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OF THIEVES AND SALVATION VICTORIES:

PURGATORIO V, 133

DIANA GLENN

DANTE'S discourse with the penitent souls in the *Purgatorio* reveals that these shades are characterised by a tendency towards self-effacement that is radically different from the destructive and self-absorbed attitude of the infernal spirits.¹ Whereas the latter preserve an inner core of obduracy devoid of remorse, the contrite souls in Purgatory, through their trusting openness and willingness to communicate information about their private lives and the wider social and political circles of influence in which they once moved, help the Wayfarer to gain immeasurably in courage and inner strength. Throughout his journey, Dante-character is privy to surprising disclosures and, if the souls in Purgatory express amazement at his living presence among them, he is equally astonished by the news they relay to him, which has the potential to alter the destiny of members of the living Christian community and also to advance the spiritual cause of members of the community in Purgatory: "qui per quei di là molto s'avanza" (*Purg.* III, 145). Both in expressing their sense of wonder and in revealing an awareness of their weaknesses and faults in the earthly life, the contrite souls in Purgatory encourage Dante to value the support of others, as they themselves do with regard to both fellow repentant sinners and the living on earth who offer prayers on their behalf. The doctrine of the *suffragia mortuorum* — the doctrine that the prayers of the living can be directed towards the spiritual good of the souls in Purgatory — means that Dante's return to the world of the living, after his brief visit to the realm of the dead, offers the possibility of real and positive benefits for the penitent souls of Purgatory who are in a state of transition. Through his encounter with the shade of Pia in *Purgatorio V*, the Pilgrim Dante is led to a higher level of spiritual cognition, not only as regards the souls in Purgatory, whose dialogues move back and forth in temporal and spatial terms as they reconstruct past events, relationships and places on earth, but also in relation to social networks and the interconnectedness of human society at large.

In her address to Dante in the concluding section of *Purgatorio V*, Pia presents herself as a bride whose afterlife has been forgotten by the living, and most particularly by her former partner, and she entreats Dante to remember her when he returns to the world of the living. Although she has been the victim of a violent crime, Pia is not

DIANA GLENN

vindictive and does not promote the idea of revenge. Nevertheless her delicately-phrased request and allusion to the betrayal of a lifelong partnership (through the image of the wedding ring) lead Dante and the reader to ponder on the question of Pia's marital vow and on the true nature of that marital union from which she is receiving no solace in the afterlife. It is precisely because her words concentrate on a particular relationship in the world of the living that her isolation as a purgatorial soul, one for whom no one on earth is offering prayers, seems most poignant. Through the linguistic expediency of the past participles in lines 130 and 131, "tornato" and "riposato", coupled with the imperative form "ricorditi" (133), Pia's monologue offers a snapshot of Dante's presumably long life to be enjoyed after his otherworldly sojourn ("la lunga via", 131), during which he will have time to rest in the company of family and friends and ponder on what he has seen, heard and experienced. This is, in effect, what Pia wishes for him at the end of his journey: a full life, *una lunga vita*, with time to take repose and reflect. In her choice of the word "riposato", she suggests the image of Dante in his old age, who looks back on a lifetime of memories. By means of this auspicious formula, Pia is able to contrast, in a succinct and dramatic way, the curtailment of her own life, so callously obliterated, suggesting that she cannot forget the act of violence that has cut off her life expectancy so prematurely. Thus Pia's life and death are lexically conjoined in the disconcerting and palindromic "Siena mi fé, disfecemi Maremma" (134). It is an arresting statement that serves both as an indictment against "colui", the betrayer of the marriage vow, and as evidence that, although she seeks no revenge, Pia vividly recalls the merciless behaviour of the one who has denied her the possibility of a long and fulfilling life, including "riposo" and the gathering of memories.

Evidence regarding Pia's historical identity is not conclusive, despite scholarly attempts to establish a possible identification with Pia de' Tolomei, Pia Guastelloni and Pia Malavolti. Traditional Dante commentary supports a theory of uxoricide, whereby Pia de' Tolomei's husband, Nello d'Inghiramo de' Pannocchieschi, allegedly disposed of his spouse at his castle near Massa Marittima in order to marry Countess Margherita Aldobrandeschi, with whom he was amorously involved. The *vecchi chiosatori* variously speculated on Pia's husband having found some fault with his bride "per alcun fallo ch'el trovò in lei".² Twentieth-century critics have advanced the view that Pia was the widow of Tollo (Bertoldo) di Prata and that she died while under the protective custody of Nello d'Inghiramo, who had once acted as proxy for Tollo.³ Whilst it is unlikely that Pia is a fictional character with no historical basis, the documentary evidence for her identity remains inconclusive and over the years her *persona*, variously interpreted as a young flibbertigibbet, a loveless, betrayed wife, a luckless bride succumbing to the wasting effects of malaria or a devoted mother of two sons, has acquired a somewhat romanticised aura.⁴ Pia's brief appearance in *Purgatorio* V has been interpreted by a number of twentieth-century readers in a sentimental light as a type of solicitous addendum, effective in its restoration of decorum and civility after the disordered upheaval of the natural world evoked by Bonconte da

