

**LINGUA INDISCIPLINATA. A STUDY OF TRANSGRESSIVE SPEECH IN THE  
“ROMANCE OF THE ROSE” AND THE “DIVINE COMEDY”**

by

**Gabriella Ildiko Baika**

BA, “Babes-Bolyai-University,” Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 1991

MA, “Babes-Bolyai-University,” Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 1992

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
the University of Pittsburgh in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh,  
2007

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

This dissertation was presented

by

Gabriella Ildiko Baika

It was defended on

December 1, 2006

and approved by

Dissertation Advisor: Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Department of French and Italian

Co-Advisor: Dennis Looney, Associate Professor, Department of French and Italian

Diana Mériz, Associate Professor, Department of French and Italian

Bruce Venarde, Associate Professor, Department of History

Copyright © by Gabriella Ildiko Baika

2007

**LINGUA INDISCIPLINATA. A STUDY OF TRANSGRESSIVE SPEECH IN THE  
“ROMANCE OF THE ROSE” AND THE “DIVINE COMEDY”**

Gabriella Baika, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2007

My dissertation is an investigation of the two masterpieces of medieval, allegorical literature from the perspective of the Latin moral tradition of their time. Discussing Jean de Meun and Dante's obsessive concern with the sinfulness of speech, I relate the numerous verbal transgressions treated in the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy* to what historians of moral philosophy have called “the golden age of the sins of the tongue” (1190-1260), a time span during which moralists, theologians and canonists wrote a great number of Latin texts on *peccata linguae*. I argue that the radical inclusion of the sins of speech among the other classes of sins treated in the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy* is to be accounted for in light of the major thirteenth-century treatises on *peccata linguae*. While Jean de Meun, in the wake of Alain of Lille, treats the sins of the tongue in a dispersed manner, without regard to a classification based on the gravity of the sins, Dante follows a scholastic approach and assigns most of the sins of tongue he is dealing with to the infernal area of Fraud, in a hierarchical order. Taking up elements from William Peraldus's *Summa vitiorum* and Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, both very popular at the time, Dante constructs his own micro-system of *peccata linguae*, a system within a system. Written shortly after the golden age of the sins of the tongue, the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy* extend this cultural period and transfer the preoccupation with sinfulness of human speech from the exclusive sphere of Latin moral tracts to the realm of vernacular poetry.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>PREFACE.....</b>  | <b>VII</b> |
| <b>1.0        INTRODUCTION.....</b>  | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>2.0        MEDIEVAL AUTHORITIES ON TRANSGRESSIVE SPEECH.....</b>  | <b>15</b>  |
| <b>2.1        PERALDUS'S EIGHTH "CAPITAL" VICE.....</b>  | <b>17</b>  |
| <b>2.2        LAURENT D'ORLÉANS AND <i>LES PECHIÉS DE LA LANGUE</i> .....</b>                              | <b>27</b>  |
| <b>2.3        DOMENICO CAVALCA .....</b>   | <b>33</b>  |
| <b>2.3.1        The <i>Pungilingua</i> ('The Wounding Tongue') .....</b>                                   | <b>37</b>  |
| <b>2.4        THOMAS AQUINAS AND THE SINS OF WORD.....</b>   | <b>45</b>  |
| <b>3.0        FROM JEAN DE MEUN'S MULTIDISCURSIVE DISPERSAL TO DANTE'S<br/>SYSTEM OF SINS.....</b>         | <b>54</b>  |
| <b>3.1        ORIGIN, FUNCTIONS AND SINS OF SPEECH IN THE "ROMANCE OF<br/>THE ROSE".....</b>               | <b>55</b>  |
| <b>3.1.1        Lady Reason on speech and its transgressions.....</b>                                      | <b>55</b>  |
| <b>3.1.2        Nature on the (verbal) vices of humans .....</b>   | <b>71</b>  |
| <b>3.1.3        Genius's Grievances against Feminine Speech .....</b>                                      | <b>82</b>  |
| <b>3.2        DANTE'S MORAL APPROACH TO SPEECH.....</b>  | <b>90</b>  |
| <b>4.0        <i>LINGUA DOLOSA</i> ('THE GUILEFUL TONGUE'): SPEAKING UNDER THE<br/>SIGN OF FRAUD .....</b> | <b>113</b> |

|            |  |            |
|------------|--|------------|
| <b>4.1</b> | <b>FLATTERY AS FORM OF TRANSGRESSIVE SPEECH.....</b>   | <b>115</b> |
| 4.1.1      | The art of <i>losange</i> in the <i>Rose</i> .....   | 120        |
| 4.1.2      | Ornaments of speech: seduction and flattery in <i>Canto XVIII</i> of the<br><i>Inferno</i> .....                           | 128        |
| <b>4.2</b> | <b>EVIL COUNSELING, OR WHAT THE OLD WOMAN AND FRIEND<br/>HAVE IN COMMON WITH ULYSSES AND GUIDO DA MONTEFELTRO.....</b>     | <b>142</b> |
| 4.2.1      | The Lover's evil counselors.....   | 142        |
| 4.2.2      | The name of the sin: medieval moralists on <i>pravum consilium</i> and<br>Ulysses and Guido's sin .....                    | 157        |
| <b>4.3</b> | <b>'DOUBLE-TALK' (<i>BILINGUIUM</i>) IN FAUS SEMBLANT'S DISCOURSE</b>  | <b>187</b> |
| <b>4.4</b> | <b>SOWING OF DISCORD AND FALSIFYING OF WORDS: TWO VERBAL<br/>SINS ASSOCIATED WITH FRAUD IN DANTE'S <i>INFERNO</i>.....</b> | <b>209</b> |
| 4.4.1      | The <i>seminator di scandalo e di scisma</i> .....   | 210        |
| 4.4.2      | The verbal <i>falsador</i> .....   | 226        |
| <b>5.0</b> | <b>DISTORTING THE VERTICAL DIMENSION: THE PROBLEM OF<br/>BLASPHEMY .....</b>   | <b>244</b> |
| <b>5.1</b> | <b>THE "BLASPHEMIES" OF JEAN DE MEUN .....</b>   | <b>246</b> |
| <b>5.2</b> | <b>THE SIN OF BLASPHEMY IN DANTE .....</b>   | <b>270</b> |
|            | <b>CONCLUSIONS .....</b>   | <b>301</b> |
|            | <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>  | <b>307</b> |

## PREFACE

I am first deeply indebted (and grateful) to Professor Yves Citton, our former director of graduate studies, to whom I owe my presence here. His guidance during the first years of my Ph.D. program was invaluable, and I could not think of a more fitting *hommage* to him than this dissertation.

I also owe many sincere thanks to my two dissertation directors, Professor Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Professor Dennis Looney, not only for kindly accepting to direct my work, but also for their constant support throughout these five years. I could not be what I am today as a “medievalist” without what they have taught me. Professionally, the things I have learned from two of the finest medievalists in the United States are today my most cherished treasure. On a more personal level, the words fail me when I try to recall all the efforts and dedication Dr. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski invested in our relationship. Without her, I would not have gotten so far.

I am also grateful to my *dantisti* friends, Dr. Marino Balducci and Dr. Massimo Seriacopi, for my Italian scholarship and our long discussions on Dante hermeneutics, at the *Carla Rossi Academy* and the *Società Dantesca Italiana*. Professors Franca Petrucci Nardelli and Armando Petrucci, with whom I had the unique opportunity to work at the Newberry Library in Chicago, have also contributed to this dissertation, by giving me the knowledge and confidence necessary for approaching medieval manuscripts. In terms of scholarships, I have been extremely

fortunate, as I have benefited from three one-year research fellowships, generously granted by the University of Pittsburgh.

The credit for my doctoral work must also go to the Medieval Academy of America, whose grant has represented for me an extraordinary morale booster and has given me the opportunity to finalize my work in European archives.

I would also like to thank my wonderful parents, for their unconditional patience, love and support, and last, but not least, to my beautiful daughter Mary-Annick, the true “rationale” behind my work. This Ph.D. dissertation is as much mine as it is theirs.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

As early as the fifteenth century, critical readers of the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy* likened the two poetic narratives, discovering analogies between them and listing a common concern with human vices as first among the poem's many striking similarities. Christine de Pizan and Laurent de Premierfait were the first to comment upon the two medieval allegorical poems from a comparative point of view, thus pioneering a tradition that would extend to the present day, a tradition of associating the *Rose* and the *Comedy* from various viewpoints and using the poems as illustrations of specific aspects related to the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup>

The year 1878 marked a turning point in this comparative tradition with the discovery of the *Fiore* and the *Detto d'Amore*, two thirteenth-century Italian translations of the *Romance of the Rose*. Gianfranco Contini and Luigi Vanossi credited Dante Alighieri with penning the *Fiore*, an authorship that would represent the irrefutable piece of evidence for both Dante's familiarity with the *Rose* and the influence of the French narrative on the *Comedy*.<sup>2</sup> By providing the

---

<sup>1</sup> For an outline of the history of these comparative attempts, see Earl J. Richards' book *Dante and the "Roman de la Rose."* *An Investigation into the Vernacular Narrative Context of the "Commedia."* (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1981), 71-81. An insightful comment on Christine de Pizan's assessment of the French and Italian poets is provided by Sylvia Huot, "Seduction and Sublimation: Christine de Pizan, Jean de Meun and Dante," in *Romance Notes*, 25 (1985), 361-373.

<sup>2</sup> See Gianfranco Contini, "Un nodo della cultura medievale: la serie *Roman de la Rose-Fiore-Divina Commedia*," in *Un'idea di Dante*, (Turin: G. Einaudi, 2001), 245-283. For Luigi Vanossi, see *Dante e il "Roman de la Rose": Saggio sul "Fiore"* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1979). The question of the authorship of the *Fiore* has been reopened by Zygmunt Baránski and Patrick Boyde in: *The Fiore in Context. Dante, France and Tuscany* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). The most recent findings and standpoints with respect to the *Fiore* as a work attributable to Dante have been reunited by Johannes Bartuschat and Luciano Rossi in *Studi sul canone letterario del Trecento: Per Michelangelo Picone* (Ravenna: Longo, 2003).

“missing link” in the circular chain from the *Rose* to the *Comedy*, the hypothesis of Dante’s authorship of the *Fiole* —which, in fact, has remained until now a controversial issue in Dante studies—would validate the theories about the kinship between the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy*.

What is striking, however, in the critical studies likening the *Divine Comedy* to the *Romance of the Rose* is that among so many common aspects taken into consideration by scholars throughout time, aspects ranging from astronomy to mythology, poetics and scholastic philosophy, the common concern with vices noted by de Pizan and de Premierfait, in the fifteenth century, has not been investigated. We lack today a thorough and fundamental study that examines the two allegorical poems from the viewpoint of moral theology, a branch of medieval thought to which both Jean de Meun and Dante owed a great deal. Although the denomination “medieval *summae*,” applied to both the second part of the *Rose* and the *Comedy*, has become commonplace in literary criticism, this denomination is ordinarily left in a sphere of indeterminacy. The term *summa* had, in medieval times, a rather broad spectrum of meanings; the works of Vincent of Beauvais, who practiced this genre from multiple perspectives, best exemplify this polysemy. According to the field of knowledge envisioned, the *summa*--the Latin medieval term for the more modern coinage *encyclopedia*--could be *naturale* (when it dealt with natural sciences), *historiale* (when it investigated the historical past), *doctrinale* (when it considered the corpus of theological doctrines), and finally, *morale*, when it focused on the vices and virtues of human beings.

In the wake of Christine de Pizan and Laurent de Premierfait’s remarks about Jean de Meun and Dante’s common preoccupation with morality, I suggest that the *Romance of the Rose*

---

and the *Divine Comedy* should be considered first and foremost in their intersection as moral summae. In my opinion, the treatment of vices and sins represents the main meeting point between the *Romance of the Rose* and *Divine Comedy*. It is here that we need to look for affinities, before any other considerations related to the narrative form, to the *Fiore*...or to the moonspots.<sup>3</sup>

While we do have today attempts at treating Dante's *Comedy* from either the viewpoint of its genre as a moral *summa* (in the pioneering book of Patrick Boyde on *Human Vices and Human Worth*) or of its virtual connection with Latin medieval treatises on vices (in the groundbreaking studies of Siegfried Wenzel, for instance), we lack such fundamental studies in *Rose* criticism. Surprisingly, no scholar has yet undertaken to respond to the subtle, provocative challenge launched by Jean de Meun in the second part of the *Romance*, that of discovering and “counting” the vices he scattered throughout his poem (vv.19870-19887).<sup>4</sup> Since, to my knowledge, no *Rose* scholar has either verified the real number of sins, or explored the possible connections between them, or further identified, even tentatively, the sources Jean might have drawn on for his handling of sins, I undertake to gently take up the gauntlet thrown by Jean at the face of his so often scandalized readers and to look more closely at a class of sin to which the moral treatises from the thirteenth century were particularly conducive: the sins of the tongue.

---

<sup>3</sup> The latter are usually evoked in literary criticism when it comes to proving the influence of the *Romance of the Rose* on Dante's *Comedy*.

<sup>4</sup> This lack of responsiveness on the part of the critics is all the more surprising when we consider that one of Jean's chief literary models was Alain of Lille, the author, among others, of an important treatise on virtues and vices, and at the same time one of the pioneers of the tradition on verbal sins. Should Jean have been unaware of Alain's *Tractus de vitiis et virtutibus*? Or of his fascinating dictionary of philosophical and moral terms, the *Liber de Distinctionibus*? These texts were popular in the later Middle Ages, due to the great theological and intellectual authority of their author, surnamed *Doctor Universalis*. But even if we cannot ascertain Jean de Meun's knowledge of these other writings of Alain of Lille, it is enough to remember that Nature's diatribe against homosexuality in the *Rose* is modeled on Alain's vigorous attack on male homosexuality from *De planctu naturae* to ascertain that echoes from Alain's view of human morality resound in the *Romance of the Rose*.

The intellectuals of the Middle Ages--and I am referring here to the French and Italian contexts--developed a powerful discourse about the virtues and evils of human speech. The first sign of this increased sensitivity to the dangerous potential of spoken words appeared at the dawn of the twelfth century, in the work of the brilliant thinker Hugh of St. Victor. As a Parisian master in theology operating at the Augustinian monastery of St. Victor, Hugh concentrated his religious efforts on the elaboration of a moral reform designed to help the “outer man” (an Augustinian concept) to reach a state of inner perfection close to divine bliss. This state of inner felicity could be reached only by means of a rigorously disciplined behavior, including gestures, attitudes and use of language.<sup>5</sup> For Hugh of St. Victor, speech ought not be a spontaneous and arbitrary flow of words; rather, it was a matter of knowledge and method. Underlying all human utterance, there was a specific *scientia* (‘science, knowledge, know-how’) that provided norms for a disciplined speech. This science needed to be acquired so that discipline in speech might be followed. Hugh of St. Victor’s notion of *disciplina in locutione* (‘disciplined speech’) thus involved the observance of a set of rules meant to regulate the production of words, a set that he took from classical rhetoric and reworked in a Christian context. According to the Greco-Roman art of oratory, every public speaker was supposed to adapt his speech to five criteria: what is spoken, to whom, when, where, how. These criteria that in classical rhetoric had been parameters for forging a convincing public argumentation, became, at the hands of Hugh of St. Victor, norms designed to model the morally correct speech of Christians. Each of these five circumstances of speech enabled the pious speaker to achieve discernment in words; it helped

---

<sup>5</sup> This whole complex of behavioral attitudes belonged to what Hugh called the *scientia recte vivendi* ‘the art of leading a virtuous life’, which he elaborated in *De Institutione novitiorum*, a moral tract intended for young monks. The Latin text of this treatise, seemingly written before 1125, can be found in *Patrologia Latina* 176, 925-952. Important remarks about Hugh’s contributions to the development of a moral and theological lexicon in medieval Latin are made by Roger Baron, “Hugues de St. Victor lexicographe,” in *Cultura Neolatina* 16 (1956), 109-145.

him produce a *discretio loquendi*, a carefully thought-out discourse.<sup>6</sup> The language user who failed to observe these linguistic-moral norms was an ‘indiscrete,’ i.e., inconsiderate, speaker, and the tongue with which he uttered the indiscriminate words, a *lingua indisciplinata*, i.e., an unruly tongue.

Under the influence of St. Victor, toward the end of the twelfth century, another important ecclesiastic thinker in France, the Franciscan master Raoul Ardent, elaborated a vast ethical work entitled *Speculum Universale*, which advanced new norms for virtuous speech.<sup>7</sup> Preoccupied with the problematic of good and evil in human mores, Raoul Ardent devoted an entire book of his work to the uses of speech (*De moribus linguae*), a book in which he not only expounded norms for morally proper speech, but also discussed deviances from these norms, transgressions of them. In forging his anthropological system, Raoul Ardent started from the same Augustinian distinction inner/outer man that had been operative in the thought of Hugh of St. Victor. For Ardent, either man had specific habits. As far as the outer man was concerned, Ardent distinguished between habits of deeds, of thought and of word (*Mores exteriores hominis in tribus considerantur: in verbo, in sensu, in opere*; XIII.1. f. 161r).<sup>8</sup>

In Ardent’s view, five moral criteria were supposed to govern the production of *bonum verbum* or *bona locutio: veritas* (‘truth’), *utilitas* (‘usefulness’), *honestas* (‘propriety’), *discretio*

---

<sup>6</sup> Hugh of St. Victor’s contribution to the medieval discourse on the use of language is, thus, also important from the viewpoint of the creation of a meta-language, i.e., of a lexicon employed to describe speech. We will find again the label *discrete* Hugh applied to morally correct speaking in the most prominent moralists on the sins of the tongue, such as Radulfus Ardens, William Peraldus, Thomas Aquinas... and Dante.

<sup>7</sup> Francesco Minuto has carefully studied the presence of Hugh of St. Victor’s ideas in Ardent’s *Speculum*. See “Sui rapporti tra lo ‘Speculum Universale’ di Radulfus Ardens e il ‘Didascalicon’ di Ugo di San Vittore,” in *Atti dell’Istituto Veneto di Scienze* (Lettere ed Arti, 1948-1949, CVII. II, Classe di Scienze Morali e Letterari), 103-117.

<sup>8</sup> The manuscript I have worked with for Raoul Ardent is: Paris, BnF, lat. 3240. The *Speculum morale* seems to have been written between 1193-1200. My main sources for the life and work of Raoul Ardent are: Johannes Gründel’s *Die Lehre des Radulfus Ardens von den Verstandestugenden auf dem Hintergrund seiner Seelenlehre* (Munich: Schöningh, 1976), and the chapter “Rodolfo Ardente: I costumi della lingua,” from Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio’s book *I peccati della lingua, Disciplina ed etica della parola nella cultura medievale* (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1987), 35-71.

(‘discernment’) and *directio* (‘direction’). All of these criteria had to act simultaneously in the act of speech; when just one of them was transgressed, the words failed to be morally perfect (*irreprehensibilis*) and a *mala locutio* occurred. For instance, when the moral criterion of truth was violated, the *locutio* ceased to be virtuous, becoming mendacious and giving rise to sins such as lying, perjury, false promise, false doctrine, etc.; when the criterion of utility was violated, the words became *otiosa*, *risoria*, *irrisoria* or took the shape of evil counsels. When the imperative of *honestas* was disobeyed, the sin of *turpitudo* (‘obscenity’) was committed, whereas when the quality of *discretio* was transgressed, several verbal sins such as *stultiloquium* (‘foolish talk’), *secreta revelare* (‘disclosing of secrets’), etc., occurred.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike Hugh’s theory of disciplined speech from *De institutione novitiorum*, which had focused exclusively on the verbal behavior of monks, Ardent’s chapter on the usages of speech from the *Speculum Universale* offered a much larger opening on the habits of speech of society, and dealt with several socio-professional categories: aside from the linguistic conduct of the ecclesiastics, Ardent also considered the speech of laymen in all aspects of their everyday communications (political, family or commercial exchanges).<sup>10</sup> Ardent’s encyclopedic *Speculum* is, according to Johannes Gründel, the masterpiece of medieval ethics in twelfth-century Europe. It is of great relevance to my dissertation that such a work is deeply concerned with the good and evil of language. Like Hugh of St. Victor, but on a much ampler scale, Raoul Ardent was concerned to establish norms for an impeccable use of speech and to inveigh against the

---

<sup>9</sup> As to the criterion of discernment, Ardent faithfully follows in the footsteps of his model, Hugh of St. Victor, and maintains the same rigorous scheme of the circumstances of speech. If just one of the circumstances was not observed, the entire speech was considered failed (*Si autem unum istorum defuerit, sermo indiscretus erit*; *Speculum*, XIII.12, f. 164v). For--and here Ardent becomes very severe-- just as the well-discerned speech comes from intellect and fore-thinking, so the non-considerate speech is born out of numbness of mind and lack of fore-thought: *Sicut autem discretus sermo nascitur ex intellectu et ex preconsideratione, sic sermo indiscretus nascitur ex hebetudine mentis aut ex impreconsideratione.* (*ibidem*).

<sup>10</sup> Ardent’s complex sociological opening was facilitated by the Aristotelian framework he adopted, through the agency of Hugh of St. Victor’s *Didascalicon*: the tripartition of ethics into political, familial and solitary.

transgressions of these norms. All these transgressions were as many sins of the tongue that could harm God, another or oneself.<sup>11</sup> Through the agency of William Peraldus, terms and concepts pioneered by Raoul Ardent would permeate the discussion of transgressive speech of great scholasticism.

Contemporary with Raoul Ardent and preoccupied with the same problematic of sinful or transgressive speech is a leading figure of French culture who had a great impact on both the theology and the poetry of the European Middle Ages: Alain of Lille. The concern with the harm one can do in speaking runs like a thread in the works written by *Doctor Universalis*, from his *Summa of Preaching*, which considers three verbal sins in three distinct chapters (garrulousness, lying and slander), through his *Treatise of Vices and Virtues* or his *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, to his celebrated allegorical poem the *Plaint of Nature*.<sup>12</sup> Although Alain's approach to the sins of the tongue is traditional, in the sense that he does not come up with a personal and original system, but considers verbal transgression as an offspring of the capital sins, his activity as a moralist on speech is relevant to my dissertation inasmuch as Alain of Lille was one of Jean de Meun's and Dante's greatest models.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Raoul Ardent takes up this classification of verbal sins from Peter the Cantor's influential moral tract, *Verbum abbreviatum* (written about 1191).

<sup>12</sup> Evil silence and pomposness are criticized in the *Plaint of Nature*, which also violently inveighs against the sins of flattery and slander, as progeny of the capital sin of envy. The work on virtues and vices offers a micro-treatise on lying, false testimony and perjury [*Tractus de Virtutibus, et de Vitiis et de Donis Spiritus Sancti*. O. Lottin, ed., *Medieval Studies* 12 (1950), 20-56]. The vast theological dictionary defines several terms dealing with evil speech (see *Liber in distinctionibus dictiōnū theoloγicalium*, in *PL* 210, 685-1012). Alain of Lille's famous collection of sermons associates sins of the tongue with various social and professional categories: merchants, lawyers, monks, etc., and condemns the dissolute words triggered by drunkenness or lust, verbal offenses caused by anger, or the verbosity of the proud (see *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, *PL* 210, 120-190).

<sup>13</sup> Since my dissertation is not concerned with the sphere of influence exerted by Alain of Lille on Jean de Meun, I will not develop the argument on Alain's approach to verbal transgressions. Here, I confine myself to mentioning that Alain was one of the pioneers of the medieval tradition of the sins of speech, whereas in the chapters of my dissertation I will frequently allude to, or quote, Alain's ideas or definitions. Regarding Jean de Meun's debt to Alain of Lille in the field of allegorical poetry, thorough studies have been written by Ernest Langlois, *Origines et sources du 'Roman de la Rose'* (Paris: E. Thorin, 1890), Pierre-Yves Badel, *Le Roman de la Rose au XIVe siècle. Etude de la réception de l'œuvre* (Geneva: Droz, 1980), G. Raynaud de Lage, *Alain de Lille, poète du XIIe siècle*

The efforts made by the French ecclesiastic intellectuals who in the twelfth century attempted to provide norms for morally correct speech and sensitize Christians to the harm derived from the transgressions of these norms bore remarkable fruits in the mid-thirteenth century. About 1236, William Peraldus, a Dominican monk from Lyon, wrote an encyclopedia of vices, in which after seven chapters devoted to the seven capital vices, he inserted an eighth, called *De peccato linguae*, in which he grouped twenty-four (!) manifestations of this sin. The element of originality of this endeavour was that Peraldus no longer considered the verbal trespasses “daughters” of the seven deadly sins, as they had been considered in Cassian or Gregory’s ethical systems, but gave them an autonomous status and grouped them under the same heading, as sins committed through the medium of speech. Needless to say, the great number of linguistic trasgressions Peraldus unites under the caption *De peccato linguae* goes far beyond the number of verbal sins scattered as progeny of the capital vices in Cassian and Gregory’s systems.<sup>14</sup>

Between 1260 and 1270, another Dominican writer, Steven of Bourbon, drew up a treatise on preaching, within which, under the confessed influence of William Peraldus, he introduced a chapter dedicated again to the sins of the tongue, a chapter comprising a generous assortment of exemplary stories about the personal and social consequences of wicked speech.

---

(Paris: Vrin, 1951), Alan Gunn, *The Mirror of Love, a Reinterpretation of the ‘Romance of the Rose’* (Texas: Texas Tech Press, 1952), Daniel Poirion, “Alain de Lille and Jean de Meun,” in *Alain de Lille, Gautier de Chatillon, Jakemart Giélée et leur temps* (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1980, 134-159), Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). For the relationship Alain of Lille - Dante, see: Peter Dronke, *Dante and Medieval Latin Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), “Boethius, Alanus und Dante” [*Romanische Forschungen* 78 (1966), 119-125], and A. Ciotti’s “Alano e Dante,” in *Convivium* 27 (1960), 257-288.

<sup>14</sup> In Cassian’s eight-fold system, *fornicatio* (‘lust’) has as progeny: obscenity, scurillity and idle talking; from avarice spring: lying, perjury, false testimony; from sloth springs verbosity; *cenodoxia* (‘vanity’) gives rise to discord and boasting and *superbia* to blasphemy, *murmur*, and slander (Cassianus, *Collatio V*, SC, 42, p. 209). In Gregory’s seven-fold scheme, we have the following relationships: from *inanis gloria*: boasting, quarrel and discord, from *invidia*: whispering and slander; from *ira*: strife, insult, contradiction and blasphemy; from avarice: deceit and perjury, from *ventris ingluvies*: lewd language and loquacity.

The preoccupation with the sins of the tongue became so acute that it ended up pervading the major theological treatises of the time: Alexander of Hales, Vincent of Beauvais, and Thomas Aquinas, all devoted a privileged space to sinful speech in their *Summae*.

The proliferation of such texts have prompted Silvana Vecchio and Carla Casagrande, two reputed Italian medievalists concerned with the moral systems of the European Middle Ages, to state that the timeframe between 1190-1260 represented ‘the golden age of the sins of the tongue’ (*il secolo d’oro dei peccati della lingua*). Two major phenomena are responsible, in Casagrande and Vecchio’s view, for this explosion of morals texts dealing with speech transgressions: the rise of new forms of lay piety, triggered by the intense activity of the two preaching orders, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, and the development of new forms of expression in vernacular languages.

Thorough and extremely well documented,<sup>15</sup> Casagrande and Vecchio’s book on the medieval ethics of speech has, in recent years, been instrumental for researchers of cultural and literary phenomena in various fields. Richard Newhauser has included the findings of the two Italian medievalists in his history of moral tracts in the Middle Ages. Edwin Craun has resorted to the theses expressed in *I peccati della lingua* to substantiate his claim that four major poets of the English Middle Ages--Chaucer, Gower, Langland and the Patience poet--drew heavily on the tradition of the sins of the tongue in their works.<sup>16</sup> Bettina Lindorfer,<sup>17</sup> and, more recently, the

---

<sup>15</sup> The two authors have examined dozens of primary texts, some of them never edited, from short sermons to vast moral and theological encyclopedias, and hundreds of secondary texts covering an impressive span of time and drawn up in several European languages.

<sup>16</sup> *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature. Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> “*Peccatum linguae* and the Punishment of Speech Violations in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times,” in *Speaking in the Medieval World*, Jean E. Godsall-Myers, ed. (Leiden, NLD: Brill, 2003), 23-46.

historian Sandy Bardsley<sup>18</sup> have also used *I peccati della lingua* as a background for their own research in the field of medieval habits and assessments of speech.

In *I peccati della lingua*, Casagrande and Vecchio note that the medieval preoccupation with the verbal sins exceeds the golden period of seventy years between 1190-1260. Concerned with the overwhelmingly vast material of primary texts, the two scholars focused mostly on this period and dealt chiefly with the major authors who established a tradition of the sins of the tongue in the Middle Ages: preachers, confessors, canonists and theologians. Understandably, the consideration of the writers of literary works of the period would have exceeded the scope of such a study.

My dissertation on transgressive speech in the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy* has been inspired by the findings of Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio. The two masterpieces of medieval poetry in France and Italy, one of which (the *Rose*) allegedly a model for the other one (the *Comedy*), testify to the same preoccupation with the evils of speech Casagrande and Vecchio document in *I peccati della lingua*. The dates at which these two literary works were written (about 1280 the *Romance of the Rose*, and 1306-1320, the *Divine Comedy*) situate them in the immediate temporal proximity of the golden age of the sins of the tongue. Both Jean de Meun and Dante Alighieri reserve an impressive space for the transgressions of speech in their poems: in the *Rose*, each and every protagonist discusses uses and abuses of language, whereas Dante punishes several sins of the tongue in the *Inferno* and still alludes to them in the *Paradiso*.

The assimilation of the ecclesiastic tradition of verbal sins is compounded in Jean and Dante by the specificity of their “trade”: they are both poets and, as practitioners of an art based

---

<sup>18</sup> *Venomous Tongues. Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

on written words, they are doubly more sensitive to (and responsible for) what they “say,” i.e., cast on paper, than an ordinary speaker. Moreover, both of them write from the positions of Christian writers, at a time when poetry was required to express the truths of theology and to be an expressive vehicle for faith and moral values.<sup>19</sup> Another important aspect that gives specificity to a consideration of the treatment of sins of the tongue by the two poets is the idiom(s) in which they write. The medieval tradition of the sins of the tongue was drawn up mainly in Latin. Jean de Meun and Dante write their allegorical poems in the vernacular. They both write at a time when the vernacular languages were opening themselves up to the formation or reception of new words, some of them unacceptable by the norms of the written language.<sup>20</sup> In this framework, the two poets are concerned not only with other people’s verbal transgressions, but also with their own potential sins, as writers.

The examination of the multiple ways in which two leading figures of the literary culture in medieval France and Italy absorbed the pastoral and theological discussion of *peccata linguae* has enabled me to formulate the thesis which underlies this dissertation: that the preoccupation with transgressive speech was not the exclusive apanage of the ecclesiastical circles. Poetry, as represented by Jean de Meun and Dante-- poetry in the vernacular--participated in original ways in the moral debate on the vices of speech.

Starting from the premise that only the recourse to the medieval tradition of *peccata linguae* can facilitate our understanding of the verbal transgressions discussed by Jean de Meun and Dante, I first undertake to highlight the ethical systems of transgressive speech that were

---

<sup>19</sup> For the inextricable link between poetry and ethics in medieval times, see the groundbreaking study of Judson Boyce Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), in which the author also devotes a few pages to Dante.

<sup>20</sup> For meticulous research on the changes undergone by vernacular languages in this period of time, see Jacques le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt: “Au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Une parole nouvelle,” in *Histoire vécue du peuple chrétien*, Jean Delumeau ed., (Toulouse: Privat, 1979), 257-279

popular in France and Italy at the time when the two poets were writing. Thus, my first chapter focuses on William Peraldus, whose *De peccato linguae* was seminal in the field of texts on immoral speech, and on two of his translators into Romance vernacular: Laurens d'Orléans and Domenico Cavalca. Since the former wrote his *Somme le Roi* in French, and the latter his *Pungilingua* in Italian, their moral lexicon provides us an important key for grasping the notions and vocabulary used to qualify acts of speech in the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy*. I also take a look at Thomas Aquinas's ethics, as his viewpoint of the pivotal role played by the will in verbal sins may illuminate Jean de Meun and Dante's standpoint with respect to transgressive speech.

The second chapter of my dissertation seeks to draw the contours of a moral theory of speech in Jean de Meun and Dante, and proposes itself as a necessary propedeutics for an investigation of the transgressions of speech discussed in the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy*. For the *Rose*, I examine Lady Reason, Nature and Genius's pronouncements on speech and bring to the fore the three main aspects of Jean de Meun's view of linguistic morality: the preoccupation with obscene speech, the will as the chief agent in verbal sins, and the negative view of female eloquence. For the *Comedy*, I consider three of Dante's minor works: *De vulgari eloquentia*, *De monarchia* and the *Convivio*, which, along with the *Purgatory* and the *Paradiso*, enlighten Dante's treatment of verbal sins in the *Inferno*.

Chapter three brings together several verbal transgressions (flattery, double-talking, fraudulent counsel, sowing of discord and falsifying of words) under the heading *Lingua dolosa* ('The Guileful Tongue'), as both Jean de Meun and Dante seem particularly concerned about linguistic fraud. Here, I analyze the positions of the characters in the *Rose* with respect to the sin of *adulatio*, and then compare them with Dante's handling of this sin in the *Inferno*. The sin of

*pravum consilium* also has representatives in both literary works: The Old Woman and Ami, two main figures in the *Rose*, recommend the use of fraud in speech, while Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro are punished by Dante in the area of Malebolge for exactly the same sin. Faus Semblant, the remarkable chameleonic figure of the *Romance of the Rose*, embodies the habits of double-talking and sowing of discord. Dante punishes the sowers of discord and the falsifiers of words in two of the deepest areas of hell.

The last chapter of my dissertation is two-pronged and somewhat particular in that it addresses the problem of blasphemy from an unusual perspective. The sin of blasphemy is not overtly tackled in the *Romance of the Rose*, but rather implied by Jean de Meun when he speaks of his authorial persona. The possible charge of blasphemy the poet feared from his readership, because of his too daring freedoms with language, would eventually be actualized by Jean Gerson, a reputed theologian involved in the *Querelle de la Rose*, a great admirer of William Peraldus and a moralist of speech himself. My dissertation will, at this point, consider the charges of blasphemy that Gerson leveled at Jean de Meun and how Jean de Meun anticipated them in the proleptic segment of the *Rose* in which the poet apologized to the reader and to the Catholic Church for his linguistic misdemeanor. I will then move on to the issue of blasphemy in Dante to discuss the idiosyncratic way in which Dante handled this verbal trespass. In the medieval tradition of the *lingua*-texts,<sup>21</sup> blasphemy was generally considered the most grievous verbal transgression. Dante reverses this taxonomy, and by placing blasphemers in the upper part of hell, devises an original hierarchy of verbal sins in which blasphemy is outweighed in seriousness by sins such as flattery, fraudulent counsel, sowing of discord, and falsifying of

---

<sup>21</sup> I borrow this term from Ralf G. Bogner, who uses it to describe the medieval productions concerned with verbal sins: *Die Bezähmung der Zunge. Literatur und Disziplinierung der Alltagskommunikation in der frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997).

words. The reasons for this reversal of terms seem to be the social and political consequences triggered by the last four verbal sins, consequences that were uppermost in Dante's mind.

My method is historical in nature in that throughout my analysis I bring concepts posited by the medieval theorists on immoral speech to bear on the transgressions of speech discussed by Jean de Meun and Dante. It is also essentially comparative, as I constantly seek to highlight the similarities or dissimilarities between the treatments of verbal sins in the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy*. At the same time, I take care to highlight the new ideas or terms the two poets brought to the conventional categories from the moral tractates on verbal sins.

As far as the title of this dissertation is concerned, I would like to draw attention to two terms. The word *indisciplinata* ('unruly') I use with respect to the tongue is taken from Hugh of St. Victor, and with exactly the same technical meaning: that of a tongue which breaks the rules of orderly speech, rules imposed by the moral imperatives of self-control and discernment. The term *transgressive* centers around the same idea of words that violate unseen spiritual boundaries. Aquinas constructed his theory of sinful speech on the Augustinian notion of words as signs. The implication is that there is a moral borderline within the use of speech, a borderline beyond which one cannot pass without incurring the great risk of losing salvation. *Trans-gressive* speech is an ethical *tra-passar del segno* by human beings, of which Dante's Ulysses is the perfect paradigm. It is a way of speaking based on lie and deceit, as is seen in Cavalca's *Pungilingua*, where perjury is defined as a *tra-passar* of the licit and truthful oath. *Trans-gressive* speech is, ultimately, the opposite of Dante's imparadised speech in writing the third *cantica*, a linguistic and moral level the poet was able to attain only by the extraordinary experience of his *tras-umanar*.

## **2.0 MEDIEVAL AUTHORITIES ON TRANSGRESSIVE SPEECH**

The notion of the relationship between language and the sacred is as old as the Old Testament. The universe began as a response to God's verbal command. Language was thus as miraculous as creation itself. The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation further elaborated this idea and posited the notion of Christ as the embodied Word. Since ordinary humans were endowed with the gift of speech as well, for Christians, human language became the most immediate connection between the world down here, corrupt and corruptible, and the transcendental world, perfect and eternal. As early as the fourth century A.D., St. Augustine, the first philosopher of Christianity, reflected at length on the specular relationship between human words and the Word, the *verbum dei*, and posited a major split within human language. According to Augustine, men use two different kinds of language: an outer language, consisting of the vocal expression of notions and ideas, and an inner language--the *verbum cordis* or *mentis-*, the true language, that reflects God's Word.<sup>22</sup> In moral terms, the closer men's outer words are to their inner, mental words, the closer men themselves are to transcendental standards. When a discrepancy occurs between what people say and what they actually think, the human language becomes tarnished with the sins of lying and hypocrisy. Augustine's doctrine of interiority, his

---

<sup>22</sup> See *De Trinitate*, book XV. For an analysis of Augustine's theory of inner speech, see Claude Panaccio, "Augustin, le verbe mental et l'amour," in *Les philosophies morales et politiques au Moyen Age. Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Medieval Philosophy*. Ottawa, 17-22 August, 1992. Vol. 1, 777-785.

philosophy of language, as well as his concerns for morality, represent a fundamental cultural legacy to Christians in the Middle Ages.

Taking up major Augustinian notions, which they enriched with their own philosophical and moral insights or combined with other strands of thought (Classical or patristic), the moralists of the later Middle Ages paid particular attention, as we have seen, to the sins committed through the medium of speech. In this chapter, I present four leading moralists--two Italians and two Frenchmen--, whose insights and pronouncements on verbal sins have proven instrumental in my interpretation of the instances of transgressive speech discussed in the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy*.

William Peraldus was the first great theologian to imply that the verbal vices were so grievous that they might constitute an eighth class of capital vice. *De peccato linguae*, Peraldus's tract on verbal sin, was seminal in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and was soon translated into French and Italian. For having transposed Peraldus's theories about sinful speech into vernacular, Laurent d'Orléans and Domenico Cavalca may also shed a great deal of light on the terms used by Jean de Meun and Dante to describe sins men commit in speech. Thomas Aquinas, whose doctrine of *peccata verbi* will close my series of presentations, is fundamental for my dissertation not only because he was one of Dante's confessed authorities in matters of ethics, but also because he introduced the notion of will as the moral agent for verbal sins, a notion that underlies both Jean de Meun and Dante's view of sinful speech.

## 2.1 PERALDUS'S EIGHTH "CAPITAL" VICE

In a study written in 1948, the French scholar Antoine Dondaine deeply deplored the fact that William Peraldus's *Summa Vitiorum et virtutibus*, a work which enjoyed an exceptional popularity not only in the Middle Ages but also in the following ages up to the seventeenth century, had, in modern times, slipped into oblivion along with the name of its author.<sup>23</sup> According to Dondaine, Peraldus should be granted a place of honor in the doctrinal history of the Middle Ages. His moral *Summa* is an exceptional product of a Christian moral theology, essentially traditional and Latin, very different from the Greco-Arab wisdom which began to infiltrate late-medieval Christian thought.<sup>24</sup>

The last three or four decades have brought a marked change in the attitude of medieval scholarship toward Peraldus. Two projects, one initiated by a group of five American scholars, the other by a Dutch team, have undertaken to provide a modern edition of Peraldus' *Summa*.<sup>25</sup> Casagrande and Vecchio's book has also contributed a great deal to the revival of interest in the figure and works of the medieval moralist. Peraldus's name is also more and more cited in the field of Dante studies, as we shall see in what follows. But who was this ecclesiastic figure, so

---

<sup>23</sup> "La faveur accordée par le moyen âge et les siècles suivants à la 'Somme des vices et des vertus' du dominicain Guillaume Peyraut n'a de comparable que l'oubli dans lequel cette même oeuvre est tombée de nos jours. Peu d'ouvrages, dans toute l'histoire littéraire connurent un aussi brillant succès," [“Guillaume Peyraut, vie et œuvres,” *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 18 (1948), 162].

<sup>24</sup> Here are the enthusiastic words with which Dondaine describes the specificity of Peraldus's moral encyclopedia: "A la différence des traités spéculatifs, où l'apport philosophique grec devient souvent prépondérant, la *Somme des vices et des vertus* ne perd pas un seul instant le contact avec les sources scripturaires et patristiques. Une inspiration profondément chrétienne anime toute l'oeuvre et plonge le lecteur dans une atmosphère d'intense vie spirituelle. (...) Du fait de ces sources la Somme est comme le dernier témoin d'une tradition qui va se trouver en partie submergée par l'envahissement de la morale péripatéticienne" ("Guillaume Peyraut," 189).

<sup>25</sup> Kent Emery Jr., Joseph Goering, Richard Newhauser, Catherine Pinchetti, and Siegfried Wenzel have started *The Peraldus Project*, a semi-critical edition of the *Summa Vitiorum*. A part of their work has already been published online, at: [www.english.upenn.edu/~swenzel/peraldus.html](http://www.english.upenn.edu/~swenzel/peraldus.html). The Dutch scholars from the *Institute of Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies* (Nijmegen), lead by Dr. A.M. Verwij, have prepared a critical, annotated edition of the third section of the *Summa de virtutibus*, "De Virtutibus cardinalibus." For more about the current state of their work, see: [www.onderzoekinformatie.nl](http://www.onderzoekinformatie.nl).

famous in the late Middle Ages, and why is he so important in the context of our discussion of transgressive speech in the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy*?

Born about 1200 in Peyraud, in the department of Ardèche, William Peraldus (Guillaume Peyraut, in the French version) was a Dominican friar, a brilliant preacher whose intense religious activity was concentrated in Lyon, where, about 1260, he was a prior of the Dominican convent; and also in Vienna. Several testimonies contemporary with Peraldus and recalled by Dondaine portray Peraldus as a man of exceptional erudition, whose intellectual and rhetorical qualities were matched only by his strong Christian qualities: according to some medieval sources, even at an old age, Peraldus was climbing the hard slopes of the Alps to reach the most isolated settlements of Christians in need of spiritual assistance. His sermons and preaching skills had made him famous in all of Europe to the point that intellectuals who met him noted down the impressions left by their encounter with him.

Among the five main works that are attributed to him, the *Summa Vitiorum and virtutibus* is by far the most celebrated. Written in its entirety before 1250,<sup>26</sup> the *Summa* is a work of moral theology with a bipolar structure: its first part deals with the capital vices, and its second with the cardinal and theological virtues, as well as with the beatitudes. The *Summa Vitiorum* adopts but at the same time explodes the traditional Gregorian scheme of the capital vices: to the seven vices postulated by Gregory the Great, and treated by Peraldus in seven different tracts or chapters, Peraldus adds an eighth, which he examines in a distinct chapter called *De peccato linguae*.<sup>27</sup> The interpretations given to this structural aspect of the *Summa Vitiorum* by

---

<sup>26</sup> Judging from a manuscript from Combray, dating from 1277, the *Summa Vitiorum* probably dates from as early as 1236. The *Summa de virtutibus* was written after the section on vices, and would date from 1248. These dates advanced by Dondaine have generally been accepted by modern scholars.

<sup>27</sup> Siegfried Wenzel correctly points out that the addition of a new category of vice is not the only liberty Perladus takes with respect to the Gregorian system. The Dominican moralist also changes the order of the vices within the

Peraldus's scholars converge into the idea that by adding this "new" vice to the traditional seven, Peraldus conferred to the verbal sin the status of an eighth capital sin. The implication of Peraldus's addition was that the harm men may commit with their tongue is as serious as the evils they commit by other means. According to the same interpreters (Casagrande, Vecchio, Wenzel, Lindorfer, Craun) the inclusion of an eighth capital vice, the vice of the tongue, represents the hallmark of Peraldus's moral system.

Under the generic heading *De Peccato linguae*, the medieval moralist discusses twenty-four classes of verbal sin, in twenty-four separate chapters:

1. *blasphemia* (blasphemy)
  2. *murmur* (tale-bearing)
  3. *peccati defensio* (excusing sin)
  4. *periurium* (perjury)
  5. *mendacium/falsum testimonium* (lying/false testimony)
  6. *detractio* (slander)
  7. *adulatio* (flattery)
  8. *maledictio* (cursing)
  9. *convitium* (insult)
  10. *contentio* (quarreling)
  11. *bonorum derisio* (mocking good people)
  12. *pravum consilium* (evil counsel)
  13. *peccatum seminantium discordiae* (sowing of discord)
  14. *bilinguium* (double talking)
- 

system, coming up with the arrangement: gluttony, lechery, avarice, accidia, pride, envy and wrath, which reverses the Gregorian order. See Wenzel: "By the early thirteenth century, the seven vices had, in moral theology, as well as in its practical applications, become the standard topic of discussing the major inclinations to evil in human behavior. What was not standard, and hence surprises us, is the order in which Peraldus presents the seven, which contrasts with the normal one, derived from Gregory the Great, that begins with pride and ends with lechery." [The Continuing Life of William Peraldus's *Summa Vitiorum*, in *Ad litteram. Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery Jr., eds. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 137].

15. *rumor* (rumor)
16. *iactantia* (boasting)
17. *secretorum revelatio* (ferreting of secrets)
18. *indiscreta comminatio* (blunt threats)
19. *indiscreta promissio* (imprudent promise)
20. *verbum otiosum* (idle talk)
21. *multiloquium* (loquacity)
22. *turpiloquium* (lewd talk)
23. *scurrilitas* (scurrility)
24. *indiscreta taciturnitas* (imprudent taciturnity)

The rationale for the inclusion of an eighth vice in a work structured on a sevenfold system is given in the first paragraph of the tract on verbal sin, where Peraldus obliquely complains of the insufficiency of the Gregorian scheme: *Ultimo inter peccata dicendum est de peccato linguae quia istud peccatum remanet post alia peccata* ('lastly among the sins we must speak of the sin of the tongue, because this sin remains after the other sins'; 9.1).<sup>28</sup> To this argument which bears on the technical necessities related to the structure of his work, he adds another complaint, which has to do with a compelling moral reality: among people, even those truly regretful of their sins, few are aware of, and therefore try to shun and redeem, the evils they commit in speech: *Multi cavent sibi de aliis peccatis qui non cavent a peccato linguae*; 'many people guard themselves against other sins, but they do not do so against the sin of the tongue').<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Peraldus uses the terms 'vice' and 'sin' interchangeably, as synonyms. The technical distinction between vice, as a steady moral disposition toward evil, and sin, the actual accomplishment of the disposition, will be made only later on, by Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>29</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the translation of the Latin quotes I use from medieval authors is mine.

In the tract on verbal sin, Peraldus maintains the tripartite pattern of treatment he had hitherto applied to the other capital vices: *detestatio* (a list of reasons why Christians should abhor the respective vice), *species* (subclasses of each chief vice), *remedia* (practical solutions for fighting the evil inclinations). Taking up Hugh of St. Victor's theory of the *disciplina in locutione*, just as Raoul Ardent had done before him, Peraldus individuates, as we have seen, the evils of speech in the tongue, an organ which by its anatomic slipperiness is prone to moral deviance, and advances no fewer than eighteen reasons that should move men to control their speech. These reasons constitute the part of *detestatio* within the tractate.

As far as the sins themselves are concerned, the first four (blasphemy, *murmur*, excusing sin and perjury) offend God directly, whilst the last twenty vices offend man. Among the twenty-four, blasphemy is considered the gravest, but no other attempt at arrangement according to a criterion based on gravity is pursued by Peraldus. In other words, there is no explicit reference to a hierarchy of sins in his tract on verbal transgressions. Each of the twenty-four chapters provides several definitions of each vice, but even these definitions are schematic, very concise. The moralist is more interested in the phenomenology of the sin, and most often obliquely characterizes the sin by the specific behavior of the sinner. A keen observer of the contemporary social scene, Peraldus frequently associates verbal sins with specific segments of society: *murmur* and rumor with monks, lying with merchants, scurrility with minstrels, women with quarreling, and... blasphemy with drunkards. To reinforce his ethical message, Peraldus draws extensively from scriptural and patristic authorities, which he intersperses with quotes from classical sources, such as Cicero, Seneca, Horace. The style of the writing is highly metaphorical, and the obsessive insistence with which certain motives or images recur are the

*apanage* of the skilled Christian orator concerned with convincing the sinners to avoid evil tendencies.

The last part of the tract provides a list of eight remedies against verbal transgressions, which are in fact repressive attitudes against sinful tendencies of the tongue. The theme of the *custodia linguae*, with which, in the wake of Hugh of St. Victor and Raoul Ardent, Peraldus had begun his treatise on *De peccato linguae* recurs in this final part, giving thus a circular structure to the last tract of the *Summa Vitiorum*.<sup>30</sup>

In the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, Peraldus's moral encyclopedia enjoyed an exceptional fortune: more than three hundred manuscripts are known from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century alone.<sup>31</sup> In the fifteenth century, Jean Gerson, the famous chancellor of the University of Paris, mentions Peraldus's *Summa* in one of his writings from 1423, called *De examinatione doctrinarum*, and it seems that the esteem in which he held the Peraldian work was extremely high: Gerson allegedly said that if it happened that all the books in the world would suddenly vanish, and only Peraldus's *Summa* survived, the loss would not be that bad.<sup>32</sup> In the sixteenth century, three editions of the *Summa* were printed in 1571 alone, and in the seventeenth century, four different editions were printed in the same year, 1668. Of the medieval manuscripts of the *Summa*, Edwin Craun counts thirty-three copies in England alone.

Modern scholarship on Peraldus has proven with many irrefutable arguments that *Summa Vitiorum*'s influence on subsequent European moral thought was strong and took various

---

<sup>30</sup> I do not dwell longer on Peraldus in this introductory part, since I will return to his *De peccato linguae* for each of the verbal sins Dante treats in the *Inferno*. For an overview of Peraldus's system of oral sins, see Casagrande and Vecchio's chapter "Guglielmo Peraldo: I vizi capitali e il peccato della lingua," (in *I peccati della lingua*, 103-140), and more recently, Craun's account of Peraldus' approach to verbal sin, in *Lies, Slander and Obscenity*, 14-17.

<sup>31</sup> Wenzel also notes: "In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries both *Summae* could be found in practically any major library all over Europe, whether monastic or secular or eventually lay, often even in multiple copies." ("The Continuing life of William Peraldus," 136).

<sup>32</sup> Quoted by E. J. Arnold, in *Le 'Manuel des péchés'. Etude de littérature religieuse anglo-normande* (Paris: Droz, 1940), 29.

shapes: from expansions of the *Summa*, to abbreviations of it, adaptations or simple quotes. Siegfried Wenzel has thoroughly examined and detected Peraldus's presence in works such as: *Erchantnuzz der Sund* ('Knowledge of Sin', fourteenth century, Vienna), *De Lingua* (Oxford, fourteenth century), *Summa iusticie* (England, beginning of the fourteenth century), Alexander Carpenter's *Destructiorum vitiorum* (England, fifteenth century), *Primo videndum est* and *Quoniam ut ait sapiens* (late-medieval England, sources for Chaucer's Parson's Tale). Casagrande and Vecchio have also contributed strong arguments for the influence of Peraldus's *Summa* on Vincent of Beauvais, Bartholomew of San Concord, John of Friburgh, Steven of Bourbon, Servasanto da Faenza, Laurens d'Orléans, and Domenico Cavalca.

The last three names are very important in the context of our discussion of the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy*, and I will treat Laurens d'Orléans and Cavalca separately for reasons that I will explain in due course. Servasanto da Faenza was a Franciscan friar, who, between 1277 and 1285, wrote an adaptation of Peraldus's *Summa* in Florence. Entitled *Liber de virtutibus et vitiis*, da Faenza's work offers a summary of Peraldus's tract on verbal sin (*De vitio lingue et eius multiplice specie*) and deals with selected verbal sins, such as: blasphemy, *murmur*, slander, flattery, sowing of discord, double-talking.<sup>33</sup> We know from Dante's biography that he had a strong sympathy for the Franciscan order, and da Faenza's work in Florence during the years preceding Dante's exile increases the probability of Dante's familiarity with Peraldus. To my knowledge, Casagrande and Vecchio's mention of Servasanto da Faenza has not yet been connected with Dante.

Another name with a strong resonance in Dante's biography might have been the intermediary between Peraldus's *Summa* and Dante: according to J. Th. Welter, Brunetto Latini

---

<sup>33</sup> My sources for this information are Casagrande and Vecchio, *I peccati della lingua*: 132

undoubtedly drew on Peraldus's *Summa Vitiorum*, in his *Le livre du trésor*, written about 1266, a work reputedly known to Dante. Dondaine and Lindorfer subscribe to Welter's assertion.<sup>34</sup> As far as the relationship Dante-Peraldus is concerned, two studies dealing with this subject have been written that leave no doubt as to Dante's familiarity with the *Summa Vitiorum*. In "Un'Auctoritas di Dante," Franco Mancini contends that the work of the Dominican friar is one of the models Dante visited most frequently.<sup>35</sup> Mancini compares textually fragments from the *Summa Vitiorum* with passages from the *Divine Comedy*, giving an overwhelming list of similarities between the two works. Although some of these analogies seem to me a little far-fetched (like the comparison of Ulysses' *orazion picciola* with Peraldus's words on *superbia*: *[Indocti] miseri sunt in vita ista. Quodammodo enim brutis inferiores sunt*; 'The unlearned are unhappy in this life. They are even inferior to beasts'),<sup>36</sup> other similarities Mancini has highlighted are too striking to be discarded: the punishment imagined by Dante for the usurers with Peraldus's identical image, the description of Cayaphas in *Inferno* XXIII with an eerily similar description in Peraldus, etc. According to Mancini, the portrayal of the *veglio di creta* should also be related to Peraldus, just as dozens of other images or metaphors that Mancini generously selects from the three *canticas* of the *Comedy* and compares, with painstaking care, with textual quotes from the *Summa Vitiorum*. The evidence gathered by Mancini is, in the main,

---

<sup>34</sup> See *L'exemplum dans la littérature religieuse et didactique du Moyen Age*, (Paris: Guitard, 1927), 168, for Welter; *Guillaume Peyraut. Vie et oeuvres*, 191, for Dondaine; and "Peccatum linguae," 27, for Lindorfer. Although Lindorfer's article does not deal with Dante, it is worth noting that she mentions Brunetto and Dante in the same connection with the moral category of *peccatum linguae*: "It is not surprising, therefore, that Albertanus da Brescia in his *Art of Speaking and Being Silent*, Brunetto Latini in his *Li Livres dou Tresor*, Erasmus in *Lingua* and even Dante in the *Divine Comedy* all refer, explicitly or implicitly, to the *Summa Vitiorum et virtutibus*." (id.)

<sup>35</sup> *Studi danteschi* 45 (1968), 95-119. The critic does not fail to note, first, Peraldus's sway on Iacopone da Todi and, again, Brunetto Latini, and to signal the presence of many copies of the *Summa Vitiorum* in Dante's time in cities like Pisa, Assisi, Perugia.

<sup>36</sup> In this very passage, Peraldus reinforces his idea with a kindred quote from Boethius, an author whose influence on Dante was avowed by Dante himself. Ulysses' *orazion picciola* may thus have been shaped by Boethius through a direct influence, not necessarily through the intermediary of Peraldus.

overwhelming.<sup>37</sup> One idea, especially, seems to me tantalizing in Franco Mancini's study: that Dante's relationship to Peraldus did not take the shape of slavish imitation. Peraldus's Latin *Summa Vitiorum* represented an inexhaustible source of inspiration, from which Dante gleaned scraps of information, concepts and metaphorical images that he used in idiosyncratic ways in his poem written in the vernacular [my emphasis]. Thus, Dante would be a *traduttore-traditore* of Peraldus, a splendid idea, which I will retain for my treatment of the sins of the tongue in the *Inferno*. My discussion of the infernal circles punishing verbal sins will add more affinities between Dante and Peraldus to the already long list drawn up by Franco Mancini.

Although focusing on just one aspect of the connection *Summa Vitiorum-Divine Comedy*, Siegfried's Wenzel's article on "Dante's Rationale for the Seven Deadly Sins," brings more compelling evidence to support Dante's reliance on Peraldus. The seven forms of evil love according to which Dante disposes the seven terraces of the mount Purgatory correspond faithfully to the forms of *amor inordinatus* with which Peraldus characterizes the moral term *sin*. The theory of disorderly love through which, in Purgatory XVII, Virgil explains the structure of Purgatory to the pilgrim reproduces Peraldus's doctrine of sin as *amor inordinatus*, from *Summa Vitiorum (De Superbia)*. According to Wenzel, this approach to sin is unique in the moral theology of the Middle Ages, and Dante could have taken it only from Peraldus.

Recently, other Dante critics like Bruno Porcelli and Richard A. Shoaf have contributed more evidence supporting the theory of a connection between Dante's *Comedy* and Peraldus's *Summa*.<sup>38</sup> As both Shoaf and Purcelli's contributions analyze (each) one specific aspect of this

---

<sup>37</sup> The Italian critic does not confine himself to the *Comedy*, he also mentions *Convivio I.V.5*, as being indebted to Peraldus.

<sup>38</sup> Porcelli, Bruno. "Peccatum linguae, modello mosaico, climax narrativo nel canto di Ulisse." *Critica letteraria* 19.72 (1991): 423-443.

connection, I will refer more extensively to them when I will discuss the respective places in the *Comedy* (the circle of evil counselors, and falsifiers, respectively). Although the main goal of my dissertation is not to add further proof to Peraldus's sway on Dante, the examination of the Perldian treatment of the sins of the tongue in connection to Dante seems to me unavoidable and born of common sense, therefore I will point to possible affinities between Dante's text and the text of *De peccato linguae* every time it will be necessary.

As to the question whether Dante knew the *Summa Vitiorum* directly or indirectly, I adhere to the conclusion Siegfried Wenzel has reached: “(...) whether or not Dante knew Peraldus's *Summa* directly is hard to say. The material which Peraldus had collected was soon used and propagated by authors of Latin and vernacular manuals on the sins and on confession. Hence it is possible that Dante became acquainted with our passage at second hand, although the rationale itself is usually not found in the less speculative, more popular handbooks of the time. On the other hand, Dante may have seen the *Summa* during his contacts with Dominican friars at Santa Maria Novella in Florence or at the Sorbonne.”<sup>39</sup>

Since Wenzel reached this conclusion in 1965, many years before Casagrande and Vecchio published the results of their research on the variegated dissemination of Peraldus in France and Italy, in Wenzel's two suppositions regarding the places where Dante might have “met” the *Summa*, I would only substitute the Florence of Servasanto da Faenza for the

---

Richard A. Shoaf. “Dante and Peraldus: The *acqua falsa* of Maestro Adamo (A Note on *Inferno* 30. 64-69)”, in *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 10 (1980), 311-313.

<sup>39</sup> “Dante's Rationale for the Seven Deadly Sins (*Purgatorio* XVII),” *Modern Language Review* 60 (1965), 533.

Sorbonne. Seemingly, Dante's trip to Paris is more of a legend than a historically grounded fact.<sup>40</sup> Why look for "Dante's Peraldus" in France, when we can find him in Florence?

In what follows I will describe two vernacular compilations of Peraldus, one in French the other in vernacular Italian.

## 2.2 LAURENT D'ORLÉANS AND *LES PECHIÉS DE LA LANGUE*

"Quelqu'un entreprit alors d'accorder en langue d'oïl l'œuvre du célèbre dominicain."<sup>41</sup> These are the words with which, in the wake of Charles Langlois, we could characterize Laurent d'Orléans's work, and more notably, his French tract on the *pechies de la langue*. The "famous Dominican" Langlois speaks of as the object of such a linguistic process of "accommodation" is, of course, William Peraldus.

*Somme le roi*, also known as *Somme Lorens* or *Li Livres royaux des vices et des vertus* is a moral encyclopedia which, according to several of its interpreters, bears the irrefutable imprint of Peraldus's *Summa Vitiorum et virtutibus*.<sup>42</sup> Written in 1279-80 by Laurent d'Orléans, a

---

<sup>40</sup> The hypothesis of Dante's visit to Paris has been accredited especially by those critics who have studied the possibility that Dante might have become acquainted with the *Romance of the Rose* during a trip to the French capital. There is, however, no biographical evidence to support such a hypothesis.

<sup>41</sup> Charles V. Langlois, *La vie en France au Moyen Age*, (Geneva: Slatkine, 1970, IV), 134.

<sup>42</sup> The earliest assertion in this sense belongs to R.E. Fowler, who, in a study from 1905, advances the hypothesis that both Gower (in *Mirour de l'Omme* and the *Confessio Amantis*) and the author of the *Somme le Roi* drew extensively on Peraldus's *Summa (Une source française des poèmes de Gower)*, Mâcon, 1905). Speaking of Peraldus's legacy in the later Middle Ages, Welther also asserts: "La Somme-le-Roi (...) renferme de larges emprunts faits à la Summa (de Guillaume Peyraut), à côté de traités latins antérieurs." (*L'Exemplum*, 169). Let us mention in passing that in the list drawn by Welther of writers influenced by Peraldus, *Somme le Roi* immediately follows Brunetto Latini's *Livre du Trésor*. One of the places where Peraldus's sway on Laurent d'Orléans is more easily recognizable seems to be the chapter on the sins of the tongue, from the *Somme le Roi*. (See *I peccati*, 132-133).

Dominican friar, confessor to King Philip III, *Somme le Roi* was commissioned by the king himself, who wanted to have and offer to his court a major book of moral instruction drawn in the living, everyday language.<sup>43</sup>

The book is structured in six major tracts: 1. the ten commandments; 2. the twelve articles of faith; 3. the seven deadly sins; 4. the virtues; 5. the commentary on the *Pater nostrum*; and 6. the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>44</sup> None of these parts is original; they are translations or adaptations of previous writings, mostly Latin. Charles Langlois remarks that the entire *Somme*, a generally ‘badly wrought book’ (*un livre mal fait*), is a short version of another moral tract called *Le Miroir*. Even when the *Somme* deviates from the *Miroir*, Langlois says, (in the chapters on the sins of the tongue and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for instance), it is still not original, because these two chapters are borrowings from Peraldus.<sup>45</sup> The great eclecticism on account of which Langlois pronounced his severe judgment on the originality of the *Somme* does not weigh negatively in our consideration of Laurent d’Orléans.<sup>46</sup> Our purpose is precisely to examine the way in which a moral writer in French vernacular adapted Peraldus’s Latin tract on

---

<sup>43</sup> Charles Langlois notes that a great part of the immediate success of the *Somme* must be attributed to the fact that, being a book commissioned by the king himself, the *Somme* easily aroused the curiosity of the aristocratic circles of the time (*La vie en France*, 123).

<sup>44</sup> In Ms. 2071 of the *Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal* which I use, the order is as follows: the seven deadly sins are placed at the very beginning, so as to emphasize the importance of the ethical component of the *Somme*. The same manuscript ends with the ten commandments, while the part devoted to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit is missing. There are several other French manuscripts of the *Somme* beginning with the seven deadly sins instead of the ten commandments (Ms. 409 and 22932, two of the oldest ones, and the Ms. of Alençon).

<sup>45</sup> For a systematic cross-reading of the *Miroir* and the *Somme*, see E. Brayer, “Contenu, structure et combinaison du ‘Miroir du monde’ et de la Somme le Roi”, *Romania* 79 (1958), 1-38, and 433-470.

<sup>46</sup> Despite his negative assessment of d’Orléans as a writer, Langlois is quick to evoke the enormous and long success of the *Somme le Roi*, a work preserved in nearly one hundred manuscripts and translated early on into several European languages (Italian, Spanish, Provençal, English and Flemish). For the English adaptations of the *Somme*, see Leo Carruthers, *La Somme Le Roi de Lorens d’Orléans et ses traductions anglaises: Etude comparée* (Paris: Association des Médiévistes Anglicistes de L’Enseignement Supérieur, 1986). One of the English versions of the *Somme* is available in a modern edition: *The Book of Vices and Virtues. A Fourteenth century English translation of the ‘Somme le Roi’ of Lorens d’Orléans*. N. Francis, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1942).

verbal sins. What matters for us is Laurent's work as a translator, the terms and notions he used to describe verbal transgressions.

In the French *Somme*, the section on les *pechies de la langue* is imbedded into the larger category of *pechies de la gueule* ('sins of the mouth'), which occupy the seventh position within the scheme of the capital sins. The general framework Laurent adopts in his moral tract is an allegorical presentation of the seven capital vices starting from St. John the Apostle's vision of the seven-headed beast coming out of the sea. Within this general framework, each individual sin is a head (*chief*) of the beast. The simile makes sense if we are to consider the etymological association between the heads of the beast and the seven sins as "capital" ('heads' from which subsequent offspring derives). The ten horns of the beast are, then, the *trespassemens* ('transgressions') of the ten commandments. Unfortunately, however, and this is one of the main charges addressed by critics to Laurent, when he comes to treating the subdivisions of the seven sins, he gives up the allegory of the seven-headed beast, and speaks of branches and twigs of the tree of evil.<sup>47</sup>

The seventh head of the apocalyptic beast is, thus, represented by *les pechies de la gueule*, a 'head' subdivided into the... tree of gluttony and the tree of *les pechies de la langue*. Although in the *Summa Vitiorum* Peraldus had not treated the sins of the tongue along with the sins of *gula*, the association between gluttony and verbal sin was not unusual, but rather a traditional coupling, as Casagrande and Vecchio have pointed out. In Laurent's *Somme*, the sins of the tongue flow quite naturally from a virulent condemnation of drunkenness, as a

---

<sup>47</sup> The allegory of the trees of good and evil was the general framework in which the *Miroir* treated the virtues and vices. Thus, although, Laurent replaced the image of the tree of evil with that of the apocalyptic beast, he was unable to move further within this framework, and switched to the tree, which could lend itself more easily to divisions and ramifications.

manifestation of the sin of gluttony. The drunkards have the evil habit of frequenting the *taverne* ('tavern'). Here, in this *ecole et chapelle du diable* ('school and chapel of the devil'), people no longer pay attention to the way they speak and are prone to committing very many sins of the tongue.

This is the springboard from which Laurent launches his disquisition on the sins of the tongue. If we were to read this section in parallel with the *De peccato linguae* one major difference would strike the eye: only ten main verbal transgressions are posited by Laurent. The French moralist justifies his reduction with the help of a new biblical metaphor. The evil tongue (*la male langue*) is the dry tree Jesus cursed on his way to Jerusalem, because it was bearing no fruits. Counting the ways in which the *male langue* manifests itself would be as hard and daunting as counting the leaves of a tree. What can be counted, however, more easily in a tree are its branches, and Laurent identifies ten such main branches: idle talk (*oiseuse*), boasting (*vantise*), flattery (*losenge/losengerie*), slander (*detraction*), lying (*mensonge or fallace*), perjury (*perjure or faux serment*), contention (*contenz*), *murmur* (*murmure*), rebellion (*rebellion*) and blasphemy (*blaspheme*).

In the category of *oiseuse* enter the vain words, the words of the peddlers, the stories and jokes. All the practitioners of idle speech waste not only time, but also their inner self (*vudent le tresor du coeur*), says Laurent taking up an Augustinian-Peraldian idea. *Vantise* (the former *iactantia*, of Peraldus) is also a form of transgressive speech, as the one who boasts acts like a thief (*voleur de Dieu*) who attributes to himself what is God's work. For the sin of flattery, the third branch of the tree of the evil tongue, Laurent uses two terms *adulateur*, a reminiscence of Peraldus's *adulator*, but also--and more often--the terms *losengeur* ('the one who sings praises',

‘praiser’), or *flateur*, that were more common in the everyday language. We will encounter these French terms in the *Roman de la Rose*, when the habit of flattery is discussed.

Peraldus’s *detractio* came down to the *Somme* as *detection*, but the practitioner of this sin is not so much the *detractor*/ ‘detracteur’ as in Peraldus, but rather the *medisans* (which etymologically means ‘evil speaker’, or ‘the one who speaks evil’). The technical moral terms used by Peraldus are thus not only gallicized (like in the couple *detractio-detection*), but also replaced with more understandable terms from the living language, that the laymen were able to grasp.

The sin of *mendacium* is translated by Laurent as *mensonge* and is described, along Peraldian lines, as a falsification of reality. Lying falsifies man (*fausse lomme*) as one falsifies the royal seal or money, therefore the liar (*le menteur/mensongier*) will be judged at the Last judgment as a *faussaire* (falsifier). From lying, Laurent moves on, just like Peraldus, to *perjurium*, translated as *perjure* or *faus serement*, the latter term being less cryptic, and defines it as a transgression (*trepassemenz*) of the truthful oath. The next category, *contenz*, is Peraldus’s former *contentio*, but here again new moral terms are introduced, as the sin is subdivided into seven twigs: *estriver* (‘contradicting’), *tencier* (‘quarreling’), *ledengier* (‘name calling’ or ‘insulting’), *mal dire* (‘cursing’), *remponer* (‘reproaching’), *menassier* (‘menacing’), *descorde sosciter* (‘sowing of discord’). Among these seven divisions of *contenz* (of which several were separately treated by Peraldus as autonomous categories), Laurent establishes a slight hierarchy, asserting that the most dangerous is the sin of sowing of discord, because it disrupts cities and agreements (*destourbe les pais et les concordes*).

The sin of *murmure* follows that of *contenz*, as the ones who do not dare to quarrel overtly, start speaking in a low voice, between the teeth. This class of verbal sin is further

divided into 1. murmuring against man (like the servants against their masters, or the poor against the rich, etc.) and 2. murmuring against God. The next verbal sin, *rebellion*, flows naturally from murmuring. For if protesting in a low voice is a bad thing, it is even worse to rebel (*male chose est de murmurier, mais trop vault pis rebellion*), says Laurent, who draws again comparisons among verbal sins. It is worth noting that *rebellion* was not among the twenty-four classes of *peccatum linguae* established by Peraldus; it is Laurent's own contribution, likely made to please the one who had commissioned the book. No other "virtue" could more please a king than submission, the diametrical opposite of *rebellion*, a sin to be inveighed against virulently, as Laurent does. Why is rebellion a verbal transgression? Because the "rebels," in their desire to impose their will on others, do not heed other's people's advice, but make fun of them. Moreover, if they are chided, they defend themselves verbally and protest against scriptural warnings.

The last sin treated is blasphemy, again a deviation from Peraldus's line of thinking, according to which blasphemy was the utmost form of transgressive speech and was thus treated at the very beginning of the *De peccato linguae*. Although the reasons that may drive man to insult God or the saints are taken up by Laurent, the harsh tone of Peraldus's condemnation of blasphemy does not subsist in the confessor of king Philip. Again, the reason for this depreciation of the gravity of blasphemy might lie in the addressee of the book. As a king, Philip was likely to be more concerned with political and worldly matters than with religious ones, and Laurent was undoubtedly well aware thereof. In *La littérature française au moyen âge*, Gaston Paris notes the mild tone of Laurent's moral tract, and explains it by the fact that the moralist did not want to turn the world into a cloister (*il ne veut pas faire du monde un cloître*)<sup>48</sup>, while

---

<sup>48</sup> (Paris: Hachette, 1914), 157.

Langlois, with his outspokenness, does not hesitate to speculate about the embarrassment Laurent may have felt in writing a book of moral instruction for his king: “Il n'est pas douteux, du reste, que frère Laurent se soit senti gêné, à la longue, par la conscience qu'il était amené à rabâcher.”<sup>49</sup>

All these factors may account for the major differences in structure and in tone between the *De peccato linguae* and Laurent's chapter on the sins of the tongue. The reason why the latter is important for us is the moral lexicon that Laurent d'Orléans introduces in the French language, and this shortly before Jean de Meun started writing his *Mirroir aus amoureux*. Several of the terms used by Laurent are present in the *Romance of the Rose*, as well, therefore a reading of the *Somme*, even a perfunctory one, as I have provided here, may cast a great deal of light on the verbal habits that the characters of the *Rose* are debating obsessively.

## 2.3 DOMENICO CAVALCA

Like Peraldus and d'Orléans, Domenico Cavalca was a Dominican friar, one of the most prolific writers of his order. Born about 1270 in Vicopisano, near Pisa, into the noble family of the Gaetani, he was educated at the ecclesiastic school of St. Catherine of Alexandria, in Pisa. According to the *Chronicles* and the *Annals* of the Dominican priory in Pisa, the sources that document his life and career, Cavalca did not hold an academic degree, but was extremely active as a preacher and ecclesiastic reformer. During his life, he helped reform the nuns from two

---

<sup>49</sup> *La vie en France*, 140.

monasteries, St. Anna and the Misericordia, and himself founded another monastery, called Santa Marta. His constant support for the poor and the sick in the hospitals and prisons earned him the name *Dominicus hospedalarius*. He died in 1342, with a reputation of holy man.<sup>50</sup>

All throughout his life, Cavalca alternated his charitable works with study and writing. His religious works are numerous and variegated and have proven very influential in Dominican circles. An important aspect of these works is represented by the so-called *volgarizzamenti* ('translations into vernacular'), such as: *Atti degli Apostoli* ('Acts of the Apostles'), *Dialogo di san Gregorio* ('Dialogue of St. Gregory the Great'), *Vite dei Santi Padri* ('Lives of the Fathers'), *Lo specchio de' peccati* ('Mirror of Sins'), *Medicina del cuore ovvero trattato della Patientia* ('Medicine of/for the Heart or Treatise on Patience'), *Pungilingua* ('The Wounding Tongue'), *Epistola a Eustochio* ('Epistle to Eustochio'), translations highly valued by both Cavalca's contemporaries and even more recent criticism.<sup>51</sup> The last three texts are compilations of materials drawn from Peraldus's works: the *Lo specchio de' peccati* is a synopsis of the *Summa Vitiorum*, the *Medicina del cuore ovvero trattato della Patientia* is a lengthy reworking of Peraldus's chapter on anger, whereas the *Wounding Tongue* is an ample adaptation of Peraldus's tract on the sins of the tongue.

---

<sup>50</sup> The *Annals* report that the entire city took part in the funeral, especially the underprivileged, who mourned deeply the loss of their protector, whereas the *Chronicles* mention the reputation of saintly man he deservedly had at his death. My source for these pieces of information is Benedict M. Ashley, O.P., "Dominic Cavalca and The Spirituality of the Word," published electronically at <http://www.op.org/domcentral/study/Ashley/cavalca.html>. More information about the life and works of Cavalca can be found in Carmelina Naselli's *Domenico Cavalca* (Città di Castello: Il Solco, 1925) and in Telio Taddei's "La vita del Cavalca dai suoi scritti," in *Memorie domenicane*, Pistoia: Riviste dei Padri Domenicani, 1942. Other than these three above-mentioned studies and brief entries in various modern dictionaries about Italian authors, I have found no recent study dealing with the figure or works of Cavalca. For the complete list of critical studies written about Cavalca in the nineteenth century, see *Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana*, Vittore Branca, ed. (Turin: Unione Tipografica-Editrice Torinese, 1986), 563.

<sup>51</sup> In assessing Cavalca's skills as a translator from Latin into vernacular, Sebastiano Bastionetto notes: "Nel tradurre, il Cavalca partecipa allo spirito del testo talmente da dar l'impressione di proporre un testo originale." ('When he translates, Cavalca adheres so well to the spirit of the text that he seems to write an original text.' *Dizionario critico*, 562; translation mine). Benedict Ashley also notes that along with Cassian's *Conferences* (a text dear to St. Dominic, the founder of the Dominican order), Cavalca's Italian version of the *Lives* contributed to the transmission of the important legacy of Byzantine spirituality to the Latin West. (op. cit., 2).

In translating, Cavalca was well aware of the hermeneutic mechanisms and difficulties involved in the process of *volgarizzamento* and left us a compelling proof of this awareness in the *Prologue* to the *Dialogo di San Gregorio*:<sup>52</sup>

Tal cosa par ben detta per grammatica, che ridotta in volgare secondo l'ordine delle parole par niente e meno utile; e alcune volte una piccola parola per grammatica è di tanta significazione che non si può trarre intendimento se non per molte parole; e alcuna volta per fare ben dettato si pongono molte parole e volendo recare a volgare intendimento si possono e debono molto abbreviare per trarne più bella sentenza.

A thing which seems well said in Latin, when transferred in the vernacular with the same word order, seems nil and less useful; at other times, a small Latin word is so meaningful that one can preserve its shade of meaning only by using lots of words; and sometimes, to form a good expression in Latin, one uses many words, and willing to translate this expression into the vernacular, one can and must abbreviate a great deal in order to come up with a more beautiful vernacular phrase.<sup>53</sup>

The second level of Cavalca's work is constituted by a series of more original writings, such as *Specchio di croce* ('Mirror of the Cross'), *Frutti della Lingua* ('The Fruits of the Tongue'), *Disciplina degli spirituali* ('The Discipline of Spiritual Persons'), *Trattato delle trenta stoltitie* ('Tractate on the Thirty Follies'). Although still using a multitude of quotes from various sources, such us patristic writings (from both the Western and Eastern traditions) or moral authors closer in time (the Victorines and Peraldus, in particular), these texts reveal, according to interpreters, more of the creative side of Domenico Cavalca.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Quoted by Ashley, in "Dominic Cavalca."

<sup>53</sup> Since there is no English version of Cavalca's works, the translation of the passages from Cavalca is mine.

<sup>54</sup> The *Specchio di croce* is an original meditation on the Passion, the first text of this type in the Dominican culture, whereas the *Trattato delle trenta stoltitie* analyses the spiritual abuses made by those engaged in a combat against the world and its evils (among such abuses or 'follies' are: practicing penances in excess, hoping to win the battle without God's help, getting discouraged after the first defeat, etc.). In manuscripts, the *Trattato* is often joined to the *Disciplina degli spirituali*, a text dealing with the defects of the pious (lukewarmness, self-righteousness, depression, etc.) and bearing the imprint of Peraldus's thought. *I frutti della lingua* is an optimistic response to Peraldus's tract on verbal sin... and to Cavalca's own popularization of it, the *Wounding Tongue*. In *I Frutti*, Cavalca develops Peraldian insights on the benefits of the human ability to speak and structures his material in three main parts: one on prayer, one on preaching and the last on confession.

What is common to all these works is the moral obligation Cavalca feels toward the unlearned Christians unable to understand Latin. In the prologue to the *Specchio di croce*, the writer confesses: *ho pensato che, ben che io non possa di grande cosa, possa almeno del mio poco sapere una opera fare; non sottile né per grammatica, ma in volgare, accioché alquanti devoti secolari, perocché sono idioti e molto occupati abbiano alcuno induttivo a devozione.*<sup>55</sup> ('I have thought that, although I am not very skilled, with the scanty knowledge I have, I can at least write a work; not a subtle one, nor in Latin, but in the vernacular, so that some devout laymen, who are unlearned and very busy, may find in it an incentive to devotion'). Cavalca's concern with the instruction in the vernacular of laymen is somewhat similar to the goal of Dante's *Convivio*, that of sharing the light of knowledge with those who find themselves in spiritual darkness.

One of the most notable aspects about Cavalca, an aspect mentioned by practically all the secondary sources I have consulted, is the style of his writing, a style characterized by simplicity of syntax and clarity, in which the living language is elevated to the rank of literary *koiné*. It is relevant in this respect that the Italian purists considered Cavalca's language and mode of writing models of perfection, characteristic of the *aureo Trecento*.<sup>56</sup> Speaking of the cultural osmosis proper to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, an age in which many efforts were directed to the creation of a vernacular literary language faithful to the spirit of Latin works but comprehensible even by the unlearned, S. Bastianetto considers Cavalca a leading exponent of

---

<sup>55</sup> Quoted by Sebastiano Bastionetto, in *Dizionario critico*, 561. There is a modern edition of the *Specchio* by Tito S. Centi: *Domenico Cavalca. Specchio della croce. Testo originale e versione in italiano corrente* (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 1992).

<sup>56</sup> For a critical consideration of Domenico Cavalca as a vernacular writer, see Cesare Segre, *Volgarizzamenti del Due e Trecento* (Turin: Unione Tipografica-Editrice Torinese, 1953) and G. de Luca, *Prosatori Minori del Trecento*, I (Milan: R. Ricciardi, 1954).

this process, a *pioniere di un linguaggio e di una spiritualità* ('a pioneer of language and spirituality').

### 2.3.1 The *Pungilingua* ('The Wounding Tongue')<sup>57</sup>

The modern reader who undertakes to read Cavalca's *Pungilingua* after Peraldus's *De peccato linguae* might get the impression that Cavalca is Peraldus's voice in the vernacular, so similar the two authors sound. If we consider things in their historical context, it is not difficult to understand why the latter exerted such a powerful influence on the former. Born just one generation apart from Peraldus and belonging to the same fraternal order, sharing thus the same preoccupations with preaching and moral reformation, Cavalca could not remain insensitive to the production of the French master from Lyon. By the time that Cavalca was writing in Pisa, the *Summa Vitiorum et Virtutibus* was, as we have seen, already present in several places in Italy. The fact that Cavalca decided to *recare a volgare intendimento* Peraldus's moral texts testifies to the great authority the French moralist had in Italy in the first half of the fourteenth century, when Dante was still alive. Peraldus's chapter on verbal sin from the *Summa Vitiorum* must have impressed Cavalca particularly, since he decided to translate it apart from the *Summa*, as an autonomous book, with a new title. It is highly likely that one of the reasons why Cavalca was so attentive to this class of sins was his intellectual formation as a preacher. Preaching, the main apostolic activity of the Dominicans, was predicated on an intimate relationship to spoken words. Another plausible reason for Cavalca's idiosyncratic treatment of *De peccato linguae* might have been the fact that this chapter was, as we have seen, one of Peraldus's most salient features of

---

<sup>57</sup> I borrow the English version of the title from Ashley.

originality in the *Summa*. And finally, we have to consider that, along with being a moralist and a preacher, Cavalca was also a translator. Reproducing a Latin tract on the sins of the tongue in the Florentine dialect must have seemed a very appealing undertaking to him, since it provided him with the opportunity to verify how Peraldus moral-linguistic theories transferred to the vernacular. Would the spirit of vernacular Italian fit into the mold of Peraldus's Latin examples? This is one of the questions that might have challenged Cavalca's mind.

Cavalca's *Pungilingua* is more than a slavish reproduction of the *De peccato linguae*. *Pungilingua* follows the general pattern of the Peraldian treatment (the division into twenty-four sins, for example), but at the same time, takes many freedoms with respect to it, in the form of new ideas, additions and amplifications. This ambivalent attitude toward the original text--fidelity and distance--is clearly expressed in the Prologue to *Pungilingua*, in which Cavalca gives the rationale for his writing this work and explains the new title. I will reproduce here this prologue not only for its relevance to Cavalca's relationship to Peraldus, but also for the beauty of the Italian language explaining the harm the tongue can do. It is the same language in which, just a few years before Cavalca, Dante deplored the evils of speech in the *Inferno*. Cavalca's prologue can enlighten our understanding of why Dante embedded several verbal sins in the structure of his hell.

Imperocchè, come dice santo Iacopo Apostolo nella sua Epistola, la lingua nostra è inquieto male, piena sì, che versa, di veleno mortifero, ed infiammata di fuoco infernale, ordina, attizza, semina, e nutrica tutti i mali; e macula e disordina la ruota della nostra natività, cioè tutto il tempo e corso della nostra vita; imperocchè presto comincia e persevera insino alla fine; parmi molto utile di scrivere alcune cose a biasimo de' vizj della lingua, e di dimostrare la loro gravezza e le spezie, i gradi e i remedj, sicchè ciascuno li possa ben vedere, conoscere, odiare e confessare. E perciocchè di questa materia e di questi peccati molto bene, e singolarmente parlò il divoto e sapientissimo Fra Guglielmo di Francia, dell'Ordine dei frati Predicatori, nella sua *Summa de' vizj*, nella quale

describe, e pone ventiquattro peccati mortali, i quali della lingua procedono; intendo principalmente recare a commune volgare la detta opera, aggiugnendovi alcune altre poche cose, ragioni, ovvero esempj, che parlino di simile materia, sicchè, come ogni uomo e letterato ed idiota in questo vizio della lingua offende, così ciascuno in questo volgare trattato possa questi vizj conoscere e confessare. E perchè quest' opera è fatta per voler reprimere e vituperare i peccati della lingua, così voglio che si chiami *Pungilingua*; che siccome ella mal punge, così sia punta.

Since, as the Apostle St. James says in his Epistle, our tongue is a restless evil, so full of mortal poison that it spills out, and enflamed with infernal fire, orders, ignites, sows, and nurtures all evils; and it stains and disrupts the wheel of our birth, that is to say, all the time and course of our life, since once it gets started it perseveres up to the end, it seemed very useful to me to write a few things to blame the vices of the tongue, and to prove their gravity and species, the(ir) degrees and the(ir) remedies, so that everyone may see them well, know them, hate them and confess them. And as of this topic and of these sins spoke, in a unique way, the devout and most wise Father William of France, of the order of the Preachers, in his *Summa Vitiorum*, in which he describes and posits twenty-four mortal sins proceeding from the tongue, I mainly undertake to translate into the vernacular the above-mentioned work, adding to it a few other things, reasons, or examples which speak of the same topic, so that, since every man both learned and unlearned offends in this vice of the tongue, everyone may be able to know these vices from this vernacular tract and confess them. And because this work is designed to repress and vituperate against the sins of the tongue, I want to call it *Pungilingua* ('The Wounding Tongue'), for just as the tongue wounds, I want it to be wounded.

