Rhythmical Figures in Dante's *Commedia*: A Study of Memory and Composition after Gianfranco Contini

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Abstract

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This thesis takes Contini's 1965 study 'Un'interpretazione di Dante', and its discussion of repeated lines and part-lines, as its point of departure in order to pursue new understanding of the compositional processes of Dante's *Commedia*. It shows how the repetition of similar items, or 'figures', relates to orality both in a transmissional, or textual-critical sense, as well as in a compositional, or oral-formulaic, sense. Recollected language in the poem is discovered to be more pervasive than hitherto thought, and this data is then interrogated, revealing a conception of heterogenous units of rhythm and syntax susceptible of re-use. This challenges the frameworks for prosodic description that have been used to date to describe the poem, while setting up a new historical understanding of rhythm as 'shape'. These intertwined rhythmical-syntactical units, revealed through line-by-line comparison of the entire poem, are then shown to be historically emplaced – a product of the language-learning practices of the medieval *grammatica*. *Figurae uerborum*, a medieval conception of syntax and rhythm belonging to the *grammatica*, and Contini's 'figure ritmiche' together raise an interpretive challenge: they ask for an autonomous way of speaking about achievements of syntax and rhythm, with reference to new critical categories – particularly memorability and authority. A final section proposes a rhythmical-critical experiment: a practical-critical analysis of a specific rhythmical shape, exploring how the new compositional dynamics discovered in the course of the thesis change how the critic relates to the newly conceived poetic object. From medieval grammarians to twentieth-century philologists, this thesis uncovers a tradition of thought that sees rhythm not as an accident of poetic language, but as a grammatical phenomenon, best exemplified in the poets.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Introduction

What does a decent memory of Dante's *Commedia* hear as it reads? A few terzine from the fifth canto of *Purgatorio* are enough to give a sense of how memory uncovers echoes between parts of the poem:

> Che potea io ridir, se non « Io vegno »?
>
> Dissilo, alquanto del color consperso
>
> che fa l'uom di perdon talvolta degno.
>
> E 'ntanto per la costa di traverso
>
> venivan genti innanzi a noi un poco,
>
> cantando '*Miserere*' a verso a verso.
>
> Quando s'accorser ch'i' non dava loco
>
> per lo mio corpo al trapassar d'i raggi,
>
> mutar lor canto in un « oh! » lungo e roco;   (*Purg*. 5.19-27)[1]

At the top of this quote Dante responds to Vergil's injunction to follow, and to disregard the whisperings about him: 'Vien dietro a me, e lascia dir le genti' (*Purg*. 5.13). Dante has been reprimanded by Vergil once before now for his prurient regard for gossip. He remarked at that point how the reprimand lingered still in his memory: 'volsimi verso lui con tal vergogna, / ch'ancor per la memoria mi si gira' (*Inf*. 30.135-6). At the bottom of the above quote we also

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[1] Dante, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994). All further canto and line references will be given in this format: canticle (*Inf*., *Purg*. *Par*.), followed by Arabic numerals for canto and line. Line references only will be given in the case of successive references to a particular passage. All further references to Dante's *Commedia* will be to Petrocchi's text, in the Le Lettere edition of 1994. Subsequent citations often include, however, my amendments to Petrocchi's text, which are always explained in accompanying footnotes.

find the second instance in *Purgatorio* so far of a scene that repeats throughout the canticle.[2] Dante's shadow, his body which is impermeable to light, has startled a crowd, bringing its previous activity to a halt. Both of these actions then already have a layered significance, or are more like a second night than a début.

But narrative analogies of this kind are not the only ones to emerge. Lines and part-lines, too, recall other lines and part-lines of the *Commedia*. Textually then as well, the poet works by putting new wine in old wineskins. Line 21 above – 'che fa l'uom di perdon talvolta degno' – is a shape of line the poet often makes with 'degno', placing the adjective at the end of the line with 'di' + nominal before it. So this line recalls the poet's description of purgatory, a place 'dove l'umano spirito si purga / e di salire al ciel diventa degno' (*Purg.* 1.5-6). Sordello's appeal to Vergil a few canti on comes also to mind: 'S'io son d'udir le tue parole degno, / dimmi se vien d'inferno, e di qual chiostra' (*Purg.* 7.20-1). All three purgatorial lines in turn recall a half-line from *Inferno*, in which Pier della Vigna swears that 'già mai non ruppi fede / al mio segnor, che fu d'onor sì degno' (*Inf.* 13.74-5). These textual echoes can be found throughout the passage.

Line 23 above, in which a new set of purgatorial souls appear – 'venivan genti innanzi a noi un poco' – is a narratival, matter-of-fact replaying of Vergil's words to the bewildered souls of *Purg.* 2. There, the newly arrived 'nova gente' (58) turn to the pilgrims for direction, and Vergil replies:

…Voi credete

forse che siamo esperti d'esto loco

ma noi siam peregrin come voi siete.

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[2] The first being *Purg.* 2.67-75. Seeing Dante breathe, 's'affisar quelle / anime fortunate tutte quante, / quasi oblïando d'ire a farsi belle' (73-5).

> Dianzi venimmo, **innanzi a voi un poco**
>
> per altra via, che fu sì aspra e forte,   (*Purg.* 2.61-5)[3]

The second hemistichs of these lines are identical ('voi' becomes 'noi'), but the movement of *venire* back makes a pause-less line out of a strongly bifurcated one.

There are other part-lines that a decent memory recognises, perhaps with a subtler sense of acquaintance, from elsewhere. Sometimes the recall seems beyond comment, because reused bits of language can be merely phrasal or idiomatic. That is the case with the second hemistich of line 24, 'a verso a verso'. Singing 'Miserere' 'line by line' or 'part by part' seems natural enough. But does one also hear, in this phrasing, the *iracondi* of *Inf.* 7 employing all their limbs, 'troncandosi co' denti a brano a brano' (*Inf.* 7.114)? Or Vergil's duty in leading Dante 'per lo 'nferno qua giù di giro in giro' (*Inf.* 28.50)?[4]

The initial gerund of this same line – 'cantando "*Miserere*" a verso a verso' – might also mark out a kind of line that is characteristic of this poet. Wrestlers fight, 'avvisando lor presa e lor vantaggio' (*Inf.* 16.24). A metamorphosed snake-man, 'fiera divenuta / suffolando si fugge per la valle' (*Inf.* 25.136-7). The poet asks that Calliope 'alquanto surga / seguitando il mio canto' (*Purg.* 1.9-10). Counting up to this point in *Purgatorio*, there are over twenty-five lines that begin with a gerund. Can common syntactical organisation, of that kind, also make for memorial association?

Sometimes a prior instance of a particular word, used before in some significant way, is what is recollected in reading. Stronger still, though, is the memory of hearing the word in the same spot, or the same location in the line. So Adam's words on the fall in Paradise,

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[3] I use bold type throughout when calling attention to an argumentatively relevant part of a citation from the *Commedia*.

[4] Itself quite close to 'con questo vivo giù di balzo in balzo' (*Inf.* 29.95). See also 'di grado in grado, come que' che lassi' (*Inf.* 11.18), 'Così di ponte in ponte, altro parlando' (*Inf.* 21.1), 'potavam sú montar di chiappa in chiappa' (*Inf.* 26.33), 'e altri fin qua giù di giro in giro.' (*Par.* 32.36), 'di vello in vello giú discese poscia' (*Inf.* 34.74), 'di mondo in mondo cercar mi si face' (*Purg.* 5.63).

> …non il gustar del legno
>
> fu per sé la cagion di tanto essilio,
>
> ma solamente il trapassar del segno.   (*Par*. 26.115-17)

ring in, or appear prepared by, the description of the Purgatorial souls' amazement at Dante's body impermeable to light, found in the opening passage:

> Quando s'accorser ch'i' non dava loco
>
> per lo mio corpo al trapassar d'i raggi,
>
> mutar lor canto in un «oh!» lungo e roco;   (*Purg*. 5.25-7).

'[T]rapassar' is used in this *tronco* form five times in the *Commedia*.[5] But this pair of instances is encountered as more than a lexical reprisal. The subjective genitive endings ('del segno', 'dei raggi'), the equal syllable quantity of the hemistichs beginning 'al/il trapassar', as well as the sinalèfe over the caesural pause ('solament*e i*l', 'corp*o a*l'), all mean that 'trapassar' seems to be remembered in a particular part of the line, in a particular kind of line. It is a larger structure that is recollected than simply the lexeme.

This is also something that happens with line 19 above – 'Che potea io ridir, se non « Io vegno »?'. The infinitive verb *ridire* frequently appears exactly there in the line. So in the first lines in the *Commedia* Dante tells us, 'Io non so ben ridir com' i' v'intrai,' (*Inf*. 1.10), and in Paradise he compares himself to a pilgrim who has arrived at his votive destination 'e spera già ridir com' ello stea' (*Par*. 31.45). Reading, one can hear this word placement as echoic –

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[5] *Inf*. 3.74, *Purg*. 5.26, 8.21, *Par*. 26.117, 27.75.

as a slight recollection that this has been said this way before, such that even a mental reading voice knows how to 'say' this shape 'again', with this pause and perhaps this tone.

Continuing to listen carefully to these nine lines from *Purgatorio* 5, finding all the holds for memory, we come to what are familiar points of style. Line 27, the last cited above – 'mutar lor canto in un « oh! » lungo e roco;' – contains a doubling of adjectives which is frequent at the end of the line in the poem. It is most often not merism or hendiadys, but a conceptually contrastive pair of adjectives or verbs. This pair occupies four syllables (because of sinalèfe), and is akin to many another four-syllable pair that occupies the space between the principal stress in the line and the end of the line. So Francesca says, 'dirò come colui che piange e dice' (*Inf.* 5.126), the hypocrites go 'piangendo e nel sembiante stanca e vinta' (*Inf.* 23.60).[6] One encounters these adjectival pairs – in four, five, as well as six syllable forms – so often in the poem that they begin to take on the profile of a set shape, much as 'a verso a verso' and 'di giro in giro' do.

Six of the nine lines, then, in the first passage cited show some kind of analogy with other lines in the poem – some wholly, others in part, some in terms of phrasal or habitual language, and some by the fixed place they assign to a word in a line. This kind of associative work might be continued, depending on how one finds and counts resemblances. But there is no need to push exhaustiveness. This first exercise has cleared enough ground to suggest that Dante's poem is, in considerable part, made out of language that it constantly turns over and re-uses. To show this to be a more pervasive phenomenon than even Dante's professional readers are aware of is the first task of this thesis.

But there is a further aim in this. The poem directs us, through its reuse, towards an understanding of the objects out of which it is composed. Re-used language decomposes and shows up the discrete parts of the verse-line. It suggests how the poem thinks in its own craft,

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[6] See for example *Inf.* 5.126, 16.22, 23.60, 30.25, 30.66, *Purg.* 2.65, 5.27, 6.63.

proposing building-blocks, which in turn let us ask what aspects of the make-up of language these building-blocks privilege. That is, we can ask of this repeated language, whether the poem merely recollects words, or also syntactical, phonetic, rhythmic or other content. Beginning with repeated language, and using memory as a guide, allows for foundational questions to be posed about the units out of which the poem is composed. Prior to their division into historical linguistics[7] and metricology,[8] and into further subfields like stylistics[9] or *linguistische stilistik*[10] and rhetorical analysis,[11] this way of working asks about the constitutive

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[7] Linguistics can mean both the vast field of historical linguistics with reference to Dante, as well as the textual-critical question of the *veste linguistica* of the poem. An of excellent *précis* of historical linguistics as regards Dante is Paola Manni, *La lingua di Dante* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013). For recent trends in the study of the *veste linguistica*, see Giovanna Frosini, 'Il volgare', in *Dante fra il settecentocinquantenario della nascita (2015) e il settecentenario della morte (2021): Atti delle Celebrazioni in Senato, del Forum e del Convegno internazionale di Roma: maggio-ottobre 2015*, 2 vols (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2016), II, 505–33.

[8] The topic of metrical analysis is central to chapter 2, and will be treated amply there. The recent comprehensive analyses of the metre of the *Commedia* are Marco Praloran, 'Osservazioni sul ritmo nella «Commedia»', in *Nuove prospettive sulla tradizione della «Commedia»: Una guida filologico-linguistica al poema dantesco*, ed. by Paolo Trovato (Franco Cesati, 2007), pp. 457–66; David Robey, *Sound and Structure in the Divine Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Prue Shaw, *Dante Alighieri: Commedia: A Digital Edition* (Saskatoon: Scholarly Digital Editions, 2011); David Robey, 'Sound and Metre in Italian Narrative Verse' <http://www.italianverse.reading.ac.uk/database.htm> [accessed 2 July 2019]. This last presents Robey's line-by-line metrical analysis, which also appears in Shaw's digital edition, in an online searchable database.

[9] German-language stylistics has been particularly influential in the study of Dante. The instigating figure in this tradition is Leo Spitzer, who wrote on Dante in esp. Leo Spitzer, 'Speech and Language in Inferno XIII', *Italica*, 19.3 (1942), 81–104; Leo Spitzer, 'The Farcical Elements in Inferno, Cantos XXI-XXIII', *Modern Language Notes*, 59.2 (1944), 83–88; Leo Spitzer, 'The Addresses to the Reader in the "Commedia"', *Italica*, 32.3 (1955), 143–65.) But Spitzer's successor in his post at Istanbul, Erich Auerbach, is of course the most important representative of this tradition for Dante studies. This includes Erich Auerbach, *Dante als Dichter der irdischen Welt* (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1929); Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Bern: A. Francke Verlag, 1946); Erich Auerbach, *Literatursprache und Publikum in der lateinischen Spätantike und im Mittelalter* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1958). A figure soon to be central to this this thesis, Gianfranco Contini, was deeply influenced by this tradition, and a section of one of his most important collections of essays is devoted to the 'Storia della critica stilistica': Gianfranco Contini, *Varianti e altra linguistica: Una raccolta di saggi (1938-1968)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), pp. 633–88. For a recent history of stylistics in Italy, see Luca D'Onghia, 'Momenti della critica stilistica in Italia negli anni 1972-2011', *Italianistica: Rivista di letteratura italiana*, 41.1 (2012), 93–105.

[10] A particularly comprehensive study of syntactical-stylistic *stilemi* or 'Stilbegriffe' (defined in this case as 'Die Beschreibung der verschiedenen Normen anhand von Modifikatoren' of general syntactical norms) is Christoph Schwarze, *Untersuchungen zum syntaktischen Stil der italienischen Dichtungssprache bei Dante* (Bad Homburg: Gehlen, 1970).

[11] Giovanni Nencioni's essay 'Dante e la retorica' is fundamental to the work carried out in chapter 4, which seeks to advance his question: 'Fino a che punto infatti certi suoi stilemi sono, anziché *colores*, anziché *exornationes* attenuate attraverso una deliberata *amplificatio*, modi istituzionalizzati di un volgare che ha dilatato i propri registri, scelte normali di una sua piú ricca articolazione semantica e sintattica?' Likewise, Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo's work on Dante' rhetorical *constructio* is fundamental to that chapter. Peter Dronke is an important figure in the critical discussion regarding Dante's conception of rhetorical *ornatus*. For a summary of rhetorical sources available to Dante, Martinez' essay is the most up-to-date. Recent work, in particular an essay by Veronica Albi on Dante's relation to one specific author of an *ars poetriae*, suggests that this field will remain important. See Giovanni Nencioni, *Tra grammatica e retorica. Da Dante a Pirandello* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), p.

parts of the poem compositionally – based, that is, on the expediency of certain structures to the poet's use. These compositional units can then be placed within historical modes of reading, making sense of, and composing texts – indeed, within an understanding of language make-up closer to the grammatical categories of Dante's own time, according to which the distinction between word order and rhythm, for instance, is very different to what we take it to be now.

The present thesis makes two claims, then. Or one claim and an entailment. The first is about memory – that re-used language in the poem is so pervasive as to be not merely so many motivated correspondences (signals or signposts) between lines, but a generalisable condition of the text. The second is about grammar – that prior to our own disciplinary division into stylistics, metrics, historical syntax, and so forth, these lines that seem to share shapes, and be multiply malleable and re-usable, relate to a medieval discourse – the *grammatica* – which integrates many of the linguistic phenomena we now treat separately. These two claims amount to a theory of composition. This a word which, with some trepidation, I use here because reuse, recollection, and associated variation seem altogether to suggest a process – something in course – and the associated work or skill of a maker, a 'fabbro del parlar' (*Purg*. 26.117). We are not in the habit of speaking about composition, or the process of elaboration of the *Commedia*, principally because of the paucity of any kind of provisional document or attestation of draft stages.[12] However, a proposal of this kind, which treats internal evidence, has not yet been put forward.

124; Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, *Linguistica e retorica di Dante* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1978); Peter Dronke, *Dante and the Medieval Latin Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Ronald Martinez, 'Rhetoric, Literary Theory, and Practical Criticism', in *Dante in Context*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Baranski and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 277–96; Veronica Albi, 'Dante e Goffredo di Vinsauf: Per un primo bilancio', in *Dante e la retorica*, ed. by Luca Marcozzi (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2017), pp. 11–29.

[12] A notable exception to this statement is the theory of the proto-diffusion of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. See in particular Riccardo Viel, 'Ecdotica e Commedia: le costellazioni della tradizione nell'Inferno e nel Paradiso dantesco', in *Culture, livelli di cultura e ambienti nel Medioevo occidentale. Atti del IX Convegno della Società Italiana di Filologia Romanza (S.I.F.R), Bolgona, 5-8 ottobre 2009*, ed. by Francesco Benozzo and others (Rome: Aracne, 2012), pp. 991–1022.

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I am not the first to suggest that the *Commedia* substantially repeats itself. The credit for this claim belongs to Gianfranco Contini, and his 1965 paper 'Un'interpretazione di Dante'. Contini first published the essay in Roberto Longhi's journal *Paragone*, and then simultaneously rebound it in 1970 in both *Varianti e altra linguistica*,[13] a collection of his mid-career essays, and in *Un'idea di Dante*, his collection of Dantean essays.[14] 'Un'interpretazione' was one of Contini's most important achievements – not least in its author's own eyes.[15] In its opening pages Contini asserts a fact about the poem: what he calls the 'oggettiva memorabilità del testo dantesco'.[16] This 'memorability' is the reason why so many poets after Dante cannot escape from Dante's turn of phrase. But it also, Contini thinks, explains why the poet repeats his own turns of phrase throughout his corpus, and in the *Commedia* in particular. The principal claim of this thesis, then, is drawn from this 1965 work of Contini's. Contini's work itself merits close study as it proposes a great instauration in the way we speak about Dante that has not yet come to pass. 'Un'interpretazione' is built like a digressive spiral, where claims hide their origins and ends, and concatenation often has a dialectical force. This thesis does not then seek to explain Contini's essay as one settled claim, so much as to examine its wellsprings and where it tends, tacking close to Contini's often very individual sense of his axial terms and the consequences of his 'interpretation' of 'Dante'. Of all of Contini's terms in

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[13] Contini, *Varianti*, pp. 369–405.

[14] Gianfranco Contini, *Un'idea di Dante: Saggi danteschi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), pp. 69–111. There are important changes to the text between these printings: notably the text in *Paragone* and *Varianti* does not include footnote 1 present on p. 85 of *Un'idea* ('Lo sdrucciolo può essere ottenuto…'). The text I print throughout, as a result, is that in *Un'idea*.

[15] In a late-life interview with Ludovica Ripa di Meana, Contini names the essay as one of the two accomplishments that mattered to him most. The other was his 1984 edition of the Fiore and Detto d'Amore. See Gianfranco Contini and Ludovica Ripa di Meana, *Diligenza e Voluttà. Ludovica Ripa Di Meana Interroga Gianfranco Contini* (Milan: Mondadori, 1989), pp. 217–28.

[16] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 79.

'Un'interpretazione', the most central is *memory*, and the claim about the 'oggettiva memorabilità' of the poem. And so it is with memory that I'll begin.

Surely all poems are to some extent memorable. Mikhail Gasparov's comparative study of European verse systems begins with a definition of 'verse' as, precisely, memory-language:

> Verse is text that is felt to be language of particular seriousness, intended to be remembered and repeated. The verse text makes for this object by dividing language into defined segments that may easily be grasped by the mind. Besides the divisions within the language as a whole—into sentences, parts of sentences, groups of sentences, and so on—there is here an additional division, into correlatable and commensurate segments, each of which is called a verse line.[17]

If a 'verse line' is definitionally an 'object…easily grasped by the mind', something which other objects forged by other divisions of language (words, sentences) are not, why should Contini want to say that *this* swathe of verse is particularly memorable, or say the memorable-ness of poetry is especially true of Dante's *Commedia*?

Contini's essay looks, first, for ways to substantiate this claim about the poem's hold on memory. Of this 'objective memorability', Contini claims that 'la memoria nazionale è un corollario, una stampa della oggettiva memorabilità del testo dantesco'.[18] Contini begins with a list of endlessly rehashed, national-cultural-endowment type Dantean phrases: 'mezzo del cammin', 'l'amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle', 'falsa e bugiarda', 'tremar le vene e i polsi'.[19] His object is not Italianness, however, nor Dante's place in the history of the Italian language. He is after a stamp of the 'oggettiva memorabilità del testo dantesco' because it bears

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[17] M.L. Gasparov, *A History of European Versification*, ed. by G.S. Smith and L. Holford-Strevens, trans. by G.S. Smith and Marina Tarlinskaja (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 1.
[18] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 79.
[19] Cited in Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 79.

on the particular circumstances of this poem, the particular 'object' that this text is. '[B]uona filologia sembrandomi il riconoscimento della situazione particolare dei singoli testi', Contini writes. And so Dante's 'memorability' is 'un oggetto necessario della filologia'.[20]

A memorable object moves differently, has different and potentially more numerous contexts than an object constrained by size or abstruseness to dwell *in situ*. Poets and lawgivers are memory artists because poetry and law must be moveable, portable, goods.[21] The association between poetry and memory continues to the modern period. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, writing about William Wordsworth in his *Biographia Literaria*, attempted to analyse this connection:

> I do not adduce it as a fair criterion of comparative excellence, nor do I even think it such; but merely as matter of fact. I affirm, that from no contemporary writer could so many lines be quoted, without reference to the poem in which they are found, for their own independent weight or beauty. From the sphere of my own experience I can bring to my recollection three persons of no every-day powers and acquirements, who had read the poems of others with more and more unallayed pleasure, and had thought more highly of their authors, as poets; who yet have confessed to me, that from no modern work had so many passages started up anew in their minds at different times, and as different occasions had awakened a meditative mood.[22]

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[20] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 73.

[21] Archaic Greek poets were oral reciters and composers of formulaic language handed down to them, and as such were masters of 'un-forgetting', ἀλήθεια, also the Greek word for 'truth'. The classic study is Marcel Detienne, *Les Maîtres de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1967). Émile Benveniste, to whom I will return later in this Introduction, shows that law worked analogously, via formulaic recollection of δίκαι, or 'the formulas of law which are handed down and which the judge is responsible for keeping and applying'. Émile Benveniste, *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society*, trans. by Elizabeth Palmer (Chicago: Hau Books, 2016), p. 394.

[22] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, 2 vols (Princeton and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul and Princeton University Press, 1983), II, p. 106.

Coleridge credits 'What the common people call dictionary words', as well as Wordsworth's 'modes of connections', that is, his syntax, for producing such a high proportion of memorable lines. Of the latter, Coleridge writes, 'the grammatical construction is not unfrequently peculiar. There is peculiarity in the frequent use of the ἀσυνάρτητον…and not less in the construction of words by apposition (*to him*, *a youth*).'[23] Wordsworth's memorability in part relies on a grammatical licence, which creates 'disconnected' (*asunartēton*) lines. But this is not just peculiar syntax, it is syntax in form. The spontaneous re-emergence of 'striking passages' – the way they 'started up anew' in the minds of readers in the conduct of their lives – has to do with how these decontextualizable shapes possess something formal, an 'independent weight or beauty'. Coleridge's critical language here, in fact, draws on the recollective procedures of Wordsworth's poetry itself. In a footnote, Coleridge signals up one 'dictionary word' for meditation. The word is 'scene'. He cites from the *Prelude*, Book 5:[24]

> And when it chanced
> That pauses of deep silence mocked his skill,
> Then sometimes in that silence, while he hung
> Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize
> Has carried far into his heart the voice
> Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene
> Would enter unawares into his mind
> With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,

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[23] Coleridge, II, p. 106.

[24] Coleridge rather says he cites from 'There was a boy', a poem of 1798 published in 1800, and later introduced into the *Prelude*. The 1800 text of the printed 'There was a boy' is substantially different to that found in either the *Biographia* or the *Prelude*: 'And, when there came a pause / Of silence such as baffled his best skill: / Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung / Listening…' William Wordsworth, *The Poetic Works*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1904), p. 183.

Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received

Into the bosom of the steady lake.[25]

The 'scene' here 'Would enter unawares' into the mind of the poet, in the way that 'so many passages started up anew' in the 'minds' of Coleridge and his friends, and 'at different times'. If catchiness relies on the 'independent weight or beauty' of a line, this in turn may rely on a distinct quality of attention. '[I]n that silence, while he hung / Listening' – Coleridge calls this a 'meditative mood'.[26] This 'enter[ing] unawares into the mind' of different lines is how Contini thinks Dante's poetry works. So striking are such a great proportion of Dante's lines, that they emerge unawares in a 'memoria involontaria'.[27] We find this in the national memory, we find this in the work of other poets of Dante's period and after, and we find it in ourselves. But 'ci si può anche chiedere', Contini writes, 'se essa [la oggetiva memorabilità del testo dantesco] non cominci ad agire sull'autore stesso'.[28]

To show the workings of the poet's, or the poem's, memory of itself, Contini assembles a list – 'di necessità molto parca' – of 'echi di Dante entro Dante'.[29] He gives no initial definition of what counts as an 'echo', or a repetition, though his examples are assembled in a way that works towards the definition of a 'figur[a] ritmic[a]', a 'rhythmical abstraction' similar to what Coleridge calls a line's 'independent weight or beauty'.[30] Contini refines this object of memory from samples of 'echi di Dante entro Dante', beginning with lexical or thematic overlaps, and working from there toward a more and more abstracted unit.

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[25] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The 1805 Text*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt and Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 5.404-413.

[26] Coleridge famously claims about the effects of metre, that they extend the dislocating kind of thinking of a 'mood': 'As a medicated atmosphere, or as wine during animated conversation, they act powerfully, though themselves unnoticed. Where, therefore, correspondent food and appropriate matter are not provided for the attention and feelings thus roused there must needs be a disappointment felt; like that of leaping in the dark from the last step of a stair-case, when we had prepared our muscles for a leap of three or four.' Coleridge, II, p. 66.

[27] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 88.

[28] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 79.

[29] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 80.

[30] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, pp. 83–84.

Contini begins with correlations of lines and terzine that are 'sintatticamente affini'. His first example relates to a famous textual *crux* – the meaning of 'colui' in 'colui ch'attende là' in *Inferno* 10. 'It is obvious' Contini writes, that the following lines from *Purgatorio*:

> Da me non venni:
>
> donna scese dal ciel, per li cui preghi
>
> de la mia compagnia costui sovvenni,   (1.52-4)

'evoke and mirror in their formal particulars' the famous lines from *Inferno* 10:

> Da me stesso non vegno:
>
> colui ch'attende là, per qui mi mena
>
> forse cui Guido vostro ebbe a disdegno.[31]   (61).

Support for taking 'cui' to mean Beatrice rather than Vergil, in *Inf.* 10 can be drawn from the fact that the poet reuses the syntactical structure for a terzina at *Purg.* 1.52-4, where Vergil explicitly refers to Beatrice. Indeed, the Cato-Vergil exchange in the surrounding lines of *Purg.* 1 sounds a lot like the Beatrice-Vergil exchange reported in *Inferno* 2: 'grazie riporterò de te a lei (*Purg.* 1.83), 'di te mi loderò sovente a lui (*Inf.* 2.74); 'bastisi ben che per lei mi richegge (*Purg.* 1.93), 'tal che di comandare io la richiesi' (*Inf.* 2.54).[32] Given how these parallels address a key interpretive *crux*, it is then a surprise to find that Contini considers these first examples of 'echi di Dante entro Dante' of limited importance to his project. In this case 'La somiglianza verbale riprodu[ce] *meramente* la vicinanza tematica e ideologica'.[33] Contini's

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[31] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, pp. 80–81. *Purg.* 1.52-4, *Inf.* 10.61.

[32] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 81. Purg. 1.83, Inf. 2.74, Purg. 19.61, Inf. 2.54.

[33] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 81. My emphasis.

quarry in putting together this list is not 'merely', or even primarily, interpretative. These 'thematic or ideological' inferences cannot be assumed, always, to be the poet's motivation in repeating himself.

Contini's formula, 'echi di Dante entro Dante', recalls a long-standing exegetical strategy employed by Dante's commentators: 'Leggere Dante con Dante'. To begin to see the peculiarity of Contini's proposal, one need only see that this tradition is explicitly 'thematic or ideological'. Underpinning 'Leggere Dante con Dante' is the sense that Dante, in Simon Gilson's words, 'often marks out correspondences for reader [sic] based on systems of intratextual echoes'. These 'echoes' include a number of different phenomena of repetition: 'not only words but also linguistic formulae, rhyme words and series of rhymes, images and motifs'.[34] This intra-textual cross-reference, founded on such coincidences, can work to clarify the poet's intention, but scholars in this tradition have also suggested that such echoes are more systematically deployed. For Amilcare Ianucci, the discovery of internal networks of references amount to Dante's imitation of a Scriptural interpretative mode. Textual correspondences in the *Commedia*, he suggests, imitate the exegesis of Scripture based on 'parallel passages'.[35] For Giorgio Brugnoli, the re-turning of significant language – particularly the pervasive echoes of the language of the Ulysses canto in the later *Commedia* – amounts to a pre-modern philological attention on the part of the poet.[36] More recently, for Lloyd Howard, intra-textual echoes are addressed to the reader as 'signposts', or even 'alternate or hidden journey[s]' through the poem.[37] To these scholars' proposals might be compared similar proposals to do with systematic intra-poem echoes in other poets' work. Very influential in the

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[34] Simon Gilson, 'The Wheeling Sevens', in *Vertical Readings in Dante's Comedy*, ed. by Heather Webb and George Corbett, 3 vols (Cambridge: OpenBook Publishers, 2015), I, 143–60 (p. 148).
[35] Amilcare A. Iannucci, 'Autoesegesi Dantesca: La Tecnica Dell' "Episodio Parallelo" Nella «Commedia»', *Lettere Italiane*, 33.3 (1981), 305–28 (p. 312).
[36] Giorgio Brugnoli, *Studi Danteschi*, 3 vols (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 1998), III, pp. 13–18.
[37] Lloyd Howard, *Formulas of Repetition in Dante's Commedia: Signposted Journeys Across Textual Space* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), pp. 5, 7.

mid-Century study of Vergil, in fact, was Viktor Pöschl's theory of a system of correspondences in the *Aeneid*, for which Pöschl proposed a musical theory of composition, tied to a notion of 'mood'.[38] Against this tradition, Contini's interest in the 'echi di Dante entro Dante' he discovers is not primarily interpretative. This purposiveness he eschews with the mention of a 'memoria involontaria'.[39] A good reader can 'prender le mosse da qualsiasi punto', and the discovery of echoes 'potrebbe continuare a lungo':[40] a *prima facie* intention does not always hold.

In his first example, given above, Contini proceeds to find more echoes elsewhere in the poem. The lines from *Purg.* 1, 'Da me non venni: / donna scese dal ciel, per li cui preghi…', are also discernible in 'Elli stesso s'accusa; / questi è Nembròt, per lo cui mal coto…' (*Inf.* 31.77).[41] In this case, however, one would be hard pressed to discover or invent a thematic association. So Contini asks if 'questa volta non è assolutamente funzione della materia, ma una sorta di organizzazione originaria?'[42] The recollection of an 'independent weight or beauty', or of an 'organizzazione originaria', is not tied to content, but seems to determine the shape of the lines in *Inf.* 31 and *Purg.* 1 all the same. It is as though these lines are prepared in the same pre-existing mould. This symmetry is mostly independent of lexical choices (apart from *per lo/li cui* there are no common words), and of what the respective lines do in their respective places (one of these lines parries a false assumption, the other names a character). The 'ech[o]' here is not even of phonetic content, as '*venn*i: / *donn*a' hardly 'echoes' 's'ac*cu*sa; / *ques*ti'. The question of the make-up of the poet's memory becomes a search for what this 'original organisation' consists in, as it starts up anew in the poet's mind.

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[38] Viktor Pöschl, *The Art of Vergil: Image and Symbol in the Aeneid*, trans. by Gerda Seligson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962).
[39] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 88.
[40] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 83.
[41] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 81.
[42] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 81.

Sometimes it seems these echoes are exceedingly conservative. Contini gives the examples of 'e 'l viso m'era a la marina torto' (*Purg.* 9.45), 'Ond'io, ch'era ora a la marina volto (*Purg* 2.100),[43] and 'Com'a l'annunzio di dogliosi danni' (*Purg.* 14.67), and 'con tristo annunzio di futuri danni' (*Inf.* 13.12).[44] The retouchings here are light: one three-syllable adjective for another, or simply a *v* for a *t*. The identity in these cases runs to almost the entire line. But sometimes the 'echo' concerns just one half of the line, marking out the hemistich division: 'per la tua fame sanza fine cupa' (*Purg.* 20.12), 'e sarai meco sanza fine cive' (*Purg.* 32.101), and 'Giù per lo mondo sanza fine amaro' (*Par.* 17.112).[45] It is not just 'sanza fine' that is common to these lines: it is the same six-syllable hemistich that repeats in all three cases (made possible by sinalèfe in the last instance). If some examples express metrical divisions, grammatical forms, too, can seem like blocks reassembled to make new structures. *Purgatorio* 9.33-6,

L'ardore del fuoco fa

che convenne che 'l sonno si rompesse.

 Non altrimenti Achille si riscosse,

li occhi svegliati rivolgendo in giro

e non sappiendo là dove si fosse.

is made from number of forms also present together in *Inferno* 4: 'Ruppemi l'alto sonno' (1), 'un greve truono, sí ch'io mi riscossi' (2), 'e l'occhio riposato intorno mossi' (4), 'per conoscer lo loco dov'io fossi (6).[46] It is not just the words, but grammatical forms from *Inferno* 4 which

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[43] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 83.
[44] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 84.
[45] Contini also notes here that these lines are borrowed by Guido Gozzano in 'Signorina Felicità': 'Donna: mistero senza fine bello!' Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 84.
[46] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 82.

are reassembled in *Purgatorio*. The perfect 'mi riscossi' and 'si riscosse', and subjunctive 'dov'io fossi' and 'dove si fosse' forms are preserved in either passage, but are exchanged in 'Ruppemi l'alto sonno' and ''l sonno si rompesse'. Nominal forms, too, are common to both passages: 'li occhi svegliati', 'e l'occhio riposato'. The echoes Contini prizes are not of theme or lexis, but are grammatical or even metrical, and as such they seem to express not considered comparisons between passages, but 'involuntary' reprises.

Contini's list includes 'figure puramente grammaticali' – of the kind 'lento lento' and 'vago vago' (*Purg*. 28.5, *Purg*. 32.135), normal superlative forms which Dante uses to end lines, or 'serrando e diserrando' and 'provando e riprovando', double-gerunds he often uses to begin them.[47] It includes what Contini calls 'formule in rima', or whole phrases that repeat at the end line like 'caldi e geli' (*Purg*. 3.31, *Par*. 21.116), 'mondo errante' (*Par*. 12.94, *Par*. 20.67), or 'tra cotanto senno' (*Inf*. 4.102, *Purg*. 22.23). But beyond these recurring grammatical, or line-initial and line-end 'formulae', the largest part of Contini's attention is reserved for single lines. His interest is in the way 'riuscito una volta', a verse-line 'apparve imitabile al suo stesso inventore'.[48] As it develops, Contini's list moves further and further away from exact reprisals, and more and more towards what he at one point calls an 'identità di partizione mensurale' – a rhythmical identity between lines.[49] This culminates in his 'casi-limite', or how a late line like 'quanti son li splendori a chi s'appaia' can appear precisely modelled on the armature of 'Molti son li animali a cui s'ammoglia' (*Inf*. 1.100),[50] without repeated lexis, or how two lines from the *Paradiso* – 'E quando il dente longobardo morse' (*Par*. 6.94), 'Poi che la gente poverella crebbe' (*Par*. 11.94)[51] – share a formal shape, but express remarkably different content. This rhythmical shape is the nature of that 'organizzazione originaria', that

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[47] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 85.
[48] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 85.
[49] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 86.
[50] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 97.
[51] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 86.

pre-existing mould, which makes for the sense of identity between these lines. Without necessarily being spurred to it by a similar word, or a context, or a conceivable point of comparison, the poet nonetheless seems prone to the shapes of his own prior manufacture. To study the adhesiveness of this text in memory, including the poet's own, Contini then proposes a new tool:

> dai dati addotti già si ricava l'essenziale che valga a definire la memoria di Dante. Essa non è puramente verbale, per eccitazioni provenienti da oggetti affini, ma si organizza in figure ritmiche. Proprio del ritmo, in conformità della doppia natura, fonica e simbolica, del linguaggio, è da associarsi ugualmente allo schema mentale dell'enunciato, al valore categoriale dell'elemento (tale o tale parte del discorso), alla realizzazione timbrica della parola. Esito a dire se prevalga nello schedario l'aspetto semantico del linguaggio o quello musicale, ma, se prevedibile è l'omogeneità nell'articolazione del pensiero, colpisce come una sorpresa l'intensità dei valori puramente formali.[52]

A new critical object is proposed as a culmination, a 'figur[a] ritmic[a]'. This particular object is the refinement of the claims about poem's 'oggettiva memorabilità' and the assertion that it is 'un oggetto necessario della filologia'. Contini experimented throughout his career with declaring the 'object' of critical or philological study. In the early '40s, aged 31, Contini began work on Petrarch's authorial variants – an early work of *filologia d'autore* – with a reflexive assessment of his 'object', absorbing it into 'act': 'Se il critico intende l'opera d'arte come un «oggetto», ciò rappresenta soltanto l'oggettività del suo operare, il «dato» è l'ipotesi di lavoro

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[52] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 83.

morale della sua abnegazione', he wrote.[53] By the 1973 essay 'Un nodo della cultura medievale', Contini refuses the 'inganno naturalistico' that would represent criticism as an interaction between a reader and a textual object. Instead he sees the textual object as historically constituted by its criticism: 'un'opera vive nei suoi interpreti… Epistemologicamente è, mi sembra, del tutto corretto che si tenti di raggiungere i soggetti attraverso la loro obiettivazione nella storia della critica'.[54] In defining a new critical object in 'Un'interpretazione', the 'rhythmical figure', Contini presents in the guise of indecision a distinction that at once decides the nature of the foregoing lists. They were aimed at 'valori puramente formali', as separate as possible from semantic content, and, as a result, from any kind of verbal or psychological associationism, or 'eccitazioni provenienti da oggetti affini'. Dante's is a memory of forms, before content.

Contini will go on to say of the last examples cited above, that from his lists of re-used figures 'emerge chiaramente il preponderare del significante sul significato' in the memory of the poet.[55] This betrays a debt in the above lines, and their passing claim about the 'doppia natura, fonica e simbolica, del linguaggio', to Saussure. The phrase 'doppia natura' borrows the Saussurean distinction between concept and sound pattern. 'Le *signe* linguistique ainsi défini possède deux caractères primordiaux', Saussure states in the *Cours de linguistique générale*.[56] A likely source for Contini's borrowings from the language of linguistic structuralism is Émile Benveniste. Benveniste was in exile at the University of Fribourg during the war, where Contini gained his first teaching post in 1939. A mutual friend who had introduced Contini and Benveniste in France, the polyglot Catholic priest Jean de Menasce, also arranged for Benveniste's refuge at the Swiss university. Their friendship lasted

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[53] Gianfranco Contini, *Saggio d'un commento alle correzioni del Petrarca volgare* (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1943), p. 7.
[54] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 251.
[55] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 87.
[56] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, ed. by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye (Paris: Payot, 1971), p. 100. Saussure's emphasis.

Benveniste's lifetime, and in 1988 Contini, in an article in *Leggere*, recounted visiting Benveniste, now struggling with aphasia, for the last time in the Salpêtrière.[57] The year after Contini published 'Un'interpretazione di Dante' saw the release of Benveniste's *Problèmes de linguistique générale*. In it, Benveniste reiterates that the systematicity of language, and so the discernment of an underlying structure, applies only to phonology – not to signs as correlates of things. As such, though the relation between a sign and an object in the word appears arbitrary, there is nothing arbitrary about signification, or in the relation between a sign and its linguistic value, as this is a consequence of purely formal relations. 'Puisqu'il faut faire abstraction de la convenance du signe à la réalité, à plus forte raison doit-on ne considérer la valeur que comme un attribut de la *forme*, non de la substance. Dès lors dire que les valeurs sont « relatives » signifie qu'elles sont relatives *les unes aux autres*. Or n'est-ce pas là justement la preuve de leur nécessité ?'[58] Contini's discernment of 'valori puramenti formali' between lines of Dante's poem, then, accords with Benveniste's claim of where structure resides in language.

There have been two studies, in the wake of Contini's 'Un'interpretazione di Dante' which have tried to develop his critical object, the rhythmical figure. Both cite the particular paragraph above which defines the rhythmical figure in structuralist terms, to the exclusion of other phrases and ideas from Contini's larger essay. As a result, they are both confessedly structuralist in their approach. The first study is a 1975 book by Gian Luigi Beccaria, *L'autonomia del significante*. In it, Beccaria accepts the thesis of a 'prevalenza del ritmo sulla semanticità',[59] and, in so doing, adopts a definition of rhythm as what 'fa del discorso un'unità'. As he writes:

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[57] The short text was subsequently published in Gianfranco Contini, *Postremi esercizî ed elzeviri* (Turin: Einaudi, 1998). It is reprinted and analysed in Davide Colussi, 'Un ritratto di Gianfranco Contini', in *Le occasioni del testo: Venti letture per Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo* (Padua: CLEUP, 2016), pp. 237–54.

[58] Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 54.

[59] Gian Luigi Beccaria, *L'autonomia del significante. Figure del ritmo e della sintassi Dante, Pascoli, D'Annunzio* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), p. 128.

nella figura ritmica i rapporti formali raggiungono un'espressione "esplicita"…

indipendente da valori puramente semantici (la "forma" che si rende

indipendente dal "contenuto").[60]

This definition of a rhythmical figure proposes rhythmical 'unities' or 'units'. But for all that Beccaria purports to observe Contini's distinction between 'l'aspetto semantico del linguaggio o quello musicale', he then makes signs out of units of rhythm: 'l'autonomo configurarsi degli elementi ritmici è dovuto alla dimensione poetica che promuove ogni elemento (fonema, metro e sintassi ecc.) al rango di *segno*, di *figura* ritmica'.[61] Interpreting Beccaria's project in 1981, Pietro Beltrami went a step further. Contini's proposal regarding rhythmical figures, Beltrami writes, 'ha aperto vie completamente nuove alla ricerca'.[62] Taking over Beccaria's sense of rhythm as a unit-maker, Beltrami proposed to integrate these rhythmical units into an even more comprehensive structuralist grid. Rhythm is one level of unit among many, and the task for the philologist

consiste nell'individuare "figure", configurazione del linguaggio a tutti i livelli

(fonico, sintattico, semantico), e più ancora nel ricostruire come tali figure (la

cui natura dev'essere precisata) facciano "sistema" nell'opera studiata, nei

limiti in cui tale operazione sia concretamente possibile…[63]

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[60] Beccaria, p. 128.
[61] Beccaria, p. 7.
[62] Pietro G. Beltrami, *Metrica, Poetica, Metrica Dantesca*, Biblioteca degli studi mediolatini e volgari: nuova serie, 6 (Pisa: Pacini, 1981), p. 32.
[63] Beltrami, *Metrica, Poetica, Metrica Dantesca*, p. 9.

