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Dante's Cato: *Libertà* and the Dialectic of Empires in the *Purgatorio*

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In *Paradiso*, the third canticle of Dante's *Commedia*, Dante the pilgrim meets the shade of the Roman emperor Justinian upon reaching the second heavenly sphere of Mercury. Justinian, serving as Dante's guide to the history of Italy throughout Canto 6, presents two paradoxical models of imperial history. The invocation of Aeneas, "l'antico che Lavina tolse," calls forth the Virgilian paradigm, in which the secular, linear movement of *translatio imperii* unfolds and legitimizes the heroic foundation of temporal empire (*Par.* 6.3).¹ The allusion to Justinian's codification of the law and the reference to the Eagle, the symbol of the Roman Empire that ruled "sotto l'ombra de le sacre penne," both indicate Dante's vision of a just and divinely-ordained imperial history (*Par.* 6.7). However, this canto also introduces the Augustinian philosophy of empire, which fiercely critiques the historiography of the *Aeneid* by representing empire as a site of violence and turbulence. References to the crimes that caused the "mal de le Sabine" and the "dolor di Lucrezia" (*Par.* 6.40–41) recall Augustine's catalog of charges against the earthly empire in his polemic *The City of God*, particularly in Books 1 and 2.² The ambivalent and contradictory notion of empire in this canto of *Paradiso* exemplifies the tension Dante perceives between two major authorities of his historical imagination throughout the entirety of the *Commedia*.

Dante constructs the dialectic of Virgilian and Augustinian imperial models by negotiating the vices of Italian politics and the virtues of his ideal temporal government long before his poetic persona reaches Paradise. The intermediate realm of *Purgatorio* demonstrates the sense of urgency with which the poet believes the empire—extending beyond the local commune of Florence and Italy itself, "serva Italia" (*Purg.* 6.76)—must be purged of injustice, as if the rivers of Lethe and Eunoe, which Dante's pilgrim finds in the Garden of Eden between purgation and paradise, could cleanse the empire itself. John A. Scott argues that *Purgatorio* responds to the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII's effort to reinvigorate imperial power in Italy in the early years of the fourteenth century.³ While Henry VII's mission ultimately failed as a result of his death in 1313, for Dante the effort itself reflected the potential for an ideal imperial model to become a reality within his lifetime. Dante's revisionary history, wherein the poet imagines the actualization of this ideal empire, culminates in Beatrice's recognition of the

noble Holy Roman Emperor Henry, “l’alto Arrigo,” in an honorable seat in the celestial realm (*Par.* 30.137).

The following pages focus on Cantos 1 and 2 of *Purgatorio* as they articulate Dante’s theory of ideal monarchy, complementing his Latin prose political treatise *De Monarchia*, and projecting the gradual formation of empire through the narrative action of the canticle. Dante explores forms of empire suggesting the gap between the poet’s actual political world and his abstractions of a universal empire willed by God and governed at Rome, “the heir of Troy, the mother of the Empire, the creator of the Latin *civilitas*, the unifier of the *genus humanum*.”⁴ The early cantos of *Purgatorio* establish earthly empire as a fundamental temporal structure within the scheme of sacred history.

In these opening scenes, Dante the pilgrim arrives in ante-Purgatory and meets the shade of Marcus Cato of Utica (95–46 BCE), the historical Roman statesman who guards the seven terraces of Purgatory from the shores of the mountain. In light of the various portraits of Cato in the historiographies that Dante inherited, including Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, I argue that Cato anticipates the moral and political purpose of this canticle: to model the ideal earthly *imperium* as a temporal setting that purifies the soul and draws the will toward the heavenly city.⁵ Reading Cato on a literal level would suggest that his death by suicide reflects his sinfulness. However, Dante envisions Cato allegorically, interpreting his suicide instead as a bold declaration of political failure in Rome. He assimilates Cato into his poetic call for political reform and freedom, re-imagining his suicide as the necessary form of resistance to Julius Caesar’s empire, predicated upon violent civil war. It is through the pursuit of “libertà” that Virgil connects Dante’s otherworldly journey to Cato’s experience (*Purg.* 1.71). Given that Cato’s suicide represents his fidelity to a political ideal realized on earth, Dante asks his readers to suspend judgment of what may initially appear to be Cato’s absolute, Augustinian rejection of empire. Cato thus foreshadows Dante’s more explicit calls for imperial *renovatio*, as in in the speech of Marco the Lombard on the purgatorial Terrace of Wrath. This figure suggests that true laws are yet to be administered properly but that the ideal, which has once existed, ultimately may be realized: “Soleva Roma, che ’l buon mondo feo, / due soli aver, che l’una e l’altra strada / facean vedere, e del mondo e di Deo” (*Purg.* 16.106–8). “La mala condotta” is responsible for the corruption of empire, but Dante’s intermittent focus on alternative temporal rulers, such as Cato or the Emperor Henry VII, represents the possibility for reform and ultimately for an empire governed by a spiritually-inclined ruler enacting God’s justice on earth (*Purg.* 16.103).

Furthermore, while Cato symbolizes moral and political free will, his role is not merely allegorical: as I will show, Cato transforms the abstract principles of empire into a reality, actively critiquing the wayward souls of Dante’s poetic *peregrinatio* as a means of correcting the will and, metaphorically, the empire. Cato ensures the teleological directionality of Purgatory, the only temporal realm of

the three that Dante the pilgrim traverses, in which the souls who slowly ascend the mountain toward earthly paradise reflect repentantly upon past errors and anticipate the fulfillment of future desires in the pursuit of self-restoration. Their participation within a communal movement toward a divine *telos* models the Aristotelian conception of governance in *Politics* and in Dante's own *Monarchia*. In both texts, the totality of mankind partakes in a single collective enterprise to construct the optimal earthly order and, ultimately, freedom.⁶

The opening of *Purgatorio* abounds with resurrectional motifs signifying Dante's entrance into a world that moves him toward the *telos* of Paradise. The exordium to Canto 1 offers the image of a little ship leaving behind a "mar. . . crudele" for "quel secondo regno" (*Purg.* 1.3–4). The movement of "la navicella" across the water both literalizes and metaphorizes the soul's progress toward salvation, away from sin (*Purg.* 1.2). Here, the sea symbolizes the experience of baptism and anticipates an active landscape that purifies the soul which has been given a second chance, "dove l'umano spirito si purga / e di salire al ciel diventa degno" (*Purg.* 1.5–6). Dante shapes the classical *topoi* of this grand incipit to emphasize renewal, as well: "Ma qui la morta poesi resurga, / o sante Muse, poi che vostro sono" (*Purg.* 1.7–8). The regenerative potential of poetic language itself resurrects the imperative for an aesthetic program complementing the ethical mission of Dante's journey. Having left the subject of the souls deadened and static in Hell, this early canto of *Purgatorio* prepares for the poetry of repentant souls in ascending motion. In its ekphrastic opening verses, the pilgrim-poet expresses his delight in the new polychromatic setting of this middle place by describing it in the terms of rebirth; for instance, the hue "d'oriental zaffiro" coloring the sky contains the Latin root *oriens*, referring to the cosmological image of the rising sun (*Purg.* 1.13).⁷ The scene of renewal in the natural world moves Dante, in a moment of Boethian illumination, to clear his eyes of "l'aura morta" that clouded them in hell, and to open them to his future journey (*Purg.* 1.17).⁸