Here, Cavalca introduces himself as a humble compiler of Peraldus, whose originality and wisdom in writing about matters of transgressive speech he deeply admires and acknowledges. It is important, however, that Cavalca forewarn his readers about his personal contribution to the Peraldian text: he confesses that he added similar material to Peraldus's insights and enriched it with additions and new examples. Aware of his own originality as a translator-author, Cavalca contrives a title for this new product and calls his adaptation *Pungilingua*, a pun articulated on the twofold ability of the tongue, that of harming and being harmed.<sup>58</sup> The same vehicle for sin that is the tongue can be harmed by this tract in the vernacular, which aims at repressing, through a positive and virtuous language this time, the

---

<sup>58</sup> This title, just as the notion of the tongue as the main "culprit" for the evils of speech is typical of Peraldus and Cavalca, but will be abandoned by the great scholastics, Aquinas, in particular, who will stress that the one responsible for the sins of the tongue is not the anatomic organ, but a more subtle spiritual segment: the human will.

tongue's proneness to evil. Cavalca's self-awareness as a writer is paralleled by his concern as an ecclesiastic writer in the vernacular: he motivates his linguistic choice by the universality of the verbal sin, which can affect both the educated and the unlearned. His pastoral care encompasses, thus, a category of people unable to read Peraldus's tract in the original: the uninstructed laity, barred from access to Latin. The laymen, too, had to be made aware of all the harm that may derive from speech, and in this process of spiritual education, the vernacular language, in its most quotidian and accessible aspect, was for Cavalca the ideal linguistic tool.

After the prologue, the author dedicates the first chapter of his book to the ideal of *raffrenare* or *guardare la lingua* (the now traditional appeal to *custodia linguae*), and speaks *Di quelle cose che c'inducono a bene guardare la lingua, e mostranci la gravezza dei suoi peccati generalmente* ('Of those things that motivate us to control the tongue, and, in general, of those things which show us the gravity of its sins'). In this chapter, the eighteen reasons for the *custodia linguae* listed by Peraldus at the beginning of the *De peccato linguae* are reduced to twelve.<sup>59</sup> The first of these motives speaks of the unique gift God made to man by giving him the power to speak. The great benefit of such a gift can be verified through the fact that, when a man loses his speech, he would rather get it back than gain a large amount of money. It is therefore a great misfortune that man uses specifically the tongue, the anatomic organ in which God honored him, to offend the divinity. Secondly, we should consider that the tongue is reason's vehicle; therefore we should only speak according to reason, not to the senses. Being such a noble organ, the tongue ought to be used only in verbal functions like praying, praising, thanking God, confessing, getting the Eucharist and preaching, and not to vituperate against God or others. Another reason regards the intimate connection between heart and words: since the spoken

---

<sup>59</sup> It is likely that Cavalca did not fail to notice that some of Peraldus's 'reasons' for *custodia linguae* were overlapping.

words express the inner thoughts or feelings, the better one controls his speech, the better he will be able to dominate his feelings, and therefore a better person and Christain he will be. Unfortunately, says Cavalca, the tongue is located, in the human body, in a very humid and slippery place; therefore it is prone to many ‘slips’ or sins. Indicative of the tongue’s natural disposition toward sin is the fact that it is the only limb imprisoned in the body;<sup>60</sup> all the others are *palese* (‘in sight’). Cavalca reiterates St. James’s notion that every animal nature, bird or beast, or serpent, can be tamed, but nobody can tame the human tongue. When the Holy Spirit showed himself to the Apostles, he chose to manifest himself as a fiery tongue, because it was necessary that the evil of the tongue be redeemed and purified by a transcendental tongue. For the same need for purification, the Holy Church decreed that at baptism, one grain of salt be placed into the mouths of those to be baptized. If St. James, Cavalca explains, chose for the tongue the metaphor of fire, it is because fire is the most dangerous of all the natural elements, able to cause the greatest destruction in the shortest time. In the same way, spiritually, the harm produced by the tongue is the most rapid and the most destructive. For, Cavalca says, the tongue of an evil lawyer, or counselor, immediately gives rise to wars, scandals, and many other misfortunes. (*Che, come veggiamo, la lingua d'un malo avvocato, o consigliere, o renunziatore subitamente genera guerre, scandoli e mali assai*). It is a Peraldian perception of speech that we will see masterfully exemplified both in the *Divine Comedy*, through the figures of Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro, or Bertrand de Born, and in *Pungilingua*, through very many exemplary stories used to illustrate the sins of the *mali consilieri* and the *seminatori di discordie*.

For Cavalca, the tongue is a three-fold knife, for it may harm three beings: God, oneself and the other. It may harm nearby or at a distance, secretly or publicly. Thus, it is no wonder,

---

<sup>60</sup> “Imprisoned” by physical barriers like lips and teeth, which can limit the evils the tongue may cause.

that once in hell, the sinners painfully bite their tongues. At work is the divine law according to which the sinner is punished in the limb with which he has sinned.<sup>61</sup>

The eleventh consideration that should motivate us to rein in our tongue—the utility that might ensue—is Cavalca’s most developed motive. With our tongues we can do very many useful things, such as enriching ourselves spiritually, praising God or praying, accusing ourselves or teaching others, confessing our sins and obtaining the absolution. Under the same eleventh consideration, Cavalca takes up the doctrine of verbal *discretio* (‘discernment), and lists the main circumstances that the speaker should consider: *chi dice, la qualità di chi ode, il tempo.*<sup>62</sup> The last of the twelve considerations that should move men to govern their tongues is the example of the Saints, who all used their spiritual gift of speech in positive and virtuous ways. In the wake of Peraldus, a multitude of biblical quotes are amassed under each of the twelve considerations to reinforce the moral teaching.<sup>63</sup> All these quotes are common places in the *lingua*-texts drafted in Latin, in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries. Cavalca’s merit is that of having translated them into Italian vernacular, in a form of expression accessible to his fellow countrymen deprived of education in Latin.

Unlike Peraldus’s *De peccato linguae*, which was divided into twenty-four chapters according to the twenty-four sins of the tongue he had established, Cavalca’s book is structured in thirty chapters, because some of the sins are paid more attention to than others, and treated in more than one chapter. The list of the sins is as follows:

---

<sup>61</sup> As an example, Cavalca invokes the scriptural story of the rich man, who, in Hell, begged Abraham to send down Lazarus, to put his cool finger on the rich man’s inflamed tongue. This story, was, of course, a common place *exemplum* in the *lingua*-texts.

<sup>62</sup> Here these circumstances concern, however, only the preacher.

<sup>63</sup> To give just a few examples: the *Proverbs*’ aphorism *Morte e vita è in mano della lingua*, Jesus’s warnings: *Per le tue parole sarai giustificato, o condannato*, or: *per l’abbondanza del cuore parla la lingua*; John Chrysostom’s connection between the moral quality of the speech and the moral quality of the speaker: *Tale è l’uomo quale è la lingua sua, ciascuno si conosce alla lingua, s’egli è di cielo, o di terra o di inferno*; St. James’s notion that *Vana è la religione di colui il quale la sua lingua non raffrena*.

1. *bestemmiare Dio*
2. *mormorare* (four distinct chapters)
3. *difendere e scusare il peccato suo o altrui*
4. *spergiuro, e male giudicare*
5. *bugiare*
6. *detrazione* (three chapters)
7. *peccato degli adulatori* (accompanied, in the same chapter, by the kindred sin of those who listen to flatterers)
8. *maladire e bestemmiare*
9. *convizio*
10. *contenzione e garrire*
11. *derisione* (two chapters),
12. *peccato de'mali consiglieri e confortatori al male*
13. *peccato dei renunziatori e seminatori di discordie*
14. *peccato dei bilingui e novellieri*
15. *peccato della jattanza*
16. *peccato del rivelare i secreti*
17. *peccato dello stolto promettere e minacciare altrui*
18. *peccato del parlare ozioso e multiloquio*
19. *peccato del parlare disonesto e giullaresco*
20. *peccato di varj e dissoluti balli e canti* (two chapters)
21. *peccato degl'indovini ed incantatrici e malefici*

If we compare this list with that of Peraldus, the structural changes are obvious: Cavalca conflates two distinct sins in Peraldus: murmur with rumor, adds a new category of verbal sinners (the *novellieri* ‘peddlers’), which he treats in the same chapter with the double-talkers, groups the sins of foolish promise and menace in one chapter; he does the same with idle talk and loquacity, whereas he develops the *scurrilitas* into the sins of dissolute songs... and dance,

of which the French Dominican had not spoken. The last sin in Peraldus's list, *indiscreta taciturnitas* is replaced in *Pungilingua* by the sins of the diviners and magicians, who misuse their verbal gifts to predict future events or to drive people to idolatry. Cavalca does acknowledge the existence of a transgression such as *mal tacere* ('evil silence'), but he considers it a twenty-fifth sin (Peraldus spoke only of twenty-four), and promises to deal with it at length, in a separate tract, since this type of transgression is too serious to be treated in just one chapter.<sup>64</sup> The idea of such a new project might also explain the most striking omission with respect to Peraldus's treatment: the absence of the tally of remedies for verbal sins with which the French ecclesiastic concluded his *De peccato linguae*.

Like Peraldus, Cavalca defines the sin through the behavior of the sinner. Sometimes, however, Cavalca does not mention the technical name of the sin (*adulatio*, or *pravum consilium*, for instance, as Peraldus did at the beginning of his chapters), but introduces it indirectly ('the sin of the flatterers', 'the sin of evil counselors', etc.). A new aspect in *Pungilingua*, an aspect that is to be accounted for by Cavalca's skills as a translator, is the constant care he takes to explain the technical terms he uses. When he introduces terms such as *convizio*, *adulatori* or *derisione*, for instance, he immediately specifies the meaning of the words: *del convizio, cioè di villaneggiare e vituperare il prossimo con parole d'obbrobrio* ('of insult, that is, of vilifying and vituperating against one's neighbor with words of disgrace'), or: *del peccato degli adulatori cioè dei lusinghieri*, ('of the sin of the sweet-talkers, that is to say flatterers', or again: *della derisione, cioè di fare beffe d'altrui* 'of derision, that is to say, mocking the other').

---

<sup>64</sup> Cavalca will keep the promise made at the end of the *Pungilingua*, by writing, a few years later, a new tract, *I frutti della lingua*, which is, as I have mentioned, a thorough study of the benefits of speech (prayer, confession, etc.)

Thanks to Cavalca's efforts at proper and subtle translation, many lexical resources of Italian vernacular have been exploited and fixed in a written form. Unfortunately, we do not possess today a modern study devoted to a thorough examination of Cavalca's outstanding activity and talent as a translator from Latin into Italian. His contribution to the creation, enrichment or consolidation of a moral lexicon in vernacular Italian deserves a much deeper consideration than I can give here. As far as this dissertation is concerned, however, Cavalca's activity as a moralist of speech, albeit briefly underscored, is fundamental. The lengthy explanations Cavalca furnished in the everyday language to the so great variety of verbal sins Peraldus had discussed in Latin, just as the wealth of exemplary stories with which Cavalca illustrated these sins can constitute a major key in understanding Dante's own view of the sins of the tongue and their treatment in a poetic work written in vernacular at about the same time. I will use this hermeneutic key and will, thus, constantly refer to the *Pungilingua* throughout my discussion of the verbal sins punished in the *Inferno*.

## 2.4 THOMAS AQUINAS AND THE SINS OF WORD

*Peccata verborum maxime sunt ex intentione dicentis dijudicanda.* (II-II. Q. 73. Art. 4, vol. 38, 174). ('Sins of word should be judged chiefly from the intention of the speaker.' vol. 3, 1498)<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> For the Latin text of *Secunda Secundae* I rely on *Summa Theologiae*. Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices and Glossary T.C. O'Brien. (London: Blackfriars, 1974), whereas for the English version I use *Summa Theologica*. I-V. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, Inc., 1981). The latter version seemed to me closer to the spirit of Aquinas's text. All throughout my dissertation the references for the Latin text (volume and page) will be taken from T.C. O'Brien, while those for the English translation from the Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

Written about 1270, more than two decades after Peraldus's *Summa Vitiorum*, *Summa Theologica* (or *Theologiae*) is the fruit of one of the finest Dominican thinkers of the Middle Ages, the one surnamed *Doctor Angelicus* and who was elevated to the rank of Saint by the Catholic Church, which adopted Aquinas's theological views as the official doctrine of Catholicism.

The *Summa Theologica* includes an important section on moral questions: the celebrated *Secunda Secundae*, which was (and still is) generally considered the most important ethics of the Middle Ages. Built on Aristotelian premises, Aquinas's moral system is essentially a Christian one, in which the most significant aspects developed by previous Christian moralists are absorbed in an idiosyncratic way and elevated to the heights of scholastic philosophy.

For Aquinas, morality is a movement of the rational creature toward God (*motus rationalis creature ad Deum*), an ascending aspiration achieved by means of human actions. The philosopher investigates these actions from the perspective of the freedom of choice (*liber arbitrium*), which, like reason and language, represents a divine gift bestowed exclusively on man. If it were not for man's free will, the punishments or rewards, the commandments, the laws could not find a justification. Since etymologically *arbitrium* means judgment, Aquinas defines the notion of free will in intellectual terms, as a choice-based act. Depending on whether the choice operates between good or evil, a human action is qualified as moral or immoral. In the theologian's view, in the process of examining whether an action is moral or not, the most important role is played by the object and end of that particular human act, by its finality: "A moral act takes its species from two things, its object and its end: for the end is the object of the

will, which is the first mover in moral acts.” (Q.110, Art. 1, vol. 3: 1658).<sup>66</sup> As he makes it explicit in I-II, Q. 74, Art. 1, sin, as such a moral act, takes its origin in the power of free choice: “Sin is an act (...). Now since it is proper to moral acts that they are voluntary, it follows that the will, which is the principle of all voluntary acts, both of good acts, and of evil acts or sins, is the principle of sins” (vol. 2: 919). We will see that the postulate of the will as the cause of evil actions will have a major bearing on Aquinas’s conception of the sins of word, as well.

In human operations, however, will, as the main moral “trigger,” works in tandem with the faculty of deliberation (‘judgment’), as the operating subject must be aware of his goal and means. Thus, an involuntary action of violence, committed out of anger, is pardonable, since the willful movement of the soul was affected by a disorderly state of mind. When, however, the will of the agent is not affected by impulses but exerts itself with deliberation and in all awareness, the agent is fully responsible and has no palliative excuses for his act: “The accidental gravity of a sin is to be considered in relation to the sinner, who sins more grievously, if he sins deliberately than if he sins through weakness or carelessness. In this respect sins of word have a certain levity, in so far as they are apt to occur through a slip of the tongue, and without much forethought.” (II-II, Q. 73, Art. 3). It is worth noting that this extremely significant remark concerning the scale of gravity of sins is made in a question dealing with a verbal sin, a fact which proves the importance Aquinas gives to the transgressions committed by the way of speech. Here the moralist discusses degrees of comparisons of sins, and does not hesitate to put sins of word in balance with sins of deeds. His postulate is that, although sins of word are, by

---

<sup>66</sup> For a groundbreaking overview of Thomas Aquinas’s ethical doctrines, see Etienne Gilson: *Moral Values and the Moral Life. The Ethical Theory of St. Thomas Aquinas*. (Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1961). Also useful and thorough are two more recent studies: *Aquinas and Empowerment: Classical Ethics for Ordinary Lives*, G.S. Harak, ed, (Washington, DC: Washington University Press, 1996), and *Aquinas’s Moral Theory: Essays in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, S. MacDonald, and E. Stump, eds. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), which bring fresh and original insights into the ethical system of *Doctor Angelicus*.

their nature, less grievous than sins of deed, it may happen that in certain circumstances (like, for instance when a verbal sin is committed deliberately, with ‘premeditation’, as he says), this verbal sin becomes mortal: “while an idle word, which is generally speaking, venial, may even be a mortal sin” (Pt. I-II, Q. 72, Art. 6, vol. 2, p. 907).

Assessing deeds, words or thoughts, as specific human operations is, thus, not an easy task for the moralist, for every act is to be seen from all angles, i.e., considering all the circumstances in which a specific deed/word/thought has occurred. Weighing these circumstances is of utmost importance, because, in the case of moral errors, the circumstantial situation may decide whether an error, i.e., sin, is mortal or venial, whether the soul will end up in hell or not. Salvation or damnation is, thus, often a matter of conjectural framework. For if the origin of a sin depends on its inclination to an end, i.e., on the thing to which the sin turns, the gravity of a sin, which determines the fate of the soul after death, depends on what it turns away from:

The essential gravity of sins committed against one’s neighbor must be weighed by the injury they inflict on him, since it is thence that they derive their sinful nature. Now the greater the good taken away, the greater the injury. And while man’s good is threefold, namely the good of his soul, the good of his body, the good of external things; the good of the soul which is the greatest of all cannot be taken from him by another save as an occasional cause, for instance by an evil persuasion, which does not induce necessity. On the other hand the two latter goods, viz., of the body and of external things, can be taken away by violence. Since, however, the goods of the body excel the goods of external things, those sins which injure a man’s body are more grievous than those which injure his external things. Consequently, among other sins committed against one’s neighbor, murder is the most grievous, since it deprives man of the life which he already possesses: after this comes adultery, which is contrary to the right order of human generation, whereby man enters upon life. In the last place come external things, among which a man’s good name takes precedence of wealth because it is more akin to spiritual goods, wherefore it is written (Prov. XXII.1): *A good name is better than great riches.* Therefore backbiting according to its genus is a more grievous sin than theft, but it is less grievous than murder or adultery. Nevertheless the order may differ

by reason of aggravating or extenuating circumstances. (...) A backbiter is a murderer *occasionally*, since by his words he gives another man an occasion for hating or despising his neighbor.' (II-II, Q. 73, Art. 3. Vol. 3: 1499).<sup>67</sup>

The question of the ‘gravity’ (*gravitas*) of sins is of paramount importance for Aquinas, running like a thread throughout his ethical project. His premise is that sins are different from one another in the same way as sicknesses diverge from one another (I-II, Q. 73, Art. 3). Just as a physical condition affecting the body can be more or less serious than others, so sins have various degrees of gravity. With this consideration in mind, Aquinas takes constant care to establish relationships between sins, to set up hierarchies, in which often sins of deed, which he considers *a priori* the most serious (*gravius est peccare facto quam verbo*, Q. 73, Art. 3, v. 38, 178), are compared to (and exceptionally deemed less grievous than) sins of word.<sup>68</sup> The notion of a hierarchy among sins based on their varying degree of gravity also underpins the belief in a hierarchy of punishments: ‘Punishments are medicine intended to keep man away from sin: so that where there is greater proneness to sin, a more severe punishment ought to be inflicted.’(Q. 39, Art. 2, vol. 3, 1351). This leads the philosopher to make a major and severe pronouncement also on the punishments operative in Hell: it is a heretic error, he states, to consider all sins to be equal and that all the pains of hell are equal (Pt. I-II, Q. 73, Art. 2).

---

<sup>67</sup> It is interesting that Aquinas considers friendship the most valuable of man’s external things. This consideration leads him to establish degrees of comparisons among verbal sins such as backbiting, tale-bearing and reviling. ‘Now of all one’s external goods a friend takes the first place, since no man can live without friends, as the Philosopher declares (Ethic. Viii,1). Hence it is written (Eccl. VI.15): *Nothing can be compared to a faithful friend*. Again, a man’s good name whereof backbiting deprives him is most necessary to him that he may be fitted for friendship. Therefore tale-bearing is a greater sin than backbiting or even reviling, because a friend is better than honor, and to be loved is better than to be honored, according to the Philosopher’, II-II, Q.74, Art. 2, vol. 3, 1502)

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, the suggestive comparison between murder, theft and blasphemy: ‘Wherefore a sin which is about the very substance of man, e.g., murder, is graver than a sin which is about external things, e.g. theft, and graver still is a sin committed directly against God, e.g., unbelief, blasphemy and the like’ (Pt. I-II, Q. 73, Art. 3, vol. 2, 912).

But what place did Aquinas reserve for the sins committed through the medium of speech? The question is extremely important, since Aquinas operates a major shift with respect to his predecessors in this field. The verbal sins are no longer the results of the wildness and slipperiness of the tongue. Verbal sins are not even intrinsic to a word or another, or to a kind of speech or another. For Aquinas, the sins committed by means of the mouth, belong, like any other class of sins, to the field of the will. And they are no longer a separate category, as they used to be in Peraldus, but along with the sins of deeds and thoughts they constitute subspecies (or degrees) of the same moral act. In order to prove his point, the medieval moralist takes up the illustrative Aristotelian metaphor of the house, and likens the sins of thought with the foundation of the house, the sins of word with its walls and the sin of deed with its roof:

The building is the complete generation of the house, while the laying of the foundations, and the setting up of the walls are incomplete species, as the Philosopher declares (*Ethic.* X.4). (...) Accordingly sins are divided into these three, viz., sins of thought, word and deed, not as complete species, but as degrees. For the consummation of sin is in the deed, wherefore sins of deed have the complete species; but the first beginning of sin is its foundation, as it were, in the sin of thought; the second degree is the sin of word, in so far as man is ready to break out into a declaration of his thought; while the third degree consists in the consummation of the deed. Consequently these three differ in respect of the various degrees of sin. Nevertheless it is evident that these three belong to one complete species of sin, since they proceed from the same motive. For the angry man, through desire of vengeance, is at first disturbed in thought, then he breaks out into words of abuse, and lastly he goes on to wrongful deeds; and the same applies to lust and to any other sin. (...) Conclusion: Sin of thought and sin of word are not distinct from the sin of deed when they are united together with it, but when each is found by itself; even as one part of a movement is not distinct from the whole movement, when the movement is continuous, but only when there is a break in the movement. (I-II, Q. 72, Art. 7, vol. 2, 908)

What allows Aquinas to compare sins of word with sins of deed is the similar way they manifest themselves: unlike the sins of thought that are committed secretly, the sins of word and deed are both committed openly.<sup>69</sup> More importantly, the sins of word no longer proceed from a natural inclination of the human tongue, as a slippery part of the body, toward sinfulness, but from an exercise of will: (...) *verba, in quantum sunt soni quidam, non sunt in nocumentum aliorum, sed in quantum significant aliquid. Quae quidem significatio ex interiori affectu procedit, et ideo in peccatis verborum maxime considerandum videtur ex quo affectu aliquis verba proferat.* (Q. 72, Art. 2, vol. 38, 160-162 ‘(...) words are injurious to other persons, not as sounds, but as signs, and this signification depends on the speaker’s inward intention. Hence, in sins of word it seems that we ought to consider with what intention the words are uttered.’(vol. 3, 1495, emphasis mine).<sup>70</sup>

In assessing words, Aquinas, like Augustine, makes the distinction between the phonic aspect of words, their signifier, in more modern terms, and what is signified. The ability of a word to do harm (the *potestas nocendi* Peraldus was speaking of, but in reference to the tongue)

---

<sup>69</sup> As far as verbal sins are concerned, the way Aquinas defines them is of a disarming simplicity: *Peccata enim oris consistunt in hoc quod aliquis mala dicit*, vol. 38, 188. ‘For sins of word consist in speaking evil’, vol. 3, 1501). Aquinas rarely uses the phrase *peccatum, -a oris* ‘sin(s) of the mouth’, as here; most often he uses *peccatum,-a verbi/verborum*, a syntagma which I have found translated either as ‘sin(s) of word(s)’ or ‘of speech.’ The translation of the Dominican Fathers I use privileges the variant ‘sin(s) of word,’ even where Aquinas says *peccata oris*, like here. This variant seems acceptable to me, in light of Casagrande and Vecchio’s remark that with Aquinas the causality of verbal sins irrevocably moves from the sphere of the anatomic organ (tongue or mouth) to that of will. For more on this topic see: “Il peccatum oris nella scolastica: da Alessandro di Hales a Tommaso d’Aquino,” in *I peccati della lingua*, 175-203.

<sup>70</sup> The foundation of the Thomistic treatment of verbal sins is Augustine’s theory of words as signs, a theory that Aquinas quotes several times throughout his *Secunda Secundae*. One of these times occurs in the major section dedicated to lying, as Augustine was the foremost authority on which the medieval theorists on *peccata linguæ* relied for their view of the sin of lying. See, for instance, Aquinas: (‘As Augustine says (*De Doctr. Christ. I.I*), words hold the chief place among other signs. And so when it is said that a lie is a false signification by words, the term words denotes every kind of sign.(...). For as words are naturally signs of intellectual acts, it is unnatural and undue for anyone to signify something that is not in his mind.’(Q. 110, Art. 1-3, vol. 3, 1658-1660). An excellent reading of Aquinas’s semiotic theory and its relationship to Augustine is made by Marcia Colish: “Thomas Aquinas and the Conception of the Word,” in *The Mirror of Language. A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge*. (Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 1983), 111-150.

derives for Aquinas from the signified of words.<sup>71</sup> In the treatment of the sins of word, Abelard, with his doctrine of intention, thus joins Augustine in helping Aquinas assert authoritatively his most important postulate regarding the criterion to be used in the ethical valuation of an act of speech. And what is more, the differences among subjective intentions enable Aquinas to forge his own system of verbal sins: *peccata verborum praecipue pensanda sunt secundum intentionem proferentis. Et ideo secundum diversa quae quis intendit contra alium loquens hujusmodi peccata distinguuntur.* Q. 75, Art. 1, vol. 38, 192 ('sins of word should be weighed chiefly by the intention of the speaker, wherefore these sins are differentiated according to the various intentions of those who speak against another', vol. 3, 1502).

Following the principle of differentiation of verbal sins, Aquinas treats eighteen such sins, which he considers transgressions of the cardinal and theological virtues. Thus, the sin of blasphemy is opposed to the theological virtue of 'faith', contention to 'charity', perjury to 'justice (with its subclass 'religion'); reviling, slander, tale-bearing, derision and cursing are also opposed to justice, but in its subclass 'piety.' Lying, boasting and 'irony' (the latter taken in its medieval meaning) are opposed to 'truth', another subspecies of justice, and flattery and quarreling to 'friendship', also a subclass of justice. The remaining sins of word: scurrility, loquacity, obscene talk, wanton word, foolish talking, all trespass the rules of 'temperance', in various subcategories of this virtue. Thus, scurrility and loquacity are transgressions of abstinence; obscene talk, wanton words and foolish talking violate 'chastity'. Three of the eighteen sins of word treated by Aquinas belong to more than one category: blasphemy, for instance, is opposed not only to faith, but also to temperance, as a manifestation of anger.

---

<sup>71</sup> 'Our words, if we consider them in their essence, i.e., as audible sounds, injure no man, except perhaps by jarring on the ear, as when a person speaks too loud. But, considered as signs conveying something to the knowledge of others, they may do many kinds of harm. (II-II, Q. 72, Art. 1, Vol. 3, 1494).

Quarreling violates not only justice, but also temperance, as another symptom of wrath. Finally, boasting opposes both justice (with its subclass ‘truth’) and temperance (with its subclass ‘humility’), being a manifestation of pride. What is interesting is that Aquinas treats preferentially the sins of word: while he devotes entire *questions*, with several articles each, to sins like blasphemy, contention, derision, lying, reviling, slander, tale-bearing, cursing, flattery and quarreling, he mentions the others (scurrility, obscene speech, loquacity, and wanton speech), only in passing. The criterion for such discrimination must certainly lie in the degree of gravity Aquinas associated with these sins.

Echoes of the scholastic theories about the sins of word and the pivotal role played by the will can readily be detected in the *Romance of the Rose*. Here, through the highly theological discourse of Lady Nature, Jean de Meun makes authoritative statements about the critical intervention of free will in the acts of speech. I treat these aspects in Chapter Two, section “Nature on the (Verbal) Vices of Humans.”

As to the *Divine Comedy*, both the principle of the hierarchy of sins and that of a varying scale/nature of divine punishments are visibly at work in the system of hell. As far as the verbal sins are concerned, we will see that the way in which Dante embeds them into the structure of Inferno, presents affinities with Aquinas’s theories about immoral speech, but also deviations from it. Since Aquinas was one of Dante’s acknowledged authorities in matters of ethics, throughout my dissertation I will constantly highlight both the similarities and the dissimilarities between Dante and Aquinas in the treatment of specific verbal transgressions.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> As far as the general relationship Dante-Aquinas is concerned, fundamental studies have been written by Pierre Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien* (Paris, Bruxelles: Desclée de Brouwer & Cie, 1935), Etienne Gilson, *Dante and Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1963), and Bruno Nardi [see especially *Saggi di filosofia dantesca*. (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1967), 341-381, where, engaged in a virulent polemic with Busnelli,

### **3.0 FROM JEAN DE MEUN'S MULTIDISCURSIVE DISPERSAL TO DANTE'S SYSTEM OF SINS**

Neither Jean de Meun nor Dante wrote tracts on verbal sins, but instances in which they assess habits of speech from a moral standpoint are so numerous in their works that, by sorting out these instances, we can work out an ethical theory about speech for each author. It has been noted that since Jean speaks in so many voices in his poem, it is hard to detect his “real” voice as an authorial persona. In what follows, I will seek to demonstrate that three of the discursive voices in the *Rose* express standpoints with respect to verbal sins that are representative for Jean de Meun as a moralist of speech. Lady Reason speaks at length about linguistic obscenity, Lady Nature about will as the first mover in verbal acts and Genius about the wicked female speech. I will attempt to prove that these three concerns lie at the core of Jean de Meun’s overall approach to speech.

Dante did not leave us either a unique text dealing with his view of humans’ use of speech from a moral perspective, but he made references to this topic in virtually all his outputs. *De vulgari eloquentia* is a work of linguistic and literary theory concerning the status of Italian

---

Nardi reaches the conclusion that Dante is as much a *Tomista* as he is a *non-Tomista*. In the United States, the absorption of Aquinas’s ethical views by Dante has thoroughly been studied by William H.V. Reade in *The Moral System of Dante’s Inferno* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909. Rpt. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1969). Reade, however, does not investigate Dante’s relationship to Aquinas in the field of verbal sins. More recently, Marc Cogan has undertaken a systematic reading of the three canticles of the *Divine Comedy* in light of the Aristotelian-Thomistic doctrine of the three appetites: concupiscent, irascible and of the will [See *Design in the Wax: The Structure of the Divine Comedy and its Meaning*. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 1999)]. One of the conclusions Cogan reaches with regard to Inferno—that the Malebolge correspond to the inner disposition of the will—will support my theory of Dante’s scholastic approach to the sins of the tongue.

vernacular, but even in such a technical work, Dante cannot obliterate his concern with human morality, but makes connections between language and sin. *De Monarchia* places the use of speech into a political perspective and shows that transgressions of speech may lead to divisions of the body politic. *Convivio* has all the features of a moral tract, and in it the discussions about vices and virtues of language are preponderant. All these tracts, and the clues about sinful speech scattered throughout the *Purgatory* and the *Paradiso* converge into a unique, coherent ethical perspective about transgressive speech that can help us grasp Dante's handling of verbal sins in the complex construction of hell.

It is, thus, the goal of this chapter to show that the label "moralist of speech" applies to its fullest extent to Jean de Meun and Dante.

### **3.1 ORIGIN, FUNCTIONS AND SINS OF SPEECH IN THE “ROMANCE OF THE ROSE”**

#### **3.1.1 Lady Reason on speech and its transgressions**

The world of the second part of the *Rose* is a world depicted in apocalyptic tones. Long before we get to Faus Semblant's sequence, where he explicitly defines himself as an Antichrist, Lady Reason, the first allegorical character to emerge in Jean de Meun's *Rose*, already presents the contemporary scene in very dark colors: Fraud (*Baraz*) took possession of the whole world and corrupted all good mores and honest practices. The virtues which had hitherto dominated the world, all vanished under the terror of malice, this mother of all kingdoms that brought along

only evils and sins. Guile, avarice, usury and their cohorts of vices have now replaced the virtues of the golden age. Merchants, lawyers and medicine men practice their crafts for money and privileges. Even preachers speak the words of the gospel not for the sake of evangelization but to acquire riches and social benefits. Judges no longer take the side of the innocent, but accept false testimonies and make unjust decisions.

Reason's discourse is so imbued with remarks about human morality that critics have often labeled it as a moral tract in its own right.<sup>73</sup> It tackles problems related to good and evil, to malice, to fraud, to injustice, and, most importantly for us, fraudulent behavioral practices in which speech plays a pivotal role. The springboard from which this allegorical character with a long tradition in literature launches her long disquisition is a discussion about love.<sup>74</sup> *Amors* is a word with several meanings in French, corresponding to several types of feelings: there is, first, erotic love, a sort of catastrophic disorder of the senses from which the Lover, Reason's interlocutor, suffers; in the same category of unhealthy attachments lies the love of riches. Opposed to these, there is a positive and noble love, governed by the rules of friendship and charity, and, finally, the noblest form of love of all: the one represented by the attachment to reason, the highest human faculty. Lady Reason embodies, obviously, the last kind of love, and as such, she offers herself as an alternate to the Lover's cupidinous feelings for the Rose.

In her attempt to convince the Lover to follow her, Reason launches a virulent campaign of denigration against carnal love, a campaign verbalized in a long oxymoronic series, designed

---

<sup>73</sup> If we are to consider the text, Lady Reason's discourse is an exemplar of pastoral literature: the character brands her own speech a *sermon* (4671-2), and the Lover labels her lesson with the same term (4656). For the French text of the *Romance of the Rose*, I use Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. *Le Roman de la rose*, Armand Strubel, ed. (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1992), whereas for the English version, I use *The Romance of the Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. Charles Dahlberg, translator. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995).

<sup>74</sup> Spanning about three thousand lines, Reasons's sequence is the longest in the *Rose*: it represents one sixth of Jean's sequel. All of the major interpreters of the *Rose* have meditated on this complex allegorical character, and of the two books John Fleming has written on the *Rose*, one is dedicated entirely to Reason and her interlocutor. See: *Reason and the Lover* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984).

to present this type of love as full of contradictions and dangers: a heinous peace and a lovely hatred, a healthy languishing and a feverish health, a sweet evil and an unpleasant sweetness, etc.<sup>75</sup> One expression is striking in Reason's fastidious list of metaphors and oxymorons: love, Reason says, is a sin stained with forgiveness, a pardon stained with sin: *entechiez de pardon pechiez,/De pechiez pardon entechiez.*' 4312-3). Eros is, thus, presented from the outset as an immoral attitude. Carnal love is characterized without ambiguity as incompatible with Christian values, a transgressive set of feelings that humans need to shun. In these positions vis-à-vis the world and erotic love lies the essence of the extremely long discourse of Lady Reason: it is a discourse built upon the values of Classical rationalism, shored up by numerous quotations from Roman authors, but framed within the conceptual context of Christianity.<sup>76</sup>

It will thus come as no surprise that Reason's approach to the complex problematic of human behavior will bear the marks of this amalgam of Classical theories of morality and the Christian attitude towards virtues and vices.<sup>77</sup> By the same token, her numerous references to verbal practices will rest on both pagan Roman sources and biblical authorities. In what follows, I will discuss the most important points Reason makes about the use of speech and will highlight those linguistic practices that she considers abusive or transgressive. I will also tackle the theme of the *custodia linguae* ('the guard of the tongue'), a theme shared by numerous medieval tracts on the sins of the tongue, and which Reason insistently offers as solution to the transgressions committed by the way of speech. I will treat the question of flattery in a separate chapter, since

---

<sup>75</sup> Barbara Newman reminds us that this extended oxymoronic series is a borrowing from Alain of Lille's *De planctu Naturae*. (*God and the Goddesses*, 100).

<sup>76</sup> When she invokes Suetonius, she calls him a *desloial homme* ('man of no faith'), noting outraged that he had considered the Christian religion false, uncanny and dangerous (6454-8).

<sup>77</sup> Minnis casts Jean as a sort of follower of Bernard de Cluny, who promoted the assimilation of the pagan criticism of vices to the Christian contempt of the world: "I believe that the same process of assimilation and adaptation of satiric theory and tradition may be found in the *Rose*," says Minnis in *Magister amoris. The « Roman de la Rose » and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 96.

this habit has complex features in the *Rose* and becomes a moral category in its own right in Dante's *Comedy*. In the economy of my dissertation, flattery constitutes, thus, the first major point of intersection between the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy*.

References to deceitful verbal methods occur early on in Lady Reason's discourse, when she starts complaining about the decay of courtly love. We remember from the first part of the *Rose* that *fin'amors* implied specific behavioral norms, one of which being a most polite and reverent way of using language. The Lover himself, at the beginning of his conversation with Reason in the second part of the *Rose*, recalls that he had three faithful companions: *Doux Penser* ('Sweet Thought'), *Doux Parler* ('Sweet Talk'), *Doux Regard* ('Sweet Glance'), which have all abandoned him. He now has to face alone several fierce enemies: Danger, Fear, Shame and Evil Mouth (*Malebouche*). 'Sweet Talk' and 'Evil Mouth' are reminiscences of the linguistic universe of the idealized courtly love; the latter will persist in the *Rose* until the meeting with Faus Semblant who will kill him.<sup>78</sup> But at this point of the narrative, lady Reason is concerned with lovers for whom the 'sweet talk' no longer corresponds to the inner voice of the heart, but becomes a deliberate method of seducing women: *Toutevois fins amans se faignent,/Mais par amours amer ne daignent/Et se gabent ainsi des dames/Et lor promettent cors et ames/Et jurent mensonges et fables/A ceuls qu'il tiennent decevables. Tant qu'il ont leur delit eü.* (4387-92; 'they always pretend to be pure lovers and do not deign to love par amour; thus they deceive ladies by promising them their hearts and souls and by swearing lies and fables to those whom

---

<sup>78</sup> This character is little developed by Jean, who portrays him not by having him speak, but by noting the evil way in which his words affect people's lives (*male bouche/Qui envenime et qui entouche /Touz ceuls dont el fait sa matire:/Par langue les met a martire* (4101-3; 'He poisons and taints all those with whom he has to do and by his tongue he delivers them to martyrdom').

they find gullible, until they have taken they pleasure with them').<sup>79</sup> *Se faindre* ('to pretend'), *se gaber* ('to fool'), *deceivable* ('gullible') belong to a lexicon of deception that is placed in immediate relationship with acts of speech: lies, oaths and false promises. With these types of verbal practices, the lovers leave the refined space of *fin'amors* and enter the sphere of fraud. Further evil verbal habits are condemned, this time in the framework of the discussion on friendship. Within the series of good and bad loves listed by Reason, one form of love that should definitely be cultivated is friendship, a feeling which is built on social bounds and which, unlike carnal love, may lead the soul on the path of virtues. Unmindful attitudes, however, can undermine this noble feeling and one may easily lose a friend not only through pride or anger, but also by using words in an inadequate way: *Len le pert par orgueill, par ire,/Par reproche, par reveler/Les secrez qui font a celer,/Et par la plaie doulereuse/De detracion venimeuse* (4930-35). That you can lose a friend in these five different ways proves that the consequences evil verbal habits have may equal the consequences caused by two deadly sins: pride and anger. In this passage, three verbal habits--reproach, detraction and revelation of secrets--are implicitly raised to the "rank" of capital vices, since *superbia* and *ira* figure on all the medieval lists of the seven capital vices.

If we compare this approach to speech to the list of the seven capital vices, we realize that this relationship of equality--capital vice=vice of the tongue--is not usual. In the Gregorian scheme, for instance, there are established hierarchical relationships between the main vices and the sins of speech, in the sense that the latter are subordinated to the former. If we consider,

---

<sup>79</sup> The passage is to be read in opposition to a remark about the use of speech Reason makes in another place in the poem: normally, what is in your mouth reflects or should reflect what is in your heart: *Car volentiers recorde bouche/Chose qui pres dou cuer li touche* (6863-4; 'for the mouth willingly utters what touches one near the heart'). What is not uttered in a specular relationship to the inner language of feelings constitutes an act of deception and thereby a linguistic transgression.

however, this approach in comparison to Peraldus's treatment of the sins of the tongue, it will seem less unusual. For Peraldus, the twenty-four manifestations of sinful speech constituted a category on a par with Gregory's seven capital vices. Two of the verbal practices mentioned by Jean in the above passage--*detractio* and *amici secreta revelare*--are among Peraldus's twenty-four vices of the tongue, and they are treated specifically in relationship to friendship. This remark is not to suggest that Jean made the association of two capital vices with three acts of speech under the immediate influence of Peraldus. What I intend to point out is rather that, due to its extraordinary popularity, Peraldus's *Summa Vitiorum* imposed a specific approach to speech in the cultural climate of the time, an approach which considered the sins of the tongue as serious as the seven capital vices. Thus, Jean de Meun's equation of vicious verbal habits with two deadly sins should not surprise. The poet not only wrote his sequel to the *Rose* during the years when Peraldus's *Summa* was very popular (1275-1280), but he also wrote it on Rue St. Jacques, the nucleus of the Dominican activity in Paris, where Peraldus's *Summa* was certainly very well known. Laurent d'Orléans also translated the *Summa* during the same years (1279-1280). Even if there is no evidence to suggest that Jean de Meun had knowledge of the *Summa*—although he was a great reader of, and translator from Latin--or of the French *Somme Le Roi*, the cultural context in which Jean was writing was so imbued with pastoral debates about sinful speech that he could not remain untouched by them.

Moreover, whereas detraction is in the Gregorian scheme of sins the daughter of envy, *secreta amici revelare* is a moral category that owes its existence to French ecclesiastics from the twelfth-thirteenth centuries. In the book XIII of his *Speculum Morale*, Raoul Ardent discusses the practice of disclosing one's friends' secrets as a vicious verbal habit. About fifty years after Ardent, Peraldus considers this type of habit so immoral that he decides to include it among his

twenty-four classes of sinful speech. Peraldus's followers will preserve it as well in their compilations in Latin, French or Italian.<sup>80</sup> In short, at the time when Jean was writing his poem, *la révélation des secrets des amis* was a fashionable moral category, so fashionable in fact that it might have entered the *Rose* as well.

At the polar opposite of the man who discloses his friends' secrets stands the true friend, who will never betray his companion and will never reproach him with anything: *Quant son secré dit li avra,/Jamais li tierz ne le savra./ Ne de reproche n'a il garde,/Car sages hons sa langue garde./Ce ne savroit mie fous faire:/Nus fous ne set sa langue taire* (4726-30; ‘When one has told a secret to him, no third person will ever know it; nor will the teller fear any reproach, for a wise man keeps watch over his tongue, a thing no fool could do, for a fool doesn't know how to keep his tongue still’). The theme of the guard of the tongue is also a product of the cultural period in which Jean lived: introduced by Peter the Cantor, in his *Verbum Abbreviatum*, taken up by Alain of Lille and Raoul Ardent in their moral writings, the ideal of controlled speech was developed again, very close in time to Jean, by William Peraldus. In the wake of Classical authors and of the scriptural writings, Solomon especially, with his numerous references to undisciplined speech, Peraldus insistently underlines the necessity to rein in one's tongue, and to carefully choose the proper time to speak and the words to utter. The *De peccato linguae* is divided into three main parts, one of which (*prima pars*) is entirely devoted to the problematic of the guarded tongue. Here Peraldus sets out to discern the reasons why a person should rein in his tongue, and he finds no less than eighteen such reasons *quod debet hominem movere ad custodiam linguae* (‘that ought to move one to keep his tongue’). The purpose of the

---

<sup>80</sup> In Latin, it was preserved by pseudo-Vincent's *Speculum morale*, a work modeled after Peraldus's *Summa*; in French, by Laurent d'Orléans in his *Somme le Roi* and in Italian by Domenico Cavalca. The two last authors are, as we know, translators of Peraldus's *Summa*.

*custodia lingua* is a moral ideal: only by one's ability to master one's speech, can one attain the highest standards of goodness and wisdom.

In the *Romance of the Rose*, Lady Reason is obsessed with the idea that she needs to impart the Lover the lesson of disciplined speech. She posits herself as a linguistic model, teaching the lover that gossip and quarrel are two great *villonies* ('vile things') that she never practices.<sup>81</sup> If the Lover makes mistakes in words or deeds, she will correct him by her own deeds or words but in doing so she would never appeal to blame or denigration.<sup>82</sup> Her speech is always good and true (*parole bonne et voire*) and when she chastises people she takes extreme care not to utter any foolish thing or harm them with her words.<sup>83</sup> After having expressed the notion that speech makes the difference between a wise and a foolish man in the context of friendship, as we have seen, later in her discourse, she develops this notion with a greater wealth of details and references:

Si rest taire vertu petite,/Mais dire les choses a taire/C'est trop grant  
diablye a faire./Langue doit estre refrenee,/Car nous lisons de Tholomee  
/Une parole mout honneste/Au commencement de l'Almageste:/Que sages  
est cil qui met paine/A ce que sa langue refraine,/Fors sanz plus quant de  
dieu parole/La n'a on pas trop de parole/Car nus ne puet dieu tro loer. (...)  
Chatons meismses s'i acorde,/S'il est qui son livre recorde./La puez en  
escrit trouver tu/Que la premeraine vertu/C'est de mettre a sa langue  
frain:/Donte don la toe et refrain/De folie dire et d'outrages,/Si feras que  
preuz et que sages,/Qu'il fait bon croire les paiens/Com de leur diz granz  
biens aiens. (7030-7058)

---

<sup>81</sup> *Qu'il est voirs, et ne te deplaise,/Tenciers est venjance mauvaise,/Et si doiz savoir que mesdire/Est encore venjance pire* (7001-7005; 'It is true—don't let it displease you—that a quarrel is a bad vindication, and you should know that detraction is a still worse form of vindication'; emphasis mine). Let us note in passing that both *tencier* and *mesdire* are on the list of verbal sins drawn by Laurent in French.

<sup>82</sup> *Car se tu meffais ou mesdis/Ou par mes fais ou par mes dis,/Surement t'en puis reprendre/Pour toi chastier et apprendre/Sanz blasme et sanz diffamement* (7007-7011; 'for if, through what I do or say, you mispeak or misbehave, I can, without blaming or slandering you, correct you privately in order to chastise you and teach you').

<sup>83</sup> *Je ne vueill mie as gens tencier/Ne par mon dit desavancier,/Ne diffamer nulle personne/Quel qu'ele soit, mauvaise ou bonne* (7019-7022; 'I do not want to quarrel with anybody, nor, by what I say, to lessen or defame any person, whatever he may be like, bad or good').

To keep silent remains a small virtue; but to speak the things to be kept silent is to commit a diabolical deed. The tongue should be held in check. We read a very honest saying of Ptolemy at the beginning of the Almagest: he who takes trouble over what restrains his tongue is a wise man, except when he speaks of God and nothing more. On that subject one does not speak too much, for no man can praise God too much. (...) Cato himself agrees, if there is anyone who recalls his book, where you may find in writing that the first virtue is to put a bridle on one's tongue. Subdue yours then, and refrain from saying foolish and wild things; then you will do only what is worthy and wise. It is good to believe the pagans, for we may gain great benefit from their sayings.

Important traces of the theories of the French ecclesiastics about silence have permeated Lady Reason's discourse as well. Keeping silence is a virtue, not a major one, since silence is morally ambiguous, but however a virtue. Not being able to practice silence when this is required is of great danger, since loquacity and betrayal spring directly from the devil. Such a theory clearly echoes the pastoral discourse on speech as represented by the moralists I have mentioned. This pastoral echo is further reinforced when Reason starts speaking about the necessity of holding one's tongue in check, an idea she expresses twice in a relatively short passage (*langue doit estre refrenée* and *que la premeraine vertu/C'est de mettre a sa langue frain*), thus displaying an obsession with *custodia linguae* worthy of Peraldus. Even the reference to Cato, where this quote is taken from, is a certified *topos* in the medieval moral tracts on *peccata linguae*.<sup>84</sup> The pagans Reason mentions constitute one of the two major source-strains in the medieval tracts, the other one being the scriptural writings.<sup>85</sup> Cicero, Seneca, Horace, to name just a few, are authors from which the medieval moralists on speech drew extensively to legitimize their own theories about virtuous vs. transgressive speech. Even the idea that the only

---

<sup>84</sup> Edwin Craun points out that Cato's maxims are omnipresent in the moral encyclopedias of the fourteenth century (*Lies, Slander and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature*, 67).

<sup>85</sup> For a thorough examination of the sources underlying the moral *summae*, see Richard Newhauser. *The Treatise on Vices and Virtues in Latin and the Vernacular* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1993).

good loquacity is that when one praises God, is a common denominator of the above-mentioned tracts on speech.

However, not even in this passage fraught with references to the sinfulness of speech, do we encounter yet the word ‘sin’. This comes--surprisingly--when Lady Reason sets out to assess the quality of her own discourse. One of the most controversial and debated moments in the narrative of the *Rose* is when Reason recounts the castration of Saturn by his son Jupiter and she refers to Saturn’s male genitalia as *viz* (‘prick’) and *coilles* (‘balls’). Her lexical choices prompt the outraged reaction of the Lover, who qualifies Reason’s speech as *parleüire baude* (‘bawdy speech’), and expresses his attachment to good linguistic manners, that he had learned from the God of Love:

Mais or vous oÿ nommer ci/Si com moi samble, une parole/Si esbalouvree  
et si fole/Que, qui voudrait, ce croi, muser/A vous enprendre a  
encuser,L’en n’i porroit trover deffenses.(...)/ Si m’a mon maistre  
deffendu/-Car je l’ai mout bien entendu-/Que ja mot n’isse de ma  
bouche/Qui a ribaudie s’aprouche (...) De tant vous puis or chastoier,/Si  
rapercevroiz vostre outrage/Qui vous faingniez estre si sage. (5696-  
5720)<sup>86</sup>

But I heard you speak at one point, it seems to me, some words so shameless and excessive that I believe if anyone wanted to waste time in undertaking to excuse you, he wouldn’t be able to find any defense. (...) My master has forbidden me—I heard him very clearly—ever to let fall from my mouth any word approaching ribaldry. (...) Now I can chastise you to that extent, and you who pretend to be so wise will see as well your own trespass.

---

<sup>86</sup> The Lover’s claim to proper language cannot, however, be taken seriously. If we examine his own language throughout the poem we will find it fraught with irreverent words, such as the epithets he uses to describe Jealousy: *L’orde puant vieille mossue* (4109; ‘dirty, stinking, foul old woman’).

It is true, the Lover says, that God created man and the male genitalia directly, but He did not create the words people use to name them and which are full of obscenities.<sup>87</sup> The reproaches the Lover levels at Reason belong, first, to a courtly literature strain, which imposes the use of euphemisms as a norm for language, and a popular, commonsensical strain, which requires even uneducated women to use a circumlocutory manner of speech in reference to the body parts.

Si ne vous tieng pas a cortoise/Quant vous m'avez coilles nommées,/Qui ne sont pas bien renommées/En bouche a cortoise pucele./Vous, qui tant estes sage et belle,/Ne sai com nommer les osastes,/Au mains quant le mot ne glosastes/Par quelque cortoise parole/Si com preudefame en parole./Souvent voi neis ces norrices/Dont maintes sont baudes et nice,/Quant leur enfanz tienent et baignent,/Qu'el les debaillent et aplaignent/Si les nomment il autremement;/Vos savez or bien se je ment. (6924-6938)

Moreover, I do not consider you courteous when just now you named the testicles to me; they are not well thought of in the mouth of a courteous girl. I do not know how you, so wise and beautiful, dared name them, at least when you did not gloss the word with some courteous utterance, as an honest woman does in speaking of them. Often I see even when the nurses, many of whom are bawdy and simple, hold and bathe their children, they use other names for them. Now you know well if I lie.

It is worth noting that in this reproach the Lover himself uses exactly the word he said he would never use. This detail is symbolic of Jean's satirical technique, whereby he manages to dismantle a character from within, namely by having him say things that eventually turn against the character himself. But what is most important in the Lover's reaction to Reason's improper language is that it causes her to take a stand with respect to her own choice of words and to excuse herself:

---

<sup>87</sup> *Or vaut pis, dis je, que devant/Car bien vois ore aprenant/par vostre parleüre baude/Que vous estes fole et ribaude,/Car tout ait dieus les choses faites,/Que ci devant m'avez retraites,/Les moz au moins ne fist il mie,/Qu'il sont tuit plain de vilonnie.* (6975-82; ‘Now, this is worse, I said, than before, for I see clearly now by your bawdy speech that you are a foolish ribald; even if God made the things that you have mentioned before here, at least he did not make the words, which are filled with villainy’).

Biaus ami, je puis bien nommer/Sanz moi faire mal renommer/Apertement  
 par propre non/Chose qui n'est se bonne non. /Voire, dou mal seurement  
 /Puis je bien parler proprement, /Car de riens nulle je n'hai honte/S'el  
 n'est tels que a pechié monte. /Mais riens ou pechié se meist /N'est nus  
que faire me feüst, /N'ainc en ma vie ne pechié/N'encor ne faz je pas  
pechié/Se je nomme les nobles choses /Par plain texte sanz mettre gloses,  
 /Que mes peres en paradis /Fist de ses propres mains jadis,/Et tous les  
 autres estrumenz/Qui sont piliers et argumenz/A soustenir nature humaine.  
 /Qui sanz euls fust or casse et vaine. (6941-6960)<sup>88</sup>

Fair friend, I can very well, without creating a bad reputation for myself, name openly and by its own name a thing which is nothing if not good. In truth, I can safely speak properly of evil, for I have no shame about anything if it is not such that it may be sinful. But a thing in which sin lay could make no difference to me, for I never sinned in my life; if I name noble things in plain text, without gloss, I still commit no sin, since my father in Paradise made them formerly with his own hands, along with all the other instruments that are the pillars and arguments for sustaining human nature, which, without them, would now be destroyed and empty.

The above quoted passage has given rise to an extraordinary critical response over the course of time.<sup>89</sup> The interpretations have mainly revolved around the fact that, in this passage, Jean explicitly airs his adherence to the nominalist position with respect to language.<sup>90</sup> Reason's stand can be summed up as follows: she praises the gift of speech granted to her by God, and

<sup>88</sup> Alastair Minnis links this passage with Jean's antipathy for integumental discourse. Although the poet constantly promises to provide gloss on some of his most cryptic definitions, a coherent integumental program does not exist in the *Rose*, asserts Minnis, who notes that for Jean glossing had "the pejorative connotation of inappropriate concealment, implying failure to face the facts." (*Magister Amoris*, 136). Badel also alludes to Jean's reluctance to the practice of *integumentum*, and puts it on account of Jean's attempt to denounce "la déviation joachimite de l'exégèse." (*Le Roman de la Rose au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Etude de la réception de l'œuvre* (Geneva : Droz, 1980), 15).

<sup>89</sup> This surge of interest is due, in Hult's view, to the modern development of semiotics and hermeneutics. "Language and dismemberment: Abélard, Origen, and the *Romance of the Rose*," in *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 1992), 109. Other notable studies of Jean de Meun's view of language are: Marc-René Jung, "Jean de Meung et l'allégorie," *Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises* 28 (1976), 21-36, Gustav Ineichen, "Le discours linguistique de Jean de Meun," *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* 2 (1978), 245-53, and more recently Maureen Quilligan, "Allegory, Allegoresis and the Deallegorization of Language: The *Roman de la rose*, the *De planctu naturae*, and the Parlament of Foules," in *Allegory, Myth and Symbol*, Morton W. Bloomfield, ed., *Harvard English Studies* 9 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 163-86. John Fleming also makes a detailed analysis of Reason's view of language and indicates the sources for it; see chapter "Words and Things," in *Reason and the Lover*, 97-135.

<sup>90</sup> The mouthpiece for this critical trend is Daniel Poirion, with "Les mots et les choses selon Jean de Meun," *L'Information littéraire* 26 (1974): 7-11, and "De la signification selon Jean de Meun," *Archéologie du signe*, E. Vance and L. Brind'amour, eds. *Recueils d'Etudes Médiévales* 3 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1983), 165-85.

invokes Plato according to whom speech is given for expressing feelings, for teaching and learning. God, the source of all courtesy, allows Reason to speak anyway she wants, so it is her wont to speak literally about things, whenever she likes so, without wishing to gloss them. (7074-6; *Par son gre sui je coustumiere/De parler proprement des choses/Quant il me plaist sanz mettre gloses*. ‘It is my custom to speak properly of things when I please, without using any gloss’). She is the maker of words, and since she considers male genitalia beautiful, any word she would use to name them would be beautiful. Thus, the dispute between Reason and the Lover may primarily arise not from the choice of words, but from a difference in the perception of the private parts. These are base for the Lover, whereas for Reason they are beautiful as any other thing made directly by her divine father. How can she not name by their own names God’s works?--she asks rhetorically. Reason asserts that she has nothing against the women who use euphemisms by prudery, but she reserves herself the right to use the proper, non-figurative terms when she wants to speak clearly. Reason thus touches upon a limit of language, in that she considers euphemisms as sources of referential ambiguity. With the notion of euphemism, Reason arrives at the issue of linguistic hypocrisy that she overtly criticizes. In this discussion, the question of sin arises again: even if these women would call the male genitalia unashamedly, with their proper names, they would commit no sin: *Et se proprement les nommassent/ Ja certes de riens n'i pechassent*. (7137-7138; ‘And if they call them with their proper names, they do not sin in any way’).

Discussions about Jean’s philosophy of language from a Platonic position do not exhaust the overall significance of this celebrated fragment of the *Rose*. An apparently minor detail seems to have eluded the interpreters of the poem: Lady Reason vividly argues that by naming the male genitalia with their ‘proper’ (i.e, non-euphemistic) names she committed NO SIN. The

Lover had not once made this charge: he had accused Reason of being foolish and rude, but he had never mentioned anything about language as sin. This word appears, significantly, only in Reason's vocabulary and from her own initiative. Why she is so determined to refute the potential sinfulness that hovers above her linguistic acts, and what particular sin of the tongue she has in mind, are questions that require an immediate attention.

In the moral writings on the habits of language, constant attention is paid to obscene talk.<sup>91</sup> Among the authors I have perused, Raoul Ardent makes the most significant and detailed contribution to this kind of speech.<sup>92</sup> For Ardent, *turpiloquium* is a morally unhealthy linguistic habit that can affect both the speaker and the listener. It has two subspecies: speaking about base things performed according to the laws of nature and speaking of base things committed against nature. The latter type is exemplified by speech about sodomy, incest, or sexual intercourse between men and animals, and is considered the most grievous. The former type is represented by speech about natural physiological processes, such as heterosexual intercourse, elimination of bodily fluids in men and women, etc. This type of obscene talk is less shameful and serious, but still transgressive, in that it describes acts that even nature chooses to hide. When speaking about these natural but intimate acts, extreme care should be taken to describe them: the euphemism is the only solution recommended.<sup>93</sup> If proper care in language is not taken, obscene words sully

---

<sup>91</sup> Charles Muscatine sees linguistic obscenities in the framework of the notion of courtliness, and remarks that a strong sensitivity to dirty language had developed already by the early thirteenth century. ("The fabliaux, Courtly Culture, and the (Re)Invention of Vulgarity," *Obscenity. Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*. Jan Ziolkowski, ed. (Boston: Brill, 1998), 281-292. Muscatine does not make, however, the connection with the medieval *lingua-texts*.

<sup>92</sup> In Peraldus's taxonomy this sin is treated extremely schematically, in just a few lines that could be reduced to the following definition: *Hoc peccatum est turpitudo in ore, ubi multum indecens est immunditia (Summa Vitiorum, 414)*. No example is given to illustrate this vague definition.

<sup>93</sup> *Que [turpitudines] si quando necesse est significari honestioribus verbis sunt significanda et occultanda, sicut occultat ea et ipsa natura. Nonne vides quomodo horum in honestatem honestioribus verbis significant sacra scriptura.*" (*Speculum Universale*, XIII, f. 164r). ('If vile things must be expressed, these things must be coached or concealed in honest words, as nature herself conceals them. Cannot you see how, in the Sacred Scripture, the

the one who utters them and, at the same time, may corrupt the mores of the one who listens, because lewd language often arouses carnal desires.

So, the sin of the tongue Lady Reason had in mind when she refuted an accusation of sinfulness no one had leveled at her is the sin of *turpiloquium*. She chose to directly name intimate parts of the body that are natural, but that are not normally displayed. Instead of choosing euphemisms (and here the linguistic standards of courtly love meet those of the scriptures), she decided to shamelessly name the male genitalia. But why does Reason seem so concerned about her potential linguistic transgressiveness? The answer to this question can be found only if we relate Lady Reason's discourse to Jean's apologetic gesture that comes later on in the poem. The only instance in the *Rose* in which Jean drops the masks of the characters he impersonates and speaks in his own voice is when he decides to apologize to the audience and to the Catholic Church for all the verbal transgressions he may have committed while writing his poem.

Si vous pri, seigneurs amoreus,/ Par les geus d'amours savoreus,/ Que se  
vous i trouvez paroles/Semblanz trop baudes ou trop foles,/Par quoi  
sailent li mesdisant/Qui de nous aillent mesdisant/Des choses a dire ou  
dites,/Que cortoisement les desdites./Et quant vous les avrez des  
diz/Repris, retardez ou desdiz,/Se mi dit sont de tel maniere/Qu'il soit  
droiz que pardon en quiere/Pri vous que le me pardoingniez/Et de par moi  
leur respoingniez/Que ce requeroit la matire/ Qui vers teus parole me  
tire/Par les proprietez de sai:/Et pour ce teus paroles ai. (...)/Et s'il y a  
nule parole/Qui sainte eglise tiengne a fole/Presz sui k'a son voloir  
l'amende/Se je puis souffrire a l'amende. (15163-15306)

Therefore I beg you, amorous lords, by the delicious games of love, if you find here any speeches that are too bawdy or silly and that might make slanderous critics who go around speaking ill of us rise up over things that I have said or will say, that you will courteously oppose them. Then when you have reproved, prevented, or opposed these

---

dishonesty of those men is expressed through more honest words?""). When Raoul speaks of nature's concealing vile things, he alludes to the medieval belief according to which, at God's command, nature chose to hide the shameful parts of the body, by placing them in the lower section of human anatomy.

speeches, if what I say is of such a nature that I may justly ask pardon for them, I beg you to pardon me and to reply to them through me that my subject matter demanded these things; it draws me toward such things by its own properties, and therefore I have such speeches. (...) And if I make any utterance that Holy Church may consider foolish, I am ready at her wish to change it if I am capable of making the change.

What is striking in this passage is the coincidence between the Lover's assessment of Reason's language as *baude* ('bawdy') and *fole* ('foolish') and Jean de Meun's "personal" apologies for the same type of words. This important textual indication points us to the fact that Lady Reason's concerns about her deviations of language betray, in fact, the authorial awareness of potentially transgressive speech. Lady's Reason sin of *turpiloquium* is in fact Jean de Meun's own. If she refutes such a possibility by obliquely invoking the Platonic theory of naming it is because Jean de Meun himself is constantly conscious of the accusation of obscene (written) speech he may face. His apologies to the reader and to the Church are evidence in this respect. The problem is all the more serious since *turpiloquium*, as we have seen, constitutes a real moral danger for the listener/reader, in that it may prompt him to sin himself. Both Christine de Pizan and Jean Gerson will accuse Jean de Meun of lewd language conducive to sin and of evil influence on readers.<sup>94</sup> I will return to this question later on in my dissertation, when I will discuss problems related to authorial speech.

---

<sup>94</sup> Sylvia Huot reminds us that for Gerson "Jean's linguistic and poetic transgressions are not essentially different from bodily transgressions. To name the body part in a public document is tantamount to exposing one's own body to the eyes of the world." [The "Romance of the Rose" and Its Medieval Readers. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 22]. I treat Jean's transgressions of speech and Gerson's response to them in my section devoted to the "blasphemies" of Jean de Meun.

### 3.1.2 Nature on the (verbal) vices of humans

On the level of the plot in the *Romance of the Rose*, a combat takes place that opposes the Lover's supporters (Openness, Pity, Skillful Concealment, Boldness) to the defendants of the castle where Fair Welcoming is imprisoned (Resistance, Shame, Fear). What is important for us in this parodic imitation of Prudentius's *Psychomachia* is that the weaponry that some of these allegorical characters display bears symbolic representations of acts of speech. The tip of Openness' lance is made of sweet prayer. Her shield is made of supplications, and bordered with promises, agreements, oaths and engagements. (15334-41). Pity's shield is made out of relief, bordered by sighs and laments. Engaged in a close combat with Danger, Pity wins over him only when she starts crying. Her tears, notes the narrator, hurts the enemy more than any deed or word (emphasis mine) could have done (*Onques mais pour faiz ne pour diz/Ne fu si durement hurtez!* 15414-5), a brief remark that bespeaks Jean de Meun's awareness of the psychological detriment speech can cause. Shame's target has a name, like the swords of the famous knights from the Arthurian romances. It is called *Doute de male renomee* ('Fear-of-a-Bad-Reputation') and has several tongues painted on it (*mainte langue ot ou bort portraite* 15472). Skillful Concealment has a silent sword, similar, says the narrator, to a cut off tongue. The figure Boldness is introduced into the action by a characterization focused on his behavior: *aperz par faiz et par diz* ('honest in deeds and words' 15540; emphasis mine).

After a tough fight, the two "armies" reach an armistice, but this does not last long: the one who breaks it is Venus's son, Cupid, who, says the narrator, never kept any engagement, promise or word. When the fight resumes even more intensely than before, the characters shoot at each other arrows feathered with promises, services and gifts. Each of these arrows, Jean is emphasizing, is entirely made of promises and their tips are covered with the iron of the given

word and the oath: *Car il n'i entra onques fust/Qui touz de promesses ne fust,/Du fer ferrés fermement/De fiance et de serement* ‘for no wood will ever go into them that is not made entirely of promises; the arrows were tipped firmly with points made of oaths and assurances’ 15819-22).

The whole picture seems to represent not a physical combat, but a verbal one. We witness a huge allegorical clash between vices and virtues in which the acts of speech are prevalent: the shields are painted with tongues or made out of human utterances, the swords look like tongues, too, whereas the arrows are entirely made of various forms of verbal commitment. What is most worrying about this allegorical fight is that the moral worth of this intense verbal activity seems to be... nil. If we were to “translate” this allegory, an allegory of human speech, we could see this multitude of utterances as a flamboyant rhetorical display that men readily show each other, but which is devoid of substance. Humans are quick to throw at each other numerous words, to commit to each other through various linguistic acts, their lives bubble with oaths of all kinds, but the truth--or the danger--is that this whole intense and noisy activity may be devoid of essence. In the text, the combat takes place under the patronage of Cupid, a god famous for his lack of constancy and seriousness, for his failure to keep his word. Love, Jean de Meun seems to be suggesting, is a sum of promissory words that most of the time become meaningless because they are not corroborated by deeds.

On a mere narrative level, before we know what the outcome of the clash between vices and virtues is, we have to go through two more long disquisitions--Nature’s and Genius’s--that have only an indirect bearing on the plot. When the fight reaches an impasse, we see Cupid asking for his mother’s help, and then swearing together to help the Lover and the laws of nature. At hearing them, the divine Lady Nature, who was forging human beings in her workshop, leaves her work for a while, and, thanking Venus and Cupid for their help, begins her own

speech.<sup>95</sup> Her intercession starts as a painful lament on the issue of male homosexuality, but soon deviates and branches off into a dizzying array of highly philosophical themes, such as divine foreknowledge, predestination, free will, and others. Within the complex framework of the discussion of free will, Jean de Meun introduces new aspects of his view of human morality, aspects that require special attention.

The theological idea of predestination springs naturally from a discussion of the heavenly bodies and their influences. Although Jean de Meun does not deny that these bodies exert a certain influence on the sublunar world and the individual subjects, he rejects the idea of their absolute influence. He admits that the spheres can affect human characters, in the sense that they instill certain attributes in men--the so-called predispositions--but at the same time, Jean de Meun argues, men can oppose these innate dispositions through their power of choice. Through education, says Jean, proper nourishment, good company, reason or other remedies, men can obtain different results in their lives, if they know how to bridle their natural ways. From this point the discussion slides into the apparent contradiction between the notions of predestination and divine foreknowledge, on the one hand, and that of free will, on the other. This conflict is not easy to explain to lay people, says Jean de Meun (*Forz est a gens lais a descrivre*; 17110). How, despite all appearances, free will accommodates very well predestination is a thing difficult to

---

<sup>95</sup> Together with Genius's intercession, which is imbedded in Nature's discourse, the entire Nature-Genius segment covers five thousand verses. Although Jean patterned the character Nature on Alain of Lille's *Natura*, he also altered it. George Economou remarks that in Alain, the goddess *Natura* represented not only man's sensitive nature but also the functions of human reason, whereas in Jean, Reason and Nature are two distinct characters, each with its specific role. Economou also points out that whereas Alain posited a clear contrast between (immoral) Venus and (moral) Nature, in Jean, both Nature and Genius are enlisted in the service of Venus and her son, Cupid: "Whether this means a victory for Natura or for Venus, one thing is certain: Alain's Natura could never have participated in such a 'cooperative' effort, for, in her view, Venus and her son were responsible for the waywardness of man." [The Goddess *Natura* in Medieval Literature (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 120].

understand even if one is offered all the answers to all the possible objections.<sup>96</sup> The temptation to undertake such a challenging theological task as that of clarifying this false conflict is too great for Jean de Meun; he will indulge in it and will explain (*espondre*), raise objections (*opposer*), reply to these objections (*respondre*), and give examples (*mainz examples en deisse*) in a purely and brilliantly scholastic way.<sup>97</sup>

Along Boethian lines, Jean de Meun argues that the predestination instilled by the celestial influences cannot overcome man's reason and free will.<sup>98</sup> If free will did not prevail over the innate dispositions there would be no rewards for the good works of men, and no punishments for the evil ones.<sup>99</sup> This would practically mean that there would be no vices or virtues, which is a completely false argument, since virtues and vices do exist, and divine justice exerts itself in accordance to them. At the same time, there can be no conflict between divine foreknowledge and the power of choice: God knows all the actions a man can take, and the results to which each of these actions may lead, but the eventual course of action is decided by man himself, not by God.<sup>100</sup> The destiny is not fixed to that point, Jean says, that men cannot decide for themselves.

It is, therefore, false to believe that everything men do, say or think is predestined. Those who believe this actually try to excuse themselves for everything they do wrong, by claiming that they cannot have done otherwise. Jean quotes the defective thinking of these people in the

---

<sup>96</sup> *Et qui vorroit la chose enprendre, /Trop leur seroit fort a entendre,/Qui leur avroit neis solues/Les raisons encontre meües* (17111-4; 'Anyone who wanted to undertake the task would find it hard to make it understood, even if he has solved the arguments brought up in opposition').

<sup>97</sup> These technical scholastic terms appear all grouped in three lines, that serve Jean de Meun to express his regret for not being able to develop this theme even more than he had already done (and he developed it quite well: the whole sequence dedicated to predestination and free will spans 815 lines, from v. 17063 to v. 17878).

<sup>98</sup> The terms in the text are *le frans voloirs* (17203), *poir d'eslection*, *franche volonté* (17432) and *franc voloir d'ellire* (17750).

<sup>99</sup> This is one of the main postulates of Scholasticism, one of the pillars on which Aquinas, as we have seen, built his system.

<sup>100</sup> Vv. 17372-5.

following way: *Donc couvient il par vive force,/Quant voloir d'omme a riens s'efforce,/De quanqu'il fait, k'ainsi le face,/Pense, die, vueille ou porchace: Donc est ce chose destinee/Qui ne puet estre detornee* (17151-6; ‘Hence, when man’s will exerts itself in any direction, he must perforce, in whatever he does, perform it, think, say, wish or obtain it in just that way. Then the thing that cannot be defected is destined’ [my emphasis]. This kind of argumentation is unacceptable, Jean maintains, because it basically leaves no room for man’s free choice. Jean’s reproduction of the erroneous reasoning of those who oppose the pivotal role of free will is of utmost importance: it obliquely conveys the poet’s notion that the deeds, words and wishes of men depend entirely on their intentions, not on predestination. Man is fully responsible for the consequences of his deeds or sayings. With this, speech is from the outset assigned to the sphere of interiority, as a human act sprung from an inner intention.

This principle is reiterated when Jean evokes a new possible objection to the idea of free will. Those who oppose the importance of free choice maintain that if a possible thing happens, if someone had foreseen this thing and said: “This will unavoidably happen,” he would have told the truth. And since truth and necessity are interchangeable, it results that the thing that happened was necessary, i.e, predetermined. This argumentation, Jean says again, is not worth a penny, since in such a case we would be dealing with conditional necessity, not with absolute necessity. Were the adversaries of free will right, men would not feel the urge to work or seek advice in various circumstances of life. If things were divinely preordained, all human counsel would be futile and all undertaking vain. By the same token, the notions of more or less, better or worse, could not apply to our thoughts, deeds or words:

D’autre part, qui garde i prendroit,/Jamais as genz ne couvendroit/De nulle chose conseill querre/Ne faire besoingnes en terre,/Ca pour coi s’en conseilleroient/Ne besoingnes pour coi feroient/Se tout ert avant destiné/Et

par force determiné?/Pour conseill, pour oeuvres de mains/Ja n'en seroit ne plus ne mains/Ne mieus ne pis n'en porroit estre/-Fust chose nee ou chose a nestre,/Fust chose faite ou chose a faire/, Fust chose a dire ou chose a taire. (17243-56)

On the other hand, if one were to follow this logic, he should never seek people's advice on anything or do any work on earth; for why should one get advice or do any work if everything were predestined and predetermined? There would never be more or less, and there could not be any better or worse, because of any advice or manual labor, whether it was a thing born or to be born, done or to be done, something to be said or something to keep silent about. (my emphasis).

Again, Jean's subliminal message is that we should be mature enough to assume the consequences and the responsibility for our actions and speeches. We should not blame the divinity for whatever we do or undertake as individual human beings. The decision to translate an idea into action, or to say something or keep quiet lies entirely in the sphere of men's personal choices. Human deeds or words do not happen by necessity; men are the only ones to choose what to do or what to say. Both the realm of actions and that of spoken words depend on men's inner intentions, on their free choices: *Ainz font bien ou mal franchement,/Par leur voloir tant seulement* ('Instead people do good or evil freely through their will alone.' 17265-6). Examples of free will applied to the use of speech come in the text when Jean de Meun evokes another sample of erroneous reasoning:

Qu'il meïsmes seult souvent dire/Qu'il n'a pas franc voloir d'ellire,/Car Dieus par sa prevision/Si le tient en subjection,/Qui tout par destinee maine,/Et l'oeuvre et la pensee humaine,/Si que s'il veult a vertu traire,/Ce li fait Dieus a force faire/Et s'il de mal faire s'efforce,/Ce li refait Dieus faire a force,/Qui mieus le tient par le doit,/Si qu'il fait ce que faire doit/De tout pechié, de toute aumosne,/De biau parler et de ramprosne,/De los et de detracion,/de larrecin, d'occision/Et de pais et de mariage,/Soit par raison, soit par outrage:/”Ainsi, fait-il, couvient il estre...” (17757-67)

He himself is accustomed to say often that he does not have the free will to choose, because God, with his foresight, holds him in such subjection that he directs every human

thought and deed by destiny. Thus if he wants to draw toward virtue, God makes him do so by force, and if he strives to do evil, it is again God who forces him to do it. God does more than hold him by the finger, so that he does whatever he must—sinning, almsgiving, speaking well or cuttingly, giving praise or detraction, thieving, killing, making peace or marriage—either reasonably or foolishly. “Thus,” he says, “it must be”. (emphasis mine).

In this passage, Jean ridicules again the view according to which human actions are independent from men’s power of will, being entirely dictated by divine providence. He gives examples of how some people mistakenly attribute even their ways of speech to a superior force. From the rejection of such a notion, we can again glean Jean’s approach to the sins of speech: insolence, which is opposed to beautiful words, and slander, which is opposed to giving praise, depend exclusively on man’s individual choice. Attributing these acts of speech to God is a preposterous idea, at which Jean de Meun can only laugh. Reason and speech are divine gifts that men should be proud of and use properly, because these gifts are what distinguish men from animals.

The received Augustinian idea that speech was given to men for mutual comprehension and instruction could not lack in a text so obsessed with speech, as is Jean de Meun’s.<sup>101</sup> Jean’s kernel of originality with respect with this idea is that he develops it to the point where he imagines an apocalyptic potential scenario in which animal could think and speak. Within this scenario, the domestic animals would never serve man and obey his commands, the wild ones would all want to strangle him. Birds would pull out man’s eyes when he would sleep. Man would not be in any way superior to animals, since they would know how to make pieces of weaponry and clothes. And as far as the use of speech is concerned, the beasts would make such

---

<sup>101</sup> *Sanz faille, toutes bestes mues,/D’entendement vuides et nues,/Se mesconnoissent par nature./ Car, s’il eüssent parleüre/Et raison pour euls entr’entendre,/Qu’il s’entrepeüssent apprendre,/Mal fust as homes avenu.* (17797-803; ‘Without doubt, all dumb animals, empty and bare of understanding, are by nature incapable of knowing themselves, for if they had speech and reason with which to understand one another, so that they could instruct each other, it would be an evil occurrence for men’).

a skillful use of it that they could be even writers (17839; *et porroient estre escrivains*). The passage describing this apocalyptic scenario is much longer and detailed than the summary I have just given.<sup>102</sup> I have evoked this fragment for two reasons: for the manner in which it presents the act of writing as the utmost form of expression a creature endowed with reason can practice, and for the conclusion to which it leads and which justifies this otherwise unexpected deviation. Animals' real ignorance comes from their nature, Jean asserts at the end of the imagined scenario. In the same way, man's (or angels') intellectual capacities come from the nature God gave to them. But if man, as a reasonable creature, refuses to use these divine gifts, this is a defect that comes from his own vice that confuses his senses. Only the inner vice is responsible for man's straying from the right path, because naturally he is endowed with reason and the ability to choose. This argument, says Jean de Meun, should put an end to the foolish discussions of those who claim that man is not responsible for his actions: *Et pour ce tant dit vous en ai/Et tels raisons vous amenai/Que leur jangles vueill estanchier,/Car nus ne s'en puet revanchier* (17875-78; 'It is for this reason that I have said so much to you about it and brought up arguments to quell men's gossip on the subject, for nothing can defend them against it.'). This final remark is important for two reasons: it justifies Jean's disquisition on the rebellion of animals, a disquisition that may have seemed out of place, and it gives us a measure of the extent to which Jean's contemporaries were obsessed with the problematic of free will.

In Jean de Meun's perspective, human deeds and words are not dictated by necessity or providence, but performed by virtue of the individual human choices. There is no excuse for an evil action or a wicked word; the blame for them should be fully assumed on a personal basis.

---

<sup>102</sup> Although the whole discussion about what animals could do had they reason may seem a new extended parenthesis in Jean's text, it is not out of place since it leads to a specific point Jean de Meun wants to make: it is not (human) nature *per se* that is defective, it is the human's use of free will that may be so.

This type of approach is patterned on the scholastic view of morality as a sum of actions springing from individual intentions. We will find this line of thought in Dante as well. In the *Rose*, Jean de Meun gives specific examples of what kinds of (verbal) sins man is prone to. The mouthpiece through which he exemplifies human sinfulness is again Nature. Toward the end of her discourse, the allegorical female character expresses her regret for having made man and gives as reasons for her regret a comprehensive list of men's main sins. Also interesting is the way in which she frames this list: she invokes her femininity as basis for her right to speak up. As a woman, she says, she cannot keep silent, since women cannot hide anything. She will therefore tell the whole, unaltered truth about human nature. As the list of sins she gives is very complex, I will quote it here fully:

Orgueilleus est, murtriers et lerres,/Fel, couvoiteus, avers,  
trichierres,/Desesperez et mesdisanz/Et haïnneus et despisanz,/Mescréanz,  
envieus, mentierres,/Parjurs, faussaires, foz, vantierres,/Glouz, inconstanz  
et foloiables,/Ydolastres, desagreables,/Traïstres et faus ypocrites./Et  
pareceus et sodomites./Briement, tant est chaitis et nices/Qu'il est sers a  
trestouz les vices/Et trestouz en soi les heberge. (19229-19241)

He is a proud, murderous thief, cruel, covetous, miserly, and treacherous. He is desperate, greedy, slanderous, hateful, and spiteful; unfaithful and envious, he lies, perjures himself, and falsifies; he is foolish, boastful, insconstant, and senseless; he is a quarrelsome idolatror, a traitorous, false hypocrite, and a lazy sodomite; in short he is such a stupid wretch that he is slave to all the vices, and harbors them all within himself. (emphasis mine)

Nature's tally of human vices is an eclectic sum of traditional capital vices (pride, avarice, envy, gluttony, lust, sloth, etc.) and their offspring, and other, less conventional, moral categories, such as: hatred, inconsistency, folly, scorn which belong more to what we would call today psychology. The reason why Jean considers these psychological aspects "vices" is that they are manifestations reflected in human behavior. As by the medieval definition, ethics deals with behavioral practices, it is not surprising that Jean grouped manifestations like folly and

senselessness together with consecrated vices as envy and pride under the generic denomination ‘vices.’ Important for us in this long record is the presence of several sins of the tongue: slander, lying, perjury and boastfulness. These are verbal sins that belong to the traditional Gregorian scheme, as offspring of the capital vices, and also to Peraldus’s taxonomy. Also interesting, the label *faussaire* (‘falsifier’) Jean applies to man comes, in the list, right after two sins of the tongue—lying and perjury--, which are both associated in the medieval moral tracts with the notion of falsity in speech. Dante will also be sensitive to the alignment of speech and falsehood, and will group liars and perjurers with other types of falsifiers in the Malebolge.<sup>103</sup>

What we should also note about Jean’s list of human vices is the lack of a rigorous system; the absence of order and classification. He enumerates vice after vice at random, with no regard for a coherent organization. Nature (and, through her, Jean de Meun) is a moralist, but an unconventional one. Jean’s approach to human behavior is very flexible; his concern is not to come up with a new moral system; there were so many theologians around him who could assume this task. His goal is to give a global vision of human sinfulness, to encompass and exemplify as many bad behaviors as possible. To put order in so rich a material was not his concern. Jean himself is aware of this lack of organization: later in the poem, when Genius will speak, he will invite his audience to read the *Romance of the Rose*, in order to find in it exemplifications and discussions of vices: *Ces vices conter vous voudroie,/Mais d'outrage m'entremetroie:/Assez briement les vous expose/Li jolis romanz de la rose,/S'il vous plaist, la les regardez/Pour ce que d'euls mieus vous gardez.* (19883-8; ‘I would tell these vices to you, but to do so would be an excessive undertaking. The lovely *Romance of the Rose* explains them to you quite briefly; please look at them there so that you may guard against them better’). In other

---

<sup>103</sup> I treat this aspect in the chapter *Lingua Dolosa*.

words, these discussions of (some of them, mere allusions to) vices are dispersed all throughout the poem. In general, Jean de Meun rarely names vices in an explicit way; Nature's tally is one of these rare occurrences.<sup>104</sup>

In the context of our discussion of the sins of the tongue in the *Romance of the Rose*, it is important to mention that after lady Nature delivers her ethical amalgamation, she also evokes a series of horrendous punishments that await in hell those who give in to these vices. By implication, even those who commit the sins of speech above mentioned—lying, perjury, slander and boastfulness—will end up in hell. No sinner will be able to escape the infernal punishments, says Nature, because there is a supreme judge, who in the afterlife judges all deeds and words of men (*Qui tout juge en faiz et en diz*; 19320). The way in which this idea is framed establishes a relationship of equivalence between deeds and words. What is weighed at the eternal judgment is not only what people did in their earthly lives, it is also what they said. Words and deeds are of an equal weight in attracting the eternal fate of the soul after death. This important indication gives us a new measure of Jean's preoccupation with the use and/or misuse of the tongue. Dante will also phrase the equivalence between deeds and words in almost identical terms.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> I, therefore, cannot agree with Denise Baker's assertion that unlike for Alain's Nature, for Jean's "morality is clearly beyond her ken" ["The Priesthood of Genius," *Speculum* 51/2 (1976), 285]. On the contrary, I hope to have proven that Jean's lady Nature delivers one of the most important discourses on human morality (if not the most important) in the *Romance of the Rose*.

<sup>105</sup> See my section *Dante's Moral Approach to Speech*.

### 3.1.3 Genius's Grievances against Feminine Speech

Nature's long and eclectic disquisition is bracketed by two segments of Genius's intercession.<sup>106</sup>

He is introduced as Lady Nature's priest, and is the recipient of her confession.<sup>107</sup>

We have seen Nature invoking her femininity as a pretext for her right to speak her mind, for not hiding things. But what is a good justification for Nature is a poor excuse for Genius. When, at the beginning of her confession, Nature starts weeping and apologizes for this female weakness, Genius immediately follows on that and begins an enflamed critical discourse about women's temper and ways of speech.<sup>108</sup> Woman, says Genius, in a phrase that has now become legendary in criticism of the *Rose*, is an irritable animal. Not only is she easily prone to wrath, but she also harbors a great predisposition to sinfulness. Resorting to the authority of the Scriptures and that of a Roman historian (Titus Livius), Genius highlights women's fickleness

---

<sup>106</sup> According to Heather Arden, the two parts of Genius's discourse represent "two functions that he fulfills in medieval allegorical works, god of generation, and tutelary spirit or moral guide." [Romance of the Rose, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 63]. Jean took up the idea of Genius as Lady Nature's priest and a moral guide from Alain of Lille's *The Plaint of Nature*. We will see, however, that Jean ridiculed both Genius's missions.