In this interpretation of Contini's proposal, all 'levels' of language, from phonemes to words, from word order to narrative, are made up of discrete 'figures', isolable shapes that partake of the nature of each level, which it is the critic's task to isolate and then configure in a 'sistema'. A perfect parts-and-wholes logic obtains for all elements of poetic discourse, and of rhythmical figures in particular Beltrami writes:

> mi sembra particolarmente importante sottolineare che tali figure pertengono sì al significante, nel senso che non dipendono dalla trama esplicita del testo, non appartengono al messaggio in quanto comunicativo; ma esse scaturiscono comunque da un'organizzazione totale del discorso, non solo degli aspetti fonici, ma anche di quelli sintattici e semantici…[64]

As a phoneme is to a word, then, so is a grouping of 'syntactical and semantic' elements to a rhythmical figure. Rhythmical figures exhibit a higher-level organising function, grouping words or even phrases into units susceptible of re-use. These rhythmised units, themselves organised by higher levels like narrative, can now fit into the 'system' of a poem, insofar as that is definitionally 'un discorso di ri-uso'.[65]

By emphasising the structuralist aspect of Contini's essay, these critics transform Contini's hesitant sense of rhythm as 'una sorta di organizzazione originaria' into 'un'organizzazione totale del discorso'. This happens because neither Beccaria nor Beltrami ask what Contini means by 'rhythm', and, indeed, the different kinds of 'echi' discussed above suggest that there is not a simple answer to that question. But by avoiding the question, rhythm and re-use become for both simply an index of total organisation, akin to the system that is

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[64] Beltrami, *Metrica, Poetica, Metrica Dantesca*, p. 11.
[65] Beltrami, *Metrica, Poetica, Metrica Dantesca*, p. 13.

langue. Rhythmical figures are like signs – but dysfunctional signs, signs which do not signify, but which are nevertheless 'explicit', discrete, units referring to the comprehensive totality that is the poem. Contini himself can tempt this kind of structuralist imagination of a closed system, encompassing all levels of the poem, as he does for instance in his contribution to the centenary celebrations of the Accademia dei Lincei in 1965, 'Filologia ed esegesi dantesca':

> La critica che opera con elementi formali opera con elementi che non sono tutti necessariamente significativi, o meglio, come piú tecnicamente si dice, pertinenti o rilevanti. Un libro come la *Commedia* conterrà un numero fisso di versi, e poi (se la lezione ne è ben ferma) di vocaboli, di fonemi costitutivi, e questi si distribuiranno in forme e schemi da cui si estrarranno certamente delle serie.[66]

The language of systems is present in Contini's peculiar interpretation of Spitzerian *stilkritik*,[67] it is present in his developing understanding of the criticism of authorial variants,[68] it is present in his understanding of the most 'vital' or 'modern' advancements in textual criticism,[69] but it

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[66] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 122.

[67] For a discussion of Contini's assumption of Leo Spitzer's famous sytlistic *écart*, but 'regolata dalla "razionalità" del sistema testuale dalla parte del produttore (per questo non creazione mitica o irrazionale) e poi riscoperta, "resa", da parte del critico volto alla sua "dimostrabilità"', see Roberto Antonelli, 'Contini e la cultura europea', in *Gianfranco Contini 1912-2012. Attualità di un protagonista del novecento*, ed. by Lino Leonardi (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2014), pp. 3–20 (pp. 9–11).

[68] In his 1937 review of Santorre Debenedetti's edition of Arisoto's variant texts, *Frammenti autografi dell'Orlando Furioso*, Contini writes: 'A loro volta queste successive redazioni e varianti possono offrire due stati ben distinti: in un caso, i rapporti dell'essere al non-essere poetico, l'*inventio* delle vecchie arti retoriche, la scoperta o rilevazione del fantasma in relazione allo stato d'attesa, la progressiva identificazione di esso… in un altro, le vere e proprie «correzioni», cioè la rinuncia a elementi *frammentariamente validi* per altri *organicamente validi*, l'espunzione di quelli e l'inserzione di questi'. 'System' and 'organic' structure are synonyms in the Contini corpus (see next note). Cited in Antonelli, 'Contini e la cultura europea', p. 9.

[69] In the printed text of a talk given in 1953, entitled 'La « Vita » francese « di Sant'Alessio » e l'arte di pubblicare i testi antichi', Contini writes: 'Le implicazioni del suo [scil. Pio Rajna] procedere fanno scorgere più chiaro un doppio carattere della filologia, anzi della mentalità moderna: da un lato la maggior fede alla tradizione, cioè al documento, di contro alla preistoria; dall'altro la costituzione delle strutture, e cioè ancora di presenze, in quanto siano organiche.' Gianfranco Contini, *Frammenti di filologia romanza*, 2 vols (Florence: SISMEL, 2007), II, p. 983.

is not really present in 'Un'interpretazione di Dante'. That essay remains at the level of a hesitation ('Esito a dire…') between levels of linguistic phenomena, and is directed at something other than a static sense of the 'total organisation' of those levels.

Contini's 'Un'interpretazione' was also the philologist's first attempt to answer the most sensitive question of twentieth-century Romance philology. The authorship of two poems in MS Montpellier, Bibliothèque interuniversitaire, H. 438, and Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Ashb. 1234bis, known as the *Fiore* and the *Detto d'Amore*, divided (and still divides) philologists: did Dante write these poems, or not? The poems, adaptations of the French *Roman de la Rose,* are full of Italian Gallicisms, making the question of attribution based on linguistic characteristics especially fraught. 'Un'interpretazione' is the first mention of a particular relationship between the *Commedia* and that pair of poems which Contini comes to call, in his 1984 edition of the *Fiore* and *Detto d'Amore*, the 'regina delle prove' of Dante's authorship.[70] In 1965 Contini writes:

> In un sonetto del *Fiore* Pietà è, con Franchezza, ambasciatrice del Dio d'amore: situazione in qualche modo affine a quella di Beatrice presso Virgilio, sull'inizio della *Commedia*, comunque sottolineata da coincidenze, ancor meglio che testuali, ritmico-timbriche. Il verso
>
> Di non far grazia al meo domandamento
>
> anticipa la battuta di Virgilio

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[70] Dante, *Il Fiore e Il Detto d'Amore attribuibili a Dante Alighieri*, ed. by Gianfranco Contini (Milan: Mondadori, 1984), p. lxxxviii.

tanto m'agrada il tuo comandamento.[71]

Though there is no lexical overlap, the evidence of shared phonic and rhythmical shape betrays 'ancor meglio che [coincidenze] testuali', Contini says, the hand, or better the self-memory, of the Florentine poet. This 'ritmico-timbric[a]' coincidence, levitating above fraught questions of dialectology and linguistic characteristics that stymied the attribution question, is offered as a tool for solving the problem of the authorship of the *Fiore* and *Detto*. By allowing for a formal comparison of shapes from the *Fiore* and *Detto* with similar shapes in Dante's established texts, the tool has a purpose: it is a way to circumvent a philological dead-end. From a conference in Cambridge in 1994,[72] to the most recent edition of the *Fiore* and *Detto*,[73] rhythmical figures have become the way this attribution question is asked. The intimation of a closed 'system', which Beccaria and Beltrami discover in Contini's essay, is really just a prong of Contini's larger strategy – the intimation of a closed *oeuvre*, attained not through the demonstration of precise textual echoes, but by experiment with 'l'intensità dei valori puramente formali'.

But underneath Contini's attributional aim, through 'Un'interpretazione' and its object, the rhythmical figure, a number of compositional questions emerge. It is this ground, this theory of composition, and not the attributional question with which my thesis is concerned. What makes up the memorableness of Dante's language, and why this hesitation between its 'semantic' and 'musical' nature? Is there a system of composition which this memorableness indexes or serves – that is, is Dante's memorableness integral to the way the *Commedia* is put together? These compositional questions in turn pose another question about authorship: if Contini's proof of Dante's memorableness is the text's resurfacing, at different times and at different occasions, in a 'memoria involontaria', what understanding of authorship is this?

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[71] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 91.
[72] Proceedings published as *The Fiore in Context: Dante, France, Tuscany*, ed. by Zygmunt Baranski and Patrick Boyde (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).
[73] Dante, *Il Fiore e il Detto d'Amore*, ed. by Luciano Formisano (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2012).

Might it conflict with that attributional aim? Authority as recollection, authority which 'suppone un mondo aperto e una facoltà di registrazione verbale',[74] must be something quite different to authority as deliberate origination. A different conception of production, support, transmission and authorship can be drawn from Contini's memorial interpretation of Dante. In this thesis, I will examine that foundation, the claim that the *Commedia* 'si organizza in figure ritmiche', by examining the particular situation of this particular text in a number of disciplinary domains: textual criticism, grammar and linguistics, compositional theory (oral vs scriptive), and the history of language pedagogy. The plan of the work comprises five chapters.

Chapter 1 is about the textual criticism of the *Commedia*. It has long been argued that scribes' memory of the poem is a cause of manuscript contamination – that is, of the horizontal transmission of variant readings between families of witnesses, which are not vertically (filially) related. I argue that a type of textual contamination which textual critics relate to the memories of scribes, can also be found in the poem's memory of itself – in intratextual relationships between lines of the poem. This first chapter reinterprets the distinction between authorial and scribal variants.

Chapter 2 is about composition. The *Commedia* is a textual artefact with a history of oral transmission – but those poles do not quite serve a memorial text. Drawing on scholarship of memory traditions, this chapter examines how far a so-called *oral* theory of composition fits this poem. If orality means the poet's memory of units which fit a rhythmical architecture of the verse-line, this chapter looks not to external evidence of live performances, but to internal evidence of shapes of rhythm and syntax that express the prosodic contours of the line. This chapter reinterprets the distinction between composition and transmission, based on rhythmico-syntactical re-use.

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[74] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 76.

Chapter 3 examines the twentieth-century wellsprings of Contini's analysis of rhythmical figures in Dante. I show that Contini's distinction between rhythm and the semantic content of language is not primarily structuralist in origin – that instead it arrives from 'La scuola poetica uscita da Mallarmé, e che ha in Valéry il proprio teorico'.[75] I show this missing modernist source of Contini's interpretation of Dante, and locate Contini's hesitation about the make-up of his memory object ('Esito a dire se prevalga…l'aspetto semantico del linguaggio o quello musicale') in Valéry's sense of 'Le poème; cette hésitation prolongée entre le son et le sens'.[76] This chapter looks at Contini's medieval application of Valéry's modern bid for a criticism of 'figures phonétiques' in poems, able to 'estim[er] ce qu'on pourrait nommer leurs *charges poétiques*'.[77]

Chapter 4 is about grammar. Or rather, it is about the *grammatica*, the medieval discipline which taught basic literacy. I argue that the way students of Latin were taught to assess syntactical norms – with lists of *figurae uerborum* – also taught rhythm as a tool of analysis. I locate the rhythmical-figural composition of the *Commedia* in the development of the figural, rhythmico-syntactical tools which Dante and other medieval readers used to parse, explain, emend – or, critically, not emend – the texts they read. This chapter argues that rhythm is a grammatical category in the middle ages, and a basis of textual scrutiny still to be recovered.

A final chapter is an experiment in the interpretation of rhythm. I show both how rhythmical shapes can identify new sources, as well as new kinds of imitation and influence. If the importance of rhythm is established through a compositional process, this final chapter shows how rhythm in turn can serve as a foundation for criticism, discovering new relations bodied forth in the shapes of the poem's language.

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[75] Contini, *Saggio d'un commento*, p. 7.
[76] Paul Valéry, *Œuvres*, 2 vols (Gallimard, 1957), II, p. 637.
[77] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 651, 655. Emphasis Valéry's.

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My thesis aims to offer a contribution to poetics, beyond *filologia dantesca*, by particularising how memory and rhythm relate to the composition of this poem. At base, I look at tools for analysing poetic language – medieval and modern – to in turn investigate how they represent their object. Memory and rhythm are understood as shaping forces, and it is the formal and linguistic relationships between lines that are analysed to reveal those forces. Though it falls outside of this mode of proceeding, I must at the same time acknowledge that at least one of my terms, memory, has garnered a great deal of interest from cultural historians of the middle ages. Scholarship on the medieval art of memory has, at points, fruitfully concerned Dante, the author of at least one 'libro de la…memoria'.[78] Frances Yeats cites a printed text by Johannes Romberch, translated and added to by the Venetian printer Ludovico Dolce, which identifies the *Inferno* as a helpful mnemonic structure for memorising the vices:

> For this (that is for remembering the places of Hell) the ingenious invention of Virgil AND DANTE will help us much. That is for distinguishing the punishments according to the nature of the sins.[79]

Dante's usefulness to *ars memoriae* writers came to Yates as 'a great shock',[80] but scholarship over the years has come to insist that *artes memoriae* were integral to Dante's own compositional process. The common notion of a philosophical or rhetorical topic (a τόπος or 'place' of argument), when transposed to the discourse of memory, implies a spatial notion of memory, which can then be artificially constructed or manipulated and made akin to

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[78] Dante, *Vita Nova. Le Rime della Vita Nova e altre Rime del tempo della Vita Nova*, ed. by Donato Pirovano and Marco Grimaldi (Rome: Salerno, 2015), 1.1.
[79] Cited and translated by Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 95.
[80] Yates, p. 95.

architecture or terrain.[81] Architectural and topographical schemata were often recommended to students, from the classical period on, to help organise memory, and this may account for – writ large – the topographical organisation of vices and virtues in Dante's poem.[82] In another vein, as Harald Weinrich and, more recently, Lina Bolzoni have shown, *imagines agentes*, or powerfully descriptive, striking images, were often prescribed by different kinds of educators as a means to aid recall. [83] Dante's poem is full of memorable postures and gestures, serving to represent a particular disposition of vice or penitence. The most public users of this kind of rhetorical-mnemonic technology in Dante's time were preachers, and current scholarship has sought out precise parallels between the use of descriptive *exempla* in texts by St Bernard of Siena, or *ars predicandi* manuals like the *Summa de virtutibus et vitiis* of Guglielmo Peraldo, and Dante's poem.[84] Beyond these macroscopic and visual programmes for memorableness, Roberto Antonelli has also pointed out the applicability to Dante's poem of an ancient rhetorical distinction between *memoria rerum* and *memoria verborum*. The ancient orator was advised to make divisions in a discourse and separately to study each one, in order to recall the precise connections between, or the 'weave' ('contextus') of, words.[85] The sense that the *Commedia* is, on a textual level, 'Un vortice di rimandi memoriali, governati con mano certo

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[81] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 32–37.

[82] Of particular note is the 12th-century *Rhetorica Novissima* of Buoncompagno da Signa. To demonstrate the usefulness of artificial memory topographies, Buoncompagno shows the 'places' of hell and heaven to be helpful for the recollection of the vices and virtues. See Yates, p. 59.

[83] Lina Bolzoni, 'Dante o Della Memoria Appassionata', *Lettere Italiane*, 60.2 (2008), 169–93 (p. 184). But both the advice to use place-based memory structures, and the advice to use striking images to aid memory, are found together in the same passage of Cicero's *De oratore*: 'His autem formis atque corporibus, sicut omnibus, quae sub aspectum veniunt, [admonetur memoria nostra atque excitatur ;] sede opus est, etenim corpus intellegi sine loco non potest'. Cicero, *Rhetorica*, ed. by A.S. Wilkins, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1902), I, bk. 2, 357-8.

[84] See Nicolò Maldina's study for a fuller picture of the scholarship on the *summae* of *exempla* used in preaching, and their relationship to Dante. Bolzoni, pp. 189–90; Nicolò Maldina, *In pro del mondo. Dante, la predicazione e i generi della letteratura religiosa medievale* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2017), pp. 14–15.

[85] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 11.2.28: 'Dandi sunt certi quidam termini, ut contextus verborum, qui est difficillimus, continua et crebra meditatio, partis deinceps ipsas repetitus ordo coniungant'. Cited in Roberto Antonelli, 'Memoria rerum et memoria verborum. La construzione della Divina Commedia', *Criticón*, Memoria rerum et memoria verborum, 87-88–89 (2003), 35–45 (p. 40).

consapevole da Dante',[86] can accordingly be read in line with this advice belonging to *memoria* as a canon of rhetoric – to split up, and to continually bring to mind discrete passages.

These mostly preceptive texts – these *institutiones, artes*, *summae* – where they speak of memory, may indeed offer hints about the technique, or the *how*, of Dante's compositional process. But this thesis does not make use of this preceptive material, examining internal relationships and methodological tools (including some medieval ones) instead.[87] I have understood Contini's cue to interrogate the poet's memory as to do with the verbal relationships (or prosodic, or syntactical relationships, as we shall see) between disparate lines of the poem. Accordingly, my method has been the following: I have analysed each line of the poem, and, using my own memory as well as a searchable version of the text, I have identified hundreds of new verbal proximities between lines or part-lines in the poem. A first consequence of this work is to substantiate the claim that re-used language is a global phenomenon in this poem, 'un dato che si documenti non da questo o quel luogo, ma dalla totalità dell'opera',[88] too common to ignore or to present as so many motivated or authorially 'governati' correspondences. That work is not presented here in raw form. Rather, I ask of these many new correspondences between lines, how they relate to, further, or complicate the textual evidence offered by other disciplines. So, my first chapter makes use of Michele Barbi's canon of textual variants, and my second chapter makes use of Milman Parry's textual evidence for his analysis of oral compositional technique in the Homeric poems. The analysis I offer extends the way these disciplines represent their object in directions not countenanced by their practitioners. It is a comparative criticism, which attempts to interpret its particular relations betwixt and between processes theorised by others. But in this, I follow inroads into disciplines plotted by Contini himself, in an effort I understand as deictic, always about particularising *this* text:

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[86] Antonelli, 'Memoria rerum et memoria verborum', p. 42.
[87] In chapter 4 I discuss one liberal art, the *grammatica*, to understand how its relations of syntax and authority might shape this poem's language.
[88] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 78.

'buona filologia sembrandomi', as Contini writes, 'il riconoscimento della situazione particolare dei singoli testi'.[89]

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[89] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 73.

Textual Criticism

…ancor più di qualsiasi altra opera di larga e fulminea diffusione, il poema dantesco gronda di varianti irriducibili alla razionalità 'verticale' della tradizione soltanto scritta. Le costellazioni che si producono in presenza di varianti non manifestamente erronee nel tipo di « e durerà quanto il moto / mondo lontana » o di « anche di qua nuova schiera / gente s'auna », non coincidono fra loro, quasi che i copisti avessero avuto a disposizione piú ventagli entro cui operare la loro scelta.

Contini[1]

nel qual tu sè, dir si posson creati,] *beati* Mart Pa Triv

dir si posson beati è variante caratteristica di *a* [Mart Triv]…ma disdicevole all'intelligenza del luogo, nel vivo della discussione intorno al corrompersi d'alcune cose create: gli elementi ecc.

Giorgio Petrocchi[2]

The attributionist end to which Contini put his analysis of rhythmical figures only accounts for a small part of 'Un'interpretazione di Dante', and it is an end which hardly subsumes all the stations of the essay's progress. The year following the publication of 'Un'interpretazione di Dante', 1966, saw the publication of Petrocchi's national edition of the *Commedia*, a decade-

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[1] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 73.
[2] In Dante, *La Commedia Secondo l'antica Vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994), IV, 7.131, n. ad loc. I amend Petrocchi's 'se'' to 'sè'. I print here the MS sigla used in Petrocchi's edition, which I will use throughout this chapter. These witnesses – the printed edition Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Aldina AP XIV 25, and the manuscript witnesses and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Italien 538, and Milan, Biblioteca dell'Archivio Storico Civico e Trivulziana, MS 1080 – along with other witnesses of the text of the Commedia, will be discussed further below.

long project supervised by Contini.[3] Points of contact between Contini's 1965 essay and Petrocchi's edition show how much Contini's new object – the rhythmical figure – is a reflection of the textual-critical picture of the poem given in Petrocchi's edition.

An important recurring word in 'Un'interpretazione' is 'variant'. The references to 'varianti' are found in the early part of the essay, which introduces the topic of 'memorabilità' by means of the possible textual corruption caused by scribes who copied with a 'memoria oberata di ricordi'.[4] This is closely followed by the distinction of the kind of variant produced by memory from the 'varianti di collocazione' of later Renaissance poetic traditions.[5] If we go looking in the Petrocchi edition for evidence of scribes who copied with a 'memoria oberata di ricordi', we in fact find that scribal memory is mentioned often, along with another concept important to Contini's essay – that of 'echoes' between lines. So Petrocchi will write 'è importante notare come Mart resti ad una variante d'eco [in contrast to Triv], *per li altrui mai conforti*, mutato da un luogo indubbiamente attraente per i copisti, *i ma' conforti* di *Inf.* XXVIII 135'.[6] Or choosing between the variants for *Inf.* 22.119 – 'ciascun de l'altra costa li occhi volse] ripa parte' – Petrocchi writes '*parte* è variazione di copisti per la gran copia di espressioni identiche o simili fino a quel canto presenti nell'*Inferno* (da IV 125 in poi)'.[7] Petrocchi will not uncommonly justify his decisions about readings on the grounds of these 'variant[i] d'eco' produced by scribes' memories of the text they copy. What Contini has done, then, in 'Un'interpretazione', is transform these 'echoes' from a textual-critical *discrimen* into an idea

[3] The Petrocchi edition was expressly produced 'in conformità del parere tecnico da † Francesco Maggini…Gianfranco Contini, Giovanni Nencioni', according to its front matter. In Dante, *La Commedia Secondo l'antica Vulgata*, I, p. iv.

[4] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 74.

[5] Contini is referring here to his earlier work on Petrarch's authorial variants, which he sees as of a piece with later Renaissance Petrarchism. The idea is that word order is often rearranged, in successive versions, to produce a state of equilibrium in the line. Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, pp. 73–74, 76.

[6] Giorgio Petrocchi, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata. Introduzione* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994), pp. 287–88. Mart is a witness in the Braidense library, Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Aldina AP XVI 25. Mart is a printed edition from the Aldine press, published in 1515. Triv is Milan, Biblioteca dell'Archivio Storico Civico e Trivulziana, MS 1080.

[7] Petrocchi, p. 183.

of authorship. For Contini, 'variant[i] d'eco' lay bare the extensive 'echi di Dante entro Dante', as a scribal 'memoria oberata di ricordi' becomes the 'memorabilità del testo dantesco' that 'cominci ad agire sull'autore stesso.'[8] It is perhaps counterintuitive that Contini's new analysis of 'valori puramente formali', to the relative exclusion of 'l'aspetto semantico', should have its roots in a textual-critical concept. But I will show in this chapter that the kind of relationship between lines which Contini analyses with the notion of rhythmical figures, resembles in important ways the textual-critical idea of a variant for a single line.

In his brief mention of the state of Dantean textual criticism, at the beginning of 'Un'interpretazione', Contini gives two examples 'nel tipo' of variant characteristic, we are to take it, of the *Commedia* tradition on a whole.[9] These examples – 'e durerà quanto il moto / mondo lontana' (*Inf.* 2.60), and 'anche di qua nuova schiera / gente s'auna' (*Inf.* 3.120) – typify the challenges of Dantean textual criticism in that they are 'varianti non manifestamente erronee'. It is difficult with *mondo*/*moto* to securely press for error in either case. Contini gives only this pair of examples of a 'type' of variant common in the tradition, but this is enough to compare them with the lists of rhythmical figures which then appear. Take the 'figural' association of 'm'era a la marina torto' and 'a la marina volto' for instance.[10] Here, too, one word presents two almost synonymic possibilities, 'torto' and 'volto'. The difference of course is that both these 'variants' actually appear in the established text, at *Purg.* 9.45 and *Purg.* 2.100 respectively. This raises a question: can we relate a 'type' of variant to a similar type of internal relationship between lines in the poem? Whatever resemblance we detect between these cases of variation should, scrupulously, amount to a category error. Echoes between lines of the poem are something quite different to a process of scribal corruption that generates new readings. One of these is internal, a case of re-used shapes of lines. The other is external, a

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[8] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 79.
[9] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 73.
[10] Discussed above, p. 15.

process of transcription and corruption. But an analogy between these processes is something Contini points to, and if a resemblance holds, this in turn offers an association between two very distinct moments of the text: on the one hand, a compositional process, which works through memorial echoes of pre-existing line shapes, and on the other, a scribal tradition, which produces variants in the witnesses to the poem's text.

To ask about this analogy, we must begin with the question: what is a textual variant? Recognising *varianti* between witnesses at first seems a comprehensible enough task, but in the case of the *Commedia* tradition, a variant is a fraught concept, much debated over the last century. The reason for this has already been mentioned: the paucity of *error*, or the difficulty of recognising outright errors, in the tradition. One or two words might be spent on the distinction between a variant and an error. Variants do not necessarily present errors. Ideally, variant readings are not considered until the very final stages of preparing an edition, because they say nothing of importance about the relationships between surviving witnesses to a text. Errors, on the other hand, do. Since the eighteenth century, most textual critics have understood that only agreements in errors, and not agreements in other readings, securely disclose relationships between witnesses to a text. In the case of the *Commedia* tradition, recognising errors has proven extremely difficult. As a result, textual critics have had to make use of a methodological stopgap and use aggregate agreements among variant lines to establish relationships among witnesses. Variants then, and not errors, are used to classify witnesses. Strictly speaking, this state of affairs violates the so-called Lachmann, or common-error, method for establishing relationships between witnesses to a text. In a recent handbook of textual criticism, Paolo Trovato puts the so-called Lachmannian principle of this method in the following terms: 'the agreement of two or more witnesses in a good reading – that is, a current one, one that reproduces the original, a primary one – is irrelevant: only shared errors – innovations, secondary readings – can provide certain proof that two or more copies are

related.'[11] But it is as though the *Commedia* tradition gives us a plethora of 'good' readings. The fact that they must also be mutually exclusive is what then presents the difficulty.

In 1891, the Società Dantesca published a list of 400 variant lines, or variant *loci*, principally redacted by a then twenty-four-year-old Michele Barbi. The function of the list was to allow scholars in other Italian cities, as well as outside of Italy, to provide the Società with a partial collation of MSS housed in libraries beyond the Florentine libraries Barbi himself could consult. The proposed collation would, of course, be based only on Barbi's 400 *loci*, but would nonetheless provide for the first time a sketch of a MS recension for the entire tradition. The appeal to the international scholarly community was not successful, but the *loci* took root as a method which future scholars would use to establish groups of related *Commedia* witnesses. When Giorgio Petrocchi produced his national edition of the text between 1955 and 1966, the same *loci* principle, with updated *loci*, was used to establish the groups of related MSS – along with other criteria new to Petrocchi's edition (namely the delimitation of the so-called 'antica vulgata' group of 27 MSS). The use of *loci*, rather than exhaustive collation, was deemed necessary because of the number of surviving witnesses to Dante's poem. What makes the concept of a variant very singular in this tradition, therefore, is the unique editorial fate of Barbi's 400 variant *loci*. Barbi's *loci* are not 400 error-places: they are 400 places where the Florentine MSS Barbi consulted appeared particularly to diverge.[12] It is an impermissible conceptual shortcut to assume that a variant *locus* splits into a correct reading and an error (or

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[11] Trovato adds that Lachmann himself never expressed this principle. This is well known after Sebastiano Timpanaro, *La genesi del metodo del Lachmann* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1963). As Timpanaro points out, an early formulation of the 'Lachmann' principle or common-error principle is given by Paul Lejay (1861-1920). See Paolo Trovato, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lachmann's Method: A Non-Standard Handbook of Genealogical Textual Criticism in the Age of Post-Structuralism, Cladistics, and Copy-Text* (Padua: libreriauniversitaria.it edizioni, 2014), p. 54.

[12] As Elisabetta Tonello puts this: 'Ben inteso, l'elenco dei 396 loci critici proposto dal Barbi va riconsiderato per quello che rappresenta; ovvero non una serie "pura" di errori significativi, atti cioè a individuare raggruppamenti e snodi stemmatici, ma piuttosto una lista di luoghi variamente interessanti per la classificazione: errori significativi e inoltre occasioni di diffrazione, di banalizzazioni in direzioni plurime ecc.' Elisabetta Tonello, 'La tradizione della Commedia secondo Luigi Spagnolo e la sottofamiglia a0 (Mart Pal. 319 Triv e altri affini)', in *Nuove prospettive sulla tradizione della 'Commedia'. Seconda serie (2008-2013)*, ed. by Elisabetta Tonello and Paolo Trovato (Padua: libreriauniversitaria.it edizioni, 2013), pp. 71–118 (p. 80).

multiple errors).[13] With the impetus Barbi gave to this project however, and in the absence of secure errors based on exhaustive collation, scholars of the textual tradition of the *Commedia* wishing to establish stemmatic or genealogical relationships between witnesses have tried to make the variant *loci* do the work of errors. Compiling lists of lines where MSS appeared to diverge, they attempt to establish which variants are *significant* (a conceptual calque on significant error), so that these might be used conjunctively – that is, to typify groups of related MSS.

An error *is* a variant reading (unless it is an archetypal error), but a variant reading is not necessarily an error. Errors are the most obvious, most compellingly mistaken mistakes that an editor can find. To call a reading an error, it must be the sort of mistake which no two scribes could come up with, working independently of each other.[14] And so errors involve a distinction between mono- and polygenesis. Errors must be monogenetic, which means that an error must (plausibly) originate with a single copyist, and not be the sort of slip others might make too. This is a high burden of proof, but it is necessary if errors are to securely demonstrate genealogical relationships between MSS. Textual critics of the *Commedia* have, in turn, borrowed this mono- and polygenesis distinction for the criticism of variant *loci* in the *Commedia* tradition. Again, this is a conceptual calque, and obviously so because it works in the wrong direction: from a *canon variorum* towards something like monogenetic error, rather

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[13] Michelangelo Zaccarello warns of the shortcut, with *loci*, to the inapplicable notions of conjunctive error and correct reading: 'nella maggior parte dei casi, infatti, tali biforcazioni opporranno una lezione erronea caratterizzante – in senso congiuntivo – a carico di uno dei termini, e la lezione corretta – priva di qualsiasi valore guida – sull'altro versante; il metodo tenderà così a raggruppare non solo testimoni genealogicamente affini, ma anche altri che semplicemente non presentano quei tratti, con una sorta di spinta dicotomica che, opponendo due tipi testuali (X e non-X), rischia così – nel progresso del lavoro – di parificarli ed elevarli ambedue a capostipiti'. Michelangelo Zaccarello, 'La Commedia: Soluzioni editoriali. Appunti sulle interpretazioni della trasmissione e della variantistica del poema.', in *Dante: Fra il settecentocinquantenario della nascita (2015) e il settecentenario della morte (2021). Atti delle celebrazioni in Senato, del Forum e del Convegno internazionale di Rome: maggio-ottobre 2015*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi, 2 vols (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2016), II, 469–501 (p. 482).

[14] As Trovato puts the *discrimen* error/variant: 'variants…are very numerous, polygenetic, and irrelevant for genealogy[,] and significant errors…as a rule, are few, [and] may derive from earlier copies and are thus useful for the construction of the stemma', Trovato, p. 110.

than from monogenetic errors – and a resulting stemma – towards *varii lectiones*. Petrocchi's introductory volume to his 1966 national edition of the *Commedia* contains a list of both mono- and polygenetic variant places, even though only the latter could claim any real probative value for a stemma. But Petrocchi had to include both because in this tradition without secure errors, all agreements in variants, even probable polygenetic variants, take on a 'notevole seppur non determinante importanza ai fini della tradizione manoscritta'.[15] The high-contrast distinctions which the common-error method requires cannot be made to work in this tradition.

Why are errors so hard to establish in the *Commedia* tradition? This state of affairs is unique in the annals of textual criticism, and it is partly explained by the size of this tradition.[16] But the other, and more important explanation which scholars give to account for the paucity of error is, in fact, a little patchy. That explanation is *contaminatio*. Giorgio Inglese's proposal for a new stemma in 2007 – which includes his own list of *loci*, referred to as a list of 'significant errors' – reminds us at the same time that 'È ormai ben noto che la *recensio* della *Commedia* non rileva costellazioni costanti di errori. La tradizione è contaminata al punto che la nozione stessa di errore "separativo" risulta pressoché destituita di efficacia.'[17] In 1966, too, Petrocchi claimed that the tradition's widespread *contaminatio* substantially called into question his stemmatic conclusions. '[A] metà strada nella fatica della *eliminatio*', Petrocchi wrote,

> ci si accorgerebbe della materiale inidoneità dei testimoni a manifestarsi come
>
> filiazione d'altri o come proliferazione collaterale o come sicura ascendente. La

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[15] Petrocchi, p. 118.

[16] This cause cannot be underestimated: 'In terms of size: no editor, no team of editors working with the traditional methods of Italian philology could ever find the resources to look at every reading in every one of the 14233 lines of the *Commedia* in every one of the 800 plus manuscripts and significant early print editions of the poem.' Peter Robinson, 'The Textual Tradition of Dante's "Commedia" and the "Barbi Loci"', *Ecdotica*, 9 (2012), 1–32 (p. 1).

[17] Giorgio Inglese, 'Per lo "stemma" della "Commedia" dantesca. Tentativo di statistica degli errori significativi', *Filologia italiana*, 4 (2007), 52–72 (p. 59).

contaminatio non fa presa (come è solito accadere nella tradizione dei testi

medioevali o umanistici) su qualche luogo particolare, isolabile dal contesto,

ma si diffonde su tutto il territorio del poema, non risparmiando i passi

elementarmente comprensibili.[18]

Contamination, sometimes called horizontal transmission, is the mixing and matching of

readings from multiple exemplars in the process of copying. The modern textual editor's

explanation for the recalcitrance of error in the *Commedia*, then, works by recourse to early

editors' efforts to expunge errors – their efforts to repair a tradition, by mixing and matching

exemplars, that from its earliest moments must have appeared substantially corrupt. 'La diffusa

esigenza', writes Claudio Ciociola, 'di accertare la lezione corretta e di risolvere dubbi

interpretativi, linguistici ed esegetici, e l'accessibilità di copie molteplici, avranno del resto

alimentato, altrettanto precocemente, una tendenza diffusa alla collazione'.[19] For the modern

editor, this means grappling with 'un fenomeno generalizzato di trasmissione orizzontale. La

contaminazione, piaga inquinante di ogni tradizione congestionata, è fenomeno endemico nella

tradizione della *Commedia*'.[20] There is a problem with these scholars' explanation for the

recalcitrance of error, however. Though we do have documentary evidence of the kind of

scribal collation which results in *contaminatio*,[21] as Petrocchi also points out, this particular

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[18] Petrocchi, p. 10.

[19] Claudio Ciociola, 'Dante', in *La tradizione dei testi*, ed. by Claudio Ciociola and Claudio Gigante, Storia della letteratura Italiana (Milan: Il Sole 24 Ore, 2005), pp. 137–99 (pp. 179–80).

[20] Ciociola, 'Dante', pp. 179–80.

[21] This is apparent in Mart. This particular witness in the Braidense library also contains annotations showing variant readings written by a Luca Martini, who found these readings in a Florentine MS now lost but which was produced by a Forese (Donati?) between October 1330 and January 1331. Martini also copied Forese's colophon, in which Forese writes: 'Ego autem ex diversis aliis respuendo que falsa et colligendo que vera vel sensui videbantur concinna in hunc quam sobrius potui fideliter exemplando redegi.' ('Rejecting from many other readings those that seemed false and accepting those that seemed true or harmonious to the sense of the passage, I edited [the text] to the extent to which I soberly could, faithfully copying it.') Forese's editorial diligence is remarkable, and his colophon makes clear that learned scribal intervention can be a feature even of the earliest witnesses of the text. But this editorial profile is by no means apparent in all extant MSS. Forese (Donati?) cited in Petrocchi, p. 76. My translation.

tradition, different to other 'tradizione dei testi medioevali o umanistici', seems to present *contaminatio* through the entire 'territorio' of the poem, not simply in places liable to interpretive difficulty or scribal misunderstanding. If *contaminatio* is most commonly the result of effortful, practical-hermeneutical activity on the part of scribes, it is difficult to cite it as an explanation of a generalised phenomenon. Having recognised this, Contini offered a completely different way to frame the problem in 'Un'interpretazione di Dante'. That explanation is memory. Of MS traditions in which errors seem not to be discrete, but shared by multiple MS families, Contini writes:

> In simili casi, si gira l'ostacolo ricorrendo alla scappatoia di considerare i manoscritti alla stregua di edizioni composite, che collazionino e contaminino a loro gusto piú esemplari autorevoli.... Ma per questo occorrerebbe che i codici incriminati serbassero tutti una responsabile fisionomia d'intenzione critica; e poiché questa è un'evenienza rarissima, si è costretti a concludere che quelle asimmetrie provano la commistione della tradizione orale nella tradizione scritta, cioè che gli scribi copiavano ma, come faremmo noi stessi, con la memoria oberata di ricordi. Cosí si saranno irradiate, ma cosí, collaborativamente, saranno anche nate non poche di quelle varianti.[22]

The hypothesis of memorial contamination, a process Contini sees here as wholly distinct from scribal *contaminatio*, is, in the forward progress of 'Un'interpretazione', a first step towards Contini's larger purpose – that of establishing the 'oggetiva memorabilità del testo dantesco', and so the attribution of the *Fiore*.[23] But the hypothesis of memorial contamination is hardly a

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[22] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, pp. 73–74.
[23] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 79.

ladder kicked back once the definition of the 'martellante, epigrafico enunciato dantesco, atto a far presa sulla memoria' has appeared.[24] Later textual critics who mention Contini's suggestion of scribal memory usually entertain it as something akin to MS *contaminatio* – as 'ulteriori condizionamenti di tipo mnemonico'[25] – stopping well short of phrases like 'tradizione orale' that too wildly challenge their representation of a textual object. But Contini does not think that memory works like multiple readings in a textual record. For one thing, memory is also generative – 'collaborativamente' – of variant readings. It does not simply diffuse, it gives rise to these 'varianti non manifestamente eronee'.

A 2015 essay by Michelangelo Zaccarello is the first to try to discover how memory works differently to contaminate the *Commedia* tradition. Zaccarello's object in his essay, not different to other textual critics working on the *Commedia*, remains the evaluation of the trustworthiness of variant *loci* for stemmatic purposes. In this tradition without agreed-upon significant errors, conceptualising how variants arise is important. To help winnow the large number of variant places into fewer, and more significant, errors, Zaccarello recommends that variant *loci* be examined in the context of the poem, via an 'etiological criterion'. How variants arise, Zacarello thinks, 'è talora ricavabile da uno sguardo piú ampio al contesto – lessicale e narrativo – e all'uso generale del poema, con i suoi tratti ricorrenti e formulari'.[26] By comparing variant lines 'all'uso generale del poema', textual critics can work to 'stabilire una direzione innovatrice, sotto la spinta di analogie, polarizzazioni, interferenze mnemoniche, effetti di eco con parti piú o meno vicine di testo'.[27] The effect of considering possible 'mnemonic disturbances' in variant places is to indict more variant places of polygenesis – to discover more variants, even variants that look significant on their own, to really be easy slips,

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[24] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 93.
[25] Ciociola, 'Dante', p. 180.
[26] Zaccarello, II, p. 484.
[27] Zaccarello, II, p. 484.

and so unusable for stemmatic purposes.[28] Other textual scholars have brought forth other proposals to accomplish this winnowing of *loci*. Caterina Brandoli has tried to establish stricter criteria for admitting variants into consideration by excluding variant *loci* based an explicit list of polygenetic markers (including likely palaeographical origin, variants to do with adding or omitting 'empty words', phonomorphological variants in spelling, and so forth).[29] By contrast, Zaccarello's suggestion of an 'etiological criterion' asks, beyond looking at variant lines themselves, that textual scholars look at variant lines *in situ*. Many of the apparently monogenetic variants in Barbi's list of *loci* may be the result of memory slips pressurised by the surrounding context, or by analogous lines from elsewhere in the poem. As a result, these *loci* too can be suspected of polygenesis and removed from consideration, leaving the scholar with a shorter, but more secure, list of variants functioning like significant errors.

Zaccarello's attempt to interpret the mnemonic cause of variants, however, also tips into a new theory of the text. He begins to suggest that these 'interferenze mnemoniche' also require a new understanding of 'le modalità di composizione' of Dante's *Commedia*. The equation of Dante's *Commedia* with 'modalità proto-umanistiche e moderne di composizione' may not, Zaccarello suggests, best reflect this tradition's textual-critical *donées*. He raises, at one point, the notion of '*composition in performance*' (he uses the English phrase, italicized)

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[28] Zaccarello is not the first contemporary textual critic to revisit the topic of memorability. In 2010 Luigi Spagnolo suggested a redaction of Barbi's canon of *loci* based on a set of criteria including the possible influence on a scribe of nearby words while transcribing. See Luigi Spagnolo, 'La tradizione della Comedìa (I)', *Studi e problemi di critica testuale*, 80 (2010), 9–90 (pp. 11–25). Luigi Spagnolo's re-evaluation of Barbi's *loci* was in turn criticised by Elisabetta Tonello in 2013. In defending a number of Barbi's *loci* from Spagnolo's indictment, Tonello makes a distinction between 'conditions for polygenesis' and polygenesis proper. She accepts the charge that a number of the *loci* appear to present conditions of polygenesis, including memory contamination, but notes that the variants so produced still appear usefully separative (so multiple scribes could have made the same innovation, but in the event only one did so). See Tonello, pp. 74–80.

[29] Brandoli's resulting analysis of Barbi's and Petrocchi's respective canons of *loci* shows that Petrocchi's list in particular is full of possibly polygenetic variants. Brandoli indicts 7.5% of Barbi's and 55.7% of Petrocchi's *loci* of polygenesis according to the criteria which the scholar sets out. These criteria do not, moreover, include categories that grasp the possible mnemonic influence Zaccarello is defining here (by and large equal-syllable synonyms), so the effect of Zaccarello's suggestion would be to further reduce the value of the canons of loci hitherto used. See Caterina Brandoli, 'Due canoni a confronto: I luoghi di Barbi e lo scrutinio di Petrocchi', in *Nuove prospettive sulla tradizione della 'Commedia'. Una guida filologico-linguistica al poema dantesco*, ed. by Paolo Trovato (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2007), pp. 99–148 (pp. 113, 123).

to account for the plethora of not-demonstrably-erroneous variants which the *Commedia* tradition presents. Textual scholars, he suggests, might instead view this latitude of non-erroneous variation as a given of a performance composition, which exhibits an 'opposizione fra l'affermarsi di una macrostruttura di una certa stabilità e il perdurare di oscillazioni puntuali, legate tanto al passaggio orale della dettatura d'autore quanto all'uso della memoria e della *performance* orale nella trasmissione'.[30] This suggestion of course challenges the notion that all 'rimandi memoriali' in the poem are 'governati con mano certo consapevole da Dante',[31] leaving open the possibility that 'ec[hi] con parti piú o meno vicine di testo' testify to a very different picture of composition. Zaccarello stops himself here however, and his essay's main proposal – to examine wider context to discover the 'direzione innovatrice' in variant places – still casts memory as contaminating, not constitutive. His 'etiological criterion', attentive to 'mnemonic interference', is still about noise-cancellation. Rather than find a way to include, in textual criticism, a new conception of the 'processo compositivo',[32] his goal remains unchanged from that of a scholar like Petrocchi: removing mnemonically-suspect variants from consideration.

