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Dante's *Convivio*, Book 1: Metaphor, Exile, *Epochē*



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***Convivio* 1: Metaphor, Opacity, Exile¹**

The *Convivio* ‘Banquet,’ an unfinished compilation of wide-ranging vernacular commentaries to Dante’s own lyrics begun after the poet’s exile from Florence in 1302, is the only one of his works whose title is also a metaphor.² Despite Dante’s prominent decision to name his work after a banquet of knowledge, surprisingly little has been written about the *Convivio*’s deployment of the figure of metaphor.³ What work there is has noted the presence of extended images in the text, beginning with the titular banquet, and has read these as a systematic

¹I would like to thank Zyg Barański, Justin Steinberg, the members of the University of Chicago Medieval Studies Workshop, and Elizabeth Franklin for their comments on drafts of this essay. I cite the text of the *Convivio* from Ageno’s edition with emendation markings removed for clarity and the English translation of Richard Lansing except where explicitly noted. The Bible is cited in the Latin of the Clementine Vulgate and the English of the Douay-Rheims, Challoner revision. All unattributed translations are my own.

²‘[La] presente opera, la quale è Convivio nominata e vo’ che sia’ ‘The present work, which is called the Banquet, as I wish it to be’ (*Conv.* 1.1.16; Lansing 5). The title of the *Fiore* is editorial and in any case the attribution is doubtful. The title *Vita nova* might appear metaphorical but it is more properly polysemous, pointing to a variety of “newnesses of life.”

³Exceptions are Curto 9–13; Dronke 51–71; Mazzeo; Terracini 279–93; Vallone 44–46; Watt. Otherwise criticism on Dante’s use of metaphor has focused overwhelmingly on the *Commedia*, especially the *Paradiso*. See Ariani, *Metafora*; Brilli 206–08; Gibbons; Tateo, “Metafora.”

rhetorical supplement to its intellectual content.⁴ This assumption that observations about the *Convivio's* form ought to be subordinated to its doctrine clearly depends on the predominant reading of the work as philosophical—a “trattat[o] teoric[o]” ‘theoretical tractate’ (Vasoli xi).⁵ But the metaphors the poet uses often seem as alienating as they are expository: take the cryptic declaration at the end of *Convivio's* first book that the “bread” to which Dante likens his prose commentary will be “luce nuova, sole nuovo, lo quale surgerà là dove l’usato tramonerà” ‘a new light, a new sun which shall rise where the old sun shall set’ (1.13.12; Lansing 32). Dante makes no effort to explain how his bread might give off light even though this metaphor defines the *Convivio's* project of auto-exegesis.⁶

I prefer to read the *Convivio* not as a purely philosophical work but as one that uses the versatile form of the commentary to syncretize diverse disciplines (Barański, “Poesia”; Mazzucchi 67–70).⁷ Philosophy is certainly one of these disciplines; the importance of metaphor suggests that rhetoric is another; theology and poetry are also clearly present. Within this syncretic structure, I shall suggest that Dante’s metaphors create opacities that signal to us the agency of its author—a process that resembles what we now call literature (Ascoli, “Allegory” 135; Mazzucchi 35–36).⁸

In *Convivio* 1, Dante defends his work from charges of difficulty by casting its obscurity as a justifiable response to his shaming experience of banishment.⁹ In effect, the newly excluded Dante carefully

⁴Dronke talks of “symphonic imagery,” in which “the individual images set up further harmonies among one another and for one another, so that their sum . . . is more than the expressions that make them up” (57; see also Fenzi 53–57; Terracini 279–93). For contrasting explorations of the claim that metaphor can supplement philosophical endeavor, see Ricoeur 256–313; Derrida, “White,” “Retrait.”

⁵Among the many excellent studies of the *Convivio* as philosophy, see Gilson 83–161; Nardi 1–150; Vasoli. Barański sets out the problems with reading the *Convivio* as essentially philosophical (“Poesia” 10–19).

⁶Metaphor was commonly regarded as insufficient for establishing premises from which to reason: Aristotle calls metaphor “always obscure” (*Topics* 6.2.139b.32) and so inadequate for couching scientific knowledge (*Posterior Analytics* 2.13.97b.37). See Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 2.20–21; John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* 1.18–19.

⁷See Coccia and Piron for the cultural context of this syncretism. For the *Convivio* and medieval commentary traditions, see Jenaro-MacLennan; Trovato.

⁸For the lack of overlap between our modern category of literature and any medieval genre, see Allen; Barański, “Genre.”

⁹“Onde, con ciò sia cosa che, come detto è di sopra, io mi sia quasi a tutti l’Italiaci presentato . . . onde le mie cose senza dubbio meco sono alleviate; convienmi che con più alto stilo dea alla presente opera un poco di gravezza, per la quale paia di maggiore autoritate. E questa scusa basti alla fortezza del mio commento” ‘Therefore since, as has been said above, I have presented myself to virtually everyone in Italy . . . whereby my works as well as my person are without doubt made light of, it is fitting that I should add, with a loftier style, a little weight to the present work, so that it may seem to take on an air of greater authority. This should suffice to excuse the difficulty of my commentary’ (1.4.13–14; Lansing 12; cf. 1.3.1–3).

defines his unorthodox authorship in terms of his exile. We find the exile most openly and consistently evoked in the first tractate, which is also the location where Dante defines the work's project, its author figure and the relationship between the two, using metaphor in each case. This essay will therefore concentrate on this opening book, which I see as part of a series of works from the early exile years that circumscribe the poet's suffering within an internal conceptual space (Steinberg 95–123).¹⁰ In this post-exilic series, Dante makes a virtue of his wanderings by arguing that his novel literary practices are dependent on his broader experience after his exclusion.¹¹ The effect is to relate the irreducible vicissitudes of history to the problematic aspects of his authorship, which take on an equally irreducible aspect (Fenzi 25–29, 33–34).