<sup>107</sup> The studies on the figure of Genius in classical and medieval literary works are numerous. In *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Jane Chance Nitzsche investigates a comprehensive list of Genius's multifarious roles (New York: Columbia UP, 1975). George Economou draws a detailed parallel between the roles of Genius in the two French poets and Gower, their English admirer ("The Character Genius in Alan de Lille, Jean de Meun, and John Gower," *Chaucer Review* 4 (1970), 203-210; later also published in *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature*). Denise Baker focuses on Genius's embodiment as a priest ("Priesthood of Genius") and makes important remarks about Alain of Lille's sources in the conception of this character (Bernardus Silvestris, Apuleius and Martianus Capella) and about Jean's debt to Alain. She also makes the significant point that the dual priesthood of Gower's Genius "testifies to the English poet's awareness of the difference between this character's tutelary role in *De planctu naturae* and in the *Roman de la Rose*." (p. 287). A.J. Minnis ("Moral Gower and Medieval Literary Theory," in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments* [(Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 50-78], Winthrop Wetherbee ["The Literal and the Allegorical: Jean de Meun and the *De planctu naturae*," in *Medieval Studies* 33 (1971), 264-291] and Edwin Craun (in *Slander, Lies, Obscenity*) further study the role played by Genius in English literature. The latter examines Genius's sermon in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* from the perspective of the sins of the tongue that Genius condemns (see chapter "Confessing the Deviant Speaker: Verbal Deception in the *Confessio Amantis*," in *Lies, Slander and Obscenity*, 113-157).

<sup>108</sup> It is worthwhile to note that Nature herself readily admits that women have an immoral interaction with speech. First, because they swear and lie more frequently than men (*Plus hardiment que nus hon/Certainement jurent et mentent*; 18140-1), especially when they feel guilty about some misdeed, and second, because they really talk too much (*Bon fait prolexité foïr./Si sont fames mout ennuieuses/Et de parler contrarieuses*; 18302-4). Nature makes this assertion to excuse herself for her own prolixity, but behind her lies Jean de Meun who misses no occasion to lacerate women for their ways of speaking.

and their sensitivity to flattering words: *vers leur meurs nulles prieres/Ne valent tant comme blandices* (16344-5; ‘with their ways entreaties are not worth as much as blandishments’).

Amidst all the vices that women are prone to, what mostly upsets Genius is their extraordinary propensity to speech, their inability to keep the secrets their husbands reveal to them.<sup>109</sup> Sharing one’s feelings and thoughts with one’s wife is a great mistake, because soon those intimate things will become public knowledge and the social image of the man will be dramatically diminished:<sup>110</sup>

Et quiconques dit a sa fame/Ses secrez, il en fait sa dame./Nus hons qui  
soit de mere nez,/S'il n'est yvres ou forsenez,/Ne doit a fame reveler/Nule  
rien qui face a celer/Se d'autrui ne le veult oïr:/Mieus vaudroit dou païs  
foïr/Que dire a fame chose a taire,/Tant soit loiaus ne debonnaire./Ne ja  
nul fait sacré ne face/S'il voit fame venir en place,/Car s'il y a perill de  
cors,/El le dira bien le recors,/Combien que longuement atende./Et se nus  
riens ne l'en demande/Le dira ele vraiment/Sanz estrange  
amonestement:/Por nule rien ne s'en teroit;/A son avis morte seroit/S'il ne  
li sailloit de la bouche,/S'il i a peril ne reproache. (16351-72)

Whoever tells his secrets to his wife makes of her his mistress. No man born of woman, unless he is drunk or demented, should reveal anything to a woman that should be kept hidden, if he doesn’t want to hear it from someone else. No matter how loyal or good-

---

<sup>109</sup> According to Patterson, the theme of the wicked delight woman takes in “ferreting out masculine secrets that she may publish abroad” is a common denominator of the medieval misogynist literature. Patterson exemplifies this theme with Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath* and the “Sermon Joyeux de la patience des femmes obstineées contre leur maris” (“Feminine Rhetoric and the Politics of Subjectivity: The Old Woman and the Wife of Bath.” In *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose*. K. Brownlee, S. Huot, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 321, 350.

<sup>110</sup> Studying various attitudes toward women’s voices in medieval England, Sandy Bardsley notes that: “the late Middle Ages were a period in which perceptions of women’s speech underwent a sea change.” [ *Venomous Tongues. Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England*. (Penn Press: University of Pennsylvania, 2006, 2)]. Bardsley explains this acute cultural interest for women’s relationship to speech by the pastoral discourse on the sins of the tongue. Her argument is that the notion of morally deviant speech was increasingly feminized in the later Middle Ages. Female speech was often ridiculed by an eminently patriarchal society, and a woman who dared speak her mind was considered a threat to family and society. Feminine rhetoric was often associated and held responsible for crimes like sexual disorder, assault and eavesdropping. In an attempt to control feminine, “disruptive” speech, the British legal system devised the category of “scolding” woman: “Condemnations of women’s speech played an important role in determining women’s status, for even if an individual woman escaped such charges, her voice was surely restrained, her words tempered, by the ever-present fear of falling into the category of the scolding woman.” (*Venomous Tongues*). Among the writers and artists who imposed attitudes toward feminine voices in medieval England, Bardsley also mentions Chaucer, the English translator of the *Romance of the Rose*, who was greatly influenced by Jean’s misogynistic views.

natured she is, it would be better to flee the country than tell a woman something that should be kept silent. He should never do any secret deed if he sees a woman come, for even if there is bodily danger, you may be sure that she will tell it, no matter how long she may wait. Even if no one asks her anything about it, she will certainly tell it without any unusual coaxing; for nothing would she keep silent. To her thinking she would be dead if the secret did not jump out of her mouth, even if she is in danger or reproached.

The man who dares hit his wife to punish her for her loquacity incurs the risk of being publicly exposed by her. He who trusts a woman is a great fool who is risking his very own life, because if he dares make any negative comment about her, or reproach her with anything, she will have him killed.

Genius pushes the idea of women's control over their husbands to a ridiculous extreme and gives the example of a couple in which the man has something on his conscience. This foolish husband who committed (or plans to commit) a crime for which he could pay with his life, if things came to be known, is in great danger in the bed, by his wife... and because of her. Although he wants to keep quiet about what lies on his conscience, at night, in their matrimonial bed, if she sees him worried, she will draw him to her with sexually charged gestures and will manipulate him with her smooth talk until he will start disclosing all of his secrets. Here Genius adopts a female voice and reproduces at length the manipulative discourse the woman holds in the conjugal bed. She first reassures her husband that there is no one around, that their room is safely isolated from the rest of the house. Then she tells him how much she loves him and how faithful to him she is. She invokes Jesus' name and the sacred oath of matrimony to convince him that they form a sacred unity and, as such, she is entitled to know everything about her husband. She gives him the example of other married couples, where at night, in their beds, the men tell their wives all their secrets and ask for their advice. These men, she says, confess themselves to their wives more often than to the priest. The style of the reproduced discourse of the curious wife becomes ironical when she admits that she knows about what happens in other

people's beds... from the wives themselves—her female friends who tell her everything they had discussed with their husbands. Unlike these women, says Jean de Meun's female character to her man, she dislikes talking too much, gossiping or quarrelling. Again, she invokes the name of God to make her husband open up to her and she emotionally blackmails him by telling him that she will die if he does not talk to her.

At this point of the poem, the direct discourse of the inquisitive wife ceases, and Genius intervenes with a comment: after delivering her devilishly skillful speech, the wife will start caressing and covering her spouse with hypocritical kisses and tears. The result of this extraordinary tactic of verbal and gestural manipulation is that:

Adonc li mescheanz li conte/Son grant damage et sa grant honte,/Et par sa parole se pent./Et quant dit l'a, si s'en repent./Mais parole une foiz volee/Ne puet puis estre rapelee!/Lors la prie qu'ele s'en taise,/Com cil qui plus est a mesaise/C'onques avant este n'avoit/Quant sa fame riens n'en savoit./Et cele li redist sanz faille/Qu'ele s'en taira vaille que vaille./Mais, li chaitis, que quide il faire?/Il ne puet pas sa langue taire:/Or tent a l'autrui retenir!/A quel chief en puet il venir? (16545-60)

The unfortunate wretch tells her his great sorrow and shame and with his words hangs himself. When he has said it he repents; but once a speech has taken wing it cannot be called back.<sup>111</sup> Then he begs her to keep quiet, for he is more uneasy than he had ever been before, when his wife knew nothing about it. She in turn tells him without fail that she will keep quiet, no matter what happens. But what does the wretch think he can do? He cannot keep his own tongue silent. Is he going to try now to restrain another's? What result does he think he can do?

Knowledge is power, and from the moment when a wife knows the secret of her man, she will have a very strong means with which to hold him under her control. He will no longer afford to get mad at her or mistreat her, for she now has absolute power over him. In the best

---

<sup>111</sup> A Horatian dictum, at the origin, that becomes a commonplace quote in all the major medieval tracts on transgressive speech. The fact that Jean did not bother to mention the author of it testifies to the fact that this quote was so well assimilated by the pastoral discourse of the time that it became common knowledge, while the name of the author slipped into oblivion.

case scenario, she might remain faithful to her husband and not reveal his secrets until they break up, but not even this is sure, so great the female urge to speak is. Chances are that she will share her man's secrets with somebody else even before she breaks up with her husband. Genius's belief in women's malice is so firm that he exhorts his followers to preach the lesson of mistrust of women, so that every man will know how to protect himself against this terrible enemy. He who will preach the sermon against women might displease them, Genius admits, for they have a very sharp tongue (*fames qui mout ont de jangles*; 16579), but that preacher will at least have told the truth. Genius's sermon becomes dramatic at this point, as he urges all men to guard themselves against women in the following terms:

Seigneur, gardez vous de vos fames/Se vos cors amez ne vous ames,/Au mains que ja si mal n'ouvrez/Que les secrez leur descouvrez/Que dedenz vos cuers estuiez./Fuiez, fuiez, fuiez,/Fuiez, enfanz, fuiez tel beste:/Jel vous conseill et amoneste/Sanz decepcion et sanz guile. (16581-9)

'Fair lords, protect yourselves from women if you love your bodies and souls. At least never go to work so badly that you reveal the secrets that you keep hidden inside your hearts. Fly, fly, fly, my children; I advise you and urge you without deception or guile to fly from such an animal.'

Genius is, however, like all the others counselors in the poem, a contradictory character. His discourse is highly inconsistent with itself, since right after urging men to avoid the female beast, he reframes his position, and advises men to respect, love and cultivate women. Men should cherish women, dress them well, overwhelm them with their attention and serve them properly, so that the human race will be perpetuated. Then, again, Genius jumps to the opposite extreme and warns men about the harm women can do to them if they know too many things about them. The greatest danger that might arise within a couple, says Genius, is in the bed: it is when women seduce men with their sexuality that the latter are most prone to speak. Speaking in

bed is a foolish mistake. Sex is good, says the god of procreation, but should always be differentiated from the act of speech:

Mais ja tant ne vous i fioiz/Que chose a taire leur dioiz. (...) Bien affiert qu'el sachent chascunes/Assez des besoignes communes/Mais se preuz estes et senez/Quant entre vos bras les tenez/Et les accollez et baisiez,/Taisiez, taisiez, taisiez!/Pensez de vos langues tenir,/Car riens n'en puet a chief venir/Quant des secrez sont parçonierres,/Tant sont orgueilleuses et fieres/Et tant ont les langues cuisanz,/Et venimeuses et nuisanz/Mais quant li fol sont la venu/Qu'ils sont entre leur braz tenuz/Et qu'il les accolent et baisent/Entre les geus qui tant leur plaisent,/Lors n'i puet avoir riens cele:/La sont li sacré revelé./Ci se descuevrent li mari,/Dont puis sont dolent et mari. (16633-16678) (emphasis mine)

But never trust them so much that you tell them anything to keep quiet about. (...) It is a good thing for each of them to know enough about matters of mutual concern. But if you are wise and intelligent you will keep quiet when you hold them in your arms and hug them and kiss them. Keep quite, quite, quite, quite.<sup>112</sup> Think about holding your tongue, for nothing can come to any conclusion when they share secrets, so proud and haughty are they, with such corrosive, venomous and harmful tongues. But when fools come to be held in their arms and hug and kiss them in the games that are so pleasing to them, then nothing can be hidden from them. There the secrets are revealed; there husbands reveal themselves and afterward they are sorry and chagrined.

To reinforce the truth of his message, Genius adduces a biblical *exemplum*. Dalila first seduced Samson with her flattering words, and then made him open up to her and reveal his deepest secrets to her. As a result, she cut off Samson's hair while he was sleeping and deprived him of his powers. Genius considers that this cautionary tale is amply sufficient to illustrate the malice of women, but he still finds useful to reinforce his mistrust of women with a biblical quote. Solomon who was well aware about the great harm woman may cause to a man if he tells her too many things, explicitly warned: *De cele qui te dort ou sain,/Garde la porte de ta bouche/Pour fuir perill et reproache* ('In order to flee from danger and reproach, guard the gates of your mouth against her who sleeps in your bosom'; 16698-700).

---

<sup>112</sup> Dahlberg translates this verse as 'Stay still, still, still', which does not reflect very well the original *taisez, taisez, taisez, taisez*, this is why I took the liberty to retranslate this verse in a way closer to the French text.

The first part of Genius' sermon ends with these prophetic words. The second half of his intercession in the poem follows Nature's confession, and is somewhat different than the first. Whereas hitherto, under the pretense of a conversation with Nature, he had addressed men in general, now, he addresses the god of Love and his barons. In this new sermon, he promises that the gates of paradise will be open to all men who will work hard toward procreation, regardless of the framework in which they will consummate their sexual encounters: within the marriage or outside of it.<sup>113</sup> By virtue of this fact, Genius harshly condemns such Christian practices as abstinence and chastity. His unorthodox view of Christianity also allows him to promote an "extremist" idea: that all the sins of men will be forgiven if, and only if, they work to fulfill Nature's greatest law: procreation.

It has been noted that Jean's Genius is a parodic representation of the Christian priest.<sup>114</sup> His sermon on morality is just a caricature of what such discourse should entail. Although Genius does exhort people to avoid vices, instead of really broaching a sermon on them, he sends

---

<sup>113</sup> This is a great departure with respect to Alain of Lille's Genius, who insisted that the only licit context of erotic love was the marital institution.

<sup>114</sup> Heather Arden notes that: "Jean has created the satiric portrait of a demagogic preacher who has taken an idea (procreation has a function in the natural order) to an extreme (procreation is the only good), a monomaniac who has some familiarity with current ideological disputes and much skill in rhetorical manipulation." (p. 64). Arden also explains Genius's misogynistic views by his reducing women to their procreative function. Genius's misogyny is, however, a more complex phenomenon than Arden believes. In fact, Genius has a high opinion about women as participants in the act of procreation, this is why he concedes that men should worship women, for the natural good they can accomplish. Genius's main problem with women comes rather from the fact that they do not let themselves be reduced to their procreative role. They have their own intelligence, their own ways and especially their own voices. Genius maligns women only insofar as they do not always submit to male desires and control. This is why he vituperates against female fickleness and above all, the female use of speech. Women's temper and power of speech are two domains man have difficulty controlling. On the other hand, if we leave the world of fiction, we will retrieve misogynistic ideas not only in Genius discourse, but in several others: in Ami's discourse (especially in the segment produced by the Jealous Husband), in Nature's, in Jean's apologetic speech toward his readership, and even in the final part of the poem, when the Lover talks about the way both young and old women make a devilish use of their power of speech and drive men into temptations (21455-21540). In an attempt to exculpate Jean de Meun from the charge of misogyny leveled at him as early as the Renaissance, Lionel J. Friedmann took great care to show that Jean's attacks against women are only literary clichés and cannot be explained by his so-called "realism." Friedman's investigation fails, however, to consider all the voices who speak against women in the *Rose*, focusing only on Jealous Husband and briefly mentioning Genius ("Jean de Meun, 'Antifeminism', and 'Bourgeois Realism,'" *Modern Philology*, LVII (1959), 13-23).

the audience back to Nature's discourse, which allegedly comprised twenty-six of them: *Contre les vices batailliez/Que nature vostre maistresse/Me vint huy conter a ma messe:/Touz les mes dist, ainc puis ne sis;/Vous en truoverez .XXVJ./Plus nuisanz que vous ne cuidiez!* (19870-5; 'Fight against the vices that Nature, our mistress, has just told me about today at my mass. She told me them all, and I never sat down afterward. You will find twenty-six of them, more harmful than you think').<sup>115</sup> The "priest" bluntly states that counting these vices would be a challenging undertaking (*d'outrage m'entremetroie*; 19884) and with a simple invitational gesture asks his audience to look for them in other parts of the poem.<sup>116</sup> Refuting the task to go over the vices of man, Genius confines his sermon to just a few words which exhort Christians to serve the laws of nature, to return what they have stolen, to stay away from murder, to be loyal, thoughtful of others, and also to keep both hands and mouth clean (*Netes aiez et mains et bouche*; 20650). Taking into consideration the condensed form in which this sermon on vices is delivered, we can surmise the emphasis the medieval pastoral discourse routinely placed on speech. The priest in the *Romance of the Rose* teaches that harmful words may sully the mouth to the same extent as evil deeds sully the hands.<sup>117</sup> If Christians wish to avoid ending up in hell for their afterlife, they should pay as much attention to their sayings as they do to their actions.

---

<sup>115</sup> This exact numeric mention seems made up here for ironic purposes. The truth is that, in the long history of the reception of the *Rose*, no reader has undertaken to verify the correctness of Genius's assertion. Are there really twenty-six vices disseminated in the texture of the poem? The readerly lack of interest in this question may be explained by the very nebulosity of Jean's own notion of "vice."

<sup>116</sup> Genius's remark that these vices are explained in a succinct manner (*Assez briement les vous expose/Li jolis roman de la rose*; 19885-6) can be read as new proof of Jean's awareness of the allusive and unsystematic fashion in which he approached morality.

<sup>117</sup> The same point of view had already been expressed by Lady Abstince: *Sire, la vertu premeraine,/La plus gran, la plus souveraine/Que nus hom mortieus puisse avoir/Par science ne par avoir,/C'est de la langue refrener:/A ce se doit chascuns pener,/K'ades vient mieus qu l'en se taise/Que dire parole mauvaise;/Et cil qui volentiers l'escoute/N'est pas preudons ne dieu ne doute./Sire, seur touz autres pechiez,/De cestui estes entechiez!* (12183-12192; 'Sir, the chief virtue, the greatest and most sovereign that any mortal man may have, through knowledge or possession, is to bridle his tongue. Everyone should take the trouble to do so, since it is always better to keep silent than to utter a wicked thing, while he who listens to it willingly is neither worthy nor God fearing. Sir, you are stained with this sin above all others').

Alan Gunn considered the character Genius the mouthpiece of Jean de Meun's own philosophy.<sup>118</sup> If this were true, we would expect to see Jean adhere to his pastoral precepts. But as an author, i.e. as a user of speech himself, Jean seems to systematically and vigorously trample underfoot all the good advice about the moral use of speech Genius (and many other characters in the poem) give. He speaks more like the women whose sinuous, guileful and sometimes dirty talk have him so outraged.<sup>119</sup> As we shall see in the fifteenth-century debate over the *Romance of the Rose*, keeping one's mouth clean is a beautiful moral precept that Jean himself, although he repeatedly gives, is not able to follow.

### 3.2 DANTE'S MORAL APPROACH TO SPEECH

That speech is a concern central to Dante's thought has been acknowledged by virtually any commentator who considered Dante's prophetic claims or his art.<sup>120</sup> As far as Dante's

---

<sup>118</sup>A. Gunn, *The Mirror of Love. A Reinterpretation of the "Romance of the Rose,"* (Texas: Texas Tech Press, 1952), 396-410, 493-95.

<sup>119</sup>I find brilliant Lee Patterson's idea that in medieval poetry "the voice of the poet is inescapably aligned with that of women." (*Feminine Rhetoric*, 319). Patterson gives Matheolus' *Lamentations* as an example of how the poetic function becomes associated with feminine speaking: "in complaining about her (his wife's) endless nagging Matheolus repeats himself verbatim and at length, just like a woman." (*ibid.*, 321).

<sup>120</sup>Numerous studies have been written that examine either Dante's linguistic thought or the poet's preoccupation with the immorality of speech, in general, and with his own potential verbal sinfulness, in particular. Joan Ferrante thoroughly investigates Dante's view of the sinfulness of speech in: "The Relation of Speech to Sin in the *Inferno*." *Dante Studies*, 87 (1969), 33-46. Many of her insights from this article are taken up and developed in the chapter "Exchange and Communication," from her book on the *Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984). Steven Botterill makes important points about Dante's philosophical view of language in the preface to his edition of *De vulgari eloquentia* from 1996. The same author considers the exemplification of Dante's view of language through the figure of Bernard of Clairvaux in the *Paradiso. Dante and the Mystical Tradition. Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994). Within the context of the relationship between heresy and faith, Giuseppe Mazzotta discusses the prophetic content of Dante's own message and argues that for Dante, because of his metaphorical language, prophecy is prone to turning into blasphemy (*Dante, Poet of the Desert*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979). Also important is his more recent study from 2001, a brilliant demonstration of how Dante's view of language from the treatise on vernacular is recast in the cantos of the lower hell in the *Comedy*. "L'esilio da Firenze. Il *De Vulgari Eloquentia e il cerchio della frode.*" *Dante. Da Firenze all'aldilà* (Firenze: F. Cesati, 2001), 233-247). Teodolinda Barolini wrote two groundbreaking books, both of which tackle

philosophy of language is concerned, Bruno Nardi has correctly pointed out that a theory of language *per se* does not exist in Dante, but that the poet elaborated several important linguistic concepts in the *Convivio*, *De vulgari eloquentia*, and the *Paradiso*. Analyzing these concepts from a philosophical perspective, Nardi has come to the conclusion that, despite the apparent “discontinuity” in Dante’s views, there is a unity of thought in the poet’s speculative approach to speech.<sup>121</sup>

Since the object of this study is an investigation into the nature of the sins with verbal connotations in Hell, I will begin by taking a look at the works written before the *Comedy*. The references to the proneness of speech to sin Dante scattered throughout his other works may help us understand better his treatment of verbal sins in the *Inferno*.

At the same time, additional references woven into the text of *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* also shed a great deal of light on Dante’s view of the sins of speech. I undertake, thus, to gather

---

the problem of Dante’s truth claims in the *Comedy*. In the chapter “Ritornerò poeta” from *Dante’s Poets* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), Barolini argues that the chief concern of Dante’s textuality is the question of truth and falsity, a pervasive concern that motivates Dante’s assessment of his poetic precursors and his own poetic output, including the *Comedy*. In the *Undivine Comedy*, Barolini studies more closely and amply the problem of the poem’s credibility and discloses the technical mechanisms by which Dante achieved the supreme artistic paradox: that of “situating the *menzogna* of art within the framework of a prophetic stature that guarantees truth” (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992). John Fyler wrote a book on the decay of language in Chaucer, Jean de Meun and Dante, considering, for the latter poets, Reason’s discourse in the *Rose* and *Paradiso XXVI* in the *Comedy* (*Language and the Declining World in Chaucer, Dante and Jean de Meun*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007). There are certainly many other studies, published both in the United States or in Europe, which, in one form or another, starting from one point or another, approach, or allude to, Dante’s complex and tortuous relationship to speech. Enumerating these studies here would take too long and would cause too great a diversion from the focus of my dissertation. Some of them will be, however, referred to, or quoted throughout the chapters of my dissertation. My selection of the titles cited above has been dictated by the fact that these were the books that helped me best in grasping the complexity of Dante’s linguistic and philosophical universe. They were the ones that weighed most on the course and shape of the Dante component of my work.

<sup>121</sup> Nardi interprets Dante’s revisions of his own linguistic theories as a remarkable sign of maturation, not as condemnable inconsistencies; see “Il Linguaggio,” in *Dante e la cultura medievale* (Bari: Laterza, 1984). Stefano Rizzo also argues for an evolution rather than an inner contradiction in the poet’s linguistic perspective; see *Il ‘De vulgari eloquentia’ e l’unità del pensiero linguistico di Dante* (*Dante’s Studies*, LXXXVII (1969), 69-88). For a complex overview of all the major critical opinions expressed on Dante’s view of language, see Ileana Pagani’s book *La teoria linguistica di Dante*, which peruses a wide range of critical studies from Marigo and Nardi, through Pagliaro, Pézard, to Dragonetti, Contini and Mengaldo, all of whom contributed to the “storia critica” of *De vulgari eloquentia* (Napoli: Liguori, 1982).

all these scattered pieces of information about the immorality of language and use them as a springboard from which to tackle the verbal sins punished in the *Inferno*. I will begin with *De vulgari eloquentia*, which contains some significant clues about the relationship speech-sin, and then continue with the *De Monarchia*, the *Convivio* and the *Comedy*. I adopt this order because I follow a criterion based on the wealth of information about Dante's view of transgressive speech. There are just a few indications in this respect in *De Vulgari* and *De Monarchia*, but more numerous in the *Convivio* and the last two *canticas* of the *Comedy*. The *Paradiso* and the *Purgatorio* have also the advantage of providing solutions for the sins of speech, thus rounding out Dante's treatment of these sins.

Chapters II and III from Book 1 of the treatise on vernacular eloquence are cast within a pronounced Augustinian framework. Like for Augustine, for Dante language is a system of signs by which humans represent the concepts that form in their minds.<sup>122</sup> This system of representation arises from the need humans have to share their ideas and feelings: "Now, if we wish to define with precision what our intention is when we speak, it is clearly nothing other than to expound to others the concepts forming in our mind."(I. II.3).<sup>123</sup> Sharing is thus for Dante the basic principle at the root of all human utterance. In this context, language, this *egregium humani generis actum* ('distinguished human act'), is a meeting of the minds and of the souls; ideally, it is the vehicle that may help us achieve a wonderful, universal communion. From the fact that terms like 'intention' and 'sharing' belong to a moral lexicon, we can see that the origin of human speech is from the outset placed by Dante within a moral context. The impression

---

<sup>122</sup> Dante's debt to Augustine's epistemology of language has carefully been studied by Marcia Colish, who peruses all of Dante's works to argue that the Italian poet reformed the artistic language simultaneously with his working out of a poetics of rectitude. (*The Mirror of Language*, 152-221.)

<sup>123</sup> For the English text of the *De vulgari eloquentia*, I use Steven Botterill's translation (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

becomes even more marked when Dante discusses the famous biblical episode of the Tower of Babel. Until Nimrod's presumptuous attempt to build an edifice able to reach the sky, this divine abode, humans had all been able to communicate harmoniously with each other. But Nimrod's transgressive gesture attracted the divine anger which decreed that from then on humans would start speaking different languages. The transcendental power punished Nimrod and his workers in their speech, a punishment with much more instructive, stronger and far-reaching repercussions than would have been the physical death. The diversification of speech into many languages would turn out to be a barrier to communication and to social concord, a lesson for human kind. That Dante might have seen in this story an illustration of the principle of *contrapasso* seems plausible: speech was the means by which Nimrod united so many people and had them work together in the construction of the transgressive edifice, therefore, the punishment visited on them affected particularly this manifestation of human intelligence and sociability.<sup>124</sup> The excursus into the Old Testament's stories of Nimrod and Adam elicits from Dante an exclamation paradigmatic for his polar concern with speech and sin: *O semper natura nostra prona peccatis!* ('Oh, human nature, always inclined toward sin!' I.VII.2:12). This bitter exclamation would clearly have been more fitted to the moral universe of the *Comedy*, and had it not been for the moral framework in which Dante develops his theory of original speech, these words would have seemed odd and inadequate in a scientific treatise on the status of vernacular eloquence. The bottom line is that even when he is mainly preoccupied with scholarly matters such as dialects and poetry, Dante cannot obliterate his concerns with sin.

---

<sup>124</sup> For Dante, the Tower of Babel represents the third major transgression of human kind, after the fall and the flood, with which it is put on the same par (I. VII). The evocation of the tower gives the poet the opportunity to develop his theory of the Adamic language, which was the holy tongue (*sacratum ydioma*), created by God together with the first man and preserved by the Jews, among whom Jesus would be born. Dante will subsequently revise this view in the *Paradiso*. As for Nimrod, the "author" of the tower, we will find him in hell among the traitors, speaking tongues that nobody is able to understand (*Inf. XXI*, 77-81)

Another place in which *De vulgari* foreshadows the *Comedy* is where Dante argues for the necessity of speech to humans, a necessity that differentiates them from other species: “Between creatures of different species, on the other hand, not only was speech unnecessary, but it would have been injurious, since there could have been no friendly exchange between them,” (I.II.5:5). Here speech is cast between two polar opposites that mark its potentiality: by virtue of its social nature, speech can be injurious, and this is unnatural; or it can promote friendly human interactions, and this is its natural function. Speech as a perverted means by which people may harm each other will become a dimension fully exploited by the first *cantica* of the *Divine Comedy*. The poem’s solution to the sins of speech is also prefigured by the Latin tract: speech is a divine gift bestowed on man, of whom it is required to use this gift for the glorification of the divine. Speech is ultimately a sign of the divinity in us, the most powerful link that ties us not only one with another, but also to the highest good.<sup>125</sup> All of these aspects representative for *De vulgari eloquentia* will be seen at work in the *Comedy*, in a different context and in a much more dramatic way.

If *De vulgari eloquentia* informs us about the impact of sin on speech, *De Monarchia* offers us clues about how this relationship can affect humans on a political level. In discussing the qualities that make a monarch best disposed for ruling, Dante relies on Aristotle’s authority to draw attention to the dangers that result from the discrepancy between one’s outward pronouncements and one’s actual deeds: “And from this one can refute the error of those who believe they can improve the life and morals of others by saying good things but doing evil. They have not noticed that Jacob’s hands were more persuasive than his words, even though the

---

<sup>125</sup> “Yet He still wished that Adam should speak, so that he who had freely given so great a gift should be glorified in its employment. And likewise, we must believe that the fact that we rejoice in the ordered activity of our faculties is a sign of divinity in us.’ I.V.2, 11).

former suggested what was false and the latter what was true. Accordingly, Aristotle says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: ‘In matters involving feeling and conduct, words are to be believed less than deeds.’” 1.13.4: 71).<sup>126</sup>

This passage illuminates the placement in hell of figures such as Jason, Ulysses, Guido da Montefeltro or Sinon, in all of whom the distance between skillful speech and evil deeds had important political consequences. Ulysses will be cast in the *Comedy* as the paradigm of those who want to reform the life and mores of others (for Ulysses, his crew, to whom he holds a pompous speech about human virtues), but in reality sacrifices them to his personal ambitions. The divorce between artful ways of using the gift of speech (*bona loquendo*) and the type of actions that this (rather) misuse of speech gives rise to (*mala operando*) counts for the location of the above mentioned characters in the area of fraud. Just as from the standpoint of the linguistic analyst, Dante cannot forget sinful human nature, so in *De Monarchia*, from the perspective of his political ideas, Dante cannot bracket his moral concerns.

Seen from a social and political angle, sin receives a definition that is intended by Dante to explain the ruinous nature of discord and division: ‘sinning is nothing else than scorning unity and moving away from it towards multiplicity’ (*peccare nichil est aliud quam progredi ab uno spreto ad multa* 1.15.3:81). This definition is one of those fascinating cases in which Dante takes up classical moral concepts (or characters), and giving them a new spin (or a new face), presses them into the service of his own ideas and makes them bear on the reality of his own days.<sup>127</sup> In the classical quote, *peccare*, although *per se* a moral term, is given not a moral, but a philosophical definition, in that the phrases *progredire ab uno* and *spretare ad multa* are highly

---

<sup>126</sup> The quotes from this political tract are from *Dante's Monarchia*. Translated, with a commentary, by Richard Kay. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998).

<sup>127</sup> Dante takes up this thesis from Plutarch, through the filter of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, to prove his point that the political unity is good and plurality is bad.

abstract and indeterminate. In the moral tracts from Dante's time, the definitions given to sin(s) are extremely specific and precise. They do not describe sin in terms of a sort of universal phenomenon of dispersal, but as particular evil acts related to individuals and their wills. Dante's merit in the assimilation of the classical quote is to implement it into the concrete ground of the political situation of his country and, thus, restore to the sin its determinacy. It is a tendency that we will see best at work in the *Divine Comedy*, where definitions given to Classical (Aristotelian or Ciceronian) terms such as incontinence, violence and fraud will be represented by specific characters, who will illustrate these otherwise too abstract terms by their own concrete sins.

At the other pole of the multiplicity and sin stands social harmony, defined as a union of wills: *est enim Concordia uniformis motus plurium voluntatum; in qua quidem ratione apparent unitatem voluntatum, que per uniformem motum datur intelligi, concordie radicem esse vel ipsam concordiam* ('it is apparent that a unity of wills, which is implied by their uniform motion, is the root of concord, or simply concord itself.' 1.15.5, 83). This passage from *De Monarchia* enlightens the treatment of the sowers of discord in the *Inferno*, just as the awareness Dante has of Aristotle's concept of *ebulia* 'prudence' accounts for the link between fraudulent counselors and sowers of discord.<sup>128</sup> Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro are assigned to the eighth pouch of Malebolge specifically because they infringed the norms for prudence and gave fraudulent counsel. They are followed by the sowers of discord, who, by their evil counsel, caused social disintegration and wars. All these links between words, sins and politics emerge already in *De Monarchia* and will be apparent again, in a more complex way, in the *Comedy*. Due to these

---

<sup>128</sup> Dante invokes the Aristotelian term in 2.5.23, 136. By *ebulia*, Aristotle (and in his wake Thomas Aquinas) understood excellence of deliberation manifested in the rectitude of counsel. For the Aristotelian definition, see the *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.9 (10), and for Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* II-II. Q. 47-52). As I will highlight in the section dedicated to the fraudulent counselors, a trend in the Dante criticism has been to interpret Ulysses as the embodiment of Aquinas's definition of 'false prudence'.

interconnections between Dante's prose works and his poem, I will reutilize some of the passages quoted above in the treatment of the specific sins in the *Inferno*.

In the series of Dante's prose works, I have left the *Convivio* for the end, because, through its pervasive concerns with morality, this work constitutes an ethical tract in its own right and, thereby, prefigures best Dante's mission as a moralist in the *Comedy*.<sup>129</sup> In Book Four, he describes himself as studying carefully people's behavior and becoming so disgusted with this view of human sinfulness that he undertook the task of trying to correct moral errors: *proposi di gridare a la gente, che per mal cammino andavano, acciò che per diritto calle si dirizzasse* ('I resolved that I would cry out to those who were walking along this evil path so that they might place themselves back on the right way.' IV.1.9, 215).<sup>130</sup> A meaningful statement that offers us an idea of Dante's stature as a moralist is the dissociation he operates between bad habits and their practitioners: *li errori de la gente abominava e dispregiava, non per infamia o vituperio de li erranti, ma de li errori; li quali biasimando credea far dispiacere, e, dispiaciuti, partire da coloro che per essi eran da me odiati* ('I sought, as far as I was able, to scorn and despise the errors of mankind, not to defame or denigrate those who err, but rather their errors. By blaming them I sought to render them displeasing, and by rendering them displeasing, to

---

<sup>129</sup> Of the four *trattati* ('books') of the work, it is especially the last one that deals with ethical matters, but preoccupations with ideas like malice, justice, will, etc. occur in the previous *trattati* as well. As a general format, the *Convivio* is patterned on Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and includes three canzoni (*Voi, che'ntendo il terzo ciel movete, Amor che nella mente mi ragiona* and *Le dolci rime d'amor ch'i'solia*) accompanied by the attendant commentaries. The declared purpose of this work is to enlighten men spiritually and move them to virtue. Highly important in this context is the firm belief Dante has in the ability of literature to reform people's mores: at the beginning of the fourth *trattato* he asserts that the purpose of the canzone *Le dolci rime* is to bring people to the straight path: *riducer la genter in diritta via*.

Useful interpretations of the *Convivio* are provided by Patrick Boyde, who dwells at length on the issue of the twofold happiness [*Human Vices and Human Worth in Dante's "Comedy."*] (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge UP, 2000), 84-99], and by John Took, who analyzes the tract as a point of intersection between Neo-Platonism and Aristotelian thought [*Dante: Lyric Poet and Philosopher. An Introduction to the Minor Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)].

<sup>130</sup> For the Italian text of this work I use: *Convivio*. A cura di Giorgio Inglese. (Milan: RCS Rizzoli, 2004), and for the English version: Richard Lansing, *Dante's Il Convivio (The Banquet)* (New York: Garland, 1990).

remove them from those persons whom I hated because of them'. IV.1.5: 214). Dante's scorn has a direct target: the moral errors, and the blame he addresses to the morally weak has an active value--that of helping them mend their ways. He hates them only to the extent that they are tarnished by their vices, but it is a benign form of hate that hopes to cure the diseases for the benefit of the spiritually ill.

The view of the *costumi disordinati* ('disorderly mores') and the *difetti di vita* ('defects of life') worries Dante and prompts him to appeal to that particular science that is best able to help him understand the inner motivations that underlie the behavioral mechanisms of men: moral philosophy, that he considers the supreme science, to which all others should be subservient.<sup>131</sup> It is here that all men who want to reform their lives should look, because this science, moral philosophy, teaches the rules for a good behavior and drives the vices away: *li costumi sono beltà de l'anima, cioè le vertudi massimamente, le quali tal volta per vanitadi o per superbia si fanno men belle e men gradite... E però dico che a fuggire questo, si guardi in costei, cioè colà*

---

<sup>131</sup> In Book one, when he discusses the structure of heavens in correlation with the sciences, he assigns moral philosophy to the Crystalline Heaven and quotes Thomas Aquinas on his view of the pre-eminence of ethics with respect to all other sciences: *Lo cielo cristallino, che per Primo Mobile dinanzi è contato, ha comparazione assai manifesta a la Morale Filosofia; che Morale Filosofia, secondo che dice Tommaso sopra lo secondo de l'Etica, ordina noi a l'altre scienze. (...) E non altrimenti, cessando la Morale Filosofia, l'altre scienze sarebbero celate alcuno tempo, e non sarebbe generazione né vita di felicitade, e indarno sarebbero scritte e per antico trovate,* ('The Crystalline Heaven, which has previously been designated as the Primum Mobile, has a very clear resemblance to Moral Philosophy; for Moral Philosophy, as Thomas says in commenting on the second book of Ethics, disposes us properly to the other sciences. ...) Likewise if Moral Philosophy ceased to exist, the other sciences would be hidden for some time, and there would be no generation or happiness in life, and in vain would these bodies of knowledge have been discovered and written down long ago.' II.XIV. 14: 134-135). Later on he repeats this idea in a metaphoric context, asserting that just as the beauty of the body arises from the orderly disposition of the limbs, so the beauty of philosophy resides in that branch of it that deals with orderly moral virtues: *La moralitate è bellezza de la Filosofia; ché, così come la bellezza del corpo resulta da le membra in quanto sono debitamente ordinate, così la bellezza de la sapienza, che è corpo di Filosofia, come detto è, resulta da l'ordine de le virtudi morali, che fanno quella piacere sensibilmente, E però dico che sua biltà, cioè moralitate, piove fiammelle di foco, cioè appetito diritto, che s'ingenera nel piacere de la morale dottrina; lo quale appetito ne diparte eziando da li vizii naturali, non che da li altri.* ('Morality is the beauty of philosophy, for just as the beauty of the body derives from the degree to which its members are properly ordered, so the beauty of wisdom, which, as has been said, is the body of philosophy, derives from the order of the moral virtues which enable her to give pleasure perceptible to the senses. Therefore I say that her beauty (that is, morality) rains down flames of fire (that is, right appetite), which is engendered by the pleasure imparted by moral teaching, an appetite that removes us from even the natural vices, not to speak of others.' III.XIV.11, 207).

*dov'ella è esempio d'umiltà, cioè in quella parte di sé che morale filosofia si chiama. E soggiungo che, mirando costei, dico la Sapienza, in questa parte, ogni viziato tornerà diritto e buono.* (III.XV.14: 208; ‘mores are the beauty of the soul, the virtues especially, which sometimes by vanity, sometimes by presumptuousness become less beautiful and less likable... However, I am saying that in order to avoid this situation, one has to follow philosophy, namely that part of philosophy that sets an example of humility, that is, that part of it which is called moral philosophy. And I add that by following this one, Wisdom I mean, every vicious man will become good and virtuous’; translation mine).<sup>132</sup>

Along Aristotelian-Thomistic lines, Dante expresses his *morale dottrina* in terms of right/evil appetite, justice/injustice, making the important point that all our decisions and operations are rooted in the will, this innate function of reason.<sup>133</sup> It is in the will that originate our virtues and our vices: *Perché nel volere e nel non volere nostro si giudica la malizia e la bontade* (‘because good and evil are determined by what we will or fail to will’ I.II.6, 46).

---

<sup>132</sup> Lansing’s translation of the *Convivio* does not cover this passage.

<sup>133</sup> (...) *la nostra ragione a quattro maniere d'operazioni (...) operazioni che essa considera e fa nel proprio atto suo le quali si chiamano razionali, sì come sono arti di parlare.* (...) *Sono anche operazioni che la nostra ragione considera ne l'atto de la volontade, sì come offendere e giovare, sì come star fermo e fuggire alla battaglia, sì come stare casto e lussuriare, e queste del tutto soggiacciono a la nostra volontade; e però semo detti da loro buoni e rei perch'elle sono proprie nostre del tutto, perché, quanto la nostra volontade ottenere puote, tanto le nostre operazioni si stendono.* (IV.IX. 5: 252; ‘our reason is related to four kinds of activities (...) activities which it contemplates and performs by its own act, and these are called rational, as for example the art of speech. (...) There are also activities which our reason contemplates as an act of the will, as for instance giving offense or assistance, standing ground or fleeing in battle, and remaining chaste or yielding to lust. These are completely subject to our will, and therefore we are considered good or evil, because they are completely of our own making; for as far as our will can reach, so far do our activities extend.’ emphasis mine). For an overview of Dante’s assimilation of Aristotle and Aquinas’ s moral theories, see Peter Boyde’s chapter “Aristotelian Values Through Dante’s Eyes,” from *Human Vices*, 77-99. A similar and very solid book is Marc Cogan’s *Design in the Wax* (1999), which also deals with Dante’s relationship with Aristotle and Aquinas. Cogan argues that it is indeed Aristotle’s ethics that underpins the structure of the three moral realms of the Comedy, but not Aristotle that we know today, i.e, as we interpret him today, but the one that the Middle Ages/Dante knew: Aristotle interpreted through the lenses of Thomas Aquinas. Within this thesis, Cogan demonstrates that at the root of each of the three realms of the *Comedy* lies the tripartite structure of the appetite—concupiscible, irascible and intellectual (or of the will), an Aristotelian tripartition that in the *Divine Comedy* was filtered through Aquinas.

The vices mainly represent forms of injustice, such as betrayal, ingratitude, falsity (*falsitade*), theft, deceit, which constitute so many inhuman sins (*inumani peccati*).<sup>134</sup> Speech, as a human faculty, is itself rooted in the will, an important point that deserves here a few remarks. According to Casagrande and Vecchio, the main contribution of scholasticism to the moral theories on the sins of the tongue is the transference of the cause prompting these sins from the tongue (which by its slipperiness is prone to sin) to the will. The main representative of this trend was, as we have seen, Thomas Aquinas. From the passages I have quoted from the *Convivio* it results that *l'arte di parlare*, being a rational act, is rooted in the will. By the same token, it follows that the SINS germane to speech, are seen from a scholastic angle as rooted in the will. As an additional support to my thesis, I adduce here Cogan, in whose interpretive scheme the infernal area of Malebolge (where Dante assigns most verbal sins) corresponds to the appetite of the will. I will retain the relationship between verbal sins and will posited by *Convivio* for its bearing on the structure of Malebolge and will make references to this relationship throughout the sections dedicated to the sins of speech in the *Inferno*.

More textual indications in the *Convivio* prepare us to approach the first *cantica* of the *Comedy*, and one of them is of utmost importance for elucidating the matter of Dante's decision to embed sins of verbal nature among sins of deeds. In a passage in which Dante stresses the care one should grant to all of our actions, and especially to speech, Dante defines words as germs of operation:

---

<sup>134</sup> Here Dante uses the term *peccato* as a synonym for vice, a rare occurrence in the text of the *Convivio*, which privileges the terms *errore morale* or *vizio*. Being so familiar with Aquinas's *Secunda secundae*, as the *Convivio* itself proves it, Dante might have been aware of the Thomistic distinction between vice (a settled evil disposition of the will) and sin (the actual realization of that disposition). The *Convivio* is mainly concerned with vices, which it divides into innate and acquired, whereas The *Comedy*, dealing mostly with sinners, will privilege the word *peccato*. It is, however, important to mention that in Dante these two terms—vice and sin—are less technical than in Thomas Aquinas.

(...) Da vedere è come ragionevolmente quel tempo in tutte le nostre operazioni si dee attendere, e massimamente nel parlare. (...). Per che le parole, che sono quasi seme di operazione, si deono molto discretamente sostener e lasciare, perché bene siano ricevute e fruttifere vengano, si perché da la loro parte non sia difetto di sterilitade. E però lo tempo è da provedere, sì per colui che parla come per colui che dee udire. (IV.II.8: 223)<sup>135</sup> (emphasis mine)

It is to consider how reasonable it is that we should await the proper moment in all our undertakings, and most of all in speaking. (...) This is why great discretion must be shown in using or in avoiding the use of words—which are, as it were, the seed of our activity—so that they may well be received and fruitful in effect, so as to avoid any defect of sterility on their part. The right moment must therefore be predetermined, both for the one who speaks as well as the one who must listen.

The act of speech is emphasized in this passage as an act of utmost importance, to which proper care should be given. In our words germinate actions, words themselves are a kind of deeds; saying is virtually doing and this relationship is envisaged in terms of the social impact of our initiatives: when, or even before, we speak, we have to carefully consider and assess the impact that our words may produce on their recipient(s). This passage contains in a nutshell the doctrine of the disciplined speech, pioneered by Hugh of St. Victor and taken up by the theorists of the sins of the tongue in the late Middle Ages.<sup>136</sup> In Dante's time, speaking discretely meant

---

<sup>135</sup> Dante will splendidly reuse the metaphor of the “germinating” power of words in the context of Count Ugolino’s acknowledgment that his words may cause the infamy of his mortal enemy, the archbishop Ruggieri: *Ma se le mie parole esser dien seme /che frutti infamia al traditor ch’io rodo,/parlar e lagrimar vedrai insieme.* (*Inferno* XXXIII, 7-9; ‘But if my words will be seed to bear the fruit of/infamy for the traitor I gnaw, you will see me speak/and weep together.’).

<sup>136</sup> As I have mentioned in the introductory part of my dissertation, this doctrine assimilated the rhetorical scheme of the six circumstances of speech and applied it to the way of speech of Christians. In the twelfth century, Hugh of St. Victor redesigned the circumstances of speech within the context of his theory of monastic ‘disciplined speech’ and from him the circumstances invaded the subsequent moral tracts on speech form the late Middle Ages. (In the *Paradiso*, we will find Hugh’s name mentioned among the inhabitants of the sphere of the Sun.) Under the influence of Hugh of St. Victor’s ideas, Raoul Ardent, the author of the *Speculum Universale*, subsumes the circumstances of speech under the criterion of *discretio* applied to speech. Closer in time to Dante, we will find the scheme of the circumstances reutilized by Albertano da Brescia (*De Doctrina loquendi et tacendi*), Brunetto Latini (*Trésor*) and William Peraldus. As far as the latter is concerned, he takes up some of the vices that Ardent attributed to the indiscrete speech, such us *indiscreta promissio* (‘unfulfilled promise’), *secreta amici revelare* (‘disclosing friends’secrets’) and *stultiloquium* (‘foolish talk’) and develops them in the chapter “De peccato linguae,” from his *Summa Vitiorum*.

thinking beforehand to whom one spoke, what the speaker had to say, when, where and to what purpose he spoke. Discreet speech meant screening one's own words through these norms--become true moral filters--which, if respected, could protect human speech against all potential transgressions. Dante gives specific examples of the risks a speaker lacking self-control incurs: *se'l parladore è mal disposto, più volte sono le sue parole dannose* ('if the speaker is in a bad mood, his words can be harmful in many ways'). The lack of self-control may be considered here tantamount to the lack of control over speech, exactly the bad kind of situation that the scheme of the circumstances is intended to prevent. By the same token, if the hearer is in a bad mood, the words of the speaker, even if they came from a good intention, may be ill received (*se l'uditore è mal disposto, mal sono quelle ricevute che buone siano*). The latter case falls under the circumstance concerning the addressee: when you are speaking, be aware of the person to whom you speak, take into account who that person is, what kind of person it is (morally), what (s)he means to you, etc.<sup>137</sup> And the passage ends with a biblical quote that posits time as a circumstance to consider in order to control speech: *E però Salomone dice ne lo Ecclesiaste: tempo è da parlare, e tempo è da tacere.* ('Even Solomon says in the Ecclesiastics: there is a time to speak and a time to keep silent'), a commonplace quote in the moral tracts on speech in the late Middle Ages (we will find it for instance in Peraldus, Albertano and again, Brunetto Latini).

---

<sup>137</sup> For an extended exemplification of this circumstance, see Brunetto Latini's *Trésor*, which under the rubric "the person to whom you are speaking" develops an impressive list of potential hearers (friends, enemies, princes, knights, parents, priests, nuns, drunk men or wicked women, etc.) and gives indications about the way in which each of these categories should be addressed or talked to. Among these classes of addressees, we also find that hearer who is a sower of discord: "it is terrible to have in a city a sower of discord or a person who speaks foolishly, so be careful not to speak to a sower of discord, for you will be putting logs on his fire." [The Book of Treasure 'Li Livres dou Tresor'. Translated by Paul Barrette and Spurgeon Baldwin (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1993), 209]. Brunetto's treatment of the circumstance *cui* ('to whom') may help us better understand Dante's mistrust of an ill-disposed listener.

Moving on to the *Comedy*, in the *Inferno* we find several sins associated with speech: blasphemy, a sin of violence, and at least four more sins (flattery, fraudulent counsel, sowing of discord, false speech) grouped in the Malebolge, the section of hell where manifestations of fraud are punished.<sup>138</sup> All of these verbal habits are treated by medieval moralists as forms of transgressive speech. Distributed apparently randomly in Dante's hell among sins of a non-verbal nature such as simony, hypocrisy, theft, etc., the last four verbal sins above mentioned form nearly half of the structure of Malebolge and are embedded into the system of fraud in calculated connections with the other sins. The great number of verbal transgressions punished in lower hell is, thus, significant for the importance Dante placed on the morality of speech as a human institution, whereas the interrelationships these verbal trespasses establish with the sins of a non-verbal nature by which they are surrounded shed more light on Dante's conception of immoral speech. The connections among the malicious sins of Malebolge and the way in which they are ordered also provide us important clues about the degrees of gravity Dante attached to specific speech-related sins.

In the structure of the *Purgatorio*, modeled on the Gregorian scheme of the seven capital vices, there are no verbal sins, but the preoccupation with speech continues. Here models of communication are offered, both on the horizontal level (among individuals), and on the vertical level, in the human relationship with the transcendental. Here flattery is excluded, Cato, the guardian of the second realm, warns from the outset.<sup>139</sup> The souls welcome the visitors with courteous speech; Casella goes as far as welcoming them with Dante's own lyrics, and the

---

<sup>138</sup> As far as the cantos depicting Malebolge are concerned, I would like to recall here Barolini's remark, according to which Dante uses these cantos "to question the basis of all human representation, to probe relentlessly the fraud inherent in language and indeed in all sign systems." (*The Undivine Comedy*, 75).

<sup>139</sup> The same holds for the practice of swearing: on the second spur of the mountain, Jacopo del Cassero tells Dante that they all trust his saying, without Dante's having to swear: *Ciascun si fida/del beneficio tuo sanza giurarlo* ('Each of us trusts your/good offices without your swearing.' (Purg. V. 64-65).

repentant stress the importance of prayer, a--or rather the only--verbal practice able to break the hardest of the divine decrees.<sup>140</sup> Manfredi explains that powerful prayers can break even the curses pronounced by the Church and shorten the soul's stay on the sacred mountain. Sapìa evokes the defiant words she had thrown at the heaven in a moment of presumptuousness, but then explains to the pilgrim that if, despite her human errors, she is given the chance to repent, it is thanks to the prayers Pier Pettinaio, a holy man, said for her.

The level of the social and political implication of speech so well-exploited in the *Inferno* is pursued in the *Purgatorio* as well: in the context of his bitter invective against the city of Florence, the poet draws attention to the shallowness of the Florentine discourses about justice: *Molti han giustizia in cuore, e tardi scocca/per non venir sanza consiglio a l'arco;/ma il popol tuo l'ha in sommo de la bocca.* ('Many have justice in their hearts but loose/the arrow late, so as not to come to the bow without/counsel; but your people have it ready on their/lips.' *Purg.* VI.130-133).<sup>141</sup> That which is on the lips does not correspond to the true speech of the heart, and very often, great words about human ideals seduce with their glowing beauty but are not rooted in the soul.<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> Moreover, when the repentant souls themselves pray, they do not even do it for themselves but for the sake of those left behind, a supreme example of charity: *Quest'ultima preghiera, segnor caro,/già non si fa per noi, ché non bisogna,/ma per color che dietro a noi restaro.* ('This last prayer, dear Lord, we do not make for/ ourselves, since there is no need, but for those who/ have stayed behind.' *Purg.* XI. 22-24).

<sup>141</sup> The English verse translation of the *Comedy* I use all throughout my dissertation belongs to Robert M. Durling, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Oxford: Oxford UP. Volume I, *Inferno* (1996), volume II, *Purgatorio* (2003), and volume III, *Paradiso* (forthcoming). Sometimes I also compare Durling's version with that of Allen Mandelbaum: *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Berkeley: California UP. Volume I, *Inferno* (1980), volume II, *Purgatorio* (1981), and volume III, *Paradiso* (1982).

<sup>142</sup> The preoccupation with verbal hypocrisy (a sin technically called *bilinguium* 'double-talking' by Peraldus and his compilers) runs like a thread in the *Comedy*. Already in the *Inferno*, Dante takes the precaution not to fall into the trap of saying what is not in his heart, a precaution framed within his agenda of promoting his art as a vehicle for truth: *ma quelle donne aiutino il mio verso/ch'aiutaro Anfione a chiuder Tebe,/sì che dal fatto il dir non sia diverso.* ('But let those ladies aid my verse who helped/ Amphion enclose Thebes, so that the word may not/ be different from the fact.' XXXII. 10-12; emphasis mine). The same evil discrepancy between inner self and outer utterances are highlighted in the *Paradiso*, when Dante addresses Cacciaguida, his forefather: *Ma voglia e argomento ne' i mortali, per la cagion ch'a voi è manifesta/diversamente son pennuti in ali;* ('But will and knowledge in us

Far from being exhausted in the *Inferno* or the *Purgatorio*, the question of transgressive speech is reopened in the *Paradiso*, sometimes in dramatic terms:

Un uom nasce a la riva/de l'Indo, e quivi non è chi ragioni di Cristo/ né chi legga né chi scriva;/ e tutti suoi voleri e atti buoni/sono, quanto ragione umana vede,/sanza peccato in vita o in sermoni./Muore non battezzato e sanza fede:/ ov'è questa giustizia che' l condanna?/ov'è la colpa sua, se ei non crede?

A man is born on the banks/ of the Indus, and no one is there to speak of Christ/ or read or write of him,/ and all his desires and acts are good, as far as/ human reason can see, without sin in life or in word./ He dies unbaptized and without our faith: where/ is this justice that condemns him?where is his fault/ if he does not believe?" (*Par. XIX.* 70-75; emphasis mine)

In this passage, the Eagle phrases Dante's question concerning the principle that underlies the salvation of the non-Christians: how can a man who has never heard of Christ and who has never sinned in deeds or words be condemned to eternal punishment?<sup>143</sup> Judging from the way this question frames morality, we may infer the utmost importance Dante granted to speech. Just like deeds, words too can impact human morality. Like for Jean de Meun, in Dante's Christian scheme of the final judgment, assessing words is equivalent to assessing deeds, therefore a verbal transgression, where it exists and it is serious, may cause the loss of the soul.

---

mortals,for the/reason that is manifest to you, have differently/feathered wings.' Mandelbaum's translation of this passage is slightly different in that it translates *argomento* as 'word': 'Whereas in mortals, word and sentiment-/to you, the cause of this is evident-/are wings whose featherings are disparate.' *Par. XV.79-81*). Here human hypocrisy is played against the sincerity of the inhabitants of the heavenly sphere, who are unable to lie. I will return to the problem of hypocrisy and double-talking and will treat them more amply in the chapter dedicated to fraudulent speech.

<sup>143</sup> For a fine analysis of the theological question of the implicit revelation and its bearing on this canto of the *Paradiso*, see A.M. Chiavacci Leonardi. "La salvezza degli infedeli: Il Canto XX del *Paradiso*," in *Regnum celorum violenza pate. Dante e la salvezza dell'umanità* (Montella: Accademia Vivarium Noveum, 2002), 193-203. Chiavacci Leonardi argues that the great question weighing on Dante's mind finds its solution in the Virgilian hero Rifeo, whose presence in heaven shows that baptism is surpassed by the inner, personal relationship with the transcendental.

Alongside the *Convivio*, this quote from the *Paradiso* may thus elucidate the reasons for Dante's decision to imbed verbal transgressions among sins of deeds in hell.

Another passage that deserves careful consideration concerns the issue of the broken vows treated in the *trilogia dei canti* (*Paradiso* III, IV and V). Piccarda Donati, one of the rare female characters in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, justifies her place in a lower sphere of the celestial hierarchy by her unfulfilled monastic vows.<sup>144</sup> Although Piccarda's location is not a punishment proper, the fact that she insists on her lower degree of blessedness raises questions about the extent of her religious transgression. Piccarda's failing may be examined under the optic of the medieval ethical category of *indiscretum votum*, a sin of speech defined by medieval moralists as the erasure of the moral and institutional pact concluded with God. Dante himself uses the word *cancellamento* 'erasure' in his description of Piccarda's sin. Erasure, however, also works in the opposite direction in the *Paradiso*. Despite her failing to keep her monastic vow, Piccarda is still assigned a place in the Empyrean, which shows that *il cancellamento* functions in Dante's text not only to describe a human failing, but also to explain a transcendental act: forgiveness--or erasure of sin--on the part of the providential justice. The encounter with Piccarda offers Dante the opportunity to express his solution to the problem of the dispensation of vows: a vow cannot be erased, he maintains, it can only be permuted, i.e. recuperated through a harder commitment. Within the framework of our discussion about transgressive speech, Piccarda's

---

<sup>144</sup> The trilogy is intended to draw attention to the too great ease and superficiality with which humans make pledges. Making a vow is a serious matter that should be treated with discernment, and Dante expresses this idea in an explicit and imperative way: *Non prendan li mortali il voto a ciancia;/siate fedeli, e a ciò far non bieci.* ('Let not mortals take vows as idle talk;/be faithful, but not crosses-eyed' *Par.* V. 64-5)

presence in the Celestial heaven proves that, when exceptional circumstances require it, what otherwise would have been a mortal sin of the word becomes a forgivable transgression.<sup>145</sup>

*Paradiso* XXVI and XXVII also offer us important indications about Dante's view of language. The former canto gives Dante the opportunity to recast his discussion of the Adamic language and to shift to the view that this language was spent by the time the Tower of Babel was built. At the same time, through the agency of Adam, *il padre antico*, Dante expresses his views of the mutability of the linguistic sign: at the beginning of time, people called God *I*, but then they replaced this word with *El*, a shift that bespeaks human inconsistency and the variability of language as a system of sign. *Opera naturale è che l'uom favella; ma così o così, natura lascia/poi fare a voi secondo che v'abella* (*Par.* XXVI.130-2; 'It is a natural operation that man speaks, but/ whether in this way or that, Nature allows you to/ do it as it may please you') is the passage that best illuminates the problematic of speech in this canto. Interpreted traditionally in the context of the linguistic theory of the mutability of sign, the phrase *ma così e così* may also be read in a moral key: it is natural that men should speak, but the use or misuse of the gift of speech is no longer a natural law but depends on the individual will of each person. *Paradiso* XXVII further deepens this opinion: here age is put in relationship to speech in a way that emphasizes the corruption brought to the natural purity of speech by the advanced age: *Tale, balbuziendo ancor, digiuna,/che poi divora, con la lingua sciolta,/qualunque cibo per qualunque luna;/e tal, balbuziendo, ama e ascolta/la madre sua, che, con loquela intera,/ disïa poi di*

---

<sup>145</sup> It is not the first time that Dante shows how the divine decrees can be changed. In the *Inferno*, Beatrice justifies her being asked by Lucia to help Dante with these words: *Donna è gentil nel ciel che si compiange/di questo 'mpedimento ov'io ti mando,/sì che duro giudicio là sù frange*. ('There is a noble lady in Heaven, who grieves/ this impediment to which I send you, so that she/ vanquishes harsh judgment there on high.' II. 94-96; emphasis mine). In the *Paradiso*, as well, Dante stresses that sometimes the divine counsel willingly lets itself be overcome by love: *Regnum celorum violenza pate/da caldo amore e da viva speranza,/che vince la divina volontate* ('*Regnum celorum* suffers the violence of burning/love and lively hope that overcome God's will', XX. 94-96; emphasis mine). Through their intense charity, Piccarda and Constance, even if they broke their religious vows, they also infringed the Heaven's severity, and earned their right to a place in the celestial hierarchy.

*vederla sepolta.* (Par. XXVII.130-135; ‘This one, while still a babbler, observes fasts,/and later, when his tongue is loosed, devours/whatever food in whatever month,/and this one, while still a babbler, loves and/obeys his mother, and later, with full command of/ speech, desires to see her buried.’). Just as the incorporation of food grows bigger with the progress of age, to the point where it becomes nocuous for the body and turns into a sin, so individual human speech grows into evil and breaks sacred family ties. Here gluttony and murderous speech are put on the same level, as equal transgressions committed by way of the mouth. The prejudices of the *mala bocca*, a biblical phrase Dante used in the *Convivio* as a metaphor for the misuse of speech,<sup>146</sup> recur thus, in the *Paradiso*, in this association with gluttony. Transgressive linguistic behavior is therefore a theme not just in the *Inferno*, the *cantica* that most prominently deals with the sins of speech, but of the entire *Comedy*.

That even in the *cantica* of the heavenly spheres we encounter characters speaking of the evils people may commit with their wicked tongues/mouths is less odd than it might seem at first glance. Here the disembodied souls of the holy, besides their harsh criticism of the human misuse of the divine gift of speech, often offer themselves models for speech. Thus, in the Heaven of Jupiter, the souls forming the Eagle speak at the same time: they all form the same words simultaneously, realizing a perfect communion of wills and speeches that stand in sharp contrast to the verbal practices of the sowers of discord from the *Inferno*: *ch'io vidi e anche udi' parlar lo rostro,/e sonar ne la voce e "io" e "mio",/quand' era nel concetto e "noi" e "nostro"* (Par. XIX.10-12; ‘for I saw and also heard the beak speaking, and/the voice sounding both *I* and mine, though/logically it was *we* and *ours*’). In heaven, the linguistic signs normally used for the

---

<sup>146</sup> *E però dice Salomone a lo adolescente figlio “Li schernidori Dio li schernisce, e ali mansueti Dio darà grazia”.* E altrove dice: *“Rimuovi da te la mala bocca, e li altri atti villani siano di lungi da te”* (‘This is why Solomon says to his adolescent son: God scorns scorners, and to the meek God will give grace. And elsewhere he says: Keep far ways from you an evil mouth, and let base actions be far from you.’ IV. XXV. 2, 315-316).

idea of individuality—personal pronouns or possessive pronouns--are reinvested with a new function: that of expressing unity in plurality or the idea of the common good.

The figures of St. Francis and St. Dominic are offered as paradigms for virtuous speech on earth: they represent that type of preaching in which words concord with intentions and with deeds.<sup>147</sup> Dante casts the two mendicant friars as the perfect examples of the true preachers, examples that should embarrass and modify the hypocritical behavior of those who speak the words of the doctrine without believing in its message: the false preachers condemned by Beatrice in *Paradiso* XXIX. But the holy figure that perhaps voices most explicitly Dante's ideal of speech is Thomas Aquinas, the one who in the text praises the merits of St. Francis, and, outside the text, is an authoritative scholastic voice on the vices of the word. Aquinas's speech is characterized as '*l discreto latino* (*Par. XII.144*), a phrase that makes an explicit reference to the above-mentioned theory of discrete speech.<sup>148</sup> The meaning of the phrase becomes even clearer when Aquinas sets out to instruct Dante not to judge or speak too quickly, like those who cannot discern between an assertion and a negation: *E questo ti sia sempre piombo a' piedi/ per farti mover lento com'uom lasso/e al sì e al no che tu non vedi:/ ché quelli è tra li stolti bene a basso,/ che senza distinzione afferma e nega/ne l'un così come ne l'altro passo;/ perch'elli'ncontra che più volte piega/l'oppinion corrente in falsa parte,/e poi l'affetto l'intelletto lega.* (*Par. XIII. 112-120*; 'And let this ever be lead upon your feet, to make/you move slowly, like a weary man, to both the *yes*/and the *no* that you do not see:/for surely he is low among the fools who affirms and denies without distinction in either case,/for it often happens that a hasty opinion turns/ in a wrong direction, and then affect binds the/intellect'). Hastiness can cause men to form erroneous

---

<sup>147</sup> In the texts they are characterized as two champions of the faith, able to move people to virtuous actions with their speeches and their deeds: *due campioni, al cui fare, al cui dire/lo popol disviato si raccorse* (*Par. XII, 44-45*).

<sup>148</sup> Coincidentally or not, Hugh of St. Victor, the author of the theory of discreet speech, is mentioned in the same canto, just a few lines before (*Par. XII. 133*).

opinions and speak thus in incomplete knowledge of the facts.<sup>149</sup> Dante should not fall into this trap, but weigh up facts and choose very carefully between the ‘yes’ and the ‘no’. In the New Testament, Christ had given as parameters for speech just these two, straight, words: yes, or no, but in the text Aquinas is implying that even these simple words should be uttered with extreme care when the facts are not sufficiently clear. Those who randomly use affirmative or negative statements are counter-example of speakers, the stupidest of the stupid (*tra li stolti bene a basso*). Asserting and denying are the most fundamental acts of speech, and when one performs them *sanza distinzione* (‘without discernment’) one speaks *indiscreetly*, in the medieval acceptation of the term. Opposed to these ill speakers is Aquinas himself, whose language (*latino*) does make distinctions between positive and negative values and is characterized by Dante as *discreto*.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, the entire discussion moves around King Solomon, a biblical

---

<sup>149</sup> The last part of Aquinas’ s discourse in canto XIII is fraught with quotes and terms drawn from the *Secunda secundae*. The term *regal prudenza* ‘kingly, political wisdom’ is treated in Q. 47, Art. 11 as one of the three categories of prudence (the other two being the personal and the domestic prudence). Even the dangers of the hastiness of judgment to which Dante’s Aquinas draws attention are amply treated in the *Summa Theologica*, where the theologian speaks namely of the rashness and levity of mind which can cause unfounded judgments or unjust accusations (Q. 53, Arts. 1,2,3 and again in Q. 60, Art. 2). Dante’s Aquinas is, thus, less a fictive construct and more the author of the *Summa Theologica* speaking in his own, doctoral, voice.

<sup>150</sup> The *Convivio* testifies to the fact that Dante knew the concept of *discretio* from St. Thomas: *sì come dice Tommaso sopra lo prologo de l’Etica, ‘conoscere l’ordine d’una cosa ad altra è proprio atto di ragione’; e è questa discrezione*, (‘For as Thomas says at the head of his prologue to the Ethics, to know the relationship between one thing and another is the proper act of reason, and this is discrimination’; IV.VIII.1: 247; emphasis mine). The fact that now, in the *Paradiso*, Dante returns the concept of *discretio* to Aquinas is the supreme form of compliment. Now, it is evident that this concept covers a wide range of intellectual operations, but what seems the most significant to me is that both in the *Paradiso* and the *Convivio*, *discretio* is used especially in reference to speech. See for instance this passage where acting with discernment is applied to praising or blaming someone: *l’uomo non dee essere presuntuoso a lodare altrui, non ponendo bene prima mente s’elli è piacere de la persona laudata; perché molte volte, credendosi alcuno dar loda, sì da biasimo, o per difetto de lo dicitore o per difetto di quello che ode. Onde molta discrezione in ciò avere si conviene* (III. X.10: 188; ‘one ought not to be so presumptuous as to praise another without first carefully considering whether it would please the person praised; for often a person, either through fault of the speaker or through that of the listener, believes he is conferring praise on someone when in fact he is laying blame. Therefore in this matter it is necessary to use great discretion.’).

figure, who expressed himself on numerous occasions on the abuses of speech: one of Solomon's sentences of the *mala bocca* is quoted in *Convivio*, as I have shown above.<sup>151</sup>

Further and numerous textual instances justify the adjective *discreto* with respect to Aquinas's discourse: in *Paradiso* XI, Aquinas feels compelled to clarify his own enigmatic words about the Dominican order (*one fattens well, if one does not wander*) by voicing Dante's own wonder: *Tu dubbi, e hai voler che si ricerna/ in sì aperta e'n sì distesa lingua/lo dicer mio* ('You are puzzled, and you wish my words to/make clear, in such open and ample language as/befits your hearing.' 22-24). Aquinas's decision to explain his own words bespeaks both his fear of being too hermetic and his awareness of the benefits of a message that is delivered with no ambiguity. Later on, he explicitly takes again precautions not to speak to abstrusely: *Ma perch'io non proceda troppo chiuso* ('But that I may proceed not to obscurely,' 73), and, therefore, de-allegorizes the two lovers he had spoken of by naming them: *Francesco e Povertà per questi amanti/prendi oramai nel mio parlar diffuso* ('take Francis and Poverty for these two lovers now in my extended speech', *Par.* XI, 73-75). At another moment, aware of the potential ambiguity of his speech, he requires Dante's undivided attention with the words: '*Or, se le mie parole non sono fioche*' ('Now, if my words have not been hoarse', *Par.* XI.133), and two cantos later he passes along his care for discreet speech to the pilgrim: *Con questa distinzion prendi'l mio detto* ('With this distinction take what I said.' *Par.* XIII, 109).

---

<sup>151</sup> It is worth noting that in the *Convivio* Solomon is given as an example of the political leader who asked God for wisdom (*prudenza*), wisdom from which the gift of counsel is born: *Se bene si mira, da la prudenza vengono li buoni consigli, li quali conducono sé e altri a buono fine ne le umane cose e operazioni; e questo è quello dono che Salomone, veggendosi al governo del populo essere posto, chiese a Dio (...).* (*Convivio* IV. XXVII. 6: 324-325; 'If we look more closely, good counsel derives from a person's prudence, which guides both himself and others to a good end in human affairs and actions. This is the gift that Solomon asked of God upon finding himself placed at the helm of the government of the people.' ) The idea is again of Thomistic origin (in the *Secunda Secundae*, Aquinas speaks of the 'gift of counsel' as deriving from *prudentia*). This passage from the *Convivio* has often served Dantisti to show that Ulysses' wisdom is a false prudence. I will return to this question in Chapter Two, when I will discuss the sin of fraudulent counsel.

Dante casts Thomas Aquinas as the antithesis of the verbal sinners from hell: he is the holy man who, in life, imposed himself as a model of virtue and who, even in the afterlife, teaches values like *prudence* ('worldly wisdom') and *discretion* ('discernment'). The constant and conscious care Dante's Aquinas takes of the quality of his own speech draws attention to the necessity of the control over speech. Men should talk sparingly and with discernment; they should avoid using speech for promoting false opinions and unjust accusations. Dante himself—in both his hypostases: as a pilgrim and a poet—takes lessons from Thomas Aquinas. Judging and condemning people too hastily or speaking without discernment are transgressions that Dante, the demiurgic artist, knows too well: he just built up a hellish world where friends and popes are tortured for eternity alongside foes and unbelievers. Speaking too abstrusely, too diffusely or using words *non fioche* are all traps that threaten the author of the *Paradiso*, while he dramatically struggles to represent a world for which no human words had before him been invented.

Dante the pilgrim passed safely by blasphemers and fraudulent speakers in Hell; he cleansed the seven Ps on his forehead by ascending the mountain of Purgatory, and finally took lessons of wisdom and prudence from his dearest masters in the heavenly spheres. If Dante the POET committed linguistic transgressions while writing the *Comedy*, forgiveness for them comes from the *Comedy* itself, an exceptional work of art into the making of which went both the earth's and heaven's hand.

*Dolus est fraudulenta deceptio.*  
(Alain of Lille, *Tractus de Virtutibus, et de Vitiis*)

In the Middle Ages, the popular attitude toward guile was highly ambivalent: half admiration for the cunning intelligence of the trickster, like in the fabliaux, half reprobation for the moral act *per se*. The shade of admiration inherent in the popular perception of guile does not subsist, however, in the moral texts written by the ecclesiastics of the time. In the twelfth century, Alain of Lille, who systematically confronted the complex issue of fraud in his works, not only gave technical definitions to various terms pertaining to the semantic field of fraud, but also drew an apocalyptic picture of the world succumbing to the invasion of fraud and evil.

while the lightning-flash of crime blasts the earth, the night of fraud darkens the star of fidelity (...) The evening of fidelity lies heavy on the world, the nocturnal chaos of fraud is everywhere. Fidelity fades in the face of fraud; fraud, too, deceives fraud by fraud and thus trickery puts pressure on trickery. In the realm of customary behavior, accepted practices are lacking in morality. Laws lack legal force; rights lose their right of tenure. All justice is administered without justice and law flourishes without legality. The world is in a state of decline: already the golden ages of the world are in decay (...) Fraud no longer seeks the cloak of pretence nor does the noisome stench of crime seek for itself the fragrant balsam of virtue so as to supply a cloak for its evil smell. (...)

Crime, however, doffs all its trappings and does not give itself the colors of justice. It openly defines itself as crime. Fraud itself becomes the external expression of its frenzy. What remains safe when treachery arms even mothers against their offspring? When brotherly love is afflicted with fraud and the right hand lies to its sister?

(*The Plaint of Nature*, 167-168).

For Alain of Lille and the other moral authors I have presented at the beginning of this dissertation, guile, as a manifestation of fraud, was not something to be admired, but a sin, and cunning intelligence was nothing less than a *falsa prudentia*. For Thomas Aquinas, the most authoritative voice in moral philosophy in Jean de Meun and Dante's time, the concept of *dolus* 'guile', that underlies all fraudulent activity, was closely linked with speech. *Dolus* was defined as "the execution of cunning or of craftiness," an execution achieved not only through deeds but also through words, to which the category of guile seemed to be fundamentally attached: "The execution of craftiness with the purpose of deceiving, is effected first and foremost by words, which hold the chief place among those signs whereby a man signifies something to another man (...), hence guile is ascribed chiefly to speech. (*S.T. II-II*, Q. 36, Art. 4; emphasis mine).

Alain of Lille and Aquinas's concern with fraudulent behavior must have left indelible marks on Jean de Meun and Dante's view of the world. As we have seen, Lady Reason's discourse presents the contemporary scene as invaded by the forces of evil and fraud. As a matter of fact, there is no character in the *Romance of the Rose* who does not participate, from one standpoint or another, in a discussion about fraud in behavior or speech practices: all of them have something to say, for instance, about cheating or seducing; flattery, as a verbal habit, is another point of intersection among the discourses in the poem; Ami and the Old Woman overtly recommend the use of guileful verbal strategies in love. Faus Semblant, the most unsettling personage of the *Rose*, makes unashamedly the apology of lying and double-talking. In the

*Divine Comedy*, Dante is also highly concerned with the myriad manifestations of guile and fraud. Malebolge, the infernal area that receives the sinners through fraud, is the most complex structure in the organization of Hell: it comprises ten levels corresponding to ten different types of sins. Four of these sins: flattery, evil counsel, sowing of discord, and falsification of words, are based on the interaction with speech.

In this chapter, I examine several manifestations of fraudulent speech discussed by Jean de Meun and Dante and bring them together under the generous umbrella of *lingua dolosa*, a technical term that for the medieval moralists embraced those rhetorical abilities that showed human intelligence at its best but that were intended to deceive, overcome or hurt others.

#### 4.1 FLATTERY AS FORM OF TRANSGRESSIVE SPEECH

The preoccupation with *adulatio* as a moral transgression starts as early as patristic-era thought. St. Augustine is the first to give a definition of this morally wrong verbal practice, but apparently from his time to that of the theologians of the late Middle Ages there is a substantial lack of concern with this type of sin. Just as in the case of blasphemy, theorizing about the sin of *adulatio* owes its recrudescence to the twelfth-thirteenth centuries.<sup>152</sup> Two of the medieval texts that reopen the discussion of *adulatio* were written in two different countries but very close in

---

<sup>152</sup> Casagrande and Vecchio point out that the monastic culture, because of its emphasis on the divine word, paid scant attention to the sin of *adulatio*, if at all. Absent from Cassian and Gregory's typologies of sins, *adulatio* resurfaces forcefully in the moral *summae* from the twelfth through fourteenth centuries. This would also explain the fluctuating origin of this sin in some of the late medieval compilations: "L'assenza dell'adulazione dalle filiazioni dei vizi di Cassiano e Gregorio ha comportato una continua oscillazione nell'individuazione dell'origine del peccato: lo *Speculum conscientiae* lo considera filiazione della successione *superbia, inanis Gloria, appetitus humani favoris*; Roberto di Flamborough lo fa derivare dalla *vanagloria*; Guglielmo d'Auxerre dall'avarizia; Alano di Lilla dall'invidia; Grossatesta dalla *negligentia*; Bromyard dalla *cupiditas*" (*I Peccati della lingua*, 362).

time, and they both had tremendous success in the late Middle Ages. In England, John of Salisbury (1115-1180) wrote a book--appreciated both for its value as a historic document and the literary mastery with which it was composed--dedicated to the vices of the courtiers and the art of governing. The book is known as *Policraticus* and is considered by some Dante scholars, such as Umberto Cosmo and André Pézard, a main source for Dante's treatment of flattery and for his overall political views.<sup>153</sup>

Panicked by the constant and dangerous increase in the number of flatterers, Salisbury devotes memorable pages to the practitioners of this vice.<sup>154</sup> The background against which they are set is clearly a social and political one. In drawing the moral portrayal of the flatterer, Salisbury associates the habit of praising highly placed people with deceit practiced for the purpose of gaining profit:

The flatterer is inimical to all virtue, and like a sore upon the eye he fastens himself by his speech to those with whom he bonds. And what is more odious than that fraud and deceit which, under the appearance of love and faith, is exercised against the simple, the credulous and (what is most detestable), the friendly by perfidious and worthless enemies? Indeed men of this sort all speak towards the end of pleasure, not of truth. They entreat with iniquitous and deceitful words, which subvert those friends who fall into error, repeating 'Well done, well done' (...)<sup>155</sup>

---

<sup>153</sup> Advancing the hypothesis that Dante may have drawn his inspiration from the moral and political concerns voiced in *Policraticus*, Pézard contends that Dante would have known Salisbury's *Policraticus* as well as Boetius' *Consolation of Philosophy*: "Dante a vraiment pratiqué le *Policraticus*, comme il a par exemple pratiqué la *Consolation de Boèce*." ["De *Policraticus* à la *Divine Comédie*." *Romania*, 70 (1948), 4].

<sup>154</sup> Chapter six of the third book of *Policraticus* is literally translated as 'The multiplication of flatterers is beyond number and pushes out of distinguished houses those who are honorable'. [*Policraticus. Of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*. Cary J. Nederman, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)].

<sup>155</sup> *Policraticus*, III. IV.

According to Salisbury, it is not a mistake but an honorable thing for one to seek favor with the people among whom he lives, but once he breaks the rules of moderation and exaggerates the worth of another for personal profit, he lapses into the heinous mode of flattery. Flattery, like tyrannicide, is good to use against tyrants, but is absolutely forbidden among friends. Salisbury compares the flatterer with a prostitute who thrives on her fortune by selling herself, and highlighting the seductiveness of flatterers, he even gives examples of flattering phrases: « my light », « my salvation, » « my refuge, » « my heart and my life, » « invincible commander, » « the wisest of those alive, » « the most generous and benevolent of all, » « mirror of the virtues »).<sup>156</sup> What is interesting in Salisbury's view of flattery is that he attributes the origin of this practice to the Romans, whom he holds responsible for knowingly and willfully spreading this verbal technique throughout Europe. The accusation is occasioned by the Romans' habit of reverently addressing a high-ranking political figure with the plural instead of the singular:<sup>157</sup>

If it comes to words, the Romans take precedence in such matters over the Greek infidels, since it is the former who were taught the use of flattering allurements to the extent that they readily were transformed into a race of teachers themselves. This nation invented the speech by which we deceive superiors, in so far as we confer distinction on a single person by honouring him in the plural, and by the authority of their name the Romans have transmitted this technique to their neighbours and to posterity. (*Policraticus*, III.X, 22)

The same idea is expressed by Peter the Cantor, in his widely circulated moral summa *Verbum Abbreviatum* (written before 1187), in which flattery is discussed from an eminently

---

<sup>156</sup> *Policraticus* III.IX.

<sup>157</sup> By Dante's time, however, the usage fixed the plural form *voi* as a reverential pronoun deprived of any shade of flattery, as it results from Dante's encounter with Cacciaguida in the *Paradiso*.

theological perspective. Without mentioning the alleged Roman origin of the verbal practice of *adulatio*, the French theologian considers the habit of using the plural for the singular as an evil alteration of speech, both from a grammatical and a moral perspective. For it is a perversion to use forms of reverence towards humans, when the singular is used when addressing God. By the same token, words of praise should be used only in our discourses about God, not in speaking about (or to) one another in our quotidian verbal exchanges. The main line of thought that informs Cantor's treatment of *adulatio* is essentially an Augustinian one: he starts the chapter *Contra adulatores* from his *Verbum* with a reference to Augustine's figurative definition of flattery as oil, as false praise that blinds the mind and renders it incapable of perceiving the truth. Within this perspective, flatterers are vendors of the oil of false praise and disingenuous delight. The tongue of the flatterer--this skillful but mendacious speaker--is described with a phrase taken from the biblical text: *lingua dolosa*--a phrase that, thanks to Cantor's mediation, will be consistently used by the medieval moral theorists to qualify various instances of fraudulent speech. The work of Peter the Cantor will be seminal for the subsequent treatment of flattery--and other verbal deviations he examined in his moral tract--and many of his insights about the sinful potential of human language will be taken up by other medieval moralists.

Contemporary with Peter the Cantor is another great name of French culture, Alain of Lille, whose influence on Jean de Meun and Dante has been shown, as we have seen, by numerous scholars. Through *The Plaint of Nature*, the sin of *adulatio* leaves the realm of the theological tracts to enter the sphere of moral poetry. The goddess Natura, the spokesperson of Alain in the allegorical poem, complains about the human habit of flattery, which she describes in vitriolic terms. Qualified as a malign sin, springing from envy, flattery is a moral disease that affects especially those who live in the proximity of rich people: lay people and prelates alike,

whom she calls the henchmen of princes and the palace dogs. Flatterers' main method of getting what they want, gifts or a better position at the court, is cheating. For Alain, flatterers are artisans of speech, but in a bad way, they are trumpeters of insincere praise, forgers of commendation and molders of falsehood. The idea of fraud is repeatedly and emphatically asserted in all the passages describing the sin of flattery in *The Plaint of Nature*. One of these passages is worth quoting for it enlightens the perception of flattery from the viewpoint of the medieval philosophy of language on which Jean de Meun and Dante themselves relied:

What, then, is the ointment of flattery but cheating for gifts? What is the act of commendation but a deception of prelates? What is the smile of praise but a mockery of the same prelates? For since speech is wont to be the faithful interpreter of thought, words the faithful pictures of the souls, the countenance an indication of the will, the tongue the spokesman of the mind, flatterers separate, by a wide distance and divergence, the countenance from the will, the words from the souls, the tongue from the mind, the speech from the thought. For externally they smile on many as they whitewash them with praise, while internally they laugh at them in mockery. Externally they praise very many with convincing applause, while internally they cheat them with a derision that gives the lie to the applause. Externally they applaud with a countenance of virgin innocence, internally they are stinging with the scorpion's sting. Externally they rain down showers of honied flattery, internally they are heaving with storms of detraction. (*The Plaint of Nature*, XIV. 7)

These are powerful and very harsh words, which together with the medieval sense that flattery was a plague of the day, might have shaped Jean de Meun and Dante's view of this disingenuous verbal practice. The specular relationships between thoughts (or things) and speech that flattery violates also informs Jean de Meun's definition of words as the cousins of deeds and

Dante's principle of *adequatio rei et orationis*,<sup>158</sup> that he posits as an indispensable criterion for truthful speech.

Another major moral author who might have swayed Dante's conception of flattery is William Peraldus. In his widely circulated *Summa Vitiorum*, the sin of *adulatio* gains for the first time an absolute autonomy with respect to the seven capital vices, becoming a sin on its own terms, one of the twenty-four sins of the tongue grouped by Peraldus in the section *De peccato linguae*. Here, *adulatio* is defined as a perverse praise '*perversa laudatio*', for praise should be given only to God, not to men. It is a diabolical mode of speech that enables the dishonest man to manipulate his friend and lead him astray. Compared to the chameleon, the flatterer is a seducer enlisted in the service of the devil, for he makes people think of themselves exactly what they want. The flatterer is a traitor, who, like Judas, sells his benefactor under the pretense of a kiss and kills him under the guise of friendship. In the wake of the Scripture and the patristic writings, Peraldus compares flattery with a toxic honey, or a wind that turns the city of God into the city of the devil, or a net serving to trap the gullible. Taking up a scriptural quote, he defines the flatterer as a simulator who deceives his friend with his mouth.<sup>159</sup>

#### 4.1.1 The art of *losange* in the *Rose*

Flattery is a discursive practice omnipresent in the *Romance of the Rose*. Several characters in the poem touch upon the complex issue of adulatory speech, either in order to condemn it, or, on the contrary, to warmly recommend it for the social advantages it can bring along. Flattery is for

---

<sup>158</sup> This Latin phrase is a theoretical concept expressing the tenet of the nominalist position toward language, a tenet that in the *Vita Nova* Dante phrases as *Nomina sunt consequentia rerum*. For more on Dante's view of language, see Nardi's study "Il Linguaggio," in *Dante e la cultura medievale* (Bari: Laterza, 1984).