Instead of trying to fit the square peg of uncertain variants into the round hole of error, can we build a picture of the kind of variation that typifies this tradition? This would not simply be to claim that Dante's poem is not exempt from variants, as a generalised vicissitude affecting medieval texts – in other words, from 'mouvance'.[33] Rather, variation may, in some specific cases, be understood as constitutive of an authorial process, rather than simply an impairment

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[30] Zaccarello's notion of '*composition in performance*' derives from the biblical performance scholar Richard A. Horsley's book *Text and Tradition in Performance and Writing* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013). Zaccarello, II, p. 480.
[31] Antonelli, 'Memoria rerum et memoria verborum', p. 42.
[32] Zaccarello, II, p. 480.
[33] Paul Zumthor coined this term in his work form 1970s and '80s, referring to absence of a fixed, finished text in medieval textuality. Bernard Cerquiglini would also claim in the '80s that 'L'écriture médiévale ne produit pas des variants, elle est variance.' See Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1972); Bernard Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante : histoire critique de la philologie* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1989), p. 108.

to textual integrity, or a general given. There are cases where we readily acknowledge this. It is the case of course with an author's editing of their own work, towards the study of which a young Contini contributed enormously in the generation after Santorre Debenedetti and Giorgio Pasquali.[34] It can also be the case with poetry that is performed. It is well-known that the songs of Jaufré Rudel survive in many conflicting versions. Gregory Nagy showed in 1996 that when Rudel uses the verbs *franhar* ('break') and *mover* ('move') to refer to his song, the verbs have two valences, referring to two different kinds of performance. To 'break' or 'move' a song can be a negative thing, if it is done by unauthorised performers, but it can also be a positive thing, pointing to a 'process of recomposition-in-performance' constitutive of Rudel's authorship.[35] This is the term Zaccarello borrows. To vary or 'move' a song, in Rudel's second sense, is to make it new – original again – in the context of a performance. The reciprocal acknowledgement of a performer and an authoritative audience, which together make a performance authentic, requires this variation, entailing a 'paradox of immediate change without ultimate change'.[36] Poets who are thus authorised to keep turning and re-turning keep the tradition of the song alive, even as variants proliferate. The recalcitrance of error in the *Commedia* tradition, or the fact of pervasive 'varianti non manifestamente erronee', does not necessarily point to either of these eventualities – *varianti d'autore* or a live performance

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[34] For Debenedetti, see note on p. 22. The term 'varianti d'autore' derives from Girogio Pasquali, *Storia della tradizione e critica del testo* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1934), pp. 395–465. Contini reviewed Pasquali's book in 1935, noting of its most innovative concepts, that Romance philologists from previous generations like 'il Quentin e il Bédier pensassero alla tramissione trasversale, e il secondo alle varianti d'autore. Fatti rari in filologia classica sono ordinarî, o poco meno, in filologia romanza.' Contini, *Frammenti di filologia romanza*, I, p. 105. Contini's work on authorial variants, from his review of Debenedetti's edition of Ariosto to his work of Petrarch's authorial variants in the early 1940s, is discussed in ch. 3. For a fuller discussion of the origins of the study of 'varianti d'autore', see Claudio Ciociola, '"Storia della tradizione" e varianti d'autore (Barbi, Pasquali, Contini)', in *La tradizione dei Testi: Atti del Convegno, Cortona, 21-23 settembre 2017*, ed. by Claudio Ciociola and Claudio Vela (Florence: Società dei Filologi della Letteratura Italiana, 2018), pp. 3–23. Contini momentarily entertains the possibility of authorial variants in the *Commedia* in a parenthesis in 'Un'intepretazaione': 'trascuro qui l'ipotesi, forse in qualche caso non da scartarsi, ma finora non abbastanza indagata, di varianti d'autore: l'ipotesi che il bravissimo Domenico De Robertis ha perlomeno delibata per le rime della *Vita Nuova*.' Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, pp. 73–74.

[35] Gregory Nagy, *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 23–25.

[36] Nagy, *Poetry as Performance*, p. 25.

setting. But it is helpful to raise the possibility, in an impasse, that variants disclose more than binary questions of error. They can also lead to new conceptions of the 'processo compositivo' behind the diffraction of readings.

To do this we need a frame of reference – a kind or type of variant that can plausibly be discussed as a single, characteristic phenomenon. It has already been stated that undecidable, or 'adiaphoric', variants are characteristic of the tradition.[37] The Barbi canon of *loci* in particular, says Zaccarello, is distinguished by 'la pressoché assoluta *adiaforia* delle varianti in gioco'.[38] Adding specificity to this, however, Zaccarello helpfully notes that these undecidable variants are 'perlopiú di tipo sinonimico'.[39] To call a variant 'synonymic' introduces the notion of a word. With the notion of a word, we have a form for this kind of variant, as well as a number of concepts to which it is related. Does the phonetic content of a word matter in these variants, or just the parity of reference? Do the boundaries of word divisions change, or word order, or syllable quantity? Asking these questions via a reasonable, but not overly peremptory, review of the lists of variant places available, a picture of a type of variant might emerge than can then be compared to a notion of a 'processo compositivo'.

A signal example of a synonymic variant is found at *Inf.* 11.90: 'la divina vendetta li martelli'. For this line, a slew of *prima facie* acceptable readings are given in early MSS. In Ash (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Ashburnham 828, c. 1335), Cha (Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 597, c. 1327-28), and Vat (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vaticano latino 3199, c. 1351-53), we find 'la divina iustizia li martelli'. In Ham (Berlin, Deutsche Staatsbibliotek, MS Hamilton 203, c. 1347), instead, we find 'la divina

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[37] So Andrea Canova: 'per ciò che riguarda la Commedia, anche il concetto di errore così come lo intendono i manuali non si applica sempre con sicurezza. Anzi: è notorio che la tradizione del poema è caratterizzata proprio dalla scarsezza di errori macroscopici significativi e, viceversa, dall'abbondanza pervasiva di varianti adiafore'. Andrea Canova, 'Il testo della Commedia dopo l'edizione Petrocchi', *Testo*, 61–62 (2011), 65–78 (p. 74).
[38] Zaccarello, II, p. 483. His emphasis.
[39] Zaccarello, II, p. 483.

potensa li martelli'.[40] All three variants are syllabically equal – all are probably also 'pex[a]' words, a unit Dante conceptualises in the *De vulgari eloquentia* which embraces such 'trisillaba vel vicinissima trisillabati' with penultimate stress.[41] How does this slew of divine faculties emerge for a single line? Possibly because of memorial relation to *Inf.* 24.119: 'Oh potenza di Dio, quant' è severa / che cotai colpi per vendetta croscia!'. That line, in turn, is given as 'Oh vendetta di Dio' in Vat, and as 'Oh giustizia di Dio' in Co (Cortona, Biblioteca Comunale e dell'Accademia Etrusca, MS 88, 14C). What is more, *Inf.* 24.119 – 'Oh potenza di Dio…' – repeats the form of *Inf.* 14.16, varying it with a synonym: 'O vendetta di Dio, quanto tu dei'. As a single *locus* of variation, *Inf.* 11.90 – 'la divina vendetta li martelli] iustizia, potensa' – can appear monogenetic and significant. When placed alongside echoing lines, that appearance of monogenesis dissolves,[42] but it is additionally difficult to be precise about where memory finds its holds. The line varies within a latitude established by the poem's own use. This first example already suggests an end to which I hope to direct the current analysis: we can speak of these variants as the consequence of echoes between lines, but because the poem can work this way too – generating synonymic variants of its own lines – these variants also seem to speak to a process that meets the poem on its own terms.

Divine attributes appear in another Barbi *locus*, *Purg.* 19.125: 'a quanto fia piacer del giusto sire'.[43] The so-called Cento or 'group of one hundred'[44] reading for this line is 'de l'alto

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[40] It must be said that stemmatically (that is, using the Trovato équipe's proposal for a stemma), the reading 'vendetta' is not seriously challenged – it still has the support of the β-branch (50% of the tradition, albeit represented by a single MS, Urb (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urbinate latino 366, 1352) and at least half the γ-branch (25% of the tradition).

[41] Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. by Enrico Fenzi (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2012), 2.7.5.

[42] The gravitational pull of these lines draws in a further Barbi *locus* at Purg. 25.31, 'Se la veduta etterna li dislego'. This line in turn varies in a manner similar to *Inf.* 11.90, as 'Se la vendecta etterna' (Lau, Ricc) 'li disflego' (Ash, Eg (London, British Museum, MS Egerton 943), Fi (Naples, Biblioteca Oratoriana dei Girolamini, MS 4 20), Ham (where the whole terzina is in the margin), La (Piacenza, Biblioteca Comunale Passerini Landi, MS 190)).

[43] Petrocchi prints 'Sire', but I do not follow his capitalisation here (see note 45 below).

[44] The 'Cento' MSS are in fact a group of seventy (extant) MSS, produced in the Florentine workshop of Francesco di ser Nardo da Barberino. Petrocchi reports the following reading in the following Cento MSS: Ga (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Gaddiano 90 sup. 125, c. 1347-8), Lau (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS 40 16), Lo (Belluno, Biblioteca del Seminario, MS 35), Ricc (Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS 1010), and Tz (Milan, Biblioteca dell'Archivio Storico Civico e Trivulziana, MS 1077).

sire', which Petrocchi notes is probably an echo of *Inf*. 29.56, 'de l'alto sire infallibil giustizia'.[45] On the other hand, Po (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Palatino 313) gives 'del nostro sire' for this line, which in turn is probably formed on *Par*. 13.54, 'che partorisce, amando, il nostro sire'. If Petrocchi discards the latter two readings on the grounds of the contaminating influence of similar lines, the accepted reading in turn is not innocent of such influence. Petrocchi's accepted reading for *Purg*. 19.125, 'a quanto fia piacer del giusto sire' may equally involve the recollection of *Par*. 20.64-5, 'come s'innamora / lo ciel del giusto rege'.[46] This last example, albeit, does not involve 'sire' but 'rege'. The form however is quite similar – both words in this pair are easily-swapped disyllables. In the event I do not mean to cast doubt on Petrocchi's accepted reading, but rather, to raise the possibility that there is a serviceable type or unit here – 'alto sire', 'giusto sire', 'giusto rege' – which the poet is liable to vary as much as a later scribe.

Synonymic variants can also include formulaic phrases for a recurring concept, longer than one word. A number of Barbi's *loci* are variants that involve common ways to refer to Vergil. In the following *loci* these convertible phrases each occupy five syllables, such that 'lo mio maestro', for instance, appears in each *locus*:

lo savio mio inver' lui gridò forse] lo savio duca inver' lui g. f. Ham, lo mio maestro inver' lui g. f. Pr, lo savio mio Virgilio g. f. Cha Vat (*Inf*. 12.16)

e 'l buon maestro senza mia dimanda] lo mio maestro s. mia d. Ga Lau Lo Ricc Tz, come maestro s. mia d. Co (*Inf*. 18.82)

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[45] To which might be added Purg. 15.112, 'orando a l'alto Sire, in tanta guerra'.
[46] The case of divine attributes is particularly rich in respect of synonymic variants. This could be due to the number of lines that contain these, or indeed contamination of adjacent scholia and glosses. See also *Par*. 13.27, in una persona essa e l'umana] natura Co, sustancia Urb Vat. Here Petrocchi notes the possible interference of *Purg*. 3.36, 'che tiene una sustanza in tre persone'.

rimontò 'l duca mio e trasse mee] r. il mio maestro e t. mee Eg Fi Ham Laur Pa

Parm Pr Rb Urb, lo duca rimontò et t. mee Co (*Inf*. 26.15)[47]

Deciding between variants like these is especially difficult because the variants are already the author's own re-formulations of much-used phrases. So a space that can hold the ultra-common 'E io: «Maestro»…' might equally hold:

e io signore andiamo a maggior fretta] et io buon duca a. a m. f. Vat (*Purg*. 6.49)

Perhaps formulaic phrases for a recurring concept like 'Vergil' are of limited probative value in assessing how widespread or how characteristic these mnemonically-suspect, synonymic variants are. Other variant *loci* printed by Barbi show scribes recognising and mixing up less formulaic, but no less set, blocks of words.[48] For instance *Inf*. 9.64: 'e già venìa su per le torbide onde] già venìa su per le sucide onde Mad Mart Triv, sucidonde Parm'. The variant 'su per le sucide onde' appears in the previous canto, at *Inf*. 8.10. At least one MS, Pr (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fonds italien 539, mid-14th C), actually gives these two lines in reverse order. Memorial contamination is one explanation for the variant 'sucide onde' at *Inf*. 9.64. But

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[47] The MS support for a reading with 'il mio maestro' is much stronger, but Petrocchi accepts 'duca mio'. In either case the modern editor must shorten the line by a syllable for metrical reasons, so Petrocchi prints ''l duca mio'. I give the forms for these lines and variants that appear in Petrocchi's edition, though for this part of the essay I have not printed his modern capitalisation or punctuation. I have printed his diacritical markers on verb endings, to distinguish 'si' from adverbial 'sì', and apheresis/apocopation, and added this in printed variant readings where necessary. Though the forms I print are Petrocchi's, to be clear, my reference here is to Barbi's list of *loci*, which I have consulted in the convenient form it is presented in Caterina Brandoli's essay cited above (p. 40). I have additionally chosen here and throughout this chapter to cite MS sigla for discarded variants, but not for the variants Petrocchi accepts.

[48] The notion of recognition, instead of confusion, is a richer but no less economic conception of how scribes arrive at the following variants. I am loosely borrowing the idea from a study of critical intelligence among scribes, which notes: 'Behind accurate copying, which is more common than we sometimes think, and behind variant copying, there is often a conscious effort to be correct'. Daniel Wakelin, *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375-1510* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 63.

another is that a choice is made here to conserve an original usage against a more obvious Vergilian borrowing ('turbidus…gurges').[49] Dante varies a Vergilian line, and then deploys it, or so Petrocchi has it. But then who varies whom, and who authoritatively, is perhaps not easy to establish.

Sometimes synonymic variants relate to very common words. We see this frequently with variants relating to movement, as at *Inf,* 13.116:

nudi e graffiati fuggendo sì forte] n. e g. correndo sì f. Pr

And the inverse case at *Purg*. 6.15:

e l'altro ch'annegò correndo in caccia] >e< l'a. ch'a. fuggendo in c. Mart Triv

LauSC (MS, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pl. 26, sin.)

It is likewise difficult to choose between coming and going, 'venir' and 'andar', at *Inf*. 30.6:

andar carcata da ciascuna mano] venir c. da c. m. Cha Vat Chig

or between 'andar' and 'passar' at *Inf*. 8.101:

e se 'l passar più oltre ci è negato] e se l'andar più o. ci è n. Cha Co Mart Triv

Vat.

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[49] Vergil, *Aeneid I-VI*, ed. by R. Deryck Williams (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1996), 6.296.

Petrocchi treats this last variant place, after Barbi, as a major separative error, adding however that it is difficult to 'determinare se il richiamo a *passo* del v. 104 serva a confermare la prima lezione o sia invece la causa di un'arbitraria eco'.[50] As with movement words, Dante's words for sight sometimes substitute for one another, as at *Par*. 26.1:

> mentre io dubiava per lo viso spento] mentre io d. per lo lume s. Co Ga Ham
>
> Lau Lo Ricc Tz.

The variant reading recalls *Purg*. 3.132 ('a lume spento'), and again, whether this confirms or denies the reading is undecidable. Further optical strain is present in Barbi's *loci*, as at *Purg*. 1.27:

> poi che privato sè di mirar quelle] poi che p. sè di veder q. Laur (Florence,
>
> Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS 40 22) Mart Rb Triv

or *Purg*. 13.121:

> tanta ch'io volsi in sù l'ardita faccia] tanta ch'i' levai 'n sù l'a. f. Pr Vat.

What goes for eyes goes for speech words, too – as in *Inf*. 9.53:

> dicean tutte riguardando in giuso] gridavan t. r. in g. Co La Lau Laur Lo Mart
>
> Pr Ricc Triv Tz

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[50] Petrocchi, p. 174.

Or for parts of the body, as at *Par.* 8.64:

> fulgeami già in fronte la corona] f. già in testa la c. Mart Triv, f. già in capo la
>
> c. Pr

The relative unobtrusiveness of the above synonymic variants, however, is not true of other *loci*, where the possibilities of synonymy have been more fully exploited. At *Par.* 1.122, we find:

> del suo lume fa ciel sempre quieto] del lume suo fa 'l ciel s. q. Eg Mad Rb, del suo
>
> ordine fa 'l ciel s. q. Mart Triv

Petrocchi rejects the variant 'suo ordine' here because, he suggests, the word echoes its use at l. 109 , 'Ne l'ordine ch'io dico'. But the accepted word 'lume' certainly also appears in *Par.* 1. Whether Providence consists in an 'ordine' or a 'lume' is on those grounds entirely undecidable. Both syntagmata, 'suo lume' and 'suo ordine', also appear elsewhere in the poem ('suo lume' *Purg.* 4.63, *Purg.* 17.57, *Par.* 10.30, 'suo lucente' *Par.* 13.56: 'suo ordine' *Par.* 3.54). There are important rhythmical differences the three variant lines: the Mart Triv reading ('suo ordine') requires the elimination of the diaresis at 'quïeto', affecting the cadence (the rhyme, with 'decreto' / 'lieto' (disyllabic), does not resolve this). The syllabic equivalence of these synonymic variants does not equal a rhythmical equivalence. But purely in terms of acceptable syllable quantities, where Petrocchi hopes to hear inter-linear echoes in order to pare down viable readings, he accidentally conjures the opposite movement: both these readings involve

echoes attested elsewhere. In trying to listen to these echoes, is what we are really hearing 'echi di Dante entro Dante'?[51]

In this sense, the term 'innovation' for a variant reading does not always seem appropriate for synonymic variants in the *Commedia*. This wider lens on the poem's use suggests that a better term for these variants is often 'conservation'. This is the case with *Par*. 30.39:

del maggior corpo al ciel ch'è pura luce] del m. c. al c. ch'è vera l. Fi Ga Gv

(Florence, Biblioteca dei marchesi Venturi Ginori Liusci, MS 46) Lau Lo Ricc

Tz Urb

In choosing between 'vera' and pura', stemmatic inducements (Petrocchi's or in fact Trovato's) are equivocal, and the tradition does not divide neatly. Petrocchi, using the critical topic we have been attending to, notes that 'amor di vero ben' (l. 41) a few lines later advocates against 'vera luce' at l. 39 because of the echo. So the reading Petrocchi accepts is 'pura luce'. Might the echo be emphatic? If we look to the broader poem, we find 'vera luce' (*Purg*. 15.66), 'l'alta luce che da sé è vera' (*Par*. 33.54), 'verace luce' (*Par*. 3.32), but never 'pura luce'. We also find 'viva luce' (*Purg*. 31.139 'vera' Ham, *Par*. 13.55, *Par*. 23.31, *Par*. 31.46), and 'luce viva' appears just below the line in question at l. 49. Ten lines later, at l. 59, we find 'nulla luce è tanto mera' – a synonym of 'pura'. In this broader context, 'pura luce' at l. 39 appears to be a variant of the well-established usage 'vera luce'. If anything, 'vera luce' at l.39 is much less apt to be a scribal innovation spurred on by the pressure of surrounding words, as a (likely) scribal conservation of the poem's broader use. Once something like a memorial axis of

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[51] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 80.

selection comes into view, the presumed 'direzione innovatrice' reverses, and Petrocchi's discarded variant ('vera luce') appears the more authoritative.

The final variant place which I will cite here is a well-known one, and perhaps a rather straightforward case of memorial contamination. But in turning to my own examples of 'echi di Dante entro Dante' afterward, I hope to invert what exactly is so obvious about it, looking back at it from the way the poet himself re-uses old shapes to make new ones. At *Par*. 23.68 the variant readings preserved make clear a recollection of *Inf*. 8.29:

quel che fendendo va l'ardita prora] quel che fendendo va l'anticha p. Ash Co Laur Mart Triv, quel che secando va l'ardita p. Fi Lau, quei che deffendendo va l'ardita p. Mad

The variants 'secando' and 'anticha' here obviously betray the memory of Charon's boat – 'segando se ne va l'antica prora' (*Inf*. 8.29). The variant 'anticha' is clearly inappropriate in this passage – the comparison is that of a big boat with a 'picciola barca' (*Par*. 23.67), not an ancient one. The scribal variants attested draw out a seemingly deliberate cross-reference. The scribal mixing and matching of the two lines from *Inferno* and *Paradiso* is very obviously caused by the memorability of the first. The likely proto-diffusion of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* from as early as 1315[52] suggests that a memorable line from *Inferno* had a running start over an analogous line in the *Paradiso*, particularly in an early MS like Ash. But the simple appraisal of memorial contamination here is not enough. This can be related to the conditions that favour it. This kind of relationship between lines is what Contini named a rhythmical figure: the poet has lightly adapted an old line, mostly leaving everything where it is, to produce a new line over eighty canti later. Synonyms ('secando', 'fendendo') and easy,

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[52] Viel, p. 994.

syllabically equal switches ('anticha', 'ardita') allow for this. As we watch what Contini called a rhythmical figure emerge from the apparatus criticus of a variorum edition, I want to turn now to the internal, intra-poem relationships that disclose a process of synonymic variation but, as it were, from the opposite vector. The comparison I want to draw is between the kind of warp apparent in the above variant *loci*, and the poet's own twisting of old lines to make new ones.

As with a number of Barbi's *loci*, lines containing words for movement are particularly apt to be re-used, with synonymic words swapped in for others. So:

> quando noi ci mettemmo per un bosco   (*Inf*. 13.2)
>
> poscia che noi intrammo per la porta   (*Inf*. 14.86),

or

> ché, quando fui sì presso di lor giunto,   (*Purg*. 13.55)
>
> ma quand' i' fui sì presso di lor fatto,   (*Purg*. 29.46),

or

> com' io fui dentro, l'occhio intorno invio: (*Inf*. 9.109)
>
> e l'occhio riposato intorno mossi   (*Inf*. 4.4),

or over the line units like

> Se tu pur mo in questo mondo cieco

caduto sè di quella dolce terra	(*Inf*. 27.25-6)

Io non so chi tu sè né per che modo	
venuto sè qua giù; ma fiorentino	(*Inf*. 33.10-11).

This synonymic kind of variation affects not just common words, but also contextually-relevant words too:

Chirón si volse in su la destra poppa	(*Inf*. 12.97)
Ond' ei si volse inver' lo destro lato	(*Inf*. 16.112)

Like the 'fronte] testa, capo' alternatives for *Par*. 8.64 above, synonymic swaps for body parts are a feature of the poet's ability to vary single lines:

e di molt' altri; e qui chinò la fronte	(*Purg*. 3.44)
tal parve quelli; e poi chinò le ciglia	(*Purg*. 7.13);

again:

tosto che lume il volto mi percosse	(*Purg*. 17.44)
Tosto che ne la vista mi percosse	(*Purg*. 30.40).

Words for speech can likewise vary, while leaving everything else as it is. In the following instances, the reused-but-varied item is a half-line, not a whole line:

più non ti dico e più non ti rispondo   (*Inf*. 6.90)

Quivi il lasciammo, che più non ne narro   (*Inf*. 8.64),

mi rimiraron sanza far parola   (*Inf*. 23.86)

…guardai

nel viso a' mie' figliuoi sanza far motto   (*Inf*. 33.48).

Different faculties can be varied for each other in this way, as in:

La gloria di colui che tutto move   (*Par*. 1.1)

nel veder di colui che tutto vede   (*Par*. 21.50)

or

La tua loquela ti fa manifesto   (*Inf*. 10.25)

tutta tua visïon fa manifesta   (*Par*. 17.128),

or

Così andammo infino a la lumera   (*Inf*. 4.106)

Così parlammo infino al loco primo   (*Inf*. 29.37).

Adjectives, as much as nouns and verbs, can be swapped in for others in substantially similar lines. One of the examples of a 'figura ritmica' which Pietro Beltrami includes in his

study of the *Commedia*'s repeated language from the 1980s, might be mentioned in connection with this kind of adjectival variant:[53]

mossi la voce: "O anime affannate   (*Inf*. 5.80)

gridò a noi: "O anime crudeli   (*Inf*. 33.110)

incominciai: "O anime sicure   (*Purg*. 26.53).

Discovering a rolling set of appositions for a given noun is not particularly uncommon, as in:

Quivi si piangon li spietati danni   (*Inf*. 12.106)

che va piangendo i suoi etterni danni   (*Inf*. 15.42)

or

Ora sen va per un secreto calle   (*Inf*. 10.1)

si trasmutava per lo tristo calle   (*Inf*. 29.69).

'Spietati' and 'etterni', or 'secreto' and 'tristo', are not synonyms, but they are not unrelated appositions either – eternal torment *is* pitiless, and both these paths are narrow ones. A broader sense of synonymy reigns in the following instances:

Noi passammo oltre, là 've la gelata

ruvidamente un'altra gente fascia,   (*Inf*. 33.91-2)

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[53] Pietro G. Beltrami, *Metrica, poetica, metrica dantesca* (Pisa: Pacini, 1981), p. 46. Beltrami's study is discussed above, pp. 21-22.

> Quando noi fummo là 've la rugiada
>
> pugna col sole, per essere in parte   (*Purg*. 1.121-2)

'dew' and 'ice' are not the same but both are states of water, and fit in their respective worlds. An interesting case is:

> Li occhi rivolsi al suon di questo motto,   (*Purg*. 5.7)
>
> quando mi volsi al suon del nome mio,   (*Purg*. 30.62)

Again 'questo motto' and 'nome mio' are not synonyms, but they are both briefly-sounded 'motti'. The process of synonymic variation is still apparent between lines like the following, where word boundaries have slightly shifted:

> Quest' è colei ch'è tanto posta in croce   (*Inf*. 7.91)
>
> sovra colui ch'era disteso in croce   (*Inf*. 23.125)

Here the syllable difference between 'è' and 'era' has meant that a three-syllable synonym has had to be found for the four-syllable space of 'tanto posta'. But Fortune and Caiaphas are both in their way 'stretched out' and 'put' upon a cross. The participles in these respective lines are still variants 'di tipo sinonimico'.[54]

To recall one of Contini's examples of a typical variant – 'anche di qua nuova schiera / gente s'auna' – similar swaps for 'gente' are found in:

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[54] To this pair might be added Inf. 7.91: 'non dovei tu [scil. Pisa] i figliuoi porre a tal croce' (*Inf*. 33.87).

e vidi gente per lo vallon tondo   (*Inf*. 20.7)

e vidi spirti per la fiamma andando   (*Purg*. 25.124),

and again:

Vien dietro a me, e lascia dir le genti: (*Purg*. 5.13)

soverchiò tutti; e lascia dir li stolti   (*Purg*. 26.119).

Both these last, incidentally, are rather a radical, not synonymic variant form of

ritorna 'n dietro e lascia andar la traccia   (*Inf*. 15.33).

That Contini's awareness of 'echi di Dante entro Dante' likely arises from the experience of *variantistica* can be shown by Petrocchi's note on the line

e volser contra lui tutt' i runcigli   (*Inf*. 21.71)

which Petrocchi mentions is echoed by

porser li uncini verso li 'mpaniati   (*Inf*. 22.149).

For the former line, MS witnesses in fact record the variant 'volser] porser'.[55] 'Sia l'una che l'altra lezione sono accettabili' Petrocchi notes of *Inf*. 21.71.[56] When the echo, as between these

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[55] e volser contra lui tutt' i runcigli Ash Cha Eg Fi Ham La Laur Mad Pa Parm Po Pr Rb Urb Vat] porser Ga Lau Lo Ricc Triv Tz, poser Mart
[56] Petrocchi, p. 183.

lines, seems deliberate and authorial, and at least one synonymic substitution does too ('runcigli', 'uncini'), the variants 'volser' and 'porser' are more difficult to relate to scribal recollection – both are 'accettabili'.

One might be tempted to speculate that early in *Inferno*, a reliance on re-used lines with variant words merely indicates a relative narrowness of style – an instinctive falling back on early successes as the poet gets into his stride. This might be said of

restato m'era, non mutò aspetto   (*Inf*. 10.74)

Vedi Tiresia, che mutò sembiante   (*Inf*. 20.40),

or in the close-quartered repetitions of

un fracasso d'un suon, pien di spavento   (*Inf*. 9.65)

Ahi quanto mi parea pien di disdegno!   (*Inf*. 9.88).

But this kind of variation happens just as often in the *Paradiso*, as in the near-synonymic exchange of 'piacer' and 'bontate' (and indeed 'acquista' and 'comprende') in the following lines:

in che più di piacer lo canto acquista   (*Par*. 20.144)

quanto più di bontate in sé comprende   (*Par*. 26.30)

What strikes in an example like this is, again, the identity of syllable count in the exchanged words, as well as the identity of word order, even while the verb transitivity changes.

Although it is synonymic variation that Zaccarello suggests characterises the Barbi *loci*, examining similar mechanics between lines of the poem, we might also include examples where synonymic swaps become startling, antonymic swaps:

la rigida giustizia che mi fruga   (*Inf.* 30.70)

ché la viva giustizia che mi spira   (*Par.* 6.88).

Something similar seems to happen across species boundaries here:

Allor distese al legno ambo le mani   (*Inf.* 8.40)

e poi distese i dispietati artigli   (*Inf.* 30.9).

Sometimes two words can be varied between two uses of a similar line:

che rifulgea da più di mille milia   (*Par.* 26.78)

vidi specchiarsi in più di mille soglie   (*Par.* 30.114)

or the parts of a line can be chopped and changed, while still exhibiting the procedure of synonymically varying a particular word in a line:

quando lo 'mperador che sempre regna   (*Par.* 12.40)

Quell' uno e due e tre che sempre vive

e regna sempre in tre e 'n due e 'n uno,   (*Par.* 14.28-29).

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To these last 'sempre' appositions, might also be added:

odor di lode al sol che sempre verna,   (*Par*. 30.126).

The grammatical shifts in the following case are caused by the effort to synonymically swap 'temo' for 'fatto', resulting in a slight recalibration of the parts that remain:

che molte volte al fatto il dir vien meno.   (*Inf*. 4.147)

sì ch'al volger del temo non vien meno;   (*Par*. 13.9).

Going back further, 'temo' and 'fatto' above in turn appear synonymic swaps for 'mente' in:

nel libro de la mente che vien meno   ('E'   m'incresce   di   me   sí

duramente', l. 59).[57]

Though these last few examples show other kinds of change, they still show the same synonymic variation as before, hinting further at how fundamental this kind of variation might be to the poet's craft.

A final set of examples show more extensive transformation than one synonymic word swapped in for another, but are still worth considering here, as they further bear out this phenomenon. At the beginning of *Purgatorio*, in

Lo bel pianeto che d'amar conforta   (*Purg*. 1.19)

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[57] Dante, *Vita Nova*, p. 756.

Francesca's

> Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,   (*Inf*. 5.103)

can be distinctly heard, though much has also changed. This sense that lexis has been swapped

out, but exchanged for relevant equivalents, appears between

> e torni a riveder le belle stelle   (*Inf*. 16.83)

and

> se mai torni a veder lo dolce piano   (*Inf*. 28.74),

as well as

> rivolti al monte ove ragion ne fruga,   (*Purg*. 3.3)

and

> inver' la valle ove mai non si scolpa.   (*Purg*. 24.84).

'Lo bel pianeto', Venus, is a metonym (rather than a synonym) of 'Amor'. Likewise, a

conceptual synonymy is present in the last pair – the eternal realms. Though the same kind of

syllabically equal synonymy is unmistakable in the last examples, both also begin to point

beyond the substitution of single words, to a more robust understanding of syntactical re-use.

But before leaving off, two final examples appear to bear out this synonymic kind of variation, but re-work word order at the same time. '[A]rso' for 'vano' in

> e visse, e vi lasciò suo corpo vano   (*Inf.* 20.87)
>
> per ch'io il corpo sù arso lasciai   (*Inf.* 30.75),

and 'monte' for 'poggio' in

> e vedi omai che 'l poggio l'ombra getta   (*Purg.* 6.51)
>
> u' la prim' ombra gitta il santo monte;   (*Purg.* 28.12).

The seeming overabundance of good readings for a number of lines, which complicates the criticism of variants in the tradition of the *Commedia*, is reflected in how the poet himself makes good use of what he has already made, by varying it by a word. As in the prior examples of variant *loci*, these substitutions can be of common movement or sense words, close nominal synonyms like 'ciglia' for 'fronte', or 'aspetto' for 'sembiante', as well as of quite distinct aspects of common ideas, like 'conforta' for 'perdona' (scil. 'amor'). The comparison of a compositional aspect of the poem with a kind, or type, of variant that characterises its tradition, should direct us to an idea of a process, or concept, that yokes the two. One term which has already appeared in this discussion is *orality*. The term is first retracted, and only then put forward by Contini in his discussion of *varianti* in 'Un'interpretazione'. 'Nessuno potrà sospettare,' he writes, 'che la trasmissione della *Commedia* sia di natura orale piuttosto che scritta'. Only then he concludes that 'quelle asimmetrie [in grouping variants into MS families] provano la commistione della tradizione orale nella tradizione scritta'.[58] What Contini means

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[58] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, pp. 73–74.

by this word requires a wider lens on his work, and on the Italian philological tradition on which it builds.

A hypothesis of 'oral' contamination in a written tradition was, long before Contini, promoted by Pio Rajna as the latter sought to understand the tradition of the eleventh-century French verse *Vie de Saint Alexis*. In 1929 Rajna published a recently discovered MS witness to the text (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vaticano latino 5334, f. 125, c. 1140-60).[59] It added a seventh witness, one which seemed to propose a substantially different text to that in the standard edition. In 1872, Gaston Paris had published an edition of the *Alexis* – an edition that is in a sense a founding document of the tradition of Romance philology. Paris adapted the Lachmannian method to produce a stemma of the (then) six witnesses to the text, which he had grouped into two families.[60] Rajna's publication of a new *Alexis* witness was then also a challenge to Paris' stemma. Rajna formulated six different possible stemmata, settling on none. '[G]li stemmi ricavati dai sei primi luoghi scrutinati in presenza di V darebbero altrettante costellazioni, inconciliabili fra loro', as Contini put Rajna's findings, 'onde il corollario che la tradizione del testo sia mista', which is to say, 'agli indubbî elementi scritti si associ, in misura importante, la trasmissione orale'.[61] For Contini, Rajna's oralist critique – his intuition that greater textual fluidity is inherent to early Romance texts, making them irreducible to Lachmann's method (which is, after all, aimed at a different kind of object: mostly medieval traditions of the post-Alexandrian redactions of Classical texts) – could not be dismissed, certainly not by a simple reassertion of Lachamnnian genealogical principles. So, in the 1953 essay just cited, entitled 'La "Vita" francese "di sant'Alessio', Contini attempted

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[59] Pio Rajna, 'Un nuovo testo parziale del "San Alessio" primitivo', *Archivum Romanicum*, 13 (1929), 1–86.

[60] For the stemma, see Gaston Paris, *La vie de saint Alexis : poème du XIe siècle et renouvellements des XIIe, XIIIe, et XIVe siècles*, ed. by Gaston Paris and Léopold Pannier (Paris: Franck, 1872), p. 27 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k33044x> [accessed 8 April 2019].

[61] This text began life as an inaugural lecture given by Contini in Florence in 1953, and was not published until its appearance in *Un augurio a Raffaele Mattioli* (Milan and Napes: Ricciardi, 1970), pp. 343-374. I refer here to the editions republished in Gianfranco Contini, *Breviario di ecdotica* (Milan-Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1986), p. 75; Contini, *Frammenti di filologia romanza*, II, p. 964.

to reassert the systematicity of the *Alexis* tradition, or its susceptibility to common-error criticism, while holding on to what Rajna had shown to be so irreducibly changeful about it. To do this, he included those features which Rajna deemed 'oral'. These features are in turn a germ of 'Un'interpretazione di Dante', and so I quote Contini at some length:

> L'illazione cavata dal Rajna era che la tradizione fosse non soltanto scritta, ma orale. Anche scritta, naturalmente, come provano molti dei fatti citati fin qui, ed egli…rincarava la dose. Ma altresì orale, e di ciò scorgeva due altri indizî. Il primo era nella ripetizione erronea, un po' dappertutto, di versi e frasi remote nel testo: dato incontrastabile, ma che indica solo come in ogni tradizione scritta, e nessuno oserebbe negare, sia un minimo di oralità e memoria; o al massimo che gli scribi volgari medievali sapessero a memoria, un po' più di quelli di altre situazioni (o vòlti all'intoccabile e grammatica latino, o còlti da scrupolo classico), parti del loro testo. Il secondo indizio sarebbe nella licenza e arbitrarietà delle sostituzioni singole di lezioni.[62]

These two aspects of 'orality' – the 'ripetizione…di versi e frasi remote nel testo', and the 'arbitrarietà delle sostituzioni singole di lezioni' – on Contini's appraisal, do not necessarily detract from the usefulness of a stemma. On the contrary, once these oral phenomena are understood as inherent to an early Romance text, their interference can be minimised (in any event, it is only attendant on these scribes 'un po' più di quelli di altre situazioni'). But what is minimised here is magnified in the later essay on Dante, which now reads as a sort of hyperbole. The 'ripetizione erronea…di versi e frasi remote nel testo' becomes the general tendency

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[62] Contini, *Breviario di ecdotica*, p. 95; Contini, *Frammenti di filologia romanza*, II, p. 982.

towards re-use that 'si documenti non da questo o quel luogo, ma dalla totalità dell'opera'.[63]

The fact that 'gli scribi volgari medievali sapessero a memoria…parti del loro testo' is magnified into 'la memoria nazionale, una stampa oggettiva della memorabilità del testo'. Memorability becomes a fact about the medium itself, where memorabile lines 'occupano una percentuale amplissima del tessuto dantesco'.[64] Precisely those features of orality which were containable from the perspective of the 1953 essay, prove to be the grounds of the 1965 essay. These macroscopic topics rest on a common textual-critical bedrock: the 'arbitrarietà' with which scribes treat variant readings in the 1953 has its equivalent, in the 1965 essay, in the 'varianti irriducibili alla razionalità "verticale" della tradizione soltanto scritta'.[65] But for the foregoing analysis, what matters most is the transformation in meaning, between '53 and '65, of the word 'scribe'. By 1965, Contini has expanded this subject of memorial contamination to embrace a very different actor: 'ci si può anche chiedere se essa [memorabilità del testo dantesco] non cominci ad agire sull'autore stesso'.[66] Having defended precisely this connection between an authorial and a scribal process in the foregoing analysis of variants, let us now ask: to what extent does it make sense to speak of the *Commedia* as orally *composed*?

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[63] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 78.
[64] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 79.
[65] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 73.
[66] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 79.

Orality

> Nessuno potrà sospettare che la trasmissione della *Commedia* sia di natura orale piuttosto che scritta.
>
> Contini[1]

Why not? We know from Petrarch that the 'ignorant' recited the *Commedia* in the shops and markets, theatres and crossroads of Florence.[2] So did a blacksmith and an ass-driver, at least in a pair of Sacchetti's *Trecentonovelle*. Both these tradesmen come to rue their public recitals after an enraged 'Dante' publicly beats them for their lack of artistry.[3] As early as 1318-19, the Bolognese scholar Giovanni del Virgilio reprimanded Dante for not having written the *Commedia* in Latin, because as a vernacular text unlettered people could get a hold of it, 'et si non varient, cum sint ydiomata mille'.[4] Both Sacchetti and del Virgilio made clear the link between textual corruption and popularity and both, in turn, supposed that the right way to adjust for this was to keep the text indoors.[5] Their fears regarding oral performance were well founded. What they were trying to keep the poem from was in fact a well-developed civic poetry-performance infrastructure. We know about this in Florence from a comment of Filippo Villani's on Vergil's 'poeta fui, e cantai' (*Inf.* 1.73). Villani, himself a public 'reader' of Dante

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[1] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 73.

[2] Francesco Petrarca, *Letters on Familiar Matters*, trans. by Aldo S. Bernardo, 3 vols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), III, 21.15. Giovanni del Virgilio, 'I. Iohanes deuirgilio Danti allagerij', in *Dante and Giovanni del Virgilio: Including a Critical Edition of the text of Dante's 'Eclogae Latinae' and of the poetic remains of Giovanni del Virgilio*, ed. by Philip H. Wicksteed and Edmund G. Gardner (New York: Haskell House, 1970), pp. 287–90, l. 12.

[3] Novelle 114 and 115. Franco Sacchetti, *Le trecento novelle*, ed. by Michelangelo Zaccarello (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2014), pp. 260–63.

[4] 'And if they don't rearrange it, there'll still be lots of dialect words'. Giovanni del Virgilio, l. 15. My translation.

[5] All the above sources are discussed in John Ahern, 'Singing the Book: Orality in the Reception of Dante's Comedy', in Dante: Contemporary Perspectives, ed. by Amilcare Iannucci (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 214–39 (pp. 214–21).

attached to the Florentine Studio between 1392 and 1405,[6] contrasts the wholesome sympotic song culture of the ancient Greeks and Romans with 'ioculares quidam, persimiles comicis…in area Sancti Martini, ubi magnus colligitur numerus proditorum'. [7] From the late thirteenth century this 'piazza san Martino', really more of a dead-end alley, hosted travelling *canterini* who sang *cantari*, the form in which the blacksmith performs Dante in Sacchetti's *novella*.[8] In del Virgilio's Bologna, late in the second decade of the fourteenth century, snippets of Dante's canzoni, as well as the earliest textual record of the *Inferno*, were copied into the margins of a civic register by notaries – likely, but not certainly, from memory.[9] There is ample evidence, then, of the oral transmission of the *Commedia*, for all that our sources record this fact with fear and loathing. Dante was, despite their protestations, a 'vulgo gratissimus auctor'.

To add to the external evidence, there are the addresses to an audience, and the references to the medium within the poem itself. As Peter Armour pointed out, 'the references to the acts of writing and reading in the *Commedia* are vastly outnumbered by allusions to and images of poetry as song or speech'.[10] When the poet speaks about what he is doing, he uses the verbs *dire* and *ridire*, *dicere* or *narrar*, more often than *scrivere*: 'perché più di largo / dicendo questo, mi sento ch'i' godo' (*Par*. 33.92-3). Exclamations, rhetorical questions, invectives, and addresses which sustain a dialogue between the poet and his audience, too, refer to a speech event – even when the addressed entity is a 'lettor'. As often it is simply 'voi'. The

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[6] Talbot R. Selby, 'Filippo Villani and His Vita of Guido Bonatti', Renaissance News, 11.4 (1958), 243–48 (p. 243) <https://doi.org/10.2307/2858145>.

[7] 'Those reciters, like actors, in the piazza San Martino, where a huge throng of treacherous types is gathered'. Filippo Villani, 'Inferno 1.73-5', Dartmouth Dante Project, dante.dartmouth.edu <accessed 17/2/2016>. My translation.

[8] Blake McDowell Wilson, 'Dominion of the Ear: Singing the Vernacular in Piazza San Martino', I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance, 16.1–2 (2013), 273–87 (p. 282).

[9] Carducci, fascinatingly, was responsible for the first edition of these poems from the Memoriali Bolognesi. His oral culture thesis has been hotly debated since: 'Poesie dunque che sapevansi a mente da uomini che, per quanto dotti, non facevano professione di poeti, dovevano essere poesie allora in voga, come chi dicesse di moda, popolari alcune, quasi popolari per l'accettazione del favor pubblico tutte…'. Giosuè Carducci, 'Intorno ad alcune rime dei secoli XIII e XIV ritrovate nei memoriali dell'archivio notarile di Bologna', in Archeologia poetica (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1904), pp. 107–282 (p. 117).