The pilgrim shifts his perspective from the Southern hemispheric pole to the Northern pole, but his gaze is interrupted abruptly by the statuesque figure of Cato. Before identifying him by name, Dante characterizes Cato in reverential terms: "vidi presso di me un veglio solo, / degno di tanta reverenza in vista, / che più non dee a padre alcun figliuolo" (*Purg.* 1.29–33). Framing this stranger within the resurrectional language he uses to describe the natural world of this canto, Dante illustrates him as an image of divine grace. The four stars standing for the four cardinal virtues of Catholicism illuminate Cato's face ("di lume") so that he appears to shine like the sun ("come 'l sol") (*Purg.* 1.38–9). According to Jeremy Tambling, Cato's identification with the four stars confirms his allegorical presentation: "He is like Moses, or Christ, in Revelation 1.14–16; a semi-divine patriarch imposing reverence on a son, a figure whose white hair and its length implies mourning, loss, and suffering for mankind."⁹ Dante also conceives of Cato as a virtuous pagan, typologically connected to Old and New Testament figures,

in the *Convivio*, when he asks rhetorically, “E quale uomo terreno più degno fu di significare Iddio, che Catone? Certo nullo” (*Conv.* 4.28). The allegorically-veiled opening characterization of Cato in *Purgatorio* reflects Dante’s favorable understanding of Cato and vision of a theologized classical past, an antiquity synchronized with salvation history.¹⁰

Cato, who guards the mountain from ante-Purgatory, is associated with a new law. Still unknown to the pilgrim who has just arrived, he proves his position of moral authority by interrogating Dante and Virgil about the reason for their appearance:

‘Chi siete voi che contro al cieco fiume,
fuggita avete la pregione eterna?
diss’ el, movendo quelle oneste piume.

‘Chi v’ha guidati, o che vi fu lucerna,
uscendo fuor de la profonda notte
che sempre nera fa la valle inferna?

Son le leggi d’abisso così rotte?
o è mutato in ciel novo consiglio,
che, dannati, venite a le mie grotte?’

Purg. 1.40–48

Cato’s assumption that Virgil and Dante have escaped the infernal region furtively and broken the law of God disquiets him. However, Virgil’s immediate response identifying him as Cato creates an equal degree of readerly skepticism, this time concerning the reasons for *Cato’s* appearance in ante-Purgatory:

Or ti piaccia gradir la sua venuta:
libertà va cercando, ch’è sì cara,
come sa chi per lei vita rifiuta.

Tu ’l sai, ché non ti fu per lei amara
in Utica la morte, ove lasciasti
la vesta ch’al gran dì sarà sì chiara.

Purg. 1.70–75

The reference to Cato’s death in Utica justifies in a certain sense his position as the judge of Virgil and Dante’s journey. The historical Cato was a Stoic who opposed the first *de facto* emperor of Rome, Julius Caesar, so ardently that he committed suicide during the civil war between Caesar and Pompey to avoid being subjected to Caesar’s command. Virgil suggests a parallel between Cato’s “un-bitter” (*non. . . amara*) death and the conscious search for freedom (*libertà*) in the realm of Purgatory. Using his knowledge of Cato’s earthly past, Virgil

makes a tactical appeal to Cato's political and moral values in a gesture of *captatio benevolentiae* (*Purg.* 1.73, 71).

Dante brings up the symbolism implicit in Cato's suicide for reasons extending far beyond Virgil's play of flattery. Virgil's evocation of Cato's history invites questions about Cato's ability to transcend the seventh circle of Hell, which punishes suicides, and Limbo, which confines the most virtuous of pagans and the most celebrated of Dante the poet's literary forerunners, with the exception of Statius, whose redemption is heard in the earthquake in *Purgatorio* 20 and whose shade appears in the subsequent canto to accompany Dante to earthly paradise. However, the fact that Cato's suicide does not condemn him to Hell, but rather entitles him to an authoritative role in ante-Purgatory, conflicts with the ostensibly absolute mandate for punishment of suicides. In the seventh circle of Hell, suicides and squanderers, those who committed violence against their own possessions, have been transformed into gnarled trees. Dante shivers at the sight of these sinners, who experience the pain of dismemberment with each branch that is broken, a perfect punishment because bodily integrity, by contrast, signifies spiritual wholeness (*Inf.* 13.127–29). The slow, torturous process of being torn apart visualizes the suicide's narcissistic withdrawal from the social whole and the historical community. The suicide betrays the public good and commits, according to Giuseppe Mazzotta, a "sin of false transcendence."¹¹ In *Inferno* 34, Dante dramatizes the punishment of another suicide, Brutus. The historical Brutus was like Cato: an opponent of Caesar, a pagan Stoic, and a suicide. The ostensible similarities between Brutus and Cato expose the odd, paradoxical decision to have Cato alone transcend the mouth of Lucifer. In Judecca, the fourth ring of the ninth circle of Hell, Dante and Virgil see Lucifer chewing on the bodies of Brutus, Cassius, and Judas, splitting them into pieces without killing them, ensuring a perpetual state of torture. While the poet constructs the harshest of sentences for Brutus, he grants Cato guardianship of the domain that cleanses and revives souls.

Cato's position may have appeared inconsistent also because a certain medieval tradition interpreted Cato as cowardly and treasonous. In Book 5 of *The City of God*, Augustine criticizes Cato's pursuit of honors he should not have sought, and in Book 19, he complains of Cato's lack of fortitude, the virtue that Augustine argues enables an individual to endure the ills and misfortunes of human experience.¹² Exemplary of the Stoics, whom Augustine characterizes in terms of their "fracta superbiae cervice" (stiff-necked pride), Cato disregards the virtue of fortitude, as well as patience, by committing suicide.¹³ Augustine writes, "non enim hoc fecisset, nisi victoriam Caesaris impatienter tulisset" (for he would not have done this had he not been unable to bear the victory of Caesar).¹⁴ This perspective complicates Dante's choice to make Cato a spiritual guardian for the arriving souls in Purgatory.

Dante undoubtedly inherited associations of Cato with sin, but he departs from them in Cantos 1 and 2 by conceptualizing Cato as a source of inspiration to the souls in Purgatory and a symbol of the free will essential to their progress through this middle realm. Cato, while a figure of pagan antiquity, is recognized for his significant role in both the imperial and Christian schema. For Dante, his suicide proclaimed his refusal to live under an emperor, Caesar, whom he believed opposed the original values of the Roman Republic and who, to Cato's credit, contributed to the demise of the Republic and the rise of the Roman Empire following Cato's death. Thus, paradoxically, Cato's suicide explains his resurrection in Purgatory, signifying his voluntary and adamant self-removal from a political order depriving human beings of their freedom, and in Dante's terms, from a historical moment violating the providential plan. Dante here makes Cato's suicide an exception to the rule, framing it as self-sacrifice and a declaration of political and moral freedom. In a discussion of exemplary Romans in his *Monarchia*, he defends Cato by presenting his suicide as a necessary choice given the hostile conditions of his historical era:

Accedunt nunc ille sacratissime victime Deciorum, qui pro salute publica devotas animas posuerunt, ut Livius, non quantum est dignum, sed quantum potest glorificando renarrat; accedit et illud inenarrabile sacrificium severissimi vere libertatis auctoris Marci Catonis: quorum alteri pro salute patrie mortis tenebras non horruerunt; alter, ut mundo libertatis amores accenderet, quanti libertas esset ostendit dum e vita liber decedere maluit quam sine libertate manere in illa.