<sup>159</sup> *Prov. 11: Simulator ore decipit amicum suum* ('The guileful man deceives his friend by the way of mouth'), quoted by Peraldus in *Summa Vitiorum*, 572.

the first time (and insistently) treated by the discourse of Lady Reason, where it is openly criticized as a form of abusive speech. This insistence translates Jean de Meun's own obsession with a verbal habit that seems to have corrupted both male and female speech, at every level of society. This is the impression Jean's treatment of flattery conveys, for not only Lady Reason, but virtually all the other characters in the *Rose* make numerous references to the 'art of flattery,' and every time this happens, it is in a negative moral context. Brought and analyzed together, these references offer us not only Jean's general view of the sin of *adulatio*, but also the first great meeting point between Jean's view of fraudulent speech and Dante's moral system.

Within the context of the discussion of the love of riches, Reason describes the greedy man's heart as imbued with false will to love people (*fainte volontez d'amer*). The reason the greedy cannot nurture an honest love for others is that they are passionately attached to material values. As a consequence, one cannot count on the friendship or affection of a man obsessed with money, since his cupidity is stronger than his friendship. Once his hope of getting some profit has vanished, his charitable love or friendship disappears as well. A man who values material wealth more than his friends cannot love correctly: he only simulates he loves them and overwhelms them with exaggerated praise for the sake of material profit. He does not love the others for themselves, but for his own selfish interest: *Car ne puet bien estre amoreus/Cuer qui n'aime les gens pour eus,/Ainz se faint et les vait flatant/Pour le proufit qu'il en atant* ('4775-8; 'For the heart which does not love people for themselves can never be a loving one. Instead it pretends and goes about flattering for the gain it hopes to have').

This idea is reiterated several verses later, this time in the context of the discussion of the love of fortune and from the viewpoint of the flattered not of the flatterer. Those who by a favorable move of the wheel of Fortune see themselves placed on the top of the social scale

quickly draw to themselves cohorts of friends. These seemingly quick friends do not spare any effort in convincing the rich man that they will serve him loyally until his death. They proclaim the wealthy man their master and pledge to shed their own blood to protect him and his house. The newly minted rich, says Reason, are so naïve that they are quick to believe all these noisy declarations of love, when in fact these declarations are nothing but flattery and deceit: *Et cil qui tels paroles oient,/S'en glorifient et les croient/Ausi com se fust evangile,/Et tout est flatterie et guile...* (4873-6; ‘And those who hear such speeches glorify themselves and believe them as though they were the Gospel. But all is flattery and guile...’).

Another reference to flattery sends us to the world of myth: in recounting Phania’s interpretation of the dream of Cresus, Reason stresses that the young girl preferred to tell her father the truth, instead of flattering him with a beautiful, but false interpretation of the grim dream (6510-3). Within her own discourse in the first person, Phania tells her father that she cannot spare his pride and flatter him, since the truth is that this dream is of ill auspices (6513-6536). In this mythic sequence too, flattery is tantamount to mendacious discourse.

Lady Reason’s overall perception of flattery as a form of fraud is so strong that in some places she squarely uses the verb ‘to flatter’ with the sense ‘to lie’. In an exchange of replies with the Lover, Reason specifies that she cannot recommend avarice more than foolish liberality because they are both abominable vices and that she does not wish to flatter, i.e., lie to her interlocutor in this respect: *Ja ne te quier de ce flater* (5749). The context in which this reply is inserted has nothing to do with praises or making false compliments. Reason is not praising any of the qualities of the Lover, she does not even speak of the Lover at all; she speaks of her own definitions of prodigality and avarice. An identical use of the verb *flatter* is made on the occasion of her recounting the story of Manfred and Conrad in terms of a chess game. In the middle of her

story, she pauses to insert this parenthetical comment, meant to assure the Lover (or the audience) of the truth of her sayings: *Car se vérité conter os,/Si n'en quier je nullui flater* (6674-5; ‘If I dare tell the truth and do not seek to flatter anyone’). Again the context has nothing to do with false praise: it is a technical depiction of the game of chess that serves to allegorically illustrate the whims of the wheel of Fortune. More significantly, in this very passage, Jean de Meun explicitly quotes John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus*.<sup>160</sup> The quote is extremely important in the economy of my dissertation, since *Policraticus* was the first major medieval text to treat flattery in a social context.

In Reason’s lexicon, there is another term that she uses to convey public praise: *lous* (Lat. *laus*). When she speaks about the prodigal, she says that they put wings to the money (i.e., they make money circulate at a fast rate), because they would rather be tortured than not gain praise (*lous*) and fame (*pris*) for their liberality (5227-5229). This assessment of the prodigal is symptomatic for the central role the praise plays in the general social arena of the time. The idea Reason conveys is that being publicly praised is not only a very agreeable thing that many would like to get, but also that this praise can enable one to attain public fame. Success and glory are two most valuable civic assets, and the way to acquire them is to have your name and deeds praised by others. This is the social mechanism that allows flattery to set in and affect people’s lives.

If Reason’s position with respect to flattering speech is of condemnation, the recourse to flattery is, in return, overtly recommended by Ami. When he inveighs against Evil Mouth and

---

<sup>160</sup> The quotation is made in the same context of the chess game, with the invention of which Salisbury credits Attalus: *Et tu verras en policratique qu'il (Athalus/ s'enflechit de la matire/Ou des nombres devoit escrire,/Et cel biau gieu jolif trouva/Qye par demoustrance prouva* ( 6690-4 ‘You will see in the *Policraticus* that he (Athalus) digressed from this matter, since he should have been writing of numbers, where he found this excellent, pretty game which he tested by demonstration’).

his relatives (i.e., *lez lozangiers* of the courtly romance, or simply people with evil tongues), Ami strongly recommends the use of fraud. In his opinion, you can make the gossip and the slander stop only if you ally yourself with the slanderers, by flattering them and jollying them along:

Male bouche et touz ses paranz/A cui ja dieus ne soit garanz,/Par barat  
estuet barater,/Servir, chuer, blandir, flater,/Par hourz, par adulacions,/Par  
fausses simulacions,/Et encliner et saluer/Qu'il fait trop bon le chien  
chuer/Tant com ait la voie passée. (7387-95)

One has to trick Foul Mouth and his kin—may God never be their surety!—with Fraud: one must serve them, caress, blandish and flatter them with ruse, adulation, and false simulation; one must bow to them and salute them. It is a very good idea to stroke a dog until one has passed by.

In other words, the response to wicked linguistic practices such as gossip and detraction is... more wicked verbal habits.<sup>161</sup> To support his recommendation of fraud (in speech and acts), Ami cannot appeal to stern authorities in ethics (as Reason had done, with Cicero, Horace, Cato, and others), but he does try to authorize his own advice by appealing to that strain of popular wisdom which encourages men to make all sorts of compromises just to get out of a dangerous situation. From a metalinguistic point of view, this passage from Ami's discourse is illustrative of the richness of French vernacular in expressing one and the same sin of the tongue. *Adulare*, *adulatio*, the Latin terms from the moral tracts of the great scholastics, is translated here through a series of three synonyms: *blandir*, *flatter*, *adulacions*, if we do not consider *chuer*. Jean de Meun is linguistically richer than Laurent d'Orléans who used only two terms to describe this sin: *losange* and *flatterie*.

---

<sup>161</sup> As far as Evil Mouth is concerned, he is no stranger either to the use of flattering speech. In the discourse of Fair Welcoming, he will be depicted as one who likes to exaggerate things and spice them up with his flatteries: *Qu'il disoit plus qu'il ne savoit/Et touz jors par ses flasteries/Ajoustoit as choses oies* (14582-84; ‘his very great fault was to tell more than he knew, and by his exaggerations he added to the things that he heard’). It is worth noting that Dahlberg’s translation correctly interprets the word *flasteries* not as praise, but as exaggerations, alterations of truth, i.e, lies.

Flattery is present in the discourse of Faus Semblant as well: he describes the zeal the friars spend to obtain (written or oral) recommendations from the powerful of the day, so they can insinuate themselves more easily into people's houses. The means by which the mendicant friars persuade the rich to give them these good references is flattery:

Et pour avoir des genz loanges,<sup>162</sup>/Des riches hommes par losanges/Empestrons que lettres nous doignent/Qui la bonté de nous tesmoignent, /Si que l'en croie par le monde/Que vertuz toute en nous habonde. (11673-78)<sup>163</sup>

In order to win people's praise we tell lies to rich men and get them to give us letters bearing witness to our goodness, so that throughout the world people will think that every virtue abounds in us.

Flattery belongs thus to everyday life and practices of the mendicant friars, especially the Dominicans, whom Faus Semblant is intended to represent. Not only that, but here flattery belongs to and underlies a veritable vicious circle of fraud: the friars have recourse to flattery, this form of verbal fraud, to get recommendations that are themselves fraudulent, in that they do not reflect the truth with respect to the mendicants. These letters depict the friars as depositaries of virtues, when they are fraught with vices. This is a complex (and complicated) social mechanism in which fraudulent speech enables other forms of fraud to take place.

The Old Woman takes a stand with respect to flattery, as well. She seems to condemn it not because it is incompatible with her nature (for she does not hesitate to recommend strategies of erotic seduction to the young girls), but because she suffered so much because of it in her own

---

<sup>162</sup> Interestinlgy, the noun *loanges* Faus Semblant uses here to work out his pun (*loanges/losanges*) belongs to the same semantic family as *lous*, that we have encountered in Lady Reason's speech. Whereas *losanges* clearly conveys sweet speech, with a negative ethical connotation, *lous* and *loanges* seem to express praise proper, i.e., not necessarily associated with flattery. This range of terms bespeaks the efforts of French vernacular to assign shades of meaning to closely related words.

<sup>163</sup> Here Jean adds the word *losanges*, which was also used by Laurent d'Orléans, to his rich list of synonyms for the ethical category of *adulatio*.

youth. Thus, she complains that many of her lovers fooled her with their flattering words: *Trop sont tuit apert menteeur;/Plus m'ont menti li flateeur/Et foi et serementz jadis,/Qu'il n'a de sainz en paradis!* ('All men are very expert liars. These wastrels have told me more lies, made me more vows and oaths in past times than there are saints in paradise.' 13791-4). For The Old Woman, as it is for Lady Reason, flattery is tantamount to lying, as her words explicitly reveal in the equation *flateeur-menteeur*. As if to support The Old Woman's complaint, later on in the romance, Genius excoriates women for being too sensitive to male flattery. In his powerful anti-feminist diatribe, Venus's priest asserts that no other method is more efficacious with women than flattery. Flattery works so well on women because they are weak and naïve, and therefore prone to believe anything, be it a lie. To convince the audience of the truthfulness of his perception of the female gender, Genius resorts to the authority of Titus Livius:

Et si dist Titus Livus,/Qui connut bien quel sont li us/Des fames et quels les manieres,/Que vers leur meurs nulles prieres/Ne valent tant comme blandices,/Tant sont decevables et nices/Et de flechissable nature. (16341-7).

Titus Livius, who knew well what the habits and ways of women are, says that women are so easily deceived, so silly and of such pliable natures that with their ways entreaties are not worth as much as blandishments.

This short passage is framed by a longer segment that criticizes... not men's fraudulent speech, but the weaknesses of the female gender, described as full of malice, vices and evils (*meurs pervers*). In relationship to flattery, it is not men who are guilty of practicing it, but women for yielding to it.

In conclusion, starting with Lady Reason's discourse and ending with that of Genius, there is practically no character in the *Romance of the Rose* who does not engage in a way or another with the notion of flattery. Lady Reason criticizes this verbal practice and qualifies it as

fraudulent, Ami recommends it remorselessly, The Old Woman curses it because it harmed her, and to Genius it serves to prove how stupid women are. Throughout these varied positions, flattery emerges as an all-encompassing social behavior: it is adopted by lovers (mostly male), diligently practiced by religious figures and ardently sought by the rich. It is mainly used to seduce, manipulate and help skilled talkers get what they want. It represents such a complex phenomenon, that the French vernacular developed an impressive list of terms in an extraordinary metalinguistic attempt to describe its myriad manifestations. *Flatterie, blandice, adulacion, lous, loanges* are all terms medieval French—through its major poet, Jean de Meun—used to represent in vernacular a morally ambiguous, to say the least, habit of speech. Extremely important in the *Rose* is that, although Jean explicitly associated this habit with fraud, he never used the word sin or vice with respect to flattery, as he did with Reason's sin of naming the male genitalia. He considers Fraud a “vice,” but never labels flattering talk as sin. He is obsessed with it (otherwise he would not have all of his characters speak of it), but in his metalinguistic enterprise he did not go further than coming up with an extended series of synonyms.

In the moral tracts contemporary with Jean de Meun, flattery was however considered a sin. The accounts Alain of Lille, Peter the Cantor or William Peraldus give of flattery correspond to Jean's treatment of it: subclass of fraud, spiritual harm, vast diffusion, social implications, gender involvement; these are all aspects of false praise that bring together Jean's treatment of *flatterie* or *adulacion* with the treatment of the sin of *adulatio* by the moralists above-mentioned, despite Jean's omission of the technical term *sin*. About thirty years after the completion of the *Romance of the Rose*, in the context of the Italian moral poetry, Dante will consider the flatterers so immoral that he will reserve them a place in one of the deepest zone in hell: Malebolge, the

area of Fraud. Thus, Dante implicitly acknowledges sycophantic speech as a sin. In what follows, I will investigate Dante's assimilation of the medieval theories about flattery in *Inferno XVIII*.

#### 4.1.2 Ornaments of speech: seduction and flattery in *Canto XVIII of the Inferno*

After encountering various sinful manifestations of the human disposition toward incontinence and violence, punished in the upper and middle sections of hell, respectively, we enter Malebolge ('Evil claws'): the eighth circle of hell, by far the most extended and detailed substructure in Dante's underworld.<sup>164</sup>

Minutely divided into ten ditches, Malebolge comprises ten different species of fraud.<sup>165</sup> Thus, whereas in the upper and middle parts of hell the sinners have in common the incapacity to anchor their passions in reason, the fraudulent sinners in Malebolge stand out by a certain type of cleverness, guile, more exactly, they manifested while alive. Their defect is not the suppression of reason, as in the case of the incontinent and the violent, but the willful perversion of it. Fraudulent sinners used their intellectual gifts not for supporting the common good but for the appropriation of the objects of their desires to the detriment of their neighbors.

The main means the sinners in the eighth circle of hell used to attain their purposes was deceit--'inganno'--, a conscious and willful immoral practice bound to injure people. *La nostra*

---

<sup>164</sup> As far as etymology is concerned, Georges Güntert considers Maleboge "un nome violentamente realistico della tradizione volgare, (...), in cui riecheggiano i nomi diabolici Malacoda e Malebranche, e forse anche il Malabocca del Fiore, un calco del Malebouche del *Roman de la Rose*, come suppone, ipotizzando una lontana origine francese, Gianfranco Contini." "*Inferno XVIII.*" *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Inferno*, Vol. 1 (Firenze: Franco Cessati, 2000), 245.

<sup>165</sup> Unlike the sins of incontinence and violence, fraud is specific only to man, as a being endowed with reason and speech, and therefore is more distasteful to God: *Ma perchè frode è dell'uom proprio male/più spiace a Dio* (*Inf. XI. 26*).

*ragione*, said Dante in the *Convivio*, a *quattro maniere d'operazioni*, (...), *operazioni che essa considera e fa nel proprio atto suo, le quali si chiamano razionali, si come sono arti di parlare* (IV.IX. 5: 252; ‘our reason is related to four kinds of activities (...) activities which it contemplates and performs by its own act, and these are called rational, as for example the art of speech’). Speech and verbal exchanges are for Dante manifestations of reason, “arts” that play an important role in human relationships. In this light, the perversion of the intellectual faculties also entails the alteration of the natural functions of human speech. By the same token, if we examine some of the sinners Dante places in the area of fraud, we will find them being punished for sins of a verbal nature: flattery, divination, evil counsel, sedition and the falsifying of words, so many habits that are treated by medieval moralists as forms of transgressive speech.

Forming a large part of hell, the ten subdivisions of fraud occupy no less than thirteen cantos. The first of these is *Canto XVIII* that synthetically describes two ditches: the one inhabited by pimps and seducers, and the one inhabited by flatterers.<sup>166</sup>

These categories of sinners share an obsession with erotic concerns: pimps take advantage of the lust of others for personal profit, and seducers abuse the innocent with calculated words and deeds. Common to these two categories is, thus, the deliberation with which they practice their evil methods: the panderers turn the female body into an object of constant traffic, selling, to use Joan Ferrante’s words “something they do not possess,” and seducers lead women astray by premeditated erotic techniques. The panders are represented by Venedico Caccianemico, a Bolognese credited with the selling of his sister Ghisabella to one of

---

<sup>166</sup> The character who volunteers the name of the latter sin is Alessio Interminei da Lucca, who explains his presence in this ditch of Malebolge by the *lusinghe* (‘flatteries’) he systematically uttered while alive. But before this canto, already in *Inferno XI*, Virgil names this sin as *lusinghe*, when he explains to the pilgrim the overall structure of Hell. *Adulatori* or *lusinghieri* are the vernacular terms Domenico Cavalca adopted in reference to the practitioners of *adulatio*. In his treatment of this sin, Cavalca brings no significant elements of novelty with respect to Peraldus, therefore I do not appeal to *Pungilingua* for the sin of flattery.

the rich of the day (presumably Obizzo d'Este). Venedico admits to Dante that the ditch is full with other people native to Bologna, an assertion that indicates not only Dante's assessment of Bologna but also the frequency of this type of trade. The dialogue between the two is cut short by a horned devil who flays the sinner both with his whip and his words: *Via, ruffian! / Qui non son femmine da conio* ('Away, pimp! here there are no/ females to coin'; 65-66). Uttered with sharp irony, this monetary allusion is strong and intended to cancel the equivalence between female flesh and money, on which panders rest their trade. *Ruffian*, as a linguistic label, is an infamous appellation (speech here becomes an instrument of torture), and the moral corrective applied to Venedico restores the right angles of the feminine image, conveying that women cannot be equated with profit-bringing merchandise. The base language used by the devil corresponds to a base type of commerce, and here words are associated with human trade, carnal slavery, more exactly, to highlight the sordidness of the sin.

Also, that the “profession” of pimp has a linguistic side has been acknowledged by several Dante scholars: in order to convince women to yield to their evil traffic, the panders have to use, among other means, persuasive words and flattery.<sup>167</sup> Symbolic is also, in the text, that the Bolognese are designated with the assertive particle *sipa*, ‘yes’, the “word of their trade,” in Wayne Storey’s view.

The seducers are exemplified by a remarkable mythological character, who came down to the medieval culture as an “uncontaminated” legendary hero, a model of valiance and tenacity. Reflections of this ancient perception can be detected in *Inferno XVIII*, where Jason is introduced

---

<sup>167</sup> Georges Güntert labels Venedico an “adulatore” (op. cit, 253), and Caretti interprets the phrase *femmine da conio* as: “non solo o semplicemente ‘donne da ingannare’, ma anche ‘donne da ingannare nel modo particolare usato da Venedico per Ghisabella, cioè donne da *lusingare* (emphasis mine) e quindi indurre, per ricavarne denaro, alla ‘vogla’ altrui, ovvero al venale ‘coniugio’). [“*Inferno XVIII.*” *Lectura Dantis Scaligera*. (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1967), 597].

with the same reverence and high style that Dante reserves for the major figures of antiquity (Capaneus for instance, or Ulysses): *Guarda quel grande che vene,/e per dolor non par lagrime spanda:/ quanto aspetto reale ancor ritene!* (83-85; ‘Look at that tall one coming, who does not seem to/be shedding any tear for the pain:/how regal is his bearing still!’). A prototype of the winner in the Argonautic myth, Jason becomes in Dante’s interpretation, a defeated man. For, although Virgil introduces Jason as one who *per cuore e per senno/li Colchi del monto privat féne* (86-87; ‘by courage and wit robbed the Colchians of the ram’), making thus reference to the brave enterprise for which the hero became so famous, Virgil suggests that Jason’s courage and his wisdom also had a counterpart: *con segni e con parole ornate/Isifile ingannò* (91-92; ‘with tokens and elaborate words he deceived Hypsipyle’). Used in the service of a noble ideal, that of acquiring the Golden Fleece, Jason’s *senno* had a positive connotation: it was the power of the mind capable of overcoming the harshest obstacle imaginable. His wisdom, however, turns into guile, when through deeds and skillful words he outwits a *giovinetta*, whom he seduces to satisfy his lust. He is a *lingua dolosa*, a fraudulent speaker, to use Peter the Cantor’s synecdoche. Jason’s sin, the deceitful technique he used to ensnare Hypsipyle, is predicated on the misuse of language, and the adjective *ornate*, used to describe his seductive talk, is indicative of this. The verbal skills he possessed were used to satisfy his wicked desires, and the embellishments he attached to his rhetoric were in fact morally empty and noxious.<sup>168</sup> Used first in the *Commedia* to describe in a highly positive way Virgil’s poetic art, the reoccurrence of *ornate* in a morally negative context draws attention to Dante’s constant assessment of speech as the main means

---

<sup>168</sup> For William H.V. Reade, Jason’s sins would rather consist in the “*nocumetum proximi* involved in the false promises made to Isifile.” [The Moral System of Dante’s Inferno. (New York: Kennikat Press, 1969), 340]. Although Reade does not mention this, in the Middle Ages false promise was considered a “sin of the tongue,” treated for instance by Radulfus Ardens, William Peraldus and Thomas Aquinas. Both the word *ornate* in the text and Reade’s interpretation of Jason’s empty promises point to the fact that Jason’s main transgression was his wicked use of the rhetorical power of speech. He willfully and repeatedly misused words to achieve his selfish purposes.

used by people in their social interactions. The same fine words that can be used in poetry can also be used as means of persuasion for the perpetration of evil.<sup>169</sup> What distinguishes the beauty of a human utterance from another enchanting one, produced in a different context, is the context itself, or, more specifically, the intention that moves the speaker. Virgil used the seductive power of his language to create art, Jason used the same tool to manipulate and destroy other people's lives. As a seducer he is also mentioned in the text in relationship with Medea, his other lover, whom he abandoned as well, after making her false promises. Through the invocation of Medea, Jason's adorned words acquire an even wider range of action; the history of the couple Jason-Medea testifies to the fact that the man and the sinners he is supposed to represent use their great manipulative art not only to satisfy their lust, but also, as Ferrante put it, "to ensure their safety or success in other ventures."<sup>170</sup> Both language and love are subservient in Jason to his ambitions, an aspect that had already been highlighted, before Dante, by Jean de Meun in the *Romance of the Rose*. For Jean, Jason is guilty before all else of lying to Medea: *Que refist Jason de Medee/Qui si vilment refu boulee/Que li faus sa foi li menti/Puis qu'el l'ot de mort*

---

<sup>169</sup> Steven Botterill asserts in this sense that "the moral validity of eloquence is not, in Dante's thinking, a given," and that: "Jason's 'parole ornate' are morally quite different from Virgil's: instead of saving they betray, instead of embodying the truth they act as a vehicle of deceit. Their ornamental quality is specious, employed to conceal the speaker's malicious and self-seeking intent; eloquence here has become the means of bringing about another's harm." ["Dante's Poetics of the Sacred Word." *Philosophy and Literature* 20.1 (1996), 155-157]. The discussion of the same word (*ornate*) used to qualify both Virgil (in *Inferno II*) and Jason's speech has, on the contrary, prompted Teodolina Barolini to contend that classical culture is associated, through both Virgil and Jason, with linguistic ornament and deceit. This is how Barolini explains the fact that, toward the end of *Canto XVIII*, Dante will become vulgar on the level of style: he would thus intend to dissociate himself from flatterers, to mark a clear distance between fraudulent speakers and himself. (*The Undivine Comedy*, 77). Due to the semantic elasticity of the adjective *ornate*, I believe that Dante used it for Virgil with an esthetic value, to characterize the Latin poet's elegant style, and for Jason with a moral value, to denounce his sweet-sounding but empty rhetoric. As it is often the case with ambiguous, or polysemic words such as this, it is the context that disambiguates the lexeme. Moreover, a careful reading of *Inferno II* disallows the interpretation of Virgil's *parola ornata* as a general symbol of classical linguistic deceit. In verse 113, Virgil's speech is described by Beatrice as a *parlare onesto*, a mode of speech on account of which she can come to him in all confidence. She trusts him specifically for the quality of truthfulness of his talk. Along the same lines, in v. 126, Virgil himself characterizes his words as '*I mio parlar che tanto ben ti promette*'. His words promise to bring comfort and enlightenment to the pilgrim, a promise that the narrative of the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* will fully accomplish.

<sup>170</sup> Joan Ferrante, "Malebolge (*Inf. XVIII-XXX*) as the Key to the Structure of Dante's *Inferno*." *Romance Philology*, 20 (1967), 461.

*garenti/ (...) Puis la laissa, li maus trichierres, li faus, li desloiaus, li lierrres.* (13233-13261; ‘What did Jason do with Medea? He deceived her shamefully, the false one, when he belied his faith to her after she had saved him from death. Then he left her, the evil trickster, the false, disloyal thief...’).

Although the French text offers a long list of the sacrifices Medea made for the false and deceitful Jason, and evokes in terrible words her slaying of the two sons she had with Jason, what is salient in this description is Jason’s moral profile as a liar and a trickster. The semantic field of fraud is textually realized by words like *li faus* (two occurrences), *mentir*, *maus trichierres* (an emphatical expression) and *li desloyaux*, which also might have influenced Dante’s decision to place Jason in the infernal area of fraud. The story is echoed in the *Fiore*, where Jason is mentioned three times, twice in the context of his relationship with Medea (when he is called *quel disleale*, *Fiore* 161), and once in a neutral context that evokes Argus’ ship (*Se mastro Arguso, che fece la nave/In che Giason andò per lo tosone (...) vivesse...*; *Fiore*, 8). It is interesting that in the *Fiore* Medea plays to some extent the same role as Hypsipile in the *Commedia*; she is the one who, despite her *sapienza* (190) and *incantamenti* (161), was unable to keep beside her the one who had sworn her love and fidelity. Jason is, in this light, one who outwits somebody knowledgeable in matters of guile: Medea (like Hypsipile), a circumstance, however, which neither in the *Fiore* nor in the *Comedy*, excuses Jason, but which may give one more reason for Medea’s alignment with Hypsipile in *Inferno XVIII* (*e anche di Medea si fa vendetta*, v. 96). The fact that Jason is smarter than two clever women only enhances his deceitful ways.

Outside of the first circle of Malebolge, but within the same canto, we encounter other smooth talkers: Alessio Interminei da Lucca and Thaïs, who stand for the *lusingatori* (flatterers)

punished in the second *bolgia*. All the sinners have their heads smeared by the excrement in which they are immersed to the point that one cannot tell if they are laypeople or clerics. This indication can be read in light of Alain of Lille's critique of the prelates' propensity to *adulatio*. In the passage from *The Plaint of Nature* I have quoted in this section, the prelates are depicted as prone to flattery as the laymen. Dante's emphasis on the undifferentiated physical appearance of these two important social categories in the ditch of flatterers reinforces the idea that the ecclesiastics are affected as well by this depraved way of speech.<sup>171</sup>

Alessio Interminei confesses directly to Dante: *Qua giù m'anno sommerso le lusinghe/ond'io non ebbi mai la lingua stucca.* 'I am submerged down here by the flatteries with which my tongue was never cloyed.' (XVIII. 125-6).<sup>172</sup> By self-definition a sweet-talker, Alessio turned flattery into a mode of life; he was a con artist, an artisan of speech, as Alain of Lille would have put it. The adjective *stucca* Dante uses pejoratively here conveys, through its semantic value, that Alessio's insincere praises were a constant of his life; they were not accidents happening once in a while, but a consciously cultivated practice, a way of being.<sup>173</sup> Both the labeling of Jason's words as *ornate* and the description of Alessio's *lusinghe* reveals that Dante constantly and perceptively evaluates people's--and his own--ways of speech. In *Inferno XXXII*, the pilgrim willingly puts himself in a favorable light with respect to flattery by having Bocca degli Abati say that he, Dante the pilgrim, is a bad flatterer (*mal sai lusingar per*

---

<sup>171</sup> For the flattering clerics the law established the deposition, a penalty introduced by Gratian in his *Decretals* (1.46.3): "A cleric who is found out in the practice of flattery and scheming is to be degraded," quoted by Aquinas in *S.T. II-II, Q. 115, Art. 2*.

<sup>172</sup> These two dense lines remind Wayne Storey of the medieval way of bringing dishonor to a person's reputation by drawing disparaging *grafitti* on public buildings. Officially sanctioned, these *grafitti* were accompanied by a couplet of verses describing the man and the felony he committed: "The summary brevity of Alessio's confession and his punishment vaguely recalls the explicit *tituli* of the paintings always in the vernacular and usually reduced to simple but effective rhymes." ["*Inferno XVIII*," in *Lectura Dantis: Supplement*. Vol. 6. *Dante's Divine Comedy. Introductory Readings*, I: *Inferno*. (Tibor Wlassics, ed., Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1990), 244].

<sup>173</sup> The intent is, in Aquinas's interpretation, the factor that determines when flattery becomes a mortal sin (ST. II-II, Q. 115, Art. 2).

*questa lama*, ‘you flatter badly here in this swamp!’, 96). In the same way, flattery is banished from the outset on the mountain of Purgatory where the repentant are given the chance to redeem their errors. Cato averts Virgil’s intent to jolly him along by telling him that here flattery, or smooth talk, is not necessary: *non c’è mestier lusinghe* (*Purg.* I. 92).

But why does Dante punish the habit of flattery in hell in the area of fraud? First of all, let us recall what one of the finest analysts of this verbal practice said: “Just as the aim of the orator is persuasive speech, and the end of a physician is a medical cure, so the aim of flatterers is sweetly spoken deception.” (John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, III.10). Flatterers are speakers who enlist the help of rhetorical procedures to persuade people to act in a certain way that serves their selfish purposes. In their relationships with others, flatterers, like physicians, have a well-established goal, but unlike physicians, they do not intend to cure but to harm by deceit. Flattery is defined as perverse rhetoric; it is a form of persuasive speech that is directed at the manipulation of others. Deceit is the essence of this mode of speech; it is its very core.

Dante’s moral agenda opposes these ways, being overtly predicated on an intelligent and virtuous mode of speech. To recall here the assessment from the *Convivio*, words are to be used with extreme caution, because they contain the seeds of all the actions and their consequences: *Da vedere è come ragionevolmente quel tempo in tutte le nostre operazioni si dee attendere, e massimamente nel parlare. (...). Per che le parole, che sono quasi seme di operazione, si deono molto discretamente sostenere e lasciare, perché bene siano ricevute e fruttifere veggano, sì perché da la loro parte non sia difetto di sterilitade.* (IV.II.8: 223; ‘It is to consider how reasonable it is that we should await the proper moment in all our undertakings, and most of all in speaking. (...) This is why great discretion must be shown in using or in avoiding the use of

words—which are, as it were, the seed of our activity—so that they may well be received and fruitful in effect, so as to avoid any defect of sterility on their part').

Reception is the magic word that sheds light on all utterance of speech and that gives us the key for understanding Thaïs's presence in the circle of flatterers. The words are uttered in conjunction with a receiver, they are addressed to somebody, therefore they can be used to get to a person's mind and heart and influence him in a certain way. In Dante's text, Thaïs is: *la puttana che rispuose/al drudo suo quando disse "Ho io grazie/grandi apo te?"*: “*Anzi maravigliose!*” (130-135; ‘the whore who, when he said, ‘Do I/ find great favor with you?’ replied to her lover: Marvelous favor indeed’).

Thaïs's sycophantic reply is premeditatedly formulated to produce a certain type of reaction and attitude on the male lover in whom she is interested. What is particular about her reply is that she goes too far in trying to please him; an excess that underlies the moral definition of the flatterer. She exaggerates her own pleasure so as to ensure her success with her paramour. It is true that a most courteous way of speech should govern, in Dante's opinion, all friendly relationships. Friendships are to be built on *soavi reggimenti, che sono dolce e cortesissimamente parlare, dolce e cortesemente servire e operare* ('kind attitudes, such as speaking kindly and very courteously, serving and acting kindly and courteously'). But Thaïs's reply crosses the boundaries of the most courteous speech; it is a calculated fraud, a lie masquerading as a compliment. Truth was defined by Dante in the *Convivio* as that criterion that helps us convey a faithful image of ourselves in our speech: *Veritade, la quale modera noi dal vantare noi oltre che siamo e da lo diminuire noi oltre che siamo, in nostro sermone.*<sup>174</sup> To be truthful, our words should reflect a personal image proportionate with our true self, and in the

---

<sup>174</sup> *Convivio*, IV. XVII.

light of this definition, the same criterion may be extended to our speech about others: the words we use to describe them and their gestures should be proportionate with the genuine image we have of them. But Thaïs deliberately enlarges the image of her paramour (to paraphrase Dante *lo vanta oltre che è*), just as all flatterers exaggerate the qualities of the people they want to take advantage of. The outer, verbal projections flatterers make of their “victims” do not correspond to their true inner assessment of them; as a result, the speech of the flatterers becomes, to use Peraldus’s definition, a toxic honey. The type of *contrapasso* Dante reserved for the flatterers is justified by this definition; the *lusingatori* are punished in excrement that reflect the toxic speeches they eliminated through their mouths while alive.<sup>175</sup> Our words should bear fruits, not be sterile, said Dante in the passage I have quoted above, but the only fruits that the flatterers’ speeches bear are these toxins in which they are plunged in the afterworld. The verbal residues become the excrement in which they bathe in the second ditch of Malebolge as though to confirm Dante’s own quote from the Scripture: *Li schernidor Dio li schernisce*.<sup>176</sup>

The difference between Alessio and Thaïs is, beyond their different historical origins—one comes from the bookish universe of the Latin tradition, and the other from Dante’s own Italic, and contemporary, world—that Thaïs is from the outset placed by Dante in a social

---

<sup>175</sup> Both Pézard and Güntert attribute the idea of this *contrapasso* to the possible influence exerted by Salisbury on Dante, since in *Policraticus* (III.4), *adulatio* is defined as *fetor*. For more on the relationship between Malebolge and physiological processes, see: Robert M. Durling, “Deceit and Digestion in the Belly of Hell.” [In *Allegory and Representation: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, 1979-1980. Greenblatt, S. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1981), 61-93].

<sup>176</sup> The symbolism of the human feces may also be interpreted in an erotic framework, since in the Middle Ages, *stercum* could span a wide range of implications. Among the definitions Alain of Lille gives this term in his theological dictionary, I have found three that match the idea of profit and lust with which Thaïs is associated: *Dicitur carnalis voluptas, unde David: Suscitans a terra inopem et de stercore erigens pauperem.* *Dicitur bonum temporale, unde Jer.: Qui amplexantur stercora pro croceis.* (...) *Dicitur fetor luxuria, unde propheta: Computruerunt jumenta in stercore suo.* Jumenta quippe in stercore suo computrescere est carnales quosque in fetore luxuria vitam finire.” (*Distinctiones dictiorum theologiae*, PL 210, col. 956 B; ‘It is called bodily pleasure, hence David: Raising the weak from the dust and the poor from filth. It is called temporal good, hence Jeremiah: Those nurtured in purple now lie in ash heaps. It is called the stink of lust, hence the Prophet: The animals rot in their dirt. It goes without saying that the animals stand for those who end their lives in the stench of lust’).

context: she is a *puttana*, a whore, who, according to Pézard, was not punished in hell by Dante for this single reply, but because this reply was indicative for him of a constant practice.<sup>177</sup>

Filtered through Cicero's or Salisbury's texts, the Terentian female figure is called to represent in Malebolge the type of the female prostitute who turned adulatory speech into a way of life.<sup>178</sup>

In the moral texts of the Middle Ages, flattery was commonly associated with depraved women, and Thaïs represented, for the same medieval culture, the prototype of the whore.<sup>179</sup> It is, therefore, easy to understand why for Dante the figure of Thaïs represented the most suitable character for his exemplification of flattery as a practice with long roots in the history of mankind.

In the structure of the *Inferno*, Thaïs also offers the key for understanding Dante's placement of flattery between the sins of seduction and simony. Benvenuto da Imola has long ago pointed out Dante's association of Thaïs and Jason on the grounds of their common obsession with seduction and deceit: *et sic vide quod supra punivit viros fallentes mulieres in persona Jasonis, nunc punit mulieres fallentes viros in persona Thaidis* ('and as it is seen above that through Jason he punished men who deceived women, now, through Thaïs he punishes women who deceived men').<sup>180</sup> The link between seduction and flattery is not hard to see. Both transgressions are based on the use (or rather misuse) of the human tongue: the seducer, just like

---

<sup>177</sup> Pézard, op. cit., 6.

<sup>178</sup> Aldo Rossi mentions in this respect "il valore antonomastico del nome, tipico delle meretrici" (*Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 3, 509).

<sup>179</sup> Representative for the medieval perception of prostitutes as flatterers is Peter the Cantor, who in the wake of the biblical text, reiterates the notion that flattery is the common way of speech of prostitutes: *Mel et lac sub lingua meretricis* ('milk and honey under the tongue of the whore'; Prov. 5, quoted in *Verbum Abbreviatum* (PL 205, Col.142 A). As to the medieval perception of Thaïs as the type of the depraved woman, the *Liber Esopi* of Waltherio, that is unanimously acknowledged as a source for Dante's awareness of Thaïs, is considered by the *Enciclopedia dantesca*: "un documento del fatto che la cultura medievale continuava a fare di Taide il tipo della cortigiana, però degradato e infamato..." (Manlio Pastori Stocchi, *ED*, 3, 510).

<sup>180</sup> Quoted by Sanguinetti, op. cit., 33.

the flatterer, mobilizes his rhetorical skills to reach his self-seeking goals. Both Jason and Thaïs are skillful speakers, but there is a sharp line of demarcation between smooth talk and virtuous talk. Sweet-sounding words of seduction and flattery are no other than skillful rhetoric put to the wrong service. This is why in the system of Hell, the sin of seduction, a complex behavioral mechanism that most often enlists the support of words, is put side by side with flattery. And this is also why in the *Inferno* the first two ditches of the Malebolge are treated within the same canto, and Jason, the seducer, makes the transition to the episodes of the flatterers Alessio and Thaïs. Thaïs, in her turn, marks the passage to simony, a passage easy to understand, since simony was defined in the Middle Ages as “a prostitution of God’s bride, the church.”<sup>181</sup> Peter the Cantor furnishes again, in his treatment of *adulatio*, an interesting link between this sin and simony, in a passage that I will quote here to suggest that the association of flattery with simony was not so extravagant in the moral texts: *Attestante Gregorio (lib. XII Moral. c. 25), sicut nummus muneric et pecuniae effectus est simoniae, ita et nummus obsecutionis vel execusionis sordidae, puta adulacionis. Munus enim gratis collatum est, sed nec donum gratiae est, quod confertur tam culpae quam pecuniae, vel naturae.* (PL 205, 140B; ‘Gregory attests in *Moralia*, book 12, chapter 25, if the retribution for a service and the obtention of money is simony, then simony is also the retribution for a vile submission or deed, like flattery. Because the retribution was obtained on account of the favors; it is neither a gift of gratitude, which opposes both guilt and money, nor (a gift) of nature’).

Furthermore, according to Pézard, when Dante made the portrayal of Thaïs, he knew that he would artistically figure the Roman Church (that Dante saw as fraught with graft) as a

---

<sup>181</sup> Joan Ferrante, op. cit., 462.

prostitute.<sup>182</sup> Along these lines it is worthwhile mentioning that the *Romance of the Rose* posited already a connection between (false) *eros* and simony, in a passage that speaks of the decayed state of love, a notion that according to Jean de Meun has become synonymous with fraud and deception:

Lors ert amours sanz symonie,/L'uns ne demandoit riens a l'autre,/Quant baraz vint, lance seur fautre,/et pechiez et male aventure/Qui n'ot de souffisance cure./Orguieulz, qui desdaingne pareill/Vint avoec, o grant apareill,/Et couvoitise et avarice,/Envie et tuit li autre vice. (9528-9538)

At that time there was no simony in love; one did not demand something from another. Then Fraud came, with his lance at rest, and Sin and Misfortune, who take no heed of Sufficiency, and along with them came Pride, equally disdainful in her grand array, Covetousness, Avarice, Envy, and all the other vices.

*Inferno XVIII* is a canto subtly dominated by female figures: indirectly present in the expression *femmme da conio* that diffusely projects them as unidentified objects on the scene of the male desires and trades, women are then figured as intellectually endowed persons through Hypsipile and Medea, both capable, according to the legend, of guile and manipulation. The female potentiality for *inganno* evoked in connection with Hypsipyle is then reiterated through the figure of Thaïs, who takes the linguistic side of guile (the *lingua dolosa*) to a high level on a perverse scale of values.<sup>183</sup>

Thaïs is the opposite of Dante's ideal of female speech. In the *Comedy*, the poet casts Beatrice as the model for women's interaction with language, repairing thus in Limbo, Purgatory and Paradise, the corruption brought into and through speech by women of Thaïs's stock. When in *Inferno II*, Beatrice descends into Limbo to ask Virgil to help the lost and disheartened

---

<sup>182</sup> Dante "sait déjà, quand il peint sa Thaïs, qu'il donnera les traits d'une prostituée à l'église, dans la vision apocalyptique qui achève le Purgatoire." (Pézard, 18).

<sup>183</sup> For Lanfranco Caretti, Dante's Thaïs represents "il culmine della frode 'professionale', dell'inganno di mestiere' and her hyperbolic reply is a grotesque parody of the amorous talk. (op cit., 605)

pilgrim, her language is described as *soave e piana* ‘gentle and soft’; her speech, an exemplification of the art that Dante called in the *Convivio il cortesissimamente parlare*, is moved not by concerns of self-promotion, nor by simulated love, but by the most genuine form of charity: *I' son Beatrice che ti faccio andare;/vegno del loco ove tornar disio ;/amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare* (70-72; ‘I am Beatrice who cause you to go; I come from/ the place where I long to return; love has moved me/, and makes me speak.’). Beatrice’s words will not be false as those of Thaïs, but characterized by sincerity and truthfulness: *Oh pietosa colei che mi soccorse!/e te cortese ch'udisti tosto/a le vere parole che ti porse.* (133-135; ‘O full of pity she who has helped me!/And you/ courteous, hwo have quickly obeyed the true words/ she offered you.’; underlining mine).

The notion of praise is contained also in Beatrice’s emotional plea to Virgil, but here her praise of the Latin poet will be uttered, she promises, in front of the highest divine forum, as a form of retribution: *Quando sarò dinanzi al segnor mio,/di te mi loderò sovente a lui* (73-74; ‘ When I shall be before my Lord, I will praise/ frequently to him’) Beatrice restores to speeh that golden quality that seducers and flatterers denied to it : generosity; altruism on the level of human relationships, of the words and deeds that, according to Dante’s belief, should be beneficial to *others*, not to oneself: *Comandamento è de li morali filosofi che de li benefici hanno parlato, che l'uomo dee mettere ingegno e sollicitudine in porgere li suoi benefici utili quanto puote più al ricevitore.*<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> *Convivio* IV.XXII. The same idea is couched elsewhere in the *Convivio* in Aristotelian terms: *Sì come Aristotile dice, l'uomo è animale civile, per che a lui si richiede non pur a sé ma altrui essere utile.* (IV. XXVII).

## 4.2 EVIL COUNSELING, OR WHAT THE OLD WOMAN AND FRIEND HAVE IN COMMON WITH ULYSSES AND GUIDO DA MONTEFELTRO

### 4.2.1 The Lover's evil counselors

After flattery, the next major intersection between the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy* is the discussion of evil counsel. Two characters—Friend and the Old Woman—incarnate for Jean de Meun this form of transgressive speech, whereas Dante conceives a special place for evil counselors in Hell, among which he casts Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro.

In the *Rose*, Reason's discourse is followed by Friend's, who also gives the Lover long indications on how to cope with the malady of love. Thus, the posture Friend adopts from the very outset is that of a counselor in matters of life and relationships with the opposite gender. The light in which he describes the torments of passion is less dark than Reason's; he is a practical person, who speaks with the authority given by his own, solid experience in matters of life. It is an experience that had its own share of bitterness, therefore, the character will often speak sarcastically. Although Friend often invokes the principle according to which wisdom must govern all of the Lover's actions, the advice he will give the Lover will be less philosophical and, at the same time, less moral than that of Lady Reason. In Friend's scheme of things, if the Lover wants to reach his goal (i.e., the conquering of the castle watched by Jalousie, in which Fair Welcoming is imprisoned), he must first take care of Evil Mouth and his relatives: this implies that the Lover must show an appearance of respect and good mood toward Evil Mouth, and serve him and his lineage, even if the Lover hates them. On the occasion of this piece of advice, the Friend introduces for the first time in his discourse the basic tenet of his life philosophy: deceiving deceivers is a praiseworthy thing (*cil font bonne oevre/qui les deceveors*

*deçoivent*; 7344-5).<sup>185</sup> By virtue of this moral justification of fraud, Friend advises the Lover to offer Evil Mouth everything, be that his own body and soul, but not sincerely. Self-dedication should be only played, not felt (*offrez leur tout par grant faintise*; 7351), because--and here Friend will reiterate his principle--it is not a sin to deceive those who are already tarnished by their own deceitful practices (*De ceuls bouler n'est pas pechiez/Qui de bouler sont entechiez*; 7355-6). The moral philosophy that transpires from this approach reveals Friend's awareness of the potential transgressiveness of his advice: he obliquely admits that counseling fraud is a sin, but tries to excuse himself by invoking a piece of 'popular wisdom' according to which deceit practiced on tricksters is morally licit. On account of this justification, flattery and fallacious dissimulation (*fausses simulations*) are encouraged as harmless methods of reaching one's purposes.

The problem is that Friend encourages the Lover to adopt disingenuous ways in his social dealings even with people less immoral than Evil Mouth: the guardians of the Jalouse's castle, or young girls. With the former, Friend encourages the Lover on using lies, swearing, bribing or dissimulating:

(...) Pour apaiser leur presentez./ Et puis des maus vous dementez/Et dou travail et de la paine,/K'amours vous fait qui la vous maine./Et se vous ne povez donner,/Par promesse estuet sermonner:/Prometez fort sanz delaier,/Comment qu'il aille dou paier;/Jurez fort et la foi bailliez/Ainz que conclus vous en ailliez;/Si leur priez qu'il vous sequerent./ Et si vostre oeill devant euls pleurent,/Ce vous iert mout granz avantages;/Plorez! Si ferez mout que sages;/Devant euls vous agenoilliez/Jointes main, et vos eulz moilliez/De chaudes lermes en la place,/Qui vous coulent aval la face,/Si q'il les voient bien cheoir:/C'est mout granz pitié a veoir;/Lermes ne sont pas despiteuses,/ Meismement a genz piteuses. (7443-65).

---

<sup>185</sup> This statement will have Christine de Pizan outraged in the *Querelle*, insofar as she will interpret it as declaration of immorality made by Jean de Meun himself. For more on this topic, see my section on Jean de Meun's blasphemies.

Lull them by giving them such gifts. Afterward you will complain of your woes and of the toil and torment that Love, who brought you there, has made for you. Now if you can give nothing you must promise something by oath; however the payment goes, make a strong promise without delaying. Swear vehemently and pledge your faith rather than go away beaten; beg them to save you. And if your eyes weep in front of them it will be a very great advantage for you. Weep; you will do a very wise thing. Kneel down before them with joined hands and, right on the spot, moisten your eyes with hot tears that run down your face so that they can easily see them falling; it is a very pitiable sight to see. Tears are not despicable, especially to men of pity.

The first strategy recommended in this long list is to corrupt the watchmen (or generally those who stand in one's ways) with presents. Gifts soften everyone's heart and make them more favorable to one's cause.<sup>186</sup> If one wants to get something from people, one has to touch their most sensitive chord (here *pitié*), to impress them with one's suffering, and once one has fooled them, one ought not hesitate to take advantage of their weakness for one's own selfish benefit; this is the lesson Friend imparts to the Lover. The persuasive strategies Friend recommends cover a wide range of manifestations, many of which are concerned with the usage of language: complaints, promises, oaths and prayers. Out of these strategies, the one that strikes me as most

---

<sup>186</sup> The notion that making presents helps you influence or manipulate people is reiterated later on, in a more general context: *Sachiez que dons les genz affolent,/As mesdisanz les langues tolent:/Se mal es donneours savoient/Tout le bien dou monde en diroient./Biau don soustienent maint bailli/Qui fussent ores mal bailli./Biau don de vins et de viandes/Ont fait donner maintes provandes!/Biau don si font, n'en doutez mie./Porter tesmoing de bonne vie;/Mout tiennent partout biau lieu don./Qui biaus dons donne, il est preudon!/Dons donnent los a donneours/Et empirent les prenneours/Quant il leur naturel franchise/Obligent a autrui servise./Que vous diroie? A la parsomme./Par don sont pris et dieu et homme.* (8231-48; 'Know that gifts fool people and rob the scandalmongers of their gossip. Even if they knew evil of the donors, they would speak all the good in the world about them. Fair gifts sustain many bailiffs who were formerly in poor circumstances; fair gifts of wine and food have been the source of many prebends; and fair gifts, without doubt, bear witness to a good life. Everywhere gifts give strong support to a fair place, and he who gives them is a worthy man. Gifts give praise to the givers and put those who take in a worse light, for gifts put their natural freedom under the obligation to serve another. What should I say? In sum, both god and man are captured by gifts'). Remarkable in this passage is the idea that presents affect people's discourses: those who would normally gossip keep quiet if they are jolted along with gifts. Under the influence of gifts, even if they would have reasons to speak ill of someone, they change their discourses from slander into praise. A similar idea is expressed by Dante, who describes the Bolognese barristers as changing the negation into an assertion for the sake of material profit.

fraudulent is the excessive usage of promises (*sermonner par promesse* or: *prometez fort*) with the awareness that they may not become true.

Making false promises seems to be a very fashionable practice in the Middle Ages, since we will find it exemplified in Dante too, through the figure of Guido da Montelfeltro in *Inferno* XXVII. In the *Rose*, dealing with watchmen requires verbal skills, maintains Friend, and nothing is more harmful to a lover's cause than a careless way of speech. A lover who wants to win over fierce guardians should never be a hasty speaker (*hastif sermonneur*), on the contrary, he should take all the time he needs to formulate his request, and moreover, he has to seize the right moment when to speak, i.e., when the watchman is in a good mood. We can see from this type of advice that Friend gives the Lover a veritable lesson of rhetoric: "be careful how you speak, when you speak," only that the advice concerning these circumstances of speech is pressed into the service of ruse. As far as fraudulent crying (*plorer par baraz*) is concerned, Friend vividly recommends the usage of onion juice or other spices for the stimulation of tears. He points out that this has always been a very successful practice with women, who wishing to seduce men, were themselves fooled by men's false tears and words (*faveles*). Through Friend's remarks about the games of Love, Jean de Meun obliquely denounces the code of courtly love, based on a series of gestural and linguistic attitudes that for Jean were mere fallacies.<sup>187</sup>

More hypocritical attitudes are recommended by Friend in relationships with women: the Lover has to try everything to adapt his behavior to the behavior of the young woman he desires. If she is childish, he has to play childish; if she is wise and mature he has to behave like a mature person himself. If she hates or blames something, he should hate it and blame it himself. He

---

<sup>187</sup> Another exemplification of the hypocrisy of *fin'amors* that Jean condemns is the convention of writing that promoted the concealment of the true gender of the lover under the opposite pronoun (the pronoun *il* designated 'she', and *elle* 'he').

should be happy when she is happy, cry when she cries, and praise whatever she praises.<sup>188</sup> He has to flatter her, by eulogizing her looks and manners at all times. That all of Friend's pieces of advice represent exhortations to the use of fraud is made clear by the Lover's reaction at hearing them. Only a hypocrite would do such devilish things, he exclaims, apparently outraged: *Nus hons, s'il n'est faus ypocrites,/Ne feroit ceste deable (7798-9).*<sup>189</sup>

But the Lover's reply does not diminish Friend's enthusiasm as a counselor of fraud, and the remainder of his discourse offers the reader more surprises. An interesting aspect of the relationship between language and love occurs when Friend starts speaking about female venality:

Nepourquant, s'il me requeroit/Conseil, savoir se bon seroit/Qu'il feïst  
rimes jolivetes/Motez, flabiaus et chançonnêtes,/Qui'il veuille a s'amie  
envoyer/Pour li tenir et apaier:/Ha! Las! De ce ne puet chaloir,/Biau dit i  
puet trop po valoir!/Li dit espor loé seront,/D'autre preu petit i feront.  
(8341-50)

Nevertheless, if he were to ask my advice in order to find out if it would be a good idea for him to make pretty rhymes, motets, little stories and songs that he may want to send to his sweetheart to hold her and make her happy, I must answer that, alas, it can make no difference. Pretty songs can be worth very little in this case. Perhaps the songs will be praised, but they will bring in little profit.

In sharp opposition with the golden age, when love was sincere, and devoid of simony, in Friend's days love has become a form of commerce, in which the woman lets herself be conquered by men with well filled pockets. In this context, the noblest expressions of human

---

<sup>188</sup> It is valuable to note that in the French text, the pronoun used to designate the generic woman for which Bel-Accueil stands is *il*, since the grammatical gender of the noun Bel-Accueil ('Fair Welcoming') is masculine. For a thorough study of the implications of this pronominal obfuscation, see Simon Gaunt, "Bel-Accueil and the Improper Allegory of the *Romance of the Rose*." *New Medieval Literatures*, 2, Rita Copeland, D. Lawton, W. Scase, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 65-93.

<sup>189</sup>I say apparently, because the Lover will end up heeding to Friend's devilish advice.

language: poetry, tales, songs, in other words all the assets of the literary tradition of *fin'amors* have become powerless and useless in competition with money. Money talks, not the verse, and women now run to embrace those rich in their pockets, not in their hearts. Jean places the diminishing stature of courtly poetry as a driving force in love in the framework of Friend's depiction of the end of the golden age. This is an extraordinary moment in Friend's discourse, which presents the state of the contemporary scene in terms that will become the hallmarks of Dante's language in the *Comedy*:

Lors ert amours sanz symonie,/L'uns ne demandoit riens a l'autre,/Quant baraz vint, lance seur fautre,/Et pechiez et male aventure/Qui n'ot de souffisance cure./Orguieulz, qui desdaingne pareill/Vint avoec, o grant appareill,/Et couvoitise et avarice,/Envie et tuit li autre vice. (...) Tantost cil doulereus mauffé/De forsenerie eschauffé,/De duel, de corrouz et d'envie,/Quant virent genz mener tel vie,/S'escourcerent par toutes terres/Semanz descors, contens et guerres./Mesdiz, rancunes et haÿnnes/Par corrouz et par ataÿnnes./ Et pour ce qu'il orent or chier,/La terre firent escorchier/Et li sachierent des entrailles/Ses ancianes repostailles./Metaus et pierres precieuses,/Dont gens devindrent envieuses;/Car avarice et couvoitise/Ont es cuers des homes assise/La grant ardeur d'avoir aquerre./L'une l'acquiet, l'autre l'enserre. (...) Tantost com par ceste maisnie/Fu la gens mauvaise et faisnie,/La première vie laissierent/De mal faire puis ne cessierent/Car fals et tricheour devindrent.(9530-95)

At that time there was no simony in love; one did not demand something from another. Then Fraud came, with his lance at rest, and Sin and Misfortune, who take no heed of Sufficiency, and, along with them, came Pride, equally disdainful in her grand array, Covetousness, Avarice, Envy, and all the other vices. (...) Immediately these wretched devils, excited by fury, sorrow, anger, and envy when they saw men leading such a life, rushed off through all countries, sowing discord, contention and war, slander, rancor, and hatred through anger and quarreling. Because they held gold dear, they had the earth flayed for it, and they drew out its bowels for its old deposits of metals and precious stones that make men grow envious. For Avarice and Covetousness established in the hearts of men the burning desire to acquire possessions. The latter acquire them and the former locks them up. (...) As soon as this troop had played its evil tricks, men abandoned their first life and after that they did not cease doing evil, for they became false and treacherous.

Fraud and sufficiency are Aristotelian terms consecrated by the moral tracts of the later Middle Ages. They will become fundamental coordinates for Dante's moral system, which posits the notion of fraud as one of the axes of hell, and that of sufficiency as a criterion of distinction between insufficient love and excessive love in purgatory. In Jean's list, Fraud is followed by two generic terms with further moral connotations *pechiez* ('sin') and *male aventure* ('misdeed' or 'mischief', 'misfortune'), which spring from violating the right mean between two extremes (*souffrance*). In this passage, Classical, Aristotelian theories of morality are intertwined with the Christian list of the deadly vices (pride, covetousness, avarice, wrath, sorrow), in an ethical amalgam that will characterize Dante's system of hell, as well. More importantly for us, this long and disorderly list contains several sins of the tongue: sowing of discord, contention, slander, and quarrelling. Here, Jean's approach to them seems to follow a Gregorian pattern, with sins of the tongue stemming from the seven capital vices.

The surprises offered by Friend's discourse do not end with the picture of the dark days in which Fraud and his companions conquered the world. As though Friend forgot his complaint about the decay of the morals at the very moment when he uttered it, shortly later he resumes his office of fraudulent counselor and begins again to recommend the use of ruse and deceit in the relationship between men and women.<sup>190</sup> Cheating is a perfectly moral practice in Friend's view of life, therefore he meticulously gives instructions on what a cheating man should say or do to appease the suspicions of his girl friend or fiancée: he should vigorously deny all the accusations of infidelity, he should swear he still loves her, he should flatter and promise her he would always stay true to their love (9811- 9898). Not only that, but he should also make some mental

---

<sup>190</sup> This kind of contrast that occurs within the discourse of a character is shocking as it undermines the very coherence of that character. This is however a writerly practice that Jean systematically applies to his characters: we will see it again at work in the discourses of The Old Woman, Nature, Genius, and especially Faus Semblant.

efforts and come up with some fictitious dreams he had about her, dreams he should romantically tell her before they go to sleep:

Si li doit faindre noviaus songes/Touz farcis de plaisanz mençonges./Et quant vient au soir, qu'il se couche/Touz seuls, en sa chamber, en sa couche./Avis li est, qaunt il sommeille/-Car pou i dort i mout i veille-/Qu'il l'ait entre ses braz tenue/Avoeques lui trestoute nue/Par soulaz et par druërie,/Toute saine et toute guerie/Et par jour en lieus delitables:/Tels fables li cont ou samblables. (9887-98)<sup>191</sup>

He must pretend to have unusual dreams, all stuffed with pleasing falsehoods. Let him say that when night comes and he lies all alone on his bed in his room, it seems to him, when he sleeps—for he sleeps but little and is often awake—that she was completely healthy and cured, and that all night long and through the day, in delightful places, he held her naked in his arms in the solace of love-making. He should tell her such fables or similar ones.

The ability of speech to convey truth in the relationship between a man and a woman, and in a more general way between people, is called into question here. Jean's female readership must have had a shock reading these lines (as indeed had Christine de Pizan), and their trust in the male erotic speech must have been seriously shaken. But was not this the very agenda of Jean de Meun as the author of the *Mireor aus amoureus*, a moral encyclopedia for lovers? Jean writes a book in which all categories of lovers need to see their images reflected; this entails that even those lovers who conquer the object of their desires through sweet talking, lies and ruse (because love is, as we have seen, a sin, and a form of simony) will recognize themselves in the mirror. Moreover, this book has didactic purposes: it is explicitly written with the goal of instructing people (especially the youth) in matters of love and life. As such, by questioning the truthfulness of erotic language, this book undertakes to disillusion young women and make them more alert

---

<sup>191</sup> The interesting rhyme *songe/mençonges* has been used in criticism of the *Rose* to show Jean's mistrust for the dream as a narrative form.

to the traps of verbal strategies of seduction. Words are the cousins of deeds, says Jean in his apology, or at least this is what they should be. That this is not always the case is a sad occurrence, and Friend's discourse is the perfect exemplification of such an occurrence. Men use language to lie, to charm, to seduce women into their beds, in short, to manipulate. Words are no longer expressions of truth but veils that may cover it very well. The moral substance is not in the speech, because this can be false and treacherous, but in the intention underlying this speech.

If Friend's sequence focuses on the falsity inherent in the male verbal methods of seduction, the discourse of the Old Woman teaches exactly the same methods from the opposite angle: she instructs young women on how to seduce men.<sup>192</sup> The Old Woman introduces herself in the *Roman* as having a great expertise in erotic relationships: she did not need to go to school to take lessons on love, she says, for at school one studies only theories, whereas life taught her the practice of love: *N'ainc ne fui d'amour a escole/Ou l'on seüst la theorique;/Mais je sai tout par la pratique:/Experimenz m'en ont fait sage* (12806-9). Like in Friend's case, the Old Woman's idea of wisdom is very different from Lady Reason's. For Reason, wisdom meant the ability to discern between good and evil and to opt for the righteous path in life; it implied shunning temptations and vices and keeping measure in desires. It also meant the ability to rein in one's tongue and speak with discernment. The Old Woman's idea of wisdom is the exact opposite of Lady Reason's moral doctrine. The experience that made her wise, she says, is exclusively based on an endless game in which the woman is at times the duped and at other times the trickster: *Maint vaillant homme ai deceü/Quant en mes las le tins cheü;/Mais ainz fui par mains deceüe/Que je m'en fusse aperceüe* (12831-4). By virtue of this rich life experience,

---

<sup>192</sup> For a study of this allegorical figure, see Luis Beltrán. "The Old Woman's Past." *Romanische Forschungen* 84 (1972), 77-96. Bertran analyzes the Old Woman in the framework of the medieval tradition of depicting old women in romances and fabliaux.

the Old Woman developed a solid corpus of knowledge--her *doctrine*, she says—that now she imparts to Fair Welcoming. Just as for Friend it was morally licit to trick the trickster, so for the Old Woman it is natural that a woman places her heart in several places, not just one. This is an idea that runs like a thread throughout her speech. A woman should never offer her heart but sell it, and sell it well, to the man who offers the highest price for it.

Deviant forms of speech are also strongly recommended to women as a constitutive part of the game of love: perjury, lies and false promises. These acts form the linguistic ‘weaponry’ that any woman should master if she wants to win over a man. Women should not be afraid to swear falsely, they should not be afraid they might commit a sin, since even God will not take seriously a love oath uttered by a woman, but will readily pardon her perjury: *S'ele est parjure, ne li chaille:/Dieus se rit de tel serement/Et le pardonne liement* (13128-30). To justify her support for the linguistic habit of perjury, the Old Woman has recourse to mythology and invokes the pagan gods, with Jupiter at the forefront, who made of false swearing in love a current practice. In ancient times, it is because men saw their gods betraying their words, that men themselves felt justified in lying and making false promises, the Old Woman says (*Ce devroit mout asseürer/Les fins amanz de parjurer/Saintes et sainz, moustiers et temples/Quant li dieu leur donnent examples.* 13139-42). Across this veiled critique of mythic morality, perjury as a verbal practice is obliquely condemned the very moment it is recommended. It is one of those instances in which Jean de Meun weaves a contradiction into the intimate nature of a character, in order to undermine that character’s claims to moral truth and wisdom. The Old Woman seems to recommend perjury, but by invoking the values of a pagan world in which gods themselves were big liars, she calls into question the very morality of the practice of swearing. From an artistic point of view, it is a performance that not many writers could achieve. Jean de Meun

rarely says things directly, his artistic intelligence is convoluted rather than straightforward and it takes a great art to be able to undermine a position on a moral issue the very moment that position is firmly asserted. It is a literary strategy that, as I have argued, represents the hallmark of Jean de Meun as a writer concerned with moral themes. Both Friend and the Old Woman (and later on False Seeming) recommend deceit in deeds and words, but the foundation of their recommendations is compromised by the very contexts in which these recommendations are made. In the Old Woman's speech, perjury is legitimized by the mores of the ancient world, but to a Christian, this world made of numerous gods is *a priori* mendacious. Thus, this form of moral legitimization simply does not stand.

By this illusory solution offered to the issue of false swearing, the trust in the messages conveyed through human language is again sapped. The Old Woman explicitly expresses this idea, by saying that one must be a fool to believe the words of a lover only because (s)he swore they were true: lovers have changing hearts, and both the youth and the old easily deny their own words and vows (*Juene genz ne sont point estables;/Non sont li vieill souventes foiz,/Ainz mentent serement et foiz;* 13146-9). After she makes this general point, the Old Woman returns to questions related to the female gender. A woman who loves just one man deserves all the suffering and torments of love, because fidelity is a stupid thing: no matter how experienced a woman is, and how well versed in erotic tricks she is, she cannot keep the man she loves for too long. Men are masters in the art of making false promises and oaths, as again the myths of the ancient world show. Aeneas repeatedly swore fidelity to Dido, but ended up betraying his words and abandoning her. Because she trusted too much in his fallacious speeches, when he left, she suffered so much that she committed suicide. Phyllis also waited in vain for Demophon to keep his promise. He never came back to her and she hung herself. Paris as well had declared fidelity

to Oenone in writing, on the skin of a tree, but was quick to forget his vows when he fell in love with beautiful Helen. Jason belongs to the same gallery of perjurers in love, for he abandoned Medea after he had sworn he would never leave her. Again because she trusted too much in his passionate but mendacious words, when he left her, her suffering became unbearable and she committed heinous crimes: she killed the children she had with him and then herself.<sup>193</sup>

This rich list of mythical *exempla*, meant to illustrate the currency of the practice of perjury among men, becomes a new mean of authorizing the female use of the same verbal practice. The implication is that since men have remorselessly been employing verbal deceit from the beginning of times, why should ‘modern’ women not do the same? All men cheat, lie, and love several women at the same time, why should women not act in the same way? Again, a woman who loves just one man is stupid, she ought to flirt with and place her heart in several men, and make all of them love her passionately. At this point, the character teaches women how to render themselves agreeable to their male companions: how to dress themselves, how to eat, how to walk, and especially how to speak. Within the context of the usage of speech, the Old Woman draws attention to the importance of being a smooth and sweet talker: women should not only know songs and games, but they should necessarily avoid all quarrel and contention. This idea is not developed, but later on in the discourse, the character adds a new piece of advice concerning the female way of speaking: if women feel they need to cry in front of a man, to impress and manipulate him, they can do so, but they should not in any circumstances let any of their thoughts transpire through their words or deeds: *Mais gart que par voiz ne par oevre/Riens*

---

<sup>193</sup> In the text, both the love story between Phyllis and Demophon and that between Paris and Oenone are evoked succinctly, in just a few verses, whereas those between Aeneas and Dido and Jason and Medea, respectively, are told with a wealth of details. The last two couples are mentioned in the *Comedy* as well. We have seen Jason punished among seducers in *Inferno XVIII*, where he suffers for his betrayal of Medea, and we will encounter Dido evoked as well.

*de son penser ne descuevre* (13387-8) This idea is reasserted in the context of the table manners: women are strongly advised not to drink beyond measure, because they may lose control over their speech (*Et bien se gart qu'el ne s'enyyvre,/Car en homme ne en fame yvre/Ne peut avoir chose secreee/Car puis que fame est enyvree,/Il n'a point en li de deffense,/Ainz jangle tout quanqu'el pense/Et est a touz abandonnee/Quant a tel meschief s'est donnee.* ('Now a lady must be careful not to get drunk, for a drunk, man or woman, cannot keep anything secret; and when a woman gets drunk, she has no defenses at all in her, but blurts out whatever she thinks and abandons herself to anyone when she gives herself over to such bad conduct.' 13453-9). <sup>194</sup>

No matter how wicked the intention of a woman is, the appearance of decency must always be preserved. This constant interplay between essence and appearance the Old Woman recommends as a behavioral strategy to women confers tones of comedy to her speech in the poem. Her own advice is often couched in moral language, but placed in an immoral context. She says, for instance, that a woman should not yield to the first man who makes her promises; she should first check if he speaks with good intentions, springing from a pure heart, or with evil ones. But then immediately she teaches the woman how to take advantage of that man, how to dupe him with her words and get his money:

Et s'il vient aucuns prometierres/Soit loyaus homs ou  
hoquelierres,/Qui la vueille d'amours proier/Et par promesse a soi  
loier,/Et cele ausi li reparamete,/Mais bien se gart qu'ele ne se  
mete/Pour nulle riens en sa manoie./Devant qu'el tiengne la  
monoie./Et s'il mande riens par escrit/gart se cil faintement

---

<sup>194</sup> The link between excessive food or drink and verbosity was not uncommon in the Middle Ages. Both Robert de Sorbonne (*De confessione*), and Laurent d'Orléans (*Somme le roi*), for instance, treat verbal deviations together with gluttony as sins of the mouth ('*peccata gulæ*'). For more on the link between *affluentia ciborum-inundatio verborum*, see Casagrande and Vecchio, *I peccati*, the chapter "La lingua tra gula e loquacitas" (*I peccati della lingua*, 141-168).

escrit/Ou s'il a bonne entencion/De fin cuer sanz decepcion.  
(13651-62)

And if any man, either an honest man or a swindler, should make promises, hoping to beg for her love and bind her to him by vows, she may exchange vows, but she must be careful not to put herself at his mercy unless she gets hold of the money also. If he makes any promise in writing, she must see if there is any deception or if his good intentions are those of a true heart.

On the one hand, a woman must check on her paramour's honesty (or his money), and on the other, she may promise him whatever she wants. Language here is wide open to any possibilities; it may be used in any way, as long as these usages of language serve a woman's purposes. The Old Woman encourages female speakers to swear falsely on God or the saints. She goes as far as to give women the actual words they should use in addressing their paramours, and even how to reinforce the truthfulness of their words by invoking the sacred name of the founder of the papal seat.

Cele qui puis a lui s'acorde/Et qui tant set de guiles faintes,/Dieu doit jurer et sainz et saintes/ K'ainc ne se vost mais otroier/A nul, tant la seüst proier,/Et die: "Sire, c'est la soume,/Foi que doi saint Pere de Romme,/Par fine amour a vous me don,/Car ce n'est pas pour vostre don./N'est hons nez pour cui ce feïsse,/Pour nul don, tant grant le veïsse./Maint vaillant homme ai refusé/Car mout ont maint a moi musé./Si croi que m'avez enchantee:/Male chançon m'aviez chantee!"/Lors le doit estroit acoler/Et baisier pour mieus affoler./Mais s'el veult mon conseil avoir/N'entende a rien, fors a l'avoir. (13684-13700)

In giving in to him, she, who knows so many wily ruses, should swear by God and by the saints that she has never wished to give herself to anyone, no matter how well he may have pleaded; then she should say, 'My lord, this is my all; by the faith which I owe to Saint Peter of Rome, I give myself to you out of pure love, not because of your gifts. The man isn't born for whom I would do this for any gift, no matter how greatly he desired it. I have refused many a worthy man, for many have gazed adoringly at me. I think you must have cast a spell over me; you have sung me a wicked song.' Then she should embrace him closely and kiss him so that he will be even better deluded. But if she wants my advice, she should think only of what she can get.

Within this veritable lesson of rhetoric, no moral limits are imposed on female speech; rather all of them are trespassed. A woman may, or rather should, lie, make false promises, and even shore everything up with the names of God and the saints. Everything is allowed to and in speech. Perjury and blasphemy are encouraged and brought to the level of art that can be taught or imparted. The Old Woman's advice on the use of speech goes counter the entire pastoral tradition on moral speech. She recommends what the authors on moral texts on the sins of the tongue forbid. Through her the erotic linguistic code is turned into sacrilegious language.

Both Friend and the Old Woman strongly recommend the use of fraud in human relationships. The Old Woman seems to go a step further than the former, as she presses even religious language into the service of deceit. Although through these characters Jean de Meun condemns the wicked use of rhetoric only obliquely, without labeling it a sin, at the time when he was building these two characters into his poem, the activity of counseling the use of fraud was considered a sin. In his *Summa Vitiorum* from 1245, William Peraldus introduced the notion of *pravum consilium* as a sin of the tongue. In his moral *Summa* from 1270-80, Aquinas discussed this notion as well. Echoes of these late medieval examinations of the sin of evil counsel can also be retrieved in the *Divine Comedy*, where evil counseling is represented through the figures of Ulysses, Diomedes and Guido da Montelfetro. My next section examines these literary figures and sets Dante's view of the sin of *consiglio frodolente* in the context of Peraldus, Aquinas and Cavalca's treatment of *pravum consilium* ('malo consiglio').

#### 4.2.2 The name of the sin: medieval moralists on *pravum consilium* and Ulysses and Guido's sin

Two of the most important postulates of hermeneutics found themselves verified in *Canto XXVI* of the *Inferno*: one concerns the multiplicity of possible interpretations given to one and same literary work, and the other the immunity of great art to history. Readers in different times and different places see different things in one and the same literary fragment, in one and the same episode or character, argues Gadamer, and there is hardly another place in the *Divine Comedy* that illustrates this argument better than the Ulysses episode. Over the course of seven centuries of literary criticism, Dante readers and scholars have seen different and sometimes highly opposing meanings in the Dantean reinterpretation of the Homeric myth. But if there is one thing to be appreciated amidst this great volume of varying and contrasting readings, this is the proof all these readings gather in favor of the genius of the medieval Italian poet. Every time we read a text, said Gadamer, we awaken that text, we bring it to a new life, and the fact that over the course of time Dante's Ulysses has received so many interpretations is irrefutable evidence for the permanence of the textual life of the *Comedy*. Thanks to the fascinating and highly controversial figure of Ulysses--and to many other abiding spiritual insights of Dante's--the *poema sacro* has so far been immune to historical death.

The main hermeneutical difficulties of *Inferno XXVI*, the narrative of which unfolds in the eighth circle of Malebolge, are two: the first springs from Dante's omission of the name of the sin in the taxonomic moral list provided in *Inferno XI*: the sins punished in pouches eight and nine are branded by Virgil not as specific sins, but as *simile lordura* ('like trash'). Half of this strongly pejorative but vague phrase is disambiguated in the narrative of the ninth *bolgia*, labeled as the *bolgia* of the sowers of schism and discord, a denomination accepted by literary critics

with no reservation. But the label *consiglio frodolente*, given in the text with respect to Guido da Montefeltro has been less well accepted, especially when extrapolated from Guido to Ulysses. Because *Inferno XXVI*, which contains the Ulysses episode, gives basically no explicit indication of the sin for which Ulysses is punished, an omission that only compounds the mystery of the phrase *simile lordura*, Dante's readers felt justified in searching for Ulysses' sin in different directions: some have said Ulysses, like Guido, is punished for his evil use of language; some have argued for a sin of *astutia*;<sup>195</sup> some others for *falsa prudential*,<sup>196</sup> whereas another category has refused to see any kind of sin in Ulysses, insisting on the greatness of the figure, on the admiration Dante supposedly felt for him, and completely forgetting that the hero is tortured in hell.<sup>197</sup>

---

<sup>195</sup> John Ahern dismisses the theory of the *consiglio frodolente*, and, drawing on medieval moralists on *astutia* (Grosseteste, Aquinas, Cavalca, etc.), posits slyness as the reason for the Greek's presence in Hell. See "Dante's slyness: The Unnamed Sin of the Eighth Bolgia," in *Romanic Review*, 73. 3 (1982), 275-291. Richard Kay also pleads for *astutia* in "Two pairs of Tricks: Ulysses and Guido in Dante's *Inferno XXVI-XXVII*," in *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, 1 (1980), 107-124.

<sup>196</sup> See, for instance, Massimo Seriacopi, who, in the wake of an early commentator, develops the Thomistic concept with application to Dante's Ulysses: "Fondamentale, come già notato nel primo capitolo, è poi l'intervento dell'Anonimo Fiorentino, che introduce uno dei "termini chiave" per l'interpretazione del canto, quella *prudenzia*, che, come virtù, tiene il mezzo, e il cui vizio-estremizzazione di grado superiore (o sapere finalizzato all'inganno) è l'*astuzia* e la *callidità*." *All'estremo della "Prudentia."* *L'Ulisse di Dante* (Roma: Zauli, Arti Grafiche, 1994), 51. The list of sins ascribed to Dante's Ulysses does not end here, however; Nardi has spoken of a Luciferic-Adamic *superbia*, whereas Porena, Donno and others of evil use of *ingegno*. Rocco Montano has interpreted Ulysses' trespass as *vana curiositas* ("Il folle volo d'Ulisse." *Suggerimenti per una lettura di Dante* (Napoli, 1956), 131-174, whereas Fiorenzo Forti has argued for "fol hardement" ['Curiositas' o 'fol hardement', in *Fra le carte dei poeti* (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1965), 41-77]. Other interpretations were offered by Mario Trovato who argues for *injustice* ("Il contrappasso nell'Ottava Bolgia," in *Dante Studies*, 94 (1976), 47-60, and Lawrence V. Ryan, who pleads for betrayal ("Ulysses, Guido and the Betrayal of Community," *Italica*, 54 (1977), 227-249).

<sup>197</sup> See Mario Fubini, "Il peccato di Ulisse" and "Il canto XXVI," published in *Il peccato d'Ulisse e altri scritti danteschi* (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1966), 1-76. For an overview of the major interpretive engagements with Dante's Ulysses, see Anthony K. Cassell, "*Ulisseeana*: A Bibliography of Dante's Ulysses to 1981," *Italian Culture*, 3 (1981), 23-45, and more recently Massimo Seriacopi's *Ulisse all'estremo della prudentia*, which contains ample recollections of the main discussions around Ulysses, from the early commentators on Dante to the most modern. For a sharp analysis of the interpretive flaws of the chief trends in the approach to Dante's Ulysses, see Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, where the author highlights the paradoxes inherent in the positions sustained either by the "pro-Ulysseans. (Those who glorify Ulysses, like Fubini, for instance, forget the relevant fact that he is punished in Hell, whereas the "moralists" deny to Ulysses his thematic significance for the whole poem). Ulysses, Barolini says, is "privileged by the poet, not morally or eschatologically but textually and poetically" (p. 51).

The second hermeneutical node raised by the text figuring circle eight comes from the specificity of the *contrapasso*: on the bottom of this infernal area, Dante and Virgil see a great number of tongue-shaped flames which enshroud sinful souls.

Here too critics have debated the message conveyed by this form of retribution and argued that this *contrapasso* is ambiguous, less clear than other forms of punishment ascribed to other sinners.<sup>198</sup> Here, however, the *contrapasso* has served best the interpreters defending the thesis of Ulysses punished in Hell for wrongful use of the gift of speech, since there is an obvious figural correspondence between the tongue, as an anatomic organ used to utter words, and the form of the souls represented as tongues of fire.<sup>199</sup> Thus, among the early commentators, Pietro Alighieri, introduces the source that provided Dante the image of the tongue-like flames, and quotes the famous passage from the Epistle of Saint James, where the tongue is described as a dangerous fire, harboring a great destructive potential.<sup>200</sup> Pietro's discussion of the biblical source has been convincingly developed in our days by Richard Bates and Thomas Rendall, who

---

<sup>198</sup> “Il grosso dilemma nell’interpretazione di questi versi riguarda comunque i termini del contrapasso che non sono chiari, o che, perlomeno, ci lasciano la sensazione di una ‘verità nascosta’ nel profondo e non pienamente percepibile al primo contatto con il testo; si avverte la presenza di un referente arcaico—probabilmente biblico—che associa analogicamente disposizione al peccato e risposta divina a questo particolare tipo di *aversio*. (Seriacopi, op. cit., 48).

<sup>199</sup> Mazzotta makes a splendid connection between this *contrapasso* and Alain of Lille’s description of rhetoric as “ignis in ore,” in *Anticlaudianus*. [See *Dante, Poet of the Desert. History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 92]. For Boitani, too, this form of retribution figures a “tragedy of language,” (“Beyond the Sunset: Dante’s Ulysses in Another World.” *Lectura Dantis*, Fall 1991, 38), and, in the same vein, Truscott, speaks of the flames as punishing the “misuse of the gift of counsel in speech” (“Ulysses and Guido. *Inferno* XXVI-XXVII,” in *Dante Studies*, XCI (1973), 54).

<sup>200</sup> *Lingua modicum membrum est et magna exaltat, ecce quantum ignis quam magnam silvam incendat et lingua ignis est inflammans totam nativitatis nostre.* Jac. II.5-8 (‘The tongue is a tiny part of the body that accomplishes great things. Just as a very small fire ignites a very big forest, so the tongue is a fire that enflames all of our race;’ translation mine). Another possible source would be Solomon, Proverb XXXIII: *vir impius prodit malum et in labiis eius ignis ardescit* (‘an ungodly man diggeth up evil and in his lips there is a burning fire’). Throughout my dissertation, the translation of the biblical quotes follows the King James version of the Bible. For more comments on Pietro Alighieri’s interpretation of the fiery tongues in Malebolge, see Seriacopi, op. cit., 49-50.

analyze textually the Epistle and argue that James is clearly the source that served Dante in his figuration of the *contrapassso* for fraudulent counselors.<sup>201</sup>

In what follows, I undertake to examine *Inferno XXVI* and *XXVII*, with a focus on the figures of Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro, and reopen the discussion around the moral category of fraudulent counsel. This section of my dissertation is intended as a response to those critics who have maintained that Ulysses (and even Guido) are not punished by Dante for *consiglio frodolente* because there was no such moral category in the Middle Ages.<sup>202</sup> To respond to such an incorrect assertion, I will do a simple test of verification in which I will use the main medieval theorists on *pravum consilium* ('evil, wicked counsel') in the late Middle Ages, William Peraldus and Domenico Cavalca, in particular, to see if their theories apply to Dante's Ulysses and Guido, and if so, to what extent. Since it is not one of the objectives of this part of my dissertation to give a survey of the extremely varied positions within what Teodolinda Barolini has rightly called "the Ulysses *querelle*," when necessary I will invoke only those critical standpoints that are relevant to my discussion of the sin of *consiglio frodolente* in the *Inferno*.

The interpretation of fraudulent counsel as the sin punished in the eighth pouch of Malebolge starts early on, with Dante's own sons Jacopo and Pietro, both of whom argued for

---

<sup>201</sup> Bates and Rendall complain about those interpreters who ignore the link between the sin and the *contrapasso* in Ulysses' case, a link that they consider "one of the most satisfying congruencies of the *Inferno*," since: "Not only is the Greek's sin presented through his punishment, but, as in the earlier scene of the barrators, we actually witness the sinner practicing his sin, upon his men in the *orazion picciola* (XXVI, 112-120), upon the poets in the whole narration of his last voyage, and, most importantly, upon the reader, who may very well be taken in, as many critics have been, by the great orator's specious rhetoric." "Dante's Ulysses and the Epistle of James," *Dante Studies*, 108 (1989), 35.

<sup>202</sup> It is mainly Ahern who denied the existence of *consiglio frodolente* as an established moral concept: "Nor do most readers realize that there is no Christian tradition of a sin of Fraudulent Counsel" (in "Dante's Slyness," 275). This position is resumed in the *Dante Encyclopedia*: "*Fraudulent counsel* is not a recognized classification of sin in the Middle Ages and is used by Dante very specifically to describe only the evil guidance of Guido." [Richard Lansing, ed., (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000), 423].

the linguistic side of Ulysses and Guido's transgressions.<sup>203</sup> For Francesco da Buti, as well, there was no doubt that the moral category of *fraudulento consiglio* was to be applied also to Ulysses, not only to Guido da Montefeltro.<sup>204</sup> In modern times, the same is the position defended by Giorgio Padoan,<sup>205</sup> Giorgio Brugnoli,<sup>206</sup> Anna Dolfi,<sup>207</sup> Maria Corti, Bruno Porcelli, and the above-mentioned Bates and Rendall.

Since two of these scholars have made important assertions about Dante's possible connections with the medieval theorists on the sins of the tongue, I will briefly highlight their contributions, before proceeding to my analysis of the sin of the eighth pouch.

Analyzing the topos of *lingua ignea* in the ecclesiastic tradition of the Middle Ages, Maria Corti expands her discussion of Ulysses around the link between the metaphor of the fiery tongue and the medieval moral theories of speech: "Vagheggiatori di postille al tema, i commentatori vi hanno costruito la teoria dei 'peccati della lingua', due dei quali, fondendosi in uno, riguardano direttamente Ulisse a livello di fabula e di allegoria: il *consiglio fraudolento* (una delle forme del *mendacium*) e la *fraus* dei filosofi che, con la loro nefasta *garrulitas* separano la coscienza scientifica da quella religiosa; in entrambi i casi il peccatore viene definito *homo linguosus* e la sua lingua, *lingua ignea* (...) Così l'*uomo falsidicus*, che è un tipo del

---

<sup>203</sup> Jacopo Alighieri characterizes the sinners of the eighth pouch as "coloro che frodolentemente consigliano altri" [in *Chiose alla cantica dell'Inferno di Dante Alighieri scritte da Jacopo Alighieri*, G. Piccini, ed., (Florence: Bemporad, 1915), 130], and Pietro describes the sin as "consulendo et suggerendo calidissime, idest astute, alicui consilia" [in *Super Dantis ipsius genitoris Comoediam Commentarium*, V. Nannucci ed., (Florence: Garinei, 1844), 232].

<sup>204</sup> See the *Commento di Francesco da Buti sopra la Divina Commedia*, C. Giannini, ed. (Pisa: Nistri, 1858-1862, I), 673.

<sup>205</sup> See "Ulisse 'fandi factor' e le vie della Sapienza," in which Padoan calls Ulysses "persuasore frodolente." (1960, rpt. In *Il pio Enea, l'empio Ulisse* (Ravenna: Longo, 1967), 170-99.

<sup>206</sup> Brugnoli, Giorgio. "Dante Filologo: l'esempio di Ulisse." *Studi danteschi* III. (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 1998), 27, where he speaks of the "possibilità d'inganno della comunicazione verbale in fase di persuasione."

<sup>207</sup> In her argument for the sin of fraudulent counsel, Ana Dolfi considers a fraud not only the *orazion picciola* of Ulysses but also his speech to Dante and Virgil [See "Il canto di Ulisse: occasione per un discorso di esegesi dantesca," *Forum Italicum* 7-8 (1973-4), 22-45].