[10] Peter Armour, 'Dante's Tongue: The Language of Oral Narration in the Comedy' (unpublished paper, given to the Oxford Dante Society, 2001), p. 3. My thanks to Margaret Bent for bringing it to my attention.

internal evidence is still enough to suggest that an at least imagined act of recitation is part of the poem at every point. A couple of extant studies of orality in the *Commedia* tradition have drawn on these addresses, as well as from the external testimony of contemporary writers and scholars, to propose at least a '[t]wofold reception',[11] or a written text that was nonetheless conceived of as 'a task for [the] tongue'.[12] Orality, for both, is primarily a question of reception, imagining an audience and a distinct channel of public reception.

To add to Ahern and Armour's evidence, it might also be added that the *Commedia* frequently reflects on the duration of live speech. The poet Charles Bernstein wrote that what distinguishes a live poetry reading from reading a text is 'an engagement not with abstract time but with duration and its microtones, discontinuities, striations, and disfluencies.'[13] The *Paradiso* in particular frequently refers to the 'duration', or the *while* of speech: 'ritegna l'image | *mentre ch'io dico*' Dante instructs us (*Par.* 13.3, my emphasis throughout), and then makes use of the same duration himself in *Par.* 20: 'sì, *mentre ch'e' parlò*, sì mi ricorda' (145). He makes use of the time of listening to prepare an answer, 'così m'armava io d'ogne ragione / *mentre ch'ella dicea*' (*Par.* 24.49), and is attended to in this time in turn: '*Mentr' io diceva*, dentro al vivo seno / di quello incendio tremolava un lampo' (*Par.* 25.79). The *while* of speech is referred to in the *Inferno* as well: 'Mentre che sì parlava, ed el trascorse' (*Inf.* 25.34). There also are other actions, apart from speech, that can occupy this 'mentre' space: singing is one of them 'E mentr' io li cantava cotai note / forte spingava con ambo le piote' (*Inf.* 19.118), and another is feeling lost '*Mentr' io dubbiava* per lo viso spento' (*Par.* 26.1). The poem's references to the time it takes to say its words may well address the factual time of recitation. One of the resources available to live performance is the complexity of attention and disattention, or the parallel time of a listener. These examples refer to this complementary time

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[11] Ahern, p. 218.
[12] Armour, p. 24.
[13] Charles Bernstein, 'Introduction', in *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 3–23 (p. 14).

of thinking, preparing, recollecting, or getting ready to respond, furthering a sense that the *Commedia* understands itself as 'a task for [the] tongue'.

But beyond Ahern and Armour's sense of a '[t]wofold', or parallel oral reception, what about the internal evidence for orality from a compositional standpoint? That is, orality as something the poem shows about itself from how it is put together? If the suggestion that the *Commedia* was orally composed seems wilfully contrarian,[14] then it is worth looking carefully again at these terms. It is perhaps the notion of oral *reception* that is the misleading term, because it can only point to something other than the textual evidence – a parallel, extra-textual part of the poem's dissemination we can never know very much about. But if a text is conceived of as a 'task for the tongue', shouldn't that affect its inner workings as well? To posit oral *composition*, on the other hand, does not so sharply raise a question of mouth *or* pen. It is memory – the poet's extensive recollection of lines and part-lines, as well as the forward momentum of this memory through a tradition – that are the features associated with oral composition. The factual *os, oris* root of 'orality' is less important than the recollective process, through which new lines are made of old ones. The mouth is at the same time not negligible, but this is because 'The poet who is repeating his own phrase, or that of another, is doing so by ear.'[15] This sense of the 'oral' poet's activity is drawn from the first part of Milman Parry's 'Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making', of 1930. I do not suppose, crudely, that what Parry proved in late 20s and early 30s about Homeric poetry can also be discovered, *pari passu*, about Dante's. But if, as Contini put it, 'la vera sede della *Commedia* stia nella memoria e non nel libro',[16] then the last century's achievements in the study of traditional, or memory-

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[14] I need only point to the importance of the notion of 'textuality', or the textual support implied by the notion of 'autoexegesis', which has become fundamental to scholars' understanding of Dante in recent decades. A foundational study in this respect is Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[15] Milman Parry, The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers, ed. by Adam Parry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 321.

[16] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 73.

transmitted poetry can help to suggest how this distinct support makes for a distinct object. In this chapter I want to push the resemblance between Contini's question – 'ci si può anche chiedere se essa [la "memorabilità del testo dantesco"] non cominci ad agire sull'autore stesso'[17] – and Milman Parry's sense of a bardic 'technique of diction', which was 'dependent on [the poet's] memory of an infinite number of details'.[18] I do not find evidence of any knowledge, on Contini's part, of Parry's work or of work in the Anglo-American Classics, or Indo-European comparativist, tradition that embraced Parry. Only one Dante scholar, and much more recently, seems to have drawn methodological ideas from Parry. Lloyd Howard mentions Parry's study of oral-formulaic composition his 2001 book, *Formulas of Repetition in Dante's* Commedia. Howard proposes a study of repetitious 'verbal figuralism' in Dante – but oddly does not mention Contini's 1965 study of 'figure ritmiche'. Howard's study quickly sidelines its Parry-esque oral-formulaic opening, to propose a series of what he calls interpretive 'signposts' which make for 'alternate journey[s]' across the *Commedia*.[19] The mnemotechnical poet, which Parry discovers in the Homeric corpus and which Contini's 'Un'interpretazione di Dante' discovers in the *Commedia*, is not just a signposter however. Contini writes of repeated language as 'un dato che si documenti non da questo o quel luogo, ma dalla totalità dell'opera', suggesting that, instead of so many motivated correspondences, this describes a generalisable condition of the text.[20] There are two sides to this tentatively oralist reading of Contini's 'figure ritmiche' which I wish to pursue here. The first is a process of thinking-in-verse, involving two procedures which, to use two bits of nomenclature, Parry called economy – or thrift – and analogy. The second aspect, arrived at by a new understanding of how syntax and rhythm intertwine, is a new conception of rhythm, which helps explain why Contini analysed *rhythmical* figures, and not verbal or syntactical ones.

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[17] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 79.
[18] Parry, p. 20.
[19] Howard, p. 5.
[20] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 78.

What is at the root of the discovery of an oral poetics? When Milman Parry arrived in Paris in 1923, the idea that Homeric texts were composed of remembered 'formulae' had already been advanced. Parry's eventual supervisor, the comparatist Antoine Meillet, had, also in 1923, published *Les origines indo-européennes des metres grecs*. In it, Meillet expressed the radical thought that 'L'épopée homérique est toute faite de formules que se transmettent les poètes. Qu'on prenne un morceau quelconque, on reconnaît vite qu'il se compose de vers ou de fragments de vers qui se retrouvent textuellement dans un ou plusieurs passages'.[21] The word 'formula' is Meillet's first, but was readily taken up by his new American doctoral student. Meillet's 1923 book studied Homeric metre, and Meillet's *aperçu* was that the 'formules' which populate the Homeric texts are also convenient shapes with respect to the exigencies of the hexameter line. This explanation for repeated language in Homer is where Parry began, in his 1928 thesis 'L'Épithète traditionnelle dans Homère: essai sur un problème de style homérique'. Parry took the most obviously pre-formed and routinely deployed aspect of Homeric language, the epithets used for gods, goddesses, and heroes, and on the basis of these described a system. The advance on Meillet's suggestion was this systematic claim: for a given metrical slot (say, the space from the fourth-foot caesura to the end-line), there is only one noun-epithet formula for each god or person.[22] The fact that there is only one for a given metrical slot was the crucial discovery: it must be that bards learned by rote these noun-epithet formulae for gods, goddesses, and heroes, and used these set shapes on every occasion without innovating. Hence the system was 'traditional' – the word Parry used in 1928. The word 'oral' he learned to use only in the early Thirties, after thinking more deeply about the scene of the

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[21] Antoine Meillet, Les origines indo-européennes des mètres grecs (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1923), p. 61 <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1159857> [accessed 13 August 2017].
[22] Parry's proof of a 'system' is precisely formulated: 'Now if a complete study of names of persons…reveals on the one hand that these exists in the case of a considerable number of them a noun-epithet formula in a particular grammatical case and of a given type, and on the other hand that none of these persons, or almost none, is designated by more than one noun-epithet formula in this case and of this [metrical] type, then we shall have established an extended system of great simplicity, and with it the proof that this system, in so far as it deals with unique elements, is traditional.' Parry, p. 17.

memory performance he was theorising, and coming across Marcel Jousse's *Le style oral rythmique et mnémotechnique chez les verbo-moteurs* (Paris: Beauchesse, 1925) – a remarkable, if in its turn exceedingly unsystematic text. The systematicity Parry discovered in the epithet responds to one requirement and only one: versification. In the case of the epithet, he says, we find 'a widely extended system entirely free from any element superfluous from the point of view of versification.'[23] Only one formula for a given idea for a given metrical slot: this is the simplicity, or economy, upon which the claim of a system of traditional language relies.

This discovery of the economy, or thrift, or simplicity, of a system of diction – Parry's discovery of Homer's[24] very narrow, ideally nil, axis of selection when expressing a particular idea (say a name) in a given part of the line[25] – has a further entailment. If a system with no superfluous elements can be described for names, outside of a closed system like this there is also a general tendency towards this kind of simplicity. That is, there is a tendency to reuse blocks of language whenever possible. We can see this in the way existing elements are adapted to suit new contexts. So, to fit the space between the beginning of the fifth foot and the end-line (the space of the distinctive hexameter cadence), there is one way to say 'he/she suffered pains' – 'ἄλγεα πάσχει' – used ten times. To say '*they* suffered pains', a form is found which uses a different verb, to fit the same space: 'ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν'. This is used four times counting

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[23] Parry, p. 17.

[24] Of course a consequence of Parry's discovery is that 'Homer' is not a historical poet but a system of traditional diction. More recent research suggests that the word 'Homeros' is formed on the Indo-European root *ar-*, as in *ars*, and that the name roughly means 'he who joins together'. See Gregory Nagy, 'Aristarchus and the Epic Cycle', The Center for Hellenic Studies of Harvard University, 2010 <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/3231#noteref_n.44> [accessed 17 April 2019].

[25] Parry defines the formula in 1930 thus: 'a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea', Parry, p. 272. Substantial modifications to this definition have been subsequently proposed. The importance of metre to an 'essential idea' has been questioned, as well as to whether a 'group of words' is necessary. A summary of these developments up to the '90s found in Calvert Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 16–17.

both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[26] This way of putting new wine in old wineskins, or crafting on 'analogy', is what Parry saw as the distinctive process of thought and action of the oral poet:

> Analogy is perhaps the single most important factor for us to grasp if we are to arrive at a real understanding of Homeric diction. To understand the role of analogy in the formation of epic language is to understand the interdependence of words, ideas, and metre in epic poetry. It is to see to what extent the hexameter and the genius of the bards influence epic style. [27]

This 'interdependence' of words and a metrical shape requires a distinct kind of cognitive labour to wield. It requires a kind of thinking that privileges rhythmical space and shape, and then thinks laterally over given linguistic forms for it. The resulting associations can often be startling for their reach and their precision of application. This is the case, for instance, with the deft transformation in the *Odyssey* of the 'feminine cry surrounded [me]' ('ἀμφήλυθε θῆλυς αὐτή', γ 122) into 'the sweet scent surrounded me' ('ἀμφήλυθεν ἡδὺς αὐτμή', μ 369).[28] Rhythm and word divisions here remain the same, and also evident phonic suggestions have been followed ('thēlus' 'female', into 'hēdus' 'sweet'; 'autē' 'cry' into 'autmē' 'scent'). The result of this word-substitution is a very precisely articulated, but very laterally imagined, altered sense. Conformity to the hexameter in other words precipitates its own, associative, conditions for thought, and this 'power…is attested by each artifice of epic diction'.[29] Deft word-substitutions can grow to formula-substitutions: 'In the bard's mind there will always be an association between words of one unique expression and those of another, and thus, by

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[26] Parry, p. 309.
[27] Parry, p. 68.
[28] Parry, p. 72. Miniscule letters refer to the *Odyssey*, majuscule to the *Iliad*. Gamma and mu refer to constituent books, respectively 3 and 12.
[29] Parry, p. 176.

analogy, he will draw from two unique formulae, one which will repeat the metre of an already existing formula'.[30] Along with a distinct cognitive mode, belonging to the craft, then comes a distinct critical mode. If the critic of Homeric poetry must now place less emphasis on originality in diction, she may begin to articulate a critical mode that embraces this constant renewal, adaptation, and variation through which remembered words are again made present.

'Analogy' is the word Parry chose to express this new critical horizon. But 'analogy', too, explains some peculiarities of the textual tradition of the Homeric poems. The workings of 'analogy' explain why we find, in the Homeric texts, a phenomenon akin to that discussed in the last chapter: the re-use of part or whole lines, but with indifferent, often synonymic, variants. So Parry writes, of the third line of the *Iliad*, 'πολλὰς δ᾽ ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄιδι προΐαψεν' ('he sent many stout souls to Hades'):

> In *A* 3 [*Iliad*, book 1, l.3] we have a formula which, but for the change of a word, fills a whole line and is itself a complete sentence. Verses of this kind are outdone in usefulness only by those used unchanged, and one would have such a line here if one wished to adopt ψυχάς [as in *A* 3], the variant reading to *Λ* 55 [*Iliad*, book 11, l. 55], for κεφαλάς.

That is, *Iliad Λ* 55 presents an adiaphoric, or indifferent, variant – 'souls' for 'heads' – and the editor's decision is between the wholesale re-use of a line, or wholesale re-use plus the swapping-out of one word for a synonym of equal length. This kind of variant, in the case of Homer, is now produced by the performance mechanics of a 'technique of diction'. It is produced through the memorial-compositional process by which an oral composer-performer crafts new lines on 'analogy' with old ones. As a result, the kind of synonymic variant analysed

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[30] Parry, p. 176.

in the last chapter is a ubiquitous feature of the Homeric textual tradition. 'Homeric poetry is characterized on every level by an aesthetic of repetition', as Adrian Kelley says.[31] But it would be equally true to say that it is characterised by an aesthetic of variation.[32] The two are intimately linked in the compositional action or 'genius of the bards', who re-present – make *mimēsis* with – the old words, making them new.[33] It can as a result be difficult for a modern editor of Homer to distinguish between a variant arising from the poem's composition-in-performance, in which traditional elements are continuously reformulated according to a technique of diction, and a scribal variant arising later, through *contaminatio*, scholia, misunderstanding, or the like.

Is it necessary that there be a factual oral performance, in order to discuss an analogous 'technique of diction'? In one sense, there *is* a factual basis to oral recomposition-in-performance in the case of the *Commedia*. That is what del Virgilio was so worried about: 'et si non varient…'. Likewise, it was for recomposing-and-varying the poem in memory that Sacchetti's blacksmith and ass-driver were beaten. But it would not be good to press the similarity with a Bronze-Age, pre-literate performance culture too far. Rather, it bears pointing out that Parry's term for the performance motor of Homeric poetry, 'analogy', is more complex still, and was in fact coined by scholars in a textual culture who did not have recourse to, and had never dreamt of, the bardic performances of Mycenae. Probing 'analogy', much like 'echo' in the last chapter, may again bring about a proportioned comparison.

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[31] Adrian Kelly, *A Referential Commentary and Lexicon to Iliad VIII* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 4.

[32] Nagy frequently refers to a *poetics of variation* in Homer. The first chapter of the above-cited study of performance proposes just this: 'The Homeric nightingale and the poetics of variation in the art of a troubadour', in Nagy, *Poetry as Performance*, pp. 7–38. See also the section entitled 'Homer and the Poetics of Variation' in Gregory Nagy, *Homer the Preclassic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), pp. 273–10.

[33] Nagy shows μίμησις to mean, in the archaic period and after, principally 're-enactment' rather than 'imitation'. He writes: 'If you *re-enact* an archetypal action in ritual, it only stands to reason that you have to *imitate* those who re-enacted before you and who served as your *immediate* models. But the *ultimate* model is still the archetypal action or figure that you are re-enacting in ritual, which is coextensive with the whole line of imitators who re-enact the way in which their ultimate model acted, each imitating each one's predecessor.' From the discussion of *mimesis* in Nagy, *Poetry as Performance*, pp. 55–58.

I noted in the last chapter, concerning the textual criticism *Commedia*, that 'adiaphoric' (or indifferent) variants of the *Commedia* appear to offer a 'plethora of good readings'. Parry could ask in 1930, of those who still clung to the idea of Homeric single authorship, 'How have they explained the unique number of *good* variant readings in our text of Homer, and the need for the laborious editions of Aristarchus and of the other grammarians, and the extra lines, which grow in number as new papyri are found?'.[34] 'Analogy' is in fact the ancient label for the editorial method of Aristarchus, head librarian at Alexandria in the second century BC. Aristarchus' editorial method recognised that the Homeric texts appeared to comprise a system of diction, in which elements were re-used.[35] Developing a method of editing the Homeric texts on this basis, he left no line *aparamuthēton*, or 'uncontextualised in the mythos [the whole poem]'.[36] He systematically considered what the modern *Commedia* editor calls 'echoes' – the intra-poem evidence of similar re-use – even to the point of neglecting the consideration of evidence from multiple MSS.[37] Each line in his text of Homer was checked against internal echoes for similar usage, and as re-use, or analogy, confirmed readings, on anything *sui generis* doubt was cast (via a specially developed critical *sēmeion* – the *obelos* (†)). 'Aristarchus' rigorous analysis [of] Homeric poetry as a system was monumentalised by his reputation as an "analogist,"' notes Gregory Nagy, 'in opposition to an "anomalist" like his contemporary, Crates of Mallos, who was head of the library of Pergamon'.[38] We saw Petrocchi mediated between these poles at *Inf.* 21.71, for instance.[39] If the substantial re-use of part- and whole lines, together with so many 'good' variants in the tradition of Homer, recalls the textual situation discussed in the last chapter, so does the particular textual-critical topic of memorial

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[34] Parry, p. 268. Parry's emphasis.
[35] Gregory Nagy, Homer's Text and Language (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 46.
[36] Nagy, Homer's Text and Language, p. 47.
[37] This position is however nuanced by Franco Montanari, 'From Book to Edition: Philology in Ancient Greece', in World Philology, ed. by Sheldon Pollock, Benjamin A. Elman, and Ku-ming Kevin Chang (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 25–44 (p. 43).
[38] Nagy, Homer's Text and Language, p. 47.
[39] See above, p. 59.

contaminatio. Like those scribes who copied the *Commedia* with a 'memoria oberata di ricordi', early rhapsode-scribes of Homer, notes Martin West, '[h]aving the poetry in their heads…tended to rely on their memories rather than carefully reproduce an exemplar'.[40] Though Parry means his term 'analogy' to refer to a memorial technique for *viva voce* performance conditions, the term's ancient textual-critical use suggests that a highly literate culture, remote from those conditions, could also conceive of memorial processes animating the texts of Homer. Between Aristarchus' editorial tools that suit a system of memory, and earlier scribes' reliance on their memories in copying, ancient scribes and editors represent a continuum, rather than a quantum break, with the oral-memorial dynamics through which Homer was composed in performance. Looking for a comparable dynamic of 'analogy' in Dante, we are in this sense still comparing scriptive cultures, doing away with the concern that a comparative investigation of 'oralist' compositional processes involves absolutist claims about orality *vs* writing.

If economy and analogy are the traits of the system of re-used blocks of language that Parry discovered in Homeric diction, a system is still not quite a technique. Oral poetry relies on systematic elements, but the compositional technique is not fully expressed by them. The traditional poet is not only a rememberer of systems of units, she is also a joiner, who weaves re-uses together. Beyond an 'aesthetic of repetition' and variation, then, there is an aesthetic of articulation: of joining-together, or syntax.[41] How and where a bard joins, exposes partitions in the verse-line, where the re-used elements are stitched together. Syntax and rhythm, then, build units which infer each other. These formulae – units of idea-plus-metrical-shape – work between anticipatable places in the line. These are the common caesurae (word-divisions

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[40] M.L. West, *The Making of the Iliad: Disquisition & Analytical Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 72.
[41] As Parry puts this: 'the technique of formulary diction, which we have described as the union of formulae of which each has its fixed place or places in the line, can be described from another point of view as a technique of making at the same time a sentence and a line.' Parry, p. 229.

within a foot, not, as in Romance, medial-line pauses), and diareses (word divisions between feet). Different formulae begin or end at these different, but anticipatable, spots in the dactylic hexameter line. Or to put it the other way around, they create these common partitions of the verse line by frequently beginning and ending there. These common break-places in the line as a result have names: the hepthemimeral caesura (fourth foot), the penthemimeral caesura (third foot), the trochaic caesura (third foot), and the bucolic diaeresis (between the fourth and fifth foot).[42] The architecture of the line can then be understood in terms of these cuts or divisions. A simple example is:[43]

$$\text{εῖσε(ν) δ(έ μ') εἰσαγαγοῦσα} \begin{cases} \text{κατὰ κλισμούς τε θρόνους τε (κ 233)} \\ \text{ἐπὶ θρόνου ἀργυροήλου (κ 314, 366)} \end{cases}$$

('Leading me (or them) in, she sat me (or them) | upon couches and chairs / upon a silver-studded chair')

These three lines are made up of two different solutions to the space between the trochaic caesura, where the first phrase cuts, and the end-line. The different parts are independent, so another phrase of correct length can be sutured to any one of them. The latter end-line solution can, in its turn, be re-used:

$$\begin{rcases} \text{(κ 314, 366) εῖσε δέ μ' εἰσαγαγοῦσα} \\ \text{(η 162) ἀλλ' ἄγε δὴ ξεῖνον μὲν} \\ \text{(Σ 389) τὴν μὲν ἔπειτα κάθεῖσεν} \end{rcases} \text{ἐπὶ θρόνου ἀργυροήλου}$$

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[42] 'Since the problem of the poet is not only that of making a verse of six dactylic feet, but of fitting his words between the pauses within the verse, the formulas which express the most common ideas fall exactly between one pause in the verse and another, or between a pause and one of the verse-ends. The ways in which these formulas fit into the parts of the verse and join on to one another to make the sentence and the hexameter are very many, and vary for each type of formula.' Parry, p. 307.

[43] Parry, p. 209.

('Leading me in she sat me / But he lead the stranger / he told her to sit down |

on(to) a silver-studded chair')

Metrically, the two formulae looked at here present a cut, not at a foot-division, but at a spot in the third foot – the trochaic caesura:

$$_1\!\!-\!\!\smile\smile\,_2\!\!-\!\!\smile\smile\,_3\!\!-\!\!\smile\!\Big|\!\smile\,_4\!\!-\!\!\smile\smile\,_5\!\!-\!\!\smile\smile\,_6\!\!-\!\!-$$

[44]
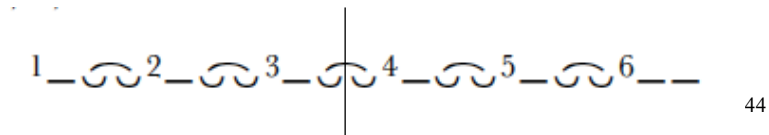
What is interesting about the above example of Homeric mix-and-match is that the two formulae analysed here (which are found together in two identical lines in the *Odyssey*, κ 314 and κ 366), when themselves joined together also present a metrical fault. One phrase ends with a vowel, and the other begins with a vowel, so that when they are used together at their suture they create hiatus – a 'gaping' stop between facing vowels in separate words that was not thought pleasant (*ah eh*). The second formula's initial word, ἐπὶ, in the Bronze Age in fact began with a consonant (a digamma, 'ϝ') which was lost by the Classical period. Now shorn of its initial consonant and beginning with a vowel, the formula continued to be used as though the consonantal digamma was still there, because the logic of combination belonging to this technique of diction outlasts even phonetic changes in the language thus sewn together. Because the compositional technique of Epic dactylic hexameter works this way – thinking between expected metrical spaces and joining formulae in regular spots – an architecture of the verse-line can be recovered that is different to the line's succession of feet. The systems of formulae elevate an apparently incidental aspect of the prosody of the Greek verse-line – cesurae, or the common presence of word divisions at regular spots in the line – to a place of

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[44] I reproduce here a metrical diagram of dactylic hexameter from Mark Janse, 'The Metrical Schemes of the Hexameter', *Mnemosyne*, 56.3 (2003), 343–48 (p. 343). Solid lines represent long syllables, 'u'-shaped ones short syllables. The diagram represents five dactyls (long-short-short) and an anceps (the final two-syllable foot). The yoking of short syllables here represents the fact that a trochee (long-long) can be substituted for a dactyl. My medial line shows the position of the trochaic caesura in relation to this metre.

conceptual prominence. These cuts, or caesurae, now describe the compositional stops where already formed chunks of language are sutured one to the next. In a similar way, I suggest, the analysis of remembered and re-used language in the *Commedia* might shed new light on the shape of the Italian hendecasyllabic line in Dante's use, allowing us newly to play its stops, if not pluck out the heart of its mystery, from the vantage of the poet's use.

To do this, I also want to show that 'echi di Dante entro Dante' also often think in terms of a caesura. A caesura means something different in Romance than in Greek: it is a medial-line pause, not a mid-foot word-break, and it is by no means an obligatory feature of the Italian hendecasyllabic line. But this pause in the line is a spot where a logic of combination is most pronounced, and so a good place to begin. This line from *Inf.* 2,

che ritrarrà la mente che non erra.   (6)

has a pause after the seventh syllable ('mente | che'). What appears to either side of this caesura is, likewise, preserved in new combinations:

e rechiti a la mente chi son quelli   (*Inf.* 11.87),

and

priegoti ch'a la mente altrui mi rechi   (*Inf.* 6.89),

and

Da queste due, **se tu ti rechi a mente**
lo Genesì   (*Inf.* 11.106),

but also

> ma 'l fatto è d'altra forma **che non stanzi**.   (*Purg*. 6.54),

and

> né per altro argomento **che non paia**.   (*Par*. 17.142).

The first verse can then be usefully thought of as two hemistichs in combination: one of seven syllables with stress on the sixth ('che ritrarrà la mente', 'e rechiti a la mente', 'se tu ti rechi a mente', 'priegoti ch'a la mente',) and one of four syllables with stress on the third ('che non erra', 'che non stanzi', 'che non paia'). These combinations always involve a seventh-foot caesura – unless, as at *Inf*. 11, a mirror is made of the line, and the seven-syllable shape comes second, rather than first. The smaller, four-syllable shape found in combination here also need not be thought of as a specifically end-line shape. Used first, 'che non paia' or 'che non stanzi' would create a lyric caesura – an initial four syllable hemistich, with stress on the third syllable (i.e. 'e beati | '). There is evidently, in these examples, more malleability in word order than in Greek formulaic use. Here 'e rechiti a la' can become 'se tu ti rechi a' without changing quantity. The Greek metre has a long/short syllable succession that would make that kind of change less possible. There is no succession of feet in this Italian verse form, and hence more latitude for word-order reconfiguration. Latitude within the unit does not necessarily compromise the sense that what we see is an identifiable figure. To investigate this comparison, we must now turn to the poem.

To investigate a figural, combinatory, versification-thinking, one might begin with what look like merely habitual turns of phrase that repeat throughout the poem. No one will deny that the poet has some habitual ways of beginning or ending lines, which he uses from time to time, or certain fairly fixed ways of doing certain things, like introducing direct speech.[45] But even a phrase like 'Allor si mosse,' at *Inf.* 1.136, which is used again and again, seems to bear out, rather than just a tic, a combinatory logic. The first half of *Inf.* 1.136, 'Allor si mosse, e io li tenni dietro', immediately provides for Beatrice's explanation, 'amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare,' in the next canto (*Inf.* 2.72). That first hemistich, or the part of the line preceding the medial caesura, in this second instance is soldered on to a second hemistich from 'Oltre la spera' – 'al cor dolente, che lo fa parlare'.[46] This second hemistich, in turn, supplies *Inf.* 4.23 soon afterward, 'Così si mise e cosí mi fé intrare', although the adverbs 'Così…così' give this last instance a distinct rhythm.[47] When we see a unit similar to 'Allor si mosse' in the poem, very often the position of the caesura, as well as the particular kind of caesura – employing sinalèfe ('mosse | e', 'mise | e') – are constants. So:

>
> quand' io mi mossi, e 'l troppo star si vieta   (*Inf.* 7.99)
>
> per ch'un si mosse – e li altri stetter fermi –   (*Inf.* 21.77)
>
> Per ch'io mi mossi e a lui venni ratto   (*Inf.* 21.91)

but also:

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[45] These are so consistent that Luigi Spagnolo finds an invisibly corrupt line by studying a case where a formula is missing. Luigi Spagnolo, 'La lacuna invisibile (Inf. IV 74)', *Lingua nostra*, 77.1–2 (2016), 9–10.

[46] Dante, *Vita Nova*, p. 587.

[47] Support for the sense that *Inf.* 2.72 is the precedent for this line comes from the fact that the line is defective. Usually a tonic vowel – such as 'fé' – is followed by dialèfe. But 'fé' must be followed by sinalèfe here to preserve the syllable count. It is as though the poet was expecting this hemistich to count like 'che lo fa parlare', and a forced metrical oddity is the consequence of replacing 'che' with 'così'.

Per ch'io mi volsi, e vidimi davante   (*Inf*. 32.22)

Allor mi dolsi, e ora mi ridoglio   (*Inf*. 26.19)

Così li dissi; e poi che mosso fue   (*Inf*. 2.141)

and in the imperfect, rather than perfect:

Io lo seguiva, e poco eravam iti   (*Inf*. 16.91).

The form can also be added to. With the addition of a two-syllable genitive ('del ciel'), it still looks familiar, but the line's caesura, with its distinctive sinalèfe, is now moved from the fifth to the seventh position (from feminine *a minore* to feminine *a maiore*):

virtù del ciel mi mosse, e con lei vegno   (*Purg*. 7.24).

In the following instance –

Allor mi volse al poeta, e quei disse   (*Inf*. 12.113) –

we find the form, but the caesura is located elsewhere in the line. The question as to whether it makes sense to speak of figural combination that does not join at the caesura is something to attend in a second moment. The above form can also be subtracted from. The five-syllable hemistich 'Allor si mosse' seems preserved in 'Lucia si mosse' – but this is found between two lines:

Lucia, nimica di ciascun crudele,
si mosse, e venne al loco dov' i' era   (*Inf*. 2.100-1).

The phrase split this way creates a lyric caesura in the second line with, again, the sinalèfe 'mosse | e' join. Two further examples of this hemistich inform us of its provenance:

> Elli si mosse; e poi, cosí andando (*Inf.* 10.124)
>
> allor si mosse contra 'l fiume, andando (*Purg.* 29.7)

As Giorgio Inglese notes, these lines, in particular the second, appear to recollect *Roman de la Rose* ll. 128-9, '*Lors m'en alai* parmi la prée | *Contre* val l'iave esbanoiant'.[48] The intertext is invaluable because it shows that what is remembered, in respect of this first hemistich ('Lors m'en alai' = 'Allor si mosse'), is not so much an intertext as a useful architecture, made a native possibility of the Italian line. Even with an 'alquanto stereotipo' phrase – this is how Beltrami refers re-uses like 'Allor si mosse' – there is then a richer, and more conservative, combinatory thinking than perhaps expected, which even when it adapts quantities, preserves a join, while narrowing possibilities over that join (an aspect I will expand on in a moment; for now it is worth noting the similarity of 'e ora', 'e poi', 'e poco', or 'e a lui venni ratto', 'con lei vengo').

In looking for a pervasive logic, I do not think that certain other conspicuously repeated part-lines are of much probative value – though they do deserve a mention here. Aspects of dialogue – '"Sappi ch'i' son Bertram del Borno, quelli', '"sappi ch'i' fu' il Camiscion de' Pazzi' (*Inf.* 28.134, 32.68), or '"Oh", diss'io lui…' (*Purg.* 8.58, 8.121, 11.79…), or '…Maestro, che è quel ch'i' odo?" (*Inf.* 3.32, 21.127, *Purg.* 23.13) – indeed the whole 'insistite serie di "E io a lui…", "Ed elli a me…", "Io li rispuosi…" che…rammentano i "disse lui… dissi io…" degli americani odierni e dei loro derivati', as Contini puts it,[49] are so obvious that they do not need

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[48] In Dante, *Commedia*, ed. by Giorgio Inglese, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Rome: Carocci, 2016), II, 29.7, n. ad loc. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. by Armand Strubel (Paris: Librarie Générale Française, 1992).
[49] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 71.

to be included in this exploration of figural composition. Beltrami does include this kind of repetitious phrasing in his study of 'figure ritmiche' in the early '80s – a measure of his distance, I think, from what Contini was trying to show.[50]

It is not this obviously formulaic diction, but rather the discovery, that one often makes, that an internal echo also has a specific contour – that a part of a line has a specific syllable quantity, or a specific place in the line – that matters. When, in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante defines *cantiones* by their syllable quantity per verse (from 3 to 11), he declares that the hendecasyllable 'videtur esse superbius, tam temporis occupatione, quam capacitate sententie, constructionis et vocabulorum'. Syllable count, 'temporis occupati[o]',[51] accordingly, may be a dimension equally fundamental to interior, hemistich re-use dynamics. In *Inferno* 5 Dante begins to understand the evidence of divine judgement around him:

Intesi ch'a così fatto tormento

enno dannati i peccator carnali,   (37-8).

The shape is recalled as he learns to decline such judgement in *Purgatorio* 6:

Veramente **a così alto sospetto**

non ti fermar, se quella nol ti dice

…

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[50] So Beltrami includes in his lists of figures turns of phrase like '"Oh", diss'io lui', 'da l'altra parte', 'Ed io: "Maestro…"', 'Noi andavam', 'ma tu chi se', 'Chi crederebbe', 'ci appressammo', and the like. Of these he comments: 'Ci si rende conto che l'ampiezza stessa del poema, e il ripetersi in esso, nel variare delle situazioni narrative, di contingenze stilistiche e sintattiche analoghe portano abbastanza naturalmente alla ripresa di forme simili.' Beltrami, *Metrica, Poetica, Metrica Dantesca*, p. 59.

[51] 'seems to be the best, both for its [long] duration, and for its capaciousness in respect of meaning, syntax, and words'. Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia [Fenzi ed.]*, 2.5.3. My translation. In what follows I take over Dante's alertness to this aspect of versification – syllable quantity. Ch. 4 will expand upon the significance of *constructio*. A consistent *temporis occupatio* is still virtually the only assured metrical principle of the Italian hendecasyllable (see discussion below, p. 109 ff).

Non so se 'ntendi: io dico di Beatrice   (43-6).

The four syllables of 'Intesi ch'' of *Inf.* 5.37 are replaced with 'Veramente' before the caesura at *Purg.* 6.43, but after this appears the same figure – 'a così fatto tormento', 'a così alto sospetto'. This seven-syllable figure (*seven* because of sinalèfe) leaves only three syllables remaining with which to complete the line (if another four-syllable form is found, it too must end with a vowel). This seven-syllable figure, 'a così alto sospetto', has, in-built, two stresses – one on its fourth, and the other on its seventh syllable. If the poet wishes to use this shape as a first hemistich, before the caesura – as he does in the instances below – then this seventh-position stress makes the figure trickier to use (or, there are considerably fewer seventh-position-principle-stress lines in the poem than sixth (*a maiore*) lines). By adapting the figure to have a final disyllabic word, rather than a trisyllable (like 'sospetto'), the stress will fall on the sixth position, which is much more usable. So we find:

ch'a così fatta parte si confaccia   (*Inf.* 34.33)

a così lunga scala ti dispuose,   (*Par.* 26.111)

ma così salda voglia è troppo rada   (*Par.* 4.87).

These line-initial uses of the figure employ a final disyllable rather than a trisyllable, moving the cesura back to the canonical sixth position. That shape, in turn, can be used again as a second hemistich:

de le mie ali a così alto volo,   (*Par.* 25.50).

The particularly long figure – 'a così alto sospetto' – of seven or eight syllables, can in turn be split up, or thought of in two parts – in fact, to pyrotechnical result:

> A così riposato, a così bello
>
> viver di cittadini, a così fida
>
> cittadinanza, a così dolce ostello,   (*Par*. 15.130-2).

Only the last line contains the whole figure, but the two prior lines create two *a maiore* caesurae with just the first part, 'a così bello', etc. The rhythm of the terzina is unique – line-ends seem to be lost in the fluid enjambment, the lines pausing only at their medial caesurae – but the new prosodic contour is in fact created with already hewn, weighed and measured blocks.

Looking at the caesural join, and treating it as fundamental, we often find the re-use of similar forms maintains the caesura in the same position:

> là dov' i' era, de la bella Aurora   (*Purg*. 2.8)
>
> là dov' io era, ancor non appariva: (*Par*. 23.117);

this fifth-position can be mirrored from the right:

> più innanzi alquanto che là dov' io stava,   (*Purg*. 13.98),

and when the position of the caesura does change, we can often give an explanation. In these cases,

> là dov' io son, fo io questo vïaggio,   (*Purg*. 2.93)

and

> e là dov' io fermai cotesto punto,   (*Purg*. 6.40),

the hemistich has been respectively shortened and lengthened by one vowel, returning the end of the figure, and the position of the caesura, to the canonical *a minore* and *a maiore* positions. Here is a hemistich which expresses the same idea but in a seven-syllable form, which, from a versification standpoint, then works as a second hemistich:

> si mosse, e venne al loco dov' i' era   (*Inf*. 2.101)[52]
>
> per conoscer lo loco dov' io fossi.   (*Inf*. 4.6)
>
> mi trasse a sé del loco dov' io stava   (*Inf*. 21.24)
>
> I' mossi i piè del loco dov' io stava   (*Purg*. 10.70)

This second-hemistich shape, with 'al/lo/del loco', in place of 'là' of the first 5-syllable form, if considered on its own has a sixth-syllable stress. Curiously it is never used as a first hemistich, which would have made for a perfectly good line *a maiore*. That there are broadly two forms for this expression – one of five syllables and one of seven – used respectively in the first and second hemistich (again, broadly speaking), allows for the thought to emerge that there is, in Dante, at points a strikingly similar tendency towards economy – towards a preservation of forms in relation to given versification slots. This is what Parry discovered about Homer: not that there is only ever one way of saying something, but that there is one way of saying something for a given space, or tranche, of the verse-line – for the space between a caesura and

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[52] This line is mentioned just above, p. 81.

the end-line, or between two caesurae, say. For a figure like this one – 'là dov' i' era' – which conveys what Parry would call a single 'essential thought' – 'there' – it is a striking fact that the poet is so conservative, as if recognising the serviceableness of an already-hewn shape. The recognition of this kind of exact, equally-contoured repetition is not something I find in critical writing on Dante. Even Beltrami does not consider, with his figures, their shape, but only the fact of shared words or parts of speech. He begins with recurring adjective-and-noun, and noun-and-adjective pairs, but without considering quantity or proportion, and their effect on versification.[53] The recognition of a plastic contour, in respect of these re-used hemistichs, likewise does not necessarily imply the sense of a 'vortice di rimandi memoriali, governati con mano…consapevole' – that is a different idea, and one that tacks less close to the text. Noticing that there are re-used, rather stable shapes joined to others, is more like noticing a skill – or that a precise, habitual action is being confirmed.

The effect of noticing a repetition like the following:

voi che correte sì per l'aura fosca!   (*Inf*. 23.78)

and

levando i moncherin per l'aura fosca,   (*Inf*. 28.104),

is like a growing absorption in habit. The language feels layered and practiced, and endowed with a certain place and function in the line. In two canti in the late *Paradiso*, Dante re-turns the same line-initial, enjambed 7-syllable form:

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[53] See esp. the examples in Beltrami, *Metrica, Poetica, Metrica Dantesca*, pp. 26–29.

tal mi sembiò l'imago de la 'mprenta

de l'etterno piacere, al cui disio

ciascuna cosa qual ell' è diventa   (*Par*. 20.76-8)

ché la bellezza mia, che per le scale

de l'etterno palazzo più s'accende,

com' hai veduto, quanto più si sale   (*Par*. 21.7-9)

però che sì s'innoltra ne lo abisso

de l'etterno statuto quel che chiedi,

che da ogne creata vista è scisso   (*Par*. 21.94-6).

Often a simple locution like 'his/her eyes' keeps to a regular spot in the line (here between syllables 4 and 6):

Lucevan li occhi suoi più che la stella   (*Inf*. 2.55)

non fiere li occhi suoi lo dolce lume?   (*Inf*. 10.69)

dicendo: «Li occhi suoi già veder parmi».   (*Purg*. 27.54)

di levar li occhi suoi mi fece dono.   (*Purg*. 28.63)

Merrenti a li occhi suoi; ma nel giocondo   (*Purg*. 31.109).

Certain expressions are recognisably line-end, like

che de l'anella fé sì alte spoglie,   (*Inf*. 28.11)

sentia dir lor con sì alti sospiri   (*Purg*. 19.74)

Veramente a così alto sospetto   (*Purg*. 6.43),

or

che ritrarrà la mente che non erra.   (*Inf*. 2.6)

come Livïo scrive, che non erra,   (*Inf*. 28.12),[54]

or

ch'ella mi fa tremar le vene e i polsi   (*Inf*. 1.90)

tanto ch'i' perde' li senni e ' polsi   (*Inf*. 13.63)

con lo 'ntelletto, e mosse il fummo e 'l vento (*Purg*. 5.113),

or are line-initial, like

e fé sì lor, che ciascun se ne loda   (*Inf*. 22.84)

si fé sì chiaro, ch'io dicea pensando: (*Par*. 21.44),

or

questi m'apparve, tornand' ïo in quella   (*Inf*. 15.53)

cotal m'apparve, s'io ancor lo veggia   (*Purg*. 2.16),

---

[54] Both of which are drawn, again, from 'e se 'l libro non erra (l. 66)', from 'E' m'incresce' (see above, p. 59), and, before that, from the *Roman de la Rose*, 'Se Titus Livius ne ment' de Lorris and de Meun, l. 5630.

or even

> fannomi onore, e di ciò fanno bene.   (*Inf*. 4.93)
>
> fàccianli onore, ed esser può lor caro.   (*Purg*. 5.36).

We can see often how the hemistich division (caesura) is created by the re-use of shapes that produce these boundaries. In the following four examples, it is the second hemistich which remains constant, producing a caesura in the same place:

> su per lo scoglio infino in su l'altr' arco   (*Inf*. 27.134)
>
> rotto dal mento infin dove si trulla.   (*Inf*. 28.24)
>
> che li animali, infino al picciol vermo,   (*Inf*. 29.61)
>
> e tronco 'l naso infin sotto le ciglia,   (*Inf*. 28.65),[55]
>
> si ravvolgëa infino al giro quinto.   (*Inf*. 31.90)
>
> del mezzo, puro infino al primo giro   (*Purg*. 1.15),[56]

the way 'infino' breaks the line, 'amendue' does here:

> per cui tremavano amendue le sponde   (*Inf*. 9.66)
>
> lo dosso e 'l petto e ambedue le coste   (*Inf*. 17.14)
>
> non trasmutò sì ch'amendue le forme   (*Inf*. 25.101).

The same can be said of:

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[55] cf. p. 54.