“Intendo fare un generale convivio”: The Entrance of Metaphor

The first tractate famously opens on the extended metaphor of the banquet, which promises that Dante's expositions of his poems will lead the reader to knowledge. The primary image of work-as-feast intertwines with another metaphor of people-as-flock.

E io adunque, che non seggio alla beata mensa, ma, fuggito della pastura del vulgo, a' piedi di coloro che seggiono ricolgo di quello che da loro cade . . . per li miseri alcuna cosa ho riservata, la quale alli occhi loro, già è più tempo, ho dimostrata; e in ciò li ho fatti maggiormente vogliosi. Per che ora volendo loro apparecchiare, intendo fare un generale convivio di ciò ch'i' ho loro mostrato. . . Vegna qua qualunque è per cura familiare o civile nella umana fame rimasto . . . e questi prendano la mia vivanda col pane che la farà loro e gustare e patire.

Therefore I (who do not sit at the blessed table, but, having fled the pasture of the common folk, gather up a part of what falls to the feet of those who do sit there . . .) have set aside for those who are unfortunate something that I placed before their eyes some time ago, by which I have increased their desire. Wishing now to set their table, I intend to present to all men a banquet of what I have shown them. Let come here all those whose human hunger derives from domestic or civic responsibilities, and

¹⁰Other terms in this series include: the *De vulgari eloquentia*; the exile lyrics “Tre donne intorno al cor mi son venute” “Three ladies have gathered around my heart” and “Doglia mi reca nello core ardire” “Grief brings a burning to my heart” (*Rime* 13–14); and *Epistole* 1–4. *De vulgari* 2 conceives of the *canzone-stanza* as a mental space, which Durling and Martinez have read as an attempt to encapsulate Dante's position in the universe microcosmically (27–32).

¹¹The claim is made most directly at *DVE* 1.6.3; *Rime* 13.73–80; but see *Conv.* 1.2.13–16; 1.4.13–14. For the “virtues” of Dante's exile, especially in “Tre donne,” see Mazzotta.

... partake of my food with bread, for I will have them both taste of it and digest it. (1.1.10–13; Lansing 4; translation modified)¹²

Here, metaphor is the means by which we discover the axioms we will need to interpret the *Convivio*: first, that the author writes as an outsider; second, that the *Convivio*, its author, and readers are united by their humility; third, that the readers of Dante's poetry desired further interpretations of its obscurities. The figurative language colors our knowledge, linking it to its specific means of presentation.¹³ Dante then uses this coloring to structure his first tractate: the banquet image opens new sections of discussion (1.2.1; 1.10.1; cf. 2.1.1; 4.22.1), while those who scorn the *Convivio*'s vernacular are labeled "pecore, e non uomini" 'sheep not men' (1.11.9; Lansing 26).

At the same time, the multiple layers of figurative coloring create opacities in the text of the *Convivio*. For example, Dante had earlier distinguished the metaphoric pasture of the uninstructed from the banquet he offers to his reader by the food consumed in each place:

Oh beati quelli pochi che seggiono a quella mensa dove lo pane delli angeli
si manuca! e miseri quelli che colle pecore hanno comune cibo!

Blessed are the few who sit at the table where the bread of the angels is eaten, and most unfortunate those who share the food of sheep! (1.1.7; Lansing 4)

But *Convivio* 1's iterations of this apparently simple opposition between the fodder of ignorance and the bread of knowledge are not so neat: in the passage examined previously, the poet talks not of two but of three types of sustenance—the "erba e ghiande" 'grass and acorns' (1.1.8; Lansing 4) of the common folk; the bread of the banquet; and the food that the bread accompanies. We soon learn that the bread represents the *Convivio*'s prose commentary, while the third term "vivanda" 'food' is its poems (1.1.14). However, the relationship between the two parts of the banquet remains problematic: the commentary's bread is a mere accompaniment to the poems' food (whose

¹²I have emended Lansing's "pasture of the common herd" to "pasture of the common folk," since Dante's ovine metaphor does not extend to the word "vulgo" 'crowd/people.' I have also changed his translation of "vivanda" from 'meat' to 'food' because that is how it is used in other early Italian texts (for details, search the *Opera del vocabolario italiano* database for "vivanda.")

¹³Paul Ricoeur has talked of metaphor's "split reference"—its introduction of suspension into the metaphoric expression—which models for the reader the "split structure" of apprehending a text cognitively, imaginatively, and affectively (see "Study 7: Metaphor and Reference" 216–56).

nature is never specified) and yet the poems need their wheaten exposition since it is “la luce la quale ogni colore di loro sentenza farà parvente” ‘the light that renders visible every shade of their meaning’ (1.1.15; Lansing 5). Moreover, *Convivio* 1’s detailed account of itself as “bread” tends to subsume the other foods: the passage just quoted hints that the prose, independently of the poems, is equivalent to the angelic bread of the divine table, while we shall see below that Dante also claims it is made of animal fodder (1.5.1).

Although Dante gives us no extra-metaphorical framework within which to understand his intellectual endeavor, the metaphors do supply us with answers, albeit cryptic ones, to some of our questions, such as what the book is and who wrote it. However, there are other questions we must bracket off entirely, especially, “how does the book do what it says it does?”¹⁴ This suspension of judgment, known as *epochē* in the philosophical tradition, leaves the reader to work with only such certainties as he or she can derive from the *Convivio*’s figurative self-definition.¹⁵ In particular, we know that it is Dante’s exile that affords him his access to the divine table, after he fled the “pastura del vulgo” ‘pasture of the common folk’ (1.1.10; Lansing 4). The bounded uncertainty of *epochē* very effectively models the exile’s condition of outsiderhood for the reader, permitting a glimpse of the shape that identification might take but also preventing its final achievement.

The coloring of our understanding through metaphor serves to connect the *Convivio*’s text laterally to authoritative intertexts, particularly Scripture.¹⁶ The banquet image is biblical in origin: exegetes and theologians would often draw on images of divine feasts (e.g. John 2.1–11) in order to describe progress toward knowledge and understanding as a systematic process of consumption and digestion (Constable 11–12; Curtius 134–36). The metaphor of the people as a

¹⁴Ricoeur’s interlocutor Jacques Derrida concentrated especially on this problem of “the metaphor . . . without which the concept of metaphor could not be constructed” (“White” 220). “The recourse to a metaphor in order to give the ‘idea’ of metaphor: this is what prohibits a definition, but nevertheless metaphorically assigns a checkpoint, a limit, a fixed place: the metaphor/dwelling” (“White” 253).

¹⁵See Cicero’s definition of *epochē*: “illum ipsum sapientem de quo omnis hic sermo est, cum ei res similes occurrant quas non habeat dinotatas, *retenturum adsensum* nec umquam ulli viso adsensurum nisi quod tale fuerit quale falsum esse non possit” ‘the wise man himself who is the subject of all this discussion, when he encounters similar things that he has not got distinguished apart, *will reserve his assent*, and will never assent to any presentation unless it is of such a description as could not belong to a false presentation” (*Academica* 538–39; emphasis added). Ricoeur treats the metaphor-*epochē* relationship (247–56).

¹⁶For the dependence of the *Convivio*’s vernacular prose on the Latin of the Vulgate Bible, see Baldelli 89–90.

flock of sheep in need of a shepherd is also common in the Bible,¹⁷ though it can be found in the classical tradition: Dante could well have had in mind Aristotle's comparison of a good king to a good shepherd (*Nicomachean Ethics* 8.11.1161a15).

The authority of these metaphoric predecessors short-circuits the need for Dante to explain how his metaphors work. The connection that the metaphors establish with the language of the Bible, medieval culture's universal ethical resource (Barański, "Scritturale"), supplies an orthodox justification for the unorthodox choice of the vernacular and its broad reading public. Meanwhile, Dante's abject posture and self-description as the one who has left the people's pasture casts the exiled poet as a Christological *vir dolorum* 'Man of Sorrows': the one sheep among many straying ones on whom the punishment is laid.¹⁸

The Rhetorical Concepts of *Transumptio* and *Dispositio*

Although Dante draws on the Bible and its exegesis for his banquet image, he shares the technique of entitling his work with such an extended metaphor with the secular tradition of thirteenth-century Italian rhetoric (Benson 34–35).¹⁹ Bene of Florence calls his treatise *Candelabrum*, for example, and Guido Faba names one of his *Rota nova* 'New Wheel.' The rhetoricians offered Dante a term for such a metaphorical system—*transumptio* 'adoption/transference'—as well as a sympathetic account of its uses.²⁰ Dante thus inserts his biblical

¹⁷"Vos dispersistis gregem meum, et eiecistis eos, et non visitastis eos: ecce ego visitabo super vos malitiam studiorum vestrorum" 'You have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold I will visit upon you for the evil of your doings' (Jer. 23.2).

¹⁸See Isa. 53.6; Phil. 2.7; cf. Martinez, "Cavalcanti." Watt sees the importance of systematic biblical metaphor in authorizing Dante's newfound status after the exile. However, Dante's metaphorization of theological content in a secular vernacular text is more controversial than Watt makes out; indeed, as Hollander once showed in "Dante *Theologus-poeta*," it is precisely Dante's treatment of theology as a discipline that can be syncretized that most defines his work against the contemporary cultural context (*Dante* 39–89).

¹⁹The *De vulgari* also begins with "[una] catena di metafore tutte specifiche del linguaggio retorico" '[a] chain of metaphors, all of them specific to rhetorical language' (Mengaldo 46; cf. also 149–50). See Nencioni for Dante and Bolognese rhetoric.

²⁰The term originates with Quintilian as a translation of the Greek *metalepsis* 'substitution'; it becomes popular in the later Middle Ages mainly thanks to Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* (Copeland and Sluiter 596, 602n). In thirteenth-century Italy, *transumptio* is particularly associated with Boncompagno da Signa's *Rhetorica novissima* and Bene of Florence's *Candelabrum* (Boncompagno 281; Bene 220; cf. Forti 106–11). Ardizzone proposes an alternative view which generalizes *transumptio* beyond metaphor to the act of naming itself (80–99).

convivial metaphor into a well-established tradition of using systematic imagery to define a secular intellectual project.²¹

Dante does not use the term *transumptio* in the *Convivio*, preferring the problematic *allegoria* (e.g. 1.2.17),²² but he does employ the adverb *transumptive* in another text of the early exile period: his epistle to Cino da Pistoia.²³ The letter defines *transumptio* as the definitive act of the poet (cf. *Vita nova* 16.7–10), applying it to the attached sonnet's description of Love as the horseman of the will.²⁴ The third epistle's vision of *transumptio* suggests that its repeated comparisons can reproduce verbally the internal dialogues of lyric subjectivity. Moreover, at Cino's prompting, Dante sets up exile as a privileged space in which such dialogues may occur.²⁵

The third epistle shares many commonalities with the *Convivio* (Ascoli, *Making* 122–29): in both works, Dante offers a learned prose commentary to his own lyrics (albeit the epistle is in Latin); each text also treats a change of heart in the lyric self (Fenzi 13). *Epistole* 3's description of poetic *transumptio* therefore seems very pertinent

²¹As Pukart notes, Boncompagno's work already points toward an appropriation of sacred sources within the secular framework of *dictamen*. For the comparison with Dante, see Ariani "Metaphorismi" 29–33. See also Guido Faba's biblically allegorical autobiography that precedes his *Rota nova* (Kantorowicz; Copeland "Biography.") But neither incorporates poetry, the vernacular public, or exile in the way the *Convivio* does.

²²As Martinez points out, the difficulty stems from the fact that, when Dante uses the term *allegory* of his own work, it could describe either an authorial signifying methodology or a readerly hermeneutic process ("Allegory" 24). As this essay argues, *Convivio* 1's use of metaphor already requires a hermeneutic response that accounts for authorially introduced difficulty before Dante discusses the allegorical interpretation of his poems at *Conv.* 2.1.

²³"Reddatur, ecce, sermo Calliopeus inferius, quo sententialiter canitur, quanquam *transumptive more poetico* signetur intentum, amorem huius posse torpescere atque denique interire" "Behold, there is given below a discourse in the diction of Calliope, wherein the Muse declares in set phrase (though, *as poets use, the meaning is conveyed under a figure*) that love for one object may languish and finally die away" (*Epistole* 3.4; Toynbee; emphasis added). The term also appears in the disputed Epistle to Cangrande to describe one of the *modi* 'ways [of signifying]' of the *Commedia* (*Epistole* 13.27).

²⁴"Però nel cerchio della sua palestra / libero albitrio già mai non fu franco, / sì che consiglio invan vi si balestra. / Ben può co' nuovi spron punger lo fianco; / e qual che sia 'l piacer ch'ora n'adestra, / seguitar si convien, se l'altro è stanco" "Within the circuit of this wrestling-ground / Free will has never won enfranchisement / And wisdom's darts have vainly sought to wound. / To ply new spurs may sometimes suit his bent: / Whatever the fair face which he has found, / Follow we must once other charms are spent" (*Rime* 104.9–14; Diehl 219).

²⁵See the salutation: "Exulanti Pistoriensi Florentinus exul inmeritis per tempora diuturna salutem et perpetue caritatis ardorem" "To the Exile from Pistoia a Florentine undeservedly in exile wishes health through long years and the continuance of fervent love" (*Epistole* 3.1; Toynbee). See also the rest of the exchange between Cino and Dante in which the Pistoian jurist, also in exile, challenges his friend to reimagine the love lyric in order to explore their shared condition (*Rime* 483–512, especially *Rime* no. 101.1–7).

to understanding the extended metaphors in the *Convivio*. The two texts differ, however, in that the *Convivio*'s systematic metaphors occur not only in the lyrics but also in the prose. Again we see the problematic status of the *Convivio*'s "bread," which announces itself not as a philosophical treatise, but rather as a "quasi comento" 'kind of commentary' (1.3.2; my translation). While the commentating prose necessarily depends on the poems for its structure, the qualifier "quasi" points to the affective claims that the prose itself makes, over and above those of the lyrics.²⁶ The application of *transumptio* within the *Convivio*'s prose is central to this affective appeal and contributes to the hybridity which sets the *Convivio* apart from other literary and intellectual endeavors of its time (Mazzucchi 42–70).

One group of texts from which *Convivio* differs is the rhetorical treatises from which it draws its use of extended metaphor.²⁷ Dante even indulges in *transumptio* as he critiques learned professionals like the rhetoricians for exploiting their literacy for gain, comparing them to a lute owner who rents out the instrument instead of playing it.²⁸ The image comes very close to humanism: it depicts Dante's own erudition as existing on a purely artistic plane, separate from civic dealings. In this extra-political creative sphere, the judgment of the exiled author gains a kind of privilege as it subsumes the cherished rhetorical doctrine of decorum, which insisted on the judicious use of tropes and figures according to the material and the audience (Barański, "(Anti)-retorica").²⁹

The justification for this authorial privilege comes from another rhetorical term: *dispositio* 'ordering.'³⁰ According to *dispositio*, the decorum of individual parts of a work depends on its whole, which in

²⁶Barański, "Poesia"; Grayson 33–60; De Robertis each stress, from different angles, the cross-fertilization between the *Convivio*'s verse and prose.

²⁷See Mengaldo for the issues discussed here with regard to the *De vulgari* (44–60).

²⁸"E a vituperio di loro dico che non si deono chiamare litterati, però che non acquistano la lettera per lo suo uso, ma in quanto per quella guadagnano denari o dignitate: si come non si dee chiamare citarista chi tiene la cetera in casa per prestarla per prezzo, e non per usarla per sonare" 'To their shame I say that they should not be called learned, because they do not acquire learning for its own use but only insofar as through it they may gain money or honor; just as we should not call a lute-player someone who keeps a lute in his house for the purpose of renting it out, as opposed to playing on it' (*Conv.* 1.9.3; Lansing 22).

²⁹"Seu velis materiam ampliare sive ad brevitatem reducere debes verba propria, si poteris, invenire, ita quod sermone *decenti* res quelibet *decoretur*" 'When expanding your material's canvas or achieving brevity, you must find proper words if you can, so that any subject may be decorated by fitting speech' (Bene 220; emphasis added).

³⁰"Dispositio est rerum inventarum in ordinem distributio" 'Arrangement [*dispositio*] is the distribution of arguments thus discovered [by *inventio*] in the proper order" (Cicero, *De inventione* 18–19).

turn can judged by comparison to the cosmos, and to the individual as microcosm.³¹ The central thinker here is Augustine of Hippo (cf. *Conv.* 1.2.14), for whom the mixed rhetorical structure of the Bible is the ultimate example of divine *dispositio* (Cameron 62–67).³² The *Convivio* seeks to create its own, very personal, mixed structure, in which metaphor functions as one index of *dispositio*. The Bishop of Hippo had celebrated the profits of wrestling with divinely created “obscura allegoria” ‘obscure allegory’ of the Bible (*De Trinitate* 15.9.15); Dante, meanwhile, proclaims that he created the “ombra” ‘obscurity’ (1.1.14; Lansing 5) in his poems that now requires his “allegorica esposizione . . . appresso la litterale istoria ragionata” ‘allegorical exposition, after having discussed the literal account’ (1.1.18; Lansing 5). The world, the literary work and the individual reader can all participate in this order that is rhetorical in form but divine in origin, and so not finally comprehensible.³³ The *Convivio*’s appropriation of ineffability explains how it can be both highly structured and yet fragmentary: the author’s ordering of the work claims to reflect the divine order of the cosmos, which can only be grasped piecemeal.³⁴ Augustine would describe the reader’s attempts to reassemble the shards of this structure with a spatial metaphor: *peregrinatio huius vitae* the ‘pilgrimage/exile of this life’ (Claussen; Ferguson).

“Legno senza vela”: The Author as Metaphor

Not far into *Convivio* 1, Dante uses *transumptio* when describing his existence as a “peregrino” ‘foreigner’ (1.3.3; my translation).

Veramente io sono stato legno senza vela e senza governo, portato a diversi porti e foci e liti dal vento secco che vapora la dolorosa povertade.

³¹Dante evokes *dispositio* in all of these contexts: he defines his work as “la presente disposizione” ‘the present disposition’ (1.1.15; my translation; cf. 1.5.6; 1.7.11); he demands that only those whose bodies are well “disposed” take their places at his banquet (1.1.12); and he talks of “l fuoco che è disponente del ferro al fabro che fa lo coltello” ‘the fire that prepares the iron for the smith who makes the knife’ (1.13.4; Lansing 31).

³²See, for example, Augustine’s explanation of the fit between the perfect number six and the six days of creation in terms of Wisdom 11.21: “omnia in mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti” ‘thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight’ (*De genesi ad litteram* 4.3.7–4.7.14).

³³Man labors, then, in a poem of history that he cannot read as a whole. Nevertheless, God has disposed the *logos* of history as a set of rhetorical oppositions” (Vance 47). In the *Convivio*’s case the poem of history has become a glossed book.

³⁴For material evidence in support of this reading, see Arduini’s examination of the earliest extant manuscript of the *Convivio*, which was copied by a workshop of scribes and may well have circulated in fragments (20–26).

Truly I have been a ship without sail or rudder, brought to different ports, inlets, and shores by the dry wind that painful poverty blows. (1.3.5; Lancing 9)

This description of the impoverished poet as a storm-tossed ship is part of a gradual incorporation into Dante's work of a metaphor that was widespread in the Italian lyric tradition as a parallel for human existence (Boccia 9–17). Dante had largely eschewed such imagery until after his exile; thereafter, he appears to light upon this metaphor as a particularly efficient way of communicating his condition, since its established nuances range from the existential, to the theological, and the metaliterary.³⁵

In particular, Dante's tone and phrasing here echo and repudiate Guittone d'Arezzo's demand that the moral poet give up love literature in "Ora parrà s'eo saverò cantare" 'Now we shall see whether I can still sing,' his poem of existential conversion.³⁶ Guittone uses the ship image in a quasi-Stoic manner as a means of describing an inward virtue of the will. If lyric poets crew their ships-of-self with Wisdom and Justice, as the Aretine understands them, they will abandon their concentration on love and dedicate themselves to didacticism. Guittone's use of the lyric form to persuade others reflects a model of literary engagement with history in which the poet reacts to his environment and seeks to shape it through his use of language. Dante calls this "municipal" poetics in the *De vulgari eloquentia*.³⁷ Another writer named in the same chapter of the *De vulgari*, Brunetto Latini, also uses the ship metaphor in a municipal spirit. In his *Rettorica*, Brunetto addresses his readers as his "porto" 'port' (98), shortly before he describes lyric exchanges between lovers as a rhetorical debate in which they seek persuade each other.³⁸

³⁵For Dante's metaliterary use of nautical imagery after his exile, see the sonnet to Cino "Io mi credea del tutto esser partito" 'I thought I had left behind for good' (*Rime* 107.1–4), while an important pre-exilic use of the trope comes in "Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro" 'I wish my speech to be as harsh' (*Rime* 1.18–21).

³⁶"Ma chi cantare vole e valer bene / in suo legno nohier diritto pone, / ed orrato saver mette al timone" 'But he who wants to sing well and attain merit, / places Justice in his boat / and puts honored Wisdom at the rudder' (Guittone 25.16–18; Jensen 175). Note that both poets use the synecdoche "legno" 'wood' for 'ship.'

³⁷"Post hec veniamus ad Tuscos . . . quorum dicta, si rimari vacaverit, non curialia, sed municipalia tantum inveniuntur" 'After this, we come to the Tuscans . . . whose poetry, if there were space to study it closely here, we would find to be fitted not for a court but at best for a city council' (*DVE* 1.13.1; Botterill).

³⁸"Ma chi volesse bene considerare la proprietà d'una lettera o d'una canzone, ben potrebbe apertamente vedere che colui che lla fa o che lla manda intende ad alcuna cosa che vuole che sia fatta per colui a cui e'la manda" 'Anyone who considers the nature of a letter or a love poem will clearly see that the person who makes or sends one wishes for something to be done by the person to whom he sends it' (Latini 101–02). For Dante's spatialized riposte to "municipal poetics," see Steinberg 98–106.

Just as Dante rebuts the Latin rhetoricians' attempts to instrumentalize metaphor via decorum, here he rejects Guittone and Brunetto's co-option of the lyric to intersubjective persuasion. In place of Guittone's internal drama, Dante's ship is threatened from the outside, maintaining the boundedness of the lyric space from which his poems emanated.³⁹ Even "Le dolci rime d'amor ch'i' solia" 'The tender rhymes of love I once sought out' (*Conv.* 4.*canzone*, Lansing 139), which incorporates moral teachings within a lyric framework, just as Guittone desired, casts itself as a hiatus from, not a disavowal of, love poetry.⁴⁰ Moreover, the *Convivio's* widespread use of *transumptio* in the prose reflects a countervailing approach to Guittone's: instead of rhetoricizing his lyrics, Dante incorporates a canonically poetic process into his didactic prose.⁴¹ The self-metaphorization as ship enables Dante to establish a bounded exilic space within and yet without the Italian lyric tradition.⁴²

"Quello purgare da ogni macula": The *Retrait* of *Transumptio*⁴³

Although *Convivio* 1 is framed by the *transumptio* of the banquet, during most of the book the promised feast is present only at several degrees of metaphoric remove. It returns at the opening of the second and tenth chapters, and then again at the beginning of the second book's prose to mark the start of the commentary proper. The reserving of the titular metaphor to certain punctual interventions casts the body of the book as a digression within the *Convivio's* structure. Indeed, when the banquet image returns in the midst of Dante's discussion of writing in the vernacular, it is precisely to justify the length of the "digressione della mia scusa" 'digression that I make in stating my

³⁹Brunetto's addressing of his readers as his "port" also breaches the bounds of the self since it implies that his "ship" travels out of the page toward them.

⁴⁰"Le dolci rime d'amor ch'i' solia / cercar ne' miei pensieri, / convien ch'io lasci: non perch'io non spero / ad esse ritornare" 'The tender rhymes of love / I once sought out within my thoughts / I must now leave; not that I do not hope / to return to them anew' (4.*canzone*.1-4; Lansing 139).

⁴¹Metaphor had been recognized as a distinctively poetic technique since Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 3.1405a.6). The Bolognese rhetoricians consciously adopt their idea of *transumptio* from the tradition of poetic arts such as the *Poetria nova* (Forti 106-11).

⁴²In fact, as Segre has shown (134-51), the poetic tradition exerts a considerable influence on Guittone's own prose in his *Lettere*, including in the use of metaphor (135-36), but the Aretine poet puts this inheritance to a resolutely hortatory, object-focused use, whereas the *Convivio's* syncretism acts as a kind of proxy for Dante's subjectivity.

⁴³"The withdrawal of metaphor gives place to an abyssal generalization of the metaphoric—metaphor of metaphor in two senses—which splays (*évase*) the borders [between metaphoric and proper meanings], or rather, invaginates them" (Derrida, "*Retrait*" 22).

apology' (1.10.4; Lansing 23), which occupies eight out of the book's thirteen chapters. The implication is that the *Convivio's* prose cannot stand by itself without good reason and should preferably take its structure from Dante's lyric poetry, as do *Convivio* 2, 3, and 4.

In the absence of the later books' verse lemmata, *Convivio* 1 is organized according to its metaphors, especially that of the prose as humble accompanying bread (1.1.15). Dante casts the first two questions he will raise in the opening book—speaking of oneself, and the difficulty of the text—as “macule” ‘flaws’ in the bread that must be purged before the banquet can start (1.2.1). The third and final question, writing in the vernacular, is also described as a flaw (1.5.1), but in a more ambiguous manner that we shall examine below. The poet, in his role as “servant” to the host of the banquet (whose identity remains unclear), says that he will cut away the first two flaws with “lo coltello del mio giudicio” ‘the knife of my judgment’ (1.2.2; Lansing 6).

The ordering metaphor of flaws requiring removal suggests that each section of the book aims to eliminate itself so that the promised banquet can begin. This raises a question mark over the status of Dante's extended, and apparently abstract, disquisitions on topics such as fame (1.3.6–11), obedience (1.7.2–11), or generosity (1.8.1–18). These certainly appear to be general statements of principle, yet they provide premises for “flaws” that are to be “cut away.” Will the premises disappear with the flaws in the midst of which they are articulated? Is it possible for the poet's judgment to “cut around” them?

The problematic logic of the book's metaphoric structure becomes especially evident with the final “flaw”: that of the *Convivio's* being written in the vernacular. Dante points out that the language of the *Convivio* pertains to its very substance and likens his use of the vernacular to his “bread” being made of “biado,” that is, grains especially suitable for animal fodder (Chiappelli and Fenzi 77).⁴⁴ The word connects the *Convivio's* vernacular back to the “pastura del vulgo” ‘pasture of the common folk’ from which Dante had fled, suggesting that exile may have brought Dante the skill of making animal fodder into bread. Here the structuring metaphor of the flaws has to move further away from a connection to its proper terms: the offending

⁴⁴“Poi che purgato è questo pane dalle macule accidentali, rimane ad escusare lui da una sostanziale, cioè dall'essere volgare e non latino: che per similitudine dire si può di biado e non di frumento” ‘Now that this bread is cleansed of its accidental impurities, it remains to apologize for one pertaining to substance, that is, for its being in the vernacular and not in Latin; which is to say, by way of metaphor, for its being made of rougher grains and not of wheat’ (1.5.1; Lansing 12; translation modified). Lansing translates “biado” as ‘oats,’ which is overly specific.

grain cannot logically be removed from the metaphorical bread of the tractate with a knife as happened with the first two flaws, because it would leave no substance behind it.

At the end of the tractate, once he has defended his use of the vernacular to his satisfaction, Dante still does not attempt to excise the bread's grain. Instead he returns to biblical language, describing the commentary as barley bread that feeds the multitude (cf. John 6.9).

Questo sarà quello pane orzato del quale si satolleranno migliaia, e a me ne soverchieranno le sporte piene.

This commentary shall be that bread made with barley by which thousands shall be satiated, and my baskets shall be full to overflowing with it. (1.13.12; Lansing 32)

Aquinas had excluded breads made from flours other than wheat from sacramental usage on the grounds that they were not *proprie dictu* bread at all (*Summa contra gentiles* 4.69). But Dante circumvents this restriction by revealing that his humble “pane . . . di biado” (1.5.1) is in truth the “pane orzato” of the Gospel (and perhaps of the angels also?)

The next sentence goes even further: in the declamation that ends *Convivio* 1, Dante returns to the mixed food and light metaphors of the book's opening chapter, declaring his bread to be “luce nuova, sole nuovo, lo quale surgerà là dove l'usato tramonterà” ‘a new light, a new sun which shall rise where the old sun shall set’ (1.13.12; Lansing 32; cf. 1.1.14–15). The comparison of cognition to a spontaneous, divine enlightenment contaminates the first tractate's systematic metaphor of digestion as progress toward understanding with another, equally biblical, image. But the promised enlightenment of “coloro che sono in tenebre ed in oscuritate” ‘those who lie in shadows and in darkness’ (1.13.12; Lansing 32) does not happen in *Convivio* 1 itself; instead the final apodictic demonstration of the author's intellectual claims is deferred to later treatises, a move that will become programmatic for the work as a whole (Fenzi 56).⁴⁵

The result is a metaphoric tension between the slow progressive understanding proper to digestion and the instantaneous intellectual illumination of light. This tension—or adynaton, to give it its technical name—cannot be resolved within the bounds of the book and the reader must therefore respond with a suspension of judgment, or

⁴⁵This climax through deferral is paralleled at the level of the period by the *Convivio*'s preference for the ascending construction: the prolepsis, or fronting, of a secondary proposition that depends causally on the primary proposition (Baldelli 92; Segre 257–61).

epochē, as to which process more accurately describes Dante's work. The mystical language crystallizes the ethical impact of Dante's prose: the biblical echo assures us of the passage's moral significance;⁴⁶ however, the adynaton means that the reader bears the responsibility of establishing that ethical lesson before he or she can pursue it.⁴⁷

È lo mio pane . . . con sufficienza preparato: The Afterlife of Metaphor

At the outset of the second prose tractate, two *transumptiones* collide: the comparison of the prose to the bread at the titular banquet is made for the final time. Meanwhile, the nautical image returns in an altogether more positive light, with Dante making, for the first time in the Italian vernacular tradition, the traditional identification of the Latin poets between a new work and a ship that will carry the reader forward.⁴⁸

Poi che proemialmente ragionando, me ministro, è lo mio pane nello precedente trattato con sufficienza preparato, lo tempo chiama e domanda la mia nave uscir di porto . . . con isperanza di dolce cammino e di salutevole porto e laudabile nella fine della mia cena.

Now that by way of a preface my bread has been sufficiently prepared in the preceding book through my own assistance, time calls and requires my ship to leave port . . . with the hope of a smooth voyage and a safe and praiseworthy port at the end of my feast. (2.1.1; Lansing 40)

As with the mixing of bread and light imagery, no attempt is made to resolve this new adynaton of bread that is also a ship and a feast that arrives at a port. But aspects of the metaphoric structure play important cognitive roles. In particular, the fact that it is now the treatise, not the author himself, taking a maritime journey makes explicit for

⁴⁶The biblical echo of Dante's difficult metaphoric combination suggests an alternative trope by which to characterize the passage when viewed from the reader's perspective: that of enigma—riddle or conundrum. As Cook has emphasized, Augustine and others saw readers' encounters with puzzles in the biblical text in strongly ethical terms (371–78).

⁴⁷Cherchi makes very similar observations on the role of adynaton in troubadour lyric, arguing that the figure's very ambiguity frames the reader's hermeneutic choices as ethically significant, granting the poetic voice an individual moral authority (81–123).

⁴⁸See Ceccoli et al. for the vernacular tradition (15; and cf. also Dante, *Rime* nos. 1 and 107, cited above). Boccia identifies two classical sources of the *Duecento* nautical metaphor: Ovid's depiction of the lover's ardor as a tempest, and Cicero's trimming of the sails of rhetoric in order to set out toward contemplation (7–8; and cf. Curtius 128–30).

the first time the connection between the suspension of *epochē* and the anticipation of *peregrinatio*.

The *peregrinatio/epochē* connection will become the essential poetic process of the *Commedia*, a forerunner of which is *De vulgari* 1's "hunt" for the illustrious vernacular.⁴⁹ There are also further, appropriately fragmentary, equations between *epochē* and *peregrinatio* in the *Convivio*, particularly in the fourth tractate, whose poem has a spatial metaphor for its subtitle: "Contra-li-erranti" 'Against-the-wandering-ones' (4.*canzone*.141; my translation). Here we find the ship of human society moving through history (4.4.5; 4.5.8)—another unprecedented recuperation of a classical usage in the Italian tradition (Ceccoli et al. 15)—as well as the common existential theme of the voyage of the individual life (4.28.8; 4.28.12). Non-nautical journeying metaphors also abound, such as the foolish man who strays from another's footprints across a snow-covered plain (4.7.6–7). Nonetheless any reader seeking to board *Convivio* 2.1's ship of progress through the commentary, or any of the fourth book's virtuous vessels, must first find a way of bracketing off or suspending the memory of the author's sail-less, rudderless ship from the first tractate.⁵⁰

In the final analysis, *Convivio* 2.1's ship image can be productive within the *Convivio*'s economy because it promises us intellectual forward motion, not because it delivers it. The author uses the cross-references and parallelisms of *transumptio* to sketch out the work's *dispositio*, inviting the reader to take up its adumbration. Any progress made tends to coincide with the spatial metaphor of Augustinian *peregrinatio*, albeit not yet to the totalizing extent that we find in the *Commedia*. Counterbalancing this spiritualized progress, however, is the irreducibly personal fact of Dante's exile, here represented in

⁴⁹"Quam multis varietatibus latius dissonante vulgari, decentiorem atque illustrem Ytalie venemur loquellam" 'Amid the cacophony of the many varieties of Italian speech, let us hunt for the most respectable and illustrious vernacular that exists in Italy' (*DVE* 1.11.1; Botterill). For this and other "metaphorical microtexts" in the treatise, see Phipps.

⁵⁰These two irreconcilable faces of the *Convivio*'s ship image also create intriguing questions for the *Commedia*, which depends on the *transumptio* of the journey at a structural level (Basile). Take the repeated and challenging presence of negative ship imagery in the *Paradiso*: the reader's "piccioletta barca" 'little bark' that ought not follow the poet's "legno che cantando varca" 'ship that singing makes its way' (*Par.* 2.1–15; Hollander, *Paradiso*); the ship that Thomas Aquinas has seen sink within sight of its harbor (*Par.* 13.136–38); the "varco / folle d'Ulisse" 'mad track of Ulysses' that Dante sees when he looks back to earth from the Heaven of Fixed Stars (*Par.* 27.82–83); Neptune's incomprehension at the Argo's maiden voyage (*Par.* 33.94–96). Each of these ships' journeys suggests that our own *peregrinatio* through the poem is somehow separate and different from the poet's creation, which remains a journey, but one that takes place inside its own delimited metaphoric space.

the memory of the first tractate's belabored vessel. The inescapable cross-reference allows the reader momentary access to an exilic space, which corresponds to that of Dante's authorship, while he or she experiences *epochē*.

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