Montefeltro's tempest-driven, blood-stained corpse being dragged and submerged by the raging torrents of the Archiano and the Arno. Vying amidst twentieth-century critical views of Pia are those of a genteel, even maternal, petitioner and those of a timid, fragile soul: Vannucci calls her "una gentilissima";⁵ Bosco speaks of "sollecitudine tutta femminile, anzi materna, per le piccole cose della nostra vita";⁶ Puppo considers her "una fragile donna che si spegne silenziosamente";⁷ while Chiari deems that Pia speaks "con timidezza e con riserva".⁸ Other critics have offered aesthetic readings of Pia's monologue such that her encounter with Dante is "drawn with pastels, in *sfumato* tone".⁹ However, a closer look at the context of Pia's exchange with Dante reveals that her discourse, seemingly domestic and personalised in its focus, is charged with an intensity of purpose whose spiritual application is universal:

"Deh, quando tu sarai tornato al mondo
e riposato de la lunga via",
seguitò 'l terzo spirito al secondo,
"ricorditi di me, che son la Pia;
Siena mi fè, disfecemi Maremma:
salsi colui che 'n nanellata pria
disposando m'avea con la sua gemma". (*Purg.* V, 130-36)

In elucidating possible literary sources for Pia's *salutatio* and epitaph, Hermann Gmelin's 1955 commentary¹⁰ links "Siena mi fè, disfecemi Maremma" (134) to Donatus' epitaph of Virgil, "Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere" ("Mantua bred me, Calabria took me"), and Pia's allusion to betrayal (135-36) to a possible Virgilian source, that is, Dido's recollection of the death of her husband, Sychaeus (*Aeneid* IV. 28ff.). To my mind, there is a further source, a biblical one, whereby Pia's illustration of the brevity of an individual's life on earth is set against the eternal relationship between the human soul and its Divine Creator. Pia's petition to Dante, "ricorditi di me", contains a lexical clue, in the form of a biblical reminiscence from Luke's Gospel, that has repercussions for a more cogent understanding of the salvation drama of the souls in *Purgatorio* V. The biblical echo suggests that underpinning the events recalled in Canto V and its interlocutors' need for prayers from the living is an episode at the heart of the Christian faith: Christ's death on the cross at Golgotha and, in particular, one of the events accompanying it, the episode of the two robbers who are crucified with Christ.

The presence of the crucified robbers is recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but only Luke's Gospel (23:39-43) reports the verbal exchange between Christ and the thieves. Matthew's Gospel states: "At the same time two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left" (27:38). When the crowd and chief priests mock Jesus by saying, "If you are God's son, come down from the cross!", Matthew's Gospel reports: "Even the robbers who were crucified with him taunted him in the same way" (27:44). The Gospel according to Mark

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DIANA GLENN

records, "And they crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left" (15:27). John's Gospel gives no detail about the robbers other than to say that their legs were broken by the soldiers before they were taken away. Luke's Gospel (23:39-43) states:

Unus autem de his, qui pendeabant, latronibus, blasphemabat eum, dicens: Si tu es Christus, salvum fac te ipsum, et nos. Respondens autem alter increpabat eum, dicens: Neque timeas Deum, quod in eadem damnatione es. Et nos quidem juste, nam digna factis recipimus: hic vero nihil mali gessit. Et dicebat ad Jesum: Domine, memento mei, cum veneris in regnum tuum. Et dixit illi Jesus: Amen dico tibi: Hodie mecum eris in paradiso.

(One of the criminals hanging there abused him. "Are you not the Christ?" he said. "Save yourself and us as well!" But the other spoke up and rebuked him. "Have you no fear of God at all?" he said. "You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus", he said "remember me when you come into your kingdom." "Indeed, I promise you", he replied "today you will be with me in paradise").¹¹

In extremis, the crucified thief repents of his misdeeds. Acknowledging that he deserves his punishment, he turns to Christ and makes a humble request, asking only to be remembered by Him in Heaven: "Gesù, ricordati di me, quando entrerai nel tuo regno". The thief's request is followed by the immediate confirmation, uttered by Christ, also undergoing a violent death by crucifixion, that the thief will be with Him that very day in Paradise: "In verità ti dico, oggi sarai con me nel paradiso".¹² The robber gives us no epitaph of his life, but his sincere repentance and Christ's intercession win him eternal salvation. Thus the moment of sincere contrition, articulated through the briefest of requests, is enough to save the Good Robber's soul for all eternity. This intense and dramatic utterance by the crucified thief — the revelatory quality of his admission, his recognition of the apportioning of justice, of the nature of divine reward and punishment, and the sincere request to be remembered — constitute his personal, salvation drama, a drama of the soul before the moment of death involving self-recognition, conversion in the form of repentance, and the surety of a future heavenly reward.