[56] This line constitutes an interesting exception, because of the pause required for the sense.

e piange là dov' esser de' giocondo	(*Inf*. 11.45)
vedi oggimai quant' esser dee quel tutto	(*Inf*. 34.32),

and

O voi che siete due dentro ad un foco	(*Inf*. 26.79)
dirizzò li occhi miei tutti ad un loco	(*Inf*. 31.15).[57]

In the following examples, it is a consistently employed first hemistich which produces the caesura:

che'e' sì mi fecer de la loro schiera	(*Inf*. 4.101)
Così girammo de la lorda pozza	(*Inf*. 7.127)
va per lo regno de la morta gente	(*Inf*. 8.85)
In questo fondo de la trista conca	(*Inf*. 9.16)
e 'n su la punta de la rotta lacca	(*Inf*. 12.11),

and

di qua, di là soccorrien con le mani	(*Inf*. 17.47)
Di qua, di là, su per lo sasso tetro	(*Inf*. 18.34)
di qua, di là discesero a la posta	(*Inf*. 22.148)
di qua, di là, e poi diè cotal fiato	(*Inf*. 27.60),

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[57] cf. just above, pp. 87-8.

which first appears as

di qua, di là, di giù, di sú li mena   (*Inf*. 5.43).

It is striking how often the prepositional adverb 'in su' keeps to the same mid-line position, producing a similar second hemistich and in each of the following cases also creating a caesural join with sinalèfe:

Chirón si volse in su la destra poppa   (*Inf*. 12.97)

fanno lamenti in su li alberi strani   (*Inf*. 13.15)

Noi discendemmo in su l'ultima riva   (*Inf*. 29.52)

Allor venimmo in su l'argine quarto;   (*Inf*. 19.40)

quando la brina in su la terra assempra   (*Inf*. 24.4)

ch'è giudicata in su le tue accuse   (*Inf*. 28.45)

feriami il sole in su l'omero destro,   (*Purg*. 26.4).

Likewise with 'che tutto':

e questo savio gentil, che tutto seppe   (*Inf*. 7.3)

l'altezza de' Troian che tutto ardiva   (*Inf*. 30.14)

fatta com' un secchion che tuttor arda   (*Purg*. 18.78)

e io la cheggio a lui che tutto giuggia   (*Purg*. 20.48),

and 'ad ogne':

sì, ch'ogne parte ad ogne parte splende	(*Inf.* 7.75)
che l'onestade ad ogn' atto dismaga,	(*Purg.* 3.11)
E quei che m'era ad ogne uopo soccorso	(*Purg.* 18.130)
lo sol talvolta ad ogne uom si nasconde,	(*Par.* 12.51),

or 'ch'ogn'':

e questo sia suggel ch'ogn' omo sganni	(*Inf.* 19.21)
ché l'ardor santo ch'ogne cosa raggia	(*Par.* 7.74)
con quello sposo ch'ogne voto accetta	(*Inf.* 3.101),

whereas 'omai' is often collocated at the end of the first hemistich, creating the mid-line pause:

lo tuo piacere omai prendi per duce;	(*Purg.* 27.131)
a domandarmi omai venendo meco?».	(*Purg.* 33.24)
voglio che tu omai ti disviluppe,	(*Purg.* 33.32)
d'ammirazione omai, poi dietro ai sensi	(*Par.* 2.56)
come tu vedi omai, di grado in grado,	(*Par.* 2.122)
Riguarda bene omai sì com' io vado	(*Par.* 2.124).

In some hemistich-figure repetitions, we find the phenomenon discussed in the first chapter – synonymic variation, but between lines of the poem rather than between MS witnesses. Now a mechanics is apparent behind these variants – the re-use of a weighed and measured verse-object:

pesol con mano a guisa di lanterna   (*Inf.* 28.122)

Io vidi un, fatto a guisa di lëuto   (*Inf.* 30.49)

un peccatore, a guisa di maciulla   (*Inf.* 34.56)

prima che sia, a guisa di fanciulla   (*Purg.* 16.86)

Nasce per quello, a guisa di rampollo   (*Par.* 4.130).

Where there is a mobility of collocation with these objects, the length, or the *temporis occupatio*, often stays exactly equal, facilitating this re-positioning. We see this in the following 5-syllable form:

di là più che di qua essere aspetta   (*Inf.* 6.111)

avendo più di lui che di sé cura   (*Inf.* 23.41),

or this 7-syllable one:

serrando e diserrando, sì soavi,   (*Inf.* 13.60)

Lo ciel poss' io serrare e diserrare   (*Inf.* 27.103),

or this one:

E io a lui: «Qual forza o qual ventura   (*Purg.* 5.91)

qual merito o qual grazia mi ti mostra?   (*Purg.* 7.19),

or this 6-syllable form:

quando fu l'aere **sì pien di malizia**   (*Inf*. 29.60)

quell' altro è Folo, **che fu sì pien d'ira** (*Inf*. 12.72)

e sem sì pien d'amor, che, per piacerti, (*Par*. 8.38).

But for this analysis, the emphasis should not simply be on the repetitions themselves, or the fact of conservation, so much as on the combinatory dynamic which this repetitious language serves, such that we can see a thinking in terms of a parts-logic of the verse-line. Here the central feature is the collocation of the caesura. The very strong sixth-position cut of the following figure,

onde l'ultimo dì percosso fui   (*Inf*. 14.54)

anzi l'ultimo dì qua giù ti mena   (*Inf*. 15.48),

might, for one of these lines, be the effect of having thought of the five-syllable second hemistich, 'qua giù ti mena', first, as in

colui ch'attende là, **per qui mi mena**

forse cui Guido vostro ebbe a disdegno (*Inf*. 10.62-63).

The strongly bifurcated prosody of this early pair of lines,

di qua dal sonno, quand' io vidi un foco (*Inf*. 4.68)

di qua dal suon de l'angelica tromba (*Inf*. 6.95)

makes possible an analogy on the first hemistich, which preserves the caesura,

di qua da Trento l'Adice percosse   (*Inf.* 12.5).

This figure creates a feminine hemistich, with a final vowel 'o' before the caesura – or this vowel is truncated. A famous line from the *Purgatorio* gives a similar first hemistich, the caesura now moved down the line:

di qua dal dolce stil novo ch'i' odo!   (*Purg.* 24.57).[58]

The caesura is now in position 8, but the same feminine '-o' ending is here too. The phrase's early idea of being on 'this side' of a 'sound' has insinuated itself in Bonagiunta's ears as well. One of the second hemistichs appearing here too, in *Inf.* 12.5 above, is in turn found in *Purgatorio*, in a line which conserves the same location of caesura:

di qua da Trento **l'Adice percosse**

tosto che lume **il volto mi percosse**   (*Purg.* 17.44).

Again, the join is conserved: sinalèfe with the definite article. A trail of combinations could, in turn, be pursued further – the new first hemistich, 'tosto che lume', is like that in 'tosto che questo mio segnor mi disse' (*Inf.* 16.55), or 'Tosto che l'acqua a correr mette co' (*Inf.* 20.76) – but there is no need to continue along a chain. We have noted that a given caesura repeats

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[58] The second hemistich phrase 'ch'io odo' is, in turn, established in lines like 'Quei sono spirti, maestro, ch'i' odo?' (*Purg.* 16.22) – also *Inf.* 3.33, *Purg.* 23.13, *Par.* 7.55. The similar shapes adduced here do not particularly give sustenance to Sanguineti's controversial reading, in his critical edition, 'di qua del dolce stil! e il novo ch'io odo'. We find 4-5 syllable first hemistichs beginning 'di qua', and we find repeated use of 'ch'io odo' (3 syllables), but no other similar line with the 6 + 5 division he posits. Still, his reading has the advantage of being canonically *a maiore*.

together with given forms, and that these can be recombined. Equally, when the form is added to, as in *Purg*. 24.57, the shape of the prior join, its position now shifted, seems to be recalled. Dante's, too, as Parry puts it, is a 'memory of an infinite number of details'.[59]

If a caesura can be read as a point of figural combination, it is also the point where syntax and prosody most collide. In the following lines –

Ma per quella virtù per cu' io movo   (*Inf.* 12.91)

and

che non sanza virtù che da ciel venga   (*Par*. 33.98) –

the similar first half makes for a similar second half. The *casus obliquus* of the pair of relative clauses, soldered on after 'virtù', recall each other – not quite as identical shapes, but as similarly indirect resolutions to the first hemistich ('per cu[i]', 'che da'). Both also have figural precedents themselves: the second hemistich of the *Par*. 33.89 shows analogy with the second hemistich shape at *Inf*. 7.24, which it is close to in other ways,

virtù del ciel mi mosse, **e con lei vengo**   (*Inf*. 7.24),

and the second hemistich of *Inf*. 12.91, 'per cu' io movo', is likely a development from *Inf*. 2.76: 'O donna di virtù sola **per cui**' (*Inf*. 2.76).

The recognition that syntax is constrained by the re-use of figures ought to nuance the idea of combination so far. In many cases the preservation of a hemistich insinuates, over the

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[59] Parry, p. 20.

join, a broader thinking in terms of economy and analogy, relating the join over that prosodic division to a reduced set of syntactical solutions. In this pair of lines from the *Paradiso*,

in parte fia **la tua voglia contenta**   (11.136)

and

per far di sé **la mia voglia contenta** (22.30),

the phrases which connect are related syntactically. These are two different voices of the same root verb, *facio* and *fio*, active and passive, which converge in these attempts to produce a middle-voiced verb. When the same figure appears at *Paradiso* 17.30, 'e come volle / Beatrice, fu la mia voglia confessa', again *facio* (or 'fare') is part of it. A further twist on the shape, which breaks up the figure, appears five lines prior to this last instance, at 17.25:

per che **la voglia mia** saria **contenta**.

I suggest this breaking-up is possible because of the precise syllable quantity of the figure – an equivalent 4-7 line could also be made here (**per che saria la mia voglia contenta*), and because the poet knows well the weight, or the *temporis occupatio* of both parts, he can imbricate the hemistichs accordingly. It is a nice flourish.

The conservation of a join, above and beyond the conservation of a particular hemistich, is vital to notice because, though much less conspicuous to the eye, it tells us more about why these repetitions happen in the first place. Each of the following shapes,

vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore	(*Inf.* 1.83)
che fece per viltade il gran rifiuto.	(*Inf.* 3.60)
quivi trovammo Pluto, il gran nemico.	(*Inf.* 6.115)
Allor chiusero un poco il gran disdegno	(*Inf.* 8.88)
solvetemi, spirando, il gran digiuno	(*Par.* 19.25)
Venne Cefàs e venne il gran vasello	(*Par.* 21.127)

is preceded by an initial 7-syllable, feminine caesura. As a result, what we see is that this 'il gran…' figure, though it might seem like a just a ready shape, is in fact employed under very exact circumstances. This figure allows for sinalèfe with a prior seven-syllable hemistich, ending in a vowel. And though at one point we see this figure in a slightly different quantity, this use too preserves this join with sinalèfe:

Quando ci scorse Cerbero, il gran vermo   (*Inf.* 6.22).

Because, as much as a particular figure, a particular join is often preserved, sometimes little words – prepositions, articles – seem to be included in the conception of the figure. All uses of the following figure appear to be oblique:

In questo fondo de la trista conca	(*Inf.* 9.16)
andavan li altri de la trista greggia	(*Inf.* 28.120)
Sanguinoso esce de la trista selva	(*Purg.* 14.64).

Likewise, with this important set of lines, it is not just the 'city + trisyllable', but the 'ne la', 'de la', and 'per la città' that composes the figure:

Per me si va ne la città dolente   (*Inf*. 3.1)

li cittadin de la città partita   (*Inf*. 6.61)

O Tosco che per la città del foco   (*Inf*. 10.22).

This syntactical musculature is then adapted in a further line,

cinge dintorno la città dolente   (*Inf*. 9.32),

where 'dintorno' is of an equal quantity to 'se va ne' above. Likewise, the figure here is not simply 'pietade + adjective', but a six- or seven-syllable partitive genitive:

non hai tu spirto di pietade alcuno?   (*Inf*. 13.36)

sente il sapor de la pietade acerba.   (*Purg*. 30.31)

What changes in an example like this are the words, but what stays the same is the shape they are fitted to and the syntactical join. This significantly inverts the presumed order of *inventio* – words are *easier* to adapt then orderings, orderings in turn easier than joins, and consequently the hemistich forms for 'di qua da', or 'ne la', seem to be what the poet's memory tenaciously holds to. These forms of follow-on can be very conspicuously repeated – as with this pair of joins, not now caesural but enjambed:

Allora il duca mio parlò di forza

tanto, ch' i' non l'avea sì forte udito   (*Inf*. 14.61-2)

104

Già eravam de la selva rimossi

tanto, ch'i' non avrei visto dov' era   (*Inf*. 15.14)

or again

Poscia vid' io mille visi cagnazzi

fatti per freddo…   (*Inf*. 32.70-1)

Ma perch' io veggio te ne lo 'ntelletto

fatto di pietra e, impetrato, tinto,   (*Purg*. 33.73-4).

In this pair of lines from early in *Inferno*, the repeated hemistich is easy to spot from the caesura *a maiore* employing sinalèfe:

Allor distese al legno ambo le mani   (*Inf*. 8.40)

Io son colui che tenni ambo le chiavi   (*Inf*. 13.58)

The fact that both uses follow on from a perfect verb suggests the tendency towards economy and analogy, to use Parry's terms. It is noticeable, in this respect, that the repetition of syntactical jointure can even constrain lexical choices and ideas. So the following line from the first cantica,

sì che dal fatto il dir non sia diverso   (*Inf*. 32.12)

appears to share a hemistich with this line from the end of the *Commedia*,

sì che dal dicer mio lo cor non parti   (*Par*. 32.150).

Whether *Inf*. 32.12 really divides by a 5-syllable first hemistich ('sì che dal fatto'), or (as shown) by a 6-syllable one ('sì che dal fatto il dir'), is an ambiguity that has to do with the fact that both 5- and 6-syllable shapes like 'sì che dal fatto…' can be found elsewhere, as at

sì che dal foco salva l'acqua e li argini   (*Inf*. 15.3)

and

sì che dal cominciar tutto si tolle   (*Inf*. 2.39).

But the question is more interesting still. It is clear that *Inf*. 32.12 can be read with two different principle stresses – it is prosodically ambivalent. As Vittorio Russo notes, the caesura in Dante's hendecasyllable often presents a 'mobilità di collocazione estremamente varia, spesso ambivalente o ambigua, che lascia alle esigenze contestuali e all'interpretazione largo margine di scelta nella lettura'[60] This line can be performed 'sì che dal fátto | il dir non sia diverso' or as 'sì che dal fatto il dír | non sia diverso'. The placement of the major prosodic stress in the line is a question of what the voice interprets to be the emphasis in the phrase (the 'dir' or the 'fatto'). Figural associations then, like that between *Inf*. 32.12 and *Par*. 32.150, also raise this performance dimension. And in doing so, they reveal something about how this memory works. There is an immanent phonological contour to these figures: the poet has to hear *Inf*. 32.12 one way, and not another, to produce *Par*. 32.150. The prosodic unit appears tied to a voice that

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[60] Vittorio Russo, *Il romanzo teologico. Sondaggi sulla 'Commedia' di Dante* (Naples: Liguori, 2002), p. 15.

106

lingers over one word and not another in emphasis. These are not just expedient shapes for versification, these are voiced, meaningful ones.

The following early line,

che mena dritto altrui per ogne calle   (*Inf*. 1.18),

seems likely to have its caesural pause at the sixth syllable (after 'altrui'). And the poet must have remembered it that way when he wrote

e reducemi a ca **per questo calle**   (*Inf*. 15.54).

Ten canti later however we find

com' ho fatt' io, **carpon per questo calle**   (*Inf*. 25.141),

The 'collocazione estremamente varia' of the caesura means that what is recollected can be, in different uses, of different lengths, because the caesural cut is often a question of the voice's interpretation. In this last instance, if we ask how 'per ogni calle' and 'per questo calle' become a larger hemistich, we can also see how the recollection of 'a ca per questo calle' can easily become 'carpon per questo calle'.

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The result of these figural combinations is a challenge to how we conceive of versification. To see this, we must first get in view the system of scansion we currently use for the poem. That

is a system of metre. The sense that metre is how verse should be described arrives from centuries of grammatical-didactical theory based on Greek and Latin poetry. It is clear from Aristotle that metre, or a *metron*, is a special condition of rhythm.[61] In both Greek and Latin, the alternation of long and short syllables creates, naturally and in all discourse, a sense of rhythm.[62] When this rhythm is sequenced into a fixed pattern of longs and shorts and so becomes 'regular', or divisible in terms of the same discretely measured pattern (Lat. regula = Gk. metron), a metrical line, or a foot, is described – i.e. a glyconic or an iamb. What distinguishes metrical language is this repetition of relatively simple units: it 'sets [a listener] on the watch for the recurrence of such and such a cadence', as Aristotle puts it.[63] As a result of this repetition, a peculiar condition of rhythm emerges, undeniably very repetitive, but which is also thereby made suitable for accompaniment by other patterns, like dance steps or music.[64] Metre is used to make verse in other languages, like the Romance and Germanic ones, which do not differentiate long from short syllables, but which do have alternative binary markers – stressed and unstressed syllables. It is the simple divisibility (*ratio*) that matters. The first question to ask when trying to establish a frame for versification is, then: is the *Commedia* metrical?

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[61] In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle advises orators to be rhythmical but not metrical: 'The form of diction should be neither metrical nor without rhythm. If it is metrical, it lacks persuasiveness, for it appears artificial, and at the same time it distracts the hearer's attention, since it sets him on the watch for the recurrence of such and such a cadence… If it is without rhythm, it is unlimited, whereas it ought to be limited (but not by meter)'. Aristotle, *The Complete Works: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), II, 1408b-1409a.

[62] Although it is only in the Hellenistic period that long and short vowels are expressly identified as the matter of metres. Prior to this, upbeats and downbeats (*bases*) of marked time are the content of rhythm. See Marco Ercoles, 'Metrics ("Métron"), Ancient Theories Of', in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics*, ed. by Georgios K. Giannakis (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 431–36 (p. 434) <https://www.academia.edu/10190871/Metrics_m%C3%A9tron_Ancient_Theories_of> [accessed 29 March 2019].

[63] Aristotle, II, 1408b-1409a.

[64] In fact, a *metron* in early Greek sources refers to a mixed unit of rhythm and song-and-dance-step: only later is it possible to have a *metron* of rhythm in words alone. See Gregory Nagy, 'Language and Meter' <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/5972.gregory-nagy-language-and-meter> [accessed 27 March 2019].

Metre is regular, and so a condition for it is that the rhythm of one line predicts the rhythm of the next (or in the case of strophic forms, a pattern of mixed metres must re-emerge).[65] This forward predictableness is not found in the *Commedia*. Though there are clear classifiable tendencies in the stress-patterning of lines in the poem (for instance the majority have either a fourth- or a sixth-syllable stress, or are either *a minore* or *a maiore*), the stress contours of one line never determines that of the next. As a result, in Beltrami's words, the *Commedia* is 'privo…di un modello normativo di scansione prosodica al suo interno'.[66] Likewise, for Marco Praloran, 'Un modello ritmico "profondo" esiste ma è essenzialmente limitato, a nostro avviso, al numero delle sillabe, alla durata della sequenza linguistica e alla posizione obbligatoria in cui cade l'ultimo accento'.[67] The model, if any exists, is limited to what Dante referred to as *temporis occupatio*. For both Beltrami and Praloran, a regular 'internal' stress patterning cannot be established, leaving the only regular prosodic feature of the hendecasyllable that of isosyllaby (that is, isosyllaby between the first syllable and the last stressed syllable, the tenth), and so isochrony. Lines *are* arranged so that the natural position of ictus within words is more often allocated to particular spots in the line than others, but this allocation does not reflect the presence of a regular foot. For Praloran, internal stress places are only

> linee di tendenza che nascono dalla pressione di valori storico-istituzionali,
>
> dall'azione di modelli, non più astratti, ma derivanti dall'uso concreto degli

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[65] Other scholars do not take predictability to be a condition of metre. 'These types [*a minore, a maiore*] acquire full canonical status with the Petrarchism of the sixteenth century, from which time until the present century no other type of hendecasyllable was deemed to be metrically current. We may therefore call the accents that constitute these canonical stuctures *metrical* accents, in that they form part of the literary conventions of the hendecasyllable.' David Robey, 'Rhythm and Metre in the Divine Comedy', *The Italianist*, 17 (1997), 100–116 (p. 100). My reasons for disagreeing will be made clear.

[66] Beltrami, *L'esperienza del verso*, p. 124.

[67] Praloran, 'Osservazioni sul ritmo nella «Commedia»', p. 459.

autori, oltre che probabilmente – fatto molto difficile da verificare – da una sensibilità estetica.[68]

A simple repeating unit is, in terms of stress rather than duration, nowhere to be found. In the absence of internal metrical norms, how then does the poet decide on the rhythmical qualities of his line? Normative stress tendencies 'derivanti dall'uso', or a 'sensibilità estetica' do not quite hit on an answer. A different question should be posed: 'what is rhythm?' Contini's unit, the rhythmical figure, when picked apart etymologically is in this regard actually a proposition: *rhythm = figure*. And the famous exponent of an understanding of rhythm as a 'shape' was Contini's friend and colleague at the Université de Fribourg, Émile Benveniste.

The notion that rhythm is a periodic return of the same, like waves against a shoreline, is belied by its root: *rhuthmos* derives from *reō*, 'I flow'. Rivers flow, seas do not. Benveniste, in his article 'La notion de "rythme" dans son expression linguistique', published in the 1966 *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, shows that this derivative noun formed on 'to flow' expressed something else. Mustering evidence prior to Plato, he showed that the term means 'form', but form specific to things in movement, or flowing.

> ῥυθμός, d'après les contextes où il est donné, désigne la forme dans l'instant qu'elle est assumée par ce qui est mouvant, mobile, fluide, la forme de ce qui n'a pas consistance organique : il convient au *pattern* d'un élement fluide, à une lettre arbitrairement modelée, à un péplos qu'on arrange à son gré, à la disposition particulière du caractère ou de l'humeur. C'est la forme improvisée, momentanée, modifiable.[69]

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[68] Praloran, 'Osservazioni sul ritmo nella «Commedia»', p. 450.
[69] Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, p. 333.

The sense that *rhuthmos* designates periodic phenomena arrives in Plato, who binds the concept irrevocably to *metron*:

> La circonstance décisive est là, dans la notion d'un ῥυθμός corporel, associé au μέτρον et soumis à la loi des nombres : la « disposition » (sens propre du mot) est chez Platon constituée par une séquence ordonnée des mouvements lents et rapides, de même que l'« harmonie » résulte de l'alternance de l'aigu et grave'.[70]

Before Plato, rhythm signifies a distinct contour, one that is momentary, and, at least in Benveniste's telling, curiously purposive – form derived 'à son gré' or 'arbitrairement'. The 'rhythm' of a dance is then not the return of a measured bar, but the shape a dancer's body assumes in a given instant. If *rhuthmos* has a shape, is it the kind of shape then designated by the term *figura* in Latin? *Rhuthmos* is not considered among the many Greek words for form which Erich Auerbach analysed as the seed-bed of the Latin word *figura* – words like *skhēma* and *eidos*. '[T]hough we may say in general that in Latin usage', writes Auerbach,

> *figura* takes the place of *schēma*, this does not exhaust the force of the word, the *potestas verbi*. To be sure, *schēma* itself in Greek is more dynamic than the word as we use it; in Aristotle, for example, mimic gestures, especially of actors, are called *schēmata*; the meaning of dynamic form is by no means

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[70] Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, p. 334.

foreign to *schēma*; but *figura* developed this element of movement and transformation much further.[71]

If *rhuthmos* was the word for form in a Leucippian or Democritean universe of 'flow', *rein*,[72] where it was equivalent to *skhēma*,[73] *figura*, in its turn, was popularised in Latin in particular by Lucretius, who used the term to express the flux of a Democritean universe of atoms – a world constantly in movement, assuming shapes only momentarily. When Lucretius calls atoms 'corpora', whose 'concursus motus ordo positura figura' produce things in the world,[74] his word 'figura' likely translates the Democritean 'ῥυσμός', meaning the shape created by the position, relation and conjunction of bodies in motion.[75] Both *ruthmos* and *figura* then can designate 'la forme improvisée, momentanée, modifiable'.[76] Both designate, to find a workable English equivalent, *shapes* – non-final contours that the word *form* in English does not quite express. Both assume a degree of arbitrariness, but do not preclude a directedness, be it of water, cloth, or script.

The Italian hendecasyllable does not sound out in periodic returns of the same: metre is not its rhythm. But repetitions of 'shapes', repetitions that are 'meno di parole, nessi semantici e immagini che di rapporti, giaciture, contatti',[77] if they do not grant a uniform periodicity to the poem, do grant a plasticity to its language. We might see this in two senses. Rhythm as plastic contour abets the formula-like recombination (that is, the recombination of

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[71] Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. by Ralph Manheim and Catherine Garvin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 15.

[72] Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, p. 328.

[73] These philosopher's understanding of rhythm is made clear in Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 985b: 'διαφέρειν γάρ φασι τὸ ῥθσμῶι καὶ διαθιγῆι καὶ τροπῆι. τούτων δ' ὁ μὲν ῥυσμός σχῆμά ἐστιν, ἡ δὲ διαθιγή τάξις, ἡ δὲ τροπὴ θέσις' ('things differ in terms of rhythm (*rhusmos* (an Attic spelling)), contact (*diathigē*), and turning (*tropē*). Rhythm is the form (*skhēma*), contact the order (*taxis*), and turning the position (*thesis*)'). Cited in Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, p. 329. My translation, based on Benveniste's.

[74] 'bodies, whose combination, movement, order, position, and *figurae*' produce things. See previous note for lexical comparison with the Democritean terms ῥυσμός, τάξις, τροπὴ. My translation.

[75] *De rerum natura*, 1.685 and 2.1021, cited in Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, p. 17.

[76] Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, p. 333.

[77] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 80.

'shapes' within a determinate *temporis occupatio*) analysed so far, and these shapes can, in turn, become significant, *figural* in the sense of meaningful or referring. There are a few ways to substantiate this sense that Dante's rhythm is shapely – that the poem is made out of shapelinesses, which is why it is memorable. First, this is something that critics of Dante's poem report.

'[M]arcate oscillazioni del ritmo', even in the space of a single terzina, Marco Praloran writes, means that 'parole in Dante sono più "scolpite", i contorni più netti' than in other early poets.[78] Rhythm's contours can be suggestive of other media, too. Contini writes of Dante's translation of Paul at *Par*. 24.64-5, 'fede è sustanza di cose sperate / e argomento de le non parventi': 'Importantissimo tuttavia, perché smentisce l'eventuale ipotesi di una rigidità ritmica del traduttore, è che l'esemplare prosastico possa cooperare a sciogliere il verso in una sorta di quasi-prosa'.[79] It is not just that Paul sounds natural in Italian hendecasyllables, it is that Italian hendecasyllables sound natural in the rhythm of Paul's prose. This capacity to imitate, to figure the lie of language in a diversity of situations is fundamental to the poem's mimesis, and even metricologists have attempted to explain, by recourse to this extraordinary 'potenzialità nell'imitazione dell'articolazione linguistica', why it is that Italian hendecasyllabic verse 'appare tra i meno vincolanti, tra i più liberamente aperti al flusso naturale della lingua'.[80] Hearing the rhythm of Paul's epistolary prose in Dante's poem, however, is not simply like hearing 'open' verse; it is not simply 'la pressione della prosa nella lingua poetica dantesca' that shines through.[81] Contini hears a definite shape, one which reproduces an 'exemplar'. Rhythm in this imitation has a definite contour, and to hear the 'dissolution' of verse in light

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[78] Marco Praloran, *Metro e ritmo nella poesia italiana. Guida anomala ai fondamenti della versificazione* (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2011), pp. 22–23.
[79] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 78.
[80] Praloran, *Metro e ritmo nella poesia italiana*, p. 7.
[81] Praloran, 'Osservazioni sul ritmo nella «Commedia»', p. 462.

of this 'l'esemplare prosastico' is at the same time to hear the referring potential, or the figuralism, of that rhythmical contour.

But the reason to keep close to these critics' sense of the shapeliness of rhythm – indeed, the reason to opt for an understanding of rhythm as shape, rather than sequence – is that the re-used language observed so far, which so often seems to conserve word divisions, position in the line, syllable quantity, and the placement and characteristics of the caesura, above and beyond repeated words and phonetic content, might thereby express a unit generative of the principal prosodic features of the line. In other words, the overall prosodic contour of the line may recognise, and in turn be made up of, these shapes. This would be a prosodic system geared towards, and perhaps even generated from, their recollection.

Metrical or prosodic descriptions of the poem, as currently practiced, work with abstractions of each line based on the location of its principal and secondary stressed syllables. So a terzina from *Paradiso* 7 – 'Ciò che da lei sanza mezzo distilla / non ha poi fine, perché non si move / la sua imprenta quand'ella sigilla' (67-9) – is described by David Robey as 1457, 2478, 247,[82] and by Marco Praloran as 147, 247, 47.[83] Each line is thought of as its own abstract unit of metre (as interior feet cannot be found), such that lines of the same pattern – say 247 – are then grouped together and counted up.[84] These prosodic descriptions, however, cut the cake horizontally, taking prosodic features off the top while leaving the objects that account for them behind. In 1986 Marina Nespor and Irene Vogel's *Prosodic Phonology*, a now-foundational text for linguists, offered a brief analysis of the *Commedia* in a case study. Nespor and Vogel's analysis was hampered by a host of incorrect assumptions – in particular, that the

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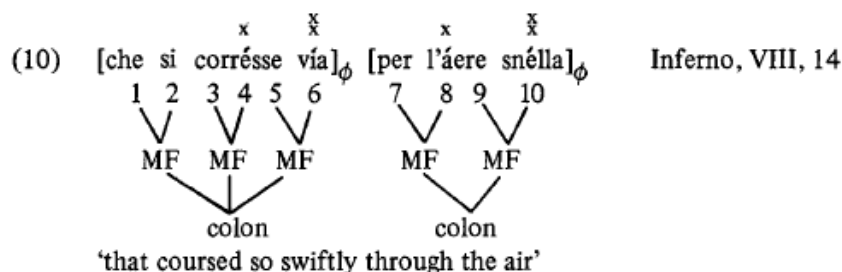[82] Robey, 'Sound and Metre in Italian Narrative Verse'.

[83] Praloran, 'Osservazioni sul ritmo nella «Commedia»', p. 465.

[84] Many different models for the hendecasyllable are proposed by Pier Marco Bertinetto. These include measuring lines by their 'rhythmic units', i.e. the space between a stressed syllable and the next, as well as measuring lines by the placement of their caesura, or the shape of the space between the fourth and eight syllable. Bertinetto even includes an analysis of rhythmical 'entropy' within each cantica. See Pier Marco Bertinetto, *Ritmo e modelli ritmici. Analisi computazionale delle funzioni periodiche nella versificazione dantesca* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1973), pp. 91–142.

hendecasyllable has an internal 'metrical organisation' which is iambic, and that every line is composed to two hemistichs.[85] But the way Nespor and Vogel explain how stress is allocated in the line re-frames the preceding discussion of re-used part-lines, and their relation to rhythm. We know that the position of the prosodic stresses in the hendecasyllable is not fixed – it is 'free'. The natural stress of the individual words identifies the positions of stress – but what about the difference between principal and secondary stress? The following line has, including all possible secondary ictus, a 2468 shape:[86]

che si corresse via per l'aere snella   (*Inf*. 8.14)

We also hear in this line that 'via' (sixth-position) has the most audible, or the principle, stress, because it is followed by a pause (a caesura). The logic behind the placement of the principal stress on 'via' cannot, purely at the level of 'tendencies' in stress allocation, be determined. Why is the principle stress not on 'corrésse' or 'l'áere'? The fact that one hears more of a stress at 'via', argue Nespor and Vogel, is that 'via' is the 'Designated Terminal Element' of a phrase (fully adopting their nomenclature, it is the 'DTE' of a 'phonological phrase' or 'φ'). Syntax is always marked, they claim, phonetically, and we stress the last element of a phrase we want to have taken as a unit. So the schema Nespor and Vogel give for *Inf.* 8.14 is, accordingly:[87]

(10)   [che si corrésse vía]_φ [per l'áere snélla]_φ   Inferno, VIII, 14
            1 2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
                  V   V   V   V   V
                  MF   MF   MF   MF   MF
                        | |
                      colon   colon
        'that coursed so swiftly through the air'

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[85] Marina Nespor and Irene Vogel, *Prosodic Phonology*, 2nd edn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), p. 280.
[86] Robey.
[87] Nespor and Vogel, p. 281.

Their double 'x's above mark out the principle stresses of the line – at six and ten – which correctly state the prosodic facts. What Nespor and Vogel suggest is that the promotion of these positions is not a metrical fact, but the result of having understood phrases and correspondingly signalling their DTEs. It is the natural prosody of the phrase, which is something different again to the natural prosody of constituent words, that produces the principal prosodic features of Dante's hendecasyllabic verse. If, then, what the principle stress in the hendecasyllabic line signals is, in fact, phrasal (and so syntactical), the leap from there towards a recollective thinking in terms of such discrete units gains support. In fact, the second 'phonological phrase' in Nespor and Vogel's example, 'per l'aere snella', is one such shape that the poet deploys often (i.e. *Inf.* 5.89, *Inf.* 12.96). Perhaps, then, the *Commedia* is not an 'open' versification system of 'free' prosodic allocation at all: it is a versification system in which prosody works as a machine for the conservation and recombination of phrasal units, which become the soul of form. If this recollection of figures, and other figures modelled on those figures, is more tractable, certainly, than in the case of formulae in the Greek hexameter (which also maintains a metrical schema), it may still be correct to regard them as the reflection of a compositional process which sutures shapes of language together.

Having drawn resources and method, throughout the foregoing analysis, from the study of ancient, orally-composed poetry, would it be fair to say that the *Commedia* is, likewise, an orally-composed poem? Recognising the pervasiveness of recollected language and having broached the question of how it relates to prosody, a question phrased in terms of textual *or* oral media has been superseded. What we glimpse through a host of internal comparisons is a process of constant recovery and re-purposing of already-used language, in shapes consistent with the prosodic contours of the hendecasyllabic line. Borrowing method is not the same as equating objects. What we can say for certain, however, is that the fears of Petrarch and Giovanni del Virgilio – that unlettered people would remember the poem and take it into the

street – were well founded. Their memory is not merely a separate track of transmission: it recognises an internal, compositionally-important feature of the poem. In respect of the distinction between composition and transmission, memory is a challenging support: the recollection 'of an infinite number of details', and the re-use, recombination, and analogy of parts, characterise authorship as much as they point towards the poem's mnemonic tenacity, its susceptibility to inscription on the support of memory for later readers and performers.

The key terms of the foregoing analysis, memory and rhythm, if they are the axial terms of innovation in the study of Bronze Age oral poetry, were also terms key to a different – and twentieth-century – literary culture, to which Contini was drawn as a young scholarship student in the Paris of the early '30s. To better get in view how memory and rhythm specify, in Dante, a compositional process, the place to turn next is, rather counter-intuitively, that 'scuola poetica uscita da Mallarmé, e che ha in Valéry il proprio teorico', which, 'considerando la poesia nel suo fare, l'interpreta come un lavoro perennemente mobile e non finibile'.[88]

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[88] Contini, *Saggio d'un commento*, p. 7.

Figure et mémoire. Contini and Valéry

> …de ma mémoire
> Triomphalement ne sais-tu
> Te lever…
>
> Stéphane Mallarmé, *Prose*[1]

'(Il faudrait, pour approfondir ce sujet, parler aussi de l'influence d'un esprit sur soi-même, et d'une œuvre sur son auteur. Mais ce n'est point le lieu.)'[2] This parenthetical bid for a new criticism is found in a 'Lettre' Paul Valéry wrote to preface Jean Royère's 1927 study, *Mallarmé*. Royère's book was successful, and went through two editions, but it was important to Valéry that his own contribution to it take on a life of its own. This same 'Lettre sur Mallarmé' continued to be published over the following years in various forms. It was prepared as its own booklet-length publication a year later, then repackaged again in 1929 for *Variété II*, the second of the five essay collections that Gallimard would edit for the mature Academician. Valéry would spend the next many years, well into the 1930s, revising and expanding upon the portrait of Stéphane Mallarmé that the 'Lettre' sketches. In 1936 a young Gianfranco Contini encountered this middle-aged poet-turned-national-man-of-letters.[3] The Mallarmé that Valéry sketches in the 'Lettre', and particularly in this little paragraph that speaks of the influence of an 'œuvre sur son auteur', must have made an impression on the young Italian philologist. Because this is also Contini's portrait of Dante: '*ci si può anche chiedere* se essa [la "memorabilità del testo dantesco"] non cominci *ad agire sull'autore stesso*.'[4] '(*Il faudrait… parler aussi* de l'influence d'un esprit sur soi-même, et *d'une œuvre sur son auteur*.)'.

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[1] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 55.

[2] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 635.

[3] *Scartafacci di Contini: Catalogo della mostra Firenze, Archivio Contemporaneo 'A. Bonsanti' 13 dicembre 2012 - 31 gennaio 2013*, ed. by Claudia Borgia and Franco Zabagli (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2012), p. 32.

[4] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 79. My emphasis.

Having discussed, in the previous chapter, how the author's memory of his own lines intimates a mnemotechnical poet, drawing parallels between the *Commedia*'s repeated shapes of language and the memory dynamics of orally-composed poetry, I want to move now in the opposite direction. Not a word so far has been written about this modernist source of Contini's portrait of Dante.[5] But I want to do more than simply ask if Contini's Dante is Valéry's Mallarmé. I want to ask, more basically, how the prospect of studying a mind acting on itself, with the difficulties that that brings, becomes a task for criticism at all. This burden in many ways resembles Parry's investigation of 'Homeric thought', and the oral poet's 'memory of an infinite number of details'.[6] But what would entice the polemically anti-'psicologistico' Contini to adopt a hermeneutic of the mind 'sur soi-même?'[7] Such reflexive action is, from the earliest moments, part of Contini's understanding of Dante. From his first essay on Dante, prefacing his 'Introduzione' to Dante's *Rime* of '39, Contini declares of the poet: '*non mai pace in lui*, ma il *tormento* della dialettica'.[8] This, too, is Valéry's portrait of the poet's mind undergoing '*tourment* plus pur, *division de soi-même* plus profonde'.[9] Valéry turns out to be the most immediate source for Contini's radical new object, the 'figur[a] ritmic[a]', and for both critics, this object relates to a particular kind of textual warp ('tourment' is from *torqueo*,

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[5] That is, not a word has been said on the relation of Contini's Dante to Valéry's writings on Mallarmé. What has been reaffirmed often is that Contini's model of Dante as author, particularly in 'Un'interpretazione di Dante', explicitly responds to famous critical positions advanced by De Sanctis and, especially, by Croce. My present purpose should certainly not be confused with a denial that Contini has in mind 'i χωρίζοντες, inclusi il De Sanctis e il Croce' – that is, the famous De Sanctian distinction between 'poet' and 'artist'. I will not discuss this well-trodden territory, but that should mark, *e silentio*, its importance. An excellent study of this line is by Giuseppe Sangirardi, 'Contini e la costruzione del modello Dantesco', in *Gianfranco Contini entre France et Italie: Philologie et critique*, Ermeneutica letteraria, 10 (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra, 2014), pp. 41–54 (pp. 41–54).
[6] Parry, pp. 1, 20.
[7] A notable instance of this polemic is found in a letter to Luigi Russo from March 1943. In it, Contini responds to the portrait of his critical practice which Russo gave in his *La critica letteraria contemporanea* of the same year: 'la definizione di *presentismo* mi lusinga talmente, oltra a cogliere la mia vera tendenza, che vorrei solo meritarla più integralmente; io, che mi sembro talora anche troppo psicologistico, cui sembra spesso psicologistico un Gargiulo…' in Gianfranco Contini and Luigi Russo, *'Il paesaggio d'un presentista': Corrispondenza tra Gianfranco Contini e Luigi Russo (1936-1961)*, ed. by Domenico de Martino (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2009), p. 61.
[8] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 4. My emphasis.
[9] This is from the 1931 'Je disais quelquefois a Stéphane Mallarmé', which will be my focus in due course. Paul Valéry, *Variété III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936), p. 36 <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k939071t> [accessed 4 May 2017]; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 659. My emphasis.

'I twist'), and so the inauguration of a new form of criticism. Their allied hermeneutic of the 'sur soi-même' is, then, essential if we are to understand how the study of 'figure ritmiche' is constructed by a particular 'figure' of the poet at work.

I'll begin with what we know positively about the relationship of Contini to Valéry, before turning to the double author portrait of Dante and Mallarmé. Contini visited Valéry by means of a letter of introduction from a friend, though only once. In a letter dated 2 July 1936, in which Valéry apologises for not being able to meet Contini, he suggests the pair might meet after the 20th of 'giugno' – presumably a slip for the same July. [10] A letter of Contini's to Albert Henry, also from July, confirms the meeting eventually took place: 'J'ai connu dernièrement Valéry, pour lequel je suis tout à fait emballé'.[11] This immediate esteem – 'emballé' is a peculiar, profile-cutting word, which Claudio Ciociola has analysed in Contini's correspondence (see previous note) – leaves its trace on Contini's work in the years to come. The first lines of Contini's 1943 'Saggio d'un commento alle correzioni del Petrarca volgare', published seven years after this meeting, are a testament to the importance of this encounter. 'La scuola poetica uscita da Mallarmé, e che ha in Valéry il proprio teorico, considerando la poesia nel suo fare, l'interpreta come un lavoro perennemente mobile e non finibile', the essay begins.[12] This brief appeal to Valéry's theoretical insights into poetry 'nel suo fare' – 'dell'*atto poetico*' it goes on – is evidence not only of what Contini read of Valéry's work, but also hints at the philological nature of the impression Valéry left on the young Contini. That has been obscured, as the citation has not particularly interested scholars for what it says about Valéry at all. 'Contini n'attaque jamais Croce directement', argues Donatella Bisconti.[13] On her

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[10] Claudia Borgia, *Inventario dell'archivio di Gianfranco Contini* (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2012), p. 530; Borgia and Zabagli, p. 32.

[11] Claudio Ciociola, 'La lava sotto la crosta. Per una storia delle Rime del '39', in *Il Giovane Contini*, ed. by Claudio Ciociola (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2014), pp. 468–569 (pp. 469–70n).

[12] Contini, *Saggio d'un commento*, p. 7.