(Now add to their number those most holy victims, the Decii, who laid down their lives dedicated to the salvation of the community, as Livy relates to their glory, not in terms worthy of them but as best he can; and that sacrifice (words cannot express it) of the most stern guardian of liberty, Marcus Cato. The former for the deliverance of their fatherland did not recoil from the shadows of death; the latter, in order to set the world afire with love of freedom, showed the value of freedom when he preferred to die a free man rather than remain alive without freedom.)

Mon. 2.5.15

Providing a context that helps to martyr Cato, Dante also cites Cicero's *De Officiis*, which characterizes Cato's death as the way to avoid facing tyranny: "moriendum ei potius quam tyranni vultus adspiciendus fuit" (it was fitting that he should die rather than set eyes on the face of the tyrant) (*Mon.* 2.5.17). The description of Cato in *Monarchia* suggests that Cato worried not for the threat of

empire, but rather for the threat that Caesar's rule would undermine the strong tradition of the Roman Republic and the freedom of the Roman people.

Dante's image of Cato bears comparison to the portrayals of him found in the writings of Cicero, Seneca, and especially Lucan, who emphasizes Cato's patriotism and emphasis on political liberty. In his *Pharsalia*, or *De Bello Civili*, which details the collapse of Rome caused by the Roman Civil War, Lucan relates Cato's articulation of his loyalty to a former Rome and his sense of grief over the loss of freedom implicit in Caesar's victory: "Non ante reuellar / Exanimem quam te conplectar, Roma; tuumque / Nomen, Libertas, et inanem persequar umbram" (I will not be hauled back before I embrace you, lifeless Rome! I will walk to your grave, Liberty, mourn your name, your insubstantial shade).¹⁵ Lucan dramatizes Cato's Stoic commitment to political liberty and, just as urgently, he portrays Caesar as a treacherous villain, mad for violence and war. Lucan implies that the rivalry and tyranny created by Caesar contravene natural laws when he offers justification for Cato's opposition not only to Caesar but also to life itself:

Hi mores, haec duri immota Catonis
Secta fuit, servare modum, finemque tenere,
Naturamque sequi, patriaeque impendere vitam;
Nec sibi, sed toti genitum se credere mundo.

(This was the manner, this the unshakeable creed of stern Cato—to seek the mean and fix a limit, to respect Natural Order and repay his land with his life, to believe he was born to serve not himself, but the whole world.)¹⁶

For Lucan, Cato's suicide is the consequence of a state destroyed by rivalry, the corruption of the collective political entity, rather than a single individual, even if that individual is representative of the state.

Augustine represents Cato as cowardly and dismissive of the advice of his wise friends, but it is Lucan's portrayal of Cato that seems to have shaped Dante's portrait of him in *Monarchia*. This treatise demonstrates the centrality of political leadership to Dante's model of governance: "Si denique unum regnum particulare, cuius finis est qui civitatis cum maiore fiducia sue tranquillitatis, oportet esse regem unum qui regat atque gubernet" (Lastly, if we consider an individual kingdom—and the purpose of a kingdom is the same as that of a city, but with greater confidence that peace can be maintained—there must be one king who rules and governs) (*Mon.* I.V.8). In Book 2, Dante echoes Lucan's Cato by suggesting that nature, or God's handiwork or art, organizes people and therefore establishes the law, but that political corruption confuses the natural order, disrupting lawful communities and their sense of collectivity. Dante explains that monarchy creates freedom when the laws exist for the sake of the citizens. In

this context, Cato's life shows how the perversion of monarchical power, by contrast, eradicates individual freedom and communal harmony. Reiterating Lucan's praise of Cato as "urbi pater. . .urbique maritus: justitiae cultor; [et] rigidi servitor honesti" (the City's father. . .and the City's bridegroom, guardian of Justice; [and] rigorous Honesty's champion)¹⁷, Dante exonerates Cato from the crime of suicide that in different circumstances would damn him to Hell and envisions the Stoic suicide as a model of Roman patriotism, but *pro patria mori* for an ideal Rome, rather than what he believes is the corrupt Rome of his historical moment. Cato's defiance by suicide shows the extent to which Dante values audacious claims to political liberty in contexts of violent or fractious rule.

Monarchia discusses Cato in his historical context, but it also de-historicizes him, using him to model the idea that a leader should govern using laws directed toward the common good: "quorum unum est quod quicumque bonum rei publice intendit finem iuris intendit" (whoever has the good of the community as his goal has the achievement of right as his goal) (*Mon.* 2.5.18–19). In the *Commedia*, too, Dante abstracts Cato's literal act and emphasizes the allegorical significance of his suicide. Thus, while Brutus, Cassius, and Cato historically are all stalwart defenders of the Roman Republic in defiance of Caesar, Dante's poem absolves only Cato of blame. Cato's faith in and nostalgia for an empire revived of the values of the original Republic distinguish him from the two Roman antagonists whom Dante shows hanging from Lucifer's mouth in Hell.

In *Purgatorio*, Dante resurrects Cato to mark Purgatory not only as the domain of freedom and moral law, but also as a space of spiritual renewal. Dante theologizes Cato's suicide: as Robert Hollander points out, Cato's death functions typologically as a precursor of Christ's death, a Christian self-sacrifice for his immediate temporal community and all of humanity.¹⁸ Dante may have been familiar with a commentary that transformed Cato into a virtuous pagan; according to Pietro di Dante's 1340 gloss, Christ harrowed Cato from hell, and the Holy Spirit inspired Cato to take vows to Christ and repent.¹⁹ Whether or not this gloss accurately reflects Dante's interpretation, in the *Commedia*, Cato transcends the limitations of his pagan status precisely by his suicidal act. Dante purifies Cato's suicide, transforming his narrative into an *exemplum* of martyrdom.²⁰ The right to "libertà" that Cato guards in Purgatory thus makes him an appropriate figure in the poem's early symbolic context of spiritual rebirth.