Prior to *Purgatorio* V, Dante's readers have been prepared for the notion of God's infinite mercy through an act of sincere repentance ("la bontà infinita ha sì gran braced", *Purg.* III, 122), by the presence of the shade of Manfred in *Purgatorio* III. Neither the Church nor temporal powers have had any bearing on the excommunicated Manfred's spiritual salvation after death, nor have they influenced the quality of the direct relationship instituted at the moment of death by Manfred's final spiritual act. The biblical episode of the robber's salvation victory, achieved

through his recognition of error and sincere repentance and made possible through Christ's intercession and mercy, underscores the salvation victories of the souls in Antepurgatory, who must still undergo final purification before attaining their reward in Paradise. The souls in *Purgatorio* V were sinners until just before their violent deaths, but at the moment of death they repented and so won a reprieve from Hell. They have left behind their mortal remains and are now fulfilling their eternal destiny, determined by their earthly choices, which is taking them on their journey to Paradise. Glauco Cambon speaks of "a paradisaic anticipation" in *Purgatorio* V since it looks back to the earth of the living and echoes the infernal world, "while at its climax foreshadowing Paradise".¹³ In Canto V the souls *in extremis* turned away from sin and the perdition of Hell towards God's love and mercy. Although they were "peccatori infino a l'ultima ora" (53), and Jacopo's candid acknowledgement of the gravity of past sins highlights this fact, they have nevertheless reconciled themselves to God: "pentendo e perdonando, fora / di vita uscimmo a Dio pacificati" (55-56). Sketching their portfolios from birth ("Quindi fu' io", 73; "Io fui di Montefeltro", 88; "Siena mi fé", 134) on to the afterlife, where they hope to be aided by the prayers of the living, they reveal to Dante their final passage from earthly to eternal life, offering signposts for Dante's own spiritual recovery as one who has strayed from the path of virtue. Moreover, Dante will relay information to the living that has repercussions on a number of levels, since the concerns represented by Jacopo, Bonconte and Pia reflect a threefold preoccupation with earthly ties in the form of (i) members of a local community, "tu mi sie di tuoi prieghi cortese / in Fano", 70-71; (ii) the community of the living on earth, "io dirò vero, e to 'l ridi tra' vivi", 103; and (iii) the followers of Christ's message of forgiveness through the link with the Golgotha episode.

Purgatorio V resonates with numerous echoes, both lexical and visual, from the drama at Golgotha. For example, Jesus addresses his mother, who is standing by the cross, while Bonconte, on the point of death, utters Mary's name, "nel nome di Maria fini" (101); Bonconte folds his arms across his breast in the form of a cross and Christ dies on a cross; Jacopo's body bleeds from its open wounds and Bonconte bleeds from the throat, while Jesus' body is pierced by the spear of one of the Roman soldiers; after losing Bonconte's soul to the angel, the angry devil summons up a torrential storm, while after Christ's death, the earth is in upheaval, with the effects of the violent earthquake recorded in Matthew's Gospel (27:50-53). Underscoring the christological associations is Dante's own "figural moral function" of a descent into and subsequent emergence from Hell "on the third day".¹⁴

The figure of Pia is most often remembered in her memorable line of verse: "ricorditi di me, the son la Pia" (133). Her salvation, achieved through her sincere contrition at the point of death, along with that of her fellow late repentants, Jacopo and Bonconte, offers a message of hope to the living and highlights the irrelevance of earthly sanctions and jurisdictions, both secular and ecclesiastical, in the face of God's infinite saving power and the special and exclusive relationship experienced by the individual soul with its Divine Creator. The sentimentality conveyed by some critics,

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DIANA GLENN

when discussing and analysing Pia's encounter with Dante, is entirely their own invention and is not consonant with the intention of the text, which is closely aligned to the pressing need felt by the souls in Antepurgatory for the prayers of the living. It is this desire to begin the rite of purification in Purgatory proper that above all informs their speech with Dante.

At the heart of Dante's poetic enterprise is the resolve of the former *uomo politico* — a man of great intellect and probity who experienced first-hand the intrigues and cabals dividing his city — to report to the world, not as a divine messenger but rather as a divinely-appointed emissary. This is linked to his view of his role as Poet, which is also that of portraying models of responsible civic behaviour, particularly when the negligence of temporal and spiritual leaders is bringing their respective offices into disrepute. Although Antepurgatory has been described as "a kind of no-man's-land" (Cambon, p. 107), the link with Luke's Gospel supports the notion of the universalising character of Dante's survey of providential history, in this case a pivotal moment in the New Testament narrative that has direct application for, and provides a benefit to, the living Christian community for their afterlife. Thus although Jacopo's and Bonconte's monologues address a wider political context, and Pia's concise statements focus on the nature of private relationships, all three exchanges with the interlocutor Dante serve to illuminate the quintessential nature of the individual soul's relationship with its Maker.