[13] Donatella Bisconti, 'Gianfranco Contini sur le «discrimen» Dante-Pétrarque', *Ermeneutica letteraria*, 10 (2014), 67–77 (p. 76).

reading, Contini is leveraging Valéry's radical negation of the art object ('il poema storico rappresenta una sezione possibile [del lavoro], *a rigore gratuita*, non necessariamente l'ultima'),[14] as a counterblast to the understood Crocean opinion to the contrary. Croce would write later of the study of authorial variants that 'quella sorta di genesi non genetica [è] stata adottata e protetta dai decadenti, incapaci di cogliere con la meditazione i rapporti della vita dello spirito'.[15] Without denying a game of marionettes in a Crocean court, there is also scope for investigating the primary reference: asking whether Contini is positively declaring an influence on his method.[16]

In '36, when Valéry and Contini met, the former had also begun to edit Mallarmé's texts. Already in the 'Lettre' from 1927, and particularly in Valéry's discussion of 'influence…sur soi-même' ('Mais ce n'est point le lieu'), Valéry's image of a mind turned on itself presages the kind of attention Valéry would turn to his task as editor. In the 1930s Valéry studied authorial variants, resulting from Mallarmé's constant reworking of his poems. And it is in the midst of his textual criticism of Mallarmé's poems – and in particular this examination of a single, authorial hand on his own work – that the young Contini met Valéry. Contini is often understood in Italy to be the inaugurator of the criticism of authorial variants, or *filologia d'autore*, beginning with his 1937 'Come lavorava l'Ariosto'.[17] The 1943 'Saggio' on Petrarch, which begins with the citation of Valérian poetics and is concerned with authorial variants, was the young Italian philologist's second major venture in that discipline, after his review of Santorre Debenedetti's edition of Ariosto.[18] Contini, from its opening lines, attests to the

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[14] Contini, *Saggio d'un commento*, p. 7. My emphasis.
[15] Benedetto Croce, 'Illusione sulla genesi delle opere d'arte, documentata degli scartafacci degli scrittori', *Quaderni della Critica*, 3.9 (1947), 93–94 (p. 94).
[16] At a late stage in the preparation of the present study, I was made aware of Maria Teresa Giaveri, 'Paul Valéry e il «critico dentro di sé»', *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, 4.1 (1998), 149–66 (p. 150). Giaveri's shows that Valéry is the forerunner of genetic criticism in Italy and Europe more broadly. Her essay does not concern Valéry's relation to Contini's work on Dante, but does cite Contini's mention of Valéry's influence at the beginning of the former's essay on Petrarch's variants (discussed below, p. 117).
[17] Giulia Raboni and Paola Italia, 'Storia', *Filologia d'autore*, 2016 <http://www.filologiadautore.it/wp/la-storia/> [accessed 11 May 2017].
[18] See note on p. 41.

impetus Valéry gave to this work – and so to this discipline – as he begins this study of Petrarch's variants with Valéry's Mallarmé.

> Se il critico intende l'opera d'arte come un «oggetto», ciò rappresenta soltanto l'oggettività del suo operare, il «dato» è l'ipotesi di lavoro morale della sua abnegazione; e una considerazione dell'*atto* poetico lo porterà a spostare dinamicamente le sue formule, a reperire direzioni, piuttosto che contorni fissi, dell'energia poetica.[19]

To be clear, Valéry is hardly offering ready-made philological tools. When Valéry speaks about poetry as 'act', as for instance in a conference booklet from 1938, he ends by saying: 'Je n'entrerai pas dans l'examen du travail conscient, et de la question de l'analyser en *actes*. Je n'ai voulu que donner une idée très sommaire du domaine de l'invention poétique'.[20] Contini *will* enter into this. The 'question de l'analyser en *actes*' becomes a methodological commitment from the early '40s. Contini gives strenuous thought to how 'l'analyser en *actes*' must proceed, and a 'coscienza mallarméana' is turned toward the criticism of Petrarch's variants, to reposition ('spostare') the critic in relation to her wonted tools.

The 1965 'Un'interpretazione's borrowing from Valéry are less patent – and they are not overtly signalled. But the essay's characterisation of work, author, and poetic act in the *Commedia*, as it works to fulfill Valéry's wish for a criticism of the 'œuvre sur son auteur' (recall the parenthesis, the 'Mais ce n'est point le lieu'), also borrows another key word from Valéry's essays on Mallarmé. 'L'instinct de cette valeur mnémonique de la forme,' writes Valéry, 'paraît très fort et très sûr chez Mallarmé de qui les vers se retiennent si aisément'.[21] It

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[19] Contini, *Saggio d'un commento*, p. 7.
[20] 'La poésie est d'ailleurs essentiellement "in actu"'. Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 1415.
[21] Valéry, *Variété III*, p. 19; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 651.

is this same ease, this same memorability, that makes up, in 'Un'interpretazione di Dante', 'un oggetto necessario della filologia'.[22] This is 'un dato che si documenti non da questo o quel luogo, ma dalla totalità dell'opera', and has as its support in the 'memoria collettiva' or 'memoria nazionale' of so many lines and part-lines of the poem.[23]

What accounts for this 'valeur mnémonique'? Out of Valéry's discussion of memory in 'Je disais quelquefois' emerges a new object:

> Ces propriétés sensibles du langage sont aussi dans une relation remarquable avec le mémoire. Les diverses formations de syllabes, d'intensités et de temps que l'on peut composer sont très inégalement favorables à la conservation par la mémoire, comme elles le sont d'ailleurs à l'émission par la voix. On dirait que les unes ont plus d'*affinité* que les autres avec le mystérieux support du souvenir : chacune semble affectée d'une probabilité propre de restitution exacte, qui dépend de la figure phonétique.[24]

This 'figure phonétique' is what is inscribed on the support of memory. That language is shapely, and that science can be made of its shapeliness, is also the intuition upon which 'Un'interpretazione di Dante', and its use of the language of active memory, rests. If 'conservation par la mémoire' for Valéry 'dépend de la figure phonétique', for Contini, 'Essa non è puramente verbale, per eccitazioni provenienti da oggetti affini*, ma si organizza in figure ritmiche*.' He continues, in a passage cited in my introduction,

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[22] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 73.
[23] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, pp. 78–79.
[24] Valéry, *Variété III*, p. 19; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 651. Valéry's emphasis.

> Esito a dire se prevalga nello schedario [of passages compared] l'aspetto semantico del linguaggio o quello musicale, ma, se prevedibile è l'omogeneità nell'articolazione del pensiero, colpisce come una sorpresa l'intensità dei valori puramente formali.[25]

Here even Contini's subsequent association of the words 'musicale' and 'formal[e]' echoes a syntagm – 'combinaisons formelles et musicales' – in the few lines of Valéry's before the above cited: 'Il faut choisir : ou bien réduire le langage à la seule fonction transitive d'un système de signaux : ou bien souffrir que certains spéculent sur ses propriétés sensibles, en développent les effets *actuels*, les combinaisons formelles et musicales'.[26] The Continian proposal of 'figure ritmiche' and the Valérian proposal of 'figure phonétique' are, moreover, both constructed over the same division in the makeup of language: that between 'l'aspetto semantico' or the 'système de signaux', and its 'realizzazione' or 'les effets *actuels*'. This 'figure' depends on the latter (starkly for Valéry), on the 'propriétés sensibles du langage', or the 'combinaisons formelles et musicales', or again, as Contini puts it, 'l'intensità dei valori puramente formali'.

To understand this tradition behind Valéry's unit of 'combinaisons formelles et musicales' – a unit which seems to be exclusive of the semantic aspect of language – the place to begin is with the importance of the word *rhythm* to French experimental poetry at the turn of the last century. The proposal of a '*rhythmical* figure' in Contini's essay, rather than Valéry's 'phonetic figure', does not obscure the Valérian lineage: it really makes it more explicit. To understand how important rhythm is to what Valéry writes about Mallarmé, and how it informs his speculations on the makeup of language in general, one needs to start with Mallarmé

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[25] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 83. My emphasis.
[26] Valéry, *Variété III*, p. 19; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 650. Valéry's emphasis.

himself. Replying to a periodical questionnaire in 1886 asking readers to define poetry, Mallarmé wrote in to say that 'La Poésie est l'expression, par le langage humain ramené à son rythme essentiel, du sens mystérieux des aspects de l'existence'.[27] This reflection on 'essential rhythm' also reflects how others, even Mallarmé's detractors, made sense of his experimentalism (or did not). For Zola, Mallarmé was 'Poursuivi d'une préoccupation constante dans le rythme et l'arrangement des mots…Ses pièces de vers ne contiennent que des mots mis côte à côte, non pour la clarté de la phrase, mais pour l'harmonie du morceau'.[28] Rhythm is already a word of experiment and controversy – a word used to describe a particular crux of Mallarméan poetics, something more basic than (or just antagonistic to) the organisation of sense – before Valéry gets a hold of it.

Where we might expect Valéry, Mallarmé's friend and poetic disciple, to return to this controversy of rhythm and sense with a version of Pope's maxim – that 'The sound must seem an echo to the sense' – we in fact find the opposite. In the first lecture of a course on poetry delivered at the Collège de France in 1937, Valéry speaks of poetry as a 'liaison suivie ou entretenue entre un rythme et une syntaxe, entre le *son* et le *sens*', but this 'liaison' is, in truth, a radical division between two aspects of language 'sans relations concevables entre elles'.[29] He goes on to re-express this distinction slightly further on, to say poetry is an uneasy 'accouplement de la *variable phonétique* avec la *variable sémantique*' of language.[30] It is clear that this is a lop-sided 'accouplement', in which, when poets are at their best, the 'semantic' aspect of language is transformed utterly: 'il y a un langage poétique dans lequel les mots ne sont plus les mots de l'usage pratique et libre'.[31] The proposal in 'Je disais quelquefois à

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[27] Albert Cook, '"Entendre, Simplifier Le Monde": The Philosophical Purchase of Mallarmé', ed. by Robert Greer Cohn and Gerald Gillespie (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), pp. 53–85 (p. 74).

[28] Roman Doubrovkine, 'Leo Tolstoy, Mallarmé, and "The Sickness of Our Time"', in *Mallarmé in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Robert Greer Cohn and Gerald Gillespie (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1998), pp. 236–65 (pp. 258–59).

[29] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 1356.

[30] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 1356. Valéry's emphasis.

[31] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 1356.

Stéphane Mallarmé', of shapely units of sound or 'figure[s] phonétique[s]', is meant to crystallise this division in language set in motion by the difficulties of Mallarmé's rhythm, by proposing a countervailing unit of rhythm or of the '*variable phonétique*'. What this unit refers to, if it refers at all, is different to what words refer to: in the above Collège de France lecture Valéry claims rhythm and voice are 'directement choses de l'être'.[32] But making such a sharp division in language between 'la *variable phonétique*' and 'la *variable sémantique*' is also propitious of a new discipline. 'Il ne faut croire du tout que la philologie épuise tous les problèmes que peut proposer le langage', Valéry writes in 'Je disais quelquefois'.[33] If there is a semantic science, there might also be a rhythmical science.

In proposing a study of 'figure ritmiche', Contini is continuing in this tradition of rhythmical controversy and critical experiment. Scholarship so far has missed Contini's audacity here. Piero Beltrami, who sought to extend Contini's analysis of 'figure ritmiche' in Dante's *Commedia*, could assert in 1981 that with this syntagm Contini 'ha aperto vie completamente nuove alla ricerca'.[34] The theoretical slack that Contini leaves, when for instance he 'Esit[a] a dire se prevalga…l'aspetto semantico del linguaggio o quello musicale»', Beltrami tightens with claims of an 'organizzazione totale del discorso'.[35] But this refines away the collision. Read with an eye to its sources, Contini's 'hesitation' declares that he is aware of this very Valérian distinction between phonetic and semantic sense, in the same moment the he borrows Valéry's object. Indeed, his hesitation invokes a famous apothegm of Valéry's: 'Le poème; cette hésitation prolongée entre le son et le sens'.[36] Contini's 'hesitation' is not simply a theoretical failing, to be corrected. That hesitation itself, in this essay on the mutual constitution of rhythm and memory, is the point: to hestitate (*haesito*, 'I stick') it to be caught

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[32] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 1356.
[33] Valéry, *Variété III*, p. 25; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 655.
[34] Beltrami, *Metrica, Poetica, Metrica Dantesca*, p. 32.
[35] Beltrami, *Metrica, Poetica, Metrica Dantesca*, p. 11.
[36] Valéry, *Œuvres*, II, p. 637. I am grateful to Simon Jarvis for this pointer.

up in the catchiness that characterizes this poetry. The proposal that the poem is made up of 'figure ritmiche', predominately composed of 'valori puramente formali' in excess of 'l'aspetto semantico', if it accurately describes Dante's reader's sense of the catchiness of the poem, is still an idea not at first Contini's, and not at first about Dante.

It is descriptive of the experience of reading Mallarmé. Malcom Bowie, in his 1978 study, *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult*, writes of the line 'Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx'[37] that 'the rhythm and the sound-pattern of the line give it an immediate, almost formulaic, authority…the line is…removed by metre from its syntactic dependents'. Mallarméan 'rhythm' decomposes into shapely units, such that 'ideas do not unfold as a continuous syntactic sequence, but are free to develop new relationships of affinity or contrast among themselves'.[38] We better understand Valéry's insistent division of rhythm and sense, by noting that a remarkable feature of Mallarmé's poetry is that rhythm disjoins. Where it might be assumed that poetic rhythm furthers the onrush of sense, what matters to Valéry and Contini is that Mallarmé's rhythmical powers isolate shapes of language from their hypotactical bonds, making them discrete and sharply defined. Contini in fact cites from this very poem of Mallarmé's in 'Un'interpretazione di Dante': he contrasts the '*bibelot[s] d'inanité sonore*' of d'Annunzio with the 'rugosa realtà' of Dante.[39] Bowie's critical comments on 'Ses purs ongles' are well expressed by Valéry himself, in fact, in the conference article referred to above (on p. 117) in which 'figure' also makes an appearance:

> j'ai parlé de résonance, tout à l'heure, par figure. Je voulais faire allusion aux effets psychiques que produisent les groupements de mots et de physionomies

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[37] This is the first line of 'IV' from 'Plusieurs sonnets', in Mallarmé, p. 68.
[38] Malcom Bowie, *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 7.
[39] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 100.

de mots, indépendamment des liaisons syntaxiques, et par les influences réciproques (c'est-à-dire : non-syntaxiques) de leurs voisinages.[40]

Valéry is not writing about Mallarmé in particular here, but these comments are close to Bowie's regarding the independence of 'groupements de mots', hived off not by syntactical breakage but by the physiognomy of sound, 'free to develop new relationships of affinity' in the discontinuity inflicted by 'rhythm'. The rhythmical figure is, then, from its origins a closely-read critical object – a claim about a particular poetry. The sharp division of rhythm and sense, which it depends on, depends in turn on the interruptions of a 'formulaic' quality, or a 'figure', which Mallarmé achieves against hypotactic dependency. These are not simply suspended frames, waiting for sense to re-arrive: this quality of Mallarméan rhythm creates, for Valéry, a new kind of inquiry in a new domain of language. If philology does not exhaust all the problems of language, then this is because a new 'science' of 'figure[s]' is possible: 'Mallarmé s'était fait une sorte de science de *ses* mots. On ne peut point douter qu'il n'ait raisonné sur leurs figures, explore l'espace intérieur où ils paraissent, tantôt *causes* tantôt *effets ;* estimé ce qu'on pourrait nommer leurs *charges poétiques*'.[41] This is a pure 'science', one Valéry often compares to abstract geometry.[42] But it is also an applied science, one which describes the poet's labour in elaborating and manipulating what he has made.

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Contini and Valéry share a unit – a 'figur[a] ritmic[a]' or 'figure phonétique'. This unit, for both Valéry and Contini, answers a question about memory – answers why 'les vers se

[40] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 1415.
[41] Valéry, *Variété III*, pp. 25–26; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 655.
[42] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 1290.

retiennent si aisément' – and starts to make method of the thought that 'la vera sede della *Commedia* stia nella memoria e non nel libro',[43] or that memory is Dante's true and 'mystérieux support'. But the 'science' of 'figures' is not merely a critical challenge. It is what animates the poet – a part of the 'atto poetico'. In Valéry's 'Je disais quelquefois à Stéphane Mallarmé', 'figure' is also used as a placeholder for a kind of 'action'. '[P]oint de *sens*, point d'*idée* qui ne soit l'*acte* de quelque figure *remarquable*, construite de timbres, de durées, et d'intensités'.[44] The imbrication of poetic 'act' and 'figure' changes where the poet is to be found in his language. 'Peu à peu dans le Poète, le Langage et le Moi en viennent à se correspondre tout autrement qu'ils ne font dans les autres hommes'.[45] The body of language, the 'physique du discours',[46] is what acts in the 'figure', and it is only through the action of this body that '*sens*' and '*idée*' belong to the poet. Expressive language that communicates ideas is merely 'abstrait'.[47] It moves without the body of language, an 'âme sans corps'.[48] No longer simply expressive, the figure of the poet too is to be found in the action of the 'figure', or the shape of words. The '*sens*' of an '*acte* de quelque figure *remarquable*' is distinct from the 'sens' attached to words: the *word*, a presumed bearer of sense, is now token only of the alienation from the body of language, mere coin in the 'échange immédiat de paroles contre actes et d'actes contre paroles'.[49] The figure, by contrast, is where the poet bodies forth forms of meaningful utterance.

The 'figure[s]' or shapes of words in which the poet's fundamental action now appears must change the grammar of criticism. The action of the poet is a 'transformation' – this is the word that Valéry uses earliest to describe this action, and it will come, in Valéry's prose from

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[43] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 73.
[44] Valéry, *Variété III*, p. 27; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 656. Valéry's emphasis.
[45] Valéry, *Variété III*, p. 27; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 656.
[46] Valéry, *Variété III*, p. 26; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 656.
[47] Valéry, *Variété III*, p. 26; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 656.
[48] Valéry, *Variété III*, p. 26; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 656.
[49] Valéry, *Variété III*, p. 27; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 657.

the 1930s, to define the action of a 'figure'. In fact, Valéry's proposal for a criticism of the 'esprit sur soi-même', in the 1927 'Lettre sur Mallarmé' from which this chapter took its start, is introduced by a list of the 'transformations' to which the poet subjects language.

> Qu'il s'agisse de la science ou des arts, on observe, si l'on s'inquiète de la génération des résultats, que toujours *ce qui se fait* répète *ci qui fut fait*, ou le réfute : le répète en d'autres tons, l'épure, l'amplifie, le simplifie, le charge ou le surcharge ; ou bien le rétorque, l'extermine, le renverse, le nie ; mais donc le suppose, et l'a invisiblement utilisé.[50]

Moreover:

> Nous disons qu'un auteur est *original* quand nous sommes dans l'ignorance des transformations cachées qui changèrent les autres en lui ; nous voulons dire que la dépendance de *ce qu'il fait* à l'égard de *ce qui fut fait* est excessivement complexe et irrégulière.[51]

These complex 'transformations' become how Valéry understands the figure of the poet himself. In a short piece entitled 'Stéphane Mallarmé' from 1923, appearing (along with the above 'Lettre') in *Variété II*, Valéry says of Mallarmé that 'Il vécut pour effectuer en soi des transformations admirables'.[52] This portrait is carried over in the above 'transformations cachées', and Valéry's consequent proposal of a criticism of the 'esprit *sur soi-même*' (my

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[50] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, pp. 634-5.
[51] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, pp. 634-5.
[52] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 622.

emphasis). This idea of 'transformations', pure or 'en soi', is the basis of 'Je disais quelquefois à Stéphane Mallarmé':

> Ce genre d'attention se rend la structure des expressions plus sensible et plus intéressante que leurs sens ou leurs valeurs. Les propriétés des transformations sont plus dignes de l'esprit que ce qu'il transforme ; et je me demande parfois s'il peut exister une pensée plus générale que la pensée d'une « proposition », ou la conscience de penser quoi que ce soit…[53]

A linguistic warp is not simply something that Mallarmé's poetry shows positively in relation to the poetry that comes before it, but, as if purely, it is the discipline of this poetics. It is the action of this poet. Hence that 'tourment plus pur' – that part of this essay's author portrait which Contini borrows for his Dante – is to be understood psychologically, yes, but also etymologically: it is a pure *torquere*, a twisting or winding of the shapes of language. This is how Mallarmé acts on poetry and language: he 'l'épure, l'amplifie, le simplifie, le charge ou le surcharge; ou bien le *rétorque*, l'extermine, le renverse, le nie'.[54] He does not simply do this. His is a science of these 'propriétés des transformations'. And the figure of the poet, for this critic, becomes a reflex of his figural, or shapely, transformations of shapes of words.

'Un poème transforme', writes Henri Meschonnic in his 'Manifeste pour un parti du rythme'. 'Contre toutes les poétisations, je dis qu'il y a un poème seulement si une forme de vie transforme une forme de langage et si réciproquement une forme de langage transforme une forme de vie'.[55] A late member of the Mallarméan, or Valérean, school, Meschonnic's life's work was devoted to a critique of the sign, the fascination of twentieth-century

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[53] Valéry, *Variété III*, p. 29; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 658. The ellipsis is Valéry's, and terminates the paragraph.
[54] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, pp. 634-5. My emphasis.
[55] Henri Meschonnic, 'Manifeste pour un parti du rythme', 1999 <http://www.berlol.net/mescho2.htm>.

structuralism and post-structuralism alike. His claim is that the sign provides only a very partial description of language – and, for that matter, offers only its own shape of a discontinuity (that between the sign and signified) as the relation of the subject, history, and language, thus made discontinuous to one another. What the sign leaves bare is the perception that language is already formed, shapely. For Meschonnic rhythm, denigrated to a poetic effect by the ideology of the sign, is a 'forme-sujet'. To study rhythm is to tack to the formed nature of the language, but in a way that

> le rythme n'est plus une notion formelle, la forme elle-même n'est plus une notion formelle, celle du signe, mais une forme d'historicisation, une forme d'individuation. À bas le vieux couple de la forme et du sens. Est poème tout ce qui, dans le langage, réalise ce récitatif qu'est une subjectivation maximale du discours. Prose, vers, ou ligne.

Meschonnic here deepens the division of the semantic aspect of language from the rhythmical, as encountered in Valéry. Rhythm as a 'forme-sujet' cements the poet's exceptional place in the 'physique du discours', and the distinctions that might be used to extricate the poetic subject – distinctions between rhythm, and content, and 'sens' – are only effects of the false formalism of the sign. Meschonnic's division between semantic and rhythmical 'sens' confronts here a temptation of the student of rhythm: to treat a rhythmical shape as another sign ('le rythme n'est plus une notion formelle…celle du signe'). If rhythm is not a somewhat larger semiotic shape, capable of bearing meaning like a word, then what is it? The claim that it is a 'forme-sujet', that it has a role in 'dans la constitution des sujets-langage'[56] (a claim clearly indebted

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[56] David Nowell Smith's translation of the 'Manifeste' is useful for clarity here: 'For the poem, I insist upon the decisive role of rhythm in the constitution of language-subjects', in Henri Meschonnic, 'The Rhythm Party Manifesto', trans. by David Nowell Smith, *Thinking Verse*, 1 (2011), 161–73 (p. 165). http://www.thinkingverse.org/.

to Mallarmé's rhythmical definition of poetry presented above) provides a point of connection with Contini's 'Un'interpretazione di Dante'. That essay is an interpretation of 'Dante': it considers the shapes by which we recognise the subject of this poetry.

'Un'interpretazione' was Contini's first shot across the bow in a decades-long task of rhythmically attributing the *Fiore* to Dante's authorship. But whether rhythm as a 'forme-sujet', a form of 'individuation' or of authorship, and rhythm as a condition of 'memorabilità', a condition of broad-based, even popular dissemination, conflict in their conclusions, is worth asking about. This apparent contradiction is a constitutive part of the understanding of Dante's authorship in Contini's interpretation. He refers to it with the word 'classico':

> Quest'uso dei classici come riserva di citazioni è insigne in Dante, questa è la maternità dell'*Eneide*. Naturalmente in lui l'operazione assume un carattere meno papillare, e in realtà la qualità vera del suo commercio con quei magazzini di « *geflügelte Worte* » la desumiamo soprattutto da ciò che è la sua stessa produzione: produzione di citabili destinata a una società di usufruttuarî tanto meno esclusiva, piú larga non in quanto si opponga agli squisiti e li neghi, ma in quanto li includa e sottometta – con uno scatto caratteristico di tutta la mentalità esauriente e pluralistica di Dante. Egli perciò non imita, ma riproduce ed esalta una situazione ontologica, in posizione di apertura, non di chiusura.[57]

It is a rhythmical condition of the *Commedia*, the fact that it 'suppone un mondo aperto e una facoltà di registrazione verbale di qualsiasi esperienza la quale resista, anzi si rinfocoli, a qualunque rallentamento di ritmo fino alla fissità', that underwrites this conception of the

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[57] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 76.

poet's authorship, or makes him 'un produttore di *auctoritates*.'[58] Citability involves de-personalisation, the ability to create 'parole immodificabili' for others who will take them over, 'trovandole verificate nella propria, pur inedita, esperienza'.[59] *Auctoritas* in this sense is a function of rhythm, and it works as a constitutive de-personalisation – a disappearance into forms of language.[60] This is a precondition of that language's contact with the world, of a substantive authorship that is considerably greater than personality. This bi-valent state of rhythm and authority, if it is a medieval understanding of authorship, also sustains Paul Valéry's notion of the 'figure' – a surface form 'construite de timbres, de durées, et d'intensités'.[61] Valéry makes this inheritance explicit:

…si je m'avise à présent de m'informer de ces emplois, ou plûtot de ces abus de langage, que l'on groupe sous le nom vague et général de « figures », je ne trouve rien de plus que les vestiges très délaissés de l'analyse fort imparfaite qu'avaient tentée les anciens de ces phénomènes « rhétoriques ». Or ces figures, si négligées par la critique des modernes, jouent un rôle de première importance, non seulement dans la poésie déclarée et organisée, mais encore dans cette poésie perpétuellement agissante qui tourmente le vocabulaire fixé, dilate ou

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[58] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 76.

[59] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 75.

[60] An enormous corpus of scholarship on medieval conceptions of authority exists, and there is also a great deal of work specifically on the question of Dante's embodiment of *auctoritas*. A recent and ambitious study, which I engage with in the next chapter, is Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). I take it that the suggestion here of a rapport between rhythm and *auctoritas* is substantially *inedito*, and so I will tack close here to the influence behind Contini's assertion. One discipline where *auctoritas* is a matter of prime importance, the *grammatica*, is the subject of the next chapter, and so I will leave broader discussion of this topic to then. For the moment, however, let me simply adduce support for Contini's use of the term *auctoritas* to mean a memorable phrase. Zygmunt Baranski writes that, '[s]uch quotations belonged to a popular common stock of *auctoritates* whose spread was largely separate from the diffusion of the work from which they had originally been excerpted. What all this meant in practice was that a medieval intellectual could have a good knowledge and a clear sense of the importance of a canonical author without having read a single one of his works "tutta quanta"'. Zygmunt Baranski, 'Magister Satiricus: Preliminary Notes on Dante, Horace and the Middle Ages', in *Language and Style in Dante: Seven Essays*, ed. by John C. Barnes and Michelangelo Zaccarello (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), pp. 13–62 (pp. 17–19).

[61] Valéry, *Variété III*, p. 27; Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 656.

restreint le sens des mots, opère sur eux par symétries ou par conversions, altère à chaque instant les valeurs de cette monnaie fiduciaire ; et tantôt par les bouches du peuple, tantôt pour les besoins imprévus de l'expression technique, tantôt sous la plume hésitante de l'écrivain, engendre cette variation de la langage qui la rend insensiblement tout autre. Personne ne semble avoir même entrepris de reprendre cette analyse. Personne ne recherche dans l'examen approfondi de ces substitutions, de ces notations contractées, de ces méprises réfléchies et de ces expédients, si vaguement définis jusqu'ici par les grammairiens, les propriétés qu'ils supposent et qui ne peuvent pas être très différentes de celles que met parfois en évidence le génie géométrique et son art de se créer des instruments de pensée de plus en plus souples et pénétrants. Le Poète, sans le savoir, se meut dans un ordre de relations et de transformations *possibles*, dont il ne perçoit ou ne poursuit que les effets momentanés et particuliers qui lui importent dans tel état de son opération intérieure.[62]

That '[tourment]' that so characterises Dante and Mallarmé, in Contini and Valéry's respective portraits, is here identified as drawn from exactly what characterises a classical and medieval conception of authorship. This is, paradoxically, 'abus de langage': that part of *recte loquendi scientia* which taught how the poets employ *figurae* – incorrect, abnormal, or just non-standard shapes of language, which are nonetheless permitted, and are even what specify poetry. The *magnae auctoritates*, above all the classical *poetae* and supremely Vergil, are full of such 'méprises réfléchies', *figurae* which the classical and medieval grammarians then defined, classified and explained. Valéry imagines broadening this classical and medieval study of 'variation de la langage', to include in its remit not only that language that passes 'sous la

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[62] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, pp. 1289-90. Valéry's emphasis.

plume hésitante de l'écrivain' (the language of her 'hésitation prolongée'), but also what passes 'par les bouches du peuple' – a site no less characterised by 'transformations *possibles*'. Valéry's conception of Mallarmé's authorship, which draws on this classical and medieval 'science' of 'figures' to portray Mallarmé as a pure agent of 'transformations *possibles*', who 'dilate…restreint…, opère…par symétries ou par conversions, altère à chaque instant', is then the conception of authorship recuperated by Contini – who did not, I think, fully recognise its medieval wellsprings – in his rhythmical-figural interpretation of Dante. There is an experimental anachronism to both these projects: but one which, for our purposes, raises a new possibility to be investigated. Might the compositional dynamic so far studied, involving the poet's memory and his re-use of shapes of language, in fact be cast with the mould of the medieval discipline of *grammatica*, and its discourse of *figurae*?

Figura and *Grammatica*

Erwin Panofsky once said that Vergil '"discovered" the evening' in the last line of the first Eclogue – 'maioresque cadunt altis de montibus umbrae'.[1] The line, said Panofsky, was 'Vergil's most personal contribution to poetry', full of 'dissonance' which becomes a 'union of polarities in tension', 'a centered, relaxed, static unity'.[2] It is unlikely that Contini came across this passage in Panofsky, but he was fascinated by art criticism. He more than once took the opportunity to draw parallels between philology and the attributional methods of art critics Giovanni Morelli, Bernard Berenson, and his close friend Roberto Longhi.[3] All three art critics looked to minute, habitual lines – noses, hair, branches, leaves – to found claims of attribution.[4] In the 1965 essay, 'Un'interpretazione di Dante', Contini seems to borrow the art critic's eye when discussing that same line from Vergil:

> E ripetendo « *maioresque cadunt altis de montibus umbrae* » si esprime la sensazione visiva del profilo montano proiettato sul versante dirimpetto e l'associata irrimediabilità d'una fine di stagione ancor più che d'una fine di giornata…[5]

But as he draws the lines of this 'profilo montano' more fully, he recognises something that Panofsky does not about Vergil's 'most personal contribution to poetry'. In the poem itself the

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[1] 'And now larger shadows fall from the mountaintops'. Vergil, *Eclogues*, ed. by Robert Coleman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), Ecloga 1.83. My translation.

[2] Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1955), p. 300.

[3] Contini, *Breviario di ecdotica*, pp. 54–59; Contini, *Frammenti di filologia romanza*, I, pp. 49-53; Gianfranco Contini, 'Sul metodo di Roberto Longhi', *Belfagor*, 4.2 (1949), 205–10. Moreover, 'Un'interpretazione' was in published in Longhi's journal, *Paragone*, and dedicated to his wife, Anna Banti.

[4] A recent review of attributional methods in Italian Romance philology, which begins with Contini's relationship to art criticism, is Pasquale Stoppelli, 'Metodologia delle attribuzioni letterarie', in *La critica del testo. Problemi di metodo ed esperienze di lavoro. Trent'anni dopo, in vista del Settecentenario della morte di Dante. Atti del Convegno internazionle di Roma 23-26 ottobre 2017* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2019), pp. 469–81 (p. 470).

[5] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 75.

line is 'meno luttosa, meno tombale' than it is on its own.[6] In context it is only an 'appropriato e colorito segno demarcativo della conclusione'. What fills it with the 'mixture of sadness and tranquillity' that Panofsky finds in it,[7] is partly the fact that it is citable out of context. It is this de-'personal'-ising of the line, its susceptibility to being repeated on its own, that allows for exactly what so particularises it in Panofsky's reading. This is what Contini calls '*auctorit*[*as*]':[8]

> I classici, i latini in modo particolare, e Virgilio piú di tutti, constano
>
> insieme…di un tessuto compatto e della facoltà di poter essere citato per lacerti
>
> che immediatamente si risaldano in pienezza di senso.[9]

Auctoritas is, among other things, a special rhythmical condition of language which, with its 'piglio legislativo' and 'sillabazione lapidaria',[10] allows for recollection and transmission.[11] A fourteenth-century poet wishing to intervene in this – wishing, that is, to imitate the workings of classical *auctoritas*, then also has a rhythmical task: not simply to further transmit *auctoritates* as received, but, in a different linguistic setting, to try for the particular hardness of these 'parole immodificabili' which are then 'verificate nella propria, pur inedita, esperienza'.[12] There is an impersonal propriety to *auctoritas*, the success of which can be its assumption into a 'personal' or 'propria…esperienza'. It is this tension, and not the words of the *auctoritates* themselves, which Dante imitates. What Panofsky calls a 'static unity' in

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[6] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 75.
[7] Panofsky, p. 300.
[8] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 76.
[9] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 75.
[10] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 77.
[11] An interesting comparison with this perspective is early Greek history writing, and sophistic speeches: 'Any prose author of this early period who wanted to imbue his writing with a moralistic or proverbial tone might deliver his key thoughts in the impressive rhythms used by the great poets, and thereby lay claim to their authority.' Stephen Usher, 'Eurhythmia in Isocrates', *The Classical Quarterly*, 60.1 (2010), 82–95 (pp. 82–83).
[12] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 75. Not the author's 'own' experience, that is, but the reader's.

Vergil's line Contini sees reflected in Dante as a bi-valent condition of rhythm, which engages readers' 'facoltà di registrazione verbale di qualsiasi esperienza la quale resista, anzi si rinfocoli, a qualunque rallentamento di ritmo fino alla fissità'.[13] How rhythm accomplishes this fixity, and how this particular sense of rhythm could have been trained via a conception of linguistic 'authority', are what I want to explore in this chapter.

Much has been written about Dante's relationship to *auctoritas*, and in particular about his 'self-creation as *auctor*/author'.[14] Much of this, in particular the most recent and longest contribution to this topic, Albert Ascoli's *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*, has to fit a square peg into a round hole: the medieval use of the term *auctoritas* is impersonal and related to institutions – in particular to pedagogy and sovereignty – and yet his study insists that Dante acquires *auctoritas* for himself.[15] Ascoli's study then turns on a question of self-representation: for instance, by addressing Vergil as 'autore' in *Inf.* 1.85, Dante 'tacitly bridges the temporal, epistemological, and ontological abyss that separated him…from the *auctoritas* of the ancients'.[16] This self-representation then becomes a 'personalizing of the ancients and the depersonalizing, or rather, the de-historicizing of Dante himself'.[17] Ascoli's representation-of-self-as-authority procedure primarily works 'tacitly',[18] by 'hinting'[19] by 'implying', 'by implication' or 'implicitly'.[20] I would prefer to ask, formally, and in terms of the requirements and shaping power of institutions, about how language possesses *auctoritas*?[21]

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[13] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 76.
[14] Ascoli, p. 55.
[15] Ascoli is aware of this problem, and as he sees it 'Dante's own historically contingent personhood constitutes the primary obstacle to his acquisition of that quality for himself, and dictates his protracted and varied struggles to define and appropriate it'. Ascoli, p. 45.
[16] Ascoli, p. 312.
[17] Ascoli, p. 316.
[18] A few important instances where Dante's reference to an authority 'tacitly' reflects on his own, or he 'tacitly assumes…authority', and so forth: Ascoli, pp. 132, 156, 164, 302, 312, 314. Same procedure in following two notes.
[19] Ascoli, pp. 397, 400.
[20] In a single chapter called 'Authority in Person': Ascoli, pp. 304, 315, 316, 324, 332, 333, 337, 347, 349, 355, 357n, 360, 367, 376, 388, 401, 405.
[21] One of Dante's definitions of *autoritade* is explicitly formal in this way. He derives the word from *aueio*, a Latin verb meaning, he says, 'legare parole' – a meaning that can be both syntactical and, as Dante goes on to say,

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Syntax has already been mentioned a few times in this thesis. Wordsworth's 'modes of connections', says Coleridge, produce language with 'an independent weight and beauty',[22] and Nespor and Vogel show that the phonology of syntax supplies the principal prosodic features of the *Commedia*.[23] The 'static unity' of the last line of the first eclogue, which gives it the 'sillabazione lapidaria' of an *auctoritas*, is a rhythmical fact, but this, too, is not unrelated to its word order. In ancient texts treating of rhythm apart from metre, there is an awareness of the mutual associations of syntax and rhythm. 'Rhythm', says Cicero in the *Orator*, can result from using certain 'shapes' or 'figures of speech'. 'Formae vero quaedam sunt orationis, in quibus ea concinnitas est ut sequatur numerus necessario'.[24] He makes clear that this sense of 'rhythm' is a result of *compositio*, of syntax, and this is not the same as the rhythm of metre. An orator's speech must not have a preordained rhythmical pattern to execute, but instead, word order itself should naturally give rise to a rhythmical condition of language:

> non *numero solum* numerosa oratio sed et compositione fit et genere, quod ante
>
> dictum est, concinnitatis – compositione potest intellegi, cum ita structa verba
>
> sunt, ut numerus non quaesitus sed ipse secutus esse videatur…[25]

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a property of the poets 'che coll'arte musaica le loro parole hanno legate'. Ascoli begins here, and indeed this formal definition gives him one half of the impersonal-personal polarity with which he works. See Dante, *Convivio: A Dual-Language Critical Edition*, ed. & trans. by Andrew Frisardi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 4.6.3-4.

[22] Coleridge, II, p. 106. See Introduction, p. 10.

[23] See end of ch. 2, pp. 114-16.

[24] 'There are some figures of speech in which there is such harmony that rhythm [numerus] is necessarily the consequence'. Cicero, II, 220. My translation.

[25] 'not rhythm [numerus] alone, but syntax [compositio] and a kind of harmony make a speech rhythmical – and by "syntax" can be understood how the words are joined together, such that a rhythm arises that is not sought, but seems to follow naturally'. Cicero, II, 219. My translation.

Looking to syntax to produce rhythm also conceptualises a different unit of rhythm: in the place of an abstract metrical foot, the word-unit is raised to a position of prominence. Expressing this conceptual difference clearly, in relation to the development of Byzantine oratory, Vessela Valiavitcharska writes:

> The rhythm of poetry differs from that of prose in that it is organized and carried forward by a steady pace. By contrast, the rhythm of prose is organized and carried forward by its semantic units, the smallest of which is the individual word. It is the word, with its own stress, length, position, and relation to other fully stressed words, that defines the rhythmical unit of prose.[26]

For Cicero certain marked 'formae' of *constructio* or syntax – what other writers call *figurae* – abet this generalised production of rhythm from words and word groups. But in so far as the rhythm of *figurae* is produced by the organisation of 'semantic units', this particular sense of rhythm must bear a close relation to conceptions of syntax.

Most conspicuously, *figurae* were discussed by late antique and medieval grammarians as places of aberrance – but justified aberrance, because these aberrant forms were found in *auctores* like Vergil. The most ubiquitous grammatical text of the Latin middle ages, which taught students to recognise errors as well as the categories of figures and tropes, is the third book of Aelius Donatus' *Ars maior*, often referred to by its first word 'barbarismus'. If figures for Cicero are particularly harmonious, or marked shapes of *constructio*, what have they to do with a book on errors and aberrances? Here too *figurae* refer to syntax, though to see this, it is the organisation of the *Barbarismus* that provides the clue. Donatus begins with *solecismi* and

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[26] Vessela Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm in Byzantium: The Sound of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 25.

vitia, outright errors in orthography or agreement. He draws these examples of common errors from the classical poets, and so must keep reminding his reader here that 'soloecismus in prosa oratione, in poemate schema nominatur'.[27] These *solecismi* and *vitia* are only errors if taken to be in prose, which for Donatus is equivalent to 'rect[us] solut[us]que serm[o]'.[28] Donatus' *Barbarismus* then moves from *vitia*, *solecismi*, to *metaplasmi*, *schemata* (the Greek for *figurae*), and *tropi* (tropes). The lists of examples for these latter categories often contain examples recycled from the earlier categories of outright error – of *vitia* and *solecismi*. Metaplasms are faults relating to the word-unit, like the use of a long *i* for a short one in 'Italiam fato profugus',[29] now justified by the pressure of metre and above all by their appearance in an *auctor*, namely Vergil. The next category, the figures, then treats of such justified faults in units larger than single morphemes – in word order or syntax.

One of the things poems in particular do, which prose or 'rect[us] solut[us]que serm[o]' in principle does not, is confuse word order. As Calvert Watkins puts this, what appears to be '[t]he poetic disjunction of the constituents or syntactic groups' of a line of verse, often follows patterns common to Indo-European poetries, which derive from archaic usage. These 'disjunction[s]' of syntax often work in conjunction with the contours of formulae and meter.[30] We think of poetry as distinguished by a relative syntactical freedom, but its disturbances of syntax 'probably belong to the domain of poetic universals'.[31] There are rules for poetic syntax, in other words, which are distinct from the rules for syntax in general. The *grammatica* is keenly aware that word order in poetry is something different to word order in prose. Indeed, from the perspective of prose, rect[us] solut[us]que serm[o]', it appears aberrant. Those objects

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[27] 'A solecism in prose is called a figure in poetry'. Aelius Donatus, *Die Ars maior: lateinischer Text und kommentierte deutsche Übersetzung einer antiken Lateingrammatik des 4. Jahrhunderts für den fortgeschrittenen Anfängerunterricht*, ed. by Axel Schönberger (Frankfurt: Valentia, 2008), p. 136. My translation.
[28] The important word here is 'solutus', meaning unbound, or not regular like poetry. Donatus, *Ars maior*, p. 126.
[29] 'drifted by fate towards Italy'. Donatus, *Ars maior*, p. 126; Vergil, *Aeneid I-VI*, 1.2. My translation.
[30] Watkins, p. 24.
[31] Watkins, p. 25.

which embrace the medieval discussion of what we would call syntax, regular and aberrant, are the *figurae* or *schemata*.

Donatus repeats for the middle ages a distinction between two groups of *figurae*: 'Schemata lexeos sunt et dianoeas, id est figurae uerborum et sensuum. Sed schemata dianoeas ad oratores pertinent, ad grammaticos lexeos'.[32] There are 'figures of words' and 'figures of thought'.[33] The *grammatica* is only interested in the former, says Donatus. Both kinds of *figura* label usages which are aberrant from the perspective of 'rect[us] solut[us]que serm[o]', or prose,[34] but which must be explained, not emended, in the poetic *auctores.* To 'schemata lexeos' or 'figurae uerborum' belong perceptions of non-*rectus ordo* – *figurae* like zeugma, anadiplosis, anaphora, to name a few. 'Figurae sensuum' or 'figures of thought', which seem also to be equivalent to the next category, the tropes, are phenomena like metaphor. These latter do not exhibit a disturbance in the order of words, so much as in the order of signification or *thought* – and as such, they are not principally the *grammatica*'s concern. The figures 'uerborum' and 'sensuum' have their place at the end of Donatus' overall scheme of aberrant usages in the *Barbarismus*: *vitia* are orthographical, *solecismi* are errors in units larger than a word (like temporal agreement); then *metaplasmi* are *accepted* disturbances within a word, and *schemata* or *figurae* and *tropi* are accepted disturbances in units larger than a word. Understood in their place, the first kind of *figurae*, 'schemata lexeos' or 'figurae uerborum', conceptualise units of aberrant or marked word order and agreement – that is, syntax. According to the design of the *ars*, it is here to which a student turns when their reading is stymied by one too many subjects

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[32] 'There are figures of speech and figures of thought [repeated in Latin as 'figures of words' and 'figures of meanings'], but figures of thought belong to orators, and figures of speech to grammarians.' Donatus, *Ars maior*, p. 150. My translation.

[33] The distinction appears to have originated with Quintilian. See Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, p. 26. It is interesting that Auerbach's famous essay pays very little attention to 'figures' in grammatical and rhetorical treatises. Even less space is given over to 'figurae uerborum' – only a little paragraph on p. 27 – as 'figuralism' in the sense of interpretation is his quarry. This preference has the effect of separating the patristic historical-interpretive figuralism of which the essay famously treats, from the simple recognition of aberrant usage which subtends *all* claims to figuralism.