Dante emphasizes the theological reading of Cato as a spiritual exile by associating him with the passengers' recitation of Psalm 113 upon arrival at the purgatorial shores in Canto 2. The pilgrim listens as more than one hundred souls carried by the angel's boat to Purgatory sing in unison, beginning with the lyric, "In exitu Israël de Aegypto" (*Purg.* 2.46). Evoking a sense of dislocation, the souls who sing of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt themselves enter the condition of spiritual exile: unacquainted with "la via" of the new island, they arrive wandering and disoriented, "selvaggia pareva del loco" (*Purg.* 2.60, 52–3). Just as Cato

represents Roman liberty, the Israelites convey the value of freedom in Judaism, and the new *peregrin*-souls sing of the emancipation from slavery as they enter the domain representing specifically moral freedom. In these episodes, the parallel evocations of liberty and exile evoke the displacement from history, a challenging but necessary stage of the soul's progress toward divine grace.²¹

Virgil transmits history in a narrative of Aeneas's passage from Troy to Rome, but in the early cantos of *Purgatorio*, Dante jabs at the Virgilian idea of imperial continuity and sympathizes with Cato, who rejects the promise of history and empire through suicide. By staging his pilgrim-surrogate's pursuit of liberty and effort to make his will "libero," "dritto," and "sano," Dante adds meaning to his own position of political exile, during which he composed the *Commedia* (*Purg.* 27.140). In addition, Dante insinuates a comparison between himself and the Roman statesman, who freely chooses to exile himself from political history. Like Cato's, Dante's exile detaches him from his political-moral climate; for the poet, it is the Florence suffering from violent factionalism at the end of the thirteenth century. During this period, on the imperial scale, Dante feared the meddling of the papacy in the emperor's temporal jurisdiction, but even at the local level in Florence, he witnessed and experienced the effects of the corruption of Pope Boniface VIII. With the vacancy of the empire, the Church, through Boniface, had taken its seat and established its own form of imperialism.²² Dante, whose exile was a consequence of Boniface's interventions, subtly objects to the papal seizure of temporal power throughout the *Commedia*, as in *Paradiso* 30. In this canto, Beatrice alludes to the wily designs of Pope Clement V, who feigned a friendship with Henry VII but secretly worked to undermine the emperor's attempts to create unity among the cities under his jurisdiction. Beatrice says that Clement V will find Simon Magus, whose story explains the Catholic sin of simony, in the Malebolge of Hell and, reinforcing the prediction made by Pope Nicholas III in *Inferno* 19, that he will push Boniface, "quel d'Alagna," deeper into his hole of punishment (*Par.* 30.148).

Dante may have used this context of moral, religious, and political corruption as an opportunity to transform his exile from Florence into a spiritually meaningful experience. According to Mazzotta, Dante "makes of exile a virtue and a necessary perspective from which to speak to the world and from which he can challenge its expectations and assumptions."²³ Exile not only fits into Dante's theology, but also helps Dante develop a distanced political viewpoint clarifying his understanding of the actual and ideal forms of governance. The poet's loss of an urban framework broadens his knowledge of problems beyond the local; his new spatial expansionism correlates with the wider, theoretical understanding of political experience. Dante therefore addresses the limitations of empire not only through concrete references to local figures, but also abstractly through the implications of Cato's guardianship of Purgatory. Dante associates temporal politics with death; exile is a last expedient to escape imperial corruption. To choose

self-expulsion over life within an empire like Caesar's or a political atmosphere like Dante's suggests a refusal to live on earth without the temporal order maintained by the ideal *imperium*.

By asserting the superiority of Cato's guidance to Virgil's in the early cantos of *Purgatorio*, Dante further undercuts Virgil's model of empire. Despite Augustine's disparagement of Cato in *The City of God*, Cato acquires an Augustinian voice in ante-Purgatory because he, too, expresses the sense of loss in empire. Augustine distinguished between the earthly city and the heavenly city, as Dante did, but he did not believe the temporal world could be assimilated to the world of God because of its corruption and decay. According to R.A. Markus, for Augustine, "human life became a chronic conflict between sin and grace, and history the theatre in which this conflict was played out on a large scale."²⁴ While Augustine was concerned with social order, and the government as a means to preserve it, his *City of God* dismisses the possibility of restoring a fallen humanity through it. Revealing an exclusively theological rather than political purpose, *The City of God* views the political, earthly city in terms of fratricide, and the earthly order as fallen, in a perpetual state of chaos and disarray. In Book I, for instance, Augustine explains the corrupt nature of the earthly city, "de terrena civitate, quae cum dominari adpetit, etsi populi serviant, ipsa ei dominandi libido dominator, non est praetereundum silentio quidquid dicere suscepti huius operis ratio postulat si facultas datur" (that city which, when it seeks master, is itself mastered by the lust for mastery even though all the nations serve it).²⁵ Augustine records tumultuous civil divisions resembling those described by Lucan; both *The City of God* and the *Pharsalia* undermine Virgil's celebration of a secular teleology predicated upon imperial foundation and Golden Age empire. Augustine, in particular, dismisses his commitments to an eternal Rome, reimagining the secular, antique past as a temporality to be forgotten.

Nevertheless, the imperial dialectic persists as Dante alternately privileges and undercuts both the Augustinian vision and the Virgilian philosophy at various moments in *Purgatorio*. The assumption that souls are inclined to sin in *The City of God* shapes Cato's law-giving in ante-Purgatory. However, Dante also invites his readers to interpret Cato exegetically and on more than one level; the idealism implicit in the historical Cato's suicide suggests that the secular historical world contains particular elements that contravene Augustine's notion of a perverse and sullied earthly city. In this sense, Cato is a model comparable to the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII, who failed to achieve the political ideal during his lifetime but whom Dante nevertheless uses in *Paradiso* to represent hope for an improved earthly order. The representation of Cato as a leader in Purgatory suggests that Dante sacralizes Cato's loyalty to a particular political order complementing the process of Christian redemption. Synthesizing two sides of Dante's polemic of empire, Cato rejects the empire of his historical moment, but his free will and his ideal vision of the Roman *imperium* express the potential for a natural, secular

historical world capable of manifesting a political ideal. His suicide dramatizes his contempt for the figures that perpetuate the decay and malfunction of empire, but it also necessitates the charge to create a future of spiritual and political unity.

Cato thus does not function merely to inspire reflection upon the errors of past empire. The moral and political “libertà” he stands for defines his active purpose in Dante’s otherworldly journey. In ante-Purgatory, Cato aims to direct the wills of the arriving souls toward God, and thus to clear the path from enslavement to liberty, which Dante rearticulates later in *Paradiso* when he praises Beatrice’s guidance: “Tu m’hai di servo tratto a libertate / per tutte quelle vie, per tutt’ i modi / che di ciò fare avei la potestate” (*Par.* 31.85–7). Cato bridges the gap between Christian truth and the classical vision, determining the journey of the pilgrim’s soul in Purgatory as a purely ethical and spiritual purification process.

Cato’s stern treatment of Virgil and his lack of tolerance for Virgil’s flattery characterize him first and foremost as a man of laws. Virgil attempts to appeal to Cato’s memory of earthly love when he mentions Cato’s wife, Marcia. However, this gesture exposes Virgil’s Christian misunderstanding, a reminder of why Virgil is not in the same privileged position in Purgatory as Cato is. Virgil believes that reminding Cato of a pleasant memory will revoke concerns about their arrival just as powerfully as the mention of Beatrice helps him to grant their stay:

Non son li editti eterni per noi guasti,
ché questi vive e Minòs me non lega;
ma son del cerchio ove son li occhi casti

di Marzia tua, che ’n vista ancor ti priega,
o santo petto, che per tua la tegni:
per lo suo amore adunque a noi ti piega.

