savi" hides a specific reference to Ovid, whose text was most likely Dante's chief source of information regarding the phoenix. Thus Ovid is accorded both badges of honor, *poeta* and *savio*, both terms generically.

⁸² "Savia non fui" ("I was not wise" [*Purg.* XIII, 109]), says Sapia of herself, while Averroes is described as someone wiser than Dante who made the same mistake regarding the formation of the human soul: "quest' è tal punto, / che più savio di te fé già errante" ("this is such a point that it already caused a wiser than you to err" [*Purg.* XXV, 62-63]). Thus, the two non-poets to be modified by this adjective are both *non savi*. The *Paradiso's* two uses of *savio* / *saggio* are both generic. See also Michele D'Andria, "Dell'uso di 'savio' e 'saggio' nella *Divina Commedia*," *Aspetti letterari*, 8 (1968), 9-18.

postponing of reality, however, for, like *poeta*, *savio* is now an appellation Vergil must share. In the same way that *il poeta* becomes *li due poeti*, 'l *savio* becomes the plural "i savi" (XXIII, 8), referring, of course, to Vergil and Statius. On the other hand, when the three travelers reach the wall of fire that separates the last terrace from the Earthly Paradise, it is Vergil, not Statius, who knows how to persuade the recalcitrant pilgrim, reminding him of the beloved who waits, like Thisbe, on the other side of the wall. We note that Vergil now asks Statius, who had been between him and Dante, to go behind the pilgrim, with the result that Vergil is once more the pilgrim's sole guide; moreover, Vergil's wisdom in dealing with his charge is marked by a last emphatic testimonial: on hearing Beatrice's name, Dante turns "al savio duca" (*Purg.* XXVII, 41). The term is used only twice more: again in canto XXXVII, where we find "li miei saggi" (69), and finally in canto XXXIII, where Beatrice beckons to her companions: "me e la donna e 'l savio che ristette" ("me and the lady and the sage who remained" [15]). This last appearance of 'l *savio* is emblematic of Statius' role; for although he is "the sage who remained," the phrasing points to the sage who does not remain—to Vergil. Thus, words that literally refer to Statius work to eclipse him and to conjure up Vergil, showing us one more time that Statius exists in the poem less for himself than for another.⁸³

Statius, then, is a mediated figure, whose triumphs are less his successes than someone else's failures. Perhaps this fact is best clarified by those Vergilian terms from *Inferno* I that his

⁸³ Thus, Padoan writes of *Purgatorio* XXI and XXII that although they are "per antonomasia, i canti di Stazio," nonetheless "il personaggio centrale non è Stazio, è Virgilio" ("Il canto XXI del *Purgatorio*," p. 353), and J. H. Whitfield considers it the task of these cantos, having first created a gap between Vergil and Statius, "to afford to Virgil the most flattering of compensatory poetic homage" ("Dante and Statius: *Purgatorio* XXI-XXII," in *Dante Soundings*, pp. 113-129). We note, moreover, a suggestive inversion in Dante's handling of the recognition scenes of *Inferno* I and *Purgatorio* XXI: while in the *Inferno* the poet being introduced (Vergil) receives the tribute (from Dante), in the *Purgatorio* the poet being introduced (Statius) pays the tribute (to Vergil). The result is that both times attention is focused on Vergil.

successor is not allowed to appropriate, the key terms *volume* and *autore*. Both belong to the pilgrim's initial accolade to his newly found guide, in which he speaks of the love with which he has searched "lo tuo volume" (84), and declares "Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore" ("You are my master and my author" [85]). As compared to *poeta* and *saggio*, terms that describe a trajectory or progression, *volume* and *autore* are used in only two contexts: in *Inferno* for Vergil, and in *Paradiso* for God. The transition is so immense that it both heightens Vergil, the only poet who is an *autore* and whose book is a *volume*, and shrinks him by comparison with that other *autore*, Who is God, and that other *volume*, which is God's book (*volume* is used variously in the last canticle, but always with relation to texts "written by" God, for instance the book of the future, the book of justice, the universe gathered into one volume).⁸⁴ Moreover, when God is termed an author, He is not " 'l mio autore," but the "verace autore" (*Par.* XXVI, 40). It can hardly be coincidental that God should be called the *verace autore* precisely in *Paradiso* XXVI, where language and textuality are such prominent issues, and where Vergil's name last appears as part of a periphrasis for Limbo.⁸⁵ The lesson inherent in such a juxtaposition is obvious, but at the same time that Vergil will ulti-

⁸⁴ Robert Hollander discusses *autore* and *volume* in "Dante's Use of *Aeneid* I in *Inferno* I and II," *Comparative Literature*, 20 (1968), 142-156. On the image of the universe "legato con amore in un volume" ("bound by love into one volume" [*Par.* XXXIII, 86]), see John Ahearn, "Binding the Book: Hermeneutics and Manuscript Production in *Paradiso* 33," *PMLA*, 97 (1982), 800-809.

⁸⁵ *Paradiso* XXVI constructs a discourse based on the juxtaposition of human versus divine authority in the realm of textuality; thus, in the same way that Vergil, " 'l mio autore," gives way to God, the "verace autore," so the "grande autorità" of the poets and philosophers of Limbo yields to the "autorità che quinci scende" ("the authority that descends from here" [*Par.* XXVI, 26]), i.e. Scripture. *Paradiso* XXVI's double reference to divine authorities (the "autorità" of line 47 are also scriptural) is intended to contrast with the only other use of *autorità* in the poem, that of *Inferno* IV, 113, cited above. On canto XXVI and the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, see Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, "Appunti sul canto XXVI del *Paradiso*," in *Linguistica e retorica di Dante* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1978), pp. 223-246.

mately be reduced to a grammatical aside by the *verace autore*, we should remember that he is unique in being chosen for so extreme—and dangerous—a compliment. He is the only poet considered worthy of being compared and being found wanting, his are the only poetic shoulders strong enough to fail to carry such a burden. There is, in the *Comedy*, only one *autore* besides God, even if he is not a true one, and only one earthly author's *volume*. Statius and his text have no place in this world of extreme compliments, and extreme failures; Statius serves Dante's purpose precisely in that he is always secondary, never primary, and as a figure in the *Comedy* he is therefore always mediated, modified, and deflected: a *per te poeta*, 'l savio che ristette.

Dante: "ritornerò poeta"

If Statius replaces Vergil in *Purgatorio* XXII when he appropriates for himself (albeit in modified form) the name *poeta*, the final displacement is accomplished by Dante, when he becomes the only *poeta* of the last canticle, announcing in *Paradiso* XXV that he shall return as poet to Florence to receive the laurel crown.⁸⁶ Although that hope was never fulfilled, the impact of the phrase "ritornerò poeta" remains undiminished at a textual level, since it reveals the arc Dante has inscribed into his poem through the restricted use of the word *poeta*: the poetic mantle passes from the classical poets, essentially Vergil, to a transitional poet, whose Christianity is disjunct from his poetic practice (and hence the verse with its neat caesura: "Per te poeta fui, per te cristiano"), to the poet whose Christian faith is a *sine qua non* of his poetics. This is Dante himself, the *poeta* of *Paradiso*, a label that also carries some implications of a technical nature, for Dante's restricted use of seemingly generic termi-

⁸⁶ *Poeta* occurs in a general sense in the invocation of *Paradiso* I, in a context which clearly points to Dante; he is deploring the rarity with which either rulers or poets—"o cesare o poeta" (29)—seek the laurel crown. It is used again only in the celebrated opening of *Paradiso* XXV. *Poetare* occurs only once (*Par.* XXX, 32) and refers to Dante.