[34] 'straight, unbound discourse', Donatus, *Ars maior*, p. 126. My translation.

in a phrase (*syllepsis*), or by the postposition of the subject with respect to a consequence (*prolepsis*), or by repetitions at different points in a phrase which can confuse beginnings and ends (*anadiplosis, anaphora, epanalepsis, epizeuxis*), or by the abundance or absence of coordination (*polysyndeton* and *dialyton*, now often called asyndeton). There are rough edges to this taxonomy. Whether or not *figurae uerborum* contain all word-order related issues is uncertain, because hyperbaton is included among the subsequent 'tropes' – even though a trope is defined by Donatus as 'a *word* transferred from its proper signification to a likeness that is not proper to it'.[35] In the same way, paronomasia – puns – are included among *figurae uerborum* not *figurae sensuum*, but probably due to the fact of conspicuous verbal repetition present in the example given.

Understanding how the organisation of a handbook like Donatus' *Barbarismus* might feed into a practice of reading texts is important if we are to understand the rationale behind Donatus' collocation of faults beside the figures and tropes from the *auctores*. *Grammatica* represents reading as a fourfold process. First, the student reads (*lectio*): she needs to know about pronunciation, accent, and metrics to do so. Should she then come across unclear passages, she has recourse to *interpretatio*: to this category belong pedagogic materials like explanations and glosses, as well as the lists of *figurae* and *tropi*, and other pedagogic material like *etymologiae*. After *interpretatio*, the next process is correction – *emendatio*. Here reference is made to *latinitas*, clear style, which is not an aprioristic sense of good Latin, but exact precedent established by *auctores*, or *analogia* with the same. The last step in reading is *iudicium*, criticism.[36] *Interpretatio* and *emendatio*, the middle terms of this fourfold process, share a common perception: that of aberrance. Both are functionally textual-critical. What

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[35] This translation from Aelius Donatus, 'From Ars Maior', in *Medieval Grammar & Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300-1475*, trans. by Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 87–99 (pp. 96–97). My emphasis.

[36] Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory 350-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 69.

cannot be explained, must be corrected. But the student must not correct too readily, and as a result *interpretatio*, too, must be understood as textual-critical in that it works as a brake to correction.[37] This is why learning the metaplasms, figures and tropes of *interpretatio* happens in the same moment as learning to identify common varieties of errors – *vitia* and solecisms. *Auctoritas*, in turn, is the reference point for both *interpretatio* and *emendatio* – for both sides of this form of textual criticism. For *interpretatio*, the lists of figures and tropes are drawn from texts of *auctores*. For *emendatio*, good usage or *latinitas* must also make reference to *auctores*. Especially in the later middle ages, when good Latin usage could not be learned either by imitating excellent speakers or by elucidating the rules of a spoken language,[38] as Martin Irvine writes, '*auctoritas*, [or] textual precedent or written authority, became the dominant criterion for *latinitas*'.[39]

Auctoritas has a functional place, then, in the institutional practice of reading which prepared basic literacy learners – Dante among them – to parse Latin texts. Part of the means of handling textual difficulty taught by the *grammatica* involved learning discrete word order 'shapes', drawn from *auctores*, as a means of parsing distortions in surface order in later reading. Textual *interpretatio* for the *grammatica*, altogether differently to how 'interpretation' is understood after the German Enlightenment, is then not a generalisable condition of reading

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[37] This representation of a fourfold process of reading must still be an ideal: hands-on, corrective *emendatio*, for instance, cannot have been possible in a late antique or medieval classroom. A different depiction of the interior of a classroom, imagined by Alastair Minnis, suggests that these discrete stages were in fact handled by the *grammaticus* himself, in the context of a *prelectio* or prefatory lecture. Minnis writes: 'From the Roman grammarian…of the fifth century, the pupil learned the science of speaking with style (*scientia recte loquendi*) and heard the classical poets being explicated (*ennaratio poetarum*). The first of these activities comprised explanation of the elements of language, letters, syllables and words; the second comprised explanation of the intellectual context of a text. In his *prelectio* (i.e. lecture or explanatory reading), the grammarian would describe in minute detail the verse-rhythms, difficult or rare words, grammatical and syntactical features, and figures of speech, included in a given passage…These teachings methods continued, with occasional modification, into the Middle Ages.' In Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 2nd edn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 13.
[38] The two sources of *latinitas* proposed by, respectively, Cicero and Caesar. See John Dugan, 'Cicero's Rhetorical Theory', in *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero*, ed. by Catherine Steel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 25–40 (p. 37).
[39] Irvine, pp. 74–75.

but something which justifies, while preserving, a specific place of aberrance.[40] It also, in contrast to its post-Enlightenment successor, includes a wider range of perceptions of a text. The *schemata lexeos* or *figurae uerborum* place within *interpretatio* the perception of the body of discourse, of word order. These *figurae* run diagnostic on the surface of the text – on marked 'shapes' present there. The norms of syntax are then as much or more a part of the exercise of 'figural' *interpretatio* as the 'figural' play of signification.[41] Our contemporary sense of interpretation often treats only of the extension of the relationship of signifier and signified, as in the handling of metaphor, metonymy, or allegory – all *figurae sensuum* or tropes. We leave the corresponding *interpretatio* of the body of discourse – the matter of the *figurae uerborum* – comparatively underpracticed. It was to revitalise this kind of interpretation that Paul Valéry, in the '30s of the last century, suggested studying the 'effets psychiques que produisent les groupements de mots et de physionomies de mots'.[42] Valéry saw this kind of criticism as completely at odds with syntax, or as functioning completely 'indépendamment des liaisons syntaxiques'.[43] This is a measure of how much 'syntax' has changed meaning in the modern

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[40] The generalisation of misunderstanding, and the consequent need for a hermeneutic circle of the whole text, is sometimes a shift attributed to Schleiermacher. See Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 11.

[41] This second sense has, naturally, been studied much more in relation to the procedures of Dante's poetry. Interpreting *figuraliter*, 'figuratively' or with allegorical reference, is something medieval readers learned from the Vergil commentary tradition of Servius, Macrobius, and Bernard Silvestris. This tradition had an enormous influence on early readers' interpretation of the *Commedia*, too, and likely on the poem itself. This procedure of figural replacement is demonstrated by Bernard Silvestris, for instance: 'Ticius…curiosum *figurat* quod etiam ipsum vocabulum sonat. Dicitur enim Ticius quasi tisiceos, id est consumptus anima', 'Ticius *figures* care, which the word itself suggests. Tisicus is almost "tisicous", that is, consumptive'. Cited in Luca Fiorentini, *Per Benvenuto da Imola. Le linee ideologiche del commento dantesco* (Naples: Il Mulino, 2016), p. 22. My translation and emphasis. Dante himself uses the adverb 'figurate' in this way, interpreting Vergil: 'Et hii sunt quos Poeta Eneidorum sexto libro Dei dilectos et ab ardente virtute sublimatos ad ethera deorumque filios vocat, quanquam figurate loquatur'. 'And these are the ones the Poet calls, in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, beloved of Zeus, and uplifted to the heavens for their ardent virtue, and sons of the gods – although he speaks figurally'. Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia [Fenzi ed.]*, 2.4.10. My translation. Pietro Alighieri and then Benvenuto da Imola's commentaries on the *Commedia* employ, in this tradition, an *essentiale*/*moraliter* distinction, mediating between the fiction and its moral application. As Luca Fiorentini explains: 'Nell'Inferno *essentialis* precipita l'anima peccaminosa dopo la separazione dal corpo, seguendo un "naturalis descensus", che interviene, per l'appunto, "quando anima exuta a corpore in mortali peccato descendit in abyssum terrae ad poenas infernales". L'Inferno morale è invece uno stato che l'anima raggiunge, ancora in vita, nel momento un cui si allontana da Dio: ogni volta, cioè, che cede al peccato.' Fiorentini, p. 9.

[42] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 1415.

[43] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 1415.

languages, and has been restricted to the sense of complementarity, losing its broader medieval sense of a 'shape' or *figura* of word proximities. On occasion, critical proposals that would recover the priority given to the perception of word order in medieval *interpretatio* have been proposed. Geoffrey Hartman once suggested a reversal of the relative priority of our interpretative modes along these lines. He pointed out that the figural transfer or replacement of signs is never innocent of syntax. Of Milton's 'Sonorous metal blowing martial sounds' he wrote: 'Here metaphor is as much a function of syntax as syntax of metaphor'.[44] What he means, it seems, is that 'sonorous' and 'sounds' propose a redundant identity, which Milton works to distance through intervening transfers of sense (through metaphor, i.e. 'Sonorous metal'). That distancing, however, is a task for a syntactical arrangement. The distance between proper and transferred signification, of metaphor or the other *figurae sensuum*, is that opened up by a word order arrangement. Syntax itself might be described as this fundamental spacing of 'sounds' from 'sounds' that allows for an intervening differentiation, and so transfer, of sense in language. For the medieval *grammatica*, the discernment of word order arrangements is likewise prior, in the nexus *interpretatio-emendatio*, to the discernment of transferred signification. The functionally textual-critical practice of *interpretatio*, requiring the recollection and redeployment of set word order 'shapes', conceptualises units of word order as discrete textual objects. In a handbook like Donatus' *Barbarismus*, the priority of word order to transferred sense, in the act of interpreting, is precisely as Hartman opines.

That syntax is best handled by a discussion of discrete 'shapes' is not obvious to us anymore. Where we might speak of the marked postposition of an adjective, say, or even a case of number disagreement with a verb, a student trained in *grammatica* would, to describe the same phenomenon, hive off the entire affected phrase as a *figura*. This is a crucial conceptual

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[44] Geoffrey Hartman, *The Geoffrey Hartman Reader*, ed. by Geoffrey Hartman and Daniel T. O'Hara (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 225.

difference between the modern discipline and its late antique and medieval forebear: syntactical aberration is always analysed by the *grammatici* in terms of the overall effect of a disruption at the level of the phrase. The phrasal consequences of aberrant syntax are hived off as *figurae*, as '*accidentia*, i.e., as single events in language'.[45] It might be asked, why don't we think this way anymore? One answer would be that we are accustomed to such strict morphosyntactical norms in our own languages, and order is simply more restrictive. Romance languages, for instance, require rigorously hierarchical ordering of phrases and, within phrases, component words – they present, in contrast to Latin, such 'greatly reduced positional autonomy' – that consequently the 'shape' of syntax, or morpho-syntax, is determined to a great degree by this greater configurationality. [46] Linguists see Romance's strict 'semantico-syntactic interdependence' as proposing units similar to individual words in inflectional languages like Latin.[47] Because, then, our syntax is to a great extent already morphological, or already in 'shape' – nodal, vertical, and ramifying[48] – we are less equipped to understand the logic of word order 'shapes' in languages with comparatively horizontal syntax, or 'free' word order and non-positional syntax, like Latin.

Although Donatus' *schemata lexeos* or *figurae uerborum* pertain to *constructio*, or syntax, it is also clear how the word 'figura' comes to be used in a more general sense, to mean

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[45] Gualtiero Calboli, 'The Schemata Λέξεωσ: A Grammatical and Rhetorical Tool', *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 22.3 (2004), 241–56 (p. 243).

[46] Adam Ledgeway, *From Latin to Romance: Morphosyntactic Typology and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 21.

[47] Ledgeway, p. 21.

[48] So a Catalan sentence can be represented as a sequence of vertically ramifying positions: 'The nominal head *senyora* first combines directly with the prenominal adjectival phrase (AP) *vella* to form the intermediate nominal constituent, here labelled as N', namely [N' *vella* [N *senyora*]]. In turn, this newly created constituent combines with the postnominal AP *cansada* to form an even larger intermediate constituent [N' [N' *vella* [N *senyora*]] *cansada*]. In turn, the prepositional phrase (PP) adjunct *de les ulleres negres* combines with this newly formed N' constituent to form another intermediate constituent (namely, [N' [N' [N' *vella* [N *senyora*]] *cansada*] [PP *de les ulleres negres*]]), which, once combined with the determiner phrase (DP) *la* "the" which assigns a definite interpretation to the whole string, forms a semantically complete conceptual unit and hence an NP'. Ledgeway, p. 49.

a justified error. This is true not only in grammar, but applies to the plastic arts as well. As the art historian Georges Didi-Huberman writes:

> as late as the fifteenth century, 'figures' signified the reverse of what we understand by the term today. Today, everyone understands that to figure a thing means to represent the visible aspect of that thing…however, it meant rather to take one's distance from the aspect, to displace it, to take a detour away from resemblance and designation: in short, to enter into the paradoxical realm of equivocation and dissemblance.[49]

Figura is an outward shape, but one that has 'take[n] a detour' or deviated. For this reason, however, it is there to be seen. The thirteenth-century Chartres-renaissance poet Alan of Lile dramatizes such a deviant 'Figura' in his *Anticlaudianus*:

> Illic imperium datur arti [grammaticae], regula regnat,
>
> exilium patitur vitium veniamque mereri
>
> nescit Grammaticae, patiens sine fine repulsam.
>
> Defendens sese propria ratione Figura
>
> excubat ante fores artis veniamque precatur.[50]

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[49] A *faux ami* mars this translation slightly: Fr. *dissemblance* is 'unlikeness', not necessarily dissemblance or hypocrisy, as in English. But Todd's translation has opted for the more *noir* option, even for the title. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*, trans. by Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 3.

[50] 'There to that art [Grammar] is given a kingdom – rule reigns! / Fault suffers exile and does not know how to garner Grammar's indulgence, suffering endless scorn. / Figure though, defending herself on the grounds of a special reason, / stretches out before the gates of that art, and begs favour.' Alan of Lille, *Literary Works*, ed. by Winthrop Wetherbee (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 2.419-23. My translation.

Alan's allegorical 'Figura' by all rights deserves to be cast into the outer darkness of a grammatical kingdom where 'regula regnat'. But she begs indulgence at the gate – her breaches of rules are 'propria ratione'. She pleads 'veniam' – the forbearance or licence of the art of writing. Though 'Figura' here occupies the space of error, her defence relates a key aspect of all late antique and medieval discourse of figuralism. *Figurae* seek justification – and so make reference to *auctoritas*. As James Zetzel succinctly puts this: 'When Virgil does it, it's a figure of speech; when you do it, it's a mistake'.[51] Donatus' lists of figures are then all appeals to authority in the abeyance of norms. A constellation of related ideas begins to appear in the word *figura*, then, roping together syntax, aberrance, authority and – through the disjunction of syntactical norms and a conspicuous word order arrangement – a distinct sense of rhythm.

About a hundred and fifty years after Donatus, around 500, and much further east, in Constantinople, Priscian wrote the first integral treatise on syntax for a Latin audience. Dante cites Priscian as an *auctoritas* on *constructio* in the *De vulgari eloquentia*,[52] and places Priscian in the *Inferno* (15.109). The seventeenth and eighteenth books of his *Institutiones grammaticae* concern *constructio*. Priscian's text is discursive and complex, where Donatus' is slim and evidently directed at use, and so it is possible to see again in detail how conceptions of syntax and the discourse of figuralism interrelate. Priscian observes that there is a difference between syntactical arrangements and the inherent, or natural order of language.[53] The figures are not, broadly, justified faults for Priscian: the term is rather used 'pour designer précisément la

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[51] Zetzel, in a note to this, also quotes Augustine: 'If a boy is criticized for a barbarism and tries to defend himself by claiming Virgilian 'metaplasm', he will get whipped'. See James E. G. Zetzel, 'The Bride of Mercury: Confessions of a 'Pataphilologist', in *World Philology*, ed. by Sheldon Pollock, Benjamin A. Elman, and Ku-ming Kevin Chang (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 45–62 (p. 59).
[52] This is discussed below, p. 154.
[53] Jean-Claude Chevalier clearly expresses this critical distinction: 'Priscien constate, en effet, que ses deux premières propositions (nécessité de l'ordre des mots ; hiérarchisation des mots d'après le critère de dépendance et d'indépendance) peuvent sembler parfois contradictoires : l'exemple de la préposition lui paraît propre à illustrer cette opposition : la préposition dépend des autres mots du discours, puisque, sans eux, elle ne pourrait même pas exister ; dans l'ordre, elle vient donc derrière eux ; mais elle est, en même temps, préposée à ces mêmes mots. Elle est donc par sa *nature* postérieure, mais dans la *construction*, elle est antérieure'. Jean-Claude Chevalier, *Histoire de la syntaxe : Naissance de la notion de complément dans la grammaire française (1530-1750)* (Geneva: Librarie Droz, 1968), p. 30.

contradiction qui apparaît parfois entre la *ratio* et l'*usus*', between understood order and the surface order of syntax.[54] This 'contradiction' is not simply that of a fault for Priscian. As he explains,

> Omnis enim constructio, quam Graeci σύνταξιν uocant, ad intellectum uocis est reddenda. Itaque per diuersas figuras uariare solent auctores in constructione accidentia, de quibus iam supra docuimus, quae, quamuis quantum ad ipsas dictionis incongrue disposita esse uideantur, tamen ratione sensus rectissime ordinata esse iudicantur.[55]

What follows are examples like Vergil's 'pars in frustra secant', which joins a singular noun 'pars' to a plural verb. The noun is easily understood to intend a plural – 'some of them'. A *figura* like this one, for Priscian, is not simply erroneous: its 'shape' of syntax readily refers to a *ratio*, a meaningful order that is understood, and which in turn requires that particular shape. Precisely like a word, the shape of syntax is to be referred primarily 'ad intellectum uocis', to understanding, and explanations of syntactical phenomena only serve to get a student there.[56] The division between surface order and natural order allows for the former to refer directly to the latter – a *ratio*, a logical order well understood – even if it apparently contravenes good order in its own terms. In this way, the figures are grammaticalized:[57] Priscian explains them

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[54] Marc Baratin, *La naissance de la syntaxe à Rome* (Paris: Éditions de de Minuit, 1989), p. 439.

[55] 'Each construction, which the Greek call *syntax*, must be referred to the understanding of the form. Thus *auctores* are accustomed to vary their inflectional endings [*accidentia*] in construction via different shapes – which I have taught above – which, although they seem to be arranged inappropriately, in respect of those [inflectional forms], they are judged most correctly arranged from the standpoint of the order [*ratio*] of meaning.' Priscian, *Grammaire. Livre XVII - Syntaxe, I*, ed. by Marc Baratin (Paris: J. Vrin, 2010), 201. My translation.

[56] As Baratin explains: 'à partir du moment où une construction est intelligible, elle ne peut pas être incorrecte syntaxiquement puisque la construction révèle et assume les significations qui la déterminent, et par là les relations sémantiques qui la constituent. Ces significations peuvent être celles qu'indique la forme des constituants, mais elles peuvent aussi représenter des variations par rapport à ces formes.' Baratin, p. 444.

[57] By which I mean that figures no longer involve a suspension of grammatical norms, but become differently expressive of grammatical relationships. Grammaticalization for linguists refers to the shift from inflectional relationships to word order relationships, involving prepositions or other functional words.

as transformations that nevertheless perform the work of syntactical relations, but in a 'varied' way.[58]

It might appear in the above example that Priscian's sense of 'syntax' and 'figura' refer only to the inflectional agreement, and not to 'order' in the sense of position – which is the meaning of *figura* that might most bear on rhythm. This is true, but as the word *constructio* suggests (from *struo*, 'I place together'), Priscian's fundamental concern is how adjacency affects meaning in ways that exceed the significance of constitutive parts.[59] This is why the consideration of ambiguous forms, like the nominative and genitive of fourth declension nouns, for which 'constructio maxime ad eas explanandas est necessaria', form part of the *De constructione*, or why Priscian provides a definition of the pronoun *ipse* as an *appositium* or ἐπιταγματικόν – a 'juxtapositional' form.[60] Throughout, though the types of *figurae* (or *variationes* as he calls them) which Priscian treats relate principally to agreement,[61] Priscian repeats that his object is 'Sciendum…quod recta ordinatio exigit', which is to say, 'ut pronomen uel nomen praeponatur uerbo…' and so on.[62] The fact that *figurae* more directly

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[58] This is the word he uses above, 'diuersas figuras uariare'. Elsewhere Priscian claims that *figurae* are actually forms of *variatio* – a heading he invents, and which implies this convertibility with standard forms. *Variatio* groups together all usages that disturb 'conuenientes…consequentias' – agreements. Priscian, 182. The types of *variatio*, broadly, the long-recognised types of *figurae*, occupy a large part of his treatise: Priscian, 155-168.
[59] Beginning book seventeen with an explanation of the natural *ordo* of language, or the hierarchy of its parts, Priscian then looks at the positionality of the constituent parts of speech in relation to that *ordo*. Because a noun is more fundamental than a verb, 'Ante uerbum quoque necessario ponitur nomen, quia agere et pati substantiae est proprium, in qua est positio nominum, ex quibus proprietas uerbi, id est actio et passio, nascitur', 'Before the verb the noun is placed out of necessity, because to act or to be acted upon is the particular nature of a substance, and in this the invention of nouns has its origin, that is, acting and being acted upon, from whence the particularity of a verb'. Priscian, 116-17. My translation. Then of pronouns, 'Non irrationabiliter tamen illud quaeritur quare post nominis positionem non eam partem quae pro ipso nomine accipitur ponimus, id est pronomen…', 'It is asked not unreasonably why, after a noun, we do not place that part [of speech] which takes the place of a noun, that is, a pronoun'. Priscian, 117. My translation. And then participles, 'Participium etiam oportune post uerbum ponitur, ex quo et nascitur, sicut de uerbo tractantes ostendimus, quod necessario translationes uerborum fiebant in casuales figuras…', 'A participle is best placed after a verb, and it arises, as I showed when discussing verbs, because necessarily transfers of verbs into case inflections occur…', Priscian, 119. My translation.
[60] 'syntax is above all necessary to explain them'. Priscian, 200, 179. My translation.
[61] Baratin, pp. 447–57.
[62] 'Knowing what correct word order requires', i.e. 'that a pronoun or noun is placed before a verb…' and so on. Priscian, 164. My translation.

152

related to word order do not appear, or if they appear they do not appear in those terms,[63] is then a remarkable fact. Whether figural *ordo* is ever discussed or interpreted in terms of syntactical *ordo* in the later commentary tradition remains a question. The omission in Priscian has to do with a traditional disciplinary remit: with the fact that earlier taxonomies of figures put some figural phenomena out of the reach of grammarians, hiving 'grammatical' figures off from 'rhetorical' figures, which more conspicuously involve order.[64] We can only imagine how Priscian's syntax, his close analysis of positional configurationality, 'recta ordinatio', would have treated of word order figures, which most evidently disrupt or 'vary' that sense of order.

Part of Priscian's accomplishment is grammaticalizing the way 'per diuersas figuras uariare solent auctores in constructione':[65] he treated figures as equivalent to, and convertible with, inflectional relationships.[66] The stage is set, one might suppose, for *constructio* also to embrace *figurae* of word order – no longer, indeed, merely by explaining those figures as exceptions to *rectus ordo*, but, likewise, as grammaticalizable, or as related to *ratio*.[67] Figures of word order, which might be motivated by rhythm or as Cicero put it, arranged 'ut numerus non quaesitus sed ipse secutus esse videatur',[68] would then not be merely aberrations in respect of normal syntax, but, exactly like the agreement-*figurae* Priscian does treat, might 'seem to be arranged inappropriately…[but be] judged most correctly arranged from the standpoint of

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[63] The figures prolepsis, syllepsis, and zeugma, which do have clear word order consequences, are mentioned at the beginning of the discussion of *variatio*, but these interest Priscian because of non-agreement in number, etc. See Priscian, 183-4.

[64] Baratin, p. 450.

[65] Cited and translated above, p. 151.

[66] In fact it often appears that the word 'figura' applies to examples of good agreement as much as examples of 'varied' agreement. It can be used simply to mean 'a syntactical form' generally. For instance: 'Et sciendum quod tertiae omnes personae pronominum possunt per supra dictam figuram apponi primae et secundae personae excepto *sui*, *sibi*, *se*, *a se*…', 'And it should be known that all of the pronouns of the third person can, according to what was said just before, be placed next to one of the first or second person, save for *sui, sibi, se, a se*…', Priscian, 180. My translation.

[67] Interestingly, Priscian's one reference to 'usurpatio', or the 'licence' belonging to *auctores*, regards word order arrangement: 'Licet tamen et praepostere ea proferre auctorum usurpatione fretum', 'Leaning on the licence of *auctores*, it is possible to place it back and move it forward'. As Baratin makes clear in his edition, this is a singular moment that runs against Priscian's tendency not to refer *figurae* to licence. Priscian, 164. My translation.

[68] 'such that a rhythm arises that is not sought, but seems to follow naturally'. Cited p. 140.

the order [*ratio*] of meaning'.[69] Priscian's lacuna – how figural word order, which he does not

treat, and natural word order, which he does, relate – is not healed over by later medieval or,

for that matter, twentieth-century theorists. Valéry's decoupling of the 'effets psychiques que

produisent les groupements de mots…indépendamment des liaisons syntaxiques', would not

have satisfied a grammarian like Priscian. Priscian works in the opposite direction, to discover

the *ratio* of forms apparently 'indépenda[nt] des liaisons syntaxiques'. The *figurae*, which in

the tradition conceptualise units of syntax, as well as rhythm, aberrance, and *auctoritas*, in

Priscian are grammaticalized, or encompassed in an analysis of *ordinatio.* And so a possible,

if in the event unrealised question, emerges: how rhythmically-marked arrangements of words

and their underlying significant word order might be mutually construed, so as to functionally

grammaticalize rhythm.

It is not exactly that Dante does this: his treatise on language, the *De vulgari eloquentia*,

is not grammatically preceptive, but rather provides descriptive examples when it treats of

constructio. Dante cites Priscian there[70] – though, more broadly, scholars are still uncertain

about the content of what Dante means when he writes, in the *Convivio*, about 'l'arte di

gramatica ch'io avea'.[71] We must await further work on which particular grammatical texts he

encountered as a Latin learner.[72] Book two, chapter six of the *De vulgari eloquentia* is devoted

to *constructio*. There Dante gives four examples of different levels of *constructio*, from the

style 'rudium' ('of the uncultivated'), 'Petrus amat multum dominam Bertam', to that 'of the

illustrious', or 'illustrium': 'Eiecta maxima parte florum de sinu tuo, Florentia, nequicquam

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[69] Cited p. 151.

[70] Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia [Fenzi ed.]*, 2.6.2.

[71] This may mean only that he can read Latin, or it can mean that he received training in *grammatica* in the sense of a liberal art. Dante, *Convivio [Frisardi Ed.]*, 2.12.4.

[72] Anna Pegoretti notes that Boethius' *Consolation* may have been used didactically to teach *grammatica*, and that Dante may have encountered it there. Anna Pegoretti, 'On Grammar and Justice: Notes on Convivio, II. Xii. 1-7', in *Ethics, Politics and Justice in Dante*, ed. by Giulia Gaimari and Catherine Keen (London: UCL Press, 2019), pp. 14–29 (p. 21).

Trinacriam Totila secundus adivit'.[73] This last instance of 'illustrious' syntax is distinguished by its deployment of a number of *figurae.* Some of these are *figurae sensuum* – namely metalepsis: 'Totila' refers to Charles de Valois. Some are *uerborum*, namely *figura etymologica*: 'florum…Florentina'. It presents a chiastic word order arrangement, mirroring its ablative and indicative clauses (V-N-N-V). There are also five different instances of the rhythmical *cursus* (*velox, tardus* twice, and a *planus*).[74] Elsewhere in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante praises the hendecasyllable for its 'capacitate sententie, constructionis et vocabulorum'[75] – that is to say, its capaciousness for complex syntax. But as these examples above suggest, excellent *constructio* is hardly the exclusive purview of poets, and to learn it, Dante recommends studying both the 'regulatos…poetas' – Vergil, Ovid, Statius, Lucan – as well as those 'qui usi sunt altissimas prosas' – Livy, Pliny, Frontinus, and Paulus Orosius.[76] This doctrine of differing levels of style, correlated to different levels of figural ornateness in the arrangement of words (*constructio*), is probably inspired by the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.[77] But at the same time, Dante's examples for his hierarchy of *constructio* in *De vulgari eloquentia* also seem to subscribe to what Giovanni Nencioni calls a 'manierismo ornamentale – l'aspetto più medievale del gusto retorico'[78] – a programmatic figuralism which offers an understanding of syntax not substantially different to that taught by contemporary *artes dictaminis*, which, as Cesare Segre writes, 'sapevano sì insegnare le regole dell'ornato e alcuni giri sintattici di sapore latineggiante; ma certo non sapevano insegnare a costruire

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[73] 'Peter loves Ms. Berta a lot', 'Thrown out from your bosom, O Florence, the largest part of your flowers, in vain a second Attila approaches Sicily'. Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia [Fenzi ed.]*, 2.6.4. My translation.

[74] A summary of Mengaldo's figural analysis of this example is also found in Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia [Fenzi ed.]*, 2.6.4n.

[75] Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia [Fenzi ed.]*, 2.5.3.

[76] 'Metrical poets', 'those who used the highest prose styles'. Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia [Fenzi ed.]*, 2.6.7.

[77] The author of this text uses the word *constructio* to refer to arrangements of words in relation to levels of style, in the context of a catalogue of appropriate *exornationes* (his word for *figurae*). [Anon.], *Ad C. Herennium: De ratione dicendi (Rhetorica ad Herennium)*, ed. & trans. by Harry Caplan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 4.7.11, 4.10.15. For the importance of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and a discussion of Dante's recovery of a 'classical', and above all 'formal' conception of style, in place of a medieval 'objective' or 'sociological' conception, see Nencioni, pp. 112–19.

[78] Nencioni, pp. 113–14.

saldamente un periodo, né si sognavano di farlo.'[79] In the *Convivio*, by contrast, Dante, referring to his vernacular prose commentary, highlights 'le propietadi delle sue costruzioni',[80] which 'appropriateness' now implies a conception of *constructio* or syntax entirely divested of artificial 'adornamenti'.[81] This contradiction is not static, but animates Dante's later work.

Dante's recovery of the construction of a syntactical period in the *Convivio* is, famously, Cesare Segre's culminating argument in his famous analysis of early Italian prose syntax.[82] By the late *Commedia*, Nencioni writes, 'il modulo retorico [a prescriptive figuralism] ha perduto la sua cartilaginea insolubilità e si è quasi fuso nel pathos e nell'intonazione, tanto da rendersi inavvertito, come tale, a lettori non scaltriti'.[83] Dante's syntax, in the prose of *Convivio* and the poetry of the *Commedia*, then consists in a working-out of the contradiction, between *De vulgari eloquenia* and *Convivio*, in the matter of *constructio*. '[L]a formularità impressagli dai retori medievali e conservatasi nei loro discepoli,' Nencioni writes, 'si è dissolta in una libertà e in una forza struttiva'.[84] The *Convivio*'s own theorising about the relation of syntax to word order figuralism is not equal to its practice: the 'bellezza' of 'Voi che 'ntendendo' is split up, and discussed as 'grande sì per [la] construzione, la quale pertiene alli gramatici, sì per l'ordine del sermone, che si pertiene alli retorici'. [85] But the new settled-ness, and the new grammaticalness of marked form which Nencioni finds in Dante's late syntax, Robin Kirkpatrick does as well. Of *Par*. 1.1, he writes: 'Nothing "accidental" cheapens it. No one word is important save for its dependence upon another. The movement of imagination and feeling is persistently subjected to a design which rhythm and the syntactical progress of meaning deliberately impose upon it.'[86] This coupling of 'rhythm and the syntactical progress',

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[79] Cesare Segre, *Lingua, stile, e società: Studi sulla storia della prosa italiana* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1963), p. 109.
[80] Dante, *Convivio [Frisardi Ed.]*, 1.10.13.
[81] Dante, *Convivio [Frisardi Ed.]*, 1.10.12.
[82] Segre.
[83] Nencioni, p. 129.
[84] Nencioni, p. 131.
[85] Dante, *Convivio [Frisardi Ed.]*, 2.11.9.
[86] Robin Kirkpatrick, *Dante's Paradiso and the Limitations of Modern Criticism: A Study of Style and Poetic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 116.

in light of Dante's own dialectic of *constructio* – between the word order figuralism of *De vulgari eloquentia* and the natural order conception of *Convivio* – can be framed by, and I suggest is positively animated by, Priscian's lacuna in treating of *ordinatio* and *figurae*. It constitutes a working out in practice, if not in principle, of how a rhythmical arrangement presents, not an exception to, but a furtherance of the 'dependence upon [one] another', or syntax, of constituent words. This mutual implication of rhythm, 'non quaesitus sed ipse secutus', and syntactical 'dependence' constitutes a practically grammaticalized conception of word order figuralism.

One surprising proof of the foregoing, with respect to the compositional thinking analysed in this study, is the fact that a rhythmico-syntactical figuralism can be discovered to animate the production of new lines on the model of old ones, though the figuralism in question is less that of a 'manierismo ornamentale', and more that of a naturalised *ordinatio*. This, indeed, involves a new conception of *auctoritas*, now tied to the figural or formal independence of syntactically appropriate shapes. That is to say, hive-off-able figures of syntax can be found animating the composition of the poem, but these abstract shapes, in turn, seems to relate less to the 'formularità impressagli dai retori medievali', and more to 'le propietadi delle sue costruzioni'. To begin to see this, however, it makes sense to first detect the compositional expediency of those places in the poem that do clearly imitate a Latin figuralism – that is, places that deviate from Italian syntactical norms in ways that resemble marked 'giri sintattici di sapori latineggiante'. When a glance is cast over the whole poem, these figural contours appear to be compositionally re-usable, or to present relationships between lines akin to those discovered in chapters one and two.[87]

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[87] Whether these are, in fact, direct imitations of Latin or stylistic forms, perhaps derivative of Latin use, that by Dante's time had become naturalised in the vernacular, is always an issue with this kind of claim. What would have sounded Latinate to a fourteenth-century audience is a question of great complexity, and in the following few examples I of course have used my own judgement.

At *Inf.* 10.37, a disjunction reminiscent of a delayed *-que* enclitic in Latin, 'E l'animose man del duca e pronte', also lends to 'Già era dritta in sú la fiamma e queta' (*Inf.* 27.1) its elegant 8, 10 stress with sinalèfe ('duca e', 'fiamma e'). This is a syntactical shape as much as a prosodic one – memorable, and so re-usable, because aberrant in respect of Italian norms. Likewise, a series of lines, beginning with *Inf.* 7. 13, 'Quali dal vento le gonfiate vele', shuffles, in a way possible in Latin but unusual in Italian, the complement of agent ('dal vento') before what it complements. The same syntactical arrangement re-emerges seven canti later – 'piovean di foco dilatate falde' (*Inf.* 14.29) – and it is more than the syntactical shape that has re-emerged. Word divisions, too, are partly kept intact, the disyllables simply exchanged ('vento' becomes 'foco', 'vele' 'falde'). A different version is found at *Inf.* 25.47, 'di sangue fece spesse volte laco', involving a genitive rather than an ablative. This could, interestingly, be rewritten **fece di sangue spesse volte laco* to give the same pattern as the first pair. A further pair of examples of a shuffled-forward genitive also appear, 'si vede di giustizia orribil arte' (*Inf.* 14.6) and 'Quale del Bulicame esce ruscello' (*Inf.* 14.79), both within the same canto as the last.[88] At *Inferno* 29.43, 'lamenti saettaron me diversi', locally amounts to a bit of Vergilian word painting, with the adjective 'diversi' 'cut off' from its substantive 'lamenti'. For that reason, its syntax suggests *Purg.* 1.124, 'ambo le mani in su l'erbetta sparte'. Beginning with these imitations of a Latin figuralism, a compositional momentum premised on syntactical shape already emerges. The atypical syntax of these lines becomes a mould for the manufacture of new lines, and the hiving off of a discrete shape, synonymous with the *grammatica*'s conception of *auctoritas*, is naturalised and begins to operate as a compositional dynamic.

Word order that naturally produces a rhythmical shape – 'numerus non quaesitus sed ipse secutus esse videatur' – is a different understanding of rhythm to a metrical one, which

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[88] To this series could be added the pair 'mi prese del costui piacer sì forte (*Inf.* 5.104) and 'm'avean di costui già letto il nome' (*Inf.* 10.65). But there are many, many instances of this mid-line position for 'costui' (*Inf.* 1.64, 18.42…), so I am treating it as a distinct shape for the present purposes.

involves conformity to an abstract pattern. Not altogether unlike metre, however, these rhythmico-syntactical 'shapes' can have second-order quality. This accounts for the perception of their marked-ness or aberrance, and their claim on *auctoritas*. There is also a second-order quality to the *Commedia*'s deployment of syntactical figures, but the underlying notion of marked-ness seems, paradoxically, to involve 'recta ordinatio'. It is clear that the mould of the following line, itself produced on the mould of a line from Cavalcanti,[89]

come di neve in alpe sanza vento.   (*Inf.* 14.30)

is audible in

come schiera che scorre sanza freno   (*Purg.* 5.42).

It is not just the repetition of the part 'sanza freno/vento', or the fact that both lines are similes beginning with 'come'. There is also a trochaic gait, in the second half of the line, in both 'in alpe sanza vento' and 'che scorre sanza freno'. Apart from 'sanza' there are no common words, and in terms of parts of speech, one of these lines contains a verb and the other does not. Nonetheless, there is a congruent plasticity to both that cannot be unheard. Dante liked the following line so much he used it twice:

vuolsi così colà dove si puote

ciò che si vuole, e più non dimandare.   (*Inf.* 3.95-6, 5.23-4).

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[89] Line 6 of 'Biltà di donna e di saccente core' reads 'e bianca neve scender senza venti'. In Guido Cavalcanti, *Rime*, ed. by Roberto Rea and Giorgio Inglese (Rome: Carocci, 2011), p. 53.

The way the second hemistich of the last line is spat out is immediately heard in

Più non rispondo, e questo so per vero   (*Purg*. 4.96).

Clearly those famous lines from the *Inferno* were thought about in this instance: 'più non' gives as much away. But the association really consists in the second hemistich, 'e questo so per vero' – in its similarly militantly spondaic, domineering assertion after the caesura. Dante re-uses shapes reminiscent of those first lines often in the first cantica:

Non è sanza cagion l'andare al cupo:

vuolsi ne l'alto, là dove Michele…   (*Inf*. 7.10-11)

'vuolsi' and là' give away the first part of the prior shape, but more interesting is the re-appearance of the first line here, 'Non è sanza cagion l'andare al cupo' at the end of the cantica:

ché non è impresa da pigliare a gabbo   (*Inf*. 32.7).

The position of the infinitives 'andare' and 'pigliare', as well as the final disyllables 'cupo' and 'gabbo', make for a strong association. In this both cases, too, the lines also appear in a context that expresses the idea of going 'down' to the bottom of the universe – the line from *Inf*. 32 continues 'discriver fondo a tutto l'universo' (32.8). Without doubt there is an ideational congruence between these disparate lines, but most of note is the fact that the similar thought happens in the same shape, and without any of the same words in the same places.

The following lines from *Inferno* and *Paradiso*,

che innanzi a buon segnor fa servo forte   (*Inf.* 17.90)

ch'a l'abito de l'arte ha man che trema   (*Par.* 13.77-8),

share a shape that can be heard particularly from the shared position of 'fa' and 'ha'. Both lines also appear in the context of the verb 'tremare' – in *Inferno* Dante 'triema tutto' (17.87). But if there is lexical overlap between the larger contexts of these lines, that in turn only comes to light because of a wholesale rhythmico-syntactical re-use. There is a startling plasticity to this recollection that spans opposite ends of the poem, shares no common words, and yet seems to speak precisely to the 'habit' in this 'abito de l'arte', which continually re-works the forms of its own prior manufacture.

The relation of one part, here a verb, sometimes seems to determine the shape of the resulting line:

lo bivero s'assetta a far sua guerra   (*Inf.* 17.22)

risette con suoi servi a far sue arti   (*Inf.* 20.86),

and often, in this way, a prior syntactical sequence is a springboard for a complete re-imagining of the content of a line, as in:

S'elli avesse potuto creder prima   (*Inf.* 13.46)

ché, se potuto aveste veder tutto,   (*Purg.* 3.38),

or

O tu che sè per questo 'nferno tratto   (*Inf.* 6.40)

O tu che sè di là dal fiume sacro   (*Purg.* 31.1).

Here might be included lines that do share terms, but which seem all the same to propose ready syntactical shapes, ready for very different content:

perch' io sia giunto forse alquanto tardo,   (*Inf.* 24.25)

Quand' io m'ebbi dintorno alquanto visto,   (*Inf.* 32.40),

or

Ella ruina in sì fatta cisterna   (*Inf.* 33.133)

equivocando in sì fatta lettura   (*Par.* 29.75),

or

però ch'a le percosse non seconda.   (*Purg.* 1.105)

però ch'al nostro modo non adocchia.   (*Purg.* 21.30).

Sometimes a complete re-turning can be accomplished with just a flick of the wrist, changing very little, as in:

là onde 'nvidia prima dipartilla.   (*Inf.* 1.111)

là onde poi li Greci il dipartiro;   (*Purg.* 9.39),

or

162

più lieve legno convien che ti porti   (*Inf*. 3.93)

Piú lunga scala convien che si saglia;   (*Inf*. 24.55).

This applies to part-lines, as much as to whole lines, as in:

tosto divegna, sì che 'l ciel v'alberghi   (*Purg*. 26.62)

che pria turbava, sì che 'l ciel ne ride   (*Par*. 28.83).

The re-use of broadly syntactical form can also certainly involve variation in the order of the parts of speech, as in:

ché sempre l'omo in cui pensier rampolla   (*Purg*. 5.16)

che ne la mente sempre mi rampolla.   (*Purg*. 27.42),

or

forse m'avresti ancor lo star dimesso   (*Inf*. 29.15)

che s'elli avesse sol da sé dimesso   (*Par*. 7.117).

Other examples that seem to imply the abstraction of a shape, resemble, in turn, the synonymic variation discussed in chapter one, as with:

Poi che nel viso a certi li occhi porsi   (*Inf*. 17.52)

Poi fisamente al sole li occhi porse   (*Purg*. 13.13),

and

       Com' io al piè de la sua tomba fui,   (*Inf*. 10.40)

       Quando diritto al piè del ponte fue,   (*Inf*. 28.127),

and

       che m'avea contristati gli occhi e 'l petto   (*Purg*. 1.18)

       reverenti mi fé le gambe e 'l ciglio   (*Purg*. 1.51) –

which last also adapts the pair:

       ma vergogna mi fé le sue minacce,   (*Inf*. 17.89)

       tanto il dolor le fé la mente torta   (*Inf*. 30.21).

Particular verbal forms too, like this optative form, are often re-used with not simply a left-hand equivalence, but also a larger similarity (here of the disposition of final trisyllable, as well as lexically – 'pieno', 'intero', 'a punto'):

       Se fosse tutto pieno il mio domando   (*Inf*. 15.79)

       Se fosse stato lor volere intero   (*Par*. 4.82)

       Se fosse a punto la cera dedutta   (*Par*. 13.73).

the conditional form of this verb, too, is sometimes similar in this respect:

tal, ch'ogne vista ne sarebbe schiva   (*Inf*. 12.3)

però ch'ogne parlar sarebbe poco   (*Inf*. 34.24)

sì ch'ogne Bianco ne sarà feruto   (*Inf*. 24.150).

But more intriguing is when a similar thought – here of absolution – repeats simply and precisely the frame of a prior use, without important shared words:

ch'assolver non si può chi non si pente,   (*Inf*. 27.118)

sodisfar non si può con altra spesa   (*Par*. 5.63).