Lasciane andar per li tuoi sette regni;
grazie riporterò di te a lei,
se d’esser mentovato là giù degni.

Purg. 1.76–84

Despite Virgil’s efforts, however, this scene shows the absence of reciprocity in his exchange with Cato. Cato refuses the temptations of earthly love, presented through the dramatic rhetoric of love, purging his memory of erotic loss and concentrating on the sense of the future. Cato here represents Dante’s idea in *Monarchia* that legislators in the ideal realm of governance exist for the sake of the collective; a moment of indulgence in Marcia would distract Cato from the collective enterprise, potentially obstructing his ability to safeguard the proper government of the purgatorial realm. Thus, defensive of his own power of judgment, Cato responds firmly:

Marzia piacque tanto a li occhi miei
 mentre ch'i' fu' di là. . .
 che quante grazie volse da me, fei.

Or che di là dal mal fiume dimora,
 più muover non mi può, per quella legge
 che fatta fu quando me n'usci' fora.

Purg. I, 85–90

Cato's speech calls attention to the difference between *eros* and *agape*, forms of love that frame the individual's progress toward a particular end. While Cato focuses on the love for God, this scene implies that Virgil favors *eros*, a love bound to history, recalling his *Aeneid*, which stages *eros* as a driving influence of imperial foundation, and a *topos* as relevant as prophecy to the futurity of the hero's journey. In this context, it is no surprise that in *Purgatorio* Virgil's method of persuasion depends on the power of an affective bond between former lovers. Distinguishing himself from the Roman guide, however, Cato dismisses Virgil's appeal, consciously separating himself from his historical past. The guard refuses to imitate the mythological poet Orpheus, who glances backward at his lost lover Eurydice, or even the historical Dante, who records his former earthly passion and nostalgia for Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova* before completing the *Commedia*.

In *Purgatorio*, Dante thus revises the figure of Cato described in the fourth treatise of *Convivio*, in which the story of Cato and Marcia reveals the tragic limitations of the earthly love central to Virgil's epic narrative. In Dante's allegorical reading of Cato's history, Marcia transitions from Youth ("la gioventute") to Old Age ("la senetutte") when she abandons her marriage with Cato to wed another man, Hortensius, and her return to Cato after she is widowed typifies the act of turning to God in Extreme Old Age ("per che si significa la nobile anima dal principio del senio tornare a Dio") (*Conv.* 4.28). As Dante records in *Convivio*, Cato allows Marcia back into his life after her affair, returning to his former love.

When Dante places Cato in ante-Purgatory, he revises the decisions that he describes Cato making in *Convivio*. Cato now refuses to indulge in the temptations of the past, recognizing that, in Purgatory, the soul must repurpose mortal love to impel the course of spiritual development. Whereas both Virgil and Cato respond to the orders given by Beatrice, the Lady of Heaven, their different approaches to love reveal that it is only Cato between them who comprehends the new law of Purgatory. As Robert Hollander notes, "Virgil has relied upon the power of the spiritually dead when he should have appealed to that of the saved."²⁶ Virgil's attempt to assuage Cato—his belief that he, a figure damned to Limbo, might affect the spirit of the guardian of Purgatory and precisely through earthly appeals—is a reminder that he belongs not to the purgatorial region, but to the infernal region, and that his limited authority will require Dante to redirect his attention to other sources of guidance.

Through his rejoinder to Virgil's appeal, Cato refocuses Dante's journey on the ascent from the pit of Hell, up the Mountain of Purgatory, and to the heights of Heaven. As a symbol of free will, a prefiguration of Christ, and a guard of Purgatory, Cato defines this middle world as a locus of redemption, returning wayward yet hopeful souls to an Edenic origin by activating their transformation of earthly love into forms of spiritual devotion. Cato's rejection of temporal bonds recalls Augustine's process of conversion in which he turns his desire into the *delectatio* for God. Augustine famously pores over the erotic history of the *Aeneid* in his *Confessions*. He concludes that sexual experience estranges an individual from God, forcing the self into a state of conflict between the desire to please God and the desire to indulge in sinful pleasures. Augustine's perception of a corrupt mortal body and realm reappears in *The City of God*, in which Augustine distinguishes between the goods separating an individual's yearning for God from the desire for earthly pleasure: "Sic enim corporis pulchritudo, a Deo quidem factum, sed temporale carnale infimum bonum, male amatur postposito Deo, aeterno interno sempiterno bono" (Bodily loveliness, though made by God, is nevertheless temporal, carnal, and a lowly good; it is wrongly loved if it is valued above God, the eternal, inward and lasting good).²⁷ Augustine thus establishes a hierarchy of forms of love insisting on the superiority of *agape*.

Conscious of the split between forms of love within Christian theology and Augustine's text, and of the need to channel mortal love into spiritual love, Dante translates the earthly lady of the *Vita Nuova* into an object of divine affection in the *Commedia*. In the latter, Dante's obedience to Beatrice's command represents his love for God, which drives him toward his spiritual redemption. Virgil and Cato's conversation about Marcia offers an analogy to Dante's exploration of the forms of love across his works. Cato temporarily recalls the pleasure he took in Marcia's gaze. The rhetoric of the eyes invokes the convention of courtly love lyric, indebted to the tradition of Ovid, in which love for the lady enters through the eyes and moves to the heart. Nevertheless, Cato ultimately refuses to yield to the memory of his former wife, quickly redirecting his attention to the Lady of Heaven. For Cato, as for Augustine, the inward search and processes of anamnesis lead to the discovery of God, rather than the recollection of the *imagines* of a tangible, corporeal past.

Soon after the conversation between Cato and Virgil, Cato commands Virgil and Dante to begin the process of physical cleansing accompanying and metaphorizing spiritual purgation on Mount Purgatory. He orders Virgil to use a straight reed to gird Dante and to wash Dante's face ("fa che tu costui ricinghe / d'un giunco schietto e che li lavi 'l viso") (*Purg.* 1.95). Cato returns to the subject of "l'occhio" raised earlier by Virgil, only to insist that they must not be clouded, "d'alcuna nebbia, andar dinanzi al primo / ministro, ch'è di quei di paradiso" (*Purg.* 1.98–9). Emphasizing Cato's spiritual authority, his speech recalls a critical scene at the beginning of the allegorical prosimetrum *Consolatio*

Philosophiae, written by the late antique philosopher Boethius. In Book I, Prosa 2, the allegorical Lady Philosophy visits Boethius in his sickroom, and describes his condition of suffering: “paulisper lumina eius mortalium rerum nube caligantia tergamus” (for a moment his eyes are dimmed by the clouds of mortal things).²⁸ Applying the folds of her dress to his face to dry his tears, Lady Philosophy improves Boethius’s physical vision: “Tunc me discussa liquerunt nocte tenebrae / Luminibusque prior rediit vigor” (Then was the night dispersed, and darkness left me; My eyes grew strong again).²⁹ In clarifying his physical vision, though, Lady Philosophy also metaphorically heightens Boethius’s insight into an understanding of divine matters. Similarly, in Dante’s *Purgatorio*, the soul’s process of clarifying his literal vision symbolizes his changing conception of heaven. In an allegorical reading, Cato’s Boethian emphasis on cleansing the eyes invites Dante to begin his spiritual transformation.

In Canto 2, as Virgil and Dante begin to progress from the shores of ante-Purgatory to the mount, Dante reinforces Cato’s spiritual authority. Here, he stages a tension not only between Cato and Virgil, but also between Cato and the shade of Casella. After reuniting with Casella, revealing the friendship Dante and Casella once shared, Dante recalls the love lyrics that Casella used to sing, and requests for him to sing one more time to help soothe Dante’s soul, which, through his limbs, feels tired from his arduous journey:

...Se nuova legge non ti toglie
 memoria o uso a l’amoroso canto
 che mi solea quetar tutte mie doglie,

di ciò ti piaccia consolare alquanto,
 l’anima mia, che, con la sua persona
 venendo qui, è affannata tanto!

Purg. 2.106–11

Casella complies with Dante’s desire, and captivates his audience:

‘Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona,’
 cominciò elli allor sì dolcemente,
 che la dolcezza ancor dentro mi suona.

Lo mio maestro e io e quella gente
 ch’eran con lui parevan sì contenti,
 come a nessun toccasse altro la mente.

Noi eravam tutti fissi e attenti
 a le sue note.

Purg. 2.112–18

The musician's lyric elicits a moment of aesthetic pleasure suspending the temporal progress of the pilgrim-souls, who have only just ascended the shores of Purgatory, toward God.

However, in Cato's eyes, Casella's song distracts them from their teleological purpose. Cato interrupts the song as well as the souls beginning to form an audience for Casella:

Che è ciò, spiriti lenti?

qual negligenza, quale stare è questo?
Correte al monte a spogliarvi lo scoglio
ch'esser non lascia a voi Dio manifesto

Purg. 2.120–23

Cato's speech dismantles a community that he believes clashes with the kind of spiritual community encouraged in the process of purgation, one better embodied by the pilgrims who chant Psalm 113 in unison. The contrast between Casella's lyric and Psalm 113, sung at the beginning of the canto, indeed magnifies the tension between the ethical and aesthetic functions of song in the journey toward God. The useful, ethical, and collective performance of the Psalm propels the forward motion of the ship to the island of Purgatory, as well as the metaphorical journey of ascent toward the Christian eschaton. This double movement mirrors the temporal progression of Purgatory. By contrast, Casella's song brings the souls to a physical halt, enticing them into rapt admiration and wonder for what Cato constructs as a mistaken ideal and a sign of "negligenza" (*Purg.* 2.121). In his view, the proper *admiratio* does not truly appear until *Paradiso*, where divine vision produces wonder and a heightened consciousness of God. Indeed, Casella's eloquence induces in Dante an experience of bodily pleasure and relaxation, suspending the labor necessary to spiritual improvement on Mount Purgatory. In his discussion of medieval attitudes toward aesthetic and specifically literary pleasure, Glending Olson writes on one prevalent perspective: "to respond to a text only for the pleasure it gives is to misspend one's time; the pleasure, rather, should lie in the satisfactions of using literature to further one's understanding of right action or right belief."³⁰ According to this tradition, Casella's song distracts the souls from making the proper use of time in Purgatory.

In this scene, the Augustinian economies of love inform Cato's authoritative role. In Book I of Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, for instance, the image of a pilgrim who wanders to reach the fatherland exemplifies the mortal condition, that is, the earthly pilgrimage toward the ultimate good in heaven.³¹ Augustine prefaces this allegory with a statement of the distinction between things which are to be enjoyed ("res. . . aliae sunt quibus fruendum est") and things which are to be used ("aliae quibus utendum").³² According to Augustine, the journey toward God requires the individual's conscious obedience to the rules of enjoyment and

use, given that the natural mortal inclination is to travel away from God (“in huius mortalitatis vita peregrinantes a domino”).³³ The enjoyment of that which is not God delays or entirely impedes one’s upright and teleological path.

The Augustinian interpretive tradition becomes particularly pertinent to Canto 2 in *Purgatorio*, as Cato interrupts Casella’s song because it contemplates mortal *eros*, rather than reflecting on the love of God (*agape*). Dante’s *Purgatorio* once more refashions Augustine’s confession narrative, in which the affair between Dido and Aeneas temporarily thwarts the narrator’s focus on the desire for God, and in which the temptation to indulge in *amor sui* (self-love) prevents the emancipation of the self from earth-bound preoccupations.³⁴ Casella’s song constructs an experience of pleasure for the listening souls founded in corporeal and material, rather than eternal and spiritual, subjects. Thus, it raises the dilemma central to Augustine’s argument in *De Doctrina Christiana*. Returning to Augustine’s distinction between use and enjoyment, Casella’s song of love undermines the “nuova legge” of God, thwarting the destiny of the souls (*Purg.* 2.106). Casella, collapsed with the song he sings, represents the drastic effect an individual can have on the misdirection of the social totality, and allegorically, the empire. Cato’s rebuke causes the souls to flee quickly, like frightened doves (“li colombi. . .paura”) (*Purg.* 2.125, 127). By recalling the doves in the story of Paolo and Francesca in *Inferno* V, Cato’s simile represents “the insatiability of human desire quite accurately by placing the will and the apparent object of its desire at opposite poles.”³⁵

To the Augustinian Cato, the suspension of literal movement represents a regression into the earthly past. Casella’s lyric recalls a mortal experience, evoking Virgil’s recent invocation of Cato’s Marcia, and meditates on a memory not yet purged by Lethe. Unlike Cato, who abandons his nostalgia for Marcia under the new law, both Dante, who recalls a time when earthly lyric could calm him, and Casella, endowed with the *memoria* to revive the song, cling to the past; they forget, rather, the new law. Again evoking elements of the Virgilian imperial narrative, the image of Dante and Virgil enraptured by a secular song of the past evokes representations of Aeneas gazing on illustrations that stimulate his memory of former experiences.³⁶ For example, in an ekphrastic scene in Book I of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas interprets the mural painted on the wall for Dido and the Carthaginians. Remembering the events of the Trojan War from his own perspective, Aeneas displays his affective responses to the tragic details of Troy’s fall: “Sic ait atque animum pictura pascit inani / multa gemens, largoque umectat flumine vultum” (He broke off to feast his eyes and mind on a mere image, sighing often, cheeks grown with tears).³⁷ His storytelling, or recollection, suspends his journey, just as Casella’s memory stops the temporal progress of the pilgrims on Mount Purgatory. The image of the audience enraptured by Casella’s song represents an idolatrous moment at the beginning of a process of correction and purgation, and thus Cato’s harsh reprimand, accusing them of languor and alluding to the sin of

acedia, also corrects the wills of the souls. Cato raises the notion that memory can be transgressive, capable of recreating history into phantasms of the imagination. At the top of Mount Purgatory, the soul undergoes the final stage of purgation, in which the transgressive memory is washed away in the river Lethe, as atonement is contingent upon forgetfulness or oblivion of the earthly past. Lethe, as well as Eunoe, the second river that recovers the virtues latent within him (“la tramortita sua virtù ravviva”), ultimately returns penitent pilgrims to the point of origin and of innocence (*Purg.* 33.129).

The evocations of earthly love in both *Purgatorio* and the *Aeneid* luring the protagonists away from the projected mission are both a result of Virgil’s construction, as author and as guide respectively. Dante initiates his ambivalence toward Virgil’s authority as soon he begins *Purgatorio*, by imposing a redemptive spiritual meaning on temporal empire. While Virgil explicitly recalls imperial Rome, he is fundamentally limited by his imagination of temporal empire. Lacking a Christian spiritual and eschatological dimension, Virgil’s empire depends wholly on secular, and often erotic prophecy, as well as sustained genealogies as the means by which imperial foundation occurs. Throughout *Purgatorio*, Dante’s pilgrimage progressively undermines Virgil’s authority, his moral and rational counsel becoming more and more distinguished from the spiritual guidance of Beatrice and other holier figures as Dante nears the locus of earthly paradise. The *Commedia*’s vision of history diverges from that of the *Aeneid* in its assimilation of the spiritual *imperium* to the earthly *imperium*.

Dante’s own delinquent participation in the audience of Casella’s song affords Cato the opportunity to undermine Virgil’s authority and to distinguish it from the spiritual guidance necessary to shape the souls so that they may have a *diritto arbitrio* (upright will) that corresponds to the *diritta via* (upright way). Virgil’s lapse into admiration for Casella’s song expresses the uncertainty and mortality of his authority particularly when it is juxtaposed with earlier, analogous moments in which Virgil reprimands Dante for lingering before captivating scenes. The rebuke embarrasses Virgil, who, in the next canto, feels great *rimorso*: “El mi pareo da sé stesso rimorso” (*Purg.* 3.7). As Alan Levitan reminds us, in *Inferno*, when Dante is tempted to listen to the whole conversation between Sinon and Adam da Brescia, Virgil grows angry and threatens him: “Or pur mira, / che per poco che teo non mi rissol!” (*Inf.* 30.131–32). However, Virgil’s impatience, unlike Cato’s, stems from “a more general sense of the moral weakness of indulging one’s taste for listening to vulgar verbal sparring.”³⁸ Recalling his earlier reproach to the Roman guide for mentioning Marcia, Cato insists that the *amoroso canto*, like the memory of earthly love, may be part of the Virgilian experience, but that it will not be tolerated in Purgatory. While Virgil escorts Dante into Purgatory, Cato reforms his guidance, emphasizing the *libero arbitrio*, enforcing divine law, and instilling the askesis necessary for the process of purgation.

The scene of Casella's song prepares for Dante's meditation on free will, in the context of both political and spiritual transformation, throughout the entire canticle. In Dante's poetic construction of conversion, the souls in Purgatory continue to reflect on their pasts as well as what is before them, always presented with a choice to remain laggard or to straighten their wills. According to Boitani, for Dante, "freedom of the will is precisely the 'innata libertate' of holding on to a love that may be kindled from outside and of choosing either a good or a bad love—a 'noble virtue' and the condition for the existence of morality and of an ethical system."³⁹ The topographically-vertical spiritual mountain functions to erect the will and to regenerate the soul, preparing it to enter the court of Heavenly Paradise. Giving notice of his departure at the top of the mountain, Virgil confirms this purpose: "Non aspettar mio dir più né mio cenno; / libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio" (*Purg.* 27.139–40). As Dante states in *Monarchia*, perhaps echoing what he had written in *Paradiso* 5, free will is God's most valuable reward to man, "hec libertas sive principium hoc totius libertatis nostre est maximum donum humane nature a Deo collatum" (freedom [or this principle of all our freedom] is the greatest gift given by God to human nature) (*Mon.* 1.12.6). Thus, in the eschatological scheme of the *Commedia*, free will must be reformed in order to move the individual soul forward and upward to heaven.

Cato's symbolic associations with political freedom and his more literal direction of the will in the early cantos help Dante to produce a polemical reconfiguration of empire in Purgatory. Governed by free will, the soul becomes a metaphor for empire, ruled by the monarch; according to *Monarchia*, monarchy grants the will the most liberty of any political framework: "Sed existens sub Monarcha est potissime liberum" (But living under a monarch it is supremely free) (*Mon.* 1.12.8). In Purgatory, which occupies a redeemed temporality, the souls submit to a new law, although they choose the amount of time it will take to reform their will. The misguided will compares to the imperfectly governed world, but the corrected will, elegiac about the past and excited about the future, becomes a metaphor for a moral and upright government, ruled by two separate luminary powers, the emperor and the pope, and operating within the providential course of Christian history. In the early cantos of *Purgatorio*, Cato's focus on the will corresponds to Dante's desire for his model empire, articulated later in *Purgatorio* 16, as I have previously cited in my discussion of Marco the Lombard: "Soleva Roma, che 'l buon mondo feo, / due soli aver, che l'una e l'altra strada / facean vedere, e del mondo e di Deo" (*Purg.* 16.106–8).

In addition, Cato values charity, or upright love, a concept discussed also by Augustine in *The City of God* and Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*. In *Monarchia*, charity depends on the justness of the monarch, the *primum mobile* on earth, who uses it to create the sense of unity that transforms the political collective into the *imago Dei* (*Mon.* 1.11.13–15). In *Purgatorio*, a realm mirroring both the spiritual order and the earthly empire, Cato stands in for a lawgiver

whose decrees enact the will of God. Responsible for upholding an *imperium* that represents a renewed temporal order and unfolds a providential plan, Cato, like Dante's ideal monarch, helps souls reform themselves in order to resemble God's prelapsarian image of human beings.

With the climbing sun behind him, Cato emerges to the pilgrim and Virgil as the authoritative embodiment of pure empire in *Purgatorio*. As Dante uses him to define Purgatory as the site of redemption in secular history, he suggests an imperial model in which the souls imitate the lawgiver, corroborating the ideal set out in *Monarchia*, "ille qui potest esse optime dispositus ad regendum, optime alios disponere potest" (the person who is himself capable of being best disposed to rule is capable of disposing others best) (*Mon.* 1.13.1). With Cato as guide, replacing Virgil, Purgatory thus plays out the functions of social community to show the promise of earthly empire.

Moreover, through Cato, Dante exposes the strengths and weaknesses of the Virgilian and Augustinian perspectives. Ultimately, he harmonizes these perspectives to explore his own sense of a complex tension between his historical experience of government and his ideal vision of a world empire. Cato introduces the Augustinian vision, which effectively qualifies Virgilian history, channeling the prophecy and love of the *Aeneid* into spiritual forms. However, he does not wholly espouse Augustine's philosophy as the central ideology of Dante's text. Cato's plea for freedom in a secular, historical world presupposes the existence of the soul's free will; as a pagan who is also guardian of the law, Cato represents Dante's conception of natural justice, resurrecting that which is absent in the scheme of both Cato's and Dante's empire. Cato's moments as *laudator temporis acti* suggest that he looks upon secular history nostalgically and toward the future optimistically, assimilating Virgil's interest in these temporalities to the course of Christian history.

