Cantos, Carte, and Columns
A Hypothesis Concerning the Original Mise-en-page of Dante's *Comedy*[*]

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I. *Introduction:*
John Ahern's Conjecture Concerning the Number and Format of the Pages on Which Dante Wrote Out the 'Comedy'

Dante wrote out the lines of his *Comedy*, in keeping with standard practice, on pages that had been ruled with horizontal and vertical lines to guide the writing according to a predetermined format. He refers to the practice at the end of the *Purgatorio*, where he says he has no space left to describe the sweet taste of the waters of Eünoè because all the pages prepared – *tutte le carte ordite* – for the *Purgatorio* have been filled up.

> S'io avessi, lettor, più lungo spazio
> da scrivere, i' pur cantere' in parte
> lo dolce ber che mai non m'avria sazio;
>
> ma perché piene son tutte le carte
> ordite a questa cantica seconda,
> non mi lascia più ir lo fren de l'arte. (*Purgatorio* 33.136–141)[1]

* I am grateful to Robert Sokolowski and John Tomarchio for their helpful comments on a draft of this article.

1 « If, reader, I had more ample space to write, / I should sing at least in part the sweetness / of the drink that never would have sated me, / but, since all the sheets / made ready for this second canticle are full, / the curb of art lets me proceed no farther ». Quotations from the *Comedy* and translations of quoted passages are taken from *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso*, ed. Robert Hollander, Jean Hollander,

Ordite is from the verb *ordire*, which was used as a technical term in the art of weaving. Dante is comparing the horizontal and vertical lines ruled onto his page to the warp and woof of threads on a loom.[2] « The curb of art » (*lo fren de l'arte*) that stops him from describing the taste of the waters is the limit set by the formatted pages that have been prepared for the *Purgatorio*, and that have now been filled.

What was the format of the pages on which Dante wrote out the *Comedy*? No known autograph of the *Comedy* has survived, and the oldest known surviving copies date from over a decade after his death in 1321. Any discussion of the earliest copies must therefore be highly conjectural. John Ahern begins by acknowledging as much in a study titled « What Did the First Copies of the *Comedy* Look Like? » (2003). Later in the study, he offers the following conjecture concerning the copies Dante produced:

> [...] it is likely that he himself produced most of the copies he sent out [...]. He would have written in the widespread relatively rapid notarile script, *cancelleresca*, rather than a cumbersome Gothic book hand [...]. He would have written on parchment, not paper, and in the double columns long customary in legal and other texts because of their more economical use of page space. A double-column format with twelve tercets (or thirty-six verses) per column would produce a single sheet holding, on its two sides, a total of 144 verses, that is, one-hundredth of the total text, or a *canto per carta* [...]. For reasons of editorial economy and theological-aesthetic symmetry, his own bound author's copy [...] would have run to exactly 100 *chartae*. The fact that the three earliest surviving copies of the poem consist of about 100 *chartae* would tend to confirm this hypothesis [...].[3]

Doubleday, New York 2000–2007, which reproduces the text of *Dante Alighieri: La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi, Le Lettere, Florence 1994 (1966–1967), vol. II–IV. The translation of the Hollanders is accompanied by a very helpful commentary by Robert Hollander.

[2] Ronald L. Martinez, « Dante '*buon sartore*' (*Paradiso* 32.140): Textile Arts, Rhetoric, and Metapoetics at the End of the *Commedia* », *Dante Studies* 136 (2018), p. 22–61: at p. 29.

[3] John Ahern, « What Did the First Copies of the *Comedy* Look Like? » in Teodolinda Barolini, H. Wayne Storey (eds.), *Dante for the New Millenium*, Fordham University Press, New York 2003 (Fordham Series in Medieval Studies, 2), p. 1–15: at p. 12. At the beginning of his study (p. 1), Ahern says, somewhat self-mockingly, that it might fit under the heading « Immaterial Philology ». The same might be said of the present discussion. Ahern says Dante « may well never have actually seen » what Ahern calls « his own bound author's copy » (ibid.). I take it he means, not that Dante may not have seen a copy made by someone else, but rather that he may not have seen bound together pages he himself wrote out. As Ahern points out elsewhere, binding « required highly specialized skills and equipment, including a large press ». See John Ahern, « Binding the Book: Hermeneutics and Manuscript Production in *Paradiso* 33 », *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, 97 (1982), p. 800–809: at p. 801.

In the following section, I will use this plausible and interesting conjecture as the basis for a hypothesis I would like to present concerning the way in which Dante distributed his lines over the four columns of a page.

II. *Beyond Ahern's Conjecture: A Hypothesis Concerning Dante's* Mise-en-page

Recalling Dante's love of number, let us begin by considering the numbers in Ahern's conjectural description. The principle of a canto per page has a satisfying simplicity and comprehensiveness, making the elements of the 100-canto *Comedy* and those of the conjectured 100-page codex coincide perfectly, in a harmonious union of form and material. Ahern suggests that Dante settled on this arrangement « for reasons of editorial economy and theological-aesthetic symmetry », and a reader of such a codex could indeed take pleasure in the thought that its gathering of 100 pages, *legato con amore in un volume* (*Paradiso* 33.86), reflected the constitution of the poem out of 100 cantos.

More complex are the numbers Ahern specifies for the format of the individual canto-page. Each column would have thirty-six lines, allowing for twelve tercets, and the whole page would have 144 lines, allowing for forty-eight tercets. Ahern does not comment on the number 144. To a reader of scripture, the number would recall passages in the *Book of Revelation* that describe the New Jerusalem as having walls 144 cubits thick (21:17), and that put the number of the redeemed at 144,000 (7:3–8; 14:1,3–5). Might Dante have found symbolic resonance between his 144-line canto-page format and these numbers in the New Jerusalem?[4]

Incidentally, another sort of symbolic resonance involving the number 144 seems to be present in a passage in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* that imitates the form of a canto in the *Comedy*.[5] The imitation is seventy-two lines long, half the length of the 144-line page format conjectured by Ahern, and Eliot does seem to have wanted the length of his imitation to suggest something like half the length of a canto, perhaps in order to suggest also that he is only half the poet Dante is. Did he make the same conjecture

[4] In his commentary on *Purgatorio* 29.145–150, Robert Hollander points out that 144 is the number of persons in the pageant described in *Purgatorio* 29.82–30.33. Hollander refers to « the mystical number (144,000) of the Church Triumphant », and to the verses in the *Book of Revelation*.