Between such re-uses, slight adaptations to the form can be entertained (here the 3pp verb moves the caesura forward two syllables):

sì che scusar non si posson l'offense.   (*Par*. 4.108).

Likewise, this early pair of lines on providence,

ché l'alta providenza che lor volle

porre ministri de la fossa quinta   (*Inf*. 23.55-6),

lends not merely the shape of its first line, but also the shape of its enjambment, to this late pair of lines:

Ma l'alta provedenza, che con Scipio

difese a Roma la gloria del mondo, 		(*Par*. 27.61-2).

Enjambed lines, in particular, often seem like steady frames susceptible of substantive re-imagining, as in:

e 'l sol montava 'n sù con quelle stelle

ch'eran con lui quando l'amor divino

		mosse di prima quelle cose belle; 	(*Inf*. 1.39-40)

and

		Lo mio maestro e io e quella gente

ch'eran con lui parevan sì contenti,

come a nessun toccasse altro la mente 	(*Purg*. 2.115-17).

This re-use of enjambed forms is extremely stark in one instance:

O è preparazion che ne l'abisso

del tuo consiglio fai per alcun bene 	(*Purg*. 6.121-2),

and

Ficca mo l'occhio per entro l'abisso

de l'etterno consiglio, quanto puoi 	(*Par*. 7.94-5),

but there are much more flexible re-uses of enjambed forms, as here, which includes a variant like 'perché' for the functionally equivalent 'ben lo sai':

l'alta mia tragedía in alcun loco:

ben lo sai tu che la sai tutta quanta   (*Inf*. 20.113-14)

and

ritorno a dichiararti in alcun loco,

perché tu veggi lì così com' io   (*Par*. 7.122-3).

A line beginning with a particular syntactical join, as in the following instance with 'che sempre', often casts forward its rhythmical contour from that position. The following have identical positions of stress (4, 8) and a similar, but not identical, iambic gait:

che sempre nera fa la valle inferna   (*Purg*. 1.45)

ché sempre l'omo in cui pensier rampolla   (*Purg*. 5.16)

che sempre a guisa di fanciullo scherza,   (*Purg*. 15.3).

Similarly, the parts 'di retro al' and the verb *venire* are constants in this pair, but so is the particular rush, and the absence of stress in the second hemistich:

di retro al dittator sen vanno strette,   (*Purg*. 24.59)

di retro al mio parlar ten vien col viso   (*Par*. 10.101).

The following pair do not share, apart from 'là onde' and 'già', parts of speech in any of the same places. However, their equal word divisions alone make the one ring in the other:

> là onde il Carro già era sparito   (*Par*. 1.30)
>
> là onde scese già una facella   (*Par*. 30.8).

Again, the rhythmical shadow cast by 'ma per trattar' in the following lines seems to involve flattening, or removing any major stress position, from the rest of the line:

> ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai,   (*Inf*. 1.8)
>
> ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza   (*Inf*. 26.120)
>
> ma per dar lui esperïenza piena   (*Inf*. 28.48).

The first hemistich in the following lines is an evident close re-working, similar to what was analysed in chapter 2. The second hemistich, particularly at 'tenni' and 'venne', however, seems to conform to a rhythmical pattern as well:

> china' il viso, e tanto il tenni basso,   (*Inf*. 5.110)
>
> ma chinail giuso; e quei sen venne a riva   (*Purg*. 2.40).

It is this association of a rhythmico-syntactical form, that floats above a specific association of content, that appears in:

> ma per vento che 'n terra si nasconda   (*Purg*. 21.57)

ma per colei che 'l chieder mi concede,   (*Par*. 21.54),[90]

or

sentì spennar per la scaldata cera,   (*Inf*. 17.110)

lo mio pensier per la presente rissa   (*Inf*. 23.5).

Equal word divisions, but few shared words, rope together lines like:

che li altri mi sarien carboni spenti   (*Inf*. 20.102)

che 'ndarno vi sarien le gambe pronte   (*Purg*. 3.48),

and

perché 'l veder dinanzi era lor tolto   (*Inf*. 20.15)

perché 'l pregio da Dio era disguinto   (*Purg*. 6.42),

or again,

ma perché 'l sacro amore in che io veglio   (*Par*. 15.64)

Ma perché 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna   (*Par*. 32.139),

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[90] The first line adapts 'ma per color che dietro a noi restaro' (*Purg*. 11.24). Note also 'ma per amor de la verace manna' (*Par*. 12.84).

albeit associations in lexical content, beyond sharp syntactical shapes, do at points appear in these instances (as with 'veglio'/'assonna', or 'tolto'/'disgiunto').

The following lines are not quite counterexamples, but show the poet preserving the outer edges of prior arrangements, while quite conspicuously re-ordering the order and rhythm of the interior of the line:

io non so s'i' mi fui qui troppo folle (*Inf*. 19.88)

odi s'i' fui, com' io ti dico, folle (*Purg*. 13.113),

and

Allor, come di mia colpa compunto (*Inf*. 10.109)

di che ciascun di colpa fu compunto (*Inf*. 22.124),

and again,

Lo 'mperador del doloroso regno (*Inf*. 34.28)

ché quello imperador che là su regna (*Inf*. 1.124).

These last examples illustrate a further turning of a recollected shape, and in that sense offer good examples of the kind of figural thinking that fascinated Valéry: '*ce qui se fait* répète *ci qui fut fait*,' or, he adds, 'le réfute : le répète en d'autres tons, l'épure, l'amplifie, le simplifie…ou bien le rétorque, l'extermine, le renverse, le nie'.[91]

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[91] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, pp. 634-5.

How then does the above conception of figuralism, related to rhythm, syntax, and authority, relate to Contini's sense of the *Commedia* as composed of 'figure ritmiche'? Does the preceding constitute proof of the relative dominance of 'astrazion[i] ritmic[he]',[92] or of 'valori puramente formali', in the compositional process of the *Commedia*? Without denying a Saussurean conception of the 'doppia natura, fonica e simbolica' of language – a conception of the dual makeup of the sign that is equally medieval[93] – the same distinction between sound and meaning does not hold for a medieval understanding of syntax. It is a consistent feature of Priscian's thinking on syntax that *figurae*, which might be understood to privilege relationships that exceed significance and tip towards pure form, be instead recuperated into a significant *ratio*, referred to by their marked *ordinatio*. This grammaticalization of *figurae* is, I think, operative in the kind of rhythmical-syntactical abstractions discovered above, which also put pressure on the notion of a marked shape. The lines from the *Convivio* on the 'bellezza' of 'Voi che 'ntendendo' – 'grande sì per [la] costruzione, la quale pertiene alli gramatici, sì per l'ordine del sermone, che si pertiene alli retorici' – for all that they propose an analytic division between syntax and word order figuralism, do in fact relate both to 'belezza'. The 'beauty' of syntax must include this ornament, now grammaticalized, or related back to the *ordinatio* 'la quale pertiene alli gramatici'.

These intra-poem echoes, which have been analysed as evidence of a process of thinking and composing now from a number of different angles – in terms of the textual criticism of the poem, as well as oral compositional theory, and, most recently, medieval literacy pedagogy – work to newly specify the kind of textual object this poem is. The

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[92] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 84.

[93] The sharp division between signification, on the one hand, and the sound or music of language is operative in Dante's theoretical texts, and motivate his practice of commentary. Simone Marchesi sees the theoretical project of both *De vulgari eloquentia* and *Convivio* as an intensification of this divide: 'If poetry's goal is to transmit a content that is non-concretive with its form, and the goal of language is to convey concepts independently or even in spite of the form in which it does so, poetry becomes unnecessary for this project.' Simone Marchesi, *Dante and Augustine: Linguistics, Poetics, Hermeneutics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), p. 83.

importance of rhythm, memory, and a grammatical conception of figuralism relate the poem to specific conditions of authority and transmission which, to borrow a phrase from Contini, allow the critic to 'reperire direzioni, piuttosto che contorni fissi, dell'energia poetica'. In a final section, accordingly, I want to ask about how the grammar of criticism might adapt to suit this memorial, rhythmically significant, and accordingly authoritative object.

Dignum et iustum est

In the previous chapter I suggested both that medieval reading practices assign a grammatical value to the perception of rhythmical units, and that those same reading practices feed the compositional dynamics of Dante's *Commedia*. If we acknowledge how extensively this particular poem is woven out of re-used rhythmico-syntactical shapes, we must also begin to acknowledge the lacuna we have left in the criticism we practice on Dante's poem. In this part of my study I propose a critical experiment. I want to begin with a particular rhythmical shape, to set out a new direction of travel for the kind of claims criticism can make. To try rhythmical reading on for size is to recuperate, for interpretation, perceptions which are intimately connected to this poem's composition, and which, moreover, provided the foundation of the medieval practice of figural *interpretatio*. What follows is an exercise in the interpretation of a rhythmical shape in one canto of the *Commedia*.

Can one interpret a shape of rhythm? If rhythmical interpretation is akin to asking what a word means in a particular context, then the answer must be no – it is hard to imagine clarifying the meaning, in a singular sense, of such an object. But there are a number of different takes on this question that have arisen in the course of the preceding discussion. Valéry, in the footsteps of Mallarmé, understood rhythm to be outside of the semantic relationship altogether – both rhythm and voice were rather, following Mallarmé, 'directement choses de l'être'.[1] Later in the twentieth century in France, Gérard Genette interpreted 'figures' similarly as an 'écart entre le signe et le sens'.[2] The strictness of these divisions would not have been intuitive for a medieval grammarian, however, whose sense of the relation of syntax to individual words is analogous to the relation of individual syllables to a word. Syntactical

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[1] Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, p. 1356.
[2] Gérard Genette, *Figures : essais* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1966), p. 209.

interpretatio for Priscian had a very specific meaning: the convertibility of syntactical relationships and morphological ones. Semantic and syntactical values were understood as if inversely related, such that the genitive 'Hector filius Priami' could be 'interpreted' into 'Hectorem filium Priamus possedet': a syntactical relationship is implied in the inflected one and vice versa. *Interpretatio* then 'permet de dégager les catégories relationnelles que sous-entendent les jonctions formelles et par là, de simplifier l'exposé'.[3] For Augustine in the *De doctrina christiana*, the discovery of figural word order in the epistolary prose of St Paul occasions the surprising assertion: 'Et in quibus forte locis agnoscitur a doctis, tales res dicuntur, ut verba, quibus dicuntur, non a dicente adhibita sed ipsis rebus velut sponte subiuncta videantur'.[4] There is a divinely inspired figural eloquence in Scripture, says Augustine, which proceeds from 'ips[ae] re[s]' – the things themselves – and in that sense is more directly significant than words can be, as signs for things.

Word order and rhythm then can appear both significantly more and significantly less significative than a word, and both these eventualities restrict the space in which interpretation might function. A notion of rhythm as shapely, however, acknowledges a contour that, if not itself directly referring, is figural in a second sense – like a line on a pictorial plane. If reference is not precise, it is not wholly absent, either. As a result, though it would be impossible to imagine a dictionary of rhythmical figures with values assigned to each, it is nonetheless imaginable that the plasticity achieved through the figural aspects of a discourse intimates relations and even interpretable objects. A practical criticism of rhythm might then become possible. The inspiration for the following exercise in rhythmical interpretation is a book by William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words*. In it, Empson argues down the division of

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[3] Chevalier, p. 39.
[4] 'And in those places learned people might recognise, things are said such that the words with which they are said seem not to come from the person saying them but are joined to the things themselves'. It is clear that Augustine is referring to word *order* here, not simply 'verba', from the context. He is discussing eloquence, and in the next paragraph will identify a figure, 'climax', in Paul's prose. Augustine, *L'istruzione cristiana*, ed. by Manlio Simonetti, 4th edn (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), 4.6. My translation.

a word's use into its meaning and an extra-significant set of 'Emotions' or 'Tones'. '[M]uch of what appears to us as a "feeling" (as is obvious in the case of a complex metaphor) will in fact be quite an elaborate structure of related meanings'.[5] We can explain a metaphorical use, Empson says – it is not purely emotive or an effect – which suggests that the pleasure of indirection is in part that of complex reasoning. And so Empson suggests that we need to speak about 'equations' with words: an algebra of principal and secondary meanings, which itself may form part of a particular usage of a word in a particular passage of a poet, novelist, or playwright. He goes on to brilliantly analyse 'wit' in Pope's *Essay on Wit*, 'all' in *Paradise Lost*, and 'honest' in *Othello*. What goes for words does not, of course, necessarily go for rhythms. But the figures analysed in the foregoing are also structures related, though multiple re-uses, by simple or complex modifications. We have noted a reasoning suited to versification, which recollects particular shapes of syntax and rhythm, and often reinterprets their deployment and potentialities. If we cannot talk of 'meanings', Empson's list of functions for his 'equations' nonetheless resembles the kinds of transformations a figure can undergo: 'Substitution', 'Analogy', 'Shortening', 'Nomination', '(Regular) Transfer', 'Permutation', 'Adequation', and so forth.[6] For us, these are not relations that can be reasoned in the space of singular signs, but instead formal and syntactical relationships. By closely attending to a rhythmical shape, we can begin to follow its transformations within and even beyond a particular text, and interrogate the question of significance at the same time.

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[5] William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), pp. 56–57.
[6] Empson, p. 80.

Robin Kirkpatrick writes of *Paradiso* 7: 'the rhythm of the canto is designed…to draw attention wholly to the propositions of the speaker herself…The poet arrives at a formula, authoritative for himself at least, of his belief in the incarnation'.[7] There is indeed a syllogistic or enthymemic gait to much of what Beatrice says about the incarnation in *Paradiso* 7. This is apparent in the question and premises, here, of the death of the cross:

> Secondo mio infallibile avviso,
> come giusta vendetta giustamente
> punita fosse, t'ha in pensier miso;   (19-21);

and of Adam,

> …quell' uom che non nacque,
> dannando sé, dannò tutta sua prole;   (27).

And it is evident, too, in the conclusions drawn:

> La pena dunque che la croce porse
> s'a la natura assunta si misura,
> nulla già mai sì giustamente morse;   (40-2),

and

> Non ti dee oramai parer più forte,

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[7] Kirkpatrick, p. 126.

> quando si dice che giusta vendetta
>
> poscia vengiata fu da giusta corte.   (49-51).

Middle terms, revealed later, maintain this close syllogistic tacking to individual terms like 'giust[o]' and 'degn[o]', and related forms like 'giustamente' and 'dignità':

> Più l'è conforme, e però più le piace;
>
> ché l'ardor santo ch'ogne cosa raggia,
>
> ne la più somigliante è più vivace.
>
> Di tutte queste dote s'avvantaggia
>
> l'umana creatura, e s'una manca,
>
> di sua nobiltà convien che caggia.   (73-8),

and

> e in sua dignità mai non rivene,
>
> se non rïempie, dove colpa vòta,
>
> contra mal dilettar con giuste pene.   (82-4).

One last revolution of this particular shape of reasoning deserves a close look:

> Non potea l'uomo ne' termini suoi
>
> mai sodisfar, per non potere ir giuso
>
> con umiltate obiedïendo poi,
>
> quanto disobiediendo intese ir suso; (97-100).

The rhythmical gait of this canto is often understood to be an imitation of scholastic, summatic reasoning. Giorgio Inglese, for instance, refers this last syllogism to a similar argument in Aquinas (*Summa theologiae* 3.1.2).[8] But in fact this last argument, at least, has a much longer history. The word 'obedience' here, not used again in the *Commedia*, and the parallelistic, antithetical chiastic structure of these lines, recall Romans 5:19: 'Sicut per inoboedientiam unius hominis peccatores constituti sunt multi, ita et per unius oboeditionem iusti constituentur multi'. The argument of this part of Romans is, likewise, why Christ 'pro impiis mortuus est' (5:6).[9] What has been taken, in Dante, to be an instance of scholastic syllogistic reasonings is, at least in this instance, difficult to distinguish from a much more ancient structure of parallelism which, in its turn, promotes synthetic or antithetical reasoning.[10]

This chapter of Romans is particularly significant in the history of scriptural interpretation. It is constructed in a figurally conspicuous way, employing evident shapes like chiasmus, polyptoton, and even homeoteleuton in short, parallel causes with a clear rhythmical responsion.[11] But it is also a key passage of 'figural interpretation', or of a figural conception of sacred history:[12] Adam is called a 'forma futuri' – 'a figure of him who was to come'. I cite this section at some length, to introduce its formal character:

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[8] Dante, *Commedia [Inglese ed.]*, III, 7.98-100n. Claudio Gigante also compares this passage to arguments from Aquinas' *Summa* (3.46.1, 3.1.1), but misses the Pauline source. Claudio Gigante, 'Canto VII: Teologia della creazione e della redenzione', in *Cento canti per cento anni*, ed. by Andrea Mazzucchi and Enrico Malato, 3 vols (Rome: Salerno, 2015), III, 200–227 (pp. 215–16).

[9] The text referred to is that of *The Vulgate Bible*, ed. by Angela M. Kinney and Swift Edgar, 6 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[10] On the history of rhythmical parallelism see Eduard Norden's 'Logos und Rhythmus' for a brief introduction: 'Die parallelen Glieder könne, wie schon vorhin bemerkt würde, ihrem Gedanken, also dem Logos nach zueinander im Verhältnis des Synonymen oder Synthetischen oder Antithetischen stehen, je nachdem das zweite Glied das erste nur variiert oder es ergänzt oder es gegensätzlich erweitert.' In Eduard Norden, *Kleine Schriften zum Klassischen Altertum*, ed. by Bernhard Kytzler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1966), p. 545.

[11] Rhythmical responsion between parallel or antithetical *cola*, called *parison* in Greek, had particular success in the development of Greek rhythmical homiletic poetry after the sixth century. For an analysis, relating the rhythmical shape to the influence of Paul's prose, see Valiavitcharska, pp. 70–76.

[12] The phrase, of course, is Auerbach's. See Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, pp. 49–50. Whether or not there was a distinct, ancient 'figural' mode of interpretation is disputed, as adducing comparisons of the kind Paul does with the word 'typos', resembles procedures of classical forensic and rhetorical

Propterea sicut per unum hominem in hunc mundum peccatum intravit, et per

peccatum mors,

    et ita in omnes homines mors pertransiit, in quo omnes peccaverunt.

Usque ad legem enim, peccatum erat in mundo,

    peccatum autem non inputabantur cum lex non esset.

Sed regnavit mors ab Adam usque ad Mosen,

    etiam in eos qui non peccaverunt in similitudinem praevaricationis Adae,

    qui est forma futuri.

Sed non sicut delictum,

    ita et donum.

Si enim unius delicto multi mortui sunt,

    multo magis gratia Dei et donum in gratia unius hominis, Iesu Christi,

    in plures abundavit.

Et non sicut per unum peccatum,

    ita et donum.

Non iudicium quidem ex uno in condemnationem,

    gratia autem ex multis delictis in iustificationem.

Si enim unius delicto mors regnavit per unum,

    multo magis abundantiam gratiae et donationis et iustitiae accipientes in

    vita regnabunt per unum,

        Iesum Christum.

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reasoning. 'There is considerable debate about whether in antiquity there was such a thing as "typology" (the term itself is modern) and if among Christian authors "typology" is different from "allegory"', writes Margaret Mitchell. See Mitchell, p. 131n.

Igitur, sicut per unuis delictum in omnes homines in condemnationem,

sic et per unius iustificatiam in omnes homines in iustificationem vitae.

(Romans 5:12-18)[13]

It was suggested by Eduard Norden in 1898, and re-proposed by Giorgio Agamben recently, that Paul's highly figural, 'Asianic' style, employing homeoteleuton, at times in roughly equal cola (as here in 'condemnationem'/'iustificationem'), was a direct ancestor of modern vernacular poetry, which distinctively employs isosyllabic cola and rhyme.[14] The highly figural, antithetical construction of the passage from Paul which Dante cites, which is productive of a marked rhythm, is also productive of a conception of sacred history, involving the τύποι or 'forma[e]' (in Jerome's Latin) of Adam, Moses, and Christ. 'Figural interpretation' is often discussed as a distinct Pauline-then-patristic framework of thought,[15] but hiving it off as solely a mode of exegesis misses the *rhythmical*-figural thinking which supports this Pauline conception of history. If it subtends a 'figural' conception of sacred history, insinuating a paralleling or antithetical relation of Old Testament figure and New Testament fulfilment, might it be possible to further particularise the rhythmical shape of the present passage?

A word Beatrice uses in her arguments in canto 7 is *convenire*: 'di sua [scil. l'umana creatura] nobilità convien che caggia' (78), or again, 'Dunque a Dio convenia con le vie sue / riparar l'omo' (103-4). The force of the verb *convenire* has been glossed in various ways. For line 78's 'convien', Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi glosses 'di necessità decade', although, at line 68, 'dirò perché tal modo fu più degno', Chiavacci Leonardi glosses the adjective 'degno'

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[13] I have lineated the text according to the appearance of parallel *cola*, to demonstrate figural features like inversion of word order and similarity in case endings.

[14] Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. by Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 84; Eduard Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1909), II, pp. 853-4.

[15] The *locus classicus* is of course Erich Auerbach, 'Figura', in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 11–78.

as 'più a [Dio] conveniente'.[16] The conceptual challenge of this unstable modal band, which stretches from 'necessity' to 'appropriateness', is the centre of Beatrice's argument. Arguments from *convenientia*, or the 'fittingness' of the incarnation, are found in Augustine,[17] in Anselm and in Aquinas, for whom *convenientia* is also an important relation of sacramentality and even of truth.[18] *Convenientia* is also a rhetorical and aesthetic term, referring to the adequation of style to subject matter, and as such, is part of Dante's inherited understanding of style.[19] The Anselmian precedent, Anselm's *Cur Deus homo?*, has long been recognised behind Beatrice's reasoning on the incarnation in canto 7. The fullest treatment of the topic of *convenientia* in relation to this canto is by Christopher Ryan, who argues 'where to [Anselm] the Incarnation was a matter of necessity for God, in [Dante's] account it resulted from God's free choice' (this conclusion is also sustained in a recent PhD thesis by Debora Marletta).[20] But this polarity between 'necessity' and 'free choice', rather than illuminating a contrast between Dante and Anselm, seems part of the term itself – and this conceptual union of polarities, in turn, discloses something about the style of *Paradiso* 7.

Anselm did not think the incarnation 'was a matter of necessity': he could not say anything of the sort. *Cur Deus Homo?* is instead an analysis of the modal abstracts '*ability* and *necessity* and *will*' in relation to God, something required because, as Anselm explains to his interlocutor Boso, 'an ignorance of these notions produces certain difficulties which become

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[16] In Dante, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 3 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1994), III, n. ad loc.

[17] For a discussion of Augustine's separate use of *convenientia* in relation to eloquence, and his 'subverting the classical ideal of stylistic *convenientia* between subject matter and level of style' in the *De doctrina christiana*, see Marchesi, pp. 91–93.

[18] John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 4–5.

[19] For an overview of critical discussions on 'fittingness' in Dante's conception of style, see Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, 'convenienza in "Enciclopedia Dantesca"' <http://www.treccani.it//enciclopedia/convenienza_(Enciclopedia-Dantesca)> [accessed 4 August 2019].

[20] Christopher Ryan, 'Paradiso VII: Marking the Difference Between Dante and Anselm', in *Dante and the Middle Ages: Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. by John C. Barnes and Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995), pp. 117–37 (p. 127); Debora Marletta, 'Aspects of Dante's Theology of Redemption: Eden, the Fall, and Christ in Dante with Respect to Augustine' (unpublished PhD, University College London, 2011).

easy as a result of understanding these notions'.[21] This resembles Ludwig Wittgenstein's demonstration, nine hundred years later, that the words *to fit*, *to be able*, and *to understand* are words whose 'role…in our language is other than we are tempted to think'.[22] Notions of necessity and ability often change places in Anselm's text: to say 'God is not able' in fact signifies, says Anselm, 'His insuperable ability and power': nothing can make God do what He does not want to do.[23] *Convenientia*, or fittingness, is itself the centre on which these revolutions turn. Boso worries about 'the necessity of God's accomplishing what He began – in order that He not seem, contrary to what is fitting, to fail in what He has undertaken'. For Boso, 'the necessity of avoiding unfittingness seems to "constrain" God',[24] whereas Anselm responds:

> suppose that you willingly promise today to bestow a gift tomorrow; and tomorrow you bestow it with this same willingness. Although it is necessary that, if you can, you do tomorrow what you have promised (or else be caught in a lie), nonetheless the one to whom you give this benefit is no less indebted to you for the bestowal of it than if you had not made a promise. The reason for his indebtedness is that you did not hesitate to make yourself indebted to him prior to the actual giving.[25]

That first necessity, in other words, is simply the aspect under which we view God's fidelity to his will. The error is in not thinking both God's unmitigated priority to the law *and* our

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[21] Anselm of Canterbury, 'Why God Became a Man (Cur Deus Homo)', in *Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. & trans. by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, 3 vols (Toronto and New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1976), III, 39–138 (pp. 50–51).
[22] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, 4th edn (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 79e–80e.
[23] Anselm of Canterbury, III, p. 125.
[24] Anselm of Canterbury, III, p. 100.
[25] Anselm of Canterbury, III, p. 101.

unmitigated situation within it: what is 'fitting' is then a recognition of the expression of God's freedom as the law. These terms look forward to debates about legal and theological naturalism vs voluntarism in the centuries after Anselm. Freedom and necessity swap places from where Boso had them, and necessity now appears a prior relation of grace.[26] That 'convien' in *Paradiso* 7 can be glossed as both 'di necessità' and as 'God's free choice' suggests that Dante, too, has made these antithetical turns his own. Denys Turner has recently suggested that the English fourteenth-century anchorite Julian of Norwich's phrase, 'sinne is behovely', should be likewise glossed as *conveniens.* For Turner, *convenientia* 'unbinds the chains that tie freedom and necessity to exclusive disjunction.'[27] Underneath Anselm's inverting modal reasoning, there is a particular structure which animates these revolutions of freedom and necessity. At the beginning of *Cur Deus homo?*, Anselm's particular grammar of fittingness is introduced by citing a Pauline text:

>…if unbelievers would carefully consider how appropriately [convenienter] the restoration of human nature was obtained in this manner, they would not deride our simplicity but with us would praise God's wise loving-kindness. For it was fitting [Oportebat] that as death had entered into the human race by the disobedience of man, so life would be restored by the obedience of man.[28]

This adds to the grammar of Romans 5:19, the verse Dante cites in *Paradiso* 7, interpreting its rhythmically paralleling, antithetical shape by adding the language 'appropriately' and 'fitting'.

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[26] Compare Southern's comments on the *Cur Deus homo?*: 'In the *Proslogion*, [Anselm] had asserted that justice and mercy were different aspects of the same activity. In the *Cur Deus Homo* he attempted to give a convincing proof and illustration of this improbable conclusion.' R.W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 213.

[27] Denys Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 232n.

[28] Anselm of Canterbury, III, p. 52; Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo?* (London: David Nutt, 1895), p. 8.

Anselm refers to this passage from Paul as possessed of 'a certain inexpressible beauty',[29] and the paralleling, antithetical shape of Paul's prose then underpins or allows for the 'fitting' convertibility of or paralleling of antitheses in Anselm's reasoning on the incarnation and redemption. As with patristic figural interpretation, so Anselm's reasoning on God's freedom and necessity is motivated by 'a certain inexpressible beauty' in the rhythm of Paul's prose at the end of Romans 5. And both Paul's paralleling, antithetical shape, and the word Anselm attaches to it, *convenientia* or 'fittingness', appear in Dante's poem.

The peculiar rhythm which Kirkpatrick points to in canto 7 of the *Paradiso* is then a condition of reasoning from 'fittingness': it is not only 'proposition[al]' or syllogistic, it also bodies forth 'a certain inexpressible beauty'. This Pauline shape is iterated throughout the canto – 'come giusta vendetta giustamente / punita fosse', 'giusta vendetta / poscia vengiata fu da giusta corte', or again, 'contra mal dilettar con giuste pene'. Beyond the modal claim, there is a particular relation manifest rhythmically – on the figural surface of the text – one which transforms an aesthetic encounter, I want to argue, into a personal one, or the relation of a 'persona' (*Par*. 7.32, 44).

To see this, this relation might be followed, first, through Aquinas. The first question of the third, Christological part of Aquinas' *Summa* starts from the place of *convenientia*. Aquinas asks about the 'fittingness' of the God-man at *Summa theologiae* 3.1.1:[30]

> Praeterea, quae sunt in infinitum distantia, inconvenienter iunguntur, sicut inconveniens esset iunctura si quis pingeret imaginem in qua humano capiti cervix iungeretur equina. Sed Deus et caro in infinitum distant, cum Deus sit

[29] Anselm of Canterbury, III, p. 53.
[30] The text of Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* referred to here is Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. by John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón, trans. by Laurence Shapcote, 8 vols (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012).

simplicissimus caro autem composita, et praecipue humana. Ergo inconveniens

fuit quod Deus carni uniretur humanae.

Aquinas proposes here, via an objection, *convenientia* as a fundamental incarnational and

Christological relation.[31] It will come to underpin Aquinas' arguments about the beauty of

Christ – carrying forward claims of a 'certain inexpressible beauty' in relation to the Second

Person.[32] But by beginning the *tertia pars* this way, Aquinas has already revealed how this

relation can be accessed via another *ars* – via poetry. In this passage Aquinas cites the first

lines of the 'Epistula ad Pisones' ('Ars poetica') – adapting Horace's 'Humano capiti ceruicem

pictor equinam | iungere si uelit…'. The concern, here as there, is that the incongruousness of

two distinct beings thus forced together might elicit jibes: 'spectatum admissi risum teneatis,

amici?'[33]

Fittingness is important to Horace's epistle on poetry: it is how a poet reveals a

'persona', as a relation to *officia*:

qui didicit patriae quid debeat et quid amicis,

quo sit amore parens, quo frater amandus et hospes,

quod sit conscripti, quod iudicis officium, quae

partes in bellum misi ducis, ille profecto

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[31] In the same question, Aquinas establishes the modal texture of the fittingness of the incarnation thus: 'ad finem aliquem dicitur aliquid esse necessarium dupliciter: uno modo, sine quo aliquid esse non potest, sicut cibus est necessarius ad conservationem humanae vitae; alio modo, per quod melius et convenientius pervenitur ad finem, sicut equus necessarius est ad iter' (3.1.2).

[32] For further consideration of *convenientia* and Aquinas' theory of beauty, the classic study of beauty and Christology is Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, ed. by John Riches, trans. by Brian McNeil, 4 vols (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), IV, p. 398.

[33] 'if a painter wanted to join a horse's neck onto a human head…', 'if you got to see that, could you stop yourselves laughing, friends?', Horace, *Epistles Book II and Epistle to the Pisones ('Ars Poetica')*, ed. by Niall Rudd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ll. 1, 5. My translation.

reddere personae scit conuenientia cuique.[34]

If *convenientia* is the fundamental relation of *persona* for Horace, *persona*, in turn, is the word

Aquinas, following Augustine, uses to relate the two natures in Christ – in a 'unity of person'.[35]

Both terms, *convenientia* and *persona*, have a correlate history in ancient poetics, where they

constitute a mimetic character or even mask,[36] and both terms are then fundamental to the

understanding of the Second Person – his beauty, the necessity of incarnation, and the unity of

natures. What the poets here bequeath to the theologians is a conception of Personhood which

is act – almost acting. Fittingness in this mimetic sense accommodates natures in 'infinitum

distantia', such that God, as Dante puts it in canto 7, 'unì a sé in persona / *con l'atto sol* del suo

etterno amore' (32-3, my emphasis). The poetics of *convenientia*, in other words, do not recede

when these terms come to animate a theological conception of divine personhood, and in fact

convenientia subsists as a theological poetics in one very significant sense.

      The first line of *Paradiso* 7, 'Osanna, sanctus Deus sabaòth', is a citation of the Canon

of the Mass, the central part of the liturgy. Dante cites the Preface, the first part of the Canon,

which includes the Sanctus. The Sanctus is then cited again at *Par*. 26.69, in the vernacular

form 'Santo, santo, santo!'.[37] But it is the larger context of Dante's liturgical citation in

Paradiso 7, and the action of that part of the Mass, that matters here. The Preface is a dialogue

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[34] 'who knows what he owes his country and his friends, / and what love a parent, brother, and guest are due / and what is the duty of the conscript, and of the judge, / and the duties of a general sent to war – he indeed / knows how to draw the *convenientia* of character [*personae*], for each', Horace, ll. 312–16. My translation.

[35] *Summa theologiae* 3.1.1: (citing Augustine) 'naturam creatam sic sibi coniungit ut *una persona fiat ex tribus*, Verbo, anima et carne'; 'uniri Deo *in unitate personae* non fuit conveniens carni humanae secundum conditionem suae naturae: quia hoc erat supra dignitatem ipsius. Conveniens tamen fuit Deo, secundum infinitam excellentiam bonitatis eius ut sibi eam uniret pro salute humana'; 'Et ideo, sicut creatura, cum prius non esset, in esse producta est, convenienter, cum prius non esset unita Deo, postmodum fuit ei unita.' My emphasis. For a discussion of the term *persona* as a term of Christology, an innovation of Augustine's, see especially John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 100.

[36] The ancient etymology of *persona* was *per-sonare*, to sound through (as a voice does behind a mask). For a fuller discussion of the etymology of *persona*, see Heather Webb, *Dante's Persons: An Ethics of the Transhuman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 164.

[37] A discussion of the audacity of Dante's translation of the Sanctus, or '[t]he dramatic vernacularization of a canonical Latin text', propitious of a prophetic *auctoritas* is Kevin Brownlee, 'Why the Angels Speak Italian: Dante as Vernacular Poeta in Paradiso XXV', *Poetics Today*, 5.3 (1984), 597–610 (p. 599).

between the Celebrant and – in the middle ages – the other clergy in performing the Mass. The Sanctus was sung, and in fact served as an aural canopy to the subsequent Eucharist itself. The rest of the Canon, or Eucharistic prayer, was performed silently or whispered, and so this hymn would be sung overtop this central moment of the Mass not least 'in order to provide some audible interest'.[38] In the context of the silent Eucharist, this short prayer would then have been the aural reality of the Sacrament itself for laypeople gathered in the presbytery, among whom Dante could count himself. Recent emphasis on 'the pilgrim's experience with the Eucharist'[39] has missed this important detail – namely, that that 'experience', at least where it concerns the Eucharistic Prayer, cannot have gone far beyond the Sanctus.[40] An early, exceptionally important MS witness of the *Commedia*, Rb, makes this clear: the opening of canto 7, and the first word 'Sanctus', is illuminated with the Elevation of the Host – the central moment of the later Canon or Eucharistic prayer.

[38] As Andrew Hughes describes the performance of the Eucharistic prayer in the middle ages: 'The commonest arrangement was perhaps the singing of the Sanctus and the first Osanna over the Canon prayers up to the consecration, and the Benedictus and second Osanna during the prayers after that solemn moment'. See Andrew Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office: A Guide to Their Organisation and Terminology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 89.
[39] Matthew Treherne, 'Ekphrasis and Eucharist: The Poetics of Seeing God's Art in Purgatorio X', *The Italianist*, 26 (2006), 177–96.
[40] As Theodor Klauser describes the practice of the Western Church after c. 1000: 'The Canon recited silently by the celebrant and the ideas which lay behind this custom, left their mark both on the outward appearance and on the inner sprit of the liturgy through the whole of the Middle Ages and their influence extended right into the period beyond'. See Theodor Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy: An Account and Some Reflections*, trans. by John Halliburton, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 96.

Figure 1: MS Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, AG.XII.2, fol. 22v (Dante Online <http://www.danteonline.it/> [accessed 27 Oct 2015]).

The Preface is said (according to the Roman Rite):

C: Dominus vobiscum.

> *R*: Et cum spiritu tuo.

C: Sursum corda.

> *R*: Habemus ad Dominum.

C: Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro.

*R***: Dignum et iustum est.**

C: **Vere dignum et iustum est,** aequum et salutare, nos tibi semper et ubique gratias agere: Domine sancte, Pater omnipotens, aeterne Deus: Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Per quem maiestatem tuam laudant Angeli, adorant Dominationes, tremunt Potestates. Caeli caelorumque Virtutes ac beata Seraphim socia exultatione concelebrant. Cum quibus et nostras voces ut admitti iubeas, deprecamur, supplici confessione dicentes:

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus

Dominus Deus Sabaoth.

Pleni sunt cæli et terra gloria tua.

Hosanna in excelsis.

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.

Hosanna in excelsis.[41]

The jussive subjunctive 'Gratias agamus' 'Let us give thanks' – in Greek εὐχαριστήσωμεν, whence 'Eucharist' – is followed by the phrase (in bold above) 'dignum et iustum est'. This merism expresses multiple conditions of sacrifice: that it is fitting or right so to do, that it must be done rightly or fittingly.[42] This fitting merism, 'dignum et iustum', which expresses the condition of Eucharistic action, then informs the precise lexis of *Paradiso* 7: 'giusta vendetta' (20, 50), 'giustamente' (20), 'sì giustamente morse' (42), 'giuste pene' (84), and then 'perché tal modo fu più degno' (63), 'in sua dignità mai non rivene' (82), 'da queste dignitadi' (86). The reference to the Preface at the beginning of the canto, then, discloses a precise site of enactment from which are drawn the canto's axial terms. At this point in the mass, too, we also find Paul's rhythmical language at the end of Romans 5 redeployed – his paralleling and antithetical clauses. On feast days, Proper Prefaces elaborate on the fittingness of salvation history, following the phrase 'dignum et iustum est' in the Preface, through balanced, antithetical clauses: 'Qui mortem nostrum moriendo destruxit', or 'et qui in ligno vincebat, in ligno quoque vinceretur', or again 'Quia cum Unigenitus tuus in substantia nostrae mortalitatis

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[41] Lineation is my own. Otherwise as in *L'ordinaire de la messe: texte critique, traduction et études*, ed. by Bernard Botte and Christine Mohrmann, Études Liturgiques (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1953), pp. 72–74.

[42] The relation of fittingness to sacrifice is considerably older than Christianity. It is also found in ancient Greek lyric, which uses the term πρέπον, a rough equivalent of *conveniens*: 'The honour must be "like," and therefore true to, the thing honoured. Suffice it to refer to the criterion governing the selection of sacrificial victims and to the *communicatio idiomatum* between what is though befitting to the godhead, on the one hand, and to the liturgical transactions of the witness, on the other – right down to the *dignum et iustum* of the Eucharistic prayer.' H. A. T. Reiche, 'Empirical Aspects of Xenophanes' Theology', in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed. by John. P Anton and George L. Kustas (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971), pp. 88–110 (p. 95).

apparuit, nova nos immortalitatis suae luce reparavit'.[43] The language of fittingness, 'dignum et iustum', but likewise the *conveniens* shape of that fittingness, provide precise points of contact between the poetry of the canto and the poetry of the Preface in the Mass.

In Horace's epistle, it was made clear that *convenientia* can be a relation of a person – an understanding supported by later theology of the Second Person. This provides an answer to the question as to why Beatrice does not simply argue the incarnation from the place of fittingness, but further imitates a rhythmical relation, expressive of that relation. This is to imitate the relation of 'la persona che sofferse' (*Par*. 7.44), even to enter into that 'dignum et iustum' relation which is both His sacrifice and, in the Mass, ours. A 'person' is, in this sense, bodied forth by the rhythmical condition of this canto – and if, by the canto's end, Beatrice declares that 'quinci puoi argomentare ancora / vostra resurrezion' (*Par*. 7.145-6), her own argument, in its turn, constitutes a kind of reperformance, or the repetition of a figure that is at once a shape of language and the form 'of the one to come'. While, then, shapes of rhythm might be resistant to singular interpretation, this rhythmical *interpretatio* – which indeed makes reference to authorities both secular and divine – is valuable on other grounds: it offers a relation, one which has argumentative force, and at the same time newly grounds aesthetic perceptions and the encounter with a figure, or 'person'.

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[43] *The Roman Missal, Translated into the English Language, for the Use of the Laity* (New York: William Creagh, 1822), pp. 285–86.

Conclusion

> intellectus speculativus extensione fit practicus, cuius finis est agere atque facere.
>
> Dante[1]

I said in my introduction that this thesis had two claims to make. The first was that re-used language is so pervasive in the *Commedia* as to constitute a generalisable condition – that this is, as Contini says, 'un dato che si documenti non da questo o quel luogo, ma dalla totalità dell'opera'.[2] This is proven by the core of this work – its examples – which in turn supplied a number of different frames of analysis in chapters 1, 2, and 4. The second claim I set out was that an account can be given for this pervasiveness in terms of the reading practices, and institutions that shaped them, with which medieval readers – and Dante among them – were familiar. This has been arrived at through a close, formal analysis, the stages of which I would like to revisit here.

Contini's critical object in 'Un'interpretazione di Dante', the 'figur[a] ritmic[a]', derives not directly from medieval sources, but from Paul Valéry. The anachronism here is worth looking at closely. Contini once wrote that the methodological innovations of Joseph Bédier were 'un riflesso degli eventi letterarî contemporanei' – a result of the 'scissione postromantica tra naturalismo e verismo da una parte, tra l'eredità di Flaubert e di Zola', and on the other hand, 'il versante simbolistico, da Baudelaire fino a Mallarmé'.[3] What the 'figur[a] ritmic[a]', as a reflex of modernity, proposes is, on the one hand, an independence and abstractness – 'valori puramente formali' – and on the other, an intimation of process: 'una

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[1] Dante, *Monarchia*, ed. by Paolo Chiesa and Andrea Tabarroni (Roma: Salerno, 2013), 1.3.9.
[2] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 78.
[3] Contini, *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 251.

considerazione dell'*atto* poetico', as Contini writes, which leads the critic to 'reperire direzioni, piuttosto che contorni fissi, dell'energia poetica'.

Contini's modernism proposes an '*atto* poetico'. And no 'act' is captured by a single exposure. As a result, this thesis has followed the notion of an act through its effects, proposing different diagrams for it along the way. *What* Dante's memory grasps, as he transforms it and makes new shapes of language, cannot easily be held still. It is not simply a word or a phrase, or a string of parts of speech. It is not a useful cadence, or a deictic phrase. It is not even words relevant for a context, theme, or a mood. The hunt for a memorial object has lead to new ideas of versification, and the interaction of syntax and rhythm – and even then, no simple object comes to the fore. What this work instead has done, is to replace, in a hunt for an object, a conception of object with process.

The dilation of a poetic object into process – a fundamentally Continian move – has occurred with the central terms of this study. Variants in the textual tradition extend past the distinction author/scribe, and 'echoes' – contaminatory, as well as 'di Dante entro Dante' – suggest a common synonymic kind of replacement. Memory, and a re-combinatory logic of parts and joins, relates a notion of performance back to a process of composition. *Auctoritas*, understood as a shape of language, which is shaped, in turn, by practices and institutions of reading, relates the interpretation of rhythmico-syntactical shapes to Dante's own production of them. 'Se il critico intende l'opera d'arte come un «oggetto»,' Contini wrote, 'ciò rappresenta soltanto l'oggettività del suo operare'.[4] In each case, this thesis has challenged representations of a textual object by specifying forms of re-turning, *torquere*, which connect inner relations in the poem to authorial, transmissional, and memorial processes that extend beyond it. Rhythm can disclose new relationships – as when hearing how a 'giusta vendetta / poscia vengiata fu da giusta corte', a shape of fittingness brings to bear, or to ear, Paul's

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[4] Contini, *Saggio d'un commento*, p. 7.

figuralism and the 'thanksgiving' of the Mass. At base, however, this work is addressed to readers of the poem now: it succeeds if it recommends a kind of thick listening, and a specific significance to the pressing-in of a shapely recollection in the 'while' of reading.

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