*linguosus*, può agire su cose materiali (i consigli fraudolenti di Ulisse nella fabula) o su spirituali (i filosofi transgressivi); nel secondo caso la *fraus* può servirsi della *mala loquacitas* (cfr. Pietro Cantore, PL 205, 197.”<sup>208</sup>

More recently, Bruno Porcelli has made an even more specific connection between the sin of *pravum consilium* treated by William Peraldus in his popular *Summa Vitiorum* and the sin of the eighth bolgia. Arguing for a greater influence of Peraldus on Dante’s selection of the sins of the tongue punished in the Inferno, Porcelli speaks of Dante’s sources for the imagery of the tongue in the following terms: “I passi sopracitati Dante li poteva trovare, insieme con altri tratti dello stesso Giacomo, in uno almeno dei tanti tratti sui peccati della lingua diffusi tra la fine del XII e il XIII secolo (...) Intendo riferirmi al *Tractatus de peccato linguae* che tiene dietro alla presentazione dei sette peccati capitali nella *Summa Vitiorum* di Peraldo, nota a Dante e da lui utilizzata nella *Commedia*, come con valide ragioni è stato da più d’uno affermato.”<sup>209</sup> Recalling previous scholars such as S. Wenzel, F. Mancini, C. Delcorno, who all have shown textual links between the *Summa Vitiorum* and the *Comedy*, Porcelli does not question at any moment Peraldus’s influence on Dante’s decision to incorporate a category like ‘fraudulent counsel’ into the moral structure of hell.

---

<sup>208</sup> Maria Corti. “Le metafore della navigazione, del volo e della lingua di fuoco nell’episodio di Ulisse (*Inferno*, XXVI),” *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Aurelio Roncaglia*. (Modena: Mucchi, 1989; 2), 489-490.

<sup>209</sup> Bruno Porcelli, “Peccatum linguae, modello mosaico, climax narrativo nel canto di Ulisse,” in *Critica letteraria*, 19, 72 (1991) 425-6. Alfred A. Triolo points as well to the category of *malum consilium*, as a sin of the tongue treated by Pseudo-Vincent of Beauvais: “The *Speculum Morale* of the pseudo-Vincent of Beauvais, a work written in Dante’s time and obviously indebted to Aquinas, strikes me as an excellent sounding board, if not necessarily a source for this and other matters in Dante.” [“Ira, Cupiditas, Libido: The Dynamics of Human Passion in the *Inferno*,” *Dante Studies* 115 (1977), 12]. Quoting the very passage in which the *Speculum morale* defines the sin of *pravum consilium*, Trioli rightly notes that this passage has never been taken into consideration in the discussion of the sin of bolgia eight. The critic also notes that the passage has at least the advantage of showing “fraudulent counseling as a sub-species of discord, indeed of the sowing of discord, which stems both from superbia and ira. Dante’s expansion of this relatively minor category can be seen in a somewhat new light.” (op. cit., 37). What Triolo fails to notes is that the sins of the tongue treated in the *Speculum Morale* are compilations after Peraldus, from whom pseudo-Vincent of Beauvais draws extensively.

Keeping in mind Corti and Porcelli's pronouncements, it is imperative to take a closer look at the historical context in which the *Divine Comedy* was produced, and see why the notion of counsel was so important for the Christians of the late Middle Ages. One of the foremost authorities in religious concepts was Alain of Lille, who in his *Liber in distinctionibus* gives us a useful medieval dictionary of spiritual terms. What is striking in his definition of *consilium* is the polysemy of the word, which had many interrelated connotations: verbal suggestion, consensus, deliberation, judgment, precept.<sup>210</sup> The ability to practice *consilium* was not a purely human skill; it was a divine gift stemming from the Holy Spirit. This idea recurs in Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, which stipulates that the rectitude of counsel belongs to the gift of counsel, which is, in turn, an exercise of the virtue of prudence (S.T. II-II, Q. 52, Art. 2). By the same token, inordinate counsel partakes of false prudence, which is associated with craftiness or cunning (*astutia*). For Aquinas, however, *astutia* was inextricably related to *dolus* (guile), the latter being considered the execution of the former (*dolus, qui est astutiae executio...*). Along these lines, the execution of craftiness (*astutia*) with the purpose of deceiving is effected, as we have seen, first and foremost by words, which are the main signs used by man to signify something to another man (S.T. II-II, Q. 55 , Art. 4). There is no disconnection, therefore, between *astutia* and fraudulent counsel, as John Ahern argues, but a clear and irrefutable link. In Aquinas's moral system, both fraud and guile belong to *astutia*; in its manifestation as *dolus* 'guile', *astutia* is executed by words.<sup>211</sup>

One of the major contributors to the medieval discussion of sinful words is, as we have seen, William Peraldus. In his tract on the vices of the tongue, Peraldus establishes twenty-four

---

<sup>210</sup> PL 210, col. 750

<sup>211</sup> In Q. 55, Art 5 entitled "Whether fraud pertains to craftiness," Aquinas asserts: "The object of fraud is to deceive. Now craftiness is directed to the same object. Therefore fraud pertains to craftiness. Just as guile consists in the execution of craftiness, so also does fraud." (S.T., II-II, vol. 3, 1418).

manifestations of evil speech, among which the *pravum consilium* occupies a central position (the twelfth vice). Rather than giving a mere abstract definition of this sin, Peraldus attempts to define *pravum consilium* through a description of the moral profile of the perpetrator of such a sin, the *pravus consiliarius*. Compared to a traitor, the evil counselor is portrayed as someone who through deceitful words betrays the confidence of the people who turn to him for advice. He is someone who fraudulently harms his friend with his speech.<sup>212</sup> Endowed with *astutia*, evil counselors are familiar with, and practitioners of, all kinds of evil. Because of this great adherence to evil, there is hardly another sin that is more dangerous to spiritual salvation than the practice of depraved counsel. Moreover, besides the personal side of the sin, *pravum consilium* has tragic consequences also for the militant Church and the body politic, endangering the unity of both.<sup>213</sup>

Peraldus's complex treatment of the moral outlook of the depraved counselor is relevant to our discussion inasmuch as several aspects underlying the sin of *pravum consilium*--fraudulence and *astutia*, in particular--are salient in the literary portrayals of Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro.

To gain an even better understanding of the fraudulent practice of evil counsel, it is worthwhile to examine another excellent source for this sin, a source not only coeval with Dante

---

<sup>212</sup> *Pravus consiliarius proditor est. Decipit enim eum qui in eo confidit; scilicet eum qui ab eo consilium petit; quod non est parvum peccatum. Unde Prov. 26, Sicut noxious est qui mittit laceas et sagittas in mortem: ita vir qui fraudulenter nocet amico suo.* (*Summa Vitiorum*: 579; ‘The evil counselor is a traitor. For he deceives the one who trusts him and turns to him for counsel; and this is no small sin. Hence, the Proverb: ‘like a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows and death’--so is the man who does harm to his friend through fraud; underlining mine).

<sup>213</sup> *Pravi consiliarii quasi omnia malum faciunt: sic tamen ut nihil mali fecisse videantur. Ipsi dant palmas in faciem Christi et in membris eius. (...) Quasi Dominus ignorare posit astutia eorum. (...) Nullum peccatum est quod magis impedit homines a salute, quam istud. Peccatum istud multum nocivum est ecclesiae Dei. Unus enim malus consiliarius destruit quandoque totam unam patriam. Illi qui astuti sunt ad dandum consilia nociva aliis, in consulando sibiipsis iusto Dei consilio fatui inveniuntur.* (op. cit.: 579-580; ‘The evil counselors do evil like any other things, but they do it in such a way as to look like they did nothing wrong. They strike Jesus’ face and his body (...) As if God could not know their ruse. There is no sin that may hinder salvation more than this one. This sin is very harmful to God’s Church, for an evil counsel may destroy an entire country at one stroke. Those who are good at giving harmful counsels to others are proven mad by God’s just design, to their betterment’).

but of Italian origin: Domenico Cavalca. Displaying an even greater adherence to the social reality of the time than Peraldus's chapter on verbal sins, *the Pungilingua* offers major developments on Peraldus's insights. Fitting into three pages in its editions from the sixteenth century, Peraldus's section on *pravum consilium*, for instance, is significantly shorter than Cavalca's, which counts twelve pages in the 1837 Bottari edition.<sup>214</sup> Representing one of the longest sections of the *Pungilingua*, the chapter dedicated to evil counsel--*Del peccato de' mali consilieri e confortatori al male*—bespeaks from the outset, through its remarkable length, the great importance the matter of evil counsel had for the Italian moralist.

Although the *Pungilingua* was apparently written shortly after the completion of the *Divine Comedy*, this tract is important to us for two reasons: the first is that, being an Italian translation of Peraldus made only a few decades after the Latin original, it gives us a clear indication of the success Peraldus's moral treatise had in Italy, in Dante's time, which increases the circumstantial likelihood that Dante was acquainted with Peraldus. Had Peraldus's chapter on the sins of the tongue not been considered a major contribution to the medieval construction of morality, we could not speak today of *Pungilingua* and probably would not have sins like fraudulent counsel or dissemination of discord in the *Divine Comedy*. The second reason why *Il Pungilingua* is important to us is that Cavalca's insights into the sin of evil counsel can help us frame and understand better why this sin was so important to Dante that he felt the need to insert it in the structure of Malebolge.

The sin of evil counsel, says Cavalca has two subspecies, depending on the cause that prompts it. It can be caused by ignorance, when the counselor, on account of his poor judgment and advising skills, gives a piece of advice that further developments will prove wrong. This

---

<sup>214</sup> *Il Pungilingua*, 180-192.

species of evil counsel is similar to the situation in which a blind man guides another blind man and both fall into a ditch.<sup>215</sup> And if the physical blindness is so debilitating for the general state of health and well-being of the body, how much greater then spiritual blindness is, exclaims Cavalca. Moral blindness leads the prelates and the clerics to give poor advice to Christians and thus to put the mystical church at risk.<sup>216</sup> And as though this evil were not great enough already, the second species of evil counsel is even greater because it is prompted by *malizia* and executed in perfect awareness and with deliberation:

Ma vie più sommamente e più pericoloso e diabolico è il peccato di quelli, i quali saputamente ed a malizia danno mali consigli, ed a male inducono e confortano. E questo peccato è grave più e più, secondo la qualità della perversa intenzione di chi consiglia, o secondo il male che ne seguita, o può seguitare.

But most of all and most dangerous and devilish is the sin of those who, knowingly and maliciously, give evil counsels, and drive and encourage people to do evil. And the gravity of this sin depends on the quality of the perverse intention of he who gives advice, and on the evil that ensues or may ensue.

It is mainly on this second type of evil counsel that Cavalca focuses his attention. Two criteria are salient in this new definition given to the sin of evil counsel, a definition which does not exist in Peraldus but is Cavalca's original contribution: malice as a cause of evil counsel and

---

<sup>215</sup> Although it is caused by ignorance, not by malice, this species of “male consigliare” is also a sin, because the bad counselors are motivated by material profit and forget that one of the precepts of morality is that one should not engage in a profession if he is not well prepared or qualified for it. On this occasion, Cavalca speaks of the negligence of those who, in need of advice, do not search for the best counselor, but are satisfied with any kind of counselor who crosses their way. Having a good advisor is paramount, for the advisor is like a physician of the soul; just like the good physician helps the sick heal with his medical advice, so the good counselor gives Christians the best advice for their spiritual health. Along these lines, if a sick man tries hard to find the best physician for his bodily condition, it is all the more important to find the best counselors for problems of the soul.

<sup>216</sup> *Che se veggiamo che la cecità degli occhi corporali è in pericolo ed in pregiudizio di tutto il corpo, sicchè spesso incappa e cade; molto più dobbiamo credere che la cecità degli occhi spirituali, cioè de' sacerdoti, o prelati e cherici, è in grande danno e pericolo di tutto il corpo mistico della chiesa.* ('For if we see that the blindness of the bodily eyes is dangerous and jeopardizes all the body, so that this one trips and falls, even more we have to believe that the blindness of the spiritual eyes, that is the say, of the sacerdotes, the prelates and clerics is dangerous and harms the entire mystical body of the Church', op. cit., 181).

the criterion of the consequence. Either the perverse intention that underlies counsel or the dire consequences that may derive from an instance of counsel helps the moralist—or the Christians—identify a counsel as evil. We will retrieve both of these aspects in Dante’s text.

The speech of the evil counselor is fraudulent—a *parlare fraudolentemente* (p. 183)–, that has diabolic roots, because just like the devil, the perverse counselor makes evil pass as good: *sotto spezie di bene e di cosa lecita, a male induce e consiglia* (p. 182; ‘under the guise of a good and licit thing, they induce to, and counsel, evil’). The terms Cavalca uses to describe this deceit that takes place in/through language are strikingly similar to Dante’s description of Geryon as a symbol of fraud: the monster has the face of a just judge, but the second part of his body is that of a dragon. Taking up Dante’s imagery and transferring it to speech, we could label the verbal activity of the fraudulent counselors as Geryonic: their words bear the appearance of righteousness, whereas the essence of their speech is made of pure evil.

The suggestion of an advisor motivated by an evil intention is an unjust counsel—*iniquo consiglio* (p. 183)—that eventually turns against the perpetrator himself. Thus, most often, the deceiver falls into the trap set by his fraudulent suggestions. The divine justice alters the vicious counsels and very often ridicules the *astutia* of the evil counselors by changing the course of events and reestablishing equity.<sup>217</sup> Among the many examples of this sort, Cavalca gives one

---

<sup>217</sup> *Comprende Iddio i savi colle loro astuzie, e dissipata, e perverte i loro consigli, sicchè non gli possano reducere ad effetto. (...) Sono alquanti enfiati d’umana stoltizia e sapienza che vedendo che Iddio co’ suoi giudici impedisce i suoi mali desideri, s’assottigliano con astuti consigli e pensano di contrastare al consiglio ed alla disposizione di Dio. Ma per mirabile modo Dio sapientissimo gli conchiude sì, e comprende che al tutto per quella astuzia e per quella via, e per quello ingegno e consiglio, col quale credevano contrastare a Dio, si fanno venire fornito il consiglio divino, sicchè appunto serve alla disposizione di Dio, ciò che per l’umana astuzia gli contraddice.*” (op. cit., 183-184; ‘Gods understands the smart men with their craftiness, and dissipates and distorts their advices so that they cannot be accomplished (...) Full of human stupidity and cunning are those who, seeing that God with His judgments, prevents they evil desires, want to be subtle with cunning advice and think of holding up against the counsel and disposition of God. But God the wisest, in a miraculous way, sees in them and understands them so well that specifically through that craftiness and way, cleverness and advice, with which they thought they could hold up against God, the divine counsel is carried out, in such a way that the human craftiness that contradicts God, in fact serves His disposition.’).

that illustrates best the providential changing of evil counsel against the intention of the counselor: the Pharisees and leaders of the Jews advised the slaying of Christ, in order to prevent people from believing in him, but by having him killed the exact opposite of their wicked desire occurred: people started worshipping Christ, and the new faith spread from Judea into the Roman world.<sup>218</sup>

For Cavalca, the biblical archetype of the evil counselor is the serpent, who, in the Garden of Eden, advised Adam and Eve to taste from the forbidden fruit, inducing them into the original sin. The fall of humankind from its Edenic state into sinfulness is thus the result of an astute counselor who with skillful words prompted two human souls to break a divine interdiction, to trespass the sign (*trapassar il segno*, are the words Dante used to describe the same event in the *Paradiso*). Those counselors, who, like snakes, use their words to induce other people into evil, betray in fact those who trust them.<sup>219</sup> It is therefore imperative for every one to take good care in choosing one's counselors because of the virtual betrayal that hides underneath friendly counseling: *molto si debbe l'uomo guardare d'avere mali consiglieri e procurare d'aver gli buoni* (p. 189; ‘man has to take great care to shun evil counselors and try to have good ones’). The same imperative is uppermost in Dante’s mind when, in *Convivio*, he analyzes the political consequences of the words of counselors and draws attention to the risk the leaders of the world incur when they choose dishonest advisors: *e dico a voi, Carlo e Federigo regi, e a voi*

---

<sup>218</sup> More than ten biblical stories (from both the Old and New Testaments) are told by the moralist as *exempla* of wicked counsel, all to illustrate the catastrophic repercussions of perverse suggestions. At the end of these stories, he concludes: *Or così potremmo contare molte istorie, per le quali si conchiude, e mostra che molti mali e guerre, e grandi ingiustizie sono fatte per gli consigli ed impronti* (p. 188; ‘And so we could tell many stories, by means of which we deduce and show that many evils and great injustices are done by means of advices and promptings’).

<sup>219</sup> *Questi dunque tali consiglieri sono traditori in ciò che ingannano chi si fida di loro semplicemente.* (p. 182; ‘So these counselors are traitors, in that they deceive those who trust them in good faith’).

*altri principi e tiranni; e guardate chi a lato vi siede per consiglio, e annumerate quante volte lo die questo fine de l'umana vita per li vostri consiglieri c'è additato.* <sup>220</sup>

For Cavalca, the only perfect *counselor* is Christ: he is the only one who does not betray, and who in his great wisdom and charity cannot err in his advice.<sup>221</sup> As to the degree of gravity of this sin, according to Cavalca, there seems to be no other sin more dangerous for one's soul and for the social harmony and peace than evil counsel. We remember this notion from Peraldus, but there this idea was mentioned in passing, whereas in Cavalaca it is amply developed and reiterated throughout the chapter:

E dico, che singolarmente questo peccato si grava per gli mali di colpa e di pena che ne seguita; che tutto di per continua esperienza veggiamo; che uno male consigliere più guasta e dannifica in uno punto che non racconcia e non edifica tutto il tempo della vita sua in ciò che, consigliando ed ordinando una guerra, n'escono danni e guasti ed omicidi, e danni tanti e mali tanti e di colpa e di pena. (...). Sicché chi ben guata, nessun peccato è, che tanto impedisca la salute dell'uomo, quanto questo, per lo molto danno e male che ne procede, del quale tutto è tenuto a restituzione chi consigliò ed ordinò; senza la quale nessuno assolvere lo può, se egli è in istato che restituire possa. Ma pognamo che non possa, rade volte avviene che questi consiglieri di guerra bene si pentino e bene finiscano. (p.186) <sup>222</sup>

---

<sup>220</sup> Convivio IV.VI, 242 .

<sup>221</sup> Come dunque dice l'Ecclesiastico, molto si debbe l'uomo guardare d'avere mali consiglieri e procurare d'avergli buoni. E però dice: Abbi molti amici, e fra mille ne scegli uno per consigliere. E questo uno per verità dovrebbe essere Cristo solo, perochè lui solo vede e conosce il meglio, ed è fedele che non inganna. (p. 189; ' So, as the Ecclesiastic puts it, man must shun the evil counselors, and try to have good ones. For he says: have many friends, and among thousand choose one as a counselor. And this one, in truth, should be Christ alone, for he is the only one who sees and knows best, and he is faithful and does not deceive. '). This remark gives Cavalca the opportunity to deplore the moral decay of those who do not pay heed to Christ's counsels (related to poverty, chastity, humility), but shun these teachings as if they were bad.

<sup>222</sup> Cavalca's words bear a strange resemblance to Pietro Alighieri's comment on the dire repercussions of an instance of wicked counsel, a comment made within the discussion of the sin of the eighth *bolgia*: just as one spark can destroy a city by provoking a big fire, so can one word, one piece of advice: *sicut ex una favilla potest destrui tota civitas incendio, ita uno verbo et uno consilio.* (*Super Dantis*, 232; 'just as a spark can destroy an entire city, in the same way can do so a word and a piece of advice').

And I say that the gravity of this sin may be gleaned from the evils of guilt and punishment that ensue and which we see every day by ongoing experience; that an evil counselor does more damage and harm at one moment than he can mend and build in all of his life, since, by recommending and ordering war, there follow so many harms and damages and murders, and many harms and so many evils of guilt and punishment. So that, if we consider things well, there is no other sin that hinders the man's salvation than this one, because of the harms that follow for which he who gave advised and ordered war is called to restitution, if he is able to restitute, without which restitution no one can absolve him. Supposing that he cannot (restitute), it rarely happens that these war counselors repent well and end up well.

These are prophetic words that we will find exemplified in the stories of Ulysses and Guido in the *Inferno*. Cavalca describes in great detail the economic and social disasters that can ensue evil counsel. When a perverse piece of advice leads to war, many men, because they lose their property, become thieves or get ill; women, by losing their families, become whores, and all this collective sinfulness attracts the divine anger and further terrible punishments. All because of one counselor of war, because of just one counsel of war...

In conclusion, there is no man in the world who does not need a good piece of advice on matters of life, and those who assume the function of counseling others assume a great responsibility. By the same token, if they are bad counselors with poor judgment, they fail like a blind man leading the blind; if they are bad counselors by malice, they distort a Christic function and lose their souls.

Cavalca's treatment of *male consigliare* as a form of fraudulent speech rooted in malice applies in privileged ways to the narratives of the eighth pouch of Malebolge. In Dante's system of Hell, *malizia* is the third disposition toward evil and is punished in Malebolge; fraudulent counsel is located in the eighth pouch of Malebolge as a sin of malice. In order to highlight more aspects of this moral category in the text of the *Inferno*, I will now examine Dante's encounters with the mythic hero Ulysses and with the Italian condottiere Guido da Montefeltro, both represented as flames on the bottom of the eighth circle of Malebolge.

What is particular about Ulysses' soul is that it is entwined in death with Diomedes, his companion from the Trojan war. Whereas every other soul inhabiting this pouch is enveloped by an individual flame, the souls of these two legendary heroes share the same, bi-forked flame. The only difference between them is that the horn representing Ulysses is bigger than the one that hides Diomedes.

The reasons for the two Greeks' presence in this pouch are three, explains Virgil to the pilgrim: the ambush of the horse, the art that caused Deïdamia's pain at the loss of Achilles, and the story of the Palladium.

Là dentro si martira/Ulisce e Diomede, e così insieme/a la vendetta vanno  
come a l'ira;/e dentro da la lor fiamma si geme/l'aggauato del caval che fē  
la porta/onde uscì de'i Romani il gentil seme./Piangevisi entro l'arte per  
che, morta,/ Deïdamia ancor si duol d'Achille,/e del Palladio pena vi si  
porta. (55-60)

There within are punished Ulysses and Diomedes; thus together they go to/punishment as they went to anger./ And within their flame they bemoan the deceit of/the horse that made the gate to send forth the/ Romans' noble seed;/there within they weep for the art that makes/Deidamia, though dead, still grieve for Achilles; and/there they bear the punishment for the Palladium.

Evidence gathered by most modern critics argues that all three crimes involve, more or less manifestly, deceitful rhetorical techniques related to Ulysses.<sup>223</sup> Sinon, thanks to whose lies the Trojans accept the horse into their city, is instructed by Ulysses on how to speak and what to say.<sup>224</sup> The Trojan horse is a fraud and the way it is introduced into Troy is itself based on verbal fraud and manipulation. Furthermore, Cavalca's criterion for the identification of a counsel as

---

<sup>223</sup> According to Truscott, the trap of the Trojan horse is based on an "implicit suggestion of false promise." James C. Truscott, "Ulysses and Guido. *Inferno XXVI-XXVII.*" *Dante Studies*, XCI (1973), 62].

<sup>224</sup> Truscott qualifies Sinon's speech to the Trojans as "eloquence commanded by Ulysses," (op. cit., 63), whereas Brugnoli calls Sinon "l' agente di Ulisse", (op. cit., 25).

evil (criterion concerning the consequences that derive from that counsel) applies in privileged ways to the story of the horse. The destruction of the city that followed the success of Ulysses' setting up the trap of the Trojan horse amply demonstrates, if it is still necessary, that Sinon's advice to the Trojans to accept the horse, a counsel commanded by Ulysses, was a malicious one. In the case of the second crime as well, we deal with a fraudulent form of persuasion, with verbal suggestions that bear the appearance of truth but hide the ugly face of lies. Ulysses lures Achilles into joining him in the war against Troy with skillful words depicting the bright side of the war: personal military fame. What war really entails, the hideous, fatal side of it, is not mentioned by Ulysses. The criterion of the consequence applies once again: Achilles will die in the war, triggering the great pain of Deïdamia, his wife, whose name is mentioned by Dante's text in relation to Ulysses. It seems that every time Ulysses opens his mouth people around him die or suffer.

As to the third crime mentioned by the text--the one related to the Palladium--David Thompson points out that: one, Dante's text does not mention the word theft, and two, according to the legend, not Ulysses is the real author of the theft, but the giant Antenor. It is therefore highly likely that even in this mythic episode Dante saw an indication of malicious counsel.<sup>225</sup>

Thus, all three sins indicated by Virgil in relation to Ulysses and Diomedes seem to involve verbal suggestions with a main tragic consequence: the destruction of Trojan civilization. But God alters the human counsels, said Cavalca, and turns the tragedy into the seed of a new

---

<sup>225</sup> "What Ulysses and Diomedes did, presumably was to counsel Antenor in connection with his fraudulent activities (treason being, after all, one of the ultimate forms of fraud). We do not find anything as explicit as Guido's advice to Boniface, but given this whole series of negotiations between Antenor and the two Greeks, it would not have been too wild to surmise on Dante's part if he had concluded that Ulysses and Diomedes were guilty of 'consiglio frodolente' in this as in their other exploits." [“A Note on Fraudulent Counsel,” in *Dante Studies* 92 (1974), 151]. As regards the real author of the text, Thompson relies on an Italian source contemporary with Dante: Guido delle Colonne, who in *Historia destructionis Troiae* maintains that, although Ulysses was eventually accused of stealing the Palladium, it is Antenor who actually did it. As we know, Antenor is the giant who gives Dante the name for one of the zones of Cocito, the circle of traitors.

prosperity. There is a divine counsel--here, in the sense of judgment and decision--that alters and corrects the wicked human counsels--here, in the sense of verbal suggestions--, and we see this correction at work in the Ulysses episode. Ulysses and Diomedes' judgments and suggestions were all turned toward the annihilation of the Trojan nation, but divine providence intervened and changed the disaster into the birth of a new people: the Romans. This is Dante's interpretation of the mythical and historical events: the ambush of the horse--*l'aggauato del caval*--opened the door through which the noble seed of the Romans sprang: *fè la porta/onde uscì de 'i Romani il gentil seme.*

In the story of Ulysses' end, Dante changes some fundamental data to the point that his Ulysses emerges from the text completely transfigured. The most important change the poet effects concerns the circumstances of his death. Instead of ending peacefully, after twenty years of wanderings, in his country, next to his faithful family, Ulysses abandons everything and sets out on new adventures. Despite his old age, he is animated by one main desire: expertise of the world, and not just in a geographical sense, but also in a moral one; he wishes to become expert in human vices and worth:

(...) né dolcezza di figlio, né la pietà/del vecchio padre, né'l debito amore/lo qual dovea Penelopè far lieta,/vincer potero dentro a me l'ardore/ch'i'ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto/e de li vizi umani e del valore. (94-99)

(...) neither the sweetness of a son, nor compassion for/my old father, nor the love owed to Penelope, which/should have made her glad/could conquer within me the ardor that I had to/gain experience of the world and of human vices and worth.

Another major element in Dante's reworking of the myth is the way Ulysses enlists the support of his crew for his adventurous projects: he talks to them. The reproduction of this

speech is made in Hell by Ulysses himself, who recounts to Virgil with what words he convinced his men to follow him:

“O frati”, dissi, “che per cento milia/perigli siete giunti a l’occidente,/a questa tanto picciola vigilia/d’i nostri sensi ch’è del rimanente/non vogliate negar l’esperienza,/di retro al sol, del mondo senza gente./Considerate la vosta semenza:/fatti non foste a viver come bruti,/ma per seguire virtute e canoscenza.’ (112-120)

‘O brothers,’ I said, ‘who through a hundred/thousand perils have reached the west, to this so/brief vigil/of our senses that remains, do not deny the/experience, following the sun, of the world without/people. Consider your sowing, you were not made to live/like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge.

Ulysses’ handling of the ethical vocabulary already projects a shadow over the moral quality of his speech: there is a tension between the notions *vices* and *virtue* that he withholds from his crew. He reserves for himself the expertise in vices, whereas to his men he speaks only about virtue and knowledge.<sup>226</sup> The wish to be an expert in vices is itself intriguing, for in what other way can one be an *esperto* other than experiencing these vices, than running the whole gamut of them? The tradition of Ulysses *hortatur scelerum* on which Dante relies excludes the option of the Greek’s gaining expertise in vices only by... watching them in others.<sup>227</sup> Ulysses’ desire to become a specialist/connoisseur in *li vizi umani* is one of the most interesting things he

---

<sup>226</sup> Paradoxically, this contrast has eluded Patrick Boyde, who has dedicated to Ulysses a chapter in his book about human vices and human worth in the *Commedia. Human Vices and Human Worth in Dante’s “Comedy”* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge UP, 2000).

<sup>227</sup> As to the sources for Dante’s story of Ulysses, critics have indicated two main texts: Virgil’s *Aeneid*, where the spare references to Ulysses are mainly negative, and Statius’ *Achileid*, “where Ulysses is truly seen in action and which shows the spell-binding effect of his words.” [Mark Musa, “Virgil’s Ulysses and Ulysses’ Diomedes.” *Dante Studies* XCVI (1978), 188]. Brugnoli finds in *Achileid*. *I* the most significant of Ulysses’ fraudulent discourses, most of which addressed to people of good faith who trust him: the good king Licomedes and the young Achilles (op. cit., 27-38). It is in this part of *Achileid* that Ulysses is described as “sleepless in counsel and deeds of arms” (1.472), Susan Hagedorn also points out. Hagerdon also notes that: “Statius makes fraud a major theme of the *Achileid* (...); the poem presents Ulysses in the same unflattering light that Virgil and Ovid do, with a special emphasis on the rhetorical skill of the Greek hero.” [“Statius’s Achilleid and Dante’s Canto of Ulysses. Fraud, Rhetoric and Abandoned Women,” in *Abandoned Women: Rewriting the Classics in Dante, Boccaccio and Chaucer*, (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 2004), 47-74].

says about himself. Other than Dante himself who, at the end of his poetic journey through the three realms, will be the *Commedia*'s true expert in vices and virtues, there is only one other being who can lay claim to expertise in sins, in the *Inferno*: this is Minos, the monster who judges the newly arrived souls in Hell and who, with the flickering of a tail, sends the souls to specific infernal areas.<sup>228</sup> Ulysses' design and wish to become an expert in human sinfulness, far from being a noble ideal, tarnishes him and dooms him to hell. Moreover, as I have noted, he likely wants to keep this type of expertise for himself as an asset in case he needs to practice these vices for self-serving purposes. The fact that he does not propose the same type of expertise to his men may be interpreted as a protective measure; he does not want his men to be expert in vices as well, because he does not want them to be able to recognize these vices in him, their leader, the one who has control over their lives.<sup>229</sup>

Before proceeding to an examination of the *orazion picciola* from the viewpoint of Cavalca's theory of evil counsel, it is worth drawing a brief history of the interpretations given to this segment of the canto, since Ulysses' speech to his aging crew represents one of the pillars of the controversy around Ulysses. Seriacopi points out that early commentators did not consider this discourse a trap; only modern interpreters have done so. Seriacopi himself, in the wake of Forti, considers that Ulysses' *orazion* is free from any sign of deceit, despite the hero's blatant

---

<sup>228</sup> quando l'anima mal nata/li vien dinanzi, tutta si confessa;/e quel conoscitor de le peccata/vede qual loco d'inferno è da essa;/cignesi con la coda tante volte/quantunque gradi vuol che giù sia messa. (*Inf.* V. 7-12; ‘when the ill-born soul comes before/ him, it confesses all; and that connoisseur of sin/ sees which is its place in Hell; he girds himself/ with his tail as many times as the levels he wills the/soul to be sent down.’).

<sup>229</sup> In this light, I cannot agree with Mario Trovato, who considers vv. 90-105 as representing the “momento giulivo della conversione di Ulisse alla sapienza; distacco non solo dal mondo del peccato, ma degli affetti più puri” (“Il contrappasso nell’ottava *Bolgia*,” p. 49). There is not enough evidence in the text to support a moral conversion of Ulysses; there is indeed a detachment from family life and love of country, but the idea of expertise in vices undermines Trovato’s claim that Ulysses also detached himself from the world of the sin.

persuasive qualities.<sup>230</sup> The prevalent opinion among modern critics is, however, that the *orazion* is a fraud. Giorgio Padoan interprets it as a new, textual instance, of fraudulent counsel.<sup>231</sup> Pézard, Bates and Rendal all concur with this argument.<sup>232</sup> Freccero notes that “the essential characteristic of the *orazion* is that it is completely self-serving,” a trait that identifies the orator as corrupt. Mazzotta sharply notes Ulysses’ confusion between powerful eloquence and ethics: the former substitutes for the latter.<sup>233</sup>

It is true that, as Maria Corti has pointed out, the language of radical, lay Aristotelism with which Ulysses’ *orazion* is imbued figures the character as one of the wise of the world, the *sapientes mundi*.<sup>234</sup> But again, Dante’s own definition of wisdom, as opposed to cunning, helps us read Ulysses not as *homo sapiens*, but as a guileful person: *Sì come dice lo Filosofo nel sesto de la Etica*, “impossibile è essere savio chi non è buono’, e pero non è da dire savio uomo chi con sottratti e con inganni procede, ma è da chiamare astuto. (‘For as the Philosopher says in the sixth book of the Ethics, *It is impossible for a man to be wise without being good*, and therefore one who proceeds with subterfuge and deceit is not to be called wise but astute.’).<sup>235</sup> Many critics have used this passage from *Convivio* to establish that Dante’s Ulysses, despite the lofty ideals expressed by the *orazion picciola*, is not a noble character, but a trickster.

---

<sup>230</sup> Starting from the remark that in Ulysses’ *orazion* “non mancano certo le capacità di suasione, a chi dell’uso accortissimo, intelligente e raffinato della parola ha fatto un modus vivendi, come testimoniano tutte le fonti classiche consociute da Dante,” Seriacopi concludes: “Dunque la fraudolenza non è insita nella nobile orazione di Ulisse.” (op. cit., 84-91).

<sup>231</sup> Padoan: “L’orazione di Ulisse, nonostante che muova da un innegabile desiderio di perfezionamento dell’umana natura, è in definitiva un consiglio fraudolento, come benissimo avverte il Buti, proprio perché apparentemente è l’esaltazione degli ideali più giusti.” (“Ulisce ‘fandi fector’,” 87).

<sup>232</sup> André Pézard considers the *orazion* a deceiving counsel (“Le Mythe d’Ulysse chez Dante,” in *Annuaire du Collège de France: résumé des cours de 1952*, pp. 271-75, de 1953, pp. 271-77 et de 1954, pp. 306-310).

<sup>233</sup> “As Ulysses quotes Cicero to justify the higher moral imperative of the journey, he contrives ethical fictions. Far from being an ethical quest, or the case of rhetoric supported by ethics, rhetoric appears without foundation and is itself the ground of choices given as ethics.” (*Dante, Poet of the Desert*, 81)

<sup>234</sup> Corti, op. cit., 488.

<sup>235</sup> *Convivio*, IV.XXVII, 324.

According to Mazzotta's fine analysis, the *orazion* "means something other than what it says."<sup>236</sup> Padoan memorably underlines the contrast between Ulysses' overall moral profile and the sudden nobility of his ideals: "*Sic notus Ulixes?* Così conosciamo dunque Ulisse? L'*hortatur scelerum*, il *fandi factor*, l'antagonista di Enea, il malo consigliere, direbbe ora le verità più sublimi? (...) Alle parole di un Greco non è da prestar fiducia (...): presteremo fiducia a quelle di Ulisse, quando Sapiamo che dietro il suo discorso può celarsi il sorriso dolcissimo di Gerione?"<sup>237</sup>

Although all these critics consider Ulysses' "little speech" a form of linguistic fraudulence, none of them took the time to actually confront the *orazion* with the medieval theories of *pravum consilium* and see the results. A basic application of Cavalca's criteria for the identification of an instance of malicious counsel reveals that the *orazion* is, indeed, such an instance. Cavalca defines the notion of *consiglio* as *una esaminata ragione d'alcuna cosa fare, o non fare* (1837, p. 190). Four factors have to be taken into account when giving a piece of advice: one, what is expedient and useful; two, what is easy; three, what is certain; and four, what is safe. By the same token, in order for one to give good counsel, one has to suggest and choose the useful and necessary thing over the non-useful, the easy over the difficult, the certain over the uncertain and, finally, the safe over the dangerous.<sup>238</sup> None of these requisites for good counsel is observed by Ulysses in the address to his crew: the new adventures Ulysses asks his

---

<sup>236</sup> op.cit., 103.

<sup>237</sup> "Ulisce 'fandi factor,'" 186-7.

<sup>238</sup> "Anco conciossiacosachè consiglio sia, e così si definisce, una esaminata ragione d'alcuna fare, o non fare; quattro cose in ciò si debbono considerare; cioè quello che è spedito ed utile, quello che è leggieri, quello che è certo, e quello che è sicuro. E così i contrari; cioè, che sempre si debbe proponere, e preeleggere *la cosa utile e necessaria alla non utile; la leggiere alla difficile; la certa alla incerta; la sicura alla pericolosa* (p. 190; 'Then a counsel is, and may be defined as, a well thought-out reason of doing or not doing something; herein, four things must be considered, that is, what is expedient and useful, what is easy, what is certain, and what is safe. And in the same way the opposites; that is to say, that one must always propose and prefer the useful and necessary thing to the useless; the easy to the difficult; the certain to the uncertain; the safe to the dangerous.').

companions to accompany him in are neither useful, nor necessary to them, but—at the most--for himself. The new enterprise is not easy, since it requires the exploration of land hitherto uncharted and inhabited by people, whence the dangers of such a project: the sailors do not know what awaits them beyond the pillars of Hercules. These pillars are markers beyond which no living man had ever ventured, and Dante scholars have interpreted them as signs of a divine interdiction. Like the evil-counselor serpent in the biblical story told by Cavalca, Ulysses makes his companions transgress this interdiction—a new *trapassar del segno*, of which he is the unique counselor. The result of all this: collective death.

Ulysses' speech to his men has, therefore, a Geryonic aspect, insofar as his high-flown rhetoric not only manipulates and promises something it cannot offer, but also insofar as, let us not forget, the character is punished in Dante's Hell in the “post-Geryon world,” to take up Barolini's formula. Disconnected from the context of the Malebolge, Ulysses' *orazion* could have convinced readers of its truthfulness, but the fact that the *orazion* is textually inserted in, and framed by, the infernal area of fraud undermines its claims to sincerity and nobility. And there is one more thing to consider in the text of *Inferno XXVI*, a clue that comes right after the “reproduction” of the *orazion*. Critics have noted the detachment and the note of pride with which Ulysses describes to Virgil the powerful effect of his words on his crew.<sup>239</sup> It is the passage that introduces the label “little speech” which Ulysses applies to the persuasive argument he addressed to his sailors:

---

<sup>239</sup> S. Botterill notes the “scathingly ironic image of Ulysses” congratulating himself. (“Dante’s Poetics of the Sacred Word,” 158).

Li miei compagni fec'io sì aguti,/con questa orazion picciola, al cammino,/che a pena poscia li avrei ritenuti.” (121-123)<sup>240</sup>

My companions I made so sharp for the voyage,/with this little oration, that after it I could hardly/have held them back.

The adjective *picciola* that Ulysses chooses (or rather that Dante has Ulysses choose) in a moment of great awareness of his verbal power is emblematic for Ulysses’ relation to speech. What the character conveys through this lexical choice is that, on account of his extraordinary oral abilities, he did not even have to make such a great effort of persuasion. He was so good at the “art” (the same “art” that made Deïdamia lose her husband, the same “art” for which Virgil says Ulysses is punished in hell) that a few words were enough to drive his audience crazy and capable of anything. Ulysses’ mention of the effect of his words confirms our sense that the *orazion* was not a spontaneous and genuine outpouring of emotions, but an artifact. Ulysses is in fact congratulating himself for a good job; his self-satisfaction is the feeling of pride of the *artifex* who contently evaluates the product of his creative work.

Mazzotta points out that the weakness of rhetoric is that it promises something, the fulfillment of which depends on extra-discursive conjunctures.<sup>241</sup> Along these lines, the end Dante reserves for Ulysses and his crew highlights the emptiness and the speciousness of Ulysses’ *orazion*. The words of the “little speech” fall into the same category as Jason’s: they seduce because they promise, but eventually give nothing in exchange. Like Jason’s, Ulysses’ words, too, are merely *parole ornate* that deceive through their Geryonic beauty. Ulysses’ speech is a Geryonic speech, insofar as his dual rhetoric seduces but ultimately leads to disaster: the

---

<sup>240</sup> Susan Hagerdon thinks this text might have been inspired by Ulysses’ speech to Achilles, in the *Achileid*. There too, the Greek hero “congratulates himself on his ability to play with Achilles’ emotions.” (op. cit., 67).

<sup>241</sup> “By making virtue a purpose of rhetoric, Dante lays open the intrinsic error of rhetorical language: virtue is contained within the rhetorical statement, but its fulfillment lies outside of the statement.” (op. cit., 83).

shipwreck that marks the death of the sailors invalidates the nobility to which the *orazion* lays claim. Thus, although I do acknowledge the nimble-wittedness of Ulysses, my sense is that we have to focus not on the intellectual but on the moral type Dante proposes through Ulysses. The classical nobility conveyed by Ulysses' *orazion* is what Ulysses could have represented if he had really converted his expertise in vices into virtue(s). But Ulysses' oral agenda in the *orazion* is different from his actual deeds. And then, let us recall that he is not among the *spiriti magni* in Limbo, nor in Purgatorio. He is punished in hell in the spiritual area of fraud.<sup>242</sup>

A companion of Ulysses in Dante's underworld, in the sense that they share the same location and the same punishment, is Guido da Montefeltro, an important political leader in Dante's time.<sup>243</sup> Famous for his political cunning, Guido was a public figure, whose movements and gestures could have hardly escaped popular attention. One of his publicly known gestures was his conversion to Franciscanism, a conversion that occurred in his later years. In *Convivio*, Guido appears in a favorable light particularly because of this religious gesture.<sup>244</sup> This favorable light has been partly preserved in the *Commedia*, where Guido's intervention is realized through

---

<sup>242</sup> As to Ulysses' relationship with the author of the *Comedy*, excellent studies have been written over the years by Jurij Lotman, John Freccero, Giuseppe Mazzotta, Teodolinda Barolini, and others. Repeating their theories about the (non) identity Ulysses-Dante would be, as Barolini justly points out, repeating what is by now "critical dogma." I will only quote the latter, who analyzes the Ulysses theme in rapport with Dante's writerly undertaking and reaches the conclusion that: "Ulysses reflects Dante's conscious concern for himself. " He is "the lightning rod Dante places in his poem to attract and defuse his own consciousness of the presumption involved in anointing oneself God's scribe." (*The Undivine Comedy*, 52).

<sup>243</sup> Noting the pilgrim's simultaneous sensory perception of Ulysses and Guido, Truscott insists on the moral affinity between the two characters, an affinity achieved by subtle poetic means: "(...) it is as though the explicit pairing of Ulysses and Diomedes, reinforced by the comparison to Eteocles and Polynices, is fulfilled by Guido's voice, not Diomedes's: it is as though Guido takes Diomedes's place as a companion in criminal deeds. This poetic stratagem serves to accentuate the structural pairing of Ulysses and Guido which was already suggested by Dante's description of his own divided attention and also reinforces the notion that Ulysses and Guido are as much alike in their acts, words and eternal punishments, as were Ulysses and Diomedes, as equally paired structurally as Eteocles and Polynices in their flame." (op. cit., 60)

<sup>244</sup> *Bene questi nobili [lo cavaliere Lancelotto e lo nobilissimo nostro latino Guido montefeltrano] ... ne la loro lunga etade a religione si rendero, ogni mondano diletto e opera diponendo.* *Convivio* IV.XXVIII, p. 330; 'These noble men [the knight Lancelot and the most noble of the Italians, Guido da Montefeltro] late in life gave themselves to religious orders, forsaking all worldly delights and affairs.' Critics point out that at the time when *Convivio* was written, news about Guido's last fraudulent action had not yet spread.

the medium of courteous speech. The soul reverently asks the travelers to give him news about Romagna, his native land. What he is interested in is not the faith of his personal relatives, but if the country was at war or not. Like his reverent speech, this noble concern for the good of the earthly community to which he belonged projects Guido as an almost positive figure. Prompted by Virgil, Dante gives Guido disturbing news about the socio-political situation of the Italian city, torn apart by war, *mal governo* and *tirannia*.<sup>245</sup> Against the dark background of this ethical-political denunciation made by the pilgrim, Guido introduces himself as an internationally renowned politician, whose works had been those of a fox, not of a lion:

(...) l'opere mie/non furon leonine, ma di volpe./Li accorgimenti e le coperte vie/io seppi tutte, e sì menai lor arte,/ch'al fine de la terra il suono uscie.”(Inf. XXVII, 75-78)

(...) my works were not those of a lion but of fox./ The tricks and the hidden ways, I knew them all/and I so plied their art that the fame of it went out to the ends of the earth.

As far as the phrase *di volpe* is concerned, a great deal of light is shed on its meaning by Alain of Lille's dictionary, where the word *vulpes* ('fox') designates, among others, fraudulent people: “Dicuntur etiam homines fraudulenti, qui in fraudibus suis delectantur quas absciderunt in corde (...)” (*Liber*, PL. 210, col. 1011B). A professional of moral and political duplicity, Guido was well aware of the spiritual consequences of his methods; therefore, he says, when he grew old, he had a moment of *metanoia* (*ciò che pria mi piacēa, allor m'increbbe*) and took shelter in the religious life. His new status as penitent was, however, interrupted by a last temptation: pope Boniface VIII, unable to conquer the city of Palestrina, appealed to him for advice. In exchange, *il gran prete*--for whom now, in Hell, Guido reserves the harshest words--

---

<sup>245</sup> Freccero interprets Virgil's scornful refusal to speak with Guido as a “commentary on false counselors in Dante's world.” (*The Poetics of Conversion*, 143).

offered the counselor the promise of absolution. The terms of negotiations between the two reveal the awareness both men had of what was ultimately at stake: eternal salvation. First, the nature of the promise Boniface made to Guido indicates that the pope was well aware that what he was asking from his counselor was not something good, but an encouragement to evil, a *confortare al male*, as Cavalca would have put it. History tells us that, very often, political leaders (and it is well known that Boniface was a pope with strong political ambitions) had religious counselors for their spiritual concerns. But here, although he speaks of absolution, Boniface does not come to Guido for spiritual matters, but for worldly ones. It is the earthly shepherd, the one who is supposed to be the supreme spiritual guide, the cleanest of counselors, who comes in all awareness to ask for an iniquitous counsel. It is a Jack-of-all-trades kind of politician who comes to another reputedly malicious politician to ask for a suggestion they both know cannot be good.<sup>246</sup> For both men, religiosity and sacred concepts are just masks that fall off when greed or deeply ingrained corrupt ways are activated. The way in which in Hell the former political advisor now turned a friar describes the pope's mental state is remarkably similar to Cavalca's lexicon of counseling as healing:

Ma come Costantin chiese Silvestro/d'entro Siratti a guerir de la lebbre,/così mi chiese questi per maestro/a guerir de la sua superba febbre;/domandommi consiglio, e io tacetti/perché le sue parole parver ebbre. (XXVII. 94-99)

But, as Constantine asked Sylvester to/ cure him of leprosy, so he asked me to teach him/ to recover from his proud fever; he asked my/ advice, and I was silent, for his words seemed/ drunken.

---

<sup>246</sup> Trovato synthesized admirably the meaning of Boniface's role in this episode: “(...) Bonifacio è per Dante, l'*exemplum*, per eccellenza, del cattivo governo spirituale e, insieme, temporale; il punto canceroso ove si annida il cattivo genio della storia, che ha operato attraverso Diomede, Ulisse e tutti gli altri fino a Guido da Montefeltro; ma tutti superando, proprio in forza dell’ibrido potere che si accoglie in lui.” (op. cit., 54).

Secondly, Guido himself, at hearing Boniface's request, is conscious of what he is being asked: the word *peccato* he uses in his dialogue with the pope is symbolic of this awareness. He knows that by giving the pope the advice he needs to conquer the city—and only devious ways will work here—he commits a moral transgression:

(...) “Padre, da che tu mi lavi/di quel peccato ov'io mo cader  
deggio,/lunga promessa con l'attender corto/ti farà triunfar ne l'alto  
seggio. (108-111)

Father, since you wash/ me of that sin into which I must now fall, a long/promise with a short keeping will make you triumph/on your high throne.

Promising something with the awareness that the promise will never be fulfilled was presumably one of the most common of Guido's *opere di volpe* (and the false promise is itself a sin of the tongue, according to the medieval moralists quoted above). Here, however, Guido's sin consists in teaching Boniface himself how to use this kind of method. The sin of *male consigliare* is in a synonymous relationship with the inducement into evil (*confortare al male*), in Cavalca's ethical system, and this synonymy illuminates Guido's placement in the same zone with Ulysses. Through their verbal suggestions, both Ulysses and Guido induced other people into transgressive actions. As a spiritual advisor, Guido realized that the pope was a morally ill man: the series of words with medical resonance (*guerrir, febbre, ebbre*), and the half-medical, half-moral term *consiglio* placed in the middle of this series, all contribute to the idea that Guido knew exactly what kind of condition Boniface had. And yet, instead of healing the pope with a truly Christian message, he aggravated his fever and state of frenzy with the inducement into further sins.

The only problem is that, after death, one has to give account for one's evil counsels, Cavalca repeatedly asserts, who warns that there is no way this type of counselors can end up well. The divine penalty for evil counseling is unavoidably the loss of the soul: *il misero consigliere pure ne pierde l'anima* (*Pungilingua*, p. 183), and this severe moral pronouncement is exemplified magisterially in the poetic account of Guido's death: St. Francis comes down to claim Guido's soul, but a devil intervenes declaring that Guido's membership was in fact to the infernal orders. The semantic value of the general term *peccato* that Guido used to describe his speech to Boniface is clarified by the devil on the occasion of the struggle for Guido's soul:

Non portar; non mi far torto./Venir se ne dee giù tra' miei meschini/perché  
diede'l consiglio frodolente,/dal quale in qua stato li sono a' crini. (*Inf.*  
XXVII. 114-117)<sup>247</sup>

'Do not take him,/ do not wrong me./ He must come down among my slaves, because/ he gave the fraudulent counsel, since when, until/ now, I have been at his locks.'

As a Franciscan friar, Guido was supposed to know that the punishment for the kind of *peccato* he spoke of to Boniface was very serious. And the same holds for Boniface, who, as a leader in spiritual matters, knew what type of risks and consequences incurred every sin. Otherwise this whole discussion between the two men about absolution from sins as a retribution for Guido's help would be futile. Only this papal power turned out to be a kind of fraud, as well. Both Dante's handling of the episode and Cavalca's treatment of the sin of *male consigliare e confortare al male* convey the idea that no human promise, judgment or decision can compete with higher, divine laws. Cavalca says that very often evil counselors fall themselves in the traps

---

<sup>247</sup> Truscott specifies that: “‘False counsel’ as used by the cherub of Guido’s advice, means simply *advice to use false promise*, and nothing else.” (op. cit., 610). But, as I have noted, false promise was itself, in the moral tracts from Dante’s time, a verbal sin (the term technical was *indiscreta promissio*), and the true sin of Guido is basically that he counsels... a sin. Rather than being ‘simple’ matter, as Truscott suggested, the interrelationship between sins is a complex issue in the “trattatistica morale” of the late Middle Ages.

they set,<sup>248</sup> and the end of Guido exemplifies this idea: Guido, the master of false promise falls pray to Boniface's own (impossible to keep) promise of absolution. The forgiveness of sin granted by the corrupt father of the church availed Guido nothing at the moment of his death; the devil still prevailed over St. Francis in the struggle for the counselor's soul. Both Dante's text and Cavalca's treatment of malicious counsel tell us that, however great the power of forgiveness held by ecclesiastics is, there is a greater power, above the Church, which, if the Church is corrupted by wicked leaders, cancels the ecclesiastic absolution and ridicules the so-called wise. There is no power in the world and in the Church, however great and cunning that power is, that can change the fundamental moral laws established by the divine providence. The capacity for absolution of the prelates is stymied if it contravenes transcendental moral rules. This is the lesson that Dante's story of Guido da Montefeltro sets forth, and the same is the conclusion Domenico Calvaca, Dante's contemporary, reaches in his chapter dedicated to evil counselors:

Or ecco dunque, come Iddio perverte i consigli umani; e, come dice il Salmista: Il suo consiglio sta fermo in eterno. Sicchè, come dice la Scrittura: Non è consiglio, nè prudenza, nè sapienza contra a Dio. (...) Che poichè immutare non si può il divino consiglio e la divina sentenza, in ogni cosa dobbiamo inchinare le spalle, e sottometterci alla sua santissima volontà. Or questo sia detto contro agli stolti savi del mondo che credono con loro astuzie fuggire o impedire i giudici, o i consigli divini. (p. 185).

So this is how God alters the human advises; and, as the Psalmist says: His counsel stays firm in eternity. Therefore, as the Scripture says: There is no advice, no prudence, no wisdom against God. (...) For since the divine counsel and the divine sentence cannot be changed, in everything we do we have to bend our back and submit to his most sacred will. And this is to be said against the foolish wise of the world who believe that they can shun or prevent the divine judgments or counsels with their tricks.

---

<sup>248</sup> Sicchè eglino per giusto giudicio di Dio caggiono in quella fossa ed in quello lacciulo ch'eglino apparechiavano per altri. Sicchè bene si verifica il detto de'i Proverbi, che chi ordina lo iniquo consiglio, si gli torna in capo. (p. 183; 'So those men, through God's fair judgment, fall into the same ditch and trap they were preparing for the other. Therefore, this confirms the saying of the Proverbs: the unfair advice turns against the head of he who gave it').

A close reading of *Inferno XXVI* and *XXVII* from the perspective of the moral tracts on the sins of the tongue demonstrates that the sin punished in the eighth pouch of Malebolge is the sin Dante names *consiglio frodolente* (*XXVII*. 116). Ahern's argument that "neither *consiliari male*, nor *pravum consilium* are synonymous with *consiglio frodolente*" is not tenable,<sup>249</sup> since in both the Latin tracts and their translation into Italian vernacular this sin is, as I have shown, tightly connected with, and defined in terms of, fraud. If Dante used the adjective 'fraudulent' instead of 'evil' or 'wicked' it is because on the one hand, the fraudulent feature seemed to him prevalent, and on the other hand, because he embedded this sin into the moral area of fraud, in Malebolge. Of all the spectrum of features of the sin of *pravum consilium*, for Dante the most salient aspect—and, at the same time, the most relevant to his ethical system--was fraudulence. The three main moral readings I have proposed so far—Aquinas, Peraldus and Cavalca—demonstrate that the other transgressions that critics have posited as alternatives for the sin of *fraudulent counsel*: *astutia*, fraud, injustice, betrayal<sup>250</sup>—are not different from *consiglio fradudolente*, but characteristic traits of it. Far from being a "preposterous misnomer," as Anna Hatcher has argued, the label *consiglio frodolente* is the correct name for the sin punished in the eight pouch of Malebolge.<sup>251</sup> Both the text of the *Comedy*, which offers this term, and the

---

<sup>249</sup> Ahern, *Dante's Slyness*, 276.

<sup>250</sup> Lawrence Ryan speaks in both Ulysses and Guido's case of betrayal that leads to the destruction of community, be this a secular or a religious community: "For the two sinners represent, in turn, the fraud that undermines *res publica*, ordained by providence, as Dante concludes in his *De Monarchia*, to help human beings fulfill the potential of their nature within time, and the ecclesia, the divinely instituted means for attainment of the supernatural end of the species." ("Ulysses, Guido and the Betrayal of Community," 228).

<sup>251</sup> "Dante's Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro." *Dante Studies* 88 (1970): 109-117. One of the reasons why Hatcher argues against this denomination is the distinction she sees between "the use of fraud in counseling" (as embodied by Ulysses) and "the counseling the use of fraud" (as personified by Guido da Montefeltro). This distinction is however inoperative and irrelevant, since the medieval moral species of evil counsel is extremely elastic and encompasses both meanings. A simple perusal of the dozen of exemplary stories told by Cavalca to illustrate this sin reveals a much greater variety of fraudulent facets than these two detected by Hatcher.

historical context of the late Middle Ages, which provides us the evidence for the moral category of evil counsel—confirm the appropriateness of this term.

With the sharpness germane to the moralist, Dante takes an ethical category modern for his time and applies it like an analytical grid not only to his contemporaries, but also to the cultural material of Classical antiquity.<sup>252</sup> Thanks to the poetic enterprise of the *Comedy*, the category of ‘evil counsel’ leaves the stern and abstract sphere of the moral treatises and enters the realm of poetry, in the shapes of the memorable characters of Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro. The former is meant to represent the long history of fraudulent verbal practice, and the latter its adherence to the Italian, contemporary soil. If Peraldus and Cavalca gave their medieval readers the main traits of the moral profile of the malicious counselor, Dante has given his own readers concrete examples of fraudulent counselors in action, examples that have fascinated posterity for seven centuries.

#### 4.3 ‘DOUBLE-TALK’ (*BILINGUIUM*) IN FAUS SEMBLANT’S DISCOURSE

“The problem of Faus Semblant”<sup>253</sup> in criticism of the *Rose* is similar perhaps only to “il problema di Ulisse” in Dante Studies. Over the course of time, the two characters have sparked an almost equal amount of controversy among critics and engendered equally passionate polemical writings. If for Ulysses the main problem remains the exact nature of the sin for which Dante punished him in Hell, for Faus Semblant, the issue at stake is the reason why Jean de

---

<sup>252</sup> This aspect, along with the changes he operated into the Homeric myth, contributes to the creation of the new, Ulyssean, *mito in chiave christiana*, of which the Italian critics speak.

<sup>253</sup> The phrase comes from Kevin Brownlee. “The Problem of Faus Semblant: Language, History, and Truth in the *Roman de la Rose*, in *The New Medievalism*, Kevin Brownlee and M. S. Nichols, eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991), 253-71.

Meun included among the barons of Love an evil character, responsible for a great deal of extraneous and irrelevant poetic material. To counter this negative critical assessment expressed by C. S. Lewis and William W. Ryding,<sup>254</sup> recent studies have offered powerful arguments justifying Faus Semblant's textual presence in the *Rose* from different standpoints. In her groundbreaking study of Jean de Meun's structures of duality and deceit in the *Romance of the Rose*, Susan Stakel sees Faus Semblant as the main site where Jean de Meun articulates his literary treatment of moral duplicity.<sup>255</sup> In a similar vein, Richard Emmerson and Ronald Herzman promote Jean de Meun's controversial character as a key element for understanding the poem's apocalyptic framework.<sup>256</sup> Kevin Brownlee also argues that Faus Semblant's discourse is vital to the poem because it provides "one of the most important meditations on the status of language."<sup>257</sup>

In this section, I investigate Faus Semblant's relevance to Jean de Meun's poem from the viewpoint of the writer's treatment of the sin of *bilinguium*, or double-talking, an ethical category of the medieval treatises on *peccata linguae* which applies in privileged ways to Jean de Meun's controversial character. After examining the bipolar discursive structure that characterizes Faus Semblant's self-portrait, I will argue that, far from damaging Faus Semblant as a fictive construct, as some critics have maintained,<sup>258</sup> discursive bipolarity is Jean de Meun's main technical means for articulating the mimetic coherence of his hypocritical personage.

---

<sup>254</sup> C. S. Lewis. *The Allegory of Love* (New York: Oxford UP, 1936), 142, and William W. Ryding "Faus Semblant: Hero or Hypocrite?" in *Romanic Review* 60 (1969), 163.

<sup>255</sup> *False Roses. Structures of Duality and Deceit in Jean de Meun's Roman de la Rose* (Saratoga, California: Anma Libri, 1991).

<sup>256</sup> Richard K. Emmerson and Ronald B. Herzman. "The Apocalyptic Age of Hypocrisy: Faus Semblant and Amant in the *Roman de la Rose*," *Speculum* 62 (1987): 612-634.

<sup>257</sup> "The Problem of Faus Semblant," 253.

<sup>258</sup> Lewis (*The Allegory of Love*), Ryding ("Faus Semblant"), and Lee Patterson. "For the Wyves Love of Bathe: Feminine Rhetoric and Poetic Resolution in the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Canterbury Tales*." *Speculum* 58 (1983), 656-95.

Like Friend and the Old Woman, Faus Semblant is not an entirely allegorical character. He is not the personification of an abstraction, in the old-fashioned mode of Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, although he does display some allegorical features, but he is a character with a real biography. Jean de Meun casts Faus Semblant as the representation of the mendicant friar, a religious type with a central and controversial role in the religious arena in Jean de Meun's days. By virtue of his historically-grounded biography, Faus Semblant acquires a clear and distinctive social identity: he is a preacher, and a confessor, one whose life is supposed to be dedicated to God and to the spreading of the Word. His ecclesiastical skills are exceptional, the character claims, and his allegedly long experience in preaching attests to his magisterial expertise in the use of religious language:

Prelat ne sont mie si sage/Ne si lettré de trop com gié;/J'ai de devinité  
congié, /Voire, par dieu, pieça leü. (12354-57)

'There are no prelates so wise and learned as I. I have a license in divinity, and, in fact, by God, I have lectured for a long time.'

In reality, however, Faus Semblant uses his ecclesiastical privileges for the purpose of defrauding people, as he himself admits: *Mais de religion sanz faille,/J'en lais le grain et preng la paille./Pour genz enbascher y abit: Je n'en quier sanz plus que l'habit* ('But without fail, I leave the kernel of religion and take the husk. I dwell in religion only to trick people; I seek only its habit, no more', 11219-11222). His sermons are in sharp contrast with his moral depravation, and his discourse in the poem will unrelentingly highlight the contradiction between what he says and what he really thinks and does. Faus Semblant establishes a genetic affiliation with fraudulent language from the very beginning of his textual activity. Not only is he introduced in the world of the characters through a sin of speech signaled by the god of love: *c. mile foiz t'es*

*parjurez* ('you have perjured yourself a hundred thousand times', 10947), but he is also the son of a grievous sin tightly linked to speaking: Hypocrisy. The lineage of the character, with *Barat* (Fraud), as the father, and Hypocrisy, as the mother, preordains the textual life of Faus Semblant and will circumscribe his evolution in the narrative within essentially immoral parameters. The dialogue between Faus Semblant and the God of Love at the beginning of the poem reveals the discrepancy between Faus Semblant's preaching and his inner structure:

«Car si com tes habiz nous conte,/Tu sambles estre .i. sainz hermites! »  
/(Faus samblant): « C'est voirs, mes je sui ypocrites. » (Li dieus d'amours): «Tu vas preschant astinance! »/(Faus samblant): «Voire voir, mais j'emple ma pance/De tres bons morsiaus et de vins/Tels comme il affiert a devins. » / (Li dieus d'amours): «Tu vas preschant povreté. »  
(Faus samblant): «Voire, riches a poesté./Mais combien que povres me faigne/Nul povre je ne contredaigne. » (11234-11244)

'As you tell us of your habits, you seem to be a holy hermit/-It is true, but I am a hypocrite./-You go around preaching abstinence/-True, indeed, but I fill my paunch with very good morsels and with wines such as are suitable for theologians./-You go around preaching poverty./-True, abundantly richly. But however much I pretend to be poor, I pay not attention to any poor person.'

The spirited dialogue between the two *dramatis personae* hinges on three sets of replies, each of which contains a statement by the God of Love about Faus Semblant's ways and Faus Semblant's subsequent responses, which mercilessly deny each of the god's statements. With lines swiftly moving back and forth between the two interlocutors like in a miniature dramatic scene, the short remarks of the God of Love seem to have the mere function of prompting long replies from Faus Semblant, who, in reaction to what he claims to be the god's incorrect assertions, is compelled to introduce and define himself. This humorous dialectical play is designed to emphasize the contradiction between appearance and moral essence, between truth and lie, and to dismantle conventional systems of signs--the clothes and the words—, commonly

regarded as faithful indicators of social identity and moral profile, respectively, but which can easily deceive. The first of these pairs of lines posits the equivalence between the most severe type of religious figure—the hermit—, identifiable by his clothes, and the vice of religious hypocrisy, the utmost form of verbal fraud.<sup>259</sup> The last replies bring into greater focus the breach between words and deeds, between preaching the word of God and acting, a breach that will define the entire evolution of the hypocritical personage, and which, in Jean de Meun's view, characterizes many of the preachers of his day.

To gain a better grasp of Jean's distaste for these preachers, it is necessary to take a look at one of the most controversial authors contemporary with Jean de Meun, and who seems to have greatly influenced Jean's ideas. In his fundamental study about the medieval antimendicant tradition, Penn Szittyá argues, in the wake of Ernest Langlois, one of the editors of the *Rose*, for the impressive presence of William of St. Amour's antimendicant ideas in the discourse of Faus Semblant.<sup>260</sup> As Penn Szittyá has only briefly underscored ideological affinities between Faus Semblant's speech and the position of St. Amour in the quarrel with the mendicants, I will take specific notions from the writings of William of St. Amour to show how Jean de Meun assimilated some of St. Amour's 'signs' for recognizing a hypocritical preacher and used them as representational devices for patterning the textual behavior of Faus Semblant.

---

<sup>259</sup> The equation is also realized in the text at the level of prosody: the words *hermite/hypocrite* are each placed in the last position of the verse, in a rhyme highlighting the dishonest relationship between a purported man of God and his evil use of language. The technical device is repeated for an identical effect later on, in the same discourse: *Je suis des vallez antecrist,/Des larrons dont il est escrist/Qu'il ont habit de sainteé/Et vivent en tel fainté* (11717-11720 ; 'I am one of Antichrist's boys, one of the thieves of whom it is written that they have the garment of saintliness and live in pretense'). The message conveyed by these two rhymes is a double-edged sword, for at once it generalizes the sin of hypocrisy by extending it to all hermits—the sign of a Christian society in crisis—and warns the reader about the deceitfulness of the semiotic system of clothing. As Faus Semblant himself will restate at another point in his discourse, *li habiz ne fait pas le moine* (11062), and just because some people wear the symbols of a religious order or rank, this does not identify them with the order they claim to represent.

<sup>260</sup> "this section of the Roman is saturated with the language of W. of St. Amour (...) Jean de Meun clearly had texts of William's works in front of him." [Penn Szittyá, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), 186].

William of St. Amour's *De periculis novissimorum temporum* is a virulent attack against the mendicant orders, a text that 'earned' St. Amour his exile from Paris. Jean praises this text in the *Roman* and explicitly expresses his sympathy for its author. *De periculis* draws attention to the heretical climate of the day prefiguring the end of the world, and calls for true Christians to take a stand toward the many dangers that threaten Christianity.<sup>261</sup> The dangers St. Amour fears are, basically, the great social powers of the Franciscan and Dominican orders, and the extremist Christian movement initiated by Joachim of Fiore. Animated by his strong antipathy for the friars, St. Amour does not hesitate to call them servants of the devil. Most of the *De periculis* deals with these Antichristi, who are extremely dangerous, St. Amour says, because of the great power of seduction of their preaching. But, although these ecclesiastics are very skilled verbally, admits St. Amour, their doctrine is nothing but poison, because it does not spring from the heart, but from their devilish thirst of powers and privileges. These false preachers will corrupt people's morals and drive them away from true faith, as they are corrupt and heretics themselves (*in moribus erunt corrupti, et tandem in fide reprobi (...); tunc ispi faciliter mettent eos in errors, tam contra bonos mores, quam contra fidem.*).<sup>262</sup> Both their intelligence and their oratorical talent are real, warns St. Amour, and because of this, people of good faith cannot recognize them as false preachers, but succumb to their diabolical power of seduction. Feeling compelled to

---

<sup>261</sup> Those who refuse to take action or engage in the fight against these dangers will themselves perish in hell, St. Amour claims: *Quod qui non proeviderunt praedicta pericula, aut previsa non praecaverint, peribunt in illis sciendum est, quod qui haec pericula non previderint, transferentur procul dubio a civitate Dei in civitatem diaboli, et ibi captivi detinebuntur* ('It is to be known that those who will not foresee the predicted dangers, or will not be on guard against the foreseen things, will perish in them; and those who will not have foreseen these dangers will undoubtedly be moved from the city of God into the city of devil, and they will be detained therein,' translation mine.) *De periculis novissimorum temporum*, in *Opera Omnia* (Paris: Constance, 1632), 34.

<sup>262</sup> *De periculis*, 31.

instruct Christians on how to recognize these false preachers, William of St. Amour gives his audience a list of forty-one signs as tools for identification.<sup>263</sup>

Besides minor indexes like the love of fine food, soft garments, and riches which, according to William of St. Amour, characterize the false friar, and which are overtly admitted to by Faus Semblant, one of the major aspects that is salient in Faus Semblant's self-revelations is that he does not act alone in the social arena. He constantly speaks of his likes, either by using the third person plural pronoun "they," when he presents them as a diffuse and dangerous whole that he takes pain not to upset with disparaging words, or by using the inclusive pronoun "us," when he asserts his belonging to this never named but always evil social force which he speaks of as a representative. Thus, Faus Semblant's cohorts, although depicted as a vague presence (*mes amis, mes compagnons*), are always there, in the outside world, lurking in the background, never manifesting themselves in the romance, but constantly felt as an unsettling and menacing evil power.<sup>264</sup> This apocalyptic image closely echoes William of St. Amour's portrayal of the friars as a multitude of false preachers (*pseudopredicatores*) and *antichristi*, embodying the apocalyptic prophecies of the New Testament. According to St. Amour, one of the main actions of this large and evil mob is *penetratio domos* (penetrating into houses), a violent intrusion

---

<sup>263</sup> *Quod autem in simulate religione tam verborum, quam operum decipient, nec est credendum illis operibus, quae ostentant in aperto, que bono esse videntur; nam illa faciunt simulando, vid. ut sancti videantur esse, cum non sint. (...) Quasi dicent, ab operibus eorum manifestis, que bono videntur exterius, cognosci non possunt, quia ea prava intentione faciunt. Sed ab illis operibus, quae ostentare non audent, sed occultare nituntur, eo quod mundana sunt, et ad mundana tendunt, cognosceri possunt.* (*De periculis*, 29; 'But since they deceive in false religion both through words and deeds, we must not trust those works which are shown in public and which seem to be good; for those works they do by dissimulation, so that they may appear holy, when in fact they are not. (...) from those external works of them, which seem good on the outside, they [the false friars] cannot be known to do them out of evil intention. But they [the false friars] can be known from those of their works that they do not dare to display, but try to conceal, for those works are of the world and tend towards the world.'). In a subsequent text (*Contra Pericula imminentia Ecclesiae generali per Hypocritas, Pseudopredicatores, et Penetrantes Domos, et Otiosos, et Curiosos, et Gyrovagos*), St. Amour extends this list to fifty signs. Here too, he specifies that since the false ecclesiastics play their roles of preachers so well, it is necessary for the Christians to learn the signs after which they can recognize the new "Antichrists."

<sup>264</sup> In one place he speaks of their cruelty (*leur cruauté connui*, 10964) and in another he reasserts: *trop son cruel malament* (10975; 'they are very cruel in an evil way').

exerted by people able to infiltrate everywhere, even places where they are normally excluded from and where they do not belong. By “houses” St. Amour did not just mean places of lodging, but also the place, or house, of the soul, and the idea is almost literally taken up by Jean de Meun who has Faus Semblant describe himself as an intruder in all types of settings: religious and secular, and even as a thief of hearts. After confessing to the god of love that he can be found either in the cloister, or in the world, the friar admits, however, to his preference for open and intensely populated areas:

Es bours et es chastiaus, as citez/Ai mes sales et mes pales/Ou l'en puet corre a plain eslais,/Et di que je suis hors dou monde ;/Mais je m'i plunge et m'i affunde/Et m'i aese et baigne et noe/Mieus que nus poissons de sa noe. (11710-16)

I make my halls and palaces in towns, castles, and cities, where one can run with a free rein. I say that I am out of the world, but I plunge into it and immerse myself in it; I take my ease and bathe and swim better than any fish with his fin.

As the verses tellingly reveal, the urban location is a faithful identifier for the fraternal orders, whose mendicant way of life and preaching activities would draw them to cities rather than to rural settings. Remarkable in this passage is the open cynicism with which Jean de Meun highlights, on the one hand, the easy movement of Faus Semblant in an urban setting, and on the other, the contradiction between his compatibility with a worldly type of life and his purported isolation from the world.

Apart from the false friars’ unsettling presence in the *seculum*, there are two other signs connected with the mendicant orders--as personified by Faus Semblant--that render them publicly dangerous: their power of seduction and the ease with which they get in touch with people from all social estates. Both seduction and social skills rely on the care with which the

character is “composing” his public figure. In order to ensure a better circulation from one level of society to another, Faus Semblant is constantly and carefully building his external image, based on his physical appearance (his clothing which represents his “masks”) and his linguistic skills:

Trop sai bien mes habiz changier,/Prendre l'un et l'autre estrangier:/Or sui chevaliers, or sui moines,/Or sui prelaz, or sui chanoines,/Or sui cleris,  
autre heure sui prestres/Or sui deciples, or sui mestres,/Or chastelains or  
forestiers;/Briement, je sui de touz mestiers./Or sui princes, or resui  
pages,/Et sai par cuer trestouz langages./ Autre heure sui vieulz et chenuz,/Or  
resui juenes devenuz./Or sui Roberz, or sui Robins,/Or cordeliers or  
jacobins. (11191-11204)

I know very well how to change my garment, to take one and then another foreign to it.  
Now I am a knight, now a monk; at one time I am a prelate, at another a canon; at one  
hour a clerk, at another a priest; now disciple, now master, now lord of the manor, now  
forester. Briefly, I am in all occupations. Again I may be prince or page, and I know all  
languages by heart. At one hour I am old and white, and then I have become young again.  
Now I am Robert, now Robin, now Cordelier, now Jacobin.

In light of this detailed description of himself which foregrounds his chameleon-like nature, Faus Semblant represents the mendicant friar as an actor on the social stage. The masks he changes with great ease assure him direct and guaranteed access to all the people with whom he wants to interact, and his self-portrayal shows us the full complexity of his significance in a moral world.<sup>265</sup> By collapsing differences in both the religious and lay hierarchies, by blurring distinctions between professions (*métiers*) and by asserting at once his lack of ethnic specificity and his ability to speak any language, the character is in fact affirming his universality as an

---

<sup>265</sup> It is worth noting in this respect that, according to Sylvia Huot, Faus Semblant’s discourse was felt to be so subversive by its medieval copyists that it was often altered: “the discourse of Faus Semblant, with its biting satire on the mendicant orders, was viewed as dangerous by some scribal editors of the *Rose*, who occasionally inserted warnings that the passage was not for the general dissemination or even deleted parts of the text.” [The “Romance of the Rose” and Its Medieval Readers (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 17].

agent of evil, as the all-invasive incarnation of sin.<sup>266</sup> The three elements on which his identity is based--lineage, wearing apparel and verbal activity—all point in this direction. From the viewpoint of his family line, as son of the world-governing Fraud and of Hypocrisy, Faus Semblant is genetically predisposed to a fraudulent existence; from the viewpoint of the wearing apparel, a type of language itself, he is a lie; and finally, from the viewpoint of his verbal activity, he breathes forth lies, perjury and false promises.

Another sign of the friar's composing their fraudulent public image is the care they take to be perceived by people they want to convert as virtuous persons and holy pastors. A tool in this fabrication of a false social and moral perception is, according to St. Amour, the request of letters of commendation. The idea reappears in Faus Semblant's discourse, within the framework of his confessed hatred of honest work and poor people:

Et pour avoir des genz loanges,/Des riches hommes par losanges/Empestrons que lettres nous doignent/Qui la bonté de nous tesmoignent,/Si que l'en croie par le monde/Que vertuz toute en nous habonde./Et touz jours povres nous faignons... (11673-11679).

In order to win people's praise we tell lies to rich men and get them to give us letters bearing witness to our goodness, so that throughout the world people will think that every virtue abounds in us. We always pretend to be poor...

According to *De periculis novissimorum temporum*, requesting letters of recommendation is routinely counter-pointed by the false preachers' intolerance to any kind of criticism. The friars' distaste for any form of correction--a new sign for identification in St. Amour's view--is present in Faus Semblant's discourse as well. Jean de Meun's character asserts not only his incapacity to accept criticism from others and his will to order and control people's lives, but

---

<sup>266</sup> “Faus Semblant identifies himself and his cronies with avarice, hypocrisy, cruelty, pride, gluttony—all of the seven deadly sins, in fact, except lust.” (Susan Stakel, *False Roses*, 48).

also his determination to physically exterminate any person who would dare oppose his methods of conversion to evil.<sup>267</sup> The killer instinct of Faus Semblant and of the *antichristi* whom, according to the interpretation of Emmerson and Herzman, he is supposed to represent, is not only verbalized in his discourse when he warns about the faite awaiting those who do not follow him,<sup>268</sup> but actually enacted on two separate occasions: with the heinous extermination of Malebouche ('Evil Mouth'), and with the slayer of the Norman soldiers, the guardians of the Castle of Jealousy.

Another major pattern of figuration in the discourse of Faus Semblant that harks back to William of Saint Amour is the conception of the mendicant friars as the embodiment of the third historical persecutors of the church. St. Amour had a particular scheme about Salvation History, a scheme that posited three major phases of persecution against the Church. The first one, from the time of the first martyrs of the Church, was a *persecutio violenta*, based on an effusion of blood; the second, from the time of Augustine and Hilary, was a *persecutio fraudulenta*; whereas the third, close to the time of William of Saint Amour, was a persecution performed by hypocrites and predicated upon the conjunction of violence and fraud. According to Penn Szittyá who takes up Emmerson and Herzman's interpretation, St. Amour casts the friars as agents of the third persecution, in that they are both simulators of pastoral care (fraudulent ecclesiastics) and perpetrators of violence.

---

<sup>267</sup> *A tout le monde avons pris guerre/Et volons du tout ordener/Quel vie l'en i doit mener.* (11724-6)

<sup>268</sup> *Car pluseur par moi mort reçurent/Qui ainc mon barat n'aperçurent,/Et reçoivent et recevront* (11177-9 ; 'several who have never recognized my fraud have received their deaths through me, and many are receiving them and will receive them without ever recognizing it'). Or in another place: *Les genz encontre euls esmouvrons/Par les baraz que nous couvrons/Et les ferons deglavier/Ou par autre mort devier/Puis qu'il ne nous vorront ensivre* (11853-6; 'We will incite people (...) by the frauds that we hide, and we will make them perish by the sword or by some other death if they don't follow us'). This type of anti-social activity was treated by medieval moralists as a verbal sin called *seminantium discordiam* 'sowing of discord'. Dante will punish the sowers of discord among the fraudulent in Malebolge.

The mix of falsehood and physical abuse is blatant in the depiction of Faus Semblant. At the beginning of his dialogue with the god of Love, the friar confesses to pursuing fraud, and nothing but fraud, in the following terms:

Mais en quelque lieu que je viengne,/Ne comment que je m'i  
contiengne,/Nient plus fors barat n'i chaz./Ausi com dant Tyberz li  
chaz/N'entent qu'a soriz et a raz,/N'entent je a riens fors a baraz. (11069-  
74)

But whatever place I come to, no matter how I conduct myself, I pursue nothing but fraud. No more than Tibert, the cat, has his mind on anything but mice and rats, do I think of anything except fraud.

In keeping with the traditional view of St. Amour of the *falsi fratres* as apocalyptic persecutors of the Church by means of fraud and violence, Jean de Meun makes his character threaten to kill people and has him perform criminal acts. Nowhere in the romance is this combination of fraud and violence more evident than in the section of Malebouche's slayer in the middle of his pious act of confession. Since Malebouche represents a danger for Amant's conquest of the beloved, Faus Semblant and his concubine Astinance Constrainte ('Constrained Abstinence') decide to get rid of him. Before going to Faus Semblant's house where Malebouche is lodged, the two felons premeditate their act and debate how best to kill him. They wonder if they should make themselves known to Malebouche or assume false identities. Of course, they choose to assume false identities and disguise themselves as pilgrims. With meticulous care, they compose their masks to appear as virtuous and pious Christians. Constrained Abstinence puts on a robe of cameline and disguises herself as a Beguine, whereas:

Faus samblant qui bien se ratorne/Ot aussi com pour essoier/Vestuz les dras frere Soier:<sup>269</sup>/La chiere ot mout simple et piteuse/Ne regardeüre orgueilleuse/N'ot il pas, mais douce et paisible./A son col portoit une bible./A pié s'en va sanz escuier,/Et pour ses membres apuier/Ot ausi com par impotence/en sa main destre une potence/Et fist en sa manche glacier/.i. bien tranchant rasoir d'acier,/Qu'il fist forgier en une forge/Que l'en apele coupe gorge. (12086-12100)

False Seeming, who was also equipping himself well, had dressed, as though to try it out, in the clothing of brother Seier. He had a very simple, compassionate face without any appearance of pride, a sweet, peaceful look. At his neck he carried a Bible. Afterward, he went off without a squire, and, to support his limbs, as though he had no power, he used a crutch of treason. Up his sleeve he slipped a very sharp steel razor, that he had made in a forge and that was called Cut-Throat.

The detailed description of the religious attire of the two criminals and the compassionate looks they display while pretending to be holy people serve to highlight the disjunction between appearance and moral substance, between the outer self and the inner self. Both their external image and the pious speech they skillfully deliver to gullible Malebouche, before killing him, will turn out to be deceptive codes meant to warn the reader about the dangers represented by what William of St. Amour labeled *falsi fratres sub habitu sanctitatis* ('false friars wearing the habit of sanctity') and whom he identified with the hypocritical representatives of the mendicant orders of his day.<sup>270</sup> The slaying of Malebouche in the midst of his act of confession conveys St. Amour's message of the religious persecution by hypocrites.

The several 'signs' we have seen so far attached to the figure of Faus Semblant in the *Romance of the Rose* show that Jean de Meun projected this character in the wake of William of

---

<sup>269</sup> Nickname based on a pun (*soie* 'silk'), and standing for the Dominican friars, reputed for their love of silk garments.

<sup>270</sup> *Ja ne les connistrez as robes,/Les faus traytres plains de lobes:/Leur faiz vous estuet regarder/Se vous voulez d'euls bien garder* (11791-94; 'You will never recognize them by their garments, these false traitors, full of trickery; you must look at their deeds if you really want to protect yourself from them',)

St. Amour's perception of the mendicant preachers of the day. Jean arguably knew these preachers directly, from his own experience, but when he built Faus Semblant into the text of his poem, he relied not only on his own experience, but also on the list of tens of signs posited by the secular master he admired so much. St. Amour considered hypocrisy to be the main vice of those who would bring about the end of the world, and in his view, this was the major trespass of the mendicant friars, the agents of the third historical persecution of the church.

To understand in an apocalyptic framework why this vice is so pivotal to Jean de Meun's portrayal of Faus Semblant, we now need to turn our attention to the way in which William Peraldus, the author of the most popular medieval encyclopedia of vices, defined *hypocrisia*. In Peraldus' scheme, hypocrisy is one of the subspecies of the deadly vice of *superbia* 'pride', for the hypocrite sins mainly by his presumptuous attitude before his brethren and God. The association of hypocrisy with *superbia* appears several times in the self-revelations of Faus Semblant. In one place, the personage specifies that those who are truly religious are not at all prideful, but rather pious and humble,<sup>271</sup> whereas in other moments, he confesses to living with the proud (*je maing avec les orgueilleux*, 11041) and characterizes the hypocrites as 'haughty, proud and overbearing' (*fieres et orgueilleus et gogues*, 11634). Although Peraldus credits the hypocrites with the gift of intellectual subtlety, a feature that will define Faus Semblant as well, he condemns them for their duplicity, for the split between their inner and outer self. They hide their true evil intentions only to corrupt people and make new proselytes, therefore, hypocrites, warns Peraldus, constitute an extremely serious threat to the welfare of God's church (*multum ecclesie dei nocere possunt*). They are skillful speakers, he asserts several times, but they preach the doctrine of the devil. The most perilous of the three categories of hypocrites, Peraldus notes,

---

<sup>271</sup> *Religieus sont tuit piteus,/Ja n'en verrez un despiteus:/Il n'ont cure d'orgueil ensivre/Tuit se veulent humblement vivre* (11031-34).

is that represented by people who not only speak skillfully with an appearance of sincerity, but also accomplish praiseworthy deeds when, and only when, they can be seen by other people.

Several of the features identified by Peraldus as hypocritical can be traced in the portrait of Faus Semblant, who is defined by Jean de Meun as *li lierres (...) qui de trayson ot la face/Blanche dehors, dedenz nercie*, 12015-17 ('the thief with the face of treachery, white without and black within'). The friar will characterize himself and his likes around the same polarity inner/outer self: *Dehors semblons aigniaus pitables/Dedenz sommes leus ravissables*, 11721-22 ('seemingly pitiful sheep without, but ravening wolves within'). When the God of Love is asking him to justify some his extravagant statements, Faus Semblant is admitting to have said *granz diablies apertes* (11532, 'great and open devilish things'). Extremely interesting--because based on an obvious paradox--is the passage in which the hypocritical friar condemns in vitriolic terms the hypocrites, especially those who, like in Peraldus's description, perform good deeds only when they are in the public eye:

(...) les fausses genz maudites/Que la lettre apele ypocrites:/ Faites ce qu'il sermoneront,/ Ne faites pas ce qu'ils feront;/ Dou bine dire n'ierent ja lent,/ Mais il n'ont dou faire talent. (...) S'il font oeuvres qui bonnes soient/C'est pour ce que les gens les voient. (11613-28)

(...) 'the accursed false people that the letter calls hypocrites: Do what they say but do not do what they do. They are not slow to speak well, but they have no desire to do so. (...) If they do jobs that may be good, it is because people see them.'