Cato thus addresses the vices of empire, but also becomes the incipient figure through which Dante imposes a redemptive plan upon history. Dante's faith in futurity refers not only to his desire to access the spiritual world, but also to his hope for a reformed temporal order grounded in an imperial Rome with virtuous rulers that uphold its ideals. By placing the virtuous pagan at the beginning of Purgatory, Dante asks his readers to connect the temporal process to the spiritual eschaton, transfiguring earthly history to resemble the spiritual order and to resurrect the value and meaning of life on earth as God designed it. The imperative to graft a model of secular empire onto a model of spiritual empire becomes more pressing in *Paradiso* as the poet seeks to envision the divine ordination of imperial Rome. Returning to Canto 6 of the *Paradiso*, which I discussed at the beginning of this article, Justinian recalls the history of Rome and the foundation of empire, from the originary fall of Troy to the strife between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines in Dante's Italy. Justinian's somber recollection of the Rape of the Sabines and of Lucretia implicitly condemns Virgilian history,

which advocates, according to Augustine, the libido of Rome (*Par.* 6.40–2). This vision exemplifies a scene of history in which empire degenerates into civil war: “Faccian li Ghibellin, faccian lor arte / sott’ altro segno, ché mal segue quello / sempre chi la giustizia e lui diparte” (*Par.* 6.103–5). The invocations of Justinian’s history represent Dante’s doubts about the temporal structures that fail to preserve justice and freedom, and fail to direct the human individual toward God. Nevertheless, in the heaven of the planet Mercury, Dante also refuses to believe that temporal government, divined by God, would break down completely, or if it did, that it could not be fully resurrected. He yokes Justinian with emblems of justice, suggesting that the virtues of empire come to light in moments of imperial apotheosis. The image of the eagle of the empire, whose sacred wings (*l’ombra de le sacre penne*) finally come into Justinian’s hands, is the “sacrosanct sign of God’s justice and proof of God’s actual representation on earth of political right” (*Par.* 6.7).⁴⁰ Justinian’s creation of the digest of Roman law, in particular, signifies an empire willed and inspired by God: “ma ’l benedetto Agapito, che fue / sommo pastore, a la fede sincera / mi dirizzò con le parole sue” (*Par.* 6.16–18). In Dante’s work, then, Justinian imagines a divinely-directed temporal order. He establishes the laws of empire, using them to shape and guide individuals and communities toward their true good, and invokes Cato by naming “the Decii,” the Roman family name which alludes to Cato in *Monarchia*, suggesting the self-referential authority of Roman history (*Par.* 6.47). Cato, a pagan man resurrected by honoring the law in his earthly life, foretells the enactment of divine justice in temporal history, as the apotheosis of Justinian signifies the movement of history according to the manifestation of the Spirit; the Roman eagle in Canto 6 emblemizes this movement, representing “the typological *unity* of history, its continuous renewal even as it appears to be defeated by its enemies.”⁴¹ Anticipating the messages on history Dante offers through the eagle and Justinian in Paradise, in *Purgatorio*, the allusion to Cato’s story suggests the consequences of corrupt temporal powers. However, Cato’s Stoic embodiment of God’s law in the most earthly of the realms of the afterlife simultaneously resurrects hope in the restoration of the proper, prelapsarian order.

Notes

1. Subsequent in-text citations from Dante’s works will be from the following editions: Alighieri, Dante, *Paradiso*, eds. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Random House, 2007); *Purgatorio*, eds. Jean Hollander and Robert Hollander (New York: Random House, 2003); *Inferno*, eds. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Random House, 2000); *Il Convivio*, ed. Burna Cordati (Torino: Loescher Editore, 1964); *Monarchia: Testo, introduzione e commento*, ed. and trans. Gustavo Vinay (Florence: Sansoni,

1950); the English translations will be from Alighieri, Dante, *Monarchy*, ed. and trans. Prue Shaw (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

2. Augustine even devotes a section of Book 1 to the suicide of Lucretia: “. . . when a woman’s body is overpowered but the intention to remain chaste persists nonetheless, and is unaltered by any consent to evil, the crime belongs only to the man who violated her by force.” Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), I.19.

3. John A. Scott, *Dante’s Political Purgatory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), ix.

4. Charles Till Davis, *Dante and the Idea of Rome* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 34.

5. Piero Boitani aptly connects the soul to the empire: “the Empire ‘tends’ towards the city of God, where the soul shall return in perfect joy if its use of free will has deserved it and if laws are implemented,” in “From Darkness to Light: Governance and Government in *Purgatorio* XVI,” in *Dante and Governance*, ed. John Woodhouse (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 22.

6. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

7. See Caron Ann Cioffi, “‘Dolce Color d’Oriental Zaffiro’: A Gloss of *Purgatorio* I.13,” *Modern Philology*, 82 (1985): 335–64.

8. The comparison I make refers to the image of Boethius in the *Consolatio Philosophiae*, as Lady Philosophy wipes away his tears, initiating a process of philosophical and religious awakening. Boethius, *Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).

9. Jeremy Tambling, *Dante in Purgatory: States of Affect* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 67–8.

10. Offering salvation to Cato would have been viewed as highly unusual in Dante’s period. See Silvio Pasquazi, “Catone,” *Cultura e scuola* 13–14 (1965): 528–39.

11. Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 60.

12. See Augustine, *City of God*, 5.12.

13. *Ibid.*, 19.4.

14. *Ibid.*

15. M. Annaei Lucani, *Pharsalia*, vol. 1, ed. Pierre-Augustus Lemaire (Paris: Nicolaus Eligius, 1834), 2.301–3. Translation from Lucan, *Pharsalia*, trans. Jane Wilson Joyce (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 39.

16. *Ibid.*, 2.380–83.

17. *Ibid.*, 2.388–89.

18. Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante’s Commedia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 127.

19. See Hollander’s note to *Purgatorio* 1.31.

20. See Cindy L. Vitto, "The Virtuous Pagan in Middle English Literature," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 79 (1989): 1–100. While Vitto leaves the question of Cato's position in Purgatory unanswered, she argues that part of Dante's rationale for placing the virtuous pagans Trajan and Ripheus in Paradise is based in their historical dedication to the law and devotion to the Roman Empire.
21. Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, 37–8.
22. Mancusi-Ungaro, 41.
23. Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 177, 179.
24. R.A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), xi.
25. Augustine, *The City of God*, 1.Preface.
26. Robert Hollander, "Notes to Canto I," in Dante, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean Hollander and Robert Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 22.
27. Augustine, *The City of God*, 15.23.
28. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. S. J. Tester (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), Book 1, Prosa 2.
29. *Ibid.*, Book 1, Metrum 3.
30. Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 20.
31. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. R.P.H. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1.4.
32. *Ibid.*, 1.3.
33. *Ibid.*, 1.4.
34. See Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1.13.
35. John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 191.
36. Alan Levitan, "Dante as Listener, Cato's Rebuke, and Virgil's Self-Reproach," *Dante Studies*, 103 (1985): 39.
37. Vergil, *Vergil's Aeneid: Books I–VI*, ed. by Clyde Pharr (Wauconda, Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1998, 2007), Book I, 464–65. Translation is from Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 20.
38. Levitan, 45.
39. Boitani, 17.
40. Mancusi-Ungaro, 69.
41. Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision*, 181.