[5] Thomas S. Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, Vol. I: *Collected and Uncollected Poems*, ed. Christopher Ricks, Jim McCue, Faber and Faber, London 2015, p. 203–205, lines 25–96. The passage is in the second section of the last *Quartet*, « Little Gidding ». There is a speech in this passage that is thirty-six lines long, which is exactly half the length of the passage, and exactly the length of a column on the 144-line page described by Ahern.

Ahern did about Dante's 144-line page format? Or did he just round up to 144 the average number of lines in the 100 cantos, which is 142.33?

In any case, as this average number indicates, Ahern's description of Dante's page as « a single sheet holding, on its two sides, a total of 144 verses, that is, one-hundredth of the total text, or a *canto per carta* » cannot be entirely correct. As Eliot, Ahern himself, and indeed any reader of the *Comedy*, would know, none of the cantos is exactly 144 lines long, and in fact none could be. The *terza rima* rhyme scheme that Dante invented and used throughout the *Comedy* would not allow it. The scheme consists of three-line stanzas in which the first and third line rhyme (A – B – A). In each succeeding stanza, the first and third lines rhyme with the second line of the preceding stanza, and the second line introduces a new line-ending, with which the first and third lines of the following stanza rhyme (B – C – B, C – D – C, D – E – D [...]). This arrangement does not allow a canto to consist of exactly 144 lines, i.e., exactly forty-eight tercets. In fact, it does not allow a canto to consist of exactly any number of tercets, because that would leave the second line of the last tercet unrhymed, that is, lacking a rhyme in a subsequent tercet. As may be seen throughout the *Comedy*, a solitary extra line has to be added at the end of every canto, in order to provide the otherwise missing final rhyme, and so bring the rhyming, and the canto, to a close. The nearest to 144 lines this allows is 145, and thirteen of the one hundred cantos are indeed 145 lines long, but the rest are longer or shorter. As just noted, however, the average number of lines per canto is 142.33, which is just short of 144. Evidently, Dante worked with an eye on his format, looking ahead and calculating, *come quei ch'adopera ed estima, che sempre par che'nnanzi si proveggia* (*Inferno* 24.25–26), in order to ensure that each canto would fit onto its page.

If none of the cantos matches the 144-line format exactly, and canto lengths vary, how did Dante distribute the lines over the four columns in writing out a page? A natural way of proceeding would be to conform to the format for as much of the page as possible before having to deviate from it. That is, one would keep exactly to the 36-line column format in the first three columns, leaving the fourth column to fall short of or exceed thirty-six lines more or less, depending on the number of lines remaining in the canto after the first 108 lines had filled up the first three columns. Where the fourth column exceeded thirty-six lines, the additional lines would be written in the lower margin, the space left blank at the bottom of the page by the horizontal and vertical lines establishing the format.

I propose, as a hypothesis to be tested, that this is precisely what Dante did do, distributing the lines of a canto-page over the four columns as follows. (For illustration, an appendix at the end of this article presents the way in which, I am

suggesting, he would have distributed the lines over the four columns of the page in writing out the first canto of the *Inferno*.)

The first column, the left-hand column on the front of the page (*recto* a), would have thirty-six lines, making up a group of twelve tercets. These would be what we call lines 1 to 36, accustomed as we are to referring to modern editions of the *Comedy* that include marginal indications of line numbers in Arabic numerals.

The second column, the right-hand column on the front of the page (*recto* b), would have another thirty-six lines, lines 37 to 72, making up a second group of twelve tercets.

The third column, the left-hand column on the back of the page (*verso* a), would have another thirty-six lines, lines 73 to 108, making up a third group of twelve tercets.

The fourth column, the right-hand column on the back of the page (*verso* b), would always start at line 109, but it would vary in length from canto to canto.

- In the thirteen cantos of 145 lines, the fourth column would be just one line longer than each of the other three columns. It would have thirty-seven lines, lines 109 to 145, making up a fourth group of twelve tercets and the solitary closing line.
- In the sixteen cantos of 142 lines, the fourth column would be two lines shorter than each of the other three columns. It would have thirty-four lines, lines 109 to 142, making up eleven tercets and the closing line.
- In other cantos, the length of the fourth column would diverge more widely from the 36-line column format. In the shortest cantos, *Inferno* 6 and 11, the fourth column would have only seven lines, lines 109 to 115, making up just two tercets and the closing line. In the longest canto, *Purgatorio* 32, the fourth column would have fifty-two lines, lines 109 to 160, making up seventeen tercets and the closing line.

To a reader paging, *foglio a foglio*, through a copy of the *Comedy* in which all the cantos were written out in this way, the brief fourth columns of *Inferno* 6 and 15 and the long fourth column of *Purgatorio* 32 would stand out conspicuously. But even less drastically irregular fourth columns would stand out somewhat. The reader would recognise a recurring pattern of 3+1, that is, of three regular, 36-line columns, followed by a fourth shorter or longer column, on each canto-page. The reader might also notice a 3+1 pattern on a smaller scale in each canto's four last lines, which make up the final tercet and the solitary closing line. Like this closing line of the fourth column, the closing column itself would be an odd fourth, coming after a more regular threesome.

III. *Four Columns in the 'Paradiso'*

If we read the *Comedy* on the assumption that this was indeed the way in which Dante distributed his lines on the page, with a new column always starting at lines 37, 73, and 109, what we do we notice?

The first thing we notice is that breaks between columns sometimes coincide with junctures in the narrative. The second column of *Inferno* 1, for example, begins with the beginning of the morning (*Temp'era dal principio del mattino*, line 37). The first column of *Inferno* 2 ends with the end of Dante's speech expressing doubt about his worthiness to go on the journey proposed by Virgil; in the last line of his speech, and of the column, he says that Virgil, being wise, will understand what he leaves unsaid (*Se savio; intendi me'ch'i non ragiono*, line 36). At the end of the second column of *Inferno* 10, Cavalcante disappears (*supin ricadde e più non parve fora*, line 72). The fourth column of *Purgatorio* 1 begins with Cato's disappearance (*Così sparì* [...], line 109). The third column of *Paradiso* 11 begins with Thomas Aquinas's revelation that his story of Francis's courtship of a lady is really about the love between Francis and Poverty (*Ma perch'io non proceda troppo chiuso* [...], line 73). If these are just coincidences, they are interesting ones.

Even more interestingly, sometimes a column coincides with a distinct section of a canto. For example, the first column (lines 1–36) of *Paradiso* 1 is, as the *Epistle to Cangrande* calls it, a prologue to the *Paradiso*; the latter half of the *Epistle* is a commentary on this prologue.[6] Dante seems to have been guided by the format of his page in determining that the prologue to the *Paradiso* would be the length of the first column on the first canto-page of the *cantica*, with the result that, when Cangrande turned from the commentary to the text of the prologue, he would see the latter standing alone on the page as a column.

The second column of *Paradiso* 20 coincides with a distinct section of a speech made by the eagle Dante encounters in the sphere of Jupiter. The eagle is an apparition 'painted' by God, in a kind of pointillism, using the shining souls of just rulers as points of light. The eagle says that the greatest of the souls that make up its appearance are those representing the eye (20.31–36). These are the souls of David, who portrays the pupil, and of five others, who together portray the eyebrow, in a series going out from the beak: Trajan, Hezekiah, Constantine, William the Good, and Ripheus. In the thirty-six lines of the second column (37–72), the eagle describes each of these six just rulers,

[6] I take the *Epistle* to be authentic, but even if it is not, it correctly identifies *Paradiso* 1.1–36 (i.e. column *recto* a) as the prologue to the *Paradiso*.

allotting two tercets to each. In each case, the first tercet identifies the ruler, and the second tercet begins with the words *Ora conosce*, which introduce a remark about some knowledge the ruler has acquired in his blessed state. The division of the thirty-six lines into six double-tercet units, one unit for each of the rulers, together with the recurring phrase *Ora conosce*, gives these lines a formal unity that make them unlike any other passage in the *Comedy*. (The form is reminiscent of that of the sestina.) Again, as in the first column of Canto 1, Dante seems to have been guided by the 36-line per column format. When the eagle falls silent at the end of these lines, Dante compares him to a lark that first sings and then is silent (73–78). The second column of Canto 20 is the eagle's 'song', visibly standing apart on the page.

The first column of *Paradiso* 30 is another prologue. In the previous canto, Beatrice had made a long speech that ended at the end of the canto (29.10–145). In Canto 30, she will resume speaking at the beginning of the second column (30.37). The first column of Canto 30 (1–36) describes what happens while she pauses. The column has two parts. In the first part (1–15), Beatrice and Dante ascend to the tenth heaven, the glittering angels fade in the presence of the divine light, and Dante turns to look at Beatrice. In the second part (16–36), he confesses to the reader that Beatrice's now incomprehensible beauty defeats him as a poet. He has reached his limit as an artist, and he leaves her beauty to be trumpeted by others, as he begins to bring his difficult theme to an end:

> ma or convien che mio seguir desista
> più dietro a sua bellezza, poetando,
> come a l'ultimo suo ciascuno artista.
>
> Cotal qual io la lascio a maggior bando
> che quel de la mia tuba, che deduce
> l'ardüa sua matera terminando. (31–36)[7]

The last two of these lines, coming at the end of the first column, indicate that the *Comedy* is now starting to approach its end. Accordingly, as Beatrice resumes speaking at the top of the second column, she does so as a guide whose duties are nearly finished (*con atto e voce di spedito duce / ricominciò* [...], lines 37–38). As the first column of Canto

[7] « But now I must desist in my pursuit, / no longer following her beauty in my verse, / as every artist, having reached his limit, must. / Thus I leave her to more glorious trumpeting than that of my own music, as, laboring on, / I bring my difficult subject toward its close ». Following Petrocchi, Hollander and Hollander place a comma at the end of line 36 in their Italian text, although their English translation has a period at this point, as does the Hoepli edition of the Italian text. A period is evidently more in keeping with the view that lines 1–36 constitute a prologue as well as a column.

1 is a prologue to the whole of the *Paradiso*, so the first column of Canto 30 is a prologue to the concluding four cantos, set in the Empyrean.

The fourth column of *Paradiso* 33 is the *Comedy*'s famous concluding scene, Dante's allegorical vision of the Trinity and the Incarnation. The first three columns of Canto 33 describe St. Bernard's prayer to the Virgin and her response (1–43), Dante's looking up into the divine light (44–66), his prayer to be allowed to remember and tell a small part of what he saw (67–75), and his vision of all things united in the divine light (76–105). In the last tercet of the third column, he pauses:[8]

> Omai sarà più corta mia favella,
> pur a quel ch'io ricordo, che d'un fante
> che bagni ancor la lingua a la mammella. (106–108)

« Now my words will come far short / of what I still remember, like a babe's / who at his mother's breast still wets his tongue ». This tercet introduces, and thereby sets apart, the fourth and final column. Formally speaking, the fourth column is an appropriately well-balanced conclusion to the canto, the *Paradiso*, and the *Comedy*. It is a modestly unobtrusive thirty-seven lines long, as close as a fourth column could be to the thirty-six lines prescribed by the format. And it divides into two parts of nearly equal length: a first part (109–126) describing the appearance, in the depth of the divine light, of three coextensive circles of different colors, representing the three persons of the Trinity; and a second part (127–145) describing first the depiction, in one of the circles, of « our likeness » (*la nostra effige*, line 131), representing the Incarnation of the second person, and then Dante's struggle to understand this depiction, and his final illumination.

It does not seem to be a matter of chance that each of these four columns in the *Paradiso* we have just considered is a formally separate part of its canto – a prologue (1.1–36, 30.1–36), a passage of lyric formality (20.37–72), or a conclusion (33.109–145). Rather, it seems clear that, when he composed these passages, Dante was consciously engaging with his format. One might say he was submitting to the format, by letting it determine the length of a passage; or, perhaps better, that he was allowing the format to suggest to him a way in which a passage might be given a limit, and so a form, indeed, a visible form. One might also say that he was conferring on the format the dignity of collaborating with him, and of leaving traces of itself in the text.

[8] Peter Dronke, « The Conclusion of the *Commedia* », *Italian Studies*, 49 (1994), p. 21–39: at p. 33: « Now before the last movement <sc. of *Paradiso* 33> Dante pauses, collecting his strength and meditating once more on what is inexpressible, and why ».

IV. *Columns in 'Purgatorio' 28–33*

Columns coincide with narrative units several times in the final cantos of the *Purgatorio*, set in the earthly paradise.

In the first column of Canto 28, Dante walks into the earthly paradise (1–24), stops at a river (25–33), and looks across the river at blossoming trees (34–36). At the beginning of the second column (37–40), Matelda appears to him (*e là m'apparve* [...] *una donna soletta* [...]), and she will be present until the end of the *Purgatorio*. The first column is a prologue to her appearance, and to everything else that happens in these last cantos of the *Purgatorio*.

As, in Canto 28, the first column precedes the appearance of Matelda at the beginning of the second column, so likewise, in Canto 29, the first column precedes Dante's invocation of the Muses at the beginning of the second column. In the first column of Canto 29, Dante and Matelda walk in parallel, on the two sides of the river, until she says, « Look and listen » (15), at which point he begins to see a great brightness in the air and hear a sweet melody (16–36). After the invocation of the Muses at the start of the second column (37–42), the remainder of the canto is devoted to the procession representing the books of scripture, Christ, and the Church (43–154). The first column (1–36) is a prologue to the invocation and procession.

In Canto 30, Dante is moved by the sudden appearance of Beatrice (1–39) and weeps over the disappearance of Virgil (40–54). Beatrice chides him for weeping (55–81), and angels intercede for him, which causes him to weep again (82–99). In the last two tercets of the third column, Beatrice says to the angels that she is going to tell them something that she wants Dante to hear also (103–108). She thereby introduces an account of Dante's life from his birth to his current journey through the afterlife, and in particular of his infidelity to her after she died, that constitutes the fourth column (109–145).

The fourth column of Canto 30 is Beatrice's 'accusation'; the first column of Canto 31 is Dante's 'confession' (31.5–6). In the first column of Canto 31, Beatrice first tells him to confess (1–6), and he admits that her accusation is true (7–21). Then she asks what waylaid him (22–30), and he says present things distracted him when she died (31–36). Here, at the end of the first column, the confession ends, as Beatrice establishes at the beginning of the second column, when she says, « If you had kept silent about or denied what you confess (*ciò che confessi*) [...] » (37–38).

The fourth column of Canto 32 (109–160) describes the allegorical dramatisation of the history of attacks on the Church. This is the longest of the four hundred columns that make up the *Comedy*.

None of the four columns in *Purgatorio* 33 constitutes an obviously distinct narrative unit, but it seems worth noting that Beatrice begins her prophecy at the beginning of the second column (37ff.); that she says she sees Dante is not understanding her at the beginning of the third column (73ff.); and that her seven ladies, walking in the noonday sunlight, reach the edge of a shady area containing the source of the rivers Lethe and Eünoè at the beginning of the fourth column (109ff.). Like the coincidences between columns and narrative units just noted in Cantos 28–32, these breaks between columns in Canto 33, coinciding as they do with breaks in Beatrice's speech and Dante's narrative, would contribute to the air of almost liturgical formality in the action of these closing cantos of the *Purgatorio*.

V. *Cantos in Four Parts, a Column per Part: 'Inferno' 5 and 'Purgatorio' 11*

In a few cantos, every one of the four columns coincides with a narrative unit. In *Inferno* 5, for example, in the first column, Virgil and Dante descend to the second circle (1–3) and meet Minos (4–24). Dante hears cries of pain (25–27), and comes to a place where he sees that the cries are coming from souls blown about by strong winds (28–36). As yet, he does not know that he is where the lustful are punished; he only learns this at the start of the second column (37–39).[9]

In the second column, the souls of the lustful are compared to starlings and cranes driven on the wind (40–49). Virgil names over a thousand famous knights and ladies among them who died because of love (50–69), and Dante is overcome by pity (70–72).

So much for the *recto* side of the page. All this is prior to the meeting with Paolo and Francesca, to which the *verso* side is devoted (73–142). The two columns on the *verso* side describe, respectively, the two stages of the meeting. Both columns begin with a six-line exchange between Dante and Virgil, after which Dante addresses Francesca, who then makes a speech. Her two speeches are of almost the same length, twenty lines and seventeen and a half lines.

At the beginning of the third column, Dante tells Virgil he would like to speak with two of the souls that are moving together, « light on the wind »; Virgil says they will come if Dante asks them to in the name of the love that drives them (73–78). Dante does so, and they come like doves returning to their nest (79–87). Francesca makes her first speech, in which she expresses her gratitude to Dante, says where she is from, and

[9] Compare *Inferno* 6, in which it is only in the middle of the second column (53–57) that he learns he is in the circle of Hell that punishes gluttons; and *Purgatorio* 13, in which it is only at the start of the second column (37–39) that he learns he is on the terrace of Purgatory that purges the sin of envy.

tells how Love led her and Paolo to love one another, and eventually to be murdered together (88–108).

At the beginning of the fourth column, Virgil asks Dante what he is thinking, and Dante speaks of the sweet thoughts and great desire that brought these two to their sad state (109–114). Then he tells Francesca how moved he is by her suffering, and he asks her to say how Love brought them to know their desires (115–120). Francesca makes her second speech, in which she describes their reading of a book about Lancelot, and how this led them to their sin (121–138). While she speaks, Paolo weeps. As at the end of the *recto* side of the page, here at the end of the *verso* side, Dante is overcome by pity, but much greater pity here, and he falls to the ground like a dead body (139–142).

Thus the whole of the action in *Inferno* 5 has an articulation that reflects, and is reflected in, the sequence of columns on the page. There can be little doubt that Dante deliberately designed the canto so as to have four parts that would fit the four columns in just this way. The four columnar parts are like so many chapters, for which titles might be devised, for example: « Minos and the Third Circle » (1–36), « Illustrious Representatives of the Sin of Lust » (37–72), « Francesca, Part I: A Love that Led to Death » (73–108), and « Francesca, Part II: A Book that Led to Sin » (109–142).

Another canto in which the action divides into four parts in keeping with the columns is *Purgatorio* 11. This canto is set on the first terrace of the mountain of Purgatory, where the sin of pride is purged. The first column quotes a revised version of the Lord's Prayer that the penitents recite (1–24), and comments on the prayer (25–36). Each of the other three columns presents one of the penitents as exemplifying a distinctive kind of pride. In the second column, Virgil speaks with Omberto Aldobrandesco, who exemplifies family pride (37–72). In the third column, Dante speaks with Oderisi d'Agobbio, who exemplifies pride in artistic accomplishment (73–108). In the fourth column, Oderisi tells Dante about Provenzan Salvani, who exemplifies pride in political power (109–142).

Like that of *Inferno* 5, the drama of *Purgatorio* 11 reflects, and is reflected in, the sequence of columns. These cantos show an extraordinary adaptation of the poem to the format.

VI. *Turning the Page and Opening the Eyes*

Like the written word itself, the format of the four-column page requires of the reader certain actions of the eyes and hands. The most continuous action is the left to right, top to bottom movement of the eyes in taking in the letters in a column. Four times in

the course of reading the two sides of a page, the reader has to go through a column in this way. Three times, the reader also has to perform the more elaborate action of lifting the eyes from the bottom of one column to the top of the next. One of these three times, the reader has to perform the even more elaborate action of turning the page with his or her hand, thereby uncovering to his or eyes the expanse of the *verso* side. I suggest that, in composing his cantos, Dante was highly aware of these actions his readers would perform in reading the pages he sent them.

In a number of cantos, the transition from the *recto* to the *verso* side of the page occurs at the beginning of some significant incident in the narrative. As we have seen, it is at the beginning of the *verso* side in *Inferno* 5 that Dante catches sight of Paolo and Francesca, and the rest of the *verso* side is devoted to his meeting with them. Similarly, the *verso* side of *Inferno* 29 begins with his catching sight of two other sinners together (73), and the rest of the *verso* side is devoted to his meeting with them. In *Inferno* 34, the transition from the *recto* to the *verso* side coincides with the start of Virgil's and Dante's climb down the side of Satan, which is also the start of their exit from Hell (70–75). The *verso* side of *Purgatorio* 9 begins with Virgil's and Dante's approach to the gate of Purgatory (73), where they will spend the remainder of the *verso* side in their meeting with the gatekeeper. The *recto* side of *Purgatorio* 32 ends with Dante being awakened by Matelda (70–72), a prelude to his exchanges with Matelda and Beatrice (73–108) and his vision of the allegory of attacks on the Church (109–160) on the *verso* side.

Each of the three *cantiche* includes at least one canto in which the transition from the front to the back of the page occurs at a point in the narrative where Dante's eyes are freed from some hindrance, allowing him to see someone.

VI.1 « Li occhi mi sciolse » (*Inferno* 9.73)

In *Inferno* 9, two columns, in fact, begin with reference to Dante's seeing. Since Canto 8, he and Virgil have been standing before the Gate of Dis, which is locked. In the latter half of the first column of Canto 9, Virgil speaks (19–33), but at one point Dante stops listening to him because he, Dante, has looked up to the top of the nearby tower:

> E altro disse, ma non l'ho a mente ;
> però che l'occhio m'avea tutto tratto

ver' l'alta torre a la cima rovente [...]. (34–36)[10]

What he sees, as described at the beginning of the second column, is three Furies who have suddenly appeared at the top of the tower:

... dove in un punto furon dritte ratto
tre furïe infernal di sangue tinte,
che membra feminine avieno e atto [...]. (37–39)[11]

The Furies call on Medusa to come so they can turn Dante to stone, and Virgil tells Dante that if he sees Medusa, he will never get out of Hell. He tells him to turn around and close his eyes; not trusting Dante's hands, he puts his own hands over Dante's eyes (52–60). At this point Dante addresses his more thoughtful readers, and asks them to consider a deeper meaning in these lines:

O voi ch'avete li 'ntelletti sani,
Mirate la dottrina che s'asconde
Sotto 'l velame de li versi strani. (61–63)[12]

In the last lines of the second column, his eyes still covered by Virgil's hands, Dante hears the sound of something approaching across the River Styx (64–72). At the start of the third column, Virgil frees Dante's eyes by removing his hands, and he tells him to look into the mist across the water:

Li occhi mi sciolse e disse : «Or drizza il nerbo
del viso su per quella schiuma antica
per indi ove quel fummo è più acerbo». (73–75)[13]

Dante looks out and sees souls fleeing before an angel who is coming across the water in order to open the gate for him and Virgil (76–84). His eyes are freed to see the angel

[10] « And he said more, but I do not remember, / for my eyes and thoughts were drawn / to the high tower's peak [...] ».

[11] « [...] where all at once, erect, had risen / three hellish, blood-stained Furies: / they had the limbs and shape of women [...] ».

[12] « O you who have sound intellects, / consider the teaching that is hidden / behind the veil of these strange verses ».

[13] « He freed my eyes and said: 'Now look / across the scum of that primeval swamp /to where the vapor is most dense and harsh' ».

at line 73, the point at which the reader, having just turned the page, first sees the *verso* side.

VI.2 « ch'io non levai al suo comando il mento » (*Purgatorio* 31.73)

In the second column of *Purgatorio* 31, Beatrice chides Dante for his infidelity to her after she died (49–63), and he looks down at the ground in shame, like a child scolded by his mother (64–67). When you find listening painful, she tells him, lift your beard and you will find looking even more so:

> [...] « Quando
> per udir se' dolente, alza la barba,
> e prenderai più doglia riguardando ». (67–69)[14]

« Lift your beard », of course, means « Lift your face », « Look up », but Beatrice's mention of his beard also draws attention to the fact that he is a grown man behaving childishly. Dante says he raised his chin with more resistance than a strong oak tree has to being uprooted by either the north wind or the south wind, recognizing as he did the sarcasm in her reference to his beard. The two terms of this comparison – the oak tree and Dante – are presented in the last tercet at the bottom of the *recto* side of the page and the first tercet at the top of the *verso* side, respectively:

> Con men di resistenza si dibarba
> robusto cerro, o vero al nostral vento
> o vero a quel de la terra di Iarba,
>
> ch'io non levai al suo comando il mento ;
> e quando per la barba il viso chiese,
> ben conobbi il velen de l'argomento. (70–75)[15]

What he sees when he looks up is Beatrice looking lovelier than ever (76–87). He looks up to see her in line 73, that is, just when a reader would have looked up in the act of turning the page, and of lifting his or her eyes from the bottom of column *recto* b to the top of column *verso* a. At that moment, the reader would seem to be performing

[14] « 'Now that / you are grieved by what you hear, lift up your beard / and you shall have more grief from what you see' ».

[15] « With less resistance is the sturdy oak / torn from the earth, whether by our northern wind / or by the one that blows from Iarbas' lands, / than was my chin nudged up by her command. / When by my beard she sought my face / I recognized the venom in her words ».

the action of the story he or she was reading, as perhaps would be more evident to an audience watching the reader than to the reader himself or herself. Taking advantage of the format of the page, Dante has carefully arranged this performance, in which a reader, knowingly or not, would dramatically enact Dante's lifting of his chin to look at Beatrice!

VI.3 « e lo svegliato ciò che vede aborre » (*Paradiso* 26.73)

Dante's eyes are opened at the turning of the page again in *Paradiso* 26. In the previous canto, St. John had come to examine him on the theological virtue of love, St. Peter and St. James having already examined him on faith and hope, respectively. The souls of the saints appear as blazing fires, and the fire representing the soul of St. John shines most brightly, to the point of blinding Dante at the end of Canto 25 (118 – 139). At the beginning of Canto 26 (1–12), St. John assures Dante that his blindness is temporary, and that Beatrice has power to heal it. The examination on love takes up most of the *recto* side of Canto 26, and Dante successfully, if blindly, passes. Then, in the transition from the *recto* to the *verso* side of the page, Beatrice heals his blindness by means of a ray coming from her own eyes, making him see better than he did before. He is stupefied to see, together with the fires of the three saints he has already met, a fourth fire, which will turn out to be the soul of Adam (70–81). As in *Purgatorio* 31, the transition from the *recto* to the *verso* side occurs as a comparison is being made. Dante likens the healing of his eyes by the ray from Beatrice's eyes, and his sudden sight of Adam, to the awakening of a man by a bright light, and the awakened man's sight of something from which he shrinks, because he sees it so suddenly, and is unable to take it in until his judgment comes to help him. The last tercet of the *recto* side describes the man being awakened by the bright light:

> E come a lume acuto si disonna
> per lo spirto visivo che ricorre
> a lo splendor che va di gonna in gonna [...]. (70–72)[16]

The first tercet of the *verso* side describes the man, now awakened, shrinking from what he sees:

[16] « As sleep is broken by a piercing light / when the spirit of sight runs to meet the brightness / that passes through its filmy membranes [...] ».

[...] e lo svegliato ciò che vede aborre,
sì nescïa è la sùbita vigilia
fin che la stimativa non soccorre [...]. (73–75)[17]

So the first thing the reader encounters on turning to the *verso* side of the page is the awakened man (*lo svegliato*) of the simile shrinking from what he sees (*ciò che vede*), that is, to translate the simile into non-figurative terms, Dante shrinking from the sight of Adam. The meeting between Dante and Adam will occupy the rest of the *verso* side.

These passages of transition from the *recto* to the *verso* side of the page, occurring just as Dante's eyes open onto the sight of someone, and just as the reader's eyes open onto the sight of the *verso* side of the page, bring the poem, the page, and the reader together in a striking way.[18]

VII. *Parallel Passages*

In addition to breaks between columns that coincide with breaks in the narrative, columns that coincide with narrative units, and notable events at the transition from *recto* to *verso* sides of a page, our hypothesis draws attention to another interesting phenomenon, namely, the appearance of related passages at parallel places in different columns. These are parallel passages in an unusually literal sense of that term.

– At the beginning of the third column in *Inferno* 18 (73–81), for example, Dante and Virgil look down from a bridge at sinners in the first *bolgia* in the eighth circle of Hell. At the beginning of the fourth column (109–114), they look down from another bridge at sinners in the second *bolgia*.

[17] « [...] and the awakened man recoils from what he sees, / his senses stunned in that abrupt awakening / until his judgment rushes to his aid [...] ».

[18] I have not found any discussion of page turning with reference to medieval manuscripts. Craig Farrell discusses some early printed texts in « The Poetics of Page-Turning: The Interactive Surfaces of Early Modern Printed Poetry », *Scrutinizing Surfaces* 8 (2017) [online]. Andrew Piper discusses successors to page-turning in electronic formats in « Turning the Page (Roaming, Zooming, Screaming) », in his *Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times*, Chicago University Press, Chicago 2012, p. 45–61; excerpted in *The Broadview Reader in Book History*, Michelle Levy, Tom Mole (eds.), The Broadview Press, Toronto 2015, p. 511–524.

- The third tercet of the first column in *Purgatorio* 9 (7–9) says that over two hours of the night have passed. The third tercet of the second column (42–44) says that over two hours of the following morning have passed.
- At the end of the first column in *Paradiso* 15 (31–36), Dante turns (*rivolsi*) to Beatrice and sees a smile (*un riso*) in her eyes. At the end of the second column (70–72), he turns to her again (*volsi*), and she smiles at him again (*arrisemi*).[19]

In these instances, Dante seems to draw attention to pairs of passages by making them visibly 'rhyme', so to speak, thereby adding a pleasing visual detail to the reader's contemplation of the page. Sometimes the parallel is between passages on the front and back of a page, and so engages the reader's memory as well as his or her sense of sight.

- In *Purgatorio* 8, for example, the angels who guard the valley of negligent rulers against the serpent appear in the last four tercets of the first column (22–36). The serpent appears and is driven away by the angels in the last four tercets of the third column (94–108).
- In *Purgatorio* 21, Dante mentions his great thirst (*sete*) to know the cause of the trembling of the mountain in the first tercets of the first column (1–3), the second column (37–39), and the third column (73–75).
- In *Purgatorio* 29, in the final tercet of the *recto* side of the page (70–72), a tercet that begins with the word *Quando*, Dante stops at the riverbank to watch the procession on the other side. In the final tercet and concluding line on the *verso* side (151–154), lines that begin with the words *E quando*, the procession itself stops when the triumphal car is directly across from Dante.
- In *Paradiso* 2, Beatrice explains the dark spots on the moon with reference to formal principles, which she mentions twice: in the second last line on the *recto* side (71), and in the second last line on the *verso* side (147).
- In *Paradiso* 7, Beatrice, reading Dante's mind, states three questions she knows he has. She states the questions in the seventh tercets of the first column (19–21), the second column (55–57), and the fourth column (127–129), respectively.
- In *Paradiso* 9, in the last two tercets of the first column (31–36), Cunizza explains why she is not unhappy at being in the sphere of Venus, that is, no higher. In

[19] Towards the end of the fourth column in the previous canto (130–139), *Paradiso* 14, Dante explains that he has not yet turned (*rivolto*) to look at Beatrice in the sphere of Mars. In a bound codex of a hundred canto-pages lying open between Cantos 14 and 15, these passages at the end of three consecutive columns (14.130–139, 15.131–136, 15.70–72) would all be visible simultaneously.

the last two tercets of the third column (103–108), Folco echoes, completes, and generalizes her explanation, speaking on behalf of all souls in the sphere of Venus.

– In *Paradiso* 23, which is set in the sphere of the stars, the second and third columns both begin with Beatrice saying *Quivi*, « Here ». In the first line of the second column (37), she indicates that Christ is here (« *Quivi è la sapïenza e la possanza* [...] »). In the first line of the third column (73), she indicates that the Blessed Virgin is here (« *Quivi è la rosa in che'l verbo divino* [...] »).[20]

Sometimes parallel passages are still more distant from one another. For instance, the name *Cristo* occurs as a rhyme word, rhyming with itself, three times in the last two tercets of the third column (lines 103–108) in both *Paradiso* 14 and *Paradiso* 19.[21]

All these parallel passages illustrate what has aptly been called « Dante's Pervasive Symmetry », the title of a study of thematic resonances among the passages beginning at line 37 in *Inferno* 1, *Purgatorio* 1, and *Paradiso* 1, passages that are very distant from one another, but at parallel places in their respective *cantiche*.[22] Line 37, of course, is always the beginning of the second column on a canto-page.

Also parallel but widely separated from one another are two tercets in which it is announced that the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*, respectively, are almost finished. In the tercet in the *Purgatorio*, quoted at the beginning of this article, Dante says the *cantica* is ending because the pages have been filled:

> ma perché piene son tutte le carte
> ordite a questa cantica seconda,
> non mi lascia più ir lo fren de l'arte. (Purgatorio 33.139–141)[23]

[20] In the following line, she indicates that the apostles are here (*quivi son li gigli* [...] [74]). In the first line of the second last tercet of the fourth column, she speaks of the saved who rejoice here (*Quivi si vive e gode* [...] [133]). In the first line of the last tercet of the fourth column she says that St. Peter triumphs here (*Quivi trïunfa* [...] [136]). *Paradiso* 23, set in the eighth sphere, the sphere of the stars, and of the triumph of Christ and the crowning of the Virgin, is evidently the canto of *quivi*, the canto in which being *there* is particularly emphasised.

[21] The name *Cristo* also rhymes with itself three times in *Paradiso* 12.71–75 (a passage of transition from the *recto* to the *verso* side of the page) and in *Paradiso* 32.83–97.

[22] Aldo S. Bernardo, « Dante's Pervasive Symmetry », *Romance Notes* 12 (1971), p. 458–460.

[23] « [...] but, since all the sheets / made ready for this second canticle are full, / the curb of art lets me proceed no farther ».

In the parallel tercet in the *Paradiso*, St. Bernard says that time is running out, and so he and Dante must stop, like a good tailor, who makes the garment according to the cloth he has:

> Ma perché 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna,
> qui farem punto, come buon sartore
> che com' elli ha del panno fa la gonna. (*Paradiso* 32.139–141)[24]

Behind Bernard's remark about time, Dante is noting that the *space* left to him for writing is running out. And behind Bernard's simile of the limitations imposed on the tailor by the available cloth, Dante is considering the limitations imposed on him by the number and format of his pages.[25] Did Dante expect that his first readers, at least some of them, would notice that these two tercets announcing an imminent ending of a *cantica*, so widely separated from one another, both begin with the words *ma perché*, and both are situated at exactly the same place in the fourth column of their respective canto-pages?

In making use of the possibilities for parallel passages between columns, the pervasive symmetry of the *Comedy* is fractal-like, appearing at different levels of scale, from that of adjacent columns on a page to that of columns separated by an entire *cantica*.

VIII. *Conclusion*

If, then, our hypothesis, which presupposes the correctness of Ahern's conjecture, is itself correct, Dante sometimes made divisions in the narrative occur at divisions between columns; he sometimes made sections of the narrative coincide with columns; he sometimes situated significant events, such as the appearance of someone to him, at the point of transition from the *recto* to the *verso* side of a canto-page; and he sometimes placed similar passages at parallel places in different columns.

Dante was the most self-conscious of authors, and it is not surprising that he should have so carefully considered his placement of words on the page. If the material of his poem was primarily the sounds of Italian words, arranged according to groups of eleven syllables per line, it also included the representation of the words by letters on the two sides of the rectangular page, and the horizontal and vertical lines ruled onto

[24] « 'But since the time runs short that readies you for sleep, / let us stop here, as a good tailor would, / who cuts the cloak as he is stacked with cloth' ».

[25] See MARTINEZ, « Dante '*buon sartore*' (*Paradiso* 32.140) », p. 25.

the page to set the format for writing out the text. Finally, it included the page itself, which Dante seems to have approached as a sort of canvas on which he could produce interesting visual effects by adapting his composition of the text to the format. He must have taken pleasure in making the format reflect the poem, and the poem the format, in instances such as those we have considered. In doing so, he embellished his pages in ways that allowed his poetic art to participate in the illuminator's art of making the pages 'smile' (cf. *Purgatorio* 11.82), although it would, of course, be his first readers, in fact, who would smile at the visual effects he produced, not in decorative marginal images, but in the text itself, on the pages he sent to them.

Did he think ahead to later readers of later copies? Did he expect future copyists to follow the format he had used, and so transmit his inventive exploitations of the format to future readers? Ahern is doubtful that he could even hope that his correlation of cantos and pages would always be preserved in future copies:

> Dante [...] probably did not expect future copyists always to employ exactly 100 chartae. Copyists rarely if ever reproduced exactly such formats. Moreover, as an inveterate auto-commentator, he probably assumed – correctly, as it turned out – that his poem would soon elicit glosses and commentaries, which would then add many more pages to the book.[26]

Ahern implies that Dante probably did expect *some* future copyists to follow the formula of a canto per page. Did he also expect that some copyists would preserve the same formula of distribution of lines over the four columns of the page that, according to our hypothesis, he himself followed? Did he anticipate a distinction between a vulgar transmission of the text that would obliterate his careful arrangement of words on the page, and a better informed line of transmission that would preserve it? Or was he resigned to the thought that the original look of the *Comedy* on the page would inevitably be lost altogether at some point? Did he regard the visual effects in the text we have considered, over which he had taken such pains, as merely secondary features, thinking of his poem as something primarily to be heard, not seen?[27]

Was the original layout of the text ever reproduced again? No known manuscript copy or printed edition of the *Comedy* presents the text with the distribution of the lines of each canto over four columns described by our hypothesis. Nevertheless, it seems that traces of the original *mise-en-page* have permanently settled into the text, however the latter may be presented, whether in handwritten, printed, or digital form.

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[26] Ahern, « What Did the First Copies of the *Comedy* Look Like? », p. 12–13.

[27] Cf. Ahern, « Singing the Book: Orality in the Reception of Dante's *Comedy* », in Amilcare A. Iannucci (ed.), *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1997, p. 214–239.

To borrow a metaphor from phenomenology, these traces have been sedimented, that is, covered over and forgotten, but also preserved; and they are capable of being recovered, at least in part, by patient excavation.[28] In the interest of understanding the vast architecture of the *Comedy* a bit better, such excavation seems worth pursuing further.

[28] See the discussion of 'Hiddenness and Truth', in ROBERT SOKOLOWSKI, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge–New York 2000, p. 165–168.

Appendix
Conjectured distribution of lines in *Inferno*, Canto 1

column recto a, lines 1–36:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
ché la diritta via era smarrita.

Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
che nel pensier rinova la paura!

Tant' è amara che poco è più morte;
ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai,
dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte.

Io non so ben ridir com' i' v'intrai,
tant' era pien di sonno a quel punto
che la verace via abbandonai.

Ma poi ch'i' fui al piè d'un colle giunto,
là dove terminava quella valle
che m'avea di paura il cor compunto,

guardai in alto e vidi le sue spalle
vestite già de' raggi del pianeta
che mena dritto altrui per ogne calle.

Allor fu la paura un poco queta,
che nel lago del cor m'era durata
la notte ch'i' passai con tanta pieta.

E come quei che con lena affannata,
uscito fuor del pelago a la riva,
si volge a l'acqua perigliosa e guata,

così l'animo mio, ch'ancor fuggiva,
si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo
che non lasciò già mai persona viva.

Poi ch'èi posato un poco il corpo lasso,
ripresi via per la piaggia diserta,
sì che 'l piè fermo sempre era 'l più basso.

Ed ecco, quasi al cominciar de l'erta,
una lonza leggiera e presta molto,
che di pel macolato era coverta;

e non mi si partia dinanzi al volto,
anzi 'mpediva tanto il mio cammino,
ch'i fui per ritornar più volte vòlto

column recto b, lines 37–72:

Temp' era dal principio del mattino,
e 'l sol montava 'n sù con quelle stelle
ch'eran con lui quando l'amor divino

mosse di prima quelle cose belle;
sì ch'a bene sperar m'era cagione
di quella fiera a la gaetta pelle

l'ora del tempo e la dolce stagione;
ma non sì che paura non mi desse
la vista che m'apparve d'un leone.

Questi parea che contra me venisse
con la test' alta e con rabbiosa fame,
sì che parea che l'aere ne tremesse.

Ed una lupa, che di tutte brame
sembiava carca ne la sua magrezza,
e molte genti fé già viver grame,

questa mi porse tanto di gravezza
con la paura ch'uscia di sua vista,
ch'io perdei la speranza de l'altezza.

E qual è quei che volontieri acquista,
e giugne 'l tempo che perder lo face,
che 'n tutti suoi pensier piange e s'attrista;

tal mi fece la bestia sanza pace,
che, venendomi 'ncontro, a poco a poco
mi ripigneva là dove 'l sol tace.

Mentre ch'i' rovinava in basso loco,
dinanzi a li occhi mi si fu offerto
chi per lungo silenzio parea fioco.

Quando vidi costui nel gran diserto,
« Miserere di me », gridai a lui,
« qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo! »

Rispuosemi: « Non omo, omo già fui,
e li parenti miei furon lombardi,
mantoani per patrïa ambedui.

Nacqui sub Iulio, ancor che fosse tardi,
e vissi a Roma sotto 'l buono Augusto
nel tempo de li dèi falsi e bugiardi.

column verso a, lines 73–108:

Poeta fui, e cantai di quel giusto
figliuol d'Anchise che venne di Troia,
poi che 'l superbo Ilïón fu combusto.

Ma tu perché ritorni a tanta noia?
perché non sali il dilettoso monte
ch'è principio e cagion di tutta gioia? ».

« Or se' tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte
che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume? »,
rispuos' io lui con vergognosa fronte.

« O de li altri poeti onore e lume,
vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore
che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.

Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore,
tu se' solo colui da cu' io tolsi
lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto onore.

Vedi la bestia per cu' io mi volsi;
aiutami da lei, famoso saggio,
ch'ella mi fa tremar le vene e i polsi ».

« A te convien tenere altro vïaggio »,
rispuose, poi che lagrimar mi vide,
«se vuo' campar d'esto loco selvaggio;

ché questa bestia, per la qual tu gride,
non lascia altrui passar per la sua via,
ma tanto lo 'mpedisce che l'uccide;

e ha natura sì malvagia e ria,
che mai non empie la bramosa voglia,
e dopo 'l pasto ha più fame che pria.

Molti son li animali a cui s'ammoglia,
e più saranno ancora, infin che 'l veltro
verrà, che la farà morir con doglia.

Questi non ciberà terra né peltro,
ma sapïenza, amore e virtute,
e sua nazion sarà tra feltro e feltro.

Di quella umile Italia fia salute
per cui morì la vergine Cammilla,
Eurialo e Turno e Niso di ferute.

column verso b, lines 109–139:

Questi la caccerà per ogne villa,
fin che l'avrà rimessa ne lo 'nferno,
là onde 'nvidia prima dipartilla.

Ond' io per lo tuo me' penso e discerno
che tu mi segui, e io sarò tua guida,
e trarrotti di qui per loco etterno;

ove udirai le disperate strida,
vedrai li antichi spiriti dolenti,
ch'a la seconda morte ciascun grida;

e vederai color che son contenti
nel foco, perché speran di venire
quando che sia a le beate genti.

A le quai poi se tu vorrai salire,
anima fia a ciò più di me degna:
con lei ti lascerò nel mio partire;

ché quello imperador che là sù regna,
perch' i' fu' ribellante a la sua legge,
non vuol che 'n sua città per me si vegna.

In tutte parti impera e quivi regge;
quivi è la sua città e l'alto seggio:
oh felice colui cu' ivi elegge! ».

E io a lui: « Poeta, io ti richeggio
per quello Dio che tu non conoscesti,
a ciò ch'io fugga questo male e peggio,

che tu mi meni là dov' or dicesti,
sì ch'io veggia la porta di san Pietro
e color cui tu fai cotanto mesti ».

Allor si mosse, e io li tenni dietro.