Not being "slow" in speaking well, in other words, being a very good rhetorician, is the fundamental asset of the hypocrites, argues Faus Semblant in the wake of the biblical text and the medieval theologians. For both William Peraldus and William of Saint-Amour the chief trait of hypocrites is the ability to speak well. Peraldus notes with a particular stress the joy this

category of sinners find in speaking and the ease with which they communicate with people, while St. Amour suggests that a too sophisticated argumentation paralleled by outstanding verbal skills corrupts the Word and undermines the spiritual message to be conveyed. In St. Amour's view, the gift of rhetoric is one of the major signs that may help identify a false friar, and Jean de Meun's treatment of Faus Semblant repeatedly illustrates this point of view.<sup>272</sup> The hypocritical character gives details on several occasions about his preaching skills, and boasts about his ability to speak all languages: *et sai par cuer trestouz langages* (11200). His manipulation of speech associated with fraudulent ecclesiastic activities is best seen when he brags about systematically breaking the secrecy of the confessional. According to Faus Semblant's "philosophy," pastoral care must be directed primarily at the rich, as they are much more sinful than the poor, and therefore in more need of his guidance. He uses the privileges that he gains as a confessor to the rich for fraudulent purposes: he blackmails the sinners over their moral errors and is willing to give pardon only to those who pay for his silence. Making public other people's secrets is a sin of the tongue according to the medieval moral treatises, a sin called *secreta revelare* ('the disclosing of secrets'), and according to William Peraldus, this sin is all the more damning when committed by religious figures. Faus Semblant makes of *secreta revelare* his political and social agenda, since this sin is one of his main means of making a living.

---

<sup>272</sup> *Credit enim vulgus quandoque illum Praedicatorem sanctiorem esse, qui linguam habet in praedicando eruditam, et eloquentiam elegantem, cum tamen ista non faciant sanctitatem, sed plerumque operentur peccatum.* (William of St. Amour. *Contra Pericula*, 393; 'But since they deceive in false religion both through words and deeds, we must not trust those works which are shown in public and which seem to be good; for those works they do by dissimulation, so that they may appear holy, when in fact they are not. (...) from those external works of them, which seem good on the outside, they [the false friars] cannot be known to do them out of evil intention. But they [the false friars] can be known from those of their works that they do not dare to display, but try to conceal, for those works are of the world and tend towards the world'; emphasis and translation mine). There is a difference, however, between the truly saint preaching and the skilled (but false) preaching: the words of the true preachers do not spring from talent or skills, but from sacred inspiration: *Verba enim Sanctorum Praedicatorum, non ab ingegno, vel arte procedunt; sed a spiritu sancti gratia;* op. cit., 393).

If we gather all these traits related to the moral outlook of Faus Semblant, it becomes evident that the sins mainly associated with him are the sins of the tongue; through him, they invade the lives of both the rich and the poor, affect both the young and the old, and infiltrate the languages of both the native and the foreigner. The meaning Jean de Meun gives the sentence “Je parle tous les langages” (an ironic allusion to the Pentecost) is not ‘I speak French as well as Italian or German,’ but rather I speak the inner language of every soul, I know how to get to every person’s moral substance, I therefore know how to take people and manipulate them. This assertion seems a verbatim translation of William Peraldus’ definition of double-talkers: *Bilingues sunt pseudo apostoli variis linguis loquentes* (‘The double-talkers are false apostles able to speak various languages’).<sup>273</sup>

Further clues in the text contribute to the process of unmasking the corruption of rhetoric. Thus, one of the constants of Faus Semblant’s speech is the care he takes to make visible and explicit the gap between his words and his deeds. Apart from a the programmatic avowal *Mout est en moi muez li vers:/Trop sont li fait au diz divers*, 11223-26 (‘The tune is very much changed in me; my deeds are very different from my words’), he values praying over working, although, he says, his prayers are in contrast with what he does behind people’s backs. When he comes to speak about chivalry as an eminently honest social class, he curses all the honest people for the harmony between their sayings and their actions. Another interesting instance occurs when he warns the God of Love about the deceitfulness implicit in his way of talking: *Ne ja certes pour mon habit/Ne savrez o quel gent j’abit; /Non ferez vous voir as parole,/Ja tant n’ierent simples ne moles* (11076-79; ‘Certainly by my habit you would never know with what people I dwell, any more than you would from my words, no matter how simple and gentle they were’).

---

<sup>273</sup> Peraldus, *Summa Vittorum*, 582.

The passage is important for what it reveals about Faus Semblant's manner of speaking. His words, he says, should not be trusted despite their appearance of simplicity and kindness. In this context, it is useful to note that in the Middle Ages the adjective *simple* had a different connotation than its current core meaning. It was the opposite not of complicated but of double, which had a negative moral connotation. Being double meant being dishonest and William Peraldus took up these initially Augustinian terms--*simplex/duplex*--in his treatment of hypocrisy. As we have seen, for Peraldus the hypocrite is a twofold person, an individual with a split personality: one whose outer self (*exterius*) does not correspond to the inner self (*interius*). The fact that Faus Semblant constantly establishes for himself the textual posture of a double dealer, who says one thing and does the opposite, brings also into focus his talent as a double-talker, another medieval term denoting a person whose outer speech does not correspond to his mental speech. Although the words of the hypocrite seemingly convey simplicity (in the medieval sense of honesty), they are in fact "double," because what the hypocrite says is different from his mental scheme, from his internal speech. If one wants to recognize a hypocrite, asserts Peraldus, one must look not at what that person says or does, but at his true intention. It is the good "thought," the mental speech, says Faus Semblant, that qualifies a person as honest and religious:

Bon cuer fait la pensee bonne;/(...)/Et la bonne pensee l'oeuvre,/Qui la religion descoevre./Illuec gist la religion/Selonc la droite entencion.  
(11121-26)

A good heart makes the thought good (...). And it is good thought that inspires the man who reveals the religious life. In such a life lies religion based upon a right intention.

In a world in which even the deeds are sometimes deceiving because performed only for the sake of the public eye, of the appearance, as we have seen, the sole, unmistakable indicator of

righteousness is intention, an element that belongs to the sphere of inner life. Couched in the terms of Abelard's doctrine of intention, the passage is central for the discussion on moral duality and the connection between hypocrisy and double-talking. Like snakes, the sinners by *bilinguium* have two tongues, says Peraldus. One is the outer tongue that proclaims the good intention, and the other, the inner tongue that speaks the evil thought. The words of the double-talker seem simple, to wit honest, but are in sharp contrast to his *verba interiora mentis*, the inner words of the mind, which translate the evil intent of wrongdoing. The sin of double-talking has extremely dangerous consequences for the public life, concludes Peraldus, and it is all the more grievous when committed by those who are supposed to teach Christian doctrine.

All throughout his discourse, Faus Semblant casts himself as the embodiment of religious hypocrisy and double-talking. His immorality is predicated upon the split between his words and his deeds, between his outer speech and his cast of mind. This is what renders Faus Semblant's speech in the *Rose* paradoxical; this is what confers to the organization of his discourse the so much-disputed contradictory aspect. All of the critics who have dealt, from a perspective or another, with the "problem" of Faus Semblant have noted the paradoxes inherent in his discourse, paradoxes rooted in the fact that the character engages with several topics and alternately adopts, with respect to them, a pro- and con- position: he curses the noble people for not being as hypocritical as he is (11935-40), and later on he compares the hypocrite with a pig returning to his vomit, and teaches how a hypocrite can be recognized. He abhors working, but refuses mendicancy. He speaks in favor of William of St. Amour in the quarrel against the mendicant friars, and then he feels personally threatened by his book. He vituperates against the Eternal Gospel that he considers full of grossly erroneous comparisons and then he regrets that

this book was not circulated more. He deplores the state of the Church and praises the University as a defender of Christianity and then he proclaims that he is one of Antichrist's boys.

These unrelenting shifts should not surprise us in a hypocrite; they are to be accounted for in light of the same bad habit of *bilinguium* ('double-talking'), germane to this category of sinners. Domenico Cavalca developed some of Peraldus' insights vis-à-vis *bilingues* ('men with double-forked tongues') and added a forth class of double-talkers to the three already mentioned by Peraldus. Thus, according to Cavalca: *Bilingui anco sono detti quegli, i quali dicono ed una prima, ed una poi, sicchè rivoltano le parole a suo modo, e dicono e disdicono; non hanno fermezza in loro parole, sicchè per seguente generano molti scandoli* ('People with double-forked tongues are those who first say one thing, then another, and thus twist the words at it pleases them, they say and unsay things; they lack steadfastness in their speech, therefore generate many scandals.'—translation mine).<sup>274</sup>

In the wake of this definition that applies in spectacular ways to Jean de Meun's hypocritical character, I respectfully disagree with the assessment expressed by Lee Patterson who considers Faus Semblant a representational failure. The conflicting positions on which Faus Semblant's speech is patterned have prompted the critic to assert that: "these crude juxtapositions make it impossible for Jean to portray either the ethos or language of hypocrisy. As a speaker, Faus Semblant dissolves before the pressure of the inherited rhetorics that jostle side by side in his discourse, dissipating any coherence of the character before it can coalesce."

275

The descriptions of the *bilingues* that William Peraldus and Domenico Cavalca made in their famous treatises on the sins of the tongue contradict Lee Patterson's pronouncement. The

---

<sup>274</sup> *Il Pungilingua*, 199.

<sup>275</sup> Lee Patterson, "For the Wyves Love of Bathe," 672.

shifts in perspective that characterize Faus Semblant's discourse are a mimetic tool for representing his duplicitous nature; here, the “jostling of rhetorics” that Patterson is speaking of works not to demolish the character but to figure him forth. Particularly because the changes in perspective are a recurrent motif, the spotlight falls on the pattern of speech, and the variation, by being a productive pattern, reveals a premeditated literary technique for portraying the sins of *bilinguium* and hypocrisy. Emmerson and Herzman have noted in this respect that “Faus Semblant is unique not because of his hypocritical nature, but because his hypocrisy is so blatant.”<sup>276</sup> My opinion is that this blatancy is a deliberate representational strategy adopted by the writer. Jean de Meun surely knew the mendicant friars from his own daily life, but the close reading of this section of the poem proves that he also drew on the energies of two important traditions: that of antifratal literature, as best expressed by William of Saint-Amour, and that of the moral writings of his time.

All throughout Faus Semblant's intervention in the romance, the authorial stress on his pattern of speech is too evident and cultivated to be a deficiency of craftsmanship, as Patterson argues. The constant bipolarity of the friar's speech is not a factor of mimetic dissolution, but the hermeneutical key to the character. His discourse is indeed, as all his critics have noted, paradoxical in nature, but *paradoxa*, is, as Charles Presberg, one of the theorist of this figure of speech, has pointed out, an “artful discourse,” that is both “trope of thought and rhetorical strategy.”<sup>277</sup> Paradoxical discourse has its roots in Plato's definition of dialogue as the art of simultaneously arguing opposite sides of a question, the effect of which is, in Presberg's view, to “systematically use the categories of language and logic to question and mock the very

---

<sup>276</sup> “The Apocalyptic Age of Hypocrisy,” 627.

<sup>277</sup> Charles Presberg. *Adventures in Paradox* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2001), 2.

categories that undergird language and logic as discursive systems.”<sup>278</sup> In analyzing Faus Semblant, we have to consider not only what the character says and does, but across his fluctuating moods and statements, also what the writer does with his character and with the text. Faus Semblant’s textual figure is constructed along paradoxical lines as a *coincidentia oppositorum*; his discourse is designed by Jean de Meun as a dialectical space in which each argument can be seen from both sides. The speech of the character is cast by the writer in the medieval mold of a dialogue between the two sides of man—the inner and the outer--, each with its attendant speech, the aural and the mental, here constantly in disagreement. Since the internal structure of Faus Semblant is mutability, the organization of his discourse, as an authorial project, had to reflect mutability. Jean de Meun not only makes his character say he is a hypocrite, but also makes him express himself as a double-talker, designing his discourse as systematically bipolar. The carefully cultivated linguistic duality is a textual rendering of the sins of double-talking and hypocrisy, otherwise less perceptible for the reader. Only by having Faus Semblant constantly bounce from one ideological position to its opposite, from one assertive statement to its denial, can Jean de Meun render transparent the secret workings of the mind of his character and expose the potentially fraudulent resources of language.

Faus Semblant’s speech is the embodiment of Presberg’s definition of *paradoxy*. Using the voice of the false friar, Jean de Meun constantly mocks language and logic as human institutions, with both their seductions and their weaknesses, and makes visible to the reader the dangers they entail. The target audience of the *Romance of the Rose* will now be more on guard against external signs of sincerity and religiousness and more inclined to follow the path of interiority and look for the true intent underlying each word or deed.

---

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

Far from being a literary fiasco as some have suggested, the portrayal of Faus Semblant is so accomplished, and it has played such an impressive role in the history of European literature that George Puttenham, an English Renaissance writer, used the name of Faus Semblant in his rhetorical encyclopedia as a technical term for a figure of speech. In his *The Arte of English Poetry*, Puttenham uses “False Semblant” as a common noun to designate allegory, and defines it as “speaking otherwise than one seems to speak.”<sup>279</sup>

#### **4.4 SOWING OF DISCORD AND FALSIFYING OF WORDS: TWO VERBAL SINS ASSOCIATED WITH FRAUD IN DANTE’S *INFERNO***

*Cavendum tibi summe, ne aliquid seditiosum dixeris; nihil enim perniciosius in civitate, quam seditio: (ubi seditio, ibi civium divisio. Sed ut ait Dominus: Omne regnum in se divisum desolabitur, et domus supra domum cadet. ‘Be warned not to say anything seditious, anything which would bring the city to ruin. Where there is sedition, there is a divided city. The Lord says: Every kingdom divided against itself is ruined and a household divided against itself collapses.’ (Albertano da Brescia)).*<sup>280</sup>

---

<sup>279</sup> George. Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poetry*, Doidge Willcock G., Walker A., eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1936). Puttenham’s term is also quoted by Richard A. Lanham in *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>280</sup> *De Doctrina loquendi et tacendi*, 2.8., col. 102, published electronically at:  
<http://freespace.virgin.net/angus.graham/Loquendi.htm>

#### 4.4.1 The *seminator di scandalo e di scisma*

The intellectuals of the Middle Ages had an acute awareness of the importance of maintaining social and political concord, and of the tragic consequences that could arise from the disruption of this harmony. In his treatise on vices and virtues, Alain of Lille, defines concord as that virtue on account of which inhabitants of the same city and fellow countrymen live together in the respect of the same legal institutions.<sup>281</sup> And whereas Alain's definition of concord stresses the common dependence on juridical forms of organization, his concept of discord emphasizes a more spiritual side of society: discord is that form of dissension that separates people previously bound by ties of charitable love.<sup>282</sup>

In the concrete, historical context of the late medieval Italy, Albertano da Brescia, a reputed lawyer and intellectual, warns about the dire consequences of the verbal practice of sedition in a moral tract written in Latin and dedicated to the art of speaking. Albertano's words that serve as an epigraph to this essay evince a great awareness of the disasters sedition brings about in the life of a community. In a similar vein, Brunetto Latini, another leading Italian intellectual of the time, voices his concerns about an ill-governed city:

Ed io, ponendo cura,/ Tornai a la natura/C'audivi dir che tene/Ogn'uom c'al mondo vene/E nasce primamente/Al padre e al parente,/E poi al suo comune;/Ond'io non so nessuno/Cu'i' volesse vedere/La mia cittade avere/Del tutto a la sua guisa,/Né che fosse divisa/Ma tutti per

---

<sup>281</sup> "Concordia est virtus concives et compatriotas in idemptitate instituti iuris et cohabitationis spontanee vinciens." [Tractus de Virtutibus, et de Vitiis et de Donis Spiritus Sancti. Lottin, O., ed. Medieval Studies 12 (1950), 32].

<sup>282</sup> *Discordia est dissentio aliquorum quos prius amoris vinculum colligavit.* (op.cit., p. 41; 'Discord is the dissent/disunion of those previously bound by the tie of love'; translation mine).

commune/Tirassero una fune/Di pace e di ben fare,/Ché già non può scampare/Terra rotta di parte.(163- 79).<sup>283</sup>

And, becoming sorrowful/I returned to the nature/That I have heard is possessed/By every man coming into the world:/First he is born/To parents and relations,/And then to his city state;/So that I know none/Whom I would wish to see/Have my city/Entirely in his control, /Or that it be divided;/But all in common/Should pull together on a rope/Of peace and of welfare/,Because a land torn apart cannot survive.”

A man is naturally predestined to own and transform the geographical environment where he is born. Within this economic framework of land ownership (*tenere la natura*), man thrives not only with respect to nature but also inside a complex network of social relationships. He situates himself with respect to the world first by relating to his immediate family, then by expanding this inter-relational net to his extended family and to the *comune*. Nature, man and society constitute key-terms in a philosophical worldview that prompts Brunetto to air a political statement: abhorring both tyranny, dangerous for the abuses it can engender, and division, which can lead to political extinction, Brunetto calls for his fellow citizens to pull all on one single, allegorical rope: that of prosperity and harmony.

Although Brunetto does not get more philosophical than that in this passage, the communal effort that leads to social consensus is based on a union of wills. In the wake of Aristotle and Aquinas, Dante, Brunetto's disciple, defines concord in these terms: “For concord is the uniform motion of more wills than one. From this definition it is apparent that a unity of wills, which is implied by their uniform motion, is the root of concord, or simply concord itself,” (*Monarchy* 1.15, p. 82-83). For the politically engaged poet who, in *De Monarchia*, deems that

---

<sup>283</sup> *Il Tesoretto (The Little Treasure)*, Julia Bolton Holloway, ed. and transl., vol. 2, series A, Garland Library of Medieval Studies, (New York: Garland, 1981), 11. The concern with discord is also stated in *The Book of the Treasure*, this time in connection with language: “Be careful not to speak to sow discord, for there is nothing worse among men” (New York: Garland, 1993), 207.

universal peace is the highest good of a happy life on earth (1.4., p. 25), concord, first within family, then within the state, is the indispensable requisite for the attainment of this universal good: “Now, the best condition of the human race is a kind of concord, for, just as the best condition of one man is a kind of concord because it consists in a harmony between body and soul, so the same is true of a household, a city, and a kingdom, and thus of the whole human race.” 1.15, 82-83). In another passage from the same political tract, a passage advocating the cause of a unique empire guarantor of the security of the world, Dante tackles the problem of the political division from a religious angle, invoking the same scriptural quote as Albertano: *omne regnum in se divisum desolabitur*. (‘Every kingdom divided against itself shall be made desolate, *Monarchy* 1.5, 32-33)<sup>284</sup>, which prophetically sheds light on the destiny that awaits a divided political form.

Dante’s concerns about social divisions will acquire again prophetic tones in the *Comedy*, in the pilgrim’s colloquia with Ciacco and Cacciaguida, and even more dramatically in the circle of the sowers of discord (the ninth pouch of Malebolge). In the third circle of Hell punishing the gluttonous, Dante meets Ciacco, a Florentine who verbally excoriates the city of Florence for its reputed viciousness (*la tua città, ch’ piena di invidia sì che già trabocca il sacco*; ‘your city—one so full of envy that its sack has always spilled’). Paradoxically, the same discourse that expresses Ciacco’s *appartenenza* to Florence posits a split between the man and the city itself: Ciacco calls Florence not *la mia città*, but Dante’s (*la tua città*).<sup>285</sup> The identification of Florence

---

<sup>284</sup> Kay informs us that these words spoken by Jesus are reproduced by Luke 11.17, Matthew 12.25 and Mark 3.24. (*Dante’s Monarchia*. Translated, with a commentary by Richard Kay. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998; note, p. 32).

<sup>285</sup> Even the name with which the sinner identifies himself is described not as his personal “property,” but as a habit of those who socially identified him with this name: *voi cittadini mi chiamaste Ciacco* ‘you citizens called me Ciacco’, *Inf. VI. 52*.

leads Dante to enquire about the fate awaiting the inhabitants of so divided a city and about the cause of this tragic division:

Ciacco, il tuo affano/ mi pesa sì, ch'a lagrimar mi'nvita;/ma dimmi, se tu sai, a che verranno/li cittadin de la città partita;/s'alcun v'è giusto; e dimmi la cagione/ per che l'ha tanta discordia assalita. (*Inf. VI. 58-63*)

Ciacco, your trouble weighs on me so/ that it calls me to weep; but tell me, if you know, to/what will come/the citizens of the divided city;/if any there is just;/and tell me the reason so much discord has assailed it.

Dante's desire to understand the reasons for the partition of the city beset by discord prompts Ciacco's terrible prophecy: the plight of the city is due to the moral corruption of its denizens, Ciacco says, who are tormented by three great evils--envy, pride and covetousness. This is the state of affairs at the root of hate and bloodshed that will lacerate Florence for many years to come, Ciacco explains. Overwhelmed by the news and by the abundance of details with which it was delivered, the pilgrim asks his interlocutor about the destiny met in the afterlife by Florentines of good-faith such as Farinata, Tegghiaio, Mosca, Jacopo Rusticucci, and others who had dedicated their lives to the promotion of good (*ch'a ben far puose li'ngegni*). Ciacco's words fall like a death sentence; all of these people, he says, are punished deeper down in Hell, for the darkness of their hearts: *Ei son tra l'anime più nere;/diverse colpe giù li grava al fondo:/se tanto scendi, là i potrai vedere. 85-87*). It will, therefore, come as no surprise that Dante will meet Mosca, one of the evoked Florentines, in the *bolgia* of the sowers of discord. Before proceeding to an examination of this new infernal zone, I will take a look at another meaningful encounter able to enhance our understanding of Dante's treatment of discord in the *Comedy*.

*Paradiso XV, XVI and XVII* narrate the pilgrim's encounter with a member of his own family, Cacciaguida, a forefather of Dante's, also native to Florence. The words with which the character describes the civil setting in which he was born stress Florentine peace and harmony almost tautologically: *A così riposato, a così bello/ viver di cittadini, a così fida/ cittadinanza, a così dolce ostelo,/Maria mi diè, chiamata in alte grida.* ('To so peaceful, to so comely a life of citizens, to/so loyal a citizenry, to so sweet a dwelling,/Mary gave me, invoked with loud cries', *Paradiso XV*, 130-133). Cacciaguida's Florence stands in sharp opposition with Ciacco's: it is an Edenic city, where the social relationships are imbued with beauty, trust and sweetness. It is almost an exemplification of Alain's words about fraternal love as a cornerstone of civic concord. In contrast to these golden, peaceful times in which Florentine noble families lived in harmony stands the Florence of Dante's day, torn apart by rivalries between families:

Ma conveniesi, a quella pietra scema/che guarda'l ponte, che Fiorenza fesse/vittima ne la sua pace postrema./Con queste genti, e con altre con esse,/vid'io Fiorenza in sì fatto riposo,/che non avea cagione onde piangesse./Con queste genti vid'io glorioso/e giusto il popol suo, tanto che'l giglio/non era ad asta mai posto a ritroso,/né per division fatto vermiglio." (*Paradiso XVI*. 145-154).

But it was necessary that Florence, in her last/ peace, should offer a victim to that broken stone/that guards the bridge./With these folks, and others along with them, did/I see Florence in such repose that she had no cause/to make her weep./With these folk I saw her people so glorious and/ just that the lily had never been reversed upon the/ staff nor made scarlet by division.

The broken stone to which Cacciaguida alludes are the remains of the Roman God of war, Mars, the former protector of the city, that the Christian Florentines had replaced with the protection of St. John the Baptist. The popular superstition held that many of the social plights of the city were due to Mars' wrath for having been betrayed. But the main reason why this passage is important for the discussion of the circle of the seditious is that the victim alluded to by

Cacciaguida is the count of Buondelmonte, whose vicious murder would lead to the discord between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, the cause for the tragic history of medieval Florence. Allegedly, the assassination of Buondelmonte was a political decision sanctioned by Mosca dei Lamberti, and Dante, in canto XXVIII of the *Inferno*, literally quotes the words by which Mosca approved of this execution.<sup>286</sup> Ciacco and Cacciaguida's discourses on Florence offer an important topical picture of the social-political background of Florence, and at the same, furnish us a useful glimpse into Dante's rationale for the inclusion of the sin of sedition into the moral structure of Hell.

As far as the history of this sin is concerned, it is valuable to recall Bruno Purcelli, who notes that the sequence 'fraudulent counsel-sowing of discord', established by Dante in the eight-nine pouches of Malebolge corresponds perfectly to Peraldus's arrangement of the sins of the tongue in his *Summa Vitiorum*, where *pravum consilium* is immediately followed by *seminarium discordias*.<sup>287</sup> Although Porcelli's article does not deal with the latter, I adhere to his opinion that the correspondence between Dante's arrangement and Peraldus's is too great to be a coincidence. My belief is all the more firm since a comparison between Peraldus's text and Dante's *contrapasso* for the sowers of discord show a remarkable congruency.

The verb Peraldus uses all throughout the chapter he dedicates to this sin is scriptural and metaphorical: *seminare*, which sometimes appears followed by *discordia* as direct object, sometimes by *semen*, which develops the initial metaphor. Rooted in *malizia*, the sin of sedition is most hateful to God because it causes enmity *inter fratres* (here taken as brethren). Christ

---

<sup>286</sup> I return to this detail when I examine the ninth round of Malebolge.

<sup>287</sup> "In Peraldo, che distingue venti-quattro specificazioni del peccato di lingua, delle quali almeno cinque (*perjurium, mendacium, col connesso falsum testimonium, adulatio, pravum consilium, peccatum seminantium discordias*) trovano corrispondenza nelle Malebolge dantesche, il *pravum consilium* occupa il dodicesimo posto, cioè una posizione che per la sua centralità è di assoluta evidenza, come quella che gli attribuisce Dante, sia pure in altro modo. Per di più, esso è seguito nello stesso Peraldo dal *peccatum seminantium discordias*; e l'ordine si ripete (non è facile dire per caso) nella successione pravi consiglieri-seminatori di discordie. "(*Peccatum linguae*, 426).

loved the body of the Ecclesia more than his own, which he offered as a sacrifice for her welfare. In this light, those who break the unity of the church do more harm than they would do by tearing apart their own body.<sup>288</sup> Just as the greatest harm one can do the human body, this organic whole, is laceration or rupture, so the greatest harm one can do to the body of the church is division: (...) *nihil magis nocivum est corpori humano, quam divisio continuitatis, nec magis nocivum est ecclesiae Dei, quam divisio unitatis.* Despite his focus on the religious side of division, Peraldus does not neglect the civic side either, considering that one word of a seditious man can cause so great a social discord that it can lead to the destruction of the body politic. In conclusion, disseminating discord is a diabolical enterprise, for, unlike Christ, who came onto earth to make peace and unify, the devil came to break and disperse.<sup>289</sup>

Peraldus's words seem to be graphically illustrated in the *Inferno*, in the round punishing the seditious: on the bottom of the infernal valley, pained shades walk in a circular path watched by a devil who breaks the “continuity” of their bodies with a sword.

As a result, Mohamed is cleft from the throat to the belly, and his intestines hung out, Curio has his tongue cut off, Pier da Medicina has his nose and one ear sectioned, Mosca has

---

<sup>288</sup> *Et numerat Salomon 7 loco, eum qui seminat inter fratres discordias tanquam magis exosum Deo, quam alios peccatores. Plus enim dilexit Cristus corpus ecclesiae, quam corpus proprium, quum pro corpore ecclesiae, corpus proprium morti exposuerit, unde qui fodiunt corpus ecclesiae, unitatem eius dividendo, magis videnter nocere ei, quam qui corpus eius proprium foderunt, continuitatem in eo dividendo.* (*Summa Vitiorum*, 581; ‘And Solomon counts on the seventh place the man who sows discord among brethren as one who is more disliked by God than other sinners. For Christ loved the body of the Church more than his own, since he gave to death his own body for the body of the church. From which it results that those who harm the body of the church by destroying its unity are deemed more harmful than those who harm Jesus’ body, destroying its natural unity’).

<sup>289</sup> *Ex uno verbo quod dicit ille qui discordiam seminat, quandoque nascitur discordia tanta, ex qua distruitur patria una. Unde magnae malitia est seminar semen tale, cum ex uno gradu illius, talis messis surgat. Ad Cristum et ad servos eius pertinet unire e pacificare. Hac de causa filius Dei venit in mundum, ut pacem reformaret in mundo. Ad diabolo vero pertinet dispergere.* (op. cit., 581; ‘Sometimes, from one word uttered by a sower a discord may arise such a great discord that an entire country is destroyed. Hence, sowing such a seed is indicative of a great malice, because from a single movement of this seed grows such a great crop. It behooves Jesus to unite and make peace. This is why the Son of God came into this world, to reform peace in the world. Whereas dissipating is the work of the devil’).

both hands severed, and Bertrand de Born is decapitated and holds his head in front of his torso like a lantern.

After the terrible pain of the mutilation, the wounds heal, but since the souls follow a circular path, every time they pass in front of the devil they have their wounds reopened and their atrocious pain resumes. Since for Dante the relationship between parts and whole is a circular relationship underlying unity,<sup>290</sup> the circuit the sinners have to follow in this *bolgia* seems to hint at the idea of unity; with their walk they are forced to move in an undivided circle, the unity of which their actions in life could not achieve. Peraldus's comparison between the body of the church and the human body seems to account perfectly for Dante's choice of this *contrappasso*: Mohamed's intestines figure the intestinal strife he provoked within Ecclesia,<sup>291</sup> and Ali's face, cleft from chin to forehead, stands for the disfigurement he brought to the harmony of the faith.

That the type of sin Mahomed and Ali are designed to represent is of a verbal nature can be deduced indirectly from what a character in *Paradiso* says about the method underlying his conversion: '*l benedetto Agapito, che fue/sommo pastore, a la fede sincera/mi dirizzò con le parole sue.* (*Par.* VI. 16-18; underlining mine). Just as words may serve to convert a person to true faith, so they can be abused and pressed into the service of disconversion and schism.

---

<sup>290</sup> In the *Monarchy*, he describes the relationship between the part and the body in the following way: "Again, the purpose of the part is related to the purpose of the whole as the part is related to the whole. (...) what is good for the part of an organization, is not greater than what is good for the whole organization, but rather the contrary is true," *Mon.* 1.6.1, 35) Although in this passage, the relationship parts-whole is discussed in connection with mankind ("mankind in its entirety is a kind of whole," *Mon.* 1.7.1, 39) and the necessity of political subordination to a monarch, the same relationship parts-whole can be extrapolated to the anatomic imagery figuring the punishment of the sowers of discord. The whole of their bodies cannot function properly without a good working of the parts of these bodies, but these bodies are all dismembered or mutilated. It is also interesting that in the same political treatise, Dante defines sin itself as a breaking of unity and dispersion into multiplicity: "sinning is nothing else than scorning unity and moving away from it towards multiplicity." *Mon.* 1.15.3, 81)

<sup>291</sup> It is well known that for the medieval Western Europe, Mohamed was a Christian preacher, who deluded in his expectations, brought the first great schism to the body of the Church. Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, was held responsible for the creation of a new schism within Islam.

Whereas, in Paradiso, Justinian embodies the first case, Mohamed and Alì represent in Hell the latter.

Peraldus's references to the civic dimension of discord are exemplified by Dante's *seminator di scandalo*: Curio, Mosca, Pier da Medicina and Bertran de Born are all characters designed to embody the division of political nature. The first in this series, Curio, is the famous Roman general who advised Caesar to cross the river Rubicon, an action that led to civil war. Curio's presence among the sinners of the ninth bolgia is important in the economy of my discussion of the sins of the tongue in the *Inferno*, therefore I will dwell on him in a little more detail. Curio's action and punishment are described in the canto with words that emphasize the linguistic nature of Curio's sin:

“Questi è desso, e non favella./Questi, scacciato, il dubitar sommerse/in Cesare, affermando che'l fornito/sempre con danno l'attender sofferse.”/Oh quanto mi pareva sbigottito/con la lingua tagliata ne la strozza,/Curio, ch'a dir fu così ardito. (XXVIII. 96-103)

“This is he, and he cannot speak./ He, an exile, drowned Caesar's doubts, affirming/ that one prepared always suffers from delay.”/ Oh how dismayed Curio seemed, with the tongue/ cut out of his throat, he who was so bold to speak!

The verbs Dante uses to describe Curio's sway on Caesar's political decision: *affermare* e *dire*--the latter accompanied by *ardito* ‘bolding’ that enhances the stylistic effect-- point to the oral dimension of Curio's transgression; his words, his act of political counseling, are at the root of the civil war that tore the Roman unity apart. Through the figure of Curio, Dante achieves in the text the link between the sin of evil counsel, as embodied by Guido in the eight pouch of

Malebolge, and that of sedition.”<sup>292</sup> To the medieval theorists of the sins of the tongue, the moral categories of ‘evil counsel’ and ‘dissemination of discord’ were so blatantly related that Domenico Cavalca, for instance, before giving *exempla* of dissemination of discord, asserts: *Or sopra ciò non mi estendo molto, perocchè ciò che è detto di sopra, biasimando le liti e le contenzioni, ed anco i mali consiglieri, a questa materia si possono riferire.* In other words, the tens of exemplary stories he had written about the sins of *contentio* and the sin of *male consigliare* could well apply to illustrate the sin of sedition, so great the affinity among these three classes of verbal sins is.<sup>293</sup> In Dante, the genetic relationship between the sin of evil counsel and that of sedition is evident through several factors: first, both the evil counselors and the sowers of discord are located in Maleboge, the infernal area where sins of malice are punished. Second, the two bolgia where these two distinct categories of sinners are located come right one after the other (*consiglieri frodolenti* in bolgia eight and *seminator di scandalo e*

---

<sup>292</sup> Several modern interpreters have pointed to this link; Truscott, for instance notes that “(...) both the counselors of fraud and the sowers of discord use language to create *scisma*: they are all, in their different ways, ‘evil counselors’ (*Ulysses and Guido*, 70.) Along the same lines, Joan Ferrante maintains that “the effects of evil counsel in the ninth section of fraud are even more direct and widespread: divisions in church and state.” (*The Political Vision*, 186). Mazzota, too, points to the association between city and language in the circles of the lower hell (*Dante, Poet of the Desert*, 72-73).

<sup>293</sup> It is interesting that, in analyzing the degree of gravity of sedition with respect to contention, Cavalca comes to the conclusion that the former is more grievous, as it springs from *malizia*: *Ma per uno rispetto questo peccato di seminare discordie eccede quello delle contenzioni; perocchè quello comunemente procede da infermità di mente, che non può patire le ingiurie; ma questo sempre procede da pura e diabolica malizia* (p. 193; ‘But in one respect this sin of sowing discords exceeds that of contentions; because the latter ordinarily proceeds from weakness of mind, which cannot take offences, whereas the former comes from sheer and devilish malice.’) (Cavalca does not specify, however, if sedition is graver even than evil counsel). The notion of *malizia* as origin of specific vices of the tongue, such as *pravum consilium* and *seminatio discordias*, harks back to Peraldus, and it is worth noting that both Cavalca and Dante follow this moral pattern. Cavalca asserts not only with respect to *seminare discordie* but also to *male consigliare* that they are verbal trespasses stemming from malice. Both Peraldus and Cavalca furnish evidence for the fact that the medieval theorists of the sins of the tongue used to establish hierarchical relations within this class of sins, based on a criterion of gravity. The practice is occasional in Peraldus, but frequent in Cavalca and Aquinas. In his treatment of the sins of the word (*peccata verbi*) in *Secunda Secundae*, Aquinas’s constantly “weighs” specific sins of words in relationship with others, related, and establishes which is more grievous than which. This evidence confirms our sense that the sins of the tongue punished in Dante’s hell are not dispersed randomly, but distinguished and distributed according to certain criteria important for Dante. The cantos describing the pouches eight and nine, for instance, suggest that the criterion Dante had in mind for “weighing” the sin of dissemination of discord with respect to evil counsel was social: the former had the greatest public dimension--civil disorder.

*scisma* in bolgia nine. Thirdly, Curio's sin is related to that of Guido in the sense that it is a form of counsel; at the same time, it is more grievous than Guido's because it led to a civil war. That Curio's transgression is a sin of the tongue is also confirmed by the words with which his punishment is described: he can no longer speak (*favellare*) because his tongue was cut off. In Dante's time, the providential punishment of the evil doers through the members with which they had sinned was a common notion, so it should not come as a surprise that Dante reserved Curio this type of punishment.<sup>294</sup> The portrayal of Mosca dei Lamberti brings again in focus an act of speech: the words with which he approved of the murder of Buondelmonte are inserted in the text in the form of free discourse, introduced by a verb of assertion (*dire*). When he beseeches the pilgrim not to forget him, the character speaks of himself in the third person and is in fact quoting himself:

Ricordera'ti anche del Mosca,/che disse, lasso!, ‘capo ha cosa fatta.’/che fu mal seme per la gente tosca. (XXVIII.106-109).

You will remember Mosca, too, who said,/alas, ‘A thing done is done,’ the seed of evil for the/ Tuscans.

Cast in the shape of a (micro) discourse within a discourse, Mosca's words *capo ha cosa fatta* are in now, in Hell, branded by Mosca himself as an evil seed which germinated into the disruption of the social balance in Tuscany. The character's self-comment, besides being a

---

<sup>294</sup> See for instance, Corinne Leveleux, who in her study on medieval blasphemy asserts: “Nombreuses sont en effet les histoires qui mettent en scène des impies dont le cadavre est découvert sans langue ou avec une langue énorme, quand cet organe n'est pas avalé, mangé par les vers...” (in *La parole interdite. Le blasphème dans la France médiévale, XIIIe-XIVe siècles: Du péché au crime*. Paris: De Boccard, 2001). Among the late medieval sources that Leveleux evokes to substantiate her claims is Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum morale*, from which Leveleux quotes a remark about the divine punishments awaiting those who sin through their tongues: *Saepe enim puniuntur in lingua per quam peccat; iuxta illud Sap. 11 ‘per quae peccat quis, per haec et torquetur’: ut dives epulo in inferno cruciatur in lingua in qua peccaverat...* (‘For often the sinners are punished in the tongue with which they sin, according to Solomon, 11, “in that with which one sins one shall be punished,” as the rich party-man is tortured in Hell in the tongue with which he sinned’; quoted by Leveleux in *op. cit.*, 146).

repetition of the agricultural metaphor common to Holy Writ and Peraldus, is reasserting Dante's older assessment of words as seeds of human actions, made in the *Convivio*.<sup>295</sup> Mosca's words, pronounced while he was alive, were a political sanction that bore evil fruits of hate and war between two Christian families, citizens of the same country. Like in Curio's case, through the Florentine character of Mosca, Dante is again emphasizing the verbal nature of the sin of sedition, and, at the same time, the linkage with the sin of evil counsel punished in bolgia eight.

Both the oral aspect of the sin of dissemination of discord and the connection with wicked counsel reemerge in the discourse of Bertrand de Born, the famous martial poet of the Provençal lyric:

E perché tu di me novella porti,/sappi ch'i' son Bertram dal Bornio,  
quelli/che diedi al re giovane i ma' conforti./Io feci il padre e'l figlio in sé  
ribelli;/ Achitofèl non fé più d'Absalone,/e di David coi malvagi punzelli.  
(*Inf. XXVIII.133-138*)<sup>296</sup>

And that you may take back news of me, know/ that I am Bertran de Born, he who gave  
the young/ king the bad encouragements./I made father and son revolt against each  
other:/Achitophel did no worse to Absalom and David with his evil proddings.

Bertran's significance for the political view of the *Divine Comedy* has been thoroughly examined by Teodolinda Barolini, who, collating the Provençal poet with Dante's Sordello, has

---

<sup>295</sup> *Da vedere è come ragionevolmente quel tempo in tutte le nostre operazioni si dee attendere, e massimamanete nel parlare (...) Per che le parole, che sono quasi seme di operazione, si deono molto discretamente sostenere e lasciare, perché bene siano ricevute e fruttifere veggano, sì perché da la loro parte non sia difetto di sterilitade* (pp. 222-223; 'It is to consider how reasonable it is that we should await the proper moment in all our undertakings, and most of all in speaking. (...) This is why great discretion must be shown in using or in avoiding the use of words—which are, as it were, the seed of our activity—so that they may well be received and fruitful in effect, so as to avoid any defect of sterility on their part.'). As I have mentioned in the Introduction, the metaphorical notion of words as able to "germinate" and produce deeds will reoccur in Count Ugolino's discourse (*Inf. XXXIII. 7-9*).

<sup>296</sup> According to Edwin Craun, the reference to Achitophel in connection to the sowing of discord was a medieval topos, present in the works of William Peraldus, Etienne de Bourbon and pseudo-Vincent of Beauvais. (*Lies, Slander and Obscenity*, 51). For a possible source for Bertran's punishment, see Danuta Shanzer's note according to which Dante drew his inspiration from Alain of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*, where the allegorical figure of Discord is beheaded ["The Punishment of Bertran de Born," *Yearbook of Italian Studies* 8 (1989), 95-97].

highlighted the reasons for Dante's negative assessment of Bertran in the *Comedy*.<sup>297</sup> One of the remarks she makes about Bertrand is of relevance for my approach to the ninth pouch of Malebolge. Based on a close comparison between Dante's text and the Provençal texts that sketched the biography of the warmonger troubadour, Barolini comes to the conclusion that the key to understanding Dante's Bertran resides in the *vidas'* exaggerated account of Bertrand as a counselor for Henry. More significantly, Barolini says, "the *vidas* specify that Bertrand did this with his poetry: (...) *se penava e si percassava ab sos sirventes de desfar la patz e de mostrar cum chascuns era desonratz en la patz* ('he would put himself to great pains and strive with his sirventes to undo the peace and to show how each one was dishonored by peace')."<sup>298</sup>

Further textual evidence can be adduced to substantiate Teodolinda Barolini's remarks: poetry, before being an ideological statement, is language--a tool of communication. It is a written expression of one's thoughts and words. Language can do at least as much damage in its written forms as in its oral ones, if not more. In the wake of the *vidas'* accounts of Bertran's misuse of the gift of (written) speech, his discourse in the *Comedy* offers us more indications of Bertran's misuse of language. Not coincidentally, I believe, the vocabulary Dante places in Bertran's mouth is reminiscent of the medieval moral lexicon of *peccata linguae*: *i ma' conforti* suggest, through their hint at Bertran's alleged office of political counselor, the sin of evil counseling. *Male confortare* are the very Italian words with which, during the years in which Dante wrote the *Comedy*, Domenico Cavalca translated Peraldus's notion of *pravum consilium*;

---

<sup>297</sup> In Barolini's view, whereas Sordello is assigned in the text the role of symbol of politic and linguistic unity, two ideals achieved through his poetry, Bertrand is Sordello's polar opposite, insofar as he used his poetry to foster divisiveness, disunity: "In the Comedy, therefore, Dante uses Bertran and Sodello as exempla of the uses to which a poet can put his poetry in the service of the state. (...) As one would expect, the poet in Hell, Bertran, is the exemplum of the political poet who misused his position in life. By abetting disobedience and revolt, Bertran put his poetry to bad use, mishandling the responsibility that a poet has to his audience." ["Bertran de Born and Sordello: The Poetry of Politics in Dante's Comedy." *PMLA* 94. 3 (1979), 402].

<sup>298</sup> op. cit., 400. The fragment quoted and translated by Barolini belongs to *Le biografie trovadoriche*, ed. Guido Favati (Bologna: Libreria Antiquaria Palmaverde, 1961), 147.

along these lines, the perpetrators of evil counseling were called by Cavalca *confortatori al male*. The link with the sin punished in the eighth pouch of Malebolge becomes once again transparent.

Dissemination of discord was, however, in both Peraldus and Cavalca's treatments, a sin related to, but technically different from, evil counsel, and therefore described in different terms. Sedition was characterized in terms of persistent oral incitements to evil. The notion appears in Dante's portrayal of Bertran, as well, when the troubadour indirectly labels his own divisive verbal activity as *malvagi punzelli*, a phrase that conveys insistent evil suggestions.<sup>299</sup>

Another important indication of Dante's relationship to the moralists of the sins of the tongue is the label *seminator di scandalo e scisma* the poet applies to the sinners punished in the ninth pouch of Malebolge. It is worth taking a closer look at the two technical terms in Dante's appellation. Both *scandalo* and *scisma* represent moral categories well defined in the Middle Ages. Alain of Lille's dictionary of theological terms, for instance, defines *scandalum* in a very complex way, starting with the very etymology of the word: coming from Greek, scandal denotes etymologically the action of those who set up obstacles in the ways of the travelers. Morally, it signifies the act of inducing another into evil, through words or deeds. It also means saddening or offending someone.<sup>300</sup> Both the relationship of scandal to words and the notion of spiritual damage brought to another occur in Dante's text: *Inferno XI*. 23 describes lower hell as the place inhabited by that type of people who *con frode altrui contrista* ('injures someone with fraud', the same verb used by Alain) and we have just seen the great extent to which *Inferno XXVIII*

---

<sup>299</sup> The words is interpreted as *incitamenti*, by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi: "punzelli: come il più comune *pungelli*, vale 'pungoli', incitamenti (si veda sopra: *i ma' conforti*); puntellare nel senso di pungere, spronare, è in Petrarca, RVF CCLIV 4." [Note to *Inferno XXVIII*, in *La Divina Commedia. Inferno*. (Milano: Mondadori, 2005), 853].

<sup>300</sup> PL 210, col. 936.

suggests the link between words and scandal. Another source important for Dante, Thomas Aquinas, echoes Alain's definition of *scandalum* in virtually identical terms: "While going along a spiritual way, a man may be disposed to a spiritual downfall by another's word or deed, in so far, to wit, as one man by his injunction, inducement or example, moves another to sin; and this is scandal properly called." (ST II-II, 43.1). It is interesting, however, that Aquinas establishes a difference between 'scandal' (opposed to Beneficence) and 'sedition' (opposed to Peace), a distinction that does not appear in *Inferno XVIII*, where the two theological notions seem to overlap. Aquinas characterizes sedition as a sin threatening the unity of a people, city or state, but this sin is not explicitly defined in terms of linguistic acts, as scandal is. There is, however, a Thomistic distinction that appears in Dante as well: that between sedition and schism. For Aquinas, schism was a sin contrary to the ecclesiastical unity, while sedition had to do with the temporal or secular unity of the multitude. Furthermore, schism did not involve preparation for material fights, as sedition did. The divide between sedition and schism reoccur in Dante's label *seminator di scandalo e di scisma*, only that what for Dante *scandalo* covered the meanings of both Thomistic terms *scandalum* and *sedition*.

Dante's departure from Aquinas in his lexical choices is, however, not a drift apart from the moral lexicon of the late Middles Ages. Conjoining the notions of *scandalo* and *scisma* in the description of the sowers of discord seems to have been a rather usual practice, if we consider that Dante's contemporary and countryman Domenico Cavalca gives us in his *Pungilingua* textual evidence in this respect. In the chapter dedicated to the sowers of discord, Cavalca uses both *scandalo* and *scisma*, the first in a quote of Jesus' words: "Guai a quegli, per cui lo scandalo viene" (human referent that Cavalca identifies as 'gli seminatori di discordie'), and the second term in a quote from one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians: *Priegovi, che siate, e dicate tutti*

*uno, e non abbiate in voi scisma e divisione* (p. 194; ‘I beseech you that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisons among you’).<sup>301</sup> Although the two terms appear separately in Cavalca’s text, it is significant that both appear in the same chapter, in reference to the same type of sinners: the *seminatori di discordie*.

The textual clues that *Inferno XXVIII* offers us point significantly to the wrongful verbal activity that underlies the sin of those who sow discord either on a religious level or on a political plan. Implicit in Mohamed and Ali’s presence (for how is faith spread or distorted other than through the medium of speech?), the linguistic side of dissemination of discord is explicitly expressed in the portrayals of Curio, Mosca and Bertran. The latter is to be interpreted as a counterpart not only to Sordello, but to Dante-poet himself. *De Vulgari eloquentia*, the first modern treatise of literary history, drew parallels between the poetry produced on the Italian soil and that beyond the Alps, and tried to find correspondences between the best exponents of Occitan lyrics and the poets of vernacular Italian. Thus, Arnaut Daniel’s poems of love had their Italian equivalent in the poetry of Cino da Pistoia; Guirault de Borneil’s moral lyrics in the artistic output of Dante himself, only for Bertran de Born there was no Italian equivalent; this was the conclusion of the author of the treatise on the vernacular eloquence. And if Dante, the literary historian, left empty the spot reserved for Italy’s poetry of war, Dante the poet marked an even greater distance between himself and this type of verse. By placing the sin of dissemination of discord, as a verbal sin, in one of the lowest and most repulsive places in hell, and by having the warmonger Provençal troubadour represent this sin, Dante made clear that he transcended the temptation of using poetry for spreading the evil seeds of social and political discord. Had he fallen to this temptation, the harshness and bitterness of his exile would have accounted for it; his

---

<sup>301</sup> Corinthians, 1.10.

own brilliant artistic means would have served him. But the good company of his *coscienza pura*, the one that he evokes in the same *Inferno XXVIII*, has helped him not succumb to this temptation. In a supremely moral and poetical anti-Bertranian effort, Dante turned the genius of his poetry toward the Christian ideals of harmony and peace. In the fictional realm of the *Commedia*, the pity the pilgrim feels toward Geri del Bello, his own kinsman punished in the same *bolgia* with Bertran, is the pity of the man who rose above earthly laws of blood and revenge, and was striving to adhere to the higher values of forgiveness and charity.

#### 4.4.2 The verbal *falsador*

On the side opposite Truth, enmity-causing Falsehood stood in strained pose. Her face, darkened with the soot of ugliness, bespoke no gifts given her by nature; rather old age, subjecting her face to the hollows of wrinkles, had gathered it all over into folds. It was plain to see that her head was not clothed with a veil of hair and it had no robe to cover its baldness: rather, a countless assemblage of rags, joined by a limitless conjunction of threads, had woven a garment for her. This one, secretly lying in wait for the picture of truth, disgraced by deformity whatever truth graced by conformity.

(Alain of Lille, *The Plaint of Nature*)

In the *Inferno*, forms of transgressive speech such as flattery, fraudulent counsel, sowing discord, are punished in lower hell. With the sole exception of blasphemy, which is a sin of violence, all the other linguistic transgressions we have seen so far are assigned to the area of Fraud. The most striking absence in this list of sins seems to be *mendacium* ('lie'), one of the most basic (and most debated) sins of the tongue of all times. In the biblical tradition, lying was considered the "progeny" of the devil, and in consonance with this scriptural view, Dante has Malacoda, one of the devils from the circle of barristers, lie to the pilgrim and his guide that in Hell there is a

bridge that can lead them to the next circle, that of the hypocrites.<sup>302</sup> But despite this fictional enactment of the sin of *mendacium*, Dante does not use the denomination “liars” for any category of sinners in Hell. What he uses instead is a series of terms interconnected by the idea of falsity: *dire falso, la falsa* (for Potiphar’s wife), *l’falso Sinon, (non) ver testimonio, spergiuro* (all used in *Inferno* XXX, the last of the thirteen cantos devoted to Malebolge). Trying to fill the gap created by Dante’s omission of the name of the sin (a situation similar to that from *Inferno* XXVI-XXVII), early commentators came up with the phrase “*falsari di parole*” to refer to the category of sinners represented in the text by two figures: the wife of Potiphar and Sinon.

In what follows, I will examine the textual clues offered by *Inferno* XXX, and will seek to determine what specific sins of speech Dante envisioned when he introduced Sinon and Potifar’s wife into his hell. The fact that Dante omitted the name of the sin is rather uncommon for the poet-moralist, who is usually very thorough in distributing and naming sins. In an attempt to solve this new hermeneutical knot, I will look again at the way in which the major medieval texts on *peccata linguae* conceived of the relationship of speech to falsehood. More specifically, I will briefly examine the treatment of the sins of ‘lying’ (with its subclass ‘false testimony’) and ‘perjury’ in Peraldus, Aquinas and Cavalca, and will use these notions to interpret the verbal sins punished in the last pouch of Malebolge. Peraldus and Cavalca are particularly important since the former provided an authoritative discourse on these two sins and the latter introduced the

---

<sup>302</sup> As we will find out in Canto XXI, Malacoda is lying: in fact, all the bridges of the sixth pouch are broken. For a medieval perception of a liar, see Alain’s definition of *mendax* from his *Liber de distinctionibus*: *Mendax dicitur falsus, unde in Evangelio Christus ait de diabolo quod ipse mendax est et pater ejus, id est mendacii. Dicitur dolosus, unde in Psalmo: quod mendaces sunt in stateris, id est dolosi in suis negationibus. Dicitur mutabilis, unde in Evangelio: Solus Deus verax, omnis homo mendax.* (PL 210, col. 856; ‘The liar is called false, hence in the Gospel Jesus says about the devil that he is a liar himself and the father of it, that is, of the lie. It is called guileful, hence the Psalm [says] that the liars are in swaying, that is guileful in their denials. It also means changing, hence the Gospel: *Only God is true, every man is a liar.*’). In *Inferno* XXIII, Dante inserts the biblical definition of the devil as father of lying within the context of hypocrisy: *Io udi’ già dire a Bologna/del diavol vizi assai, tra’ quali udi’ ch’elli è bugiardo e padre di menzogna* (142-143). The point here is that one does not need to have a theological training to know that the devil is the prototypical liar. This was common knowledge.

attendant terminology into the Italian vernacular. I will finally argue that Dante's reasons for the omission of the name of the verbal sins represented by Sinon and Potiphar's wife lie in Dante's effort to bring together several types of sinners within one category of fraudulent speakers: the practitioners of 'lying' (with its subspecies 'false testimony') and perjury, two sins that in the medieval moral texts were allied through a common element of falsehood.<sup>303</sup> I will also take a closer look at the association of words with coins, an analogy that might represent another possible link between Dante's poem and Peraldus's encyclopedia of sins.

According to Casagrande and Vecchio, two texts—one theological, the other juridical—are responsible for the moral tracts' close association between the sins of *mendacium* and the sin of *periurium*: Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*, which use the biblical notion of false testimony as a starter in his analysis of the couple *mendacium/periurium*, and Gratian's *Decretum*, where *mendacium* and *periurium* are constantly and closely intertwined. The alignment of these two sins persists in Peraldus, Aquinas and Cavalca, with the important mention that in their texts the discourse on perjury stems from the analysis of lying.<sup>304</sup> In other words, although the two sins are treated distinctly, they are allied and investigated by means of a common lexicon of intentional falsehood. Peraldus starts from Augustine's definition of lying as *falsa significatio vocis cum intentio fallendi* ('using a word to make someone believe something untrue, with the intention to deceive'), and, recalling the biblical image of the devil as the archetypal liar, evolves an idiosyncratic approach to the problematic of lying, an approach that might have left an important mark of Dante's handling of this sin. Among the reasons that should prompt the

---

<sup>303</sup> According to Casagrande and Vecchio, long before the medieval constitution of the systems of sins of the tongue, *mendacium*, *periurium* and *falsum testimonium* formed an inseparable sin-triad. Medieval texts, they say, showed however little interest to the sin of *falsum testimonium*, privileging instead the other two (*I peccati*, 251).

<sup>304</sup> "Partire dalla menzogna è una scelta obbligata: l'analisi del *periurium*, anche quando nei testi viene affrontata per prima, presuppone logicamente l'analisi del *mendacium* e da essa soltanto può prendere le mosse." (*I peccati*, 253).

detestation of this vice abominable to God, Peraldus lists the human natural repulsion to falsity. To be more concrete and easy to understand, the moralist draws a long parallel between lying and the counterfeiting of money:

(...) quantum praevalet bonus denarius denario falso, tantum praevalet homo verax, homini falsi et mendaci. Unus bonus denarius valet centum falsos, unus homo verax centum mendaces. Unde multum melioraret se aliquis, si remoto peccato mendacci vera de cetero loqueretur: quia cui non displiceat si aliquem de denariis suis invenit falso? Quis est qui non potius velit habere denarios bonos quam falsos? Sed de ipsis non dolent miseri homines, quando seipso falsus inveniunt, et potius se volunt esse falsos quam veros.<sup>305</sup>

Just as the good dinar has more value than the forged one, so the man who tells the truth is worthier than the false and lying man. A good dinar is worth one hundred forged ones, and a man who tells the truth (is worth) one hundred liars. Therefore, every man would better himself if, casting away the sin of lying, would always say true things. For who does not hate to discover that one of his dinars is false? Who would not have true coins rather than false? But the unfortunate men have no regret when they discover themselves false and want to be rather false than true.

A liar is a traitor who breaks the bonds of trust and deceives those who confide in him. He is worse than a thief, for the latter harms the body,<sup>306</sup> whereas the former harms the soul by inducing it into error. Even the evil appetite that characterizes a thief is more understandable than the evil appetite of a liar, because the thief longs for good things belonging to others, whereas the liar desires evil things. Stealing is, therefore, not as bad as lying, because the motivation for theft comes from self-concern, whereas the motivation for lying comes mainly from the malicious will to harm others. Lying is therefore a devilish sin that springs from malice and can do much harm

---

<sup>305</sup> *Summa Vitiorum*, 558. The same notion occurs in another Peraldian text, *De eruditione principum*, where the moralist instructs the prince to control his speech as he would control money forging in the state. This second text is referred to by Casagrande and Vecchio (op. cit., 265).

<sup>306</sup> By ‘body’ Peraldus most likely means the temporal goods necessary for the physical and biological well-being of humans.

to the militant Church, who speaks the message of truth, and to society, as a whole.<sup>307</sup> A most socially disruptive speech is for Peraldus ‘false testimony’, a subclass of lying, which harms not only God (whose name is invoked as a token for the oath), but also the judges and those against whom the testimony is addressed and who are innocent.

Treated separately from *mendacium*, the sin of *perjurium* is clearly defined by Peraldus in terms of falsifying the truth, and the practitioners of this sin are labeled *falsarii* (‘falsifiers’):

Quartum est hoc quod ipse falsarius est. Si quis sigillo alicuius domini sibi commisso ad confirmandam aliquam veritatem, uteretur ad aliud confirmandum, ipse falsarius iudicaretur et excommunicatus est (...). Sic quam Deus permiserit hominibus ut assumant nomen suum ad confirmationem veritatis, si utant nomen eius ad confirmandum falsum ipsi falsarii suunt.” (*Summa Vitiorum*, p. 555).

The fourth (consideration) is that he himself is a falsifier. If someone has the seal of his master, (a seal) entrusted to him for the confirmation of a truth, and uses it in order to confirm something else, this man would be considered a falsifier and would be excommunicated. Thus, since God allowed men to use His name to confirm a truth, if they use His name to confirm a falsehood, they become falsifiers themselves.

Like Peraldus, Aquinas takes up the Augustinian definition of lying as a false signification by words, but introduces the Aristotelian tripartition of lying into officious, jocose, mischievous. The intention to deceive belongs only to the latter class, which represents the

---

<sup>307</sup> *Peior qui affuetus et mendaciis, quam fur: quia fur nocet corpori; ille autem qui mentitur, nocet animae, dum eam in errorem inducit. Item appetitus malus qui est in furore, quo ipse appetit rem alienam, est appetitus rei bonae; sed appetitus eius qui mentitur, est appetitus rei malae. Fur enim suum bonum temporale quaerit, sed mentiens alienum malum, errorem proximi. Unde peccatum mendacii peccatum diabolicum est, et peccatum malitiae. (...) Peccatum istud valde nocivum est ecclesiae Dei. Facit enim ut vix alicui fides adhibeatur. (...) Opprobrium magnum in homine, mendacium (...).* (*Summa Vitiorum*: 558-560; ‘He who is given to lying is worse than a robber, because the robber harms the body, whereas the liar harms the soul, inasmuch as he is driving it into sin. Likewise, the evil desire underlying the ardor with which the robber wants an alien thing is a desire for a good situation; whilst the desire of the liar aims at an evil thing. For the robber pursues a temporal good, and the liar seeks an alien evil, namely the error of the other. Therefore, the sin of lying is a sin of the devil and of malice. (...) This sin is very harmful to the Church of God, for it causes someone to be trusted. (...) Lying is a great shame for man’).

perfection of lying.<sup>308</sup> Perjury is also described in terms of falsehood: “That perversity in swearing, which is called perjury takes its species chiefly from falsehood. Lack of truth, lack of justice, lack of judgment; by the very fact that a man swears indiscreetly, he incurs the danger of lapsing into falsehood.”<sup>309</sup> The noun ‘falsifier’ does not appear, however, in Aquinas’s handling of the types of verbal falsehood, as it did in Peraldus, nor is the parallel between money and words drawn.<sup>310</sup>

Peraldus’s metaphorical terminology recurs instead in Cavalca’s *Pungilingua*, which uses this analogy to lobby for harder legal punishments for perjurers:

Se dunque ci vieta Dio per la sua legge di non nominare lo suo nome in vano, ben dobbiamo credere che egli ha per peggio prenderlo, e nominarlo a giurare la falsità. Onde per questo rispetto ogni spieggiuratore è falsario in ciò che usa lo nome di Dio a confermare la falsità. Onde se chi falsifica lo suggello del papa, è scomunicato per ragione; e così ogni falsatore di moneta, o di lettere secondo la giustizia della legge civile dee essere arso; bene dobbiamo credere, che quelli che falsificano lo nome di Dio giurando per esso la falsità, lo quale Dio ci concedette a giurare la verità, merita più dura sentenza. (pp. 69-70; emphasis mine).

If therefore, through His law, God forbids us to use His name in vain, we have good reasons to believe that He considers it worse if we take His name and invoke it to swear what is false. Hence, in this respect, every perjurer is a falsifier, in that he uses the name of God to confirm a falsehood. Hence whoever falsifies the papal seal is rightly excommunicated, and, in the same way, every falsifier of coin, or letters, must be burnt to stake, according to the justice of the civil law; we have good reasons to believe that those

---

<sup>308</sup> “The desire to deceive belongs to the perfection of lying. (...) The sin of lying is aggravated if by lying a person intends to injure another, and this is called a mischievous lie.” (Q. 110, Art. 1-2, 1659).

<sup>309</sup> Q. 98, Art. 1, 1610-1611.

<sup>310</sup> Apparently, Aquinas knew of this equivalence, but was reluctant to using it: “la comparaison (de la monnaie) avec le signe linguistique s’impose évidemment (...) Aussi bien chez Thomas d’Aquin, qui la critique, que chez des dominicains d’Oxford et chez des franciscains de Paris, qui la prennent à leur compte, se trouve évoquée une doctrine qui, faisant reposer le signe sur une sorte de pacte sans faire appel à aucune *virtus impressa*, développe la comparaison avec la pièce de la monnaie.” (“The comparison of the coin with the monetary sign evidently imposes itself (...) In Thomas Aquinas, who criticizes it, as well as in the Oxfordian Dominicans and the Parisian Franciscans, who appropriate it, found itself evoked a doctrine, which, attributing to the sign a sort of pact without using any *virtus impressa*, develops the comparison with the coin.” Joel Biard: “Signe monétaire et signe linguistique: La critique de la chrématistique dans l’école buridanienne,” in *Les philosophies morales et politiques au Moyen Age. Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Medieval Philosophy*. Ottawa, 17-22 August, 1992. Vol. 1, 1420.

who falsify the name of God swearing, through It, the false—when God gave us His name as a concession for us to swear the truth—deserves a harsher punishment.

And as far as eternal life is concerned, the perjurors will spend theirs in hell like all the other enemies of justice: *quello che falso giura, non sarà in cielo ma discenderà in abisso: in abisso d'inferno come pessimo nemico della giustizia* (p. 72; ‘he who swears falsely will not go to heaven but will descend to the abyss: into the abyss of hell as the worst enemy of justice’). The notion of verbal falsity reemerges in the chapter Cavalca devotes to the *peccato del bugiare, cioè dire bugie e menzogne*, which immediately follows the chapter on perjury.<sup>311</sup> Lying falsifies the human being especially in that part of the body divinely appointed for the expression of the truth: the tongue, says Cavalca. Then he goes on translating into the vernacular Peraldus’s parallel between lies and false coins and concludes the paragraph with a personal, topical allusion to contemporary liars: those who would accidentally get a false coin would be reluctant to using it for fear of the legal sanctions imposed by the court, whereas those who lie use false words with no shame or fear whatsoever.<sup>312</sup>

---

<sup>311</sup> In this, Cavalca faithfully follows Peraldus’ arrangement, where *periurium* occupies the forth position and *mendacium* (with its appendix *falsum testimonium*) the fifth.

<sup>312</sup> *Nella terza parte dico, che si mostra la gravezza di questo peccato in ciò, e perciocchè falsifica l'uomo; massimamente in quella parte, nella quale debbe avere e sonare più verità, cioè nella lingua. E però si dice ne' Proverbi: Abbominazione sono a Dio le labbra mendaci. Onde quanto migliore è il danaio buono che il falso, tanto più vale l'uomo vero che il mendace, anzi ci è troppo maggiore disuguaglio, perocchè almeno molti danari falsi vagliono un buono, ma non seguita così, che molti falsi uomini vagliono un verace, anzi sono al tutto contrari, come la verità e la falsità. Ma tanto è oggi la nostra cecità e miseria, che, come dice santo Agostino, ogni cosa vogliamo buona eccetto che noi stessi, sicchè eziando quelli, li quali si sdegnerebbono, se fosse dato loro un danaio falso posto per uno buono, e temerebbono d'usarlo per paura della corte, la quale giudica li falsari, non si vergognano d'usare e d'avere lingua falsa.* (p 85; ‘In the third part I say that the gravity of this sin is shown in that it falsifies the man; especially in that body part where the truth should lie and resound best: the tongue. Hence the Proverbs: Abominable are to God the lying lips. Hence, just as the good coin is better than the false, so is the truthful man worthier than the liar; here there is an even too great inequality, for at least many false coins are worth one good one, but it does not hold for men that many false men are worth a truthful one; on the contrary, they are entirely opposed, as truth and falsehood. But our blindness and misery are so great today, that, as St. Augustine says, we want every thing to good, but ourselves; therefore even those who would be reluctant, if they were given a false coin, to use it as a good one, and would be afraid to spend it our of fear of the court, which judges the falsifiers, are not afraid to use and have a false tongue’) The rest of the chapter as well follows the outline of Peraldus’s treatment of *mendacium*

Peraldus and Cavalca's handling of *mendacium* and *periurium* sheds a great deal of light on Dante's treatment of false speakers in the *ultima chiostra* ('the last ring') of Malebolge. Here, alchemists are assembled with impersonators, falsifiers of objects, money forgers and those who speak falsely (*dire falso*, in the text).<sup>313</sup> Although these moral categories have been identified by Dante's commentators,<sup>314</sup> the demarcation is somewhat artificial: in the text, all these (slightly different types of) sinners are grouped by Dante under the generic noun *i falsador*, that he introduces in *Inferno* XXIX. 57.

The link between the sins of the falsifiers with Dante's fundamental moral notion of *malizia* is established through a metaphor that compares this pouch with the island of Egina: *Non credo ch'a veder maggior tristizia/fosse in EGINA il popol tutto infermo,/quando fu l'aere sì pien di malizia...*" Here *malizia* denotes the biologically infested, contagious quality of the air, but even when taken metaphorically, the term may be read as a grim reminder that we are still in Malebolge, the deep infernal zone where sins of malice are condemned. Moreover, *malizia* as a pathological quality of the air is reminiscent of Dante's (and the general medieval) conception of sin as disease.

---

(the eight species of lying; false testimony as the worst type of lie because it is intended to injure others; social classes that are more prone to lying, etc.)

<sup>313</sup> The association of alchemy with money forging and the assumption of false identity is not unusual, notes Durling, who also volunteers possible sources for Dante's series of *falsador*: "The grouping together of alchemy, impersonation, and counterfeiting has a traditional basis. Alchemy, repeatedly condemned as fraudulent by the popes, often involved passing off base metals as gold (...). The traditional association of counterfeiting and impersonation goes back at least as far as Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*, to Brangane's impersonation of Isolt on her wedding night (ed. Ranke, 12601-12670); it is possible that Gottfried's passage derives from one of the lost portions of the Old French *Tristan* by Thomas, which Dante probably knew"; "Dante among Falsifiers" *Lectura Dantis: Inferno*. A. Mandelbaum, A. Oldcorn, Ch. Ross, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, 393).

<sup>314</sup> The first to have made this division is, according to Roberto Sarolli, Luigi Pietrobono. Sarolli gives this information in the Enciclopedia Dantesca, under the heading "Moglie di Putifarre," where he evokes "the quadruplice suddivisione dei falsatori (struttura rivelata dal Pietrobono)".

It should, thus, come as no surprise that people who spoke falsely from malice, as Peraldus and Cavalca described the liars and the perjurors, can be found side by side with other types of forgers in the last division of fraud. Important textual indications reveal Dante's reasons for the alignment of impersonation with fraudulent speech: Mirra, who in the myth took a fictitious identity to sleep with her own father, is depicted as *falsificando sé in altrui forma* (41; 'by counterfeiting herself').

With a variation of the same phrase, Buoso Donati's sin is described as *falsificare in sé* (44; 'to counterfeit in himself'). But also an act of forging one's own identity was considered by Cavalca the act of lying, which was a falsifying of one's self in the tongue. The same idea of lying as assuming a false identity seems to underlie Dante's introduction of Potifar's wife, presented as *la falsa ch'accusò Giuseppe* (97; 'the false woman who accused Joseph', and of the fraudulent Greek, introduced as *'l falso Sinon Greco di Troia* (98). As we shall see, the notion of *altrui forma* Dante uses in reference to Mirra may be applied to the two fraudulent speakers, as well.

According to Gen 39. 6-23, the wife of the Egyptian wealthy man for whom Joseph worked tried unsuccessfully to seduce Joseph. Outraged by the young man's rejection and using the garment Joseph accidentally lost trying to avoid her, she told the men of her house that Joseph left his garment in her hand in his attempt to do violence to her. Using the same proof to support her story, i.e. Joseph's garment, she lies for the second time, this time to her husband, to whom she tells the same story of the attempted rape. By inventing this story, the wife of the Egyptian constructed an *altered reality* (in the etymological sense of *to alter*: that of coming up with *another* fact), and by imagining herself within this fabricated reality, she falsified herself; she imagined a 'raped self' that did not correspond to the factual truth. The medium she used to

accomplish this substitution of realities were the words she uttered to build her false accusation against Joseph: a lie that, as we know, changed Joseph's destiny, and thereby the fate of the Jewish people. A sole incident recounted by the Bible was enough for Dante to declare the Egyptian woman *falsa*, an adjective that refers to her entire identity, not only to this isolated act of speech that condemned innocent Joseph. This adjective is reminiscent of another story alluded to in the Malebolge, a story involving a character contemporary with Dante. In the circle of the thieves, Vanni Fucci evokes how he escaped a death sentence, when somebody else was unjustly accused of robbing the church in Pistoia: *falsamente già fu apposto altrui* (Inf. XXIV. 139). This line too establishes a linkage between somebody's identity (*altrui*) and an act of speech (the false accusation) that caused great harm to another, innocent person. Both the story evoked by Vanni Fucci and the episode of Potiphar's wife confirm the evil power of words when they blur the lines between true and false. In Vanni Fucci's story, those inaccurate words sent an innocent man to death, just as, in the biblical story, an unjust accusation had sent Jospeh, another innocent man, to prison.

Along the same lines, the figure of the Greek drawn from the myth of the Trojan horse (and we remember from Canto XXVI Dante's fascination for this story), is presented with the adjective *falso*, followed by an ironical phrase that only compounds the adjective: *greco di Troia*. Obviously, Sinon was a Greek... from Greece, but by mocking him, Dante in fact alludes to the fictitious identity Sinon built for himself in order to enter the city and convince the Trojans to accept the gift of the horse (a great fraud itself): he passed himself off as a defector of the Greek cause who wanted to side with the Trojans. Again, the medium he used in this enterprise was his powerful, Ulyssean rhetoric, the gifts of his tongue. Sinon possesses in fact a *falsa lingua*, to take up a scriptural phrase dear to Peraldus, who used his art of speech in fraudulent ways to enforce

another, big fraud: the Trojan horse, a horse that is not what it seems to be. Here again, words, gifts, identities shift in a complex interplay to deceive and harm others: Sinon's artful lies eventually caused the fall of Troy and the destruction of the Trojan civilization. In the text, this mythical figure engages in strife with one of Dante's contemporaries: a reminder of the immunity of sin to history. Hell levels the differences between eras, spaces and languages, just as Dante's poetry conflates mythical history with real figures from his own days. At hearing himself named a false Greek from Troy by master Adam (a famous English money forger), Sinon reacts violently --*forse d'esser nomato sì oscuro* (101; 'perhaps resented being named so darkly', explains Dante--, and strikes Adam in his aching belly.<sup>315</sup> When Adam strikes back, Sinon uses his words as a tool for revenge, telling master Adam that the arm with which he struck him had not been so fast when Adam was burnt at the stake for money forging. In a strongly realistic vein, the two sinners swear at each other with an impressive eloquence of evil and curse the two organs responsible for their wicked words: Sinon curses Adam's tongue and Adam Sinon's mouth.<sup>316</sup> The dialogue between the two sinners is worth quoting, for the wealth of linguistic references it bears:

E l'idropico: "Tu di'ver di questo:/ma tu non fosti sì ver testimonio/là 've del ver fosti a Troia richiesto."/ "S'io dissi falso, e tu falsasti il conio,"/disse Sinon; "e son qui per un fallo/, e tu per più ch'alcun altro demonio!"/ "Ricorditi, spergiuro, del cavallo,"/ rispuose quel ch'avëa infiata l'epa;/ "e sieti reo che tutto il mondo sallo!"/ "E te sia rea la sete onde ti crepa,"/ disse'l Greco, "la lingua, e l'acqua marcia/che'l ventre

---

<sup>315</sup> Sinon's violent reaction to the verbal insult is clear evidence of the powerful effect of words on somebody's psyche. The act of naming or, more exactly, calling somebody bad names, is never problem free; it always bears psychological (and here also physical) consequences.

<sup>316</sup> The two anatomic references are reminiscent of the first phase of the medieval discourse on *peccata linguae*, a phase in which the tongue or the mouth were held directly responsible for malicious utterances. Only with the great scholastics, Vincent of Beauvais, for instance, and especially Thomas Aquinas, will the cause for transgressive speech be transferred from a purely biological level to that of the will. For more on this shift, see Casagrande and Vecchio's *I peccati della lingua*, 175-209.

innanzi a li occhi sì t'assiepa!”/ Allora il monetier: “Così si squarcia/la bocca tua per tuo mal come suole/ché, s’i’ho sete e omor mi rinfarcia,/tu hai l’arsura e’l capo che ti duole,/e per leccar lo specchio di Narciso,/non vorresti a’ nvitar molte parole.” (*Inferno* XXX.112-129)

And the hydroptic: “You say true there, but you/were not such a true witness where you were asked/for the truth at Troy.”/ “If I spoke falsely, you falsified the coinage,” said/ Sinon, “and I am here for one fault, but you for more/than any other demon!”/ “Remember, perjurer, the Horse,” replied he of the/ swollen liver; “and let it be bitter to you that the/whole world knows of it!”/ “And to you bitter be the thirst that cracks,” said/the Greek, “your tongue, and the stagnant water that/makes of your belly a hedge before your eyes!”/ Then the coiner: “Your mouth gapes because of/ your disease, as usual; for, if I am thirsty and liquid swells me,/you have burning fever and a head that aches,/ and to lick the mirror of Narcissus you would not/need to be invited with many words!”

The first verses in this quote persistently revolve around the dynamic truth/falsehood and offer us the complete terminology for Sinon’s verbal sins: the word *ver* occurs obsessively in three separate positions (as noun, adjective and adverb) and is played against the synonyms for falsehood: *non* (...) *sì ver testimonio, dire falso, falsare, spergiuro*.<sup>317</sup> Important is that the latter list of terms spans the whole range of types of transgressive speech associated by Peraldus and Cavalca in their tracts: false testimony, lying, perjury. All three varieties of false talk apply to Dante’s character, not just the sin of lying. This may be one of the reasons why Dante avoided to come up with the label ‘liars’ for this type of verbal sinners: the complexity of the process by which speech can appropriate falsehood goes beyond simple lying. Lies can be uttered in a public place, in front of official authorities, and then they acquire false testimonial connotations, or they can be shored up by an oath and become perjury. It is also worth noting that Dante’s perception of Sinon was common in the literary culture of the Middle Ages. In Alain of Lille’s

---

<sup>317</sup> Regarding the word *spergiuro*, Truscott points out that it must have been suggested to Dante by Virgil’s text, where Sinon is guilty of perjury, or false oath: *Talibus insidiis periurique arte Sinonis/credita res...* (*Aeneid* II, 195-6; ‘Due to the ploys of the perjurer Sinon, the things were believed’), quoted by Truscott in “Ulysses and Guido. *Inferno* XXVI-XXVII,” 64). Brugnoli points to the relationship between Ulysses and Sinon in the *Aeneid*, stressing that Sinon was instructed by Ulysses on what to tell and how to speak. (“Dante filologo: l’esempio di Ulisse,” 36-7).

*The Plaint of Nature*, for instance, we see Sinon “arming himself with subterfuges for a sinuous speech.” (1980: 217). Only that what for Alain of Lille was sinuous speech for Dante becomes transgressive speech, since the deceitful Greek is punished in Hell, in the deepest ring of Fraud. Sinon’s outrageous lies trespassed the limit between truth and falsehood and thereby helped the Greek warriors trespass the boundary that was separating them from the people of Troy: the walls of the city. For this, he is intended by Dante as a prototypical transgressive speaker, who, by having to spend the rest his afterlife in hell, is set as a moral counter-example.

An important element in the “tenzone” between Master Adamo and Sinone is the association of words with money in a verse that synthetically establishes the equivalence between falsifying of words and counterfeiting money: *S’io dissi falso, e tu falsasti il conio*. This alignment by means of prosody recalls on a textual level the grouping of counterfeiters with liars within the world of fiction. The above-quoted verse and the composition of this ring of sinners point to the common medieval comparison of money and words, a comparison drawn on the basis of their function as signs.<sup>318</sup> Both money and words were considered in the Middle Ages semiotic systems referring to specific segments of reality: the linguistic sign stood for the mental concept, while the monetary sign for merchandise.<sup>319</sup> In *Inferno* XXX, the semiotic value of the coin is alluded to by master Adam, who explains his sin in metaphorical terms: *io falsai/la*

---

<sup>318</sup> Biard contends that the analogy of words with coins was a common place in the medieval texts of theology: “... on a pu montrer de manière plus précise que tout au long du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle la comparaison avec le signe monétaire est utilisée dans la réflexion sur le signe, aussi bien linguistique que sacramental, au sein de nombreux commentaires des *Sentences*.” (‘...it has been shown in a more specific way that all throughout the thirteenth century the comparison with the monetary sign is used in the reflection on the sign, both linguistic and sacramental, within numerous commentaries on the *Sentences*.’ op. cit, p. 1420). What made this analogy possible, is in Biard’s view, the fact that the same texts that were dealing with the sacramental function of words as conveyors of truth were concerned with sins of usury and avarice, that had a direct relationship with money. Biard does not mention Peraldus in her exemplification of medieval intellectuals who took up this comparison.

<sup>319</sup> According to Biard, the medieval analogy was a conflation of Aristotle’s economic theory, as expounded in the *Politics*, and Augustine’s doctrine of the words as vocal signs, as expressed in several of his works (*De Doctrina Christiana*, *Confessions*, *De Trinitate*).

*lega suggellata del Batista* (74-4; ‘I falsified the alloy sealed with the Baptist.’). Adam’s oblique reference to the *fiorini* is in fact Dante-poet’s subtle way of showing the seriousness of the sin of counterfeiting. Here, the Florentine coin is designated not by its name but by the symbolic image it bears: that of John the Baptist.

According to Joël Biard, the name of the coin, just as the image engraved on it, were essential components of the monetary sign: “Le nom, on l’a vu, constitue le signe monétaire comme tel, par institution. Il désigne ce rapport fondateur. L’image est aussi un élément essentiel. Elle renvoie à l’autorité qui jouit du pouvoir monétaire. Mais elle n’est pas un simple signe de reconnaissance ni une simple reduplication du nom. Elle garantit la valeur. Elle devient ainsi *signe du caractère signifiant* de la monnaie. Parce qu’il y a de la convention dans le rapport d’équivalence ainsi établi entre monnaie et marchandise, il faut un *garant*. L’image témoigne de cette garantie.” (“As we have seen, the name constitutes the monetary sign as such, by institution. The noun designates this founding linkage. The image is an essential element, as well. It points to the authority that holds monetary power. But the image is not a mere sign of identification, nor a mere duplication of the noun. The image guarantees the value and, thus, becomes sign of the *signifying character* of the coin. Since there is a convention in the rapport of equivalence thus established between coin and merchandise, a *warrant* is necessary. The image testifies to this warranty”; emphasis Biard, translation mine).<sup>320</sup>

In this light, master Adam’s sin appears even more grievous since the image on the Florentine coin did not represent a political leader of the day, but a biblical hero and a martyr for the Christian faith. Master Adam used the sacred image of the Baptist as a token for his fraudulent action, just as the perjurer takes, according to every standard definition of perjury,

---

<sup>320</sup> (op. cit., 1424)

God's name as a guarantor for false words. In this, master Adam can be—and is put—on a par with word forgers such as the Egyptian woman and Sinon.

Within the context of the grouping of money forgers with false speakers, it is important to mention that, although the association between monetary sign and linguistic sign is, as we have seen, a common place in medieval culture, Dante is likely to have taken up this analogy from Peraldus's chapter on the vices of the tongue. For nowhere in the *Commedia* has this synonymy been established as clearly and explicitly as in *Inferno XXX*, the canto dealing with the falsifiers of words and metals.<sup>321</sup> Peraldus used the commonplace comparison words-coins to develop moral concepts, more specifically, to describe two sins of speech. Lying, false testimony and perjury represent acts of falsifying words, identical to the acts of those who forge coins. The alignment of falsifying of words with counterfeiting money is used by Peraldus in the specific chapters devoted to *mendacium* (with one of its subclasses, *falsum testimonium*) and *perjurium*. The two characters, Sinon and Potiphar's wife, whom Dante selects to represent the false speakers, are guilty, as we have seen, of these particular sins of speech. What is more, they are grouped with the false coiners. Sinon's phrase: *S'io dissi falso, e tu falsasti il conio* establishes an explicit rapport of equivalence between speaking falsely and forging coins. Another important piece of evidence for Peraldus's stamp on this canto is adduced by Shoaf, who argues that

---

<sup>321</sup> An interesting example of the influence of money on language occurs in *Inferno XXI*, the canto of the barrators who are described as people who for the sake of money turn the “no” into a “yes”: *O Malebranche, ecco un de li anzian di Santa Zita!/Mettetel sotto, ch'i' torno per anche/a quella terra, che n'è ben fornita:/gn'uom v'è barratier. Fuor che Bonturo;/del no, per li denar, vi si fa ita.* (37-42; ‘O Evil Claws, here is/ one of the elders of Santa Zita! Put him under, I am/ going back for more/ to that city, which is well supplied with them:/every one is a grafter there, except Bonturo; for/ money there they turn ‘no’ into ‘yes.’) For a thorough investigation of Dante’s financial imagery, see chapter “Commerce and Language,” in Joan Ferrante’s *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, where the author argues that for Dante language was a basic form of exchange, like commerce, and thus subject to similar kinds of abuses.

Peraldus's image of "false water" lies at the root of Dante's portrayal of the avaricious Master Adam.<sup>322</sup>

And if, within the last circle of Malebolge, we can find ample evidence that supports Dante's alignment of money with words, for the connection of a verbal sin punished in the *ultima chiostra* of Malebolge with the sin that comes right after it, treason, numerous medieval pieces of evidence can also be adduced to show the traditional link between false speech and treason. First of all, for the medieval moralists of the vices of the tongue (Ardens, Peraldus, and their numerous compilers), betrayal was based on a sin of the tongue called *secreta amici revelare*. The sin of perjury, as well, was described by moralists as an act of treason.<sup>323</sup> In *Inf.* XXXIII, Dante also describes the act of political betrayal in terms of lying: *a Ceperan, là dove fu bugiardo ciascun Pugliese* (16-17).<sup>324</sup> The citizens of Puglia are liars because they betrayed their king.

---

<sup>322</sup> "As part of a long-term study of the figuration of *avaritia* in medieval literature generally, and in Dante, in particular, I have been examining the lengthy chapter on this vice in the *Summa Virtutum ac Vitiorum* of William Peraldus. Peraldus in this chapter repeats and continues the ancient tradition of the avaricious man as suffering from or at least resembling one who suffers from hydropsy (Peraldus 2, 57-58). This, we know, is the disease from which Maestro Adamo suffers (*Inf.* 30. 52-57); and it is, of course, consonant with his sin that he should suffer the disease traditionally associated with the avaricious: after all, his prime motive for counterfeiting would have been avarice, which is the root of all evil (1 Ti. 6.10). (...) Numerous other sources doubtless inform Dante's episode. But it seems almost certain that one of his sources was Peraldus on the vice of avarice: Peraldus's image of false water corresponds tellingly to Dane's words *l'imagine lor vie... m'asciuga*. Moreover, given the enormous popularity of the *Summa*, the relationship proposed here is certainly plausible." ("Dante and Peraldus: The Acqua Falsa of Maestro Adamo (A Note on *Inferno* 30. 64-69)." *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 10(1980), 311-313. Among the other possible sources Shoaf lists for master Adam's episode is *The Romance of the Rose*, by Lorris and Jean de Meun. (*Dante, Chaucer and the Currency of the Word. Money, Images and Reference in Late Medieval Poetry*. Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1983), 29. Another aspect I would like to add concerns the lexicon of falsification in the description of a verbal sin: Guido Favati points out in the *Enciclopedia dantesca* that this lexicon recurs in the *Fiore* (XXXVI), where the verb *falsare* is used for *rendere bugiardo un giuramento mancare a un giuramento (e quindi spergiare)*. (Favati, 783). If *Fiore* was, indeed, authored by Dante, its definition of perjury as falsifying adds one more piece of evidence to Dante's use of the Peraldian lexicon of lying and perjury.