In the recognition of the lexical echo from the drama at Golgotha, the full resonance of Pia's words (their highly-charged intensity and biblical import) is made evident, so that her narrative provides a wider focus to the moments of high tension conveyed by Jacopo's and Bonconte's violent and disturbing tales. Like the Good Thief, Pia (whose name is suggestive of goodness and devotion) makes evident her awareness of God's boundless goodness and mercy. When linked to the crucified thief's request to Christ, her simple utterance to the Wayfarer, "ricordati di me", reverberates in a more meaningful way and may be seen as emblematic of a soul's turning to God prior to death and receiving the gift of His infinite mercy, a powerful message that fittingly and dramatically brings the canto to a close.

1 A briefer version of this essay appears in electronic form in *EBDSA (Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America)*: "Ricorditi di me, che son la Pia: A Possible Source (*Purg.* 5. 133)", September 26, 1999 (<http://www.princeton.edu/~dante/glenn.htm>). Permission to include the material in this extended form is acknowledged.

2 Recorded in Jacopo della Lana's commentary and echoed in Buti and l'Ottimo. Alessandro Lisini has provided a synthesis of the views expressed by the early commentators, "La Pia di Dante: La Pia senese nei versi del poema", *La Diana: Rassegna d'arte e vita senese*, Anno III, Fasc. IV (1928), 249-75. See also the overviews provided by Corrado Ricci, *Ore ed ombre dantesche* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1921), pp. 271-83; Giorgio Varanini's entry on Pia in *ED*, IV, pp. 462-67 and his article, "Il punto sulla Pia (*Purg.* V, 130-36)", *Studi filologici*

letterari e storici, in memoria di Guido Favati, a cura di Giorgio Varanini and Palmiro Pinagli, II (Padua: Antenore, 1977), pp. 621-38.

- 3 See Gaspero Ciacci, *Gli Aldobrandeschi nella storia e nella 'Divina Commedia'*, Torno I (Rome: Biblioteca d'Arte Editrice, 1935); Alessandro Lisini and Giulio Bianchi Bandinelli, *La Pia dantesca* (Siena: Accademia per le Arti e per le Lettere, 1939); Giorgio Varanini's entry on Pia in *ED*. See also Alessandro Lisini, *Nuovo documento della Pia de' Tolomei figlia di Buonincontro Guastelloni* (Siena: Lazzari, 1893) [per le nozze Bandini e Ciampoli-Soldateschi]; Pio Spagnotti, *La Pia de' Tolomei Saggio storico-critico* (Florence: G. B. Paravia, 1893).
- 4 For a more detailed discussion of the identity of Pia see my essay, "Ricorditi di me, che son la Pia": *Purgatorio* V", *Esperienze letterarie*, anno XX, n. 3 (1995), 47-62. More recently Filippo Morgante provides a synthesis of the episode ("La Pia dantesca", *LAlighieri*, 14, Nuova Serie, anno XL [luglio-dicembre, 1999], 33-40).
- 5 Pasquale Vannucci, *Il canto V del "Purgatorio"* (Turin: SEI, 1961), p. 30.
- 6 Umberto Bosco, *Dante vicino* (Caltanissetta-Rome: S. Sciascia, 1966), p. 149.
- 7 Mario Puppo, *Il Canto V del "Purgatorio"* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1968), p. 20.
- 8 Alberto Chiari, *Ancora con Dante* (Naples: Liguori, 1977), p. 136.
- 9 Uberto Limentani, *Dante's Comedy: Introductory Readings of Selected Cantos* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), p. 95.
- 10 Dante Alighieri, *Die Gottliche Komödie italienisch and deutsch*, Übersetzt and kommentiert von Hermann Gmelin, Band V Kommentar (Munich: Reprint, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag), 1988, pp. 108-109.
- 11 English translation taken from The Jerusalem Bible, with abridged introduction and notes (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), p. 757.
- 12 Italian translation taken from La Sacra Bibbia (Rome: Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, S.R.L., 1974), p. 1056.
- 13 Glauco Cambon, "Purgatorio, Canto V: The Modulations of Solitude" in *Dante's Craft: Studies in Language and Style* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 106.
- 14 Peter Armour, "The Theme of Exodus in the First Two Cantos of the *Purgatorio*", *Dante Soundings*, ed. David Nolan (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1981), p. 78.