<sup>323</sup> See for instance Alain's definition in the *Tractus de virtutibus, et vitiis: His evidenter traditur quod tripliciter periurat homo, ut supra diximus, dum scilicet vel sciens falsum iurat, vel putans falsum quod verum est iurat, vel existimans verum quod falsum est iurat.* (p. 43; 'A man commits perjury in three ways, as we have said above, either when he knowingly swears falsely, or swears deeming false what is true, or again swears deeming true what is false'), or Cavalca who uses Judas as an exemplum for perjurers (*Pungilingua*, 76).

<sup>324</sup> As Chivacci Leonardi's note informs us, "Ceprano (...) era in posizione strategica, quasi porta d'ingresso al regno: secondo una voce che qui Dante raccoglie, ma non documentata, i baroni pugliesi che Manfredi vi aveva

In *Inferno XXX*, the Sinon episode is one of those magic moments in the *Comedy*, where the world of the myth is brought back to life with a new meaning and pressed into the service of a Christian cause. Just as in Ulysses' case, through the figure of Sinon, the intrinsic value of eloquence is again called into question. Being an excellent speaker avails nothing when speech is built on a web of lies and deceit that brings only disasters.

As Dante himself states in the *Monarchia*, “In matters of feeling and conduct, words are to be believed less than deeds (*in passionibus et actionibus, sermones minus sunt credibiles operationis.*)”<sup>325</sup> Opposed to legendary figures such as Ulysses, Jason and Sinon, who not only are fraudulent speakers, but also come from a pagan world populated by *dei falsi e bugiardi*, is the Christian language of faith, the unique depository of truth. The only speech free from any kernel of falsehood is the speech of Faith<sup>326</sup> and its messengers: the Church and the saints.<sup>327</sup> Dante himself as a *scriba Dei* is aware of the dangers he incurs in his assiduous attempts to describe a vision that can easily be taken and judged as false. In the encounter with Cacciaguida from *Paradiso XVI*, when Cacciaguida invests the pilgrim with the mission and responsibility of recounting the true story of his journey, he insists on Dante's obligation to tell the whole, untarnished truth: *Ma nondimen, rimossa ogne menzogna,/tutta tua viſion fa manifesta;* (*Paradiso XVII*, 127-128; ‘But nonetheless, putting aside every falsehood,/make manifest all

---

posto a custodia lo tradirono, lasciando entrare i francesi di Carlo d'Angiò. Di qui la ritirata su Benevento e la sconfitta finale con la morte del re, che Dante ricorderà nel *Purgatorio* (...) Dante sa bene, dunque, che la grande battaglia era avvenuta a Benevento, e non a Ceprano. Ma nomina quest'ultima per sottolineare il tradimento, che fu la principale causa della sconfitta; bugiardo: sleale verso il re, non mantenedo l'impegno di difendere la posizione.” (2005, 834).

<sup>325</sup> 1.13.4, 71.

<sup>326</sup> In *Convivio*, Faith is described as immune from mendacity: *La nostra Fede che mentire non puote* (*Convivio*, IV.15, 278).

<sup>327</sup> In the depiction of the First Mobile, Dante reinforces the credibility of his populating this space with the holly by invoking the Catholic doctrine who cannot lie: *Questo loco è di spiriti beati, secondo che la Santa Chiesa vuole, che non può dire menzogna.* (*Convivio* II.3, 94). In the same vein, in the ‘trilogia dei voti’, the truth of Piccarda Donati’s words is reinforced by the phrase: *alma beata non porria mentire.* (Par. IV. 95; ‘a blessed soul could never lie.’).

your vision.’).<sup>328</sup> Dante’s art, as serving the divine truth, has to be free of any element of falsehood.

Along these lines, the thesis that Dante-poet runs the risk of mendacity has been convincingly developed by several modern commentators. Teodolinda Barolini, for instance, points to the fact that “If the pilgrim learns to be not like Ulysses, the poet is conscious of having to be ever more like him.”<sup>329</sup> Shoaf as well points to the risk of linguistic falsifying that Dante-poet, as a maker of images, incurs, a risk that assimilates him to Master Adam,<sup>330</sup> whereas Giuliana Carugati draws attention to the potential transgressiveness of Dante’s poetic language. Carugati interprets the poet as a maker of lies (‘menzogna’), asserting at the same time that the inherent mendacity of his representational undertaking is redeemed by the silence that establishes itself at the end of the third cantica.

---

<sup>328</sup> The phrase is an intratextual response to the poet’s address to the reader in *Inf. XIII: s’i vederai/cose che torrien fede al mio sermone* (21-22; ‘you will see things that would/ make you disbelieve my speech.’).

<sup>329</sup> In Barolini’s interpretation, the *Paradiso* is, paradoxically, the most transgressive of the three canticas, because in its strenuous attempt to represent a suprasensorial reality, the poet has to coin words, or signs that go beyond the limits of human language: “The *Paradiso*, if it is to exist at all, cannot fail to be transgressive; its poet cannot fail to be a Ulysses, since only a *trapassar del segno* will be able to render the experience of *trasumanar*.” (*The Undivine Comedy*, 54). [Dalla menzogna al silenzio. *La scrittura mistica della Commedia di Dante*. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991), 79].

<sup>330</sup> “Dante the poet, (...) confronts the question of imagery in the canto of the falsifiers, and in the vertically related cantos, because he must differentiate his coinage as poet from the false coinage of master Adam. We his readers must be able to spend his coin--read his language--for the vision which he experienced. So it is that, from his position of the allegory of the theologians, he must convince us that his coin or language is not fraudulent, not false, but a true and a valuable representation of what he saw when grace dispensed with the ordinary limits of human sight.” (*Dante, Chaucer*, 36).

## **5.0 DISTORTING THE VERTICAL DIMENSION: THE PROBLEM OF BLASPHEMY**

The discussion of the sin of blasphemy poses a few problems. Most medieval tracts on immoral speech considered blasphemy the most grievous verbal transgression. As it was directed against God himself or the saints (and thus altered the vertical dimension of speech), the tendency was to view this sin as far worse than verbal trespasses that offended one's neighbor (and distorted the horizontal dimension of speech).<sup>331</sup> Against this background, it will come as a surprise that neither Jean de Meun nor Dante follow this line of thought. Jean de Meun tackles the problem of blasphemy only in an allusive manner, in Faus Semblant's section of the *Rose*. In Dante's structure of hell, the sin of blasphemy is outweighed by all the other verbal trespasses considered by Dante.

For Jean, it is understandable why the sin of blasphemy was not a main concern: his poem is addressed to the *amoureus*, men and women in the grip of carnal desires, who talk to or about each other, and never to or against God. It would, however, be a mistake to dismiss the problem of blasphemy in the *Rose* only on this ground. The issue of blasphemous speech is much more serious in the poem than it might seem, and occurs not on the level of the characters, but on that of the writerly discourse. About one hundred-and-twenty years after the completion of the

---

<sup>331</sup> The exceptions are very few, but notable in the context of this dissertation: Raoul Ardent, for whom the sin of *secreta amici revelatio* was the most serious, and Laurent d'Orléans, who, writing his moral *summa* for his king, was not very concerned with blasphemous speech and treated it last in his series of ten verbal sins.

*Rose*, one authoritative voice in the field of moral theology would accuse Jean de Meun of blasphemies. In the famous *Querelle de la Rose* that took place in the first years of the fifteenth century, Jean Gerson, one of the most remarkable French ecclesiastics of all times, pronounced harsh words of condemnation about Jean de Meun's art.<sup>332</sup> The *Romance of the Rose* was promiscuous, incited people to sins, and deserved to be burnt like any other blasphemous or heretical book.

In the first part of this chapter, I analyze Jean de Meun's *excusacion* in the *Romance of the Rose* (vv. 15139-15306) from Jean Gerson's ethical perspective.<sup>333</sup> I undertake to confront Gerson's charges against Jean de Meun with Jean de Meun's own plea for forgiveness, to demonstrate that what Jean is in fact apologizing for are his verbal abuses.<sup>334</sup> Making this point is important in the economy of my dissertation since it allows me to gauge one more time Jean de Meun's awareness of the sins of word, an awareness expressed in a literary work written between 1270-1280, shortly after the “golden age of the sins of the tongue” (1190-1260). How sinful authorial speech may affect the quality and the reception of a literary work of art is a highly important question to which Jean de Meun gives the most serious consideration.

---

<sup>332</sup> Under the denomination “querelle de la Rose” are grouped several polemical exchanges of letters between moral critics of the *Romance of the Rose* (Christine de Pizan and Jean Gerson, in particular), and defendants of the poem (and its author), such as Jean de Montreuil, Gontier and Pierre Col. What was mostly debated by these leading intellectuals of the time was not the talent of Jean de Meun as a writer, for this even his opponents acknowledged, but the morality of the *Rose*, and, of course, of Jean de Meun himself. These polemical letters have been edited by Eric Hicks, in *Le débat sur le Roman de la Rose*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 1977. All the French quotes I use come from this edition, whereas for the English translation I rely on the edition by Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane: *La Querelle de la Rose. Letters and documents* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 1978).

<sup>333</sup> I take up Armand Strubel's term *excusacion*, to group and threat as an individual thematic block vv. 15139-15306 of the *Romance of the Rose* (1992 edition, 805).

<sup>334</sup> Gerson is one of the major theorists of verbal sins in early modern France; he wrote several texts dealing with the theme of the government of the tongue, and with flattery and blasphemy. (See *Pour qu'on refrène sa langue*, *Contre les tentations de blasphème*, *Contre les fausses assertions des flatteurs*, and *Contre le péché de blasphème*, treatises that can be consulted in *Jean Gerson. Oeuvres complètes*, vol. VII, P. Glorieux, ed., Paris: Desclée & Cie, 1966).

The last section of this chapter examines the treatment of blasphemy in Dante's *Inferno* and seeks to elucidate Dante's motives for considering the sin of blasphemy to be the "lightest" verbal transgression in the system of hell.

### 5.1 THE "BLASPHEMIES" OF JEAN DE MEUN

Mais ainz que plus m'en oiez dire,/Ailleurs vueill un petit entendre/Pour moi des males genz deffendre,/Non pas pour vous faire muser,/Mais pour moi contre euls escuser./Si vous pri, seigneur amoreus,/ Par les geus d'amours savoreus,/ Que se vous i trouvez paroles/Semblanz trop baudes ou trop foles,/Par quoi sailent li mesdisant/Qui de nous aillent mesdisant/Des choses a dire ou dites,/Que cortoisement les desdites./Et quant vous les avrez des diz/Repris, retardez ou desdiz,/Se mi dit son de tel maniere/Qu'il soit droiz que pardon en quiere/Pri vous que vous me le pardoingniez/Et de par moi leur respoingniez/Que ce requeroit la matire/ Qui vers teus paroles me tire/Par les propietez de sai:/Et pour ce teus paroles ai (...) /Et s'il y a nule parole/Qui sainte eglise tiengne a fole,/Presz sui k'a son voloir l'amende/Se je puis souffire a l'amende. (15162-15306)

But before you hear me say anything more, I want to move aside a little to defend myself against wicked people, not so much to delay you as to excuse myself to them. Therefore I beg you, amorous lords, by the delicious games of love, if you find here any speeches that are too bawdy or silly and that might make slanderous critics who go around speaking ill of us rise up over things that I have said or will say, that you will courteously oppose them. Then when you have reproved, prevented, or opposed these speeches, if what I say is of such nature that I may justly ask pardon for them, I beg you to pardon me and to reply to them through me that my subject matter demanded these things; it draws me toward such things by its own properties, and therefore I have such speeches (...) And if I make any utterance that Holy Church may consider foolish, I am ready at her wish to change it if I am capable of making the change.<sup>335</sup>

Although this small excerpt manages to give us the core of Jean's apologies to his reader, it is worthwhile mentioning that, on the whole, the apologies span more than one hundred thirty verses, a telling measure of Jean's feeling of guilt. Structurally inserted at the midpoint of the

---

<sup>335</sup> The word 'change' Dahlberg uses is somewhat unfaithful to the spirit of the original. In the text, *amende* or *amender* have a moral connotation.

poem, the segment represents a spectacular move on the part of a medieval poet. If we consider Paul Zumthor's assertion that the most difficult task of a medievalist is to find poetic subjectivities, to find, in other words, medieval authors who had the wit to say "I" when they wrote, we grasp the full significance of Jean's decision to step forward and address his reader openly. The poet's first--and last in the text--assumption of his own voice, in defiance of all the other characters whom he had impersonated hitherto, raises in the reader the awareness of an exceptional moment of both textual and extra-textual activity. It is the moment in which the "producer" of the show, or more appropriately, the actor able to interpret magisterially so many different characters—whether we call them with Bakhtinian terms *voices* or *masks*—unexpectedly drops all disguise, reveals his own face and speaks in his own voice. Strategically, it is an ingenious move, because once the writer steps out of the world of the fiction and the readers get the full grasp of the importance of this event, they will no longer focus on the plot, on the text, but on the writer as an extra-textual figure.

And where does Jean de Meun lead his readership outside of the poem? He leads them not only into his literary workshop, to disclose to them secrets of the process of literary composition, but also into his own conscience, to reveal to them aspects of his own process of moral self-examination. Thus, Jean's *excusacion* is important from a twofold perspective: that of the artificer who in the very eyes of the public slips out of the bounds of the literary fiction and turns toward his own text as toward an artifact, a product of artistic effort and linguistic practice, and secondly, that of the Christian tortured by remorse, who raises issues of morality related to the process of literary creation, and then apologizes to the Church. Jean's discourse in the first person reveals to his hearers/readers a facet of his personality that they did not expect to see: that

of a self-declared penitent sinner, who problematizes in dialogue with them the qualities of his writerly speech. And what vices does Jean de Meun himself say that his literary art has?

Jean's direct address to his readers posits as a motivation the need for self-defense, occasioned by his virtual detractors. Thus, the *excusacion* takes the form of a two-pronged dialogue: one with his admirers, whose assistance he asks for as a personal favor, and one against his enemies, whose calumnies he seeks to anticipate and counter. At a first instance, by admitting to having dropped some imprudent words (*paroles trop baudes ou trop foles*) here and there, the writer seems to apologize for some seemingly innocent slips of the tongue. Without being personally sure that these words are really blameworthy, he says, he nevertheless realizes that they might upset his admirers, so he leaves the assessment of his linguistic daringness to them: if they really deem that Jean's language offers reasons for apologies, they should not only forgive him in their hearts, but also defend him publicly, against his potential calumniators. Putting his own defense into his admirers' mouths institutes an ingenious dialogic technique that allows Jean de Meun to address not only his supporters but also his enemies. He asks his faithful readers to reply to his attackers that if he used bad words throughout his work, he did not do it by levity of mind, but because the topic of the poem itself required so.

Jean invokes the excuse of the stylistic decorum to legitimize his use of coarse language: if his speech is sometimes uncouth, it is because what he is talking about is so low. To justify his bold verbal choices, he brings up the principle of literature as a mimetic art, and, in an ingenious move, blends the requisite of the veracity of the narrative to the moral imperative of telling the truth. The classical authority that serves him best here is the Roman historian Sallust, whom our poet does not hesitate to paraphrase freely and who gives him the opportunity to problematize his status as a writer of contemporary events and mores. Poetry is placed one on one with history in

Jean's rewriting of Sallust, since what for the Roman author was the task of the historian, in Jean de Meun becomes the task of the poet. The one who writes poetry, just like the chronicler who writes objectively about history, has to preserve the truth in his words. Just as the historian depicts faithfully and truthfully the events he is witnessing, so the poet has to represent the facts with no alterations. There is a genetic affiliation between language and reality, the words are neighbors and cousins of the deeds, Jean says, and whoever makes of truthful writing a moral duty has to put words and deeds in a specular relationship, in which the former perfectly correspond to the latter. Sallust's description of the daunting task of the historian serves Jean de Meun as a springboard from which to launch his apologetic display: the selection of language is justified by the imperative of the truth. It is this moral requisite that makes of writing an enterprise whose difficulty Jean wants his readers to be aware of.

The Sallustian paraphrase introduces us into the core of Jean's *excusacion*, and what at first seemed an excuse for some unhappy lexical choices reveals now something much deeper. Narrowing the field of his targeted audience, Jean ends up addressing only two segments of it, the ones he knows he criticized most: women and the religious figures of his days. It is, thus, not the mere choice of inappropriate words that eventually worries Jean and that he expects to arouse the anger of his readers; it is the fact that these harsh words were aimed at two specific segments of the civic life. In the discourses of the Old Woman and Jealous Husband, Jean presented a horrendous picture of feminine mores, whereas through the figure of Faus Semblant he mounted a virulent attack against contemporary religious orders. It is this group of discourses that he alludes to, being aware that not only his language, but also the content of his sayings may discontent some. The figure of the historian is coupled with that of the educator, and Horace joins Sallust in an effort to account for the intricate web of purposes of the poem. Jean argues

that besides the fact that he consigned the historical truth to his book, he also took care to instruct and correct depraved women and hypocritical friars. His book is therefore not only a book of history that immortalizes people and events in writing, but also a didactic book, intended to the correction of bad morals.

The issue of the truthfulness of the text becomes more specific when Jean counters the potential charge of lying about women by invoking the longstanding misogynistic tradition he heavily relied on. There can be no place for lies, he says, in a long series of writers who said the same things about women at different moments of times, and in different places of the world. Again, writing equates telling the truth, and Jean contends he is lying to the extent that so many erudite figures from the past lied about women, which cannot be. The Horatian tenet of *docere delectandi*, that Jean is quick to invoke, gives him afresh the opportunity to reflect on his text as an artifact: in his attacks against women, he maintains, he reproduced faithfully what the authorities in the matter have said, and then, he contributed some remarks of his own to this impressive tradition. This is the part of the *delectatio* in art, Jean argues, and his personal developments in the text are part of the poetic game.

Beyond the diplomatic move of devolving the responsibility of his virulent attacks to his predecessors, there is another element in Jean's relationship to this tradition that compels attention. Writing poetry is for Jean de Meun not only immortalizing the truth or reproducing what others have said, it is also creation, and creation involves playing, having fun. The description of poetry as *geu* 'game' is an important factor in Jean's direct address, not only because it has the value of a profession of artistic faith, but also because it is meant to attract the sympathy and the understanding of the reader. Jean calls himself a poet, who, like all other poets, has to play according to some rules. One of these rules demands that the poet come up with

something new in the material he is treating, in order to please the public. And although the few personal remarks Jean made about women might displease those who recognize themselves in the picture, the same remarks might please a larger body of society that is morally upright.

The same mechanism of argumentation takes place in the justification of the criticism against the hypocritical religious, only that here the emphasis is put no longer on tradition, but on Jean de Meun's own moral profile. His attacks are not aimed at truly religious people, he takes care to mention, but against those who under the appearance of sanctity are arrogant and vicious people. Jean is better than they, therefore entitled to criticize them, because he, at least, overtly admits to being a sinner, whereas the hypocritical friars present themselves as holy men. Moreover, Jean at least fasts periodically and by belief, whereas the hypocrites only pretend to do so. These contrasts justify the strikes on the writer's part, the 'arrows' (*saiete*) he shoots from the bow of his art, the 'iron' (*fers*) of his sword. The powerful imagery of the attack is telling about Jean de Meun's awareness of the linguistic aggressiveness to which he resorts in his vituperation of the mendicant orders. It is an awareness that culminates with his apology to the Church, the only official institution toward which the writer feels he can be held accountable and toward which he is ready to mend his verbal abuses. Language as strike, arrow and sword is justified, as in the case of the criticism of depraved women, by ethical purposes: it is language that assumes the difficult task of eradicating social evil. It is corrupted because it deals with corruption; it is violent because it deals with violence.

The fact that the only direct intervention of Jean de Meun in the poem ends with an address to his 'Holy Church' bespeaks his ultimate concern: his words might have upset many, and he is well aware thereof, but what really seems to matter to him is the sanction of the Church. All the linguistic trespasses confessed hitherto are now related to the reception the

ecclesiastical authority may give to his book. A hermeneutic question that might arise here is the semantic value of the phrase: *parole fole* ('foolish word'), a phrase that, by its ambiguity, lends itself to multiple interpretations: does Jean mean that the Church might consider his attack against the friars excessive? That it might consider it untruthful? But he just said he did not put anything in his attack that is not legitimized by other books, proven by experience or by reason. One more time the issue of the text as a speaker of the truth surfaces in a vital point of the writerly discourse. Taking into account the generality of the expression and the other instances in the poem in which Jean used the adjective 'foolish' (*fol/fole*), it is more likely that the phrase describes the poet's overall usage of language in the poem.<sup>336</sup> Writing in a time when so many new words entered the vocabulary of the Romance languages, and when the ecclesiastical authorities were trying hard to impose an institutional control over the too unbridled way people used language, Jean sets his anxiety in relation to the overall quality of his speech. Here the concerns of the poet are coupled with that of the Christian, an element of novelty in literature, and the drama that arises is that the sharp tongue of the satirist, whom Jean might have inherited from the Roman poets he cultivated, clashes with the late medieval Christian ideals of disciplined speech. It is the awareness of this clash that compels Jean de Meun to intervene directly in the text and bring in it the authority of the Church.

But did the way in which Jean tries to justify his verbal abuses convince his virtual judges of his good intentions? The answer to this question would be given by Jean's posterity. Jean de Meun's apologies to the Church would indeed be answered by the Church with one of its finest voices, that of Jean Gerson, who will respond to Jean de Meun in terms that would establish one

---

<sup>336</sup> The modern French translation seems to support this idea: 'Et s'il se trouve dans mon poème une parole que la sainte Eglise tienne pour imprudente, je suis prêt à la corriger selon sa volonté, si je puis suffire à la réparation.' Out of respect for the original, however, I feel compelled to mention that 'mon poème' is the translator's addition; it does not exist in the Old French version.

of the most fascinating facts of cultural history. From the viewpoint of its time of composition, Jean's *Rose* belongs to the "golden age of the sins of the tongue" (Vecchio and Casagrande), and the poem will be judged specifically under the optic of the sins of the tongue, by a moral writer who came more than one century after Jean de Meun: Jean Gerson.<sup>337</sup>

Although Jean did not explicitly label the things he apologizes for in the *Romance* as *peccata linguae*, Gerson's thought on the sins of the tongue, as expressed in his moral texts, and the treatise on the *Rose* he wrote within the *Querelle*, identify Jean de Meun's confessed trespasses as verbal sins. Jean de Meun was an incorrigible sinner, Jean Gerson and Christine de Pizan repeatedly assert, and the picture that emerges from the collation of the *Excusacion* with the judgmental documents of the *Querelle* strikes us as being the picture of a particular type of sinner. Not one in the flesh, but one in speech, more precisely in the written word; a sinner, in other words, in literature and through literature. Jean Gerson never specifically addressed the apologetic segment of the *Rose*, on the contrary, he seems to have totally disregarded it. What he was interested in, in fact, was not to find mitigating circumstances for the morally decayed art of Jean de Meun, but to demolish it. Even if he read carefully the *Excusacion*, he might have had a hard time believing a writer who through his characters made the apology of lie and deceit throughout his work, gambling thus the veracity of his didactic enterprise.

Gerson's treatise against the *Romance of the Rose* is a judicial allegory, which unfolds at the Court of Holy Christianity and in which Chastity and Theological Eloquence accuse Jean de Meun (here designated as the Foolish Lover) of crimes against morality. The supreme judge is

---

<sup>337</sup> For an overall account of the role Jean Gerson played in the *querelle*, see Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski's thorough and recent study: "Jean Gerson and the Debate on the *Romance of the Rose*," in *A Companion to Gerson*. Brian P. McGuire, ed. (Leiden, Boston: Brill), 317-355. Very interesting is also David Hult's analysis of Jean Gerson and Christine de Pizan as "censors" of the *Rose* who illustrate the close link between "the problems of shameless speech and shameful reaction." ("Words and Deeds: Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose* and the Hermeneutics of Censorship," *New Literary History*, 28.2 (1991), 361).

Canonical Justice and the universal court of Christianity is composed of allegorical characters representing: Mercy, Truth, Faith, Sound Judgment, Reason, Knowledge, Humility, Conscience and the four cardinal virtues. Both the framework and the selection of the characters leave no doubt as to the framework in which the writer of the *Rose* is accused: we are inside a highly theological setting in which moral virtues shore up the canonical law.

It is obvious that we are not dealing with literary criticism on the part of Gerson, but with deep moral judgment. Canonical Justice, in Gerson's view, holds the place of God on earth and is here the judge bound to pronounce the final verdict, whereas the Theological Eloquence plays the role of the advocate of the court in the allegory, by virtue of his moderate and prudent rhetoric. Chastity plays the role of the accuser who, deeply wounded in her soul by the offenses of the Foolish Lover, asks the high court to find a remedy and put an end to Lover's misdeeds. The word *remedy* in Chastity's vocabulary provides us with the first clue as to the moral portrayal of Jean de Meun in this debate: in the ethical encyclopedias of the time, *remedium* 'remedy' functioned as a technical term designating the solution, a sort of treatment that was offered to the problem of vices. In William Peraldus's *Summa Vitiorum*, for instance, the most popular moral encyclopedia of the Middle Ages, each of the capital vices, including those of the tongue, was offered several healing remedies. Thus, Jean de Meun, under the name of *Foolish Lover*, the very character he contrived in the *Romance of the Rose*, is from the very outset introduced to the audience as a vicious person on whom both penance and therapy ought to be imposed by legal ruling. And Chastity starts leveling the specific charges against the Foolish Lover in a proper judicial form: she reads her petition in eight articles. These correspond more or less to each of Jean's most controversial characters.

Article one, for instance, addresses the issue of *La Vieille*, who is nothing but a devilish old woman who in lewd language advises young girls to seduce men and sleep with them outside of marriage. Articles two, three and four move on to Jealous Husband who speaks against marriage, indiscriminately bad-mouths women, and condemns the men who embrace the religious life for laying aside their basic nature. These four articles provide us with the first reason why Gerson, through the agency of Chastity, is so upset with Jean de Meun: the characters of the Old Woman and Jealous Husband constantly undermine in the *Romance* two institutions that were the pillars of Christian society: first, marriage, that granted the cover of morality to all intimate relationships between man and woman, and second, the organized structures of the religious life: the cloister or the church. Not only the content of the Old Woman and Jealous Husband's discourses in the *Romance* does upset Gerson, but also the way in which the two corrupt characters speak: they use low language and impure words that pollute the soul and spread the evil seed of lechery.

With the issue of improper language, Gerson's Chastity moves on to another key figure in the *Romance of the Rose*: Lady Reason. As an allegorical character with a quite long tradition, Reason is the worthy daughter of Divinity, representing the noblest part of man. As such, before Jean de Meun, in Guillaume de Lorris or Alain of Lille's works, Reason's discourses had been marked by wisdom and exemplary language. In the *Rose*, however, Gerson imputes to Jean de Meun, Lady Reason is turned upside down and transformed into a quirky character, who airs her unconventional views of human anatomy and sexuality in lubricious language. To Jean Gerson, the author of several texts on the capital vices, Foolish Lover, through the character of Reason, is guilty of nothing less than blasphemy: his encouraging people to speak bluntly about everything, including the male genitalia, openly called by names, is a crime. Far worse than that, the Foolish

Lover mixes up holy and spiritual notions with base words, to the confusion and the corruption of the faithful.

Gerson is too perceptive a reader to succumb to the temptations of the literary fiction. All the characters from the *Rose* he mentions are just masks behind which the real danger has one face: the one of the poet. (Gerson never calls Jean de Meun by name in the allegory; he takes up Foolish Lover, the leading protagonist of the *Rose* as a “stage” name for Jean de Meun, but he quickly gets rid of this symbolic name, too).<sup>338</sup> The writer of the *Rose* in his very own self is guilty of all the charges leveled by Chastity. The literary method that Jean de Meun uses: that of speaking through his characters, although very ingenious, can fool nobody, contends Gerson, and does not provide a sufficiently good excuse for the inflaming ideas and words expressed in the *Romance of the Rose*. Despite his undeniable literary artistry, Jean de Meun is a blasphemer, and the type of literature he writes makes war against all the virtues.

Il, en sa personne, nomme les parties deshonestes du corps et les pechiéors et villains par paroles saintes et sacrees, ainssy comme toute tele euvre fut chose divine et sacree et a adourer, mesmement hors mariage et par fraude et violence; et n'est pas content des injures dessusdictes s'il les a publiees de bouche, mais les a fait escrire et paindre a son pouoir, curieusement et richement, pour attraire plus toute persone a les veoir, ouyr et recepvoir. Encores y a pis: car afin que plus subtivement il deceust, il a mesley miel avec venin, succre avec poison, serpens venimeux cachez soubz herbe vert de devucion: et ce fait il en assemblant matieres diverses, qui bien souvent ne font gueres a son propos si non a

---

<sup>338</sup> The rhetoric that structures the eight articles of Chastity’s petition is relevant in this sense: with the exception of the first article, that begins by mentioning the name of Foolish Lover, each of the remaining seven uses only the pronoun “he,” in a progression that culminates with the unambiguous “in his own person” of articles seven and eight, which leaves no doubts as to the identity of the culprit. Later on in the *Vision*, Gerson explicitly sets forth the reasons that led him to adopt this name for Jean de Meun: *Vraiemment, quant j'auroie dis plusseurs diffames d'ung tel acteur, je ne ly puis gueres imposer que de le nommer fol amoureux: ce non emporte trop grant fardel et pesant fais de toute lubricité et de charnalité murtriere de toutes vertus, bouteresse de feu par tout ou elle puet* (295-9; Hicks, 70; ‘Truly, if I were to say slanderous things about such an author, scarcely could I accuse him more harshly than by naming him the Foolish Lover. This name bears the heavy burden and the weight of excessive lustfulness and bestial carnality, which murders all the virtues and throws fire wherever possible’).

cause dessusdicte, et pour ce qu'il fut mieulx creu et de plus grande auctoritey de tant que il sambleroit avoir plus veu de choses et plus estudié. (100)

In his own person, he uses holy and sacred words to name the dishonorable parts of the body and impure and shameful sins, as if all such works were divine, sacred and holy, even though they are done through fraud and violence and not within the marriage state. He was not content simply to utter the above mentioned affronts everywhere publicly, but he also took care, to the limits of his power, to have them portrayed skillfully and lavishly in words and pictures, the more quickly to allure people into hearing, seeing, and holding fast to these things. But still worse remains: the more subtly to deceive, he mixed honey with poison and sweetness with venom, like poisonous serpents lying under the green grass of devotion. And he does this by drawing together diverse materials, which often are scarcely to his purpose, aside from such deception, so that, by seeming to have experienced and studied many things, he would be better believed and have greater authority.

That Jean's part of the *Romance of the Rose* is a compilation of disparate materials that have no relevance to the plot is a fact noted by all the critics of the *Rose*. But Gerson again considers this artistic flaw from the viewpoint of the moralist, not from that of the literary critic. The verbosity of de Meun has a precise objective: that of conferring more weight to his message and thereby enhancing his dangerous moral influence on the readership. This leading accusation is all the more serious, since it highlights Jean de Meun's writerly perversity: in order to deceive successfully, Jean mixes up the negative moral values with the positive ones, so that the readers don't realize that they are being corrupted and perverted themselves.<sup>339</sup> When after the end of Chastity's discourse, Theological Eloquence, the advocate of the Christian court, begins his own, the idea of the dangers represented by Jean's art is further developed: the human souls are the Lord's most precious houses and there is nothing more perilous for them than dissolute words or images that set them on fire and burn them.

The notion of morally destructive art expressed in the *Querelle* is not an isolated occurrence in Jean Gerson's activity as a defender of Christian values: according to his

---

<sup>339</sup> We will see that Christine de Pizan pointed out these strangely mixed ethical signals in almost identical terms.

biographers, Gerson repeatedly asked the public authorities of his day to remove from public places images that were “suggestive of evil.”<sup>340</sup> More relevant for our discussion is the reoccurrence of the idea of evil-inducing speech in one of Jean Gerson’s treatises dealing with blasphemy. In *Contre les tentations du blasphème*, he draws attention to the dangers represented by those who freely speak of indecent or immoral things in front of young people. The words, he says, can move the youngster to do the shameful things they hear, and the same holds for those who display indecent paintings:

(...) on doit très diligemment garder que chose ne se die en face ou présente devant enfans et jeansnes gens qui les puisse lors ou après esmouvoir a telles temptations vilaines comme font ceux qui parlent hardiment contre la foy en guise de jeu ou aultrument, comme font aussi ceulx et celles qui parlent de secrez de mariage ou font parler ou les monstrent de fait en la presence de leurs enfants ou autres; ou qui presentent laides ymages ou peintures de dissolution (...). (Glorieux, 416)

(...) One must take very diligent care that nothing be said or done in front of the children and the youth that can at that moment or later move them to such base temptations, like the ones committed against faith, in jest or otherwise, like others committed by those men and women who speak about the secrets of matrimony, or cause other people to speak about them, or even perform these secrets in the presence of their children or the others; or those which display vile images or dissolute paintings (...). (translation mine)

To Gerson, Jean de Meun’s art presents itself to the readers/hearers in exactly the same terms: it is a dissolute art that, depicting or alluding to shameful acts, encourages people, especially the young and immature ones, to mimic them. Moreover, it is an art that takes holy, religious ideas in derision and thereby undermines the foundation of the Christian faith. The

---

<sup>340</sup> “Against the many influences that might have corrupted the youth of the city, he set up a cry of protest, and demanded of the public authorities that they take means to remove from the shops and public places images that were suggestive of evil” [James L. Connolly, *John Gerson, Reformer and Mystic* (Louvain: Uystpruyt, 1928)], 87.

perils represented by Jean's verbal abuses are all the more dangerous since they are fixed in writing and able, thus, to provoke an even more widespread evil in space and time.

The accusation of blasphemy was a very serious charge in the late Middle Ages, and it was all the more grievous when it was directed against a writer. Jean Gerson not only does not hesitate to use repeatedly the word *blasphemy* in describing Jean de Meun's poem, but what is more serious is that he does so from the position of a theorist of the sins of the tongue. Jean Gerson was a leading ecclesiastical figure of his times: chancellor of the University of Paris and author of numerous religious writings that made him famous Europe wide. He was also a powerful preacher and a moralist, very much concerned to draw the Christians from the clutches of the vices.

Besides numerous sermons dealing with vices that have come down to us, very important are two tracts called *Le profit de savoir quel est péché mortel et venial* and *Examen de conscience selon les péchés capitaux*, in which, among the capital vices, he treats several sins of word, such as blasphemy, flattery, detraction, garrulity, lie, perjury. Two of these sins he found so grievous that he devoted them separate texts: against flattery, he wrote *Contre les fausses assertions des flatteurs*, a tract in which he studied the catastrophic impact that flattery can have on political leaders<sup>341</sup>, and against blasphemy he wrote two texts that became famous: *Contre le péché de blasphème* and *Contre les tentations de blasphème*. To sum up his ideas on the sins of the tongue he also wrote a treatise called *Pour qu'on refrène sa langue*, in which he warns again

---

<sup>341</sup> *On ne peult faire plus grant service a ung roy ou prince que de luy monstrer constamment verité et saine doctrine. Et par le contraire ceulz ne pourront estre assez punis, soint cler ou aultrez, qui par flatterie et pour plaisir, ou par insconstance ou par male aultre fin tourneront ung roy ou prince a faulsez oppinions contre la foy et bonnez meurs, fut en espece de jeu ou aultrement* (Glorieux, 360; 'One cannot do a greater service to a king or a prince than to constantly teach him truth and sound doctrine. And, on the contrary, there is no punishment great enough against the clerics, or the others, who, by flattery and in order to please, or out of fickleness or any other evil end will draw a king or prince to false opinions against faith and good morals, in jest or otherwise,' translation mine).

of the dangers of the undisciplined speech and proposes ways (*remedies*) in which people can control their tongues.

Several of the main ideas expressed by Gerson in his ethical treatises recur in his discourse against the *Romance of the Rose* in the *Querelle*, and the most significant of them is the accusation of blasphemy. The sin of blasphemy, says Gerson in the ethical treatises occurs when:

(...) on mesdit de Dieu contra sa vraye religion crestienne ou quant on dit chose au diffame de son saint nom, comme en le maulgreant ou despitant ou deshonestement et vilainement parlant et jurant de luy et de ses benois sains et saintes (Glorieux, 3-4).

(...) one curses God against one's true Christian religion or when one says something to diffame his holy name, like when one grumbles against him, or despises him or disingenuously and basely speaks about, or swears on, him and his blessed saints and holy women. (translation mine)

Blasphemy is the most serious and dangerous temptation, worse than eating meat on good Friday or during the fast, it is the language of the devil and the damned, a vice that more than any other vices requires severe punishment by both the religious and civil authorities.<sup>342</sup> In the

---

<sup>342</sup> *L'est expedient pour eschever l'ire et la punicion de Dieu, presente et a venir, que les prelats de France et gens d'esglise, chascun en son endroit, sans attendre l'un l'autre, mettent provision contre les diz vilains blasphemies, selon leurs pouvoirs autant ou plus que se on leur vouloit tollier ou usurper leurs temporelles possessions. L'est expedient que les seigneurs et capitaines de gens d'armes et officiers temporels labourent diligemment a ce que dit est, chascun selon son endroit, pour exequuter les peines desja instituees ou pour en instituer de nouvelles et defait les exequuter sans espargnier aucuns; car autrement ce n'est que une moquerie faire les loys qui ne les tient. L'est expedient que les bourgeois et autres qui ont menasge et familie, facent diligence que leurs enfants et serviteurs se gardent de telz blasphemies, et que a ce faire les seigneurs de l'esglise et temporelz les enhortent et baillent auctorite.*" (Glorieux, 412, 3-4; 'It is necessary, in order to avoid God's current and future wrath and punishment, that the prelates of France and the ecclesiastics, each in his place, without their waiting for one another, take measures against the said vile blasphemies, according to their powers as much as, or more than if, they were taken, or usurped from, their temporal goods. It is necessary that the lords and the captains of the army and the secular officers work diligently toward this, each in his place, to execute the already-instated penalties or to institute others and execute them properly, without sparing anybody; for otherwise, it would be a mockery to make laws which are not observed. It is necessary that the bourgeois and the others who have households and families take diligent care

*Querelle*, Gerson openly and systematically calls Jean de Meun a heretic and a blasphemer, because there is nothing more dangerous than disseminating a perverse doctrine in the souls of the people, as does the author of the *Rose*, and because the same author, by using vile words in describing holy things, committed as much irreverence toward Divinity as if he had thrown Jesus' body under the feet of the swine or on a heap of dung. Gerson goes as far as to compare Jean de Meun with Mohamed, the Muslim prophet, a heretic who deliberately and maliciously blended Christian teachings with his own evil errors. On account of the great crimes of blasphemy and heresy, not only the *Romance of the Rose*, but also the other works of Jean de Meun's foolish youth should be burned, exterminated. To buttress this request, Theological Eloquence, Gerson's spokesperson in the allegory, draws an interesting parallel with the faith of the Roman poet Ovid, and his celebrated *Ars amoris*. In his book, Ovid too, used dissolute words and expressed immoral ideas, and for this, he was condemned and banished from the empire. Although his book too had the excuse of the dream as a literary framework and used the method of speaking through various characters, and although Ovid wrote a second book *Of the Remedies of Love*, to amend his former mistakes, the Roman authorities decided to send him in exile, because his writings were too serious a threat for the good morals of the Roman people. But Jean de Meun's book, Gerson says, is far worse than Ovid's *Ars amoris*, and it is unacceptable that such an utterly evil book should be tolerated and read and praised. If the Romans, who were pagans, deemed right to condemn a Roman pagan writer for his dissolute writings, it is all the more necessary to destroy Jean de Meun's writings, when he is a Christian author who does harm to his Christian readers.

---

that their children and servants guard themselves against such blasphemies, and that the majors of the church and of the secular world exhort them and confer authority'; translation mine.)

The notion of writing as an aggressive act occurs several times in Jean Gerson's treatise against the *Romance of the Rose* and it is worth taking a closer look at the association of literature with violence for what it tells us about the assessment of Jean de Meun by his critics. Jean de Meun is a violent writer in many ways: he first does violence to human language, by using smutty talk all throughout his poem, then, he violently takes up materials from other writers' works and forces them to suit his own interests, he ultimately forcibly drags the readers into profligacy<sup>343</sup> and condemns them to perdition. Jean abuses language as a noble human institution, and harms the Catholic faith and people's good morals. Gerson analyzes all these threats from a twofold perspective: civil and political. The *Romance of the Rose* makes the claim of being an educational book, when in fact it subverts the very grounds of the Christian instruction by disseminating so many heretic ideas. All throughout the treatise, the idea of education is uppermost in Gerson's mind, and there is hardly a page that does not express the importance of providing youth with sound moral lessons. Literature should be not only an informative but also a formative art, but the *Romance of the Rose* does not form good Christian citizens; it deforms them. It is by bringing in the sight of young readers immoral characters like Foolish Lover that rapine, robberies, civil conspiracies, and many other great crimes, occur, says Gerson. Such abominable things can happen by imitating bad examples from literary texts; therefore, such writings as those of Jean de Meun are a grievous danger to a great kingdom. Evil speaking and writings corrupt moral virtues because they cancel in youngsters the praiseworthy feeling of shame that keeps them from imitating the sins they see, hear or read about.

The author of the *Rose* also does violence to his own text, by turning it into a compilation of alien sources, and does violence to the source-texts he uses, by misinterpreting them and

---

<sup>343</sup> *Pousser* ('push') or *tirer a dissolution* ('draw to dissolution') are the two verbs with a connotation of violence that Gerson uses (Hicks, 68).

altering them to the point that they become unrecognizable. He is a bad continuator of Guillaume de Lorris' first part of the *Romance*, because Guillaume did not borrow from other writers, he composed his own, original poem where there was no room for filth. Furthermore, although Jean de Meun draws his inspiration from Alain of Lille's great and virtuous book *The Plaint of Nature*, he uses this text in an erroneous way and turns Alain's Nature and Genius from good into evil characters that exhort people to the commission of sins.

The preaching of sins, or *peccati predicatio* as it was technically called in the late Middle Ages, was an extremely grievous sin of the tongue because it worked at cross-purposes with the goals of the Christian teachings, based on the idea of the cultivation of moral virtues. Gerson points out that in Alain's book, neither Nature nor Genius preaches sins, as they do in the *Romance of the Rose*, and that this is a very perverse way of using literary characters and the written moral tradition. Through the agency of Theological Eloquence, Gerson maintains that Jean should have used these characters in a positive way, for sending out an unequivocal instructive message. The model he should have followed is the Bible that spells out unambiguously what is a vice and what is a virtue:

(...) je voulroie bien que ce Fol Amoureulx n'eust usé de ces personnaiges fors ainssy que la sainte Escripture en use, c'est assavoir en reprouvant le mal, et tellement que chascun eust apperceu le reproche du mal et l'approbacion du bien, et—qui est le principal—que tout se fist sans excès de legiereté. Mais nenin voir. Tout semble estre dit en sa persone; tout semble estre vray come Euvangille, en especial aux nices folz amoureulz auxquelz il parle; et, de quoy je me dueil plus—tout enflamme a luxure, meismement quant il la samble reprover (...). (379-88; Hicks 74).

I would wish that this Foolish Lover had not used these characters, except as Holy scripture did, that is, to reprove evil, in such a way that every man might perceive that condemnation of evil and that approbation of good, and (what is most important) that all those things could have been done without excessive frivolity. But no. Everything seems to be said in his own person; everything seems as true as the Gospel, particularly to those foolish and vicious lovers to whom he speaks. And I regret to say, he incites the more quickly to lechery, even when he seems to reproach it.

Jean's blending of the two antithetical moral categories of good and evil is a recurrent reason for discontentment in both Gerson and Christine de Pizan's texts against the *Romance of the Rose*.<sup>344</sup> In their views, it is extremely dangerous that an author who claims to write a didactic work, as Jean de Meun does, misleads his readers about what is good and what is bad, about what is morally correct and what is morally incorrect. Jean is sending mixed and confusing signals to his readers about how they should behave in families or in society. He makes the apology of lie, flattery and deceit, to the point that he seems to recommend them to his readers, and raises the sin of lechery to the level of virtue.

The situation is all the more upsetting since Jean de Meun was a man of great erudition and of great literary talent who put his learning and his art into the service of evil. By blurring the lines between right and wrong, by presenting vices as exemplary virtues, Jean de Meun failed as a teacher of morals, and his book represents even one hundred years after the death of its author a public disgrace and a threat to society. The posthumous judgment of Gerson and his ally, Christine de Pizan, is implacable; although they acknowledge that Jean de Meun's poem has some good parts, they lobby for the total destruction of the work because it throws its potential readers into the arms of the devil. Men are far too weak in their nature to need encouragement

---

<sup>344</sup> Christine reiterates Gerson's notion that de Meun depicts lechery as a virtue (*Et par ce semble que maintenir vueille le pechié de luxure estre nul, ains vertu—qui est erreur et contre la loy de Dieu* (152-4; Hicks, 16), and calls openly the *Romance*: *Exortacion de vice confortant vie dissolute, doctrine plaine de decevance, voye de dampnacion, diffameur publique, cause de souspeçon et mescreantise, honte de pluseurs personnes, et puet estre d'erreur* (323-6; Hicks 21; 'an exhortation to vice, a comfort to dissolute life, a doctrine full of deception, the way to damnation, a public defamer, the cause of suspicion and misbelieving, the shame of many people, and possibly the occasion of heresy'). What Christine finds most perverse in Jean de Meun's method is the fact that he embeds the evil in the good, and thus has people adhere more readily to the former. This is a subtle but blamable method, used mostly by heretics: *Et de tant est plus grand le peril: car plus est adjoustee foy au mal de tant comme le bien y est plus auttentique; et par ce ont mains soubtilz aucunes foiz semees de grans erreurs par les entremesler et palier d'aucune vérité et vertus* (299-302; Hicks, 21; 'but therein lies the greater peril, for the more authentic the good the more faith one puts in the evil. And in this way many learned men have sometimes sown great errors by intermingling good and evil and by covering the errors over with truth and virtue.').

and exhortation to vices, they need a kind of literature that teaches them good not perverse morals; they need books that depict in unambiguous terms fair and virtuous attitudes, both in private and in public life, not books that seduce men into sin. As Jean Gerson put it:

Vices et pechiés, croy moy, s'aprannent trop de legier: n'y fault maistre quelconque; nature humaine, par especial en jeunesse, est trop encline a trebuchier et a glassier et cheoir en l'ordure de toute charnalité: n'estoit besoign que tu les y tirasses ou a force boutasses. Qui est plus tost empris ou enflamné au feu de vilains plaisirs que sunt les cuers humains? Pour quoy donques souffloies tu ce feu puant par les vents de toute parole legiere et par l'auctorité de ta personne et de ton example? (...) Et tu fais pis; tu enhortes a pis: tu as par ta folie—quant en toy est—mis a mort et murtri ou empoisonné mil et mil personnes par divers pechiés, et encore fais de jour en jour par ton fol livre. (207-224; Hicks, 67)

Vice and sin, believe me, are all too easily learned, nor is there any need for a teacher. Human nature, especially in youth, is far too prone and inclined to falling, plunging and immersing itself in impurity and the filth of all carnality. There was no need for you to drag them or forcibly push them in. For what thing can more easily be seized and inflamed with the fire of filthy desires than the human heart? Why, therefore, do you fan this stinking fire with the winds of the most frivolous of all words and with the authority of your own person and your own example (...) Yet, you do worse things; you exhort to worse. Because of your foolishness, you have put to death, murdered, and poisoned thousands and thousands of men through various shameful actions, and still yet do so daily by your foolish book.

Books may continue to exist long after their authors' death, and literature has a unique ability of fixing things in writing and sending them down to next generations. What is contained in a book, especially in a skillfully written one, escapes the laws of time and is saved for posterity. Immortalized in the script, the sin is brought back to life every time a sin-inducing book is open and read, and literature may thus become a channel for the transmission of the contaminating power of evil. Expressed in highly dramatic terms that describe art as a crime, Gerson's attack against the virtual dangers of literature is not an isolated fact. Dante's *Inferno* depicts a similar peril in one of its most famous cantos. The

danger for the reader that both Gerson and Christine de Pizan warned about is the same for which Francesca and Paolo find their eternal places in hell: under the influence of the book they were reading, they committed the adulterous act described by the book:

Noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto/di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse;/soli eravamo e sanza alcun sospetto./Per più fiate li occhi ci sospinse/quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso;/ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse./Quando leggemmo il disiato riso/esser baciato da cotanto amante,/questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,/la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante./Galeotto fu'l libro e chi lo scrisse:/quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante. (*Inferno* V, 127-138)

We were reading one day, for pleasure, of/Lancelot, how Love beset him; we were alone and/without any suspicion./During many breaths that reading drove our eyes/together and turned our faces pale; but one point/alone was the one that overpowered us./When we read that the yearned-for smile was/kissed by so great a lover, he, who will never be/separated from me,/kissed my mouth all trembling. Galeotto was the/book and he who wrote it: that day we read there no/further.

This fragment introduces to us Francesca and Paolo while they were reading the Old French prose romance *Lancelot del Lac*.

From the outset the literary text is presented as a sort of third “character” in the scene. The solitude Francesca mentions (*soli eravamo*) is in fact a false one; it is solitude only with respect to other fleshly beings, but the book they were reading will prove to be the most powerful and dangerous presence by their sides. The two readers are in fact not alone, but together with the knight Lancelot and his queen Guinevere, in a blend of life and literature that will prove fatal to the readers.<sup>345</sup> Francesca and Paolo display toward their reading an attitude that somehow anticipates the sinful outcome of their encounter: they read for entertainment (*per diletto*), and become so captivated by the reading of the love scene between Lancelot and Guinevere (an

---

<sup>345</sup> As the documents of the time tell us, the adulterous relationship between the two will be discovered by Gianciotto Malatesta, Francesca’s husband and Paolo’s brother, who will kill both of them.

adulterous love, as we know), that they look several times at each other and turn pale. Again, the emphasis Dante places on the effects of the book is clear: it is *quella lettura* ('that reading') which prompts Francesca and her brother-in-law to look into each other's eyes and empties their cheeks of blood.

What they are reading affects them in a personal way and to the highest degree: the fallacious process of identification between the readers and the characters of the romance has begun. It will reach its climax when Francesca and Paolo visualize the adulterous kiss between Guinevere and Lancelot. It is this precise moment of their reading that makes them yield to the temptation woven around them by the literary love story: *ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse*.<sup>346</sup> It is likely to believe that Francesca and Paolo had been attracted to each other even before they started reading together--their isolation from other people in order to read a book is indicative in this respect. The literary description of Lancelot's falling in love (*come amor lo strinse*) made them feel personally concerned and brought them even closer together; but it is only the visualization of the literary kiss that "overcame" them (*ci vinse*).

Here, the power of literature becomes so seductive as to act almost like an aphrodisiac on the two readers. They are unable to go on with their reading, and materialize what in the book had been an immoral, but fictitious kiss into a kiss of their own, as immoral as the literary one, but this time real.

The verb *vincere* Dante uses to describe the book's effect on his reader has strong moral connotation: here, the book is the conquering enemy who breaks the human resistance of morality. As Renato Poggiali beautifully put it, this moment of defeat marks: "the descent from

---

<sup>346</sup> For the complex way Dante thematizes the notion of point throughout the *Comedy*, raising it from erotic and temporal to divine and eternal, see Franco Masciandaro: "Notes on the Image of the Point in the *Divine Comedy*," *Italica* 54.2 (1977), 215-226.

literature to life, from fiction to reality, from romanticism to realism; or more simply, from sentimental fancy to moral truth.”<sup>347</sup> The moral of this episode in the *Inferno* seems to be offered by Francesca herself, the deluded victim of courtly literature: *Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse*. In other words, the role of go-between played by Gallauhaud in the adulterous love story from the French romance, was played, in Francesca and Paolo’s own lives, by the book they were reading and its author.<sup>348</sup> Francesca’s cry of sorrow and regret excoriates both literary tradition and the writer as agents of sin.<sup>349</sup> Through her story of literary taste, lust and death, Dante condemns the fictional literature’s tendency of depicting immoral attitudes that can offer wrong models to follow to the superficial readers.<sup>350</sup>

Literary texts figure, or emulate, life—a mimetic relationship between reality and writing, in which art is the one that “copies,” i.e., depicts, human nature. But, in its turn, literary tradition

---

<sup>347</sup> “Tragedy or Romance? A Reading of the Paolo and Francesca Episode in Dante’s *Inferno*,” *PMLA* 72.3 (1957), 338.

<sup>348</sup> I find far-fetched Mark Musa and Anna Hatcher’s opinion that Francesca was not a victim of literary influence, but knowingly exploited the power of literature to seduce Paolo: “instead of being aroused by the text, she was exploiting it for the purpose of satisfying her pent-up passion.” See “The Kiss: *Inferno* V and the Old French Prose Lancelot,” in *Comparative Literature*, 20.2 (1968), 108. There is truly no indication in the text that would encourage such an interpretation.

<sup>349</sup> This condemnation comes as the culmination of the entire visit of Virgil and the pilgrim to the circle of lustful, among which are punished legendary lovers, such as Semiramis, Dido, Cleopatra, Achilles, Tristan, all figures consecrated by the literary tradition. The enumeration of all these characters is made in the text by Virgil, in a way that makes Poggiali assert that literature plays an important part in the selection of the examples of lustful: “Vergil seems to warn us that it is through books that we learn not only of great feats and noble deeds, but also of sinful passions and criminal acts. This brief incidental sentence [Virgil’s words *di cui si legge*, in reference to Semiramis] anticipates the moral of the canto, with its implied claim that history and poetry, or literature in general, by preserving and transmitting through the written word the love stories of old, may lead us into sin, as Paolo and Francesca were led by the reading of their *libro galeotto*, the romance of Lancelot du Lac. Literature is full of *falli scritti*, of ‘faults written down,’ to employ an expression which Dante uses in another passage of the *Commedia*, where he refers again, this time incidentally, to the same romance (*Paradiso* XVI, 13-15).”

<sup>350</sup> Although Francesca’s (and through her, Dante the writer’s) condemnation of *Lancelot del Lac* is quite adamant, I admit that there might be a grain of truth in Susan Noakes’s claim that Dante did not necessarily condemn the French romance *per se*, but rather the faulty way in which Francesca and Paolo read, i.e., interpreted, the love story. Recalling that the “traditional Lancelot story, already condemned by the papacy a hundred years before the *Commedia* was written, had in the prose Lancelot, been transformed into a religious attack on chivalric values,” Noakes underscores that the Lancelot text Paolo and Francesca failed to read until the end provides a clear condemnation of adultery. In Noakes’s view, Francesca and Paolo’s fault is primarily an intellectual one, insofar as they are “blind to the text’s meaning.” Their second mistake is that, instead of realizing that what they are reading is just a literary convention, they want to change their lives into literature. (“The Double Misreading of Paolo and Francesca,” *Philological Quarterly* 62 (1983), 226 and 229).

is capable of affecting lives--another mimetic relationship in which people from the realm of reality may imitate what they see depicted in literary outputs. Writing—history or literary fictions—is not without risk, for the writer is the empowered agent that mediates the transfer of significations from lives to other lives, from past to present or future. The writer can influence people’s lives in a way that can evade both geographical divisions and temporal barriers.

*Lancelot del Lac* was written many years before Dante’s time, and in French, but, in Dante’s episode of the carnal sinners, it ended up corrupting two contemporaries of Dante’s, in an Italian city. The ability of books to circulate in space and time, the persisting danger that even the good books may be misread and misinterpreted increases the responsibility of writers as moral agents. Dante’s swooning at the hearing of Francesca’s tragic love story, conveys, in Francesco d’Ovidio’s view, Dante’s fear that he too “could become a Gallehaut to somebody else.”<sup>351</sup>

Within this perspective, Gerson’s criticism of Jean de Meun, of his obscene language, and more importantly, of the confused moral message of the *Rose* become fully understandable. The kind of danger for morality Dante saw in the literary texts depicting sinful love is identical to the threat Gerson saw in Jean de Meun’s *Romance of the Rose*. In fact, by attacking Jean de Meun and his work, Gerson was attacking all of potentially immoral literary culture. If in Dante’s terms (with reference to Brunetto Latini), through writing man makes himself eternal, by the same art, the human sins are “preserved” and “transmitted” through the ages.

---

<sup>351</sup> See his reading of canto V of the *Inferno*, in *Nuovi studi danteschi*, II (Milan, 1907), 531. Noakes brings an inspired nuance to D’Ovidio’s interpretation of the pilgrim’s swooning, and argues for Dante’s awareness that his *Vita Nuova* and even the *Comedy*, despite the intentions of their author, can be misread, even in the sense that the readers may see in the text the opposite of the meaning intended by the author.

## 5.2 THE SIN OF BLASPHEMY IN DANTE

*Quelle que fut la diversité de leurs opinions sur sa consistance et son contenu, les juristes médiévaux définirent toujours le blasphème comme un ‘crimen’, sans jamais cesser de voir en lui un ‘peccatum’.* (‘Whatever the diversity of their opinions on its consistency and its content, the medieval jurists always defined blasphemy as a crime, without ever ceasing to see in it a sin’; Corinne Leveleux, *La parole interdite*)

In Dante’s system of hell, largely modeled on the three Aristotelian dispositions toward evil--incontinence, violence and fraud--the sin of blasphemy occupies the seventh circle: the one assigned to the sins of violence against God.<sup>352</sup> As such, blasphemy is aligned with sodomy and usury, both transgressions that represent offenses against the highest Good. At a first glance, the association seems unusual in that it assimilates a sin of a verbal nature with a sin of flesh--homosexuality--and a socio-economic practice relatively legal: money-lending at interest. A reading of some of the moral texts in the late Middle Ages reveals, however, that the association of blasphemy and sodomy was common in the writings of the moral analysts from Dante’s time. There are also scholastic tracts that, as we shall see, allow the comparison of blasphemy with usury. What is unusual in Dante, however, is the fact that the sin of heresy, which in medieval interpretations was conflated with blasphemy, is treated as different and punished as a “lighter” sin on the borderline between the sins of incontinence and those of violence.

In what follows, I will draw on medieval opinions about blasphemy to seek to account for the presence of this trespass in Dante’s triad of the sins of violence against God. I will first

---

<sup>352</sup> The structure of the circle of violence itself is threefold: violence against others, against oneself and against God: *Di violenti il primo cerchio è tutto;/ma perché si fa forza a tre persone,/in tre gironi è distinto e costrutto./A Dio, a sé, al prossimo si pone/far forza...* (*Inf.*, XI, 28-32). This tripartition originates in Isidore of Sevilla who is mentioned by Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* : “(...) Isidore, *De Summo bono*, in giving the division of sins, says that man is said to sin against himself, against God, and against his neighbor.” (Pt. I-II, Q. 72, Art 4).

present a short history of the sin, from the biblical text to the theories coeval with Dante, and then compare the scholastic view of blasphemous phenomenon to Dante's approach. My goal is to highlight the specificity of Dante's handling of blasphemy against the general background of the medieval views. I also look at the relationship between blasphemy and heresy, on the one hand, and blasphemy and sodomy, on the other, in an attempt to determine the reason why Dante framed the sin of blasphemy between these two others, thus setting up a hierarchy of human errors in which blasphemy is a crime more serious than heresy, but less grievous than homosexuality.

To the modern reader the term 'blasphemy' conveys a rather vague idea of irreverent speech aimed at a supra-sensorial entity. In a loose sense, blasphemy denotes speaking ill of things divine, a profanation of the sacred.<sup>353</sup> To understand the reasons why a Christian poet from the thirteenth century included such a sin in his structure of hell, we need to understand what blasphemy means in a theological sense and, especially, what it meant to the people in the Middle Ages. The term 'blasphemy' is a scriptural term, used already in the Old Testament to describe an overall disrespectful linguistic attitude toward God. In Leviticus 24:16, Moses is ordered by the godly voice to isolate from society a man who had cursed and to have him stoned to death. Despite the seriousness of the punishment it advocates with respect to the blasphemer, the Old Testament gives no example about what kinds of words or discourse are to be technically considered blasphemous. The omission seems to be deliberate on the part of the authors of the testament, who did not want to sully their own text with impious words.

---

<sup>353</sup> In Webster's dictionary, the term "blasphemy" is defined as "to speak in an impious or irreverent manner of; to speak ill or to the prejudice of; to use insulting or abusive language." It is further defined as "evil or profane speaking and irreverence of God, derogating from His power or claiming His attributes; the expression of defiant impiety and irreverence against God or things held sacred."

Due to the lack of a clear definition to describe the blasphemous practice in both the Old and the New Testaments, the term blasphemy will gradually acquire a degree of obfuscation that will persist through early Christianity.<sup>354</sup> The approach to the sin of blasphemy will become more analytic only in the fifth-sixth centuries, thanks to the first systems of capital sins achieved by Cassian and Gregory, who both introduced blasphemy into their systems, albeit in different ways.<sup>355</sup> But despite these inclusions, the bulk of the moral texts from the High Middle Ages pay scant attention to sacrilegious speech. The reasons for this disinterest seem to lie, first, in the vagueness of the concept, and second, in the fact that the authors of the moral texts were monks who by their profession were immune from crimes of speech.<sup>356</sup>

On a practical, legal level, however, the habit of speaking ill of divine matters will be sanctioned with a severity equal to that of the Old Testament. In the sixth century AD, Justinian, in his *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, introduced a section on blasphemy, which explained the famine, earthquake and pestilence of his days as signs of the divine anger, triggered by a failure to punish blasphemers. The conviction led the emperor to impose death for the sin of blasphemy. In the ninth century, Charlemagne reinforced the provision on blasphemy from Justinian's code, initiating a legal tradition faithfully followed by his close successors, and in 1140, Gratian, in his *Decretus*, still made dozens of references to blasphemy, and some others to perjury and lie. By

---

<sup>354</sup> “Under Christianity, *blasphemy* became so bloated with meanings that it burst all bounds, becoming almost meaningless. By the year 400, *blasphemy* was hardly more than a vile epithet, and in a confused way similar to the concept of heresy. The word *heresy* originally meant factionalism, which was a form of b to early Christians because it exposed the true faith to contention, even scorn. Eventually, *heresy* became the more encompassing term. Not until the time of Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century did the church coherently define blasphemy, although even then it continued as a peculiar species of heresy. (...). For early Christians both offenses blurred in meaning and blended with faction, sedition, schism, apostasy, and sacrilege.” See Levy, L.W. *Treason against God: A History of the Offense of Blasphemy*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 31-32.

<sup>355</sup> In Cassian's eight-fold scheme of capital sins, blasphemy is a daughter of pride, whereas in Gregory's septuagenary it was an offspring of wrath. Gregory's seven-fold scheme, including his view of blasphemy, will prevail.

<sup>356</sup> At least this is Corinne Leveleux's opinion. See *La parole interdite. Le blasphème dans la France médiévale (XIIIe-XIVe siècles): Du péché au crime*. (Paris: De Boccard, 2001), 100.

the thirteenth century, the legal punishments against this crime of speech became much more lax: no condemnation to death was pronounced against the blasphemer, but financial penalties were imposed.

Close in time to Dante, verbal sacrileges against God or the Virgin Mary were distinguished from lighter profanities--those against the saints--and penalized with a larger amount of money. According to Corinne Leveleux, who studied the legal treatment of blasphemy in the Middle Ages, verbal impieties directed at religious matters were a widely disseminated practice, which, between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries, caused the canonists from France and Italy to keep promulgating laws against blasphemy. The preoccupation of the lawmakers with this crime of speech, Leveleux says, is to be explained by the proliferation, in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, of theological tracts on the sins of the tongue. It is the major moral *summae* written in Dante's own time, all of which included lists of verbal trespasses, that revived the interest in the nature and consequences of blasphemy. Omitted by Alain of Lille in his twelfth-century encyclopedia of vices, blasphemy becomes a common denominator of the thirteenth-century tracts of moral theology. It will also become a constant presence in the manuals of confession of the time.

All of the literary critics who have analyzed the circle of violence against God in Dante's *Inferno* made reference only to Aquinas's theory of blasphemy from *Secunda Secundae*. To gain a better understanding of how Dante treats the sin of blasphemy in the *Inferno*, I think we need also to consider other major medieval authors on vices. The collation will not serve to demonstrate a possible influence of these authors on Dante, but to frame and grasp better the complexity of Dante's treatment of the blasphemers in the *Inferno*.

Peraldus begins his tract on the sins of the tongue with blasphemy, which he considers by and large the most serious verbal crime, punishable by death. Stressing the magnitude of the sin, Peraldus acknowledges the manifoldness of forms in which the sin of blasphemy can manifest itself. What unifies these varied manifestations is the element of anger present all throughout these forms and which leads the blasphemer to seek revenge against God.<sup>357</sup> Grounded in wrath and scorn toward things divine, blasphemy is a diabolical speech, recognizable by the horror it arouses in the listeners. Guilty thereof are not only the blasphemers, but also those who listen and tolerate blasphemies among them.<sup>358</sup>

A twofold level of implications is thus present in Peraldus: the threat that blasphemers represent to the moral health of society, and on a transcendental level, that those who commit blasphemous acts are denied salvation. As far as the latter implications are concerned, Peraldus foreshadows that those who after death will go to hell will keep blaspheming because of the great pain to which they will be subjected.<sup>359</sup> Two elements are worth mentioning in Peraldus's treatment of blasphemy, elements that cannot be found in Aquinas, but that illuminate Dante's treatment of blasphemy in the seventh circle: the perversity specific to blasphemers and the gravity of this sin with respect to heresy. Blasphemers are extremely perverse, Peraldus asserts, because instead of assuming the blame for their bad deeds and praising God for the good ones,

---

<sup>357</sup> *Nos autem hic blasphemiam intelligimus verbum in contumeliam Dei prolatum, ut cum aliquis iratus, vindicare se volens de Deo, aliqua membra de ipso nominat, quae nominanda non sunt.* (*Summa Vitiorum*, 538; ‘But we understand here that blasphemy is a word/speech uttered to insult God, like, for instance, when someone, being angry and willing to take revenge against God, names parts of Him that are not to be named’).

<sup>358</sup> *Blaspemia peccatum diabolicum est, et quasi loquela infernalis, cuius signum est horripilatio quam facit istud peccatum in audientibus.* (...) *culpabiles sint, qui blasphemos tolerant. Nec solum blasphemi culpabiles sunt apud Deum, sed etiam illi qui tolerant peccatum istud, cum prohibere possint.* (op. cit., p. 542; ‘Blasphemy is a devilish sin, a sort of hellish speech, the sign of which is the disgust this sin arouses in the listeners. (...). Guilty are those who tolerate blasphemers. According to God, not only blasphemers are guilty but also those who condone this sin, when they can forbid it.’).

<sup>359</sup> *Illi qui in inferno erunt, blasphemabunt Deum propter magnitudinem dolores.* (op. cit., 542; ‘Those who will be in hell will say blasphemies against God because of the intensity of their pain.’).

they invert the terms and attribute what is good to themselves, assigning evil to God.<sup>360</sup> The perversity of blasphemy is all the more obvious when compared to heresy: heretics sincerely believe in their ideas because they think they are correct, while the blasphemers know that what they say is wrong and still say it.<sup>361</sup> By the same token, *maius etiam peccatum videtur esse blasphemia, quam haeresis* ('it is evident that the sin of blasphemy is even more serious than heresy'). Blasphemy ultimately reduces man to an infra-animal condition and deserves the heaviest of punishments. We will encounter some of these elements again, when we will consider Dante's text.

Aquinas, too, establishes comparative relationships between blasphemy and other sins, such as perjury and homicide. In his definition, the sin of blasphemy lies in disparaging the surpassing goodness of the divinity and is opposed to the confession of faith (ST II-II, Q. 13, Art. 1). Just as faith is predicated not only on an attachment of the heart but also on verbal declarations and works of charity, so unbelief can actualize itself in words or deeds (ST II-II Q. 12, Art. 1). Along with heresy and apostasy, blasphemy is therefore a symptom of unbelief, which can manifest itself in two ways, as an inner disparagement (*blasphemia cordis*) or as an

---

<sup>360</sup> Peraldus notes: *perversitas magna quae est in peccato isto. Multum enim perversi sunt homines blasphemi, qui bona quae agunt sibi attribuant, mala vero Deo adscribunt: quum econtrario mala propter culpas eorum eis eveniant. Bona vero ex gratia Dei recipient.* (op. cit., 540; 'The great perversity which is in this sin. Blasphemers are very perverse, for they attribute to themselves their good deeds, and reproach God for their bad ones, although, on the contrary, the bad things they do happen because of their own fault, whereas the inspiration for their good deeds they receive through God's grace.'). The assertion is to be related to St. Augustine's definition of heresy, which Peraldus quotes at the beginning of his section on blasphemy and where the inverted relationship between a blasphemer and God is first underlined. Instead of attributing to God what belongs to Him, blasphemers go counter to the natural law of faith and assign Him what does not pertain to Him, or they deny or usurp what is His domain. As we have seen, Peraldus highlights without hesitation the unnaturalness of such a relationship, which he calls *magna perversitas*.

<sup>361</sup> *Haereticus enim ea loquitur de Deo, quae credit esse vera: blasphemus vero contra conscientiam suam de Deo dicit quae scit non esse dicenda.* (op. cit., 542; 'For the heretic says about God things he believes to be true, whereas the blasphemer, although he knows he is not telling the truth, says things he knows should not be said.').

oral declaration (*blasphemia oris*).<sup>362</sup> The latter represents the perfect form of blasphemy. What is interesting is that Aquinas too detects a kernel of perversity in blasphemers, as Peraldus did, and insists on the same element of falsity discussed in the Augustinian definition of blasphemy quoted by Peraldus.<sup>363</sup> Blaspheming is committing an act of fraudulence, a falsehood in one's intellect, whereby one denies something befitting God or asserts something unbefitting him. The word perversity as pronounced by Aquinas with respect to the blasphemer's will conveys the impression that blasphemy, the exact opposite of the confession of faith, is an inverted praise: the *vocalis blasphemia* represents a perverted version of what in the holy is *vocalis laus Dei*. The fraud of the blasphemer is greater than that of a perjurer since the latter only invokes the name of God in confirmation of a falsehood, whereas the blasphemer pronounces something false about God himself. In terms of the crime committed, blasphemers are even more at blame than murderers, because they do harm to God directly.

The note of falsity present in Thomas Aquinas's view of blasphemy does not seem to play any part in Dante's conception. Had Dante considered blasphemy a fraud-based sin, he would have punished the blasphemers among the falsifiers of words not among the violent. What Dante really took from Aquinas is, as Federigo Tollemache points out in *Enciclopedia*

---

<sup>362</sup> I respectfully disagree with Corinne Leveleux, who, in the wake of Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio, contends that in Aquinas the sin of blasphemy is deprived of all verbal specificity. Since confession of faith is a verbal act, blasphemy has a clear verbal component that Aquinas himself calls blasphemy of the mouth. Not only this sin, but also heresy entails a strong linguistic factor: "inordinate words about matters of faith may lead to corruption of the faith" (ST II-II, Q. 11, Art. 2, vol 3, p. 1220).

<sup>363</sup> In Aquinas, the term *perverse* is applied to the will of the blasphemers who, once in hell, will keep having the same unnatural feelings toward God and committing the same dishonest acts. Just as Peraldus did, Aquinas pictures the countless blasphemies of the damned in the underworld: "Now those who are in hell retain their wicked will which is turned away from God's justice, since they love the things for which they are punished, would wish to use them if they could, and hate the punishments inflicted on them for these same sins. They regret indeed the sins which they have committed, not because they hate them, but because they are punished for them. Accordingly, this detestation of the Divine justice is, in them, the interior blasphemy of the heart: and it is credible that after the resurrection they will blaspheme God with the tongue, even as the Saints will praise Him with their voices." And further: "(...) in hell, the damned have no hope of escape, so that, in despair, they are borne towards whatever their wicked will suggest to them." (ST II-II, Q. 13, Art. 4, v. 3, 1226).

*dantesca*,<sup>364</sup> the twofold nature of blasphemy--of the heart and of the mouth—and the note of disparagement inherent in blasphemous attitudes:

Puossi far forza ne la deitàde,/col cor negando e bestemmiando quella,/e spregiando natura e sua bontade;/e però lo minor giron suggella/del segno suo e Sodoma e Caorsa/e chi, spregiando Dio col cor, favella. (*Inf. XI.* 46-51)

One can use force against the Deity by denying it/and cursing it in one's heart or by scorning Nature/and its goodness;/and therefore the smallest subcircle stamps with its seal Sodom and Cahors and whoever speaks with scorn of God in his heart.

Apart from the element of falsity present in Aquinas's definition of blasphemy and absent in Dante's, there is another essential point in which Dante diverges from Aquinas: the separate treatment of heresy. For the Dominican doctor of the church, heresy and blasphemy were species of unbelief, and although they did differ by the element of disparagement present in blasphemy and absent from heresy, the two species fundamentally overlap.<sup>365</sup> As a matter of fact, by punishing the blasphemers lower down in hell than heretics, Dante seems to go counter an entire trend in the late Middle Ages. The theologians of the day, on the rare occasions when they took time to demarcate the two sins, considered heresy much more preoccupying than blasphemy. The reason lay in the religious tensions of the late Middle Ages, a time marked by intense heretical movements that threatened the unity of the church. As Levy points out: "Blasphemy was not a threat to the church. Heresy was. (...) God could not be harmed, although he might avenge

---

<sup>364</sup> Vol. 1, p. 611.

<sup>365</sup> One of the reproaches leveled by analysts against Aquinas is precisely the fact that, in the separation of heresy from blasphemy, Aquinas stopped halfway through. See for instance Levy: "Thus, having begun with the element of disparagement as the basis of a distinction between blasphemy and heresy, Thomas Aquinas ignored it thereafter and left heresy and blasphemy as interchangeable as ever." (op. cit., p. 52).

himself on those who tolerated blasphemers. The heretic, however, could harm the church by dividing it and winning away its adherents.”<sup>366</sup>

The superior gravity of heresy with respect to blasphemy is not reflected in Dante’s structure of hell, which clearly differentiates between heretics and blasphemers and assigns the latter lower down in the underworld. There is a certain relationship between blasphemers (punished in the seventh circle) to heretics (assigned to the sixth circle), but this relationship is mediated by two other rings: the ring of the violent toward others and that of the violent toward oneself. For Dante, heresy is a sin of incontinence that pushes people to look for religious ideas beyond the traditional faith, whereas blasphemy springs, as in Peraldus’ *Summa*, from a violent interiority.

In recent Dante criticism, the problem of the loose proximity between the circle of heretics and that of violent has been raised in interesting terms. Highlighting the differences between heresiarchs and schismatics in the system of Hell, Marc Cogan identifies the heresiarchs from the sixth circle as Epicureans and Photinians (in the Middle Ages, Pope Anastasius V was mistakenly assimilated to the latter). What both classes of heretics had in common was the denial of the possibility of salvation.<sup>367</sup> Both heresy and blasphemy are, in Cogan’s interpretation, sins of the irascible appetite, and what unites them on an imagistic level is the element of fire present in the tombs of the heretics and in the rain that torments the blasphemers. In the case of the heretics, the fire would indicate the specific type of passion that underlies the sin of heresy:

---

<sup>366</sup> Levy, op. cit, 56.

<sup>367</sup> “The (only) two heresies that Dante identifies in the sixth circle share a very similar content: human beings are incapable of an eternal life.” (Marc Cogan, *Design in the Wax: The Structure of the Divine Comedy and its Meaning*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999, 64).

despair, one of the five passions at the root of the irascible appetite. Despair is responsible for the overcoming of reason that leads to heresy.

The link between heresy and blasphemy, which Cogan shows has somewhat been preserved by Dante, comes from the tradition of the medieval texts, those of Thomas Aquinas mainly, that aligned the two sins. But Dante's debt to this traditional approach *vis-à-vis* blasphemy stops here, since the poet decides not only to dissociate but also to geographically distance the two otherwise similar sins. Moreover, unlike Aquinas, he considers the sin of blasphemy more serious than heresy, thereby reinforcing Peraldus's interpretation in which blasphemy prevailed.

If in the sixth circle, Dante punishes heretics who were not blasphemers, let us take a look at the blasphemers themselves: who they are and what they tell us about Dante's conception of blasphemy. Blasphemous speech emerges early on in the *Inferno* as a constant verbal attitude of the damned. Against a very noisy background of laments and cries that will accompany the pilgrim and Virgil all along their journey, the curses of the dead are noted by the poet as early as the third canto, in an effort to highlight the terrible despair of all those in the Ante-Hell. The image is strong and reenacts both Peraldus and Aquinas's "prognosis" of the faith of the dead in hell:

Bestemmiavano Dio e lor parenti,/l'umana spezie e l' loco e'l tempo e'l  
seme/di lor semenza e di lor nascimenti. (*Inferno* III, 103-105)

They cursed God and their parents, the human/race and the place and the time and the seed of their/ sowing and of their birth.

The poet's dramatic rhetoric develops a crescendo that runs the whole gamut of the objects of hate and curse: from God, through family to themselves, covering space and time, the

infamous speech of the shades leaves nothing untarnished in the Universe. Their hate, verbalized in hell as it had been on earth, touches not only the Creator, but also the created, humankind and themselves as representatives of it, even the origin of their own life. Speech here nullifies the attachment to a creating God, family ties, human dignity, self-respect, and the seed of life... this symbol of all potentialities. The *bestemmia* of the damned translates the most arduous form of hate into the most perversely perfect form of speech. Once in hell, Dante's sinners will not want to pay attention to the way they speak, on the contrary, most of them will use words like weapons, to harm and destroy once more. Cursing is the systematic reaction of the souls in hell to their new condition, and blasphemy, before being a sin punished in the system, is enacted as a verbal practice to figure linguistically this condition. Noting the verbal crimes in hell is for Dante an artistic duty as important as describing the various *contrappassi* or the discourses of the characters with whom the poet will engage in conversation.

The blasphemy directed at God is noted one more time in dramatic terms in the circle of the carnal sinners, to describe the intensity of the suffering. Here, the torments give rise again to cries and words of hate:

Quando giungon davanti a la ruina/quivi le strida, il compianto, il  
lamento;/bestemmian quivi la virtù divina. (*Inf. V*, 34-36)<sup>368</sup>

When they come before the landslide, there the/shrieks, the wailing, the lamenting; there  
they curse/God's power.

---

<sup>368</sup> The French interpreter Pierre Mandonnet, who reads Dante in a theological key, links the ruin of this circle to the words of the sinners to interpret their blasphemies as blasphemies against the Holy Ghost, the most grievous type of blasphemy in the New Testament. [*Dante le théologien* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et Cie, 1935), 302]. I cannot, however, agree with Mandonnet's assertion that "Dante ne fait blasphémer Dieu par les reprovés qu'au seul circle des luxurieux." ('Dante has the damned curse God only in the circle of the carnal lovers.' 303). There is more than one place in which Dante has his characters blaspheme: one is in Ante-Hell, as I have shown, the other is Vanni Fucci's transgressive gesture in the circle of the thieves, and another occurrence is in the area of betrayal.

As we have seen in the previous section, one of the most fascinating encounters in the *Comedy* is depicted in this canto: that with Francesca and Paolo. After the description of the wailing and blasphemies of the sinners, a discourse takes place that calls into question this very description: Francesca will tell Dante the pilgrim her story of love and death. In analyzing her intervention in the poem, critics have noted that Francesca is a careful speaker. The elegance of her linguistic expressions strikes the reader as much as her tragic story in which a book is responsible for the sin of adultery:

O animal grazioso e benigno/che visitando vai per l'aere perso/noi che tignemmo il mondo di sanguigno,/se fosse amico il re de l'universo,/noi pregheremmo lui de la tua pace,/poi c'hai pietà del nostro mal perverso.  
(*Inf. V*, 88-94)

O gracious and benign living creature who/through the black air go visiting us who stained the/world blood-red,/if the king of the universe were friendly we would/pray to him for your peace, since you have pity on/our twisted pain.

In fine terms redolent of the rhetoric of the courtly love lyric, Francesca addresses the living stranger, graciously and generously yielding to his request to tell her story. The way she speaks to him translates the delicacy of her inner structure, the graciousness and the benignity she sees in the pilgrim are in fact her own qualities, and the desire to please the visitors bespeaks not her sin, but her noble nature. All of her fine qualities are in sharp contrast to her situation in the afterlife, just as her refined discourse is in strange opposition with the blasphemies Dante had shortly before ascribed to all carnal sinners. Can then Francesca be a blasphemer, she, so gracious and benign herself? To answer this question we have to consider that Francesca is not only a careful speaker, she is also a responsive one. Her adultery is a reaction to the book she was reading, the telling of her story is a response to the visitors' desire to learn it, and her

blasphemies--the blasphemies of the block of souls she belongs to--are responses to her/their new condition. Her strange mention of the impossibility of praying only heightens the drama of the situation. Her adultery won the implacable enmity of the divine virtue, and as a consequence, prayer-- this expression of remorse and willingness to reform--is denied to her. The words of prayer are contorted and turned into sacrilegious ones, a perversity as serious as the perversity of the punishment she complains about ('*il mal perverso*'). By virtue of their feud with God, *i peccator carnal*, to whom Francesca is assimilated, cannot pray, they can only curse, and this is a hellish mechanism from which Francesca cannot escape.

After having seen all these clues about the “diabolical” habit of blasphemy as a constant verbal practice in the *Inferno*, we get to the circle of the violent against God, a circle that spans four cantos. Blasphemy is assigned to the first subdivision of a ring that punishes three different classes of sinners in the same way: on a plane of burning sand one group of souls lies supine, another moves restlessly in a circle, and another is seated—all groups are desperately trying to protect themselves from a merciless rain of fire.

Although less numerous than those who move in a circle, the damned who lie supine, says Dante, have looser tongues.<sup>369</sup> Thus, long before we come to know the nature of the sin of those who lie supine, we are prepared for what will follow by an allusion to their propensity to verbalize their feelings.<sup>370</sup> Among these people, the pilgrim’s attention is drawn by the impressive stature of a man who seems immune from fire, holding a contorted but at the same

---

<sup>369</sup> “Quella che giva’ ntorno era più molta/ e quella men che giacēa al tormento,/ma più al duolo avea la lingua sciolta.” (*Inferno*, XIV, 25-27; ‘The flock that was walking was largest by far, and/fewest were those lying to be tortured, but their/tongues were looser to cry out.’). Could this be an indication that those who--we will find out shortly--were homosexuals were more numerous than blasphemers, when we know how widely spread was the verbal habit of blasphemy in Dante’s time?

<sup>370</sup> The quote is also an index of the intensity of the torment of the blasphemers: while the other groups have the illusion of protecting themselves from the fiery rain either by moving or by offering their backs, the group of blasphemers are blocked to the ground, and expose their faces and their chests.

time scornful attitude. Intrigued, the pilgrim asks Virgil: *Chi è quel grande che non par che curi/lo'ncendio e giace dispettoso e torto,/sì che la pioggia non par che'l maturi? (Inf., XIV, 46-48; ‘Who is that great one who seems not to mind the/fire, and lies there scornful and frowning, so that the/ rain does not seem to ripen him?’).<sup>371</sup>*

Before Virgil gets the chance to answer Dante’s query, “il grande dispettoso” intervenes directly with clues about his identity:

“Qual io fui vivo,/tal son morto,/Se Giove stanchi’l suo fabbro da cui/crucciato prese la folgora aguta/onde l’ultimo dì percosso fui;/o s’elli stanchi li altri a muta a muta/in Mongibello a la focina negra,/chiamando “Buon volcano, aiuta, aiuta!”,/sì com’el fece a la pugna di Flegra,/e me saetti con tutta sua forza:/non ne potrebbe aver vendetta allegra.” (XIV, 51-60)

“As I/ was alive so I am dead./Though Jove tire out his smith, from whom he/wrathful took the sharp thunderbolt that struck me/on the last day--/and though he weary the others, turn after turn, at/the black forge in Mongibello, calling, ‘Good Vulcan,/ help, help!/as he did at the battle of Phlegra--and strike me/ with all his force,/he could not have happy/ vengeance thereby.”

The presence of the name *Giove* in the intervention alerts the reader about the origin of the speaker: it is a man who comes from the pagan, ancient world and who, moreover, waged war against the supreme deity. Nothing has changed in his nature, says the soul: death and his newly minted condition of being damned did not alter in any respect his essential human qualities.<sup>372</sup> And what are these qualities? From what the character says about himself, we note

<sup>371</sup> Capaneus’s attitude has often been compared with Farinata’s who looks at the surrounding landscape *come se avesse l’inferno a gran dispetto*, Canto X, 36). But, as critics have pointed out: “Il Capaneo di Dante non illustra la virtù della magnanimità, concessa invece a Farinata, bensì il vizio della presunzione, ossia la deformazione grottesca della magnanimità.” [Georges Güntert, *Lectura Dantis Turicensis*, vol. I, (Firenze: Franco Cerati Editore, 2000), 203].

<sup>372</sup> The phrase *Qual io fui vivo, tal son morto* is in fact an ironical one, as Giuseppe di Scipio notes: “While he--Capaneus--wishes to appear as a great hero who fought and dared against the gods, he is actually expressing his own

his arrogance and his ambition. The whole discourse obsessively turns around one idea: how the mightiest god of the pagans cannot vanquish him no matter what. As he speaks, the character tries to the best of his abilities to slight the power of the god, depicting him as impotent and having to beg the aid of another, subaltern god: the repetition of the verb in *Buon volcano, aiuta, aiuta!* underlines the smallness of *Giove* and the adjective *buon* is an additional sign of the need *Giove* has to get Volcano's favor. Capaneus's presumptuous words are all meant to convey the image of a "beggar" *Giove*, the opposite of the all-mighty chief of the pagan pantheon that an entire tradition sent down to us. Ridiculing a deity is, undoubtedly, a blasphemous gesture, irrespective of the cultural setting in which the act takes place, and Virgil's harsh rebuke, which castigates the arrogance of the character and uncovers his identity, further clarifies the sin:

"O Capaneo, in ciò non s'ammorza/la tua superbia, se' tu più punito;/nullo martiro, fuor che la tua rabbia,/sarebbe al tuo furor dolor compito"./Poi si rivolse a me con miglior labia/dicendo: "Quei fu l'un d'i sette regi/ch'assiser Tebe; ed ebbe e par ch'elli abbia/ Dio in disdegno, e poco par che'l pregi;/ma, com'io dissi lui, li suoi dispetti/sono al suo petto assai debiti pregi." (*Inf. XIV*, 63-72).<sup>373</sup>

"O Capaneus, since your pride/is not extinguished, you are punished more; no/punishment, other than your rage, would be/ suffering of a measure with your

---

condemnation having failed while alive, and failing now in his impotence." (*Lectura Dantis VI*: Supplement (Spring, 1990), *Lectura Dantis Virginiana*, I, Tibor Wlassics, ed., 180).

<sup>373</sup> According to Classical mythology, Capaneus was an outstanding warrior against Thebes. He was notorious not only for his gigantic stature and physical strength, but also for his arrogance, that eventually was sanctioned by Jupiter by death through lightning. Dante presumably knew the story from Statius's *Thebaid*, from which I quote a small excerpt to show the basis on which Dante rebuilt the mythical figure: "Unseeing Capaneus gripped the walls/and said, as often as the clashing clouds/caused lightning, "These are fires to use in Thebes!/These will renew my oak torch, which grows weak!" Jove's lightning hit him full strength as he spoke./The clouds absorbed his crest; his shield's boss dropped;/his limbs ignited; those who watched retreated:/his burning corpse might fall on any spot./Nevertheless he stayed and breathed his last/while facing towards the stars and leaned his smoking/body against the walls that he detested. His earthly members fell. His soul departed./Had Capaneus lost his strength more slowly/he might have hoped to feel a second bolt." [*The Thebaid. Seven against Thebes.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), Book X, 296]. For a detailed textual comparison between this passage and Dante's reworking of it, see Edward Moore, *Studies in Dante. Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante*. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 243-255.

fury."/Then he turned back to me with a better look,/saying: "This was one of the seven kings who/besieged Thebes; and he had, and seems still to have/ God in disdain, and respects him little; but, as I/ said, his spite is the ornament his breast deserves."

Virgil's words leave no doubt as to the sin of which the Theban king is guilty: on account of his *superbia*, Capaneus had and still has a scornful attitude toward God. Virgil's repetition of the verb *avere* in two different tenses--past and present--corresponds to Capaneus's own *Qual io fui morto, tal son vivo*, while the text subtly changes the name *Giove* into *Dio*. An accumulation of artistic means serves to figure linguistically Capaneus's transgression: the moral elements of *superbia* and *disdegno*, which echo the adjective *dispettoso* from line 47, are themselves reinforced by the two tenses of *avere* above mentioned and, as if the idea were not already clear, by the expression *poco par che'l pregi*. All this remarkable wealth of lexical clues are the means by which the poet attempts to build the figure of a blasphemer who otherwise would be difficult to interpret as such. In his discourse in hell, Capaneus does not curse *Giove*, his blasphemy is rather a matter of attitude and of representing *Giove* in speech as an impotent god. It is not based on imprecatory talk--no malediction is uttered upon the deity; it is something more subtle than that, and had it not been for Dante's care to underscore so many times the disdainful attitude of the character--this *sine qua non* index in all medieval definitions about blasphemy--we might have failed to recognize Dante's Capaneus as a blasphemer. Along with the frequent allusions to scorn, there is, however, one more element that helps us identify Capaneus as a blasphemer, an important element furnished again by Virgil's rebuke. Virgil mentions twice the wrath underlying Capaneus's transgressive behavior: both *rabbia* and *furor* are strong words in the Italian vocabulary, and here they are meant to help us better understand the nature--and the gravity--of the sin. In Peraldus's description of blasphemy, a wrathful inner disposition is the key-factor that leads to sacrilegious speech. Blasphemers are essentially people mad at God, who

use words to get revenge against a power they otherwise cannot overcome. Irreverent, violent speech is the only—illusory—means by which they can inflict pain on the otherwise untouchable entity against whom their anger is directed. Capaneus’s lack of faith, the little price he puts on God, to use Dante’s expressive phrase, his untamed and untamable anger at the deity he despises so intensely and the way he verbally tries to diminish the image of this deity, are all leads that point to the nature of Capaneus’s sin: *blasphemia*.

Dante’s decision to use this mythological figure to represent the sin of blasphemy—a sin “reinvented” in Dante’s own times—is problematic. Why did the poet choose a character coming from the world of the mythical pagans to embody a sin consecrated by the Christian world? The answer lies in the same motivation that determined Dante to choose Ulysses and Diomede to represent the fraudulent counselors, or Sinon the Greek to stand for the falsifiers of words. It is their symbolic value for the medieval cultural community; it is their emblematic power that made these characters so suitable for Dante’s purposes. Just as Ulysses and Sinon were for the medievals symbols of human guile and the power of rhetoric, so Capaneus was emblematic of the power of a king at odds with, and finally punished by, a supernatural power: the supreme king of the Christians.<sup>374</sup> And just as the pagan, mythological Ulysses dies in Dante’s reworking of the myth as pleased the Christian God—*com’altrui piacque*—, so Capaneus, the one who defied *Giove*, is here punished among the blasphemers against the Christian God. Neither in the case of Ulysses, nor in that of Capaneus, has Dante for a single moment mixed up Zeus/Jupiter

---

<sup>374</sup> An interesting occurrence of the same characters, and I am referring to Capaneus, Ulysses and Sinon, is in Alain of Lille’s *Plain of Nature*, in a passage in which Genius’s pen paints legendary figures of people to represent what is specific about humankind. Besides Helen, Turnus, Hercules, Plato, Cicero, and others, Alain speaks of Capaneus’s gigantic stature, of the fox-like cleverness of Ulysses, and of Sinon’s sinuous speech. See *Plain of Nature* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980), 216-217. Alain’s selection is representative for the entire panoply of legendary figures (mythical or historical) that medievals were fond of. Interesting is also the fact that Dante sees in Capaneus, Ulysses and Sinon more than what Alain saw. Dante virtually reinvents new identities for them and brings these characters back to life in a new way.

with God; the two notions came to overlap for him because what matters to him is the essential idea of respect for the sacred. The notion of divinity is so powerful in the poet's mind that the value of the words used to represent this notion--*Giove* or *Dio*--counts less.

And if there is any regret on the part of the reader that Dante did not punish among the blasphemers a contemporary of his, but chose instead a figure from a book distant in time, let us take a look at the circle of the thieves. As if Dante had felt that his choice of Capaneus as a blasphemer was a risky writerly decision—for how will Christian poetry convincingly condemn a sin of the tongue so widely disseminated in the late Middle Ages, by invoking a remote, historical figure?—, in the Malebolge, Dante has the sin of blasphemy enacted by a thief, in a guise more powerful than any possible injurious words. In the seventh ring of Malebolge, the horrified pilgrim and his guide attend the spectacle of a sinner who, being bitten at the neck by a serpent, turns first instantly into ashes, and then, like the phoenix, retakes his former shape. Like all infernal punishments, the process is cyclical and meant to take place in eternity. Each time he transforms the sinner experiences tremendous pain and psychological trauma.<sup>375</sup> Just as in Canto XIV the nature of the punishments of the violent against God made the pilgrim note *di giustizia orribil arte* ('justice's dread work'), so here, the severity of the punishment evokes in Dante the power of God's just vengeance.<sup>376</sup> As far as the identity of the incinerated and "reborn" damned is concerned, we find out from his own mouth that:

---

<sup>375</sup> *E qual è quel che cade, e non sa como,/per forza di demon ch'a terra il tira,/o d'altra oppilazion che lega l'omo,/quando si leva, che'ntorno si mira/tutto smarrito de la grande angoscia/ch'elli ha sofferta, e guardando sospira:/tal era'l peccator levato poscia.* (*Inf. XXIV*, 112-118; 'And like one who falls, he knows not how, by the force of a demon that pulls him to the earth or of/ some other occlusion that can bind a man,/when he stands up he gazes about all dismayed/by the great anguish he has suffered, and sighs as he/looks:/ such was the sinner when he stood up.')

<sup>376</sup> *Oh, potenza di Dio, quant'è severa,/che cotai colpi per vendetta croscia!* (*Inf. XXIV*, 119-120; 'Oh the/ power of God, how severe it is, what torrents of /punishment it pours forth.').

Io piovvi di Toscana,/poco poco tempo è, in questa gola fiera./Vita bestial  
mi piacque e non umana, /si come a mul ch'i' fui; son Vanni Fucci/bestia,  
e Pistoia mi fu degna tana. (*Inf.* XXIV. 122-126).

I rained down from Tuscany, not long ago,/into this fierce throat./ Bestial life pleased me,  
not human, mule that I/ was; I am Vanni Fucci the beast, and Pistoia was a/worthy lair for  
me.

Although punished primarily for being a thief,<sup>377</sup> Vanni Fucci as a poetic figure displays a more complex aspect: what characterizes him is not, as we would expect, a certain guile that the sinners of Malebolge display, but a pure and openly confessed animality. His violent nature is textually rendered by an accumulation of words like *vita bestial*, *non humana*, *mul*, *bestia*, *tana*. Critics have justly noted that as a character in the fiction he would have better fitted among the violent of the seventh circle. His impulsive nature and the propensity toward a merely instinctual mode of life are doubled by an overweening pride. Recognized by the pilgrim, Vanni Fucci confesses first his shame and embarrassment about having been seen in his hellish posture, then talks to Dante about the future. He foreshadows, more exactly, the defeat of the Ghibelline Whites by the Black Guelphs, news that concerns Dante in the keenest way.<sup>378</sup> The reason why Vanni Fucci makes this prophecy is to hurt Dante and, thus, to take revenge for having been seen in a humiliating situation: *E detto l'ho perché doler to debbia!* (*Inf.*, XXIV, 151: “And I have

---

<sup>377</sup> In 1293, he allegedly robbed the treasury of San Jacopo in the Church of San Zeno, Pistoia, and got away with the theft when another person was wrongly convicted of it. Analyzing the speech of the character, George Economou notes the reversal of the notion of *justice* that takes place in this encounter: “The trials of human justice unavoidably must suffer shortcomings, and here, quite appropriately, false impressions of guilt and innocence are spelled by testimony given *sub species aeternitatis*. [*Lectura Dantis VI*: Supplement Spring (1990), *Lectura Dantis Virginiana*, I, Tibor Wlassics, ed., 314].

<sup>378</sup> In May 1301 the Blacks were banished from Pistoia, as a result of a vote endorsed by Dante himself. Just a few months later, in November 1301, with the help of Charles of Valois, the Blacks reentered Florence, and in April 1302 expelled the Whites and brought Florence under their administrative and legal rule. According to the legend, the city of Pistoia had been founded by the remnants of Catiline’s army, an origin that also accounts for Dante’s negative assessment of Pistoia in *Canto XXV: Ahi Pistoia, Pistoia, ché non stanzi/d’incinerarti sì che più non duri,/poi che’n mal fare il seme tuo avanzi?* (10-12; ‘Ah, Pistoia, Pistoia, why do you not decree your/incineration, so that you may not endure, since you/ surpass your sowers in doing ill.’).

told you this that it may grieve you!”). The reply is placed in the text in a privileged position--it concludes not only the prophecy but also the canto--and is meant to echo Vanni’s confession of shame from lines 133-135: *Più mi duol che tu m’hai colto/ne la miseria dove tu mi vedi,/che quando fui de l’altra vita tolto.* (*Inf. XXIV*; ‘It pains me more to be caught in the/wretchedness where you see me than when I was/taken from the suffered the other life.’). Shame is worse than physical death for Vanni Fucci and no offense directed at him--or offender--can get away unpunished. As a matter of fact, that Vanni Fucci is still able to feel shame, a feeling that has moral overtones, could be interpreted as a positive aspect: a kind of remorse for what he did and what earned him his condition. His hurt pride, however, is not a measure of his feeling of human dignity, but of his overweening ego. By the same token, as if punishing Dante were not enough, at the end of the prophecy, Vanni does not stop acting. Canto XXV begins with a new, unexpected “performance” of his: *Al fine de le sue parole il ladro/le mani alzò con amendue le fiche, /gridando:* “*Togli, Dio, ch’ a te le squadro!*” (1-3; ‘At the end of his words, the thief raised his hands/with the figs, crying: “Take them, God, I’m/ aiming at you!”).

Not only Vanni’s only living visitor in Hell deserves punishment for having hurt him... with his eyes, but the creator of hell himself. That Vanni Fucci’s obscene gesture has an important meaning can be culled from Dante’s “translation.” As any other language, gestural language itself can be translated, and by putting words in the character’s mouth, the poet ensures that his public—Vanni Fucci’s public--“reads” correctly Vanni’s message. It is a message with sexual connotations, directed at God. A defiance as great as Capaneus’s arrogant and contumelious attitude that Dante evokes here is not a matter of chance, but an essential key for understanding Fucci’s moral profile: *Per tutt’i cerchi de lo’ nferno scuri/non vidi spirto in Dio tanto superbo,/non quel che cadde a Tebe giù da’ muri.* (*Inf. XXV*, 13-15; ‘Through all the dark

circles of Hell I saw no spirit/ so proud against God, not him who fell from the wall/ at Thebes.').

The comparison with the blasphemer from the circle of the violent against God sheds light, if it was still necessary, on the nature of Vanni Fucci's gesture.<sup>379</sup> The contempt for God, the anger that calls for revenge, the sacred name pronounced here with no fear, the provocation hurled at the divinity, just as the sexual meaning of the gesture of making the fig, are all manifestations described by medieval theologians as forms of blasphemy. I adduce here again Peraldus's definition, which best synthesizes them: *Nos autem hic blasphemiam intelligimus verbum in contumeliam Dei prolatum, ut cum aliquis iratus vindicare se volens de Deo, aliqua membra de ipso nominat, quae nominanda non sunt.* (*Summa Vitiorum*, 538; 'But we understand here that blasphemy is a word/speech uttered to insult God, like, for instance, when someone, being angry and willing to take revenge against God, names parts of Him that are not to be named.').

Peraldus's description contains not only the elements of *contumelia*, *verbum*, *ira*, *vindicare de Deo*, specific to blasphemers, but also the potential sexual aspect of the blasphemous words. Here the reference is to Christ's genitalia, frequently ridiculed, but as the analysts of the medieval blasphemy tell us, the sexual reference was also often made to the blasphemer's own private parts.<sup>380</sup> Documents from the end of thirteenth-century Italy testify to the frequency of the gesture of making the fig, as well as to its blasphemous nature on account of

---

<sup>379</sup> Mariana Shapiro interprets the comparison between the two blasphemers as having connotations that extend to the city of Pistoia: "To exceed all other infernal souls in pride, as Dante claims for Vanni, is no mean task and the invective against Pistoia which follows establishes two mutually supporting parallelism of Capaneus/Vanni Fucci, and of Thebes/Pistoia," [*Lectura Dantis VI* (Supplement Spring, 1990), *Lectura Dantis Virginiana*, I, Tibor Wlassics, ed., 328].

<sup>380</sup> As similar examples of what was interpreted as impious and offensive gestures, Alan Cabantous notes: "spitting in heaven's direction, or gnashing one's teeth" [*Blasphemy. Impious Speech in the West from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 12].

which the perpetrators were actionable.<sup>381</sup> Along these lines, interpreting Vanni Fucci's obscene gesture in the context of the Italian society of the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, Baldelli notes: "I gesti alludenti alle parti più intime sono supremamente ingiuriosi e sono di contenuto fin blasfemo. In questa società dunque il gesto di fare le fiche era l'ingiuria suprema; e, se rivolta a Dio, la bestemmia più atroce."<sup>382</sup> In Dante's text, the fact that Vanni pronounces God's name in hell might also be interpreted as a profanatory act of language, if we take into account the medieval sense that God's name(s) was to be uttered rarely and only with extreme caution and reverence. This attitude derives, in Alan Cabantous's view, from "the prime importance of the Word and the Name in revealed religion. God could not be called by name as no one knew his Name."<sup>383</sup> Naming God was an extremely delicate enterprise, since on the one hand, the creator of the world and language could not become a part of his own creation, and on the other hand, the divine name was the most important legacy bestowed on man: it was the way to prove the falsity of other gods. Abusing the gift of speech and the Name, further says Cabantous, implied going astray.<sup>384</sup> In this light, Vanni Fucci's naming of God in hell, right after the completion of his gesture, appears all the more impious, and is in contrast with Dante's constant care not to name Christ in the *Inferno*.

---

<sup>381</sup> Baldelli argues in this respect: "Al gesto allude, in un simile contesto, lo statuto di Prato del 1297, in latino, riportato dal Tommaseo: 'Nello statuto di Prato chiunque *ficas fecerit vel mostraverit nates versus coelum vel versus figuram Dei* o della Vergine, paga dieci lire per ogni volta; *se non, frustate.*" [Ignazio Baldelli, "Le fiche di Vanni Fucci." *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*. CLXXIV (1997), 5].

<sup>382</sup> Baldelli, op. cit., 10.

<sup>383</sup> op. cit., 5.

<sup>384</sup> Cabantous justly points out that the rationale for the medieval condemnation of blasphemy derived from the importance attached to the Word: "Speech opens humanity to the possibility of transcendence and is bestowed with a highly specific intention: that it be placed in the service of glorifying the divine, as emphasized in the second commandment to which the line from the Lord's prayer "hallowed be Thy name" answers. (...). Blasphemy constitutes, therefore, the perfect inversion of this conception and prayer. (...). And just as the authentic and necessary spoken prayer will be "heard" in the sense of hearkened to or answered because listened to by God, so the profanatory word will call forth the often dreadful and immediate punishment of the one who has travestied the essential function of language." Cabantous, op. cit., 6).

Another essential element in the medieval analysis of blasphemy that is present in the encounter between the pilgrim and the thief from Pistoia is the participation of the will in the sinful act. In Aquinas's theory, intention is the key factor that identifies blasphemy as a mortal sin. Impulsive blasphemers, who utter impious words inadvertently, on the spur of the moment, are less blamable than those who knowingly, with a full exercise of their will, pronounce injurious words about the divinity.

Here, Vanni Fucci knows what he is doing: the defeat of the Whites that he prophesies to hurt Dante is proof that the acts of the character are not due to chance, but calculated. The use Vanni makes of language is as perverse as his will, both when his evil omen offends Dante and when his impious words offend the divinity.<sup>385</sup> That Vanni Fucci's lubricious gesture is interpreted already in the order of hell as transgressive is confirmed by the way in which the scene ends: the snakes resume their attack on Vanni, and the poet "translates" again for his reader the significance of this attack: *Da indi in qua mi fuor le serpi amiche, /perch'una li s'avvulse allora al collo,/come dicesse 'Non vo' che più diche'...* (*Inf.*, XXV, 4-6; 'From then on snakes have been my friends,/because one of them wrapped itself around his neck,/ as if to say, "I won't let him say more.'")

It is also worthwhile to mention that the attack occurs not after Vanni Fucci makes the prophecy concerning the defeat of the White Guelph faction, but after his blasphemous gesture. The phrase *Non vo' che più diche* may refer not only to the prophecy itself, but also to Vanni's words (and gesture) to God.

---

<sup>385</sup> Highlighting Vanni Fucci's signification for Dante, D. L. Derby Chapin notes: "As a leader of the Blacks, he is before all else for Dante the symbol of an apotheosis of power, self-will and pride, which knows no end but its own glorification. Vanni Fucci has challenged the power of God and has literally stolen sacred images. Like Satan, by claiming for his own what belongs to God, he loses his resemblance to God. In rejecting Christ as a model, he becomes an imitator of the Devil and takes on a resemblance to him and to the beast, whose name he bears." ("IO and the Negative Apotheosis of Vanni Fucci," *Dante Studies* 89 (1971), 28.

And outside of the world of the fiction, on the level of what the poet-*artifex* does to his characters, it is to be noted the admirable way in which language, the same language that Fucci abuses in so many ways, is made turn against him. Ironically, the horrendous portrayal of the character who is lavishly described as animal, non-human, beast, mule, is not made by Virgil or any other person in the fiction, it is made... by the character himself. It is Vanni Fucci's own mouth that speaks against him with offensive words.<sup>386</sup>

If Dante casts Capaneus, the Theban king, as an emblematic blasphemer meant to represent the universal value of this sin of speech, he casts Vanni Fucci as a historically anchored blasphemer, who illustrates this sin in contemporary society, in the Italian vernacular. In Canto XIII of *Purgatory*, the figure of the Sienese Sapia Salvani has the same historical status. She, too, is an Italian contemporary of Dante's, but unlike Vanni Fucci, a blasphemous thief in life and a blasphemous speaker in death, she provides in the text the remedy for the sin. On the purgatorial mountain, Sapia makes amends for her human failings on the terrace of envy. Her main human defect--envy--was foolish ('folle'), she says, in that she would rejoice more at the others' misfortune than at her own good luck. More perversely, she felt joy even when her own countrymen were defeated at the battle of Colle, in which her own nephew died. On this occasion, she felt so empowered that she uttered an impious oath to God: *Omai più non ti temo!* (v. 122: 'Now I fear you no more'). The difference between Vanni Fucci and Sapia is that at the end of her life she repented for her treasons and benefited from the charitable prayers of a man of

---

<sup>386</sup> George Economou makes an interesting connection between the mysterious voice unable to form words that Dante describes in the same canto (vv. 65-66) with Vanni Fucci's failures of speech: "Whether the voice in the middle passage is indeed Vanni Fucci's is not as important as the complementary nature of these two instances of defective human utterance, each of which for its own reasons fails to make sense or accomplish its aim. Each illustrates a radical distortion of speech and deserves the silence it gets." (op. cit, 315).

God.<sup>387</sup> Sapia's repentance earned her the possibility of salvation, where for Vanni Fucci there was nothing left; the *sante orazioni* of *Ser Pier Pettinaio* to whom she also owes her presence on the mountain reversed the terms of her blasphemy and reestablished the sacred function of language: reverent communication with the transcendent. While Francesca da Rimini was at war with God and incapable of uttering a prayer, Sapia's repentance earned her peace with the divinity, just as the prayers spoken by the hermit on her behalf quickened her salvation. Through Sapia, Dante restores to the dialogue with God its true nature. To blasphemy, as a perverted prayer, is opposed the prayer itself. Sapia is just one of the numerous characters in the *Purgatory* who allude to the power of prayer in the process of salvation and to the ability of the prayer to accelerate the souls' ascension to the terrestrial paradise.

In hell, however, the sin of blasphemy, as a sin of word, is assimilated by Dante with sodomy and usury, an association, which, needless to say, has been puzzling interpreters for centuries. What do blasphemers have in common with homosexuals and usurers? To answer this question, I will first look at the link between blasphemy and sodomy, and then at the connection of blasphemy with usury. I will not insist on these other two transgressions of the circle of the violent against God, because, first, the two sins have received an extremely rich attention over the course of time, and second, because sodomy and usury not being sins of word, their treatment would exceed the scope of my dissertation.

The main clue of the alignment of these three sins in the system of hell is offered by the text itself. In Canto XI, that contains the so-called "map" of hell, Virgil defines the medieval notion of "art" as divine: since art imitates nature, and nature is God's daughter, art too has a

---

<sup>387</sup> *Pace volli con Dio in su lo stremo/de la mia vita; e ancor non sarebbe/o mio dover per penitenza scemo,/se ciò non fosse, ch'a memoria ebbe Pier Pettinaio in sue sante orazioni.* (*Purg.*, XIII, 124-128; 'I wished peace with God at the end of my life,/and my debt would not yet be canceled by/ penance,/were it not that Piero the comb-seller/remembered me in his holy prayers, having pity on/me in his charity.').

divine origin. According to this interpretation, the seventh circle of hell suggests that blasphemers offend God directly, and sodomites and usurers indirectly: the former by offending nature, and the latter by offending art (here understood as a profession). What is less apparent in this classification is the remarkable effort of synthesis Dante has made to get to such simplicity of distribution. The view of nature and art(s) as originating in the creator is, of course, a solid scholastic acquisition, with roots in Abelard and Alain of Lille (to name just a few of the contributors to this view), but what made the theory of the relationship “God-Nature-Art” so popular in the late Middle Ages was an impressive number of moral texts that developed ideas about deviations with respect to nature and art.

If blasphemy is an insult to God through the medium of language (spoken or unspoken), sodomy is an offense as base as the first, only the medium is different: the flesh substitutes for words. The medieval association of blasphemy and sodomy was not uncommon, and according to analysts, it had roots in the famous *Novellae 77*, of Jusitnian's code.<sup>388</sup> In the wake of this document, we have early-modern juridical texts that treat blasphemy and homosexuality on a par, to the extent that they are attached the same legal penalties.<sup>389</sup> In the moral texts of the time as well, we find connections that justify Dante's placement of blasphemers beside sodomites. In the famous and widely circulated twelfth-century treatise *Verbum abbreviatum*, Peter the Cantor metaphorically describes the sodomites as *muti a laude dei*.<sup>390</sup> An important association of language with sex (especially inverted sex) is made in the same century by one of Dante's

---

<sup>388</sup> *Ut non luxurietur contra naturam neque iuretur per capillos aut aliquid huiusmodi neque blasphemetur in Deum* ('One shall not lust against nature, nor swear on the hair of his head or anything like that, nor shall commit blasphemy against God.' (AD 538). R. Schoell & G. Kroll, *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, III, Berlin, 1954.

<sup>389</sup> Corinne Levelux quotes Ludovicus Montaltus, with his *Tractatus de reprobatione sententiae Pilati* and Tiberis Decianus, with *Tractuatus criminalis* (op. cit., p. 169).

<sup>390</sup> *Patrologia Latina*, 205, 335B.

models: Alain of Lille. In *The Plaint of Nature*, Alan describes sex in terms of grammar, and stigmatises sodomy as follows:

The active sex shudders in disgrace as it sees itself degenerate into the passive sex. A man turned woman blackens the fair name of her sex. The witchcraft of Venus turns him into a hermaphrodite. He is subject and predicate: one and the same term is given a double application. Man here extends too far the laws of grammar. Becoming a barbarian in grammar, he disclaims the manhood given him by nature. (...). For the human race, fallen from its high state, adopts a highly irregular (grammatical) change when it inverts the rules of Venus by introducing barbarisms in its arrangement of genders. Thus man, his sex changed by a ruleless Venus, in defiance of due order, by his arrangement changes what is straightforward attribute of his. Abandoning in his deviation the true script of Venus, he is proved to be a sophistic pseudographer. Shunning even a resemblance traceable to the art of Dione's daughter, he falls into the defect of inverted order.<sup>391</sup>

Just as blasphemy inverts the terms of language turning it away from prayer and confession, so sodomy is, in Alain of Lille's view, a perverted grammar, in which the genders are inverted, and the relationship between subject and predicate reversed.<sup>392</sup> Blasphemy and sodomy also meet on the common ground of the referential function of language: just as blasphemies cannot be retold or reproduced, neither in spoken language nor in writing, in the same way the acts of sodomites cannot be described. Here human language has to keep quiet. By the same token, blasphemy (or heresy) and homosexuality are in the Middle Ages categories of

---

<sup>391</sup> Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980, 68-134.

<sup>392</sup> The notion of sex as grammar and of homosexuality as a perverted science of language would prove so successful that from *De planctu naturae* on all major medieval discussion around sexuality would be formulated in terms of the science of language. An interesting interpretation given to the sin of Brunetto Latini and the three courteous Florentines from canto XVI of the *Inferno* belongs to Andre Pézard. The French critic interprets their sin as blasphemy, not sodomy, arguing that by preferring French to Italian vernacular in the writing of his *Trésor*, Latini is guilty in Dante's eyes of "apostasie linguistique," whereas the other three Florentines are guilty as well of blasphemy [*Dante sous la pluie de feu (Enfer, XV)*. (Paris : Vrin, 1950), 236]. More recently, Richard Kay has devoted a series of studies to the sins of these characters. See, for instance, 1) *Dante's Swift and Strong. Essays on Inferno XV.* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), which includes "The Sin Of Brunetto Latini," [initially published in *Medieval Studies* 31 (1969), 262-286], and 2) "The Sin(s) of Brunetto Latini," *Dante Studies* 112 (1994), 19-31.

*nefandum*, i.e., things impossible to say or describe.<sup>393</sup> Reproduced, blasphemous words would have tarnished the ears and souls of the hearers, whereas the description of the technical details of homosexual relationships would have polluted the mores of Christians and subverted the very foundations of family.<sup>394</sup>

Also a perversion, and also subversive of the divine and social orders was considered in the late Middle Ages money-lending at interest. Usury was, in Thomas Aquinas's opinion, a sin similar to sodomy, in that they were both sins contrary to nature: natural laws required that money should increase from natural goods not from their own, perverse, propagation. There was the sense that usury was a diabolical sin in that usurers in fact did not sell money, but time. They did not work themselves to earn their daily bread, but made time work for them.<sup>395</sup> Time was, however, a divine function, and its dilation for the purpose of lucre was an extremely grievous sin against the divinity.<sup>396</sup> '*L'tempo fugge che t'assonna*' sounds one of the most celebrated

---

<sup>393</sup> See in this respect Corinne Leveleux: "Associés dans la radicalité d'une condamnation absolue, ces deux crimes figuraient logiquement dans la très extensive catégorie du *nefandum*-celle de l'indicible et de l'impie." ('Associated in the radicality of an absolute condemnation, these two crimes logically belonged to the very extensive category of *nefandum*-that of the inexpressible and of impious', op. cit, p. 168).

<sup>394</sup> Examining the concept of *nefandum*, the French analyst Jacques Chiffouleau notes that it was as much a literary *topos* as a moral and juridical category. He also points out that among the classes of *nefandum*, sodomy was considered to have the most serious social implications in that it threatened the soundness of family life ("Dire l'indicible: remarques sur la catégorie du *nefandum* du XIII<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècles. *Annales. Economie, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 1990, 295-6).

<sup>395</sup> *Verbum abbreviatum* which stigmatises the sin of usury in vitriolic terms is again indicative of this perception: *Et sicut diabolus talentum peccati non vult sibi reddi (quia quanto diutius detinetur, tanto amplius multiplicatur), sic nec fenerator talentum pecuniae creditum proximo, qui etiam dando ad usuram pejor est exactore diabolo, quia diabolus auctor omnis malitiae talentum suum, non alienum, mutuum dat; fenerator vero dando mutuum talentum pecuniae, non suum, sed Dei, et quo proximus gratis esset juvandus, et ob hoc sibi collatum nequiter dat ad usuram, qui etiam tempus vendit, ut propter dilationem temporis majorem, plus lucri recipiat.* (PL 305, col. 157B; 'And just as the devil does not want to get a reward [from his human followers] for his sinful help (for the more the reward is delayed, the more it increases), so the publican does not want to get immediately the interest for the loan. But he who gives money in order to make profit is worse than the exacting devil, because the devil, being the author of all evils, makes a loan with his own property, not with someone else's, whereas the publican, by lending the property of the money, does not give his own property, but that of God. And since the other should be helped in a disinterested way, and the money-lender is rich through the grace of God, it results that the publican commits an injustice when he lends money, for he sells the time in order to make more profit from the dilation of it'; translation mine).

<sup>396</sup> In his well-known essay *Au Moyen Age: Temps de l'Église et temps du marchand*, Jacques le Goff quotes a similar vision on usury belonging this time to William of Auxerre (1160-1229) "L'usurier agit contre la loi de la

phrases in the *Paradiso*, a human time that, as Giafranco Contini has pointed out, for Dante runs back toward the eternal.<sup>397</sup> Along these lines, it is likely that what Dante condemns through the sin of usury, is not so much the abuse of money, as some have suggested,<sup>398</sup> as the abuse of time. And if it was natural in Dante's time to associate blasphemy with sodomy, in the wake of Justinian's *Ut non luxurietur*, it was also natural to equate usury with blasphemy and heresy. In 1311, the council of Vienna pronounced usury a grievous a sin as heresy and blasphemy. What Dante ultimately did in the circle of the violent against God was to offer an extraordinary synthesis of disparate trends of moral thought; he tightly mainstreamed three discrete types of perversions and grouped them together on account of their common nature of violations of divine attributes: speech, life and time.

For Dante, speech is the divine gift that allows us to communicate with each other, and then with the Highest Good; the body and life are given to man as part of a providential design, and time is given again to him for the execution of this transcendental design. Language, life and time--all manifestations of the divinity--are at stake in the transgressions of the blasphemers, sodomites and usurers. Blaspheming the name of the Highest Good is abusing the sacral function of language, having intercourse with people of the same sex means violating the natural

---

nature universelle, car il vend le temps, qui est commun à toutes les créatures. Augustin dit que chaque créature est obligée de faire don de soi; le soleil est obligé de faire don de soi pour éclairer; de même la terre est obligée de faire don de tout ce qu'elle peut produire et de même l'eau. Mais rien ne fait don de soi d'une façon plus conforme à la nature que le temps; bon gré, mal gré les choses ont du temps. Puisque donc l'usurier vend ce qui appartient nécessairement à toutes les créatures, il lèse toutes les créatures. (...) et c'est une des raisons pour lesquelles l'Église poursuit les usuriers." ("The usurer always acts against the law of universal nature, for he sells time, which belongs to all creatures. Augustine says that each creature needs to offer itself; the sun needs to offer itself in order to illuminate; by the same token, earth needs to offer all she can produce, and the same holds for water. But nothing offers itself in a way more conform to nature than time; wittingly or unwittingly things have time. So, since the usurer sells what necessarily belongs to all creatures, he hurts all creatures... this is one of the reasons why the Church condemns the usurers." *Summa Aurea*, III, 21, fol. 225v, quoted by Jacques Le Goff, in *Pour un Autre moyen Age. Temps, travail et culture en Occident: 18 essais*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), 46-47; translation mine.

<sup>397</sup> See Contini's analysis of Canto XXVIII of *Paradiso*, in *Un'idea di Dante. Saggi danteschi*. (Torino: Einaudi, 2001), 205.

<sup>398</sup> Ferrante, for instance, in *The Political Vision*, and Lisa Freinkel, in "Inferno and the Poetics of Usura." *MLN* 107 (1992), 1-17.

functioning of the body and threatening life itself by blocking the possibility of procreation. Usury is itself an unnatural interaction with time, a perversion of the notion of value from the divine through the human to the diabolical. In the text, the verb Virgil uses to describe usury is *spregiare*—the same element that appears in the definitions of blasphemy: Dante's Capaneus hates God *e poco par che'l pregi*. All three sins are acts of violence which directly or indirectly do harm to the Supreme Being and which affect the everyday life of an entire community.<sup>399</sup>

Thus, like all the other sins punished in the *Inferno*, the triad blasphemy-sodomy-usury is seen from a twofold perspective: the transcendental and the human. Besides from offending God, these transgressions also had devastating consequences on an immediate level, that of public life. For in accordance to medieval interpretations, the sin(s) of the individual had deep repercussions on the fate of the multitude.<sup>400</sup> Blasphemy was for the medieval society more than just a form of phonic pollution, what was truly at stake in the act of cursing the name of God and all such else was the core of the Christian religion with which medieval communities identified themselves. It was an infraction that could not go unpunished, because it offended the ecclesiastical structures, the profound beliefs of worshippers, and the moral values of the Christian community. Blasphemies also touched the representatives of political power: the leaders of the political organizations of the time who were considered symbols of divine authority.<sup>401</sup> The act of blaspheming was an act of lèse-majesté directed as much at supreme political figures as at the ineffable majesty of God. Moreover, in the wake of Justinian's *Ut non luxurietur*, there was the

---

<sup>399</sup> Joan Ferrante sharply notices that all the sinners of the circle of the violent against God are set against social backgrounds: Capaneus is a king, the sodomites are represented by statesmen or teachers, and usurers by leading Italian families involved in economic life. For Ferrante, the three sins that these souls embody are as many threats to the social order and concord. Along these lines, Capaneus is the figure of the “human anarchist” (*The Political Vision*, 159-160).

<sup>400</sup> I quote again as illustrative in this respect the widely popular treatise of moral philosophy written by Peter the Cantor (see especially chapter LXXIII *Peccatum unius saepe redundant in universitatem*), PL 305, col. 217C.

<sup>401</sup> Illustrative for this perception is John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, especially chapter twenty-five in which he discusses the notion of the prince as an image of the deity.

sense that natural calamities were a direct result of blasphemies gone unpunished. Laws had been promulgated therefore, to keep such criminal acts under control. The failure to control the blasphemous phenomenon would have meant political and institutional inability to keep society under control.<sup>402</sup>

To Dante, a Christian poet, the sin of blasphemy was of the utmost importance. It was a current phenomenon impossible to tolerate and whose gravity had to transpire in the structure of hell. It was a sin as old as humankind, and Capaneus, as an emblematic blasphemer, is in Dante's text a literary testimony to the evil tendency to rebellion and irreligion inherent in the corrupt human nature. At the same time the practice of blasphemy was a plague of Dante's own time, and Vanni Fucci, as a historical blasphemer, testifies to the seriousness of the crime in the Italian society of the fourteenth century... and of the sins expressed with the linguistic means of Italian vernacular. Dante's remedy for the sin of blasphemy is the remedy of the medieval moral texts on *peccata linguae*: only prayer can restore to language the sacredness erased by blasphemy, and Sapia in the *Purgatory* shows the way to follow in the human use of language.

---

<sup>402</sup> See Cabantous, *Blasphemy*, 3, and Corinne Leveleux, *La parole interdite*, 163.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding chapters, I have sought to bring to the fore those features of the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Divine Comedy* that best show the degree to which literary culture in the vernacular was sensitive to the animated medieval debate around *peccata linguae*. Both allegorical poems laid claim, in their own, specific ways, to offering lessons about morality. The reading of these poems in the context and through the lenses of the moralists on transgressive speech from the later Middle Ages shows that both Jean de Meun and Dante absorbed many aspects—ideas, images, quotes, technical terms—of the rich tradition of the *lingua*-texts.

In the treatment of verbal sins, the most salient feature common to the two poets is their adherence to the scholastic principle of the will as the root of evil speech. On account of his philosophical erudition, Jean was acknowledged as a scholastic thinker as early as the fifteenth century, when Jean de Meuntreuil and the Col brothers generously “bestowed” the title of *doctor* to the poet. In my reading of the *Rose*, the discourse that best justifies de Montreuil and Cols’s assessment is that of Lady Nature, which is extremely rich in ideas about human morality, ideas expressed from a scholastic standpoint. The most important postulate of Nature’s discourse is that human deeds or words do not “happen” by necessity; men freely choose what to do or what to say. As we have seen, both the realm of actions and that of spoken words depend on men’s inner intentions, on their free choice: *Ainz font bien ou mal franchement,/Par leur voloir tant seulement* (17265-6). I consider Lady Nature as the most important mouthpiece of Jean de Meun

as a moralist. Not only does she express philosophical opinions incongruent with her allegorical essence (and which would have better fitted Lady Reason), but also her view of human morals is so cynical that it can belong only to Jean de Meun, as a satirist of contemporary society.

Will is the agent of verbal sins for Dante, as well. On the one hand, in the *Convivio*, the writer argues that *l'arte di parlare*, being a rational act, is rooted in the will. By the same token, it follows that the sins committed through the medium of speech are rooted in the will. On the other hand, in the *Comedy*, with the sole exception of blasphemy, which is a sin of violence, all the other verbal sins are punished as sins of fraud in Malebolge, an area that, as Cogan has proven, corresponds to the appetite of the will.

One of the most important achievements of Jean de Meun and Dante as moralists of speech is the vernacular lexicon they implement. The ethical category of *peccata linguae* or *verbi* was an important part of the scholastic discourse on human morality, but this discourse was developed in Latin. Peter the Cantor, Alain of Lille, William Peraldus, Vincent of Beauvais, Thomas Aquinas wrote their texts on sins in academic Latin. Jean de Meun composed the *Romance of the Rose* in the langue d'oïl, Dante wrote both the *Convivio* and the *Divine Comedy* in the Florentine dialect. For both poets, the choice of the vernacular was the result of a deliberate choice, and was intertwined with didactic purposes. In the *Rose*, the character Lover insists that Lady Reason should instruct him in French, not in Latin (Or *me dites doncue ainçois,/Non en latin, mais en français/De coi voulez que je vous serve;* 5835-7). This remark is to be read in correlation with Jean's marked concern to be understood when he expounded philosophical principles. In the fragment of the text where the poet debates the relationships between predestination, divine foreknowledge, and free will, he notes that these relationships are not easy to explain to lay people (*Forz est a gens lais a descrivre;* 17110). The task of the poet

becomes at this point to “translate” and explain in the vernacular a scholastic discourse about sins (and verbal sins) routinely written in Latin. And we have historical evidence that Jean was an outstanding translator. Jean de Meun was actually doing in poetry what Laurent d’Orléans was doing in a technical moral tract. Only that Jean de Meun’s extraordinary linguistic verve enabled him to go further than Laurent d’Orléans. We have remarked that where d’Orléans proposes two vernacular terms for the translation of a verbal sin in French (the sin of flattery, for instance), Jean de Meun comes up with about five terms, all taken from the living language. It is no small achievement to enrich the moral lexicon in poetry more than an ecclesiastic writer does it in a moral tract proper.

Likewise, Dante had access to the corpus of philosophical and moral knowledge of his time through the mediation of Latin. He too “translated,” explained and exemplified in Italian vernacular scholastic notions about sins. In analyzing Dante’s relationship to William Peraldus, Mancini has noted that Dante is a *traduttore-traditore* of Peraldus. We have seen how many controversies the term *consiglio frodolente* aroused in Dante studies. Such a moral category did exist in the medieval tracts, but what in Peraldus was the sin of *malum consilium*, for instance, for Dante becomes *fraudulent counsel*. Cavalca, the Dominican friar who would translate Peraldus’s text on the sins of the tongue, would publish his *Pungilingua* after Dante’s death. But Cavalca’s vocabulary on the sins of the tongue is very similar to Dante’s terms for the verbal sins assigned to hell. The two meet, thus, in the common effort of transferring the discussion on *peccata linguae/verbi* from the context of academic Latin to that of the vernacular Italian. Only

that Dante preceded Cavalca's work in a conscious and constant agenda of "italianizing Scholasticism."<sup>403</sup>

Thus, in the poetic treatment of verbal sins Jean de Meun and Dante are brought together by their significant contribution to the cultural movement of "vernacularization" of the pastoral discourse on transgressive speech.

The main difference between Dante's assimilation of ethical theories about speech and Jean de Meun's is that Dante fuses these theories within a very rigorous system with internal, hierarchical relationships, whereas Jean contends himself with a non-organized framework, in which the moral terms--vices or sins---do not always seem to occupy the same positions in the structure, but rather are constantly revised and re-arranged (what is vice for one character is virtue for others). For Dante, the five verbal transgressions he treats constitute a micro-system within the larger system of the sins of hell. Jean de Meun does not have a moral system *per se*; we can glean his view of morality from disparate passages throughout his poem. To make things more confusing, in the *Rose*, some of the ethical ideas expressed by a character are at variance with ideas expressed by other characters: Friend and the Old Woman's notions of morality stand, for instance, in sharp contrast with Reason's. We have noted that this was one of the main charges leveled by Christine de Pizan and Jean Gerson in the *querelle*: that Jean de Meun failed to give his readership a clear moral instruction. Christine de Pizan even compared Jean de Meun and Dante, and gave the latter as the perfect embodiment of a true moral writer. It is a comparison out of which Jean comes... ruffled, since it is made with the explicit purpose of diminishing Jean's stature as a moral writer with respect with Dante's exemplary stature.

---

<sup>403</sup> I borrow this phrase from Giovanni Gentile, who has pointed out that Dante "rompe in letteratura l'universalità medievale" of Latin expression and "italianizza la scolastica." (*I Problemi della scolastica* [Bari: Laterza, 1923]: 38-9). Gentile's view is quoted by Bruno Nardi, in "Il Linguaggio," 189.

The differences between the two, however, come not from a different degree of talent, or a discrepancy in the concern for morality, but from the diversity of their artistic tempers and from the nature of their works. Jean de Meun never assumes in his poem the status of a judge, as Dante will do. Jean de Meun is a satirist in the tradition of the Roman poets, for whom *ridendo castigat mores* was the best attitude in art. Jean laughs at sins and mocks the sinners. Dante sends them to hell. Jean de Meun writes a “mirror” for lovers, in which the art of love is considered from every single angle: inner, outer, good, bad, commendable or blamable. Dante imagines a literary universe so strict, within a theological poem so difficult, that those embarked on a *picioletta barca* cannot follow him.

In what concerns Dante’s relationships to the moral authorities of the day, one detail must be noted about Thomas Aquinas. In the introductory part, we have underlined that among the moral writers of the time, Aquinas was the only one who systematically established degrees of comparisons among sins, and mixed verbal sins with sins of flesh or of intellect. He also argued that it was a heretic error to consider all pains of hell equal.

The hierarchy of sins and punishments that constitutes a fundamental principle of the Thomistic system also represents the hallmark of Dante’s infernal universe. Thus, although in the *Inferno* Dante presents some deviations with respect to Aquinas’s views, I believe that the general notion of a hierarchy of sins, just as that of embedding verbal sins into sins of non-linguistic nature, was inspired by Aquinas. As a moralist, however, Dante was original. He took painstaking care to build an idiosyncratic hierarchy of sins, and as a poet he went further than Aquinas could do: he imagined a scale of hellish punishments with a remarkable wealth of details and an evident concern for variety and symbolism.

By virtue of his well-acknowledged eclecticism, Dante drew his inspiration for verbal sins from several sources: Peraldus and Aquinas may be just two of them. More challenging than detecting the ultimate, absolute wellspring for Dante's treatment of transgressive speech, it seemed to me to discover why Dante chose five specific sins: blasphemy, flattery, fraudulent counsel, sowing of discord, and falsifying of words, to punish in the Inferno. The main factors that seem to have determined Dante's selection of these specific sins (out of the twenty-four posited by Peraldus, for instance), three imposed themselves to me as salient: 1) the selected verbal trespasses are motivated by their large diffusion in Dante's own days; 2) they have social and political implications; 3) they also seem to concern Dante in a personal way.<sup>404</sup>

The problematic of sinful speech opened in the *Inferno* in dramatic ways finds closure in the third *cantica* of the Comedy. *Paradiso* proposes itself as the realm in which words can no longer "sin," they can no longer be transgressive, since the rules of language are reinvented and speech is no longer a matter of individual will; it is the pure, collective thought reflected in the mirror of the godly mind. *Verbum Dei*. The word made not flesh, but POETRY.

---

<sup>404</sup> Ferrante, for instance, interprets Dante's hesitation among the evil counselors as symbolic of his own temptation to commit this sin: "Dante almost falls into the flames of this circle, perhaps because he was tempted to counsel fraud in his political dealings and knows at first hand this tendency in the clever mind." (*The Political Vision*, 463).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

Alain of Lille. *Tractus de virtutibus, et de vitiis et de donis Spiritus Sancti*. Odon Lottin, ed. *Medieval Studies* 12 (1950): 20-56

----- *Liber in distinctionibus dictionum theologicalium*. PL 210, 685-1012.

----- *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, PL 210, 120-190.

----- *The Plaint of Nature*. Translation and commentary by James J. Sheridan, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980.

----- *The Anticlaudianus of Alain de Lille. Prologue, Argument and Nine Books*. Translated, with an introduction and notes by William H. Cornong. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1935.

Albertano da Brescia. *De Doctrina loquendi et tacendi*, published electronically at: <http://freespace.virgin.net/angus.graham/Loquendi.htm>

Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated with an introduction by David Ross. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998.

Augustine of Hippo. *On the Trinity, Books 8-15*. Garreth B. Matthews ed. Translated by Stephen McKenna. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2002.

----- *Confessions*. Commentary by James O'Donnell. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

----- *On Christian Doctrine*. Translated with an introduction by D.W. Robertson Jr. New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1958.

----- *Concerning the Teacher (De magistro)*. Translated by George G. Leckie. New York: Appleton-Century Company, 1938.

Boethius. *Consolation of Philosophy*. Translated with introduction and notes by Joehl C. Relihan. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001.

Brunetto Latini. *The Book of Treasure (Li Livres dou Tresor)*. Translated by Paul Barrette and Spurgeon Baldwin. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993.

----- *Il Tesoretto (The Little Treasure)*. Edited and translated by Julia Bolton Holloway. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981.

Dante Alighieri. *Convivio*. A cura di Giorgio Inglese. Milan: RCS Rizzoli, 2004.

----- *Dante's Il Convivio (The Banquet)*, Richard Lansing, ed. New York: Garland, 1990.

----- (attributable to ) *The Fiore and the Detto d'Amore. A Late 13<sup>th</sup>-Century Translation of the Roman de la Rose*. A Translation with introduction and notes by S. Casciani, and C. Kleinhenz. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000.

----- *L'Eloquenza in volgare*, a cura di Giorgio Inglese. Milan: RCS Libri, 1998.

----- *De vulgari eloquentia*, translated by Steven Botterill. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

----- *La Divina Commedia*. Commento di Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi. Milan: Mondadori, 1991.

----- *Dante's Monarchia*. Translated, with a commentary, by Richard Kay. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998.

----- *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, translated by Robert M. Durling. Oxford: Oxford UP. Volume I, *Inferno* (1996), volume II, *Purgatorio* (2003), and volume III, *Paradiso* (forthcoming).

----- *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, translated by Allen Mandelbaum. Berkeley: California UP. Volume I, *Inferno* (1980), volume II, *Purgatorio* (1981), and volume III, *Paradiso* (1982).

Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. *Le Roman de la rose*. Armand Strubel, ed. Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1992

----- *The Romance of the Rose*. Translated by Charles Dahlberg, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.

Domenico Cavalca. *Il Pungilingua*. G. Bottari, ed., Milan, 1837.

Étienne de Bourbon. *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et aplogues tirés du recueil inédit d'Étienne de Bourbon, dominicain du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Lecoy de la Marche, ed. Paris, 1877.

Hugh of St. Victor. *Didascalicon. De Studio legendi*. A critical text. Charles Henry Buttmer, ed. Washington: The Catholic University Press. 1939.

----- *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor. A Medieval Guide to the Arts*. Translated from Latin with an introduction and notes by Jerome Taylor. New York: Columbia UP, 1961.

----- *De Institutione novitiorum*. PL 176, 925-952.

Jacques de Vitry. *Historia Occidentalis*. J. F. Hinnebusch, ed. *Spicilegium Friburgense* 17. Fribourg, 1972.

Jean Gerson. *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. VII. Palémon Glorieux, ed., Paris: Desclée and Cie, 1966.

John of Salisbury. *Policraticus. Of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*. Edited and translated by Cary J. Nederman. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.

Laurent d' Orléans. *Somme le Roi*. Paris, *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal*, lat. 2071.

*Le Roman de Renart*. Préface de Béatrix Beck. Version de Paulin Paris. Paris: Gallimard, 1986.

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Translation by A.D. Melville. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986.

Peter the Cantor. *Verbum Abbreviatum*, PL 205.

Radulfus Ardens. *Speculum Universale*. IX-XIV, BnF, Paris, lat. 3240.

Robert Grosseteste, (attributed to). *De Lingua*. Oxford, Lincoln, 56, ff. 175v-306r.

Rutebeuf. *Œuvres complètes*. Michel Zink, ed. Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2005.

*The Book of Vices and Virtues. A Fourteenth century English Translation of the 'Somme le Roi' of Lorens d'Orléans*. N. Francis, ed. London: Oxford UP, 1942.

Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. I-V. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, Inc., 1981.

----- *Summa Theologiae*. Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices and Glossary T.C. O'Brien. London: Blackfriars, 1974.

Virgil. *The Aeneid*. Translated with an introduction by David West. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003.

William of St. Amour. "De Periculis Novissimorum temporum." *Opera Omnia*. Constance, 1632, pp. 29-40.

----- "Contra Pericula imminentia Ecclesiae generali per Hypocritas, Pseudo-Predicatores, et Penetrantes domos, et Otiosos, et Curiosos et Gyrovagos," *ibid.* pp. 111-316.

William Peraldus. *Summae virtutum ac vitiorum-tomus secundus*. Gulielmo Peraldo Episc. Lugdunensi. Apud. Gulielmum Rovillium, MDLXXXV.

## Secondary Sources

*A History of Private Life, II: Revelations of the Medieval World*. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, eds. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1988.

Ahern, John. "Dante's Slyness: The Unnamed Sin of the Eighth Bolgia." *Romanic Review* 73.3 (1982): 275-291.

Allen, Judson Boyce. *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages: A Decorum of Convenient Distinctions*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982.

Alighieri, Jacopo. *Chiose alla cantica dell'Inferno di Dante Alighieri scritte da Jacopo Alighieri*, G. Piccini, ed. Florence: Bemporad, 1915.

Alighieri, Pietro. *Super Dantis ipsius genitoris Comoediam Commentarium*, V. Nannucci ed., Florence: Garinei, 1844.

Altmann, Barbara K. and McGrady, Deborah L. *Christine de Pizan. A Casebook*. Routledge. New York and London: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 2003.

*Aquinas's Moral Theory: Essays in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, S. MacDonald, and E. Stump eds. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1998.

*Aquinas and Empowerment: Classical Ethics for Ordinary Lives*, G. Harak, ed., Washington, DC: Washington UP, 1996.

Arden, Heather. *Romance of the Rose*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987.

Ashley, Benedict M., O.P., "Dominic Cavalca and The Spirituality of the Word." <http://www.op.org/domcentral/study/Ashley/cavalca.html>.

*Augustine through the Ages: an Encyclopedia.* Allan D. Fitzgerald, gen. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publ., 1999.

Auerbach, Erich. *Dante: Poet of the Secular World.* Chicago: Chicago UP, 1988.

Badel, Pierre Yves. *Le Roman de la Rose au XIVe siècle. Étude de la Réception de l'oeuvre.* Geneva: Droz, 1980.

Baird, Josph L & Kane, John R., *La Querelle de la Rose: Lettres et documents.* Chapel Hill: North Carolina Studies in the Romance languages and literatures, Nr. 199, 1978.

Baker, Denise N. "The Priesthood of Genius: A Study of the Medieval Tradition." *Speculum* 51 (1976), 277-291. Reprinted in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: A Critical Anthology.* Peter Nicholson, ed. Cambridge, England: D. S. Brewer, 1991.

Bakhtin, Mikail M. *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays.* Michael Holquist, ed. Austin: Texas UP, 1987.

Balducci, Marino A. *Classicismo dantesco. Miti e simboli della morte e della vita nella "Divina Commedia."* Florence: Le Lettere, 2004.

Baránski, Zygmunt G. and Boyde, Patrick. *The Fiore in Context. Dante, France and Tuscany.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.

Bardsley Sandy. *Venomous Tongues. Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

Barolini, Teodolinda. *The Undivine "Comedy."* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992.

----- *Dante's Poets. Textuality and Truth in the Divine Comedy.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984.

----- "Bertran de Born and Sordello: The Poetry of Politics in Dante's *Comedy.*" *PMLA* 94.3 (1979): 395-405.

----- "Medieval Multi-Culturalism and Dante's Theology of Hell." *The Craft and the Fury: Essays in Memory of Glauco Cambon.* J. Francese, ed. *Italiana* IX (2000): 82-102.

Baron, Roger. "Hugues de St. Victor lexicographe." *Cultura Neolatina* 16 (1956): 109-145.

Bartuschat, Johannes and Rossi, Luciano. *Studi sul canone letterario del Trecento: Per Michelangelo Picone.* Ravenna: Longo, 2003.

Batany, Georges. *Approches du "Roman de la Rose."* Paris: Bordas, 1973.

- Bates, Richard and Rendal, Thomas. "Dante's Ulysses and the *Epistle of James*." *Dante Studies* 107 (1989): 33-44
- Beltrán, Luis. "The Old Woman's Past." *Romanische Forchungen* 84 (1972): 77-96.
- Berthelot, Anne. *Arthur et la Table ronde. La force d'une légende*. Paris: Gallimard, 1996.
- Bertoni, Giulio. "Il canto dei lenoni e degli adulatori. (*Inferno*, C. XVIII)." *Archivum Romanicum*, 12 (1928): 288-302.
- Biard, Joel. "Signe monétaire et signe linguistique: La critique de la chrématistique dans l'école buridanienne." *Les philosophies morales et politiques au Moyen Age. Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Medieval Philosophy*. Ottawa, 17-22 August, 1992. Vol. 1. Pp. 1420-1435.
- Bisconti, Donatella. "Cordeliers et cordelières dans *La divine commédie*". Actes du colloque *Dante poète et narrateur*. "Arzanà." *Cahiers de littérature italienne médiévale*. 7 (2001): 271-304.
- Blumenfeld-Kosinski. *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan. New Translations. Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997.
- "Jean le Fèvre's *Livre de Leesce*: Praise or Blame of Women," *Speculum* 69 (1994): 705-725.
- "Jean Gerson and the Debate on the *Romance of the Rose*." *A Companion to Gerson*. Brian P. McGuire, ed. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006. Pp. 317-355.
- *Poets, Saints and Visionaries of the Great Schism. 1378-1417*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2006.
- Bloomfield, Morton W. *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval England Literature*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ann Arbor: Michigan State UP, 1967.
- Bogner, Ralf G. *Die Bezähmung der Zunge. Literatur und Disziplinierung der Alltagskommunikation in der frühen Neuzeit*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997.
- Boitani, Piero "Beyond the Sunset: Dante's Ulysses in Another World." *Lectura Dantis* 9 (1991): 34-53.
- Botterill, Steven. "Dante's Poetics of the Sacred Word." *Philosophy and Literature* 20.1 (1996): 154-162.

----- *Dante and the Mystical Tradition. Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

Boyde, Patrick. *Human Vices and Human Worth in Dante's "Comedy."* Cambridge, New York: Cambridge UP, 2000.

Brown-Grant, Rosalind. *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defense of Woman. Reading Beyond Gender.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.

Brownlee, Kevin. "The Problem of Faux Semblant: Language, History and Truth in the *Roman de la Rose*." *The New Medievalism*, Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis-Brownlee, eds. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991. Pp. 253-71.

----- "Reflections in the *Miroir aus Amoureux*. The Incribed Reader in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*." *Mimesis: From Mirror to Method, Augustine to Descartes*. John D. Lyons, Stephen G. Nichols, eds. Hanover: New England UP, 1982. Pp. 60-70.

----- "Pygmalion, Mimesis, and the Multiple Endings of the *Roman de la Rose*." *Yale French Studies* 95 (1999): 193-211.

Brayer, Edith. "Contenu, structure et combinaison du 'Miroir du monde' et de la 'Somme le Roi'." *Romania* 79 (1958): 1-38, 433-470.

Brinton, Crane. *A History of Western Morals*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959. Pp. 176-212.

Brugnoli, Giorgio. "Dante Filologo: l'esempio di Ulisse." *Studi danteschi* III. Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 1998.

Buti, Francesco da. *Commento di Francesco da Buti sopra la Divina Commedia*, C. Giannini, ed. Pisa: Nistri, 1858-1862.

Cabantous, Alain. *Blasphemy. Impious Speech in the West from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Columbia UP, 2002.

Caretti, Lanfranco. "Canto XVIII." *Lectura Dantis Scaligera*. Firenze: Le Monnier, 1967. Pp. 583-617.

Carruthers, Leo M. *La Somme Le Roi de Lorens d'Orléans et ses traductions anglaises: Etude comparée*. Paris: Association des Médiévistes Anglicistes de L'Enseignement Supérieur, 1986.

----- "Lorens of Orléans and the *Somme le roi* or *The Book of Vices and Virtues*." *Vox Benedictina*. Saskatoon: Peregrina Publishers, 5.2/3 (1998): 190-200.

Casagrande, Carla and Vecchio, Silvana. *I Sette vizi capitali. Storia dei peccati nel Medioevo.* Torino: Einaudi, 2000.

----- *I Peccati della lingua. Disciplina ed etica della parola nella cultura medievale.* Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1987.

Cassell, Anthony K. "Ulisseana: A Bibliography of Dante's Ulysses to 1981." *Italian Culture* 3 (1981): 23-45

Centi, Tito S. *Domenico Cavalca. Specchio della croce. Testo originale e versione in italiano corrente.* Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 1992.

Cervigni, Dino S. "Dante's Lucifer: The Denial of the Word." *Lectura dantis* 3 (1988): 51-63.

Chapin Derby, D.L. "Io and the Negative Apotheosis of Vanni Fucci." *Dante Studies* 89 (1971): 19-31.

Chiavacci Leonardi, Anna Maria. "La salvezza degli infedeli: Il Canto XX del *Paradiso*," in *Regnum celorum violenza pate. Dante e la salvezza dell'umanità.* Montella: Accademia Vivarium Noveum, 2002. Pp. 193-203.

Chiffouleau, Jacques. "Dire l'indicible: remarques sur la catégorie du *nefandum* du XIII<sup>e</sup> au XVe siècles. *Annales. Economie, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 1990. Pp. 289-324.

Ciotti, Andrea. "Alano e Dante." *Convivium* 28 (1960): 257-88

Cogan, Marc. *Design in the Wax: The Structure of the Divine Comedy and its Meaning.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999.

Cook, William R. and Herzman, Ronald B. "St. Eustace: A Note on *Inferno* XXVII." *Dante Studies* 94 (1976): 137-9.

Colish, Marcia L. *The Mirror of Language. A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge.* Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 1983.

----- *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition. 400-1400.* New Haven: Yale UP. Pp. 214-273.

*Concordantiae Augustinianae.* Tomus Primus et Alter. Labore F. Davidis Lenfant, Parisini Doctoris Theologi, Ordinis FF. Praedicatorum. Lutetiae Parisiorum. MDCLXV.

Connolly, James L, *John Gerson, Reformer and Mystic.* Louvain: Uystpruyt, 1928.

Corti, Maria. "Le metafore della navigazione, del volo e della lingua di fuoco nell'episodio di Ulisse (*Inferno*, XXVI)." *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Aurelio Roncaglia*. Modena: Mucchi, 1989; 2:479-91.

----- "Le fonti del *Fiore di Virtù* e la teoria della nobiltà nel Duecento." *Giornale Storico della letteratura Italiana* CXXXVI (1959), pp. 63-87.

Contini, Gianfranco. "Un nodo della cultura medievale: la serie *Roman de la Rose-Fiore-Divina Commedia*." *Un'idea di Dante*. Turin: Einaudi, 2001. Pp. 245-283.

Craun, Edwin. *Lies, Slander and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.

Curtius, Ernst R. "Dante und Alanus ab Insulis." *Romanische Forschungen* 62 (1950): 28-31.

*Dante Encyclopedia*. Richard Lansing, ed. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000.

Delcorno, C. "Dante e l'exemplum medievale." *Lettura clasensi* 12, Ravenna, Longo 1983. Also in *Lettere italiane* XXXV (1983), then published under the title "Dante e Peraldo." *Exemplum e letteratura. Tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*. Bologna: Il Mulino 1989. Pp. 195-227.

Den Eynde, Damien van. "Précisions chronologiques sur quelques ouvrages théologiques du XIIe siècle." *Antonianum* 26 (1951): 241-243.

Detienne, Marcel and Vernant, Jean-Pierre. *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*. Atlantic Highlands. N.J.: Humanities Press Inc., 1978.

Di Scipio, Giuseppe C. *The Symbolic Rose in Dante's "Paradiso."* Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1984.

Dingjan, François. *Discretio. Les origins patristiques et monastiques de la doctrine sur la prudence chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*. Arsen: Van Gorcum & Comp. N.V, 1967.

Dolfi, Ana. "Il canto di Ulisse: occasione per un discorso di esegeti dantesca." *Forum Italicum* 7-8 (1973-4): 22-45.

Dondaine, Antoine. "Guillaume Peyraut, vie et ouvres." *Archivium Fratrum Predicorum* 18 (1948): 162-236.

Donno, J. Daniel. "Dante's Ulysses and Virgil's Prohibition: *Inferno* XXVI, 70-75." *Italica* 50 (1973): 26-37.

Dronke, Peter. *Dante and Medieval Latin Traditions*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1986.

- “Boethius, Alanus und Dante.” *Romanische Forschungen* 78 (1966): 119-125.
- Duby, Georges. *Age of the Cathedrals: Art and Society, 980-1420*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1981.
- Dufournet, Jean. *Études sur « Le Roman de la Rose » de Guillaume de Lorris*. Geneva: Slatkine, 1984.
- Dunbar, Flanders H. *Symbolism in Medieval Thought and its Consummation in the “Divine Comedy”*. New York: Russel & Russel, 1961.
- Durling, Robert M. “Deceit and Digestion in the Belly of Hell.” *Allegory and Representation: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1979-1980*. S. Greenblatt, ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1981. Pp. 61-93.
- “Dante among the Falsifiers” *Lectura Dantis: Inferno*. A. Mandelbaum, A. Oldcorn, Ch. Ross, eds. Berkeley: California UP, 1998. Pp. 393-406.
- Economu, George. “The Character Genius in Alan de Lille, Jean de Meun, and John Gower,” *Chaucer Review* 4 (1970): 203-210; rpt. in *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1972.
- “*Inferno* XXIV.” In *Dante’s Divine Comedy. Introductory Readings, I: Inferno*. Tibor Wlassics ed. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press. Pp. 307-318.
- Emmerson, Richard. “The Apocalyptic Age of Hypocrisy: Faus Semblant and Amant in the *Roman de la Rose*.” *Speculum* 62. 3 (1987): 612-634.
- Enciclopedia Dantesca*. Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 6 vols. 1970-1984.
- Evans, Gillian Rosemary. *Alain of Lille. The Frontiers of Theology in the Later Twelfth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983.
- Fenster, Thelma S. and Erler, Mary. *Poems of Cupid, God of Love*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990.
- Ferrante, Joan M. *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984.
- “The Malebolge (Inf. XVIII-XXX) as the Key to the Structure of Dante’s *Inferno*.” *Romance Philology* 20 (1967): 456-466.
- “The Relation of Speech to Sin in the *Inferno*.” *Dante Studies* 87 (1969): 33-46.
- Fleming, John. *The Roman de la Rose. A Study in Allegory and Iconography*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969.
- *Reason and the Lover*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984.

- Florescu, Vasile. *Conceptul de literatura veche*. Bucuresti: Editura Stiintifica, 1968.
- Forti, Fiorenzo. ‘Curiositas’ o ‘fol hardement’. *Fra le carte dei poeti*. Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1965. Pp. 41-77.
- Freccero, John. *The Poetics of Conversion*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986.
- Freinkel, Lisa. "Inferno and the Poetics of *Usura*." *MLN* 107 (1992): 1-17.
- Friedman, Lionel J. “Jean de Meun, ‘Antifeminism’, and ‘Bourgeois Realism’” *Modern Philology* 57 (1959): 13-23.
- Fubini, Mario. *Il peccato di Ulisse e altri scritti danteschi*. Milano: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1965.
- “*Inf. XXIX.*” *Lectura Dantis Scaligera*, Firenze: Le Monnier, 1967, Pp. 999-1021.
- Fyler, John M. *Language and the Declining World in Chaucer, Dante, and Jean de Meun*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Second revised edition. Weinsheimer, Joel and Marshall, Donald G., translators. New York: Continuum, 1998.
- Gaunt, Simon. “Bel Accueil and the Improper Allegory of the *Romance of the Rose*.” *New Medieval Literatures*. R. Copeland, D. Lawton, W. Scase, eds. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. Pp. 65-93.
- Gentile, Giovanni. *I Problemi della scolastica*. Bari: Laterza, 1923.
- Gilson, Etienne. *Dante and Philosophy*. Translated by D. Moore, New York: Harper & Row Inc., 1963.
- *Moral Values and the Moral Life. The Ethical Theory of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Hamden, Conn: Shoe String Press, 1961.
- Glorieux, Palémon. *Répertoire des maîtres en théologie de Paris au XIIIe siècle*. 2 vols. Paris: Vrin, 1933-4.
- Grant, Michael. *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*. New York: Meridian, 1995.
- Gründel, Johannes. *Die Lehre des Radulfus Ardens von den Verstandestugenden auf dem Hintergrund seiner Seelenlehre*. München: Schöningh, 1976.
- “L’oeuvre encyclopédique de Raoul Ardent: Le ‘Speculum Universale.’” *Cahiers d’Histoire mondiale* 9 (1966): 553-570

- Gunn, Alan. *The Mirror of Love. A Reinterpretation of the “Romance of the Rose”*, Texas: Texas Tech Press, 1952.
- Güntert, Georges. *Canto XIV and Canto XVIII. Lectura Dantis Turicensis, I: Inferno*. Firenze: Franco Cessati, ed., 2000. Pp. 193-205 and 245-259.
- Hagedorn, Susan C. “Statius’s Achilleid and Dante’s Canto of Ulysses. Fraud, Rhetoric and Abandoned Women.” *Abandoned Women: Rewriting the Classics in Dante, Boccaccio and Chaucer*. Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 2004. Pp. 47-74.
- Hatcher, Anna. “Dante’s Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro.” *Dante Studies*, 88 (1970): 109-117.
- and Musa, Mark. “The Kiss: *Inferno* V and the Old French Prose *Lancelot*.” *Comparative Literature*, 20.2 (1968): 97-109.
- Hicks, Eric. *Le débat sur le Roman de la Rose*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1977.
- Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *Fortune’s Faces. The Roman de la Rose and the Poetics of Contingency*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2003.
- Huizinga, Johan. *The Waning of the Middle Ages*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1924.
- Hult, David H. “Language and dismemberment: Abélard, Origen, and the *Romance of the Rose*.” *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 1992. Pp. 10-131.
- “Words and Deeds: Jean de Meun’s *Romance of the Rose* and the Hermeneutics of Censorship.” *New Literary History* 28.2 (1991): 345-66.
- Huot, Sylvia. “Seduction and Sublimation: Christine de Pizan, Jean de Meun and Dante.” *Romance Notes* 25 (1985): 361-373.
- *The “Romance of the Rose” and Its Medieval Readers*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Hollander, Robert. *Allegory in Dante’s “Commedia.”* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969.
- Holme, Timothy. ‘*Vile Florentines*'. *The Florence of Dante, Giotto and Boccaccio*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980.
- Ineichen, Gustav. “Le discours linguistique de Jean de Meun.” *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* 2 (1978): 245-53
- Janson, Tore. *A Natural History of Latin*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.

Jauss, Hans Robert . « La transformation de la forme allégorique entre 1180 et 1240 : d'Alain de Lille à Guillaume de Lorris. *L 'Humanisme médiéval dans les littératures romanes du XIIe au XIV siècle*, Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1964. Pp.108-142.

Jung, Marc-René, "Jean de Meung et l'allégorie." *Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Études Françaises* 28 (1976): 21-36

Kay, Sarah. *The Romance of the Rose*. London: Grant & Cutler Ltd., 1995.

Kelly, Douglas. *Medieval Imagination*. Wisconsin: Wisconsin UP, 1978.

----- *Internal Difference and Meanings of the "Romance of the Rose"*. Wisconsin: Wisconsin UP, 1992.

*L'amour courtois et la chevalerie. Des troubadours à Chrétien de Troyes.* Une anthologie présentée par Estelle Doudet. Paris: E.J.L., 2004.

Lanham, Richard A. *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Langlois, Charles V. *La vie en France au Moyen Âge*. Vol. IV. Paris, 1926-8. Pp.123-198, 166-172.

Langlois, Ernest. *Origines et sources du 'Roman de la Rose.'* Paris: E. Thorin, 1890.

Le Goff, Jacques. *Les intellectuels au Moyen Âge*. Paris: Seuil, 2000.

----- *Pour un autre Moyen Âge. Temps, travail et culture en Occident. 18 essays*. Paris: Gallimard, 1977.

----- and Schmitt, Jean Claude. "Au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, une parole nouvelle." *Histoire vécue du peuple chrétien*. Toulouse: Privat, 1979, 257-279

----- *La Civilisation de l'Occident médiéval*. Paris: Flammarion, 1997.

----- *La Naissance du Purgatoire*. 2 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1981.

Leveleux, Corinne. *La parole interdite. Le blasphème dans la France médiévale (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles): Du péché au crime*. Paris: De Boccard, 2001.

Levy, Leonard W. *Treason against God: a History of the Offense of Blasphemy*. New York: Schocken Books, 1981.

Lewis, Clive S. *The Allegory of Love*. New York: Oxford UP, 1936.

- Lindorfer, Bettina. “*Peccatum linguae* and the Punishment of Speech Violations in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times.” *Speaking in the Medieval World*, Jean E. Godsall-Myers, ed. Leiden, NLD: Brill, 2003. Pp. 23-46.
- Looney, Dennis. “*Inferno VII.*” *Lectura Dantis Virginiana, I. Dante’s Inferno: Introductory Readings*. Pp. 82-93.
- “The Purgation and Emendation of a Simile: *Purgatorio VI* and *VII.*” *Lectura Dantis Virginiana*, 7 (1990): 133-141.
- “Believing in the Poet: *Inferno XIII.*” *Allegorica* 13 (1992): 39-52.
- Lottin, Odon. *Psychologie et morale aux XIIe-XIIIe siècles*. Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1954.
- Louis, René, “*Le Roman de la Rose*” – essai d’interprétation de l’allégorisme érotique. Paris: Editions Honoré Champion, 1974.
- Luca, G. de. *Prosatori Minori del Trecento*, vol. I. Milano: R. Ricciardi, 1954.
- Mancini, Franco. “Un’Auctoritas di Dante.” *Studi danteschi* 45 (1968): 95-119.
- Mandonnet, Pierre. *Dante le théologien*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwert & Cie, 1935.
- Masciandaro, Franco. “Notes on the Image of the Point in the *Divine Comedy*.” *Italica* 54.2 (1977): 215-226.
- Mastrobuono, Antonio C. *Dante’s Journey of Sanctification*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1990.
- Mazzoni, Francesco. “Canto XI dell’*Inferno*.” *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana*. Napoli: Loffredo, 1985.
- Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Dante, Poet of the Desert*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979.
- “Canto XXVI. Ulysses: Persuasion versus Prophecy.” *Lectura Dantis* 23 (1998): 348-356.
- “L’esilio da Firenze. Il *De Vulgari Eloquentia* e il cerchio della frode.” *Dante. Da Firenze all’aldilà*, 2001. Pp. 233-247.
- Minnis, Alastair. *Magister amoris. The « Roman de la Rose » and Vernacular Hermeneutics*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.
- “Moral Gower and Medieval Literary Theory.” *Gower’s Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983.

Minuto, Francesco "Sui rapporti tra lo ‘Speculum Universale’ di Radulfus Ardens e il ‘Didascalicon’ di Ugo di San Vittore." *Atti dell’Istituto Veneto di Scienze* (Lettere ed Arti, 1948-1949, CVII. II, Classe di Scienze Morali e Letterari). Pp. 103-117.

Montano, Rocco. "Il folle volo d’Ulisse.’ *Suggerimenti per una lettura di Dante*. Naples: Conte, 1956. Pp. 131-174

Montanari, Fausto. "La Piccarda di Dante." *Miscellanea di Studi Danteschi in memoria di Silvio Pasquazi*, vol. 2. Naples: Federico e Ardia, 1993. Pp. 589-593.

Moore, Edward. "Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante." *Studies in Dante*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1968. Pp. 243-255.

Mulder-Bakker, Anneke B. and Nip, Renée, eds. *The Prime of their Lives: Wise Old Women in Pre-Industrial Europe*. Leuven: Peeters, 2004.

Muscantine, Charles. "The fabliaux, Courtly Culture, and the (Re)Invention of Vulgarity," *Obscenity. Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*. Boston: Brill, 1998.

Musa, Mark. "Filling the Gap with *consiglio frodolente*." *Italian Culture* 3 (1981): 11-21.

----- "Virgil’s Ulysses and Ulysses’ Diomedes." *Dante Studies* 97 (1978): 187-193.

Nardi, Bruno. *Saggi di filosofia dantesca*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1967. Pp. 341-381.

----- "Il Linguaggio." *Dante e la cultura medievale*. Bari: Laterza, 1984.

Naselli, Carmelina. *Domenico Cavalca*. Città di Castello: Il Solco, 1925.

Newhauser, Richard. *In the Garden of Evil. The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2005.

----- *The Treatise on Vices and Virtues in Latin and the Vernacular*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1993.

----- "The Treatise on Vices and Virtues as a Medieval Genre and its Structural Foundations in the Classical Tradition." *Les philosophies morales et politiques au Moyen Âge. Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Medieval Philosophy*. Ottawa, 17-22 August, 1992. Vol. 1. Pp. 420-428.

Newman, Barbara. *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

Nitzsche, Jane Chance. *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. New York: Columbia UP, 1975.

Noakes, Susan. "The Double Misreading of Paolo and Francesca." *Philological Quarterly* 62 (1983): 221-239.

Padoan, Giorgio. "Ulisse 'fandi factor' e le vie della Sapienza." *Il pio Enea, l'empio Ulisse*. Ravenna: Longo, 1967. Pp. 170-99.

----- "Il *Liber Esopi* e due episodi dell'*Inferno*." *Studi Danteschi* 41 (1964): 75-102.

Pagani, Ileana. *La teoria linguistica di Dante*. Napoli: Liguore, 1982.

Pagliaro, Antonino. "Dialecto e lingue nell'otretomba." *Dante nella critica d'oggi: risultati e prospettive (a cura di Umberto Bosco)*. Florence: Le Monnier, 1965. Pp. 254-270.

Panaccio, Claude. "Augustin, le verbe mental et l'amour." *Les philosophies morales et politiques au Moyen Age. Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Medieval Philosophy*. Ottawa, 17-22 August, 1992. Vol. 1, pp.777-785.

Papahagi, Marian. *Intelectualitate si poezie*. Bucuresti: Cartea Romaneasca, 1986.

Paré, Gerard, *Les Idées et les lettres au XIIIe siècle. Le Roman de la Rose*, Montréal : Centre de psychologie et de pédagogie, 1947.

Paris, Gaston. *La littérature française au moyen âge*. Paris: Hachette, 1914.

Patterson, Lee. "For the Wyves love of Bathe: Feminine Rhetoric and Poetic Resolution in the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Canterbury Tales*." *Speculum* 58.3 (1983): 656-695.

----- "Feminine Rhetoric and the Politics of Subjectivity: The Old Woman and the Wife of Bath." *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose*. K Brownlee, S. Huot, eds. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Pp. 316-35.

Pertile, Lino. "Canto XXIX. Such Outlandish Wounds." *Lectura dantis. Inferno*. A. Mandelbaum, A. Oldcorn, Ch. Ross, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. Pp. 378-391.

----- "Inferno XXVII. Il Peccato di Guido da Montefeltro." *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, CXLI (1982-3) : 148-171.

Petterson, Thomas. "Canto XXVIII. Scandal and Schism." *Lectura dantis. Inferno*. A. Mandelbaum, A. Oldcorn, C. Ross, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. Pp. 368-378.

Pézard, André. *Dante sous la pluie de feu (Enfer, XV)*. Paris: Vrin, 1950.

- “Le Mythe d’Ulysse chez Dante.” *Annuaire du Collège de France: résumé des cours de 1952, pp. 271-75, de 1953, pp. 271-77 et de 1954, pp. 306-310).*
- “Du Polericatus a la Divine Comédie.” *Romania* 70.1-2 (1948): 1-36, 163-191.
- Poggioli, Renato. “Tragedy or Romance? A Reading of the Paolo and Francesca Episode in Dante’s *Inferno*.” *PMLA* 72.3 (1957): 313-358.
- Poirion, Daniel, “Les mots et les choses selon Jean de Meun.” *L’Information littéraire* 26 (1974) : 7-11.
- “De la signification selon Jean de Meun.” *Archéologie du signe*, E. Vance and L. Brind’amour, eds. *Recueils d’Etudes Médiévales* 3. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1983. Pp. 165-85.
- “Alain de Lille and Jean de Meun.” *Alain de Lille, Gautier de Chatillon, Jakemart Giélée et leur temps*. Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1978. Pp. 35-51.
- Porcelli, Bruno. “Peccatum linguae, modello mosaico, climax narrativo nel canto di Ulisse.” *Critica letteraria* 19.72 (1991): 423-443.
- Presberg, Charles. *Adventures in Paradox*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2001.
- Puttenham, George. *The Arte of English Poetry*, G. Doidge Willcok., A. Walker, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1936.
- Quilligan, Maureen. “Allegory, Allegoresis and the Deallegorization of Language: The *Roman de la rose*, the *De planctu naturae*, and the Parlament of *Foules*.” *Allegory, Myth and Symbol*, Morton W. Bloomfield, ed. Harvard English Studies 9. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981. Pp. 163-86.
- Raynaud de Lage, Guy. *Alain de Lille, poète du XIIe siècle*, Montréal: Institut d’Études Médiévales, 1951.
- Reade, William Henry Vincent. *The Moral System of Dante’s Inferno*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909. Reprinted Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1969.
- Richards, Earl J. *Dante and the “Roman de la Rose.” An Investigation into the Vernacular Narrative Context of the “Commedia”*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1981.
- Rizzo, Stefano. “Il *De vulgari eloquentia* e l’unità del pensiero linguistico di Dante.” *Dante Studies* 87 (1969): 69-88.
- Roberts, Renée Magriel. *The Clock and the Rose. Time and Self-Transformation in the Romance of the Rose and the Divine Comedy*, Ph.D. dissertation, UMI, 1998.

- Ryan, Lawrence V. "Ulysses, Guido and the Betrayal of Community." *Italica* 54. 2: 227-249
- Ryding, William W. "Faus Semblant: Hero or Hypocrite?" *Romanic Review* 60 (1969): 163-167.
- Sanguinetti, Edoardo. *Interpretazione di Malebolge*. Firenze: Olschki, 1961.
- Scott, John A. "L'Ulisse Dantesco." *Dante magnanimo. Studi sulla Commedia*. Firenze: Olschki, 1977. Pp. 117-193.
- "Dante's Francesca and the Poet's Attitude toward Courtly Literature." *Reading Medieval Studies* 5 (1979): 4-20.
- Segre, Cesare. *Volgarizzamenti del Due e Trecento*. Torino: Unione Tipografica-Editrice Torinese, 1953.
- Seriacopi, Massimo. *All'estremo della "Prudentia."* *L'Ulisse di Dante*. Roma: Zauli, Arti Grafiche, 1994.
- Shanzer, Danuta. "The Punishment of Bertran de Born." *Yearbook of Italian Studies* 8 (1989): 95-97.
- Shapiro, Marianne. "The Fictionalization of Bertran de Born (Inf. XXVIII)." *Dante Studies* 92 (1974): 107-116.
- "Inferno XXV." *Dante's Divine Comedy. Introductory Readings, I: Inferno*. Tibor Wlassics, ed. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press. Pp.319-331.
- Shoaf, Richard Allen. "Dante and Peraldus: The *acqua falsa* of Maestro Adamo (A Note on *Inferno* 30, 64-69)." *Quaderni d'italianistica* 10 (1989): 311-313.
- *Dante, Chaucer and the Currency of the Word*. Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1983.
- Spiegel, Gabrielle M. *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Spitzer, Leo. "Speech and Language in *Inferno* XIII." *Dante*, John Freccero, ed., Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965.
- Stakel, Susan. *False Roses. Structures of Duality and Deceit in Jean de Meun's « Roman de la Rose. »* Saratoga, California: Anma Libri, 1991.
- Storey, Wayne. "Inferno XVIII." *Dante's Divine Comedy. Introductory Readings, I: Inferno*. Tibor Wlassics, ed. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press. Pp.235-246.

Szittya, Penn. *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986.

Taddei, Telio. "La vita del Cavalca dai suoi scritti." *Memorie domenicane* 1, Pistoia: Riviste dei Padri Domenicani, 1942.

Tartaro, Achille. "La questione dei voti (*Paradiso V*)."*Letteratura e società*, I (1980). Pp. 21-37.

Thompson, David. "A Note on Fraudulent Counsel."*Dante Studies* 92 (1974): 149-152.

Took, John. *Dante: Lyric Poet and Philosopher. An Introduction to the Minor Works*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

Triolo, Alfred A. , "Ira, Cupiditas, Libido: The Dynamics of Human Passion in the *Inferno*."*Dante Studies*, 95 (1977): 1-37

Truscott, James G. "Ulysses and Guido. *Inferno XXVI-XXVII*."*Dante Studies* 91 (1973): 47-72.

Trovato, Mario. "Il Contrappasso nell'ottava bolgia."*Dante Studies* 94 (1976): 47-59

-----"The Semantic Value of *Ingegno* and Dante's Ulysses in the Light of the *Metalogicon*.*Modern Philology* 84.3 (1987): 258-66.

Vanossi, Luigi. *Dante e il "Roman de la Rose": Saggio sul "Fiore."* Florence: Olschski, 1979.

Vauchez, André. *The Laity in the Middle Ages*. Translated by Margery J. Schneider. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993.

Wenzel, Siegfried. "The Continuing life of William Peraldus."*Ad litteram: Authoritative Texts and their Medieval Readers*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992. Pp. 135-163.

-----"Dante's Rationale for the Seven Deadly Sins (*Purgatorio XVII*)."*Modern Language Review* 60 (1965): 529-533.

-----"The Seven Deadly Sins. Some Problems of Research."*Speculum* 18 (1968): 1-22.

Welter, J.-Th. *L'exemplum dans la littérature religieuse et didactique du Moyen Âge*, Paris: Guitard, 1927.

Wetherbee, Winthrop. "The Literal and the Allegorical: Jean de Meun and the *De planctu naturae*."*Medieval Studies* 33 (1971): 264-291.

Ziolkowski, Jan. *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex. The Meaning of Grammar to a Twelfth-Century Intellectual*. Cambridge: The Medieval Academy of America, 1985.

Zumthor, Paul. "Narrative and Anti-Narrative: *Le Roman de la Rose*." *Yale French Studies* 51(1974): 185-204.

Zupan, Patricia. "Dante's Ulysses: Toward Recovering a Primordial Language." *Romance Languages Annual* 1 (1989): 222-226.

Woodford, Christopher. "A Medieval Campaign against Blasphemy." *The Downside Review* 55 (1973